

THE BABBLER

ORNITHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION OF ZIMBABWE NEWSLETTER

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Mashonaland Branch

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MASHONALAND BRANCH ACTIVITIES

Outings

1. Mukuvisi Woodlands: Sunday 7th July and 4th August 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 14th July and 11th August 1996. Meet at Marimba Shopping Centre at 7.00 a.m. Beginners are very welcome. Bring your chairs and tea.

Saturday Afternoons

1. 20th July 1996. Greystone Park Nature Reserve, Gaydon Road. A bird list is needed in this area. Your assistance will be most appreciated. Meet at 2 p.m.
2. 17th August 1996. Rainham Dams. Waterfowl and grassland birds, specialities Marsh Owls, Yellow-throated Longclaws and Cape Longclaws. Meet at Belvedere shops at 3 p.m. Bring chairs and refreshments.

Sunday Outings

1. 28th July 1996. Ewanrigg Botanic Reserve. Meet at Chisipite shops at 7 a.m. (Car park in front of Bon Marche). Bring your chairs and tea/lunch if you want to make a day of it.
2. 30th August 1996 - 1st September 1996. Camping weekend in Kwekwe area. Midlands Branch is organising a weekend at Sebakwe Poort where Black Storks, Lanner Falcon and Peregrine Falcon are known to breed. Camping Echo Park 15km from Sebakwe Poort. Prices: \$20.00 per person per night. Firewood \$10.00 per bundle. Children under 18 free.

Facilities: Hot and cold showers and toilets. Braais. No electricity. Your camping fees etc. are payable at the entrance gate. Places have been reserved for 20 – 50 people.

Directions to Echo Park. Harare side of Kwekwe take turn off to Dutchman's Pool and Sable Park. At the end of the tar turn left onto dirt road. Follow the road until you come to a crossroad and turn right. Cross railway line and continue until you come to a T junction. Turn right at "T" junction and from then on Echo Park is sign posted (if not before). Echo Park is approximately 5 km from main road.

Programme: Friday 30th August - Arrive, settle in and do your own thing.

Saturday 31st August - Arrive at Sebakwe Poort at 8 a.m. Bring your lunch and liquid refreshments.

Sunday 1st September - Birding as per Saturday. Checklist call at 12 noon. Lunch and disperse for home.

Evening Meetings

Thursday evenings. 18th July 1996. Michael Irwin will speak on "Birding Journals and Magazines".

15th August 1996. Mike Sorocynski will speak on "Hole nesting Birds of Botswana" and show his superb slides.

Venue: Alexandra Sports Club between Prince Edward/Blakiston Streets. 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 13th July 1996. Osborn Dam, Waterfowl Census. 2 p.m.

Sunday 14th July 1996. Cynara, Waterfowl Census. 7 a.m.

Sunday 23rd July 1996. Bvumba. 7 a.m.

Saturday 10th August 1996. Nyanyadzi Hot springs. 2 p.m.

Sunday 25th August 1996. Cynara. 7 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.

MATABELELAND BRANCH

Evening Meetings

Friday 5th July 1996. Mid year Social and Guest Speaker. A stew, baked potatoes and steamed pudding supper followed by a presentation on the Black Stork by Dr P. Mundy. To assist with catering please complete the attached form enclosing a cheque for \$10 per head, bring your own utensils and folding chairs. Venue: To be advised depending on numbers, contact Martin Smith Tel 42474.

Friday 2nd August 1996. Video Evening. Two more titles from

Harry Erwee's magnificent collection. Venue: 3 Bouchier Wray Avenue, Hillside at 8 p.m.

Outings

Sunday 14th July. Fort Rixon Dam Waterfowl Count. The dam holds plenty of water which should add interest to the count. Meet at 8.30 a.m. at Fort Rixon dam or contact Penny Feather for details.

Sunday 21st July 1996. Aisleby Waterfowl count - our midyear will hopefully produce some interesting results, it remains to be seen how many birds return to the sewage contaminated Upper Umgusa. Meet at Aisleby boom at 7.30 a.m. or contact Martin Smith.

Sunday 28th July 1996. Carvanell. A farm with a variety of habitats including a dam, a short distance from town. Meet at Ascot car park at 8 a.m. bringing tea and lunch.

Sunday 18th August 1996. Kirby's farm, Solusi Road.

Bring tea/lunch. Meet at the junction of Khami Road/Solusi Road at 8 a.m. or contact Barbara Cromar Tel 49183.

Aisleby. Saturday 24th August 1996. Please note a Saturday afternoon outing, meet 2.30 p.m. at the boom or contact the coordinator Anne Perry Tel 42137.

From the Chairman

Migrants have gone and most indigenous birds seem well scattered due to the good rains. We luckily followed the migrants north to southeast England, where despite low temperatures and overcast conditions, swallows had returned. A Eurasian Hobby passed through and flocks of Yellow Wagtails enjoyed insect life on arable land. In the reeds both Sedge Warbler and our rarity, the European Reed-warbler began to call. The mud flats produced plenty of waders to puzzle over, mostly Common Redshank but a number of more interesting sightings - a lone Pied Avocet and a group of Black-tailed Godwit. In the trees a Nightingale was calling in full view, similar to our Thrush Nightingale beautiful voice but not much to look at.

