

THE BABBLER

ORNITHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION OF ZIMBABWE

ISSUE #17: MARCH/APRIL 1997

Mashonaland Branch

Chairman: Mr B Elliot 302465
Secretary: - 490167
Treasurer: Mrs I Gray 885406
Members: Mrs D Rushforth 741765
Mrs P Saunders 490167
Mrs D Varden 8879124
Mr R Dennison
Mr D Rockingham-Gill 882412
Mr J Saunders 490167

Editor: Mr D Gray 885406

Postal Addresses:

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

Matabeleland Branch

Martin Smith 42474
Mrs P Feather 44034

Mr W Goodwin 64121

Mr M Smith 42474

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

NATIONAL ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The national AGM will be held on Saturday 22nd March 1997 at Mazowe Sailing Club, North Bank, Lake Chivero (32 km) Harare at 2.00 p.m. See tear-off for details of accommodation.

MASHONALAND BRANCH ACTIVITIES

Outings

1. Mukuvisi Woodlands: Sunday 2nd March and 6th April 1997. Meet at Paget Road entrance at 6.30 a.m. There will be a vehicle guard in attendance.
2. Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary: Sunday 9th March and 13th April 1997. Meet at Marimba Shopping Centre at 6.30 a.m. Beginners are very welcome. Bring your chairs and tea.

Saturday Afternoons

1. 22nd March 1997: National AGM. Mazowe Sailing Club. Lake Chivero 2.00 p.m.
2. 19th April 1997: Lyndhurst Farm - John and Jill Schots. Meet at Queensdale Shopping Centre, Chiremba Road (Widdecombe), at 2 p.m. Bring chairs and tea.

Sunday Outings

1. No March outing due to Easter holidays.
2. 25th April 1997: Vulture restaurant, Featherstone. Meet at GPO Inez Terrace at 6.30 a.m. Distance approx. 130 km. Anyone

Who can offer or requires a lift, please contact Dave Gray 885406 by Monday 21st April 1997. Acacia veld, wetland and grassland - possibly Wattled Cranes. Bring chairs, tea and lunch.

Thursday Evenings

1. 20th March 1997: this talk will take place on Friday 21st March as part of the AGM entertainment. Mike Soroczynski will give an illustrated talk on Namibia. Bring your supper, 6.30 p.m.
2. 17th April 1997: bird identification with slides and sound, Alexandra Sports Club - 6 p.m. for 6.30 p.m. Bring pencil and paper to help with notes. Cash bar.

EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB

Chairman: Mr K Dixon 65819 Mutare
Recorder: Mr A B Curtis 60281 Mutare

Outings

Saturday 8th March 1997 Cynara Farm 2.00 p.m.
Sunday 30th March 1997 Burma Valley 6.00 a.m.

For April outings contact Ken or Tony.

The group assembles at the Museum in Aerodrome Road at the time stated. Transport and binoculars are available if prior notice is given. Contact Ken Dixon 65819 (home) or Tony Curtis 60281 (home).

MATABELELAND BRANCH

Future programme

Evening Meetings

Friday 7th March 1997 - video evening. Two more titles from Harry Erwee's magnificent collection - Attenborough in Paradise - featuring Birds of Paradise in New Guinea narrated by David Attenborough. Venue: 65A Clark Road, Suburbs at 8.00 p.m. Ronnie Stuttaford's home - Tel 721165

Friday 4th April 1997 - Verreaux's Eagle Survey Meeting. George will hold his pre-season briefing for all those interested in the Verreaux's Eagle Survey. Venue: 49A Lawley Road, Suburbs at 7.30 p.m. For further details contact George Banfield 71624.

Outings

Sunday 16th March 1997 - Umgusa Nature reserve. This will be a morning only outing but members are most welcome to stay on if they wish. Meet at the Falls Road Garage at 7.30 a.m., bringing morning tea.

