

THE BABBLER

ORNITHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION OF ZIMBABWE NEWSLETTER

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Mashonaland Branch

Chairman: Mr B Elliot 302465
Secretary/
Treasurer: Mrs I Gray 885406
Members: Mrs D Varden 8879124
Mr G Lowe (W) 665133
Mr D Rockingham-Gill 882412
PRO Mr K Barrow 732457
Editor: Mr D Gray 885406

Matabeleland Branch

Martin Smith 42474
Mrs P Feather 44034
Mr W Goodwin 64121
Mr M Smith 42474

Postal Addresses:

Committee: P O Box CY 161, Causeway
Editor: 14 Fisher Ave, Borrowdale

P O Box 44, Bulawayo
P O Box 44, Bulawayo

1996 SUBSCRIPTIONS

This is absolutely the last reminder. Please check your cheque book stubs etc. or phone Jacko Williams 882206 Harare.

MASHONALAND BRANCH ACTIVITIES

Outings

1. Mukuvisi Woodlands: Sunday 5th May and 2nd June 1996. Meet at Paget Road entrance at 7.00 a.m. There will be a vehicle guard in attendance.
2. Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary Sunday 12th May and 9th June 1996. Meet at Marimba Shopping Centre at 7.00 a.m.

Saturday Afternoons

1. 16th May 1996. Lyndhurst Farm. Woodland, grassland and waterfowl. Meet at Queensdale Shopping Centre on Chiremba Rd (Widdecombe Rd) 2 p.m.
2. 22nd June 1996. Kutsaga Research Station. A new area waterfowl and grassland birds. Meet at Hatfield Shops on Queensway (Airport Rd) at 2 p.m.

Sunday Outings

1. 26th May 1996. Marvel farm (28.5 km peg) Domboshawa Rd. Meet at T.A. Motors opposite Sam Levy's Village Borrowdale Rd at 7.00 a.m.
2. 30th June 1996. Harare Botanic Gardens. Meet at 7.00 a.m. in car park. There will be a vehicle guard.

Evening Meetings

Thursday evening

1. 16th May 1996. David Rockingham-Gill will speak on Important Bird Areas and African Waterfowl Census. Venue: Alexandra Sports Club 6.30 p.m. between Prince Edward/Blakiston Streets. Cash bar available.
2. 20th June 1996. Gavin Ford will speak on 'Guides and the Tourist Industry'. Venue: Alexandra Sports Club. Time 6 for 6.30 p.m. Cash bar available.

EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB

Chairman: Mr K. Dixon 62882 Mutare

Recorder: Mr A B (Tony) Curtis 60281 Mutare

Outings

Saturday 11th May 1996.	Grange Road, Old Mutare	2 p.m.
Sunday 26th May 1996.	Fern Valley, Crake Valley	6.30 a.m.
Saturday 8th June 1996.	Mutare Tiger's Kloof	2 p.m.
Sunday 30th June 1996.	Dorowa Minerals	6.00 a.m.

The group assembles at the Museum in Aerodrome Road at the time stated. It is always advisable to check on arrangements by ringing Ken or Tony.

On previous visits to Dorowa we have been joined by OAZ members from other areas. Once again we would be delighted to meet anyone interested at the Mine entrance at about 7.00 a.m. However, please let us know if you intend to come as we may well be offered lunch as in the past and a fairly accurate figure is required in advance.

MATABELELAND BRANCHOutings

Sunday 19th May 1996: Chip-Chase area, Douglasdale. Warren Goodwin is busy building a home in this area and forecasts plenty of birds. This will be a morning only outing, for details and directions contact the Chairman. Tel. 42474.

Sunday 16th June 1996: Nyamandhlovu and beyond. We have been invited to the St. James Mission area and can hopefully find plenty of birds along the Gwaai River. Meet at the Falls Road Garage at 7.00 a.m. bringing lunch.

AISLEBY

This continues to produce excellent sightings, Peter Tucker photographed a Northern Wheatear in January, and good views of Spotted Crake were had this month (March). Dates and Co-ordinators are:

Date	Coordinator	Telephone
Sunday 26th May	T English	45688 Meet at boom at 7 a.m.
Saturday 29th June	Penny Feather	44034 Meet at boom at 2.30 p.m.