Home from one winter to another, fortunately ours is never so prolonged or consistently grey! Good birding. **Martin Smith**

MIDLANDS BRANCH

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

The next two outings are confirmed. Put them in your diary.

Weekend Friday 21st - Sunday 23rd June 1996. Princess Farm Shurugwi.

Weekend Friday 30th August - Sunday 1st September 1996. Sebakwe Poort Kwekwe. See Mashonaland outings.

The next two outings are provisional and are subject to confirmation.

October 11, 12, 13. Chatsworth.

November 22, 23, 24. Central Estates, Mvuma.

REPORTSMashonaland

18th April 1996. There was a good turnout considering it was a public holiday to hear Mike Sorocynski speak on Raptors of the Jaweng Mining area. This was illustrated with his magnificent slides. He told us how he had to convince suspicious officers on the mine to allow him to set up hides to photograph these birds. Thank you Mike for a very interesting and informative talk.

Dave Gray

Eastern Districts

BURMA VALLEY, 28th April 1996. A party of 11 met up at Amsterdam Farm. The morning was cool and partly overcast and the birds seemed reluctant to appear. We tried a different area in the river at Valhalla. Whyte's Barbet, White-eared Barbet, Olive Sunbird and Miombo Double-collared Sunbirds were recorded, a Collared Sunbird and a brief sighting of a Black-throated Wattle-eye. A clearing produced an unidentified woodpecker, Black-headed Oriole, a crombec and a small bird of prey perched high in a tree mobbed by Dark-capped Bulbuls and Fork-tailed Drongos. As often happens with raptors, this one caused a fair amount of head scratching, page turning and friendly discussion (we birders never indulge in any other sort, as you all know). The final consensus was African Goshawk.

The sun well up, the clouds dispersed, we then moved east of the main road, through banana plantations to a flooded area where we saw White-faced Duck, African Jacana, Common Waxbill and a Half-collared Kingfisher. A proposed walk round the perimeter of the dam and mention of the elusive African Finfoot we set off in single file on the narrow path. Only the 4 or 5 leading the file had a very brief view of the African Finfoot which disappeared into the vegetation on a tiny islet. There was just time to notice the clear, white stripe on the head and to see that it was doing exactly what the books describe - propelling itself along by rapid paddling with it's feet and beating it's wings, but not actually flying. Finfoot are very reluctant fliers. A second African Finfoot was seen also very briefly. Other birds at the dam included Giant Kingfisher and Pied Kingfishers, African Pied Wagtail and a very large flock (about 200) Red-winged Starlings. After the tea break at Amsterdam Farm we visited the airstrip area and added a Bateleur, African Stonechat, African Palm-swifts, unidentified swallows and a Piper Cub to our list. Total for a very pleasant morning 43 species.

Our thanks yet again to Pie, Mirtula and Pru for introducing us to another most interesting area and in particular for what will perhaps be the best sighting of the year for most of us - the Finfoot. **Tony Curtis**

Inoitwa Farm, Old MUTARE, 11th May 1996. Last time I visited Sally Dilton-Hill's farm I am sure it was called Haitwa (it can't be done). I presume "it" referred to falling off her most docile horse as now the farm is called Inoitwa, (I managed to do it.) However Sally has always encouraged birders so I decided to risk a

further visit, this time armed with binoculars which I handle with considerably more confidence than horses.

We were overwhelmed to find the Museum car park full of expectant birders (14 of us). How the vegetation had changed since my last visit during the drought! The grass and reeds made it difficult for us to see the muddy edges of the dams. The Pied Kingfisher however seemed to have no difficulty and was throwing itself in with its usual enthusiasm. There were Southern Red Bishop too but only one retained part of its breeding dress. Overhead Grey-rumped Swallow replaced the Barn Swallows who have left here to delight the northern hemisphere. More interesting were the Black Stork who flew over, a comparative rarity which Tony and I had seen the previous week at CYNARA.

We could not approach the main dam which was flooded at all the approaches so we went to the grass and woodland. A Common Quail, several Striped Kingfisher and Glossy Starling were seen.

On our way back to the farmhouse we found Pale Flycatcher, Pin-tailed Whydah and Long-tailed Paradise-whydah still in breeding plumage.

Although the sun was now gone we took a short exploratory walk onto the kopjie, giving the bull a wide berth, but only a Black-headed Oriole was still calling. A lovely walk on a beautiful sunny afternoon. Thank you Sally. **Ken Dixon**

Matabeleland

Nata Sanctuary and the Makgadikgadi, 24th - 26th May 1996

This was an added extra to our normal programme and the first time we have joined the Botswana Bird Club on one of their outings. With little delay at the Border and after avoiding expensive speed traps the 400 km took a little over 4.5 hours (from Bulawayo).