Sunday 20th April 1997 - Cascades outing. Old Gwanda Road. This will be an all day outing down the Old Gwanda Road stopping at a variety of venues. Meet at 92 Arnold Way at 7.15 a.m. or contact Penny Feather Tel 44034.

Easter weekend - 28th, 29th, 30th March 1997 - we are contemplating an away weekend to the Gwaai Valley area. All interested should contact the Chairman, Tel 42474.

Aisleby - March: no outings

Sunday 27th April 1997 - meet at Aisleby boom at 7.30 a.m. or contact the co-ordinator Tim English, Tel 45688.

From the Chairman

Welcome to 1997 and a beautifully green and lush Matabeleland. The widespread rains seem to have led to a considerable dilution of birdlife both at AISLEBY and within BULAWAYO city gardens. The January waterfowl count produced some low totals, some of which are:-

<u>Species</u>	<u>1996</u>	<u>1997</u>
Little Grebe	15	89
Glossy Ibis	101	3
Southern Pochard	196	39
Red-knobbed Coot	67	210

Totals for other species were remarkably similar for both years and it would be interesting to know how many birds are year-round residents.

Bird movements are a particularly fascinating aspect of ornithology and my limited efforts as a ringer have produced a number of returns. Both a Willow Warbler and a Garden Warbler ringed late season have been recaptured within the garden at the same site. Presumably both have travelled to the Palaearctic and back; a considerable achievement for birds weighing less than 20 gm. Laughing Doves would also appear to make local movements with a return from Magwegwe; the ring proving indigestible!

Finally, a plea for our future programme, ideas and suggestions for venues and speakers would be most appreciated.

Good birding - **Martin Smith**

MIDLANDS BRANCH

Co-ordinator: Bernard Beekes P O Box 55 Shurugwi

Phone 152-6422

Future Outings

DAY OUTINGS Gweru - Contact Gavin 154-4666 or 154-4058, Bernard 152-6422 or Tommy 154-4113 for further information.

Sunday 9th February 1997. Meet outside G & T Contracting at 07h45 for 08h00 departure. Either to local farm and dam or to Antelope Park.

Sunday 13th April, Sunday 29th June, Sunday 31st August, Sunday 19th October, Sunday 16th December. Further day outings and full details will be notified in due course.

DAY OUTINGS Masvingo - Contact Lynne 139-63857 for further details. Sunday 20th April, Sunday 26th October.

DAY OUTINGS Kadoma - Contact Margaret 168-3644

With luck we will be able to organise one or two day outings

CAMPING WEEKENDS - Contact Bernard 152-6422 for further info.

The following weekends are provisional at this stage:

Friday 7th to Sunday 9th March Mazuri Ranch Kwekwe

Friday 2nd to Sunday 4th May Shangani Area

Friday 6th to Sunday 8th June Chiredzi

Saturday 9th to Monday 11th August Sebakwe Poort

Friday 3rd to Sunday 5th October Chatsworth or Chivhu

Friday 28th to Sunday 30th November Central Estates Mvuma

REPORTSThe Blue Swallow Survey 9th - 10th November 1997

The objective of this survey was to identify areas of Blue Swallow distribution in the Eastern Districts as well as additional information such as nesting records, behaviour, vegetation type etc. NYANGA with the largest area of suitable habitat was the focus area although birders in the Mutare/Vumba area contributed. No records were received from Chimanimani area. There was a good response of OAZ and On Safari members with 43 taking part in Nyanga area.

Participants gathered at Village Inn on Friday evening where Steven Evans the Biologist in charge of Blue Swallow research in South Africa gave a very informative talk on the swallows. The numbers of 70 - 80 breeding pairs in S.A. are considerably lower than in Zimbabwe. They suffer the same threat, namely the invasion of the high altitude grasslands by alien trees such as Pine and Wattle.