Please note the change to afternoon outings in June.

Evening Meetings

Friday 3rd May: Video Evening. Two videos "Vampires of Wolf Island and "Night Hunters - Owls". Venue: 3 Bouchier Wray Avenue Hillside at 8 p.m. Contact Barbara Cromar for further details. Telephone 41983.

Friday 7th June: Identification "Potpourri". A mixture of Identification problems with hands on specimens and brief video sequences plus silhouettes and calls. Contact Martin Smith for further information or if you would like to participate. Venue: 3a Holdengarde Avenue Hillside at 8 p.m.

From the Chairman

A brief dry spell in wet February enabled us to have our AGM outside, rather a relief as 36 plus bodies would have failed to fit in our lounge. Plenty of discussion took place especially in connection with the Atlas, a resolution being passed demanding to know of progress. Further to this forward movement has been made and hopefully we will hear a positive report of progress at the National AGM. Elections saw the retiring Committee being voted in for another year. Hopefully we can continue to organise an attractive programme, if you have any suggestions for evening meetings or know of venues for future outings, please do contact us.

Good birding. **Martin Smith**

Sua Pan, Nata, Botswana 24th-28th May 1996

A trip is planned to visit Sua Pan to coincide with the flamingo breeding there. For further details contact Penny Feather. Tel 44034 Bulawayo.

MIDLANDS BRANCH

Co-ordinator: Mr B W Beekes P O Box 55 Shurugwi 152-6422

Kwekwe Sebakwe Poort Weekend Saturday 31st August and 1st September 1998

People do camp at the Poort which is a National Trust site, but there are no facilities whatsoever. Camping is available at Sable Park, about 20 km from the Poort. Ablution facilities are available here but otherwise you must be completely self-sufficient. There are several breeding pairs of Black Storks resident at the Poort. In the past two seasons the Storks have not bred successfully due to the drought conditions causing low water levels and poor food supply. Hopefully this year food supplies will be better. Peak breeding period is June/July, so hopefully by early September the young will be newly fledged.

Further details to follow

Shurugwi Princess Farm weekend 12th and 13th October 1996 Details later.

REPORTS

1. National Annual General Meeting 29th-30th March 1996. Mare Dam, Nyanga. On Friday evening Darryl Plowes spoke very interestingly on Southern Sudan. Forty members attended the meeting on Saturday afternoon; they came from as far afield as Bulawayo, Shurugwi, Masvingo, Felixburg and Harare as well as Mutare and Juliasdale. Various subjects were

covered including an update report on the Zimbabwe Bird Atlas. The meeting was followed by a delicious tea. Thanks to the ladies who organised it. There was a social braai later in the evening. A very pleasant weekend was had by all who attended.

2. Mashonaland

Thursday 15th February 1996. There was a good turn out for the talk and slide show by Geoff Lowe on a recent trip to Etosha Game Reserve. Starting with a route map detailing the roads and their condition, Geoff travelled in his Peugeot and described his various stopovers and the facilities available. His slides of animals and birds were excellent, from the small Red-capped Lark to the larger Northern Black Korhaan. Many of the birds he saw also appear in Zimbabwe lowveld. Of the other birds the Sociable Weaver attracted great interest. Thanks Geoff for a most informative evening.

Sybil Duncanson

3. **Eastern Districts Bird Club**

a. Saturday 10th February 1996. OSBORNE Dam.

It was obviously the place to be that warm, dry afternoon as not only were EDBC out in numbers - 6 - but also many of the districts prominent people. In fact in the first hour there were more humans than birds seen. The water level is rising steadily - one figure given was 50 cm per day - but it will take a long time before the avian population increases significantly.