The Nata Sanctuary is a Botswana version of a Campfire Project. Set up 6 years ago, it consists of some 230 sq km around the Nata Rivers entry into the Makgadikgadi Pans. Following the good rainy season the pans were full and the Nata River mouth flooded. Great White Pelican were breeding on three islands close to the river mouth, however due to the high water level they could only be approached by boat or on foot by wading through waist high water. This we did approaching to within binocular range. Plenty of birds were sitting but no young were visible. Close by in the branches of flooded trees, African Spoonbill, egrets and White-breasted Cormorants were nesting.

Back to the grassland and some good views of Kori Bustard and Northern Black Korhaan, the latter performing noisy flight displays, cackling round in circles. Double-banded Courser, Ant-eating Chat and Burchell's Sandgrouse were seen at ground level whilst overhead large flocks of Red-billed Quelea whirled like a moving cloud of smoke.

Sunday we moved south to a region of the pan closer to the soda ash plant. Here shallow water offered conditions ideal for flamingos, thousands of birds were present, pink smattering the water surface as far as the eye could see. Both Greater Flamingo and Lesser Flamingo were present, Lesser Flamingo feeding close inshore whilst the Greater were further out in the deeper water.

A fitting end to a memorable weekend. **Martin Smith**

MidlandsLower GWERU Loudoun Farm. 13th and 14th April 1996.

Special thanks to Ivor Wilkinson for not only making Loudoun available to us but also for putting in a lot of work in preparing the camp site and making areas accessible with a lot of extra road work. Thanks Ivor for a super weekend.

Loudoun is situated in the valley of the Gweru River about 50 km NW of Gweru. Our camp situated on a hill top looked out to the sunset with a magnificent panoramic view. The farm is predominantly miombo woodland; on lower levels are some mopane and two baobab trees. Acacia areas are mainly along streamlines and old lands. The farm lies on the transitional zone from high to middle veld.

An almost total lack of raptors was noted with only one Accipiter sighting. Few water birds were seen although all the small dams were full. A young White-faced Duck caused some problems in identification, and was identified on a 2 to 1 vote! Mature birds were seen later. Not many birds were seen in the miombo and mopane, except in bird parties, apart from the ubiquitous Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill, Red-billed Hornbill and African Grey Hornbills. Each morning the Southern Ground-hornbills could be heard. Quite a few palaeartic and intra-African migrants were still present. Speckled Pigeons were seen at the homestead, where they have been in residence and breeding for a number of years although there are few rocky areas in the vicinity.

Groundscraper Thrushes were seen in natural habitat. Black-faced Waxbill was a new sighting for me. Bennett's Woodpecker I have only seen in the Zambezi valley before.

Ivor reported Grey Crowned Cranes in residence but they had moved. A pair of Kori Bustards was in residence but after a few months they appeared to have been poached.

Attendance on Saturday was 11. A warm welcome to new members the Venter family. Once again it was not only the birds but also the trees and plants that were well scrutinised. A very pleasant weekend was had by all.

Bernard Beekes

TAIL FEATHERSWattled Crane

Having read the article some months ago about the deaths of the Wattled Crane at RAINHAM Dams, my spirits have now revived. I have just returned from a piano tuning trip in the CHATSWORTH area where obviously the situation as regards these beautiful birds is encouraging. I watched a pair who are resident at a picturesque farm dam and then on the drive back spoke to a farmer who told me that if I had driven on to the DRIEFONTEIN Mission area I would have seen another larger dam where there are 70 - 80 of them. There has been much publicity about the decline of the Blue Crane in South Africa. From what I have read I can see no reason why this bird could not be introduced into this country. Certainly there seems to be plenty of suitable habitat in the area I have just visited but then perhaps the Wattled Crane might get cross - even so I think there is room. **Peter Cresswell**

Birding and Trout Fishing

We recently drove to Nyanga from Bulawayo for a spell of birding and trout fishing with very pleasing results. On the road approximately 20 km from Shangani at 9.30 a.m. an African Goshawk was spotted perched in a roadside tree. At about 10.30 a.m. 25km south of Gweru on the SOMABHULA flats 130 White-backed Vultures were seen soaring. There did not appear to be an animal carcass in the area and one wonders whether it was a foraging flight? Some rarer species in NYANGA were a Forest Buzzard on Church Road, a Barred Long-tailed Cuckoo near the Nyamziwa Falls, 4 Scarce Swifts, a pair of Cape Crows near the village, Dark-capped Yellow Warbler, Little Rush-warbler, and Red-winged Warblers and Ashy Flycatcher, White-tailed Crested Flycatcher and Blue-mantled Crested Flycatchers.

Red-collared Widowbirds, Variable Sunbirds, Common Waxbills and African Stonechats were in abundance.

One birder was lucky enough to witness an unidentified Raptor swoop on an immature Helmeted Guineafowl on the ground. The raptor lifted the young fowl a meter off the ground, then dropped it and flew off into the forest. To my mind Nyanga is a birder's paradise and the fishing is not bad for a persevering and lucky type. **Ron Stuttaford**