The Nyanga area covered ranged from Bonda and Manyoli in the west to Glen Eagles in the east, Rukotso in the north and south to Mtarazi. It was impossible to cover all the suitable areas. A total of 281 birds were sighted and 12 active nests found. The weather was hot and dry which reduced the chances of finding the swallows. Their activity periods were before 10.30 a.m. and after 3.30 p.m. During midday the swallows perched or flew short distances. Several large flocks of 10+ birds indicated that not all had paired yet. The presence of mist is vital to initiate breeding.

Many thanks to all participants who travelled around Nyanga at their own expense. I think overall it was a successful survey and we all learned something for the next survey. A more detailed report will appear in *Honeyguide*. **S. Worsley.**

Mashonaland BranchBranch AGM 16th January 1997.

There was a good turnout at Alexandra Sports Club. The business was dealt with quickly with four new committee members being elected, namely: Di Rushforth, Pat and John Saunders and Richard Dennison. Those to stand down were Ida Gray as Secretary, Geoff Lowe and Keith Barrow as PRO. A big thank you to those new committee members who agreed to stand. After the meeting Keith Holshausen gave an illustrated presentation on the Wildfowl Trust - membership forms for which are available from Dave Gray. This was an interesting and most informative presentation.

MUKUVISI WOODLANDS Report 1998

The branch held twelve monthly meetings in the Mukuvisi Woodlands during the year. A total of 135 different species of birds were recorded and 151 people attended the 11 outings for which I have figures.

Over the last few months I have been examining the last twenty years records from the Mukuvisi Woodlands and the first thing that is quite clear is that a number of birds which were recorded fairly regularly in the mid-seventies have

disappeared, while considerable numbers of other species are disappearing fast.

The table below indicates the number of monthly sightings of some of these declining species for the two recent ten year periods: -

Species	1976-85	1986-95
Yellow-billed Kite	37	14
Black-shouldered Kite	40	25
Greater Spotted Cuckoo	4	1
Jacobin Cuckoo	14	6
Levaillant's Cuckoo	7	1
Eurasian Golden Oriole	16	1
Southern Black Tit	40	24
Long-billed Crombec	21	13
White-crested Helmet-shrike	29	8
Scarlet-chested Sunbird	46	17
Pin-tailed Whydah	31	18
Common Waxbill	43	28
Orange-breasted Waxbill	32	9

Possibly more alarming are those birds for which we have an increase in monthly sightings in 1986-95 compared with 1976-85 but which over the last few years have shown a big drop in numbers. One of these is the Groundscraper Thrush which was seen in 10 months in 1993, seen in 6 months in 1994 and 1995 but only twice in 1996. The Miombo Rock-thrush population has also taken a dive being recorded in 8 months of the year in 1986 and in only 3 months in 1996. The Long-billed Crombec which is declining anyhow, was recorded in 5 months in 1986 and only once in 1996.

Some birds are, of course, expanding and I would pick out the Miombo Blue-eared Starling and the Variable Sunbird, and there are some new arrivals, the Thick-billed Weaver, the Speckled Mousebird and the Wattled Starling were not recorded at all until fairly recently.

I may be wrong in my interpretation of the records, but I do not think so. The overall picture, which is of larger birds, particularly birds of prey, and the specialised miombo woodland birds declining rapidly in numbers, may be depressing but, I believe, by and large it is an accurate one. **John Shaw**

Mystery Tour - 18th January 1997

A gloriously fun afternoon was had by about a dozen OAZ members, who in teams of twos or threes, attempted a cryptic treasure hunt for 10 specific bird species, organised by Ida and Dave Gray, in conjunction with Sybil Duncanson. Our adventure commenced at the Belvedere shops, and after 'passing a bit of Holland' in the form of Vollandam and Marken Courts, and "avoiding birdies and eagles" at the Royal Harare Golf Club, we made our way to the Botanic Gardens. This was followed by a trip down "Toilet (Blair) Road", to "Birds Breeding Paradise", a veritable apartment complex bursting with an inordinate number of maternity and nursery annexes.