49 species were recorded in two hours, one of the first being a Violet-eared Waxbill. Waterbirds were few seemingly unaware they were being counted for the World Wildfowl Survey. There were 16 White-breasted Cormorants and 1 Reed Cormorant, an African Darter, 10 African Black Duck, 2 White-faced Ducks and 2 Egyptian Goose guarding the Tower House and the bit of shoreline visible had only 3 Common Sandpiper. In the woodland on the Mt Jenya shore the usual small birds were seen plus a Jacobin Cuckoo. Familiar Chats were fairly common as were Spotted Flycatcher. On the return journey we visited Odzani where Thick-billed Weaver and Southern Red Bishop were seen among others. The dramatic changes of light and brooding clouds took much of our attention. **Ken Dixon**

b. Sunday 28th February 1996. DOROWA Mine.

This was the 14th day in a row it had rained in Mutare - the previous day rain disrupted my Waterfowl Survey at Cynara, it rained overnight and at 5.30 a.m. was still raining but there was no thought of missing the trip to Dorowa.

The usual hospitality was evident and Eric Bowker visiting his former work place arrived to guide us on our survey. It was now dry and we identified birds on the Bowling Green - a Wagtail and a Pale Flycatcher among others. We heard two Thrush Nightingales and saw an African Purple Swamphen scratching about outside the fence like a domestic hen! We watched a Eurasian Hobby chasing some swifts. Going to the wet areas we saw Magpie Shrike and Lesser Grey Shrike and then a Great Spotted Cuckoo, a first for many with superb views both at rest and in flight. At the large reed fringed dam there were numerous birds and a Little Bittern flew past. On the dried out, rehabilitated slime pan were Buffy Pipit and larks. Mechanical

trouble and rain caused a premature halt and after a cursory glance at the airstrip which produced bedraggled Red-breasted Swallows and lots of Crowned Lapwings we returned to the club house for a delicious lunch for which we must thank Hr Mafukidse and staff. 81 species were seen amongst plenty of excitement. **Ken Dixon**

c. Saturday 9th March 1996. PENHALONGA - St Augustine's.

The previous Sunday I'd spent time on the Hurrell's farm serenaded by dozens of Willow Warblers rehearsing for their European breeding season. Now in contrast it was disappointingly quiet, humid and still, so we had to hunt. Most time was spent in scrub and rocks below the Mission usually a good area, but our attention was mostly directed upwards as a series of birds of prey passed over. Martin and three of my students seemed to locate these at will but identifying them was another matter. The going became rougher and eventually we wended our way down the river where Thick-billed Weavers were at their nests and the waterfall revealed a pair of Mountain Wagtail. Our return journey consisted of a Malawian traditional dancer being pursued by 100s of children through Redwing Mine and plenty of Horus Swifts on the slime pits. A pleasant few hours but only 43 species. **Ken Dixon**

4. Matabeleland.

a. SENTINEL Ranch - February 22nd-25th.

A small group of enthusiasts travelled to the Ranch for the half term weekend. Driving into the setting sun proved hazardous with interesting scenery and tantalising glimpses of unusual birds testing the cars suspension and occupants nerves over unseen potholes. The camp is sited on the Limpopo in the shade of large sycamore figs - very conducive to a restful atmosphere. Birding was frustrating in dense riverine vegetation filled with Willow Warblers which did not appear and silhouetted canopy feeders. Despite this we had good views of Marsh Warblers, Collared Sunbird, Speckled Mousebird, Ashy Flycatchers and Red-faced Cisticolas. We viewed a Verreaux's Eagle nest site in a Baobab tree; one of only a few tree nests known. We travelled inland bouncing over kopjies in a Landrover to view a partially excavated dinosaur and we birded at a nearby pan which was beautiful, studded with lilies and overshadowed by Kipling's fever trees. There were a variety of waders and a Hadeda Ibis probing the mud. Back at camp we learned of the latest oxpecker research from a Cambridge Ph. D student.

Birds (and donkeys) were caught in mist nets; colour banded and blood samples taken. Field observations and lab genetic data would be used to work out family relationships and investigate cooperative breeding. It was a stimulating talk, which revealed how many questions remain unanswered about our avifauna.

Our trip ended with a stop at an Alpine Swift breeding site - one of a few known in Southern Africa - no swifts were seen but plenty of evidence was found below. Our thanks to Colin Bristow and the Pells for a memorable weekend. **Martin Smith**

b. Circular Drive/HILLSIDE Dams - 17th March 1996.