A rhino and eagle were our clues to the final hurdle to find Greengrove and our afternoon concluded at the Mukuvisi where a quiz had been set (which Jacko won hands down), and a welcome "cuppa". Many thanks to organisers and participants.

Deb Gundlach.

Eastern Districts

CYNARA Farm, Old MUTARE, Sunday 24th November 1996

QDS 1832D3

A couple of showers brought out the birds we'd been missing recently. From the usual 60-80 species we seemed to jump to 103 by my reckoning. These included newly arrived summer visitors, like Red-backed Shrike, Black Cuckoo and many Spotted Flycatcher and other occasional sightings - Broad-billed Roller. One new species was a Southern Pochard enjoying water lilies, presumably on a lone migration northward.

Within minutes of arrival on the flat rocky area we set up a Square-tailed Nightjar, then 5 Rufous-cheeked Nightjars (I think) which appeared suddenly and disappeared as quickly into the leaves superbly camouflaged. Darrell found an Apalis nest and an African Paradise-flycatcher nest under construction.

The main dam yielded a Bush Baby snoozing in a large Euphorbia as we searched for sunbirds. The light was at its best and opportunities for identifying and comparing waders were excellent. We chatted with our host Reg Bennett, whose sympathetic husbandry of the farm allows such a wide range of birds, mammals and who knows what else to thrive there. We hadn't reached our 'ton' before leaving, but added another 8 species on the first kilometre of the return trip. **Ken Dixon**

Drifters, Harare Road, Sunday 14th December 1996

QDS 1832C4

Disappointingly only three of us turned out for the visit to this popular place of rest and refreshment. Much in evidence was the call of the Red-chested Cuckoo. Most activity centred around the camp but a further walk was interesting due to Tom Mercer's local knowledge. Amethyst Sunbird, African Paradise-flycatcher, Black-collared Barbet, Streaky-headed Seedeater, Fork-tailed Drongos and Kurrichane Thrust were seen early on. Village Weaver congregated around the feeding tray. Black-headed Oriole and Yellow-bellied Greenbul were heard. Further away besides Zebra, there were White-crested Helmet-shrike, Green Wood-hoopoe and African Grey Hornbill. A Black Cuckoo called and we visited a Hamerkop's nest. 25 species were recorded and a comprehensive list of birds identified is posted in Poachers' Pub if an excuse for a visit is needed. Thanks to Tom for guiding and to Rob and Lynn Rogers for hosting us. **Rex Harrison.**

CYNARA Farm, Old MUTARE Saturday 11th January 1997

QDS 1832D3

When we arrived for our first outing of the year the rain that soaked Mutare had not yet reached Cynara, but the inflowing water had filled most of the dams. Despite the humidity there was plenty of activity to excite our visitors from UK, Harare and local. In a short time we identified over 60 species.

The main dam had sufficient mud to attract the usual waders. 40 Comb Duck as well as White-faced Duck and Egyptian Goose. No nightjar this time but Golden-breasted Bunting, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird and lots more in the rocky area. African Green-pigeon put in

a rare appearance. Birds of prey included African Harrier-hawk. Earlier in the week members visited Eastwood farm with bushier habitat and a small, heavily reeded dam. We saw a resident African Pygmy-goose, rarely seen here. We heard the song of Thrush Nightingale. This will be a promising site for further study. Thanks to Mrs Maas who invited us. **Ken Dixon.**

Midlands

Hope Valley Farm, Hunters Road, GWERU, Sunday 26th October QDS 1929B2

Eleven of us walked around open and vleis areas near the homestead and saw African Quailfinch and recently arrived Broad-billed Rollers. We went to the granite hill area to the east of the farm and saw Familiar Chat, Mocking Cliff-chat and Boulder Chats. Sincere thanks to the Venters for organising, transporting and feeding

CENTRAL ESTATES, MVUMA, 22nd-24th November 1996 QDS 1930B1

The Southern Carmine Bee-eater colony was active in the same situation but greater in size. Total number of holes counted was 719 and assuming half of these were being used - by two adults and an immature per hole - this would indicate a colony of 1100 birds - last years estimate was 600-900. Unusual sightings were a Black Cuckooshrike with yellow wing patches and a family of Pied Kingfishers hawking the plentiful flying ants. Fifteen people attended and 141 species were recorded. Sincere thanks to Central Estates and especially to Gary & Cathy Sharpe.

Annual General Meeting: 24th November 1996

Only four people attended but many apologies were recorded. The organisation of an AGM is difficult with the widespread membership. Four people have been co-opted onto the Committee namely Gavin Conway, Tommy Venter, Lynne Wilkins and Margaret Parrock. The newsletter edited by Bernard Beekes keeps the branch together and makes the Midlands Branch work. **B Beekes.**

TAIL FEATHERS

9th December 1996 - 6.30-5.45 a.m., a Reed Cormorant spent time at the swimming pool where it dived and swam then stood drying its wings. Another first for our property.

16th-19th December 1996. Mid-morning between 10 a.m. and 12 noon between 6 and 12 Southern Carmine Bee-eaters (on two occasions in the company of European Bee-eaters) over-flew from north to south.

19th December 1996. 3.25 p.m. 12+ Black Kites over-flew, in single file from north east to south. **Mac Kirkpatrick** - Chisipite, HARARE.

An exciting sighting. 22nd December 1996 at 5.00 p.m. pair of Copper Sunbirds feeding on a "cigarette bush" in the company of Variable Sunbirds in an Eastlea garden, HARARE. The sky was slightly overcast making the colours stand out. **Sue Bell.**

21st January 1997. Whilst in our kitchen [HARARE] I watched a female Variable Sunbird collecting nesting material from a thread hanging from a macramé hanging pot plant holder on our back patio. She flew backwards and forwards attempting to break the thread and only gave up after about a minute. **D. Gray**

Derek Solomon picked up on Internet at short notice, information that a World Bird count from 27th September - 13th October 1996 was being held. He notified a number of Zimbabwe birders who submitted counts. An incomplete report was received by e mail which indicated that 2149 species had been recorded by 54,980 observers from 48 countries but this did not include the Zimbabwe count. The combined South African count was 648 species by 120 observers. The 26 Zimbabwe observers collected 440 species. Well done to those who participated. BirdLife International has been requested to give plenty of warning of future world counts.

OAZ Cap/Hat Badges. These are available from Dave Gray at \$10 each. Other branches will be receiving their stocks in due course. The badges are the same size and likeness as the car stickers. There are not many available - so get yours soon!

Stolen binoculars. Ferdie and Tracey Couto had their Swarovski military-style Binoculars stolen from Udu Camp, Nyanga. If you are offered binoculars that fit this description please contact Ferdie or Tracey, National Parks Ornithological Branch.

Field Cards. The Field Card Co-ordinator requests that when filling in Field Cards please enter the number of birds seen - not just a tick, i.e. Dark-capped Bulbul 6.

Where is the thicket? Gone!

Where is the Eagle? Gone!

The end of living and the beginning of survival

These words are attributed to Chief Seattle in a speech to George Washington in 1855.

OBITUARY

We are sorry that our member of long-standing, Rex Newton-Howes died recently, whilst on holiday in Australia.

Rex and his wife Joan have been regular attendants at our meetings and outings over the last thirty years or so. They have sent in many field cards to the Organiser, which have been much appreciated. Some of you may have seen the many articles on garden birdwatching, in 'Pool and Garden'. Rex served on the Mashonaland Committee and was Chairman from 1970 - 1972.

We hope to see Joan again at our meetings and send our sincere sympathy to her and the family. **Sally Perrett.**