This proved a most rewarding outing close to town. A stroll through dew soaked grass produced not only wet feet but a variety of birds.

A group of Neddicky stuttered in gun-like fashion whilst overhead an African Goshawk called. Back at ground level Little Bee-eaters hawked insects and a party of Bronze Mannikins foraged for seeds. Up the watercourse to Northway dam Southern Red Bishops, teal and White-faced Duck were present and a Brown-backed Honeybird was mobbed by Rattling Cisticola. We returned via more open ground to Lambert Porter's property with a tally of 59 species.
Martin Smith

5. Midlands.

Moyo Ranch, Redcliff Nyika Dam 9 & 10th March 1996

We started about 7.30 a.m. and saw Southern Yellow-billed Hornbills, Three-banded Plover and LBJs. The Harare people arrived and we drove to Bembezaan River and saw White-fronted Bee-eaters and heard African Grey Hornbills. On our return we flushed a Black Crake and two Common Moorhens. On the opposite bank of Nyika was a pair of Water Thick-knees and Blacksmith Lapwings. We were unable to drive below the spillway so had to go right round and in doing so we saw four Steppe Buzzards and a Wahlberg's Eagle. On our return we found the Midlands members had arrived.

In the rondavels roof there were Lesser Striped Swallows nests but White-rumped Swifts were the occupants.

After lunch on the other side of the farm we saw a melanistic Ovambo Sparrowhawk and a Black-throated Canary. On our return we walked on the dam wall and saw a colony of White-fronted Bee-eaters and an African Fish-eagle eating a fish. In the evening we heard an African Scops-owl and a Barn Owl. On Sunday morning I awoke late and on arrival at camp heard that a Spotted Eagle-owl and Pearl-spotted Owlet had been flushed. We went for a drive to find Violet-eared Waxbills without success and then went on to see some ruins on the next farm, where we heard an African Paradise-flycatcher and saw Lilac-breasted Rollers. On our return we saw a female Violet-backed Starlings and Cape Glossy Starling in flight.

As we were about to leave the ranch we saw a Bateleur soaring above us.

Gordon Conway (11 years)

At Moyo we had a good turn out of 15 with Jacko, Deborah, Tony and Brian from Harare, the Wilkins family from Masvingo, Margaret Parrock from Kadoma. The total species seen was 134. **B. Beekes**

6. BIRDING BIG DAY 1996.

There were 35 teams competing in what was a great fun day enjoyed by all. Thanks to all OAZ members who offered their services as "identifiers" but ended up as team members as there was no call for "identifiers".

Ferdi Couto's team came first with 206 species. Jacko William's team was second with 145 species. Dave Gray's team was 3rd with 139 species.

The beneficiaries were Mukuvisi Woodlands Environmental Education, Mavuradonha Campfire Project, Makonde Campfire Project and OAZ bird-hide at Lake Chivero. Each received \$6000.

The bird-hide is already under construction and will also be used for education for school groups. Many thanks to all involved.

There are plans in the pipeline for a national Birding Big Day next year.

TAIL FEATHERS

1. Special Species Survey Cards. Please send in cards both old and new to Tracey Couto with special emphasis on breeding. If you do not have any breeding records still send in your cards. Cards are obtainable from: Ornithology Unit, Department of National Parks & Wildlife Management, P O Box BE 60, Belvedere.
2. Bird Carcasses. Mr Sanga of the Harare Museum requires bird carcasses to improve the collection. Road casualties etc. Do not go out and shoot birds.
3. Ornithological Congress. Anyone interested in attending in Albany, Australia on 5th - 9th October 1996 contact Jacko Williams 14 Harare Drive Greystone Park, P O Borrowdale.
4. Bird Ringing.

Here are some letters received either by Safring, Cape Town University or Pretoria Zoo, according to instructions on the ring.

- i. From an Ugandan resident who had found a ringed swallow.
"Today I found a bird wearing an advertisement for your zoo."
- ii. Ringed birds have even led to diplomatic intervention - as demonstrated by the "saga of the mad priest". In an independent state to the north, a South African ringed Barn Owl wandered into a church, whereupon the Parish priest made approaches to the S A Trade Counsellor claiming compensation for damages to the church by the "South African Owl" - According to the reverend gentleman, the owl had eventually been recaptured - with great difficulty - after a full week in the church, during which time it had caused considerable damage to paints, seats, windows and so on. It was later established that the gentleman of the cloth was being economical with the truth, the main damage having been caused when he went after the owl with a shot gun loaded with buckshot and ventilating the roof in the process.
- iii. A resident of Gauteng wrote this letter. "Dear Curator - Further to the instructions on the enclosed ring, I am informing you of the circumstances surrounding the demise of your pigeon. At 5.30 a.m. today this bird along with several others, was observed feloniously destroying crops in a Bryanston garden. Between that time and 7 a.m. several birds were shot, this one among them. The ring was noticed among the dead and the bird kept aside for close inspection. It was in wonderful condition, very fat, and is at the moment soaking in a special marinade prior to joining us for Sunday lunch. I look forward to meeting some more of these magnificent birds in identical circumstances to those pertaining today. Yours faithfully and Happy Christmas, Pigeon Lover"

Tail Tail Feathers

Peter from Bulawayo visited his cousin Fred in Kariba. Fred suggested a birdwatching trip to the Zambezi River. Peter donned his best Nikes. "Why are you wearing those smart takkies?" asked Fred. "In case we come across lions" replied Peter. Bush-wise Fred smiled and said "Don't be silly man, you will never run faster than a lion, even in those smart takkies". "I don't have to run faster than a lion" said Peter wisely "I just have to run faster than you".

HARARE Garden Bird Survey

The present Garden Bird Survey was initiated by Sally Perrett in 1984. In July 1996 it will have been running for 12 years. I have now started on an analysis of the past 12 results to see, amongst other things, if there has been any change in the bird life during that time, and to compare these findings with those of Richard Brook's in 1962, who in turn compared his findings with those of Marshall during the 1890s. It will take time to complete but certain trends are already noticeable. Among them are: Cuckoos. The 3 commonest cuckoos are the Diderick Cuckoo, Levillant's Cuckoo and Klaas's Cuckoo in that order. Klaas's Cuckoo is the first to appear, being heard from late September, but by December is silent. Why? Is it anything to do with its hosts? Irwin gives breeding records from September to April. The Diderick Cuckoo usually appears in early October and remains throughout the summer. The Levillant's Cuckoo comes in October or November and stays until at least April. Its usual host is the Arrow-marked Babbler for which Irwin (1981) gives breeding records throughout the year.

Glossy Starlings. Neither the Greater Blue-eared Starling nor the Miombo Blue-eared Starling is very common in Harare gardens. Alex Masterson, just off the Avondale Ridge, has reported the Greater Blue-eared Starling fairly regularly, but there are few records elsewhere. Only a single record of the Miombo Blue-eared Starling has been made, although it is common enough in the district, even as close as Chishawasha.

Sparrows. Both House Sparrow and Southern Grey-headed Sparrows occur, and their numbers appear to be approximately equal. But very few gardens report both species: the Southern Grey-headed Sparrow seems to favour over half a hectare, while the House Sparrow inhabits the smaller gardens.

Southern Red Bishop. In 1964 Richard Brooks wrote *Birds Round Salisbury, Then and Now*. This species has recently declined in numbers due to drainage and building and excessive interference with their nesting colonies. Whether this does account for its decline is debatable. It is not a common garden bird, but there is still considerable wet habitat in Harare. However, the recent series of drought years has certainly drastically affected its numbers. Sybil Duncanson, living near a vlei in Greendale, reported that during the wet summer of 1984/85 they came to her feeding tray in numbers, but that she stopped feeding when it seemed they were getting sufficient food in the vlei. After the end of the rains she recommenced feeding and again had numbers of Red Bishops.

My own experience is the corollary of this. There was a small dam near my house in Chisipite, where the Southern Red Bishops apparently found sufficient food; but after the drought of 1990/91, their food supply must have been exhausted, and my feeding tray was usually crowded with them. They did not reappear the following summer, and the dam dried up. Apparently they are very dependant on wet conditions.

R M Harwin