

THE BABBLER

ORNITHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION OF ZIMBABWE

ISSUE #18: MAY/JUNE 1997

Mashonaland Branch

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ACTIVITIES

MASHONALAND BRANCH

1. Mukuvisi Woodlands: Sunday 4th May and 1st June 1997. Meet at Paget Road entrance at 7.00 a.m. There will be a vehicle guard in attendance.
2. Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary: Sunday 11th May and 8th June 1997. Meet at Marimba Shopping Centre at 7.00 a.m. Beginners are very welcome. Bring your chairs and tea.

Saturday Afternoons

1. 17th May 1997: Sands Sales (Seke Road). Meet at Kentucky Service Station, Seke Road. New area.
2. 21st June 1997: Rainham Dams. Meet at Belvedere Shopping Centre at 3 p.m. Bring your chairs and liquid refreshments. The Marsh Owls should be in abundance.

Sunday Outing

1. 25th May 1997: Highbury Estate. Meet at Greencroft Shopping Centre (left hand side of Lomagundi Road at 6.00 a.m. Bring your chairs, tea and lunch.
2. 29th June 1997: Domboshawa area. Meet at TA Motors Shell Service Station opposite Sam Levy's village at 7.00 a.m. Bring your chairs and tea.

Thursday Evenings

1. 15th May 1997: Mr. Chris Bell will talk on duck breeding and illustrate this with slides. Venue: Alexandra Sports Club. Time 6.00 for 8.30 p.m. A cash bar will be available.
2. 19th June 1997: Mr. Roger Howman will talk on weavers' nests which he has studied for years. Venue: Alexandra Sports Club

Time 6.00 for 6.30 p.m. There will be a cash bar available.

EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB

Chairman Mr. K Dixon 65819 Mutare
Recorder: Mr. A B (Tony) Curtis 60281 Mutare

Outings

Saturday	10th	May 1997	Elgon Farm Odzi	2.00	p.m.
Sunday	25th	May 1997	Nyanga	6.00	a.m.
Saturday	14th	June 1997	Stapleford	2.00	p.m.
Sunday	29th	June 1997	Hot Springs area	6.30	a.m.

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 85819 (home) or Tony Curtis 60281 (home).

KAROI BIRD CLUB

Co-ordinator: Mr. K Mitchell P O Box 189 Karoi 164-630220
Secretary: Mrs. M Mitchell P O Box 398 Karoi 164-630216

Outings

Sunday	4th	May 1997	Rydings School Interpretive Centre	6.30	a.m.
Sunday	25th	May 1997	Venue to be advised.	To be advised	

Telephone either Kevin or Merle for details.

MATABELELAND BRANCH

Evening Meetings

Friday 2nd May 1997 - Raptor evening. Penny Feather has kindly offered to host the May meeting at which Warren Goodwin will focus on raptors. Verreaux's Eagle slides and a study of skins should help sort out some of the ID problems with this difficult group. Venue: 92 Arnold Way, Burnside at 8.00 p.m. Contact Penny Feather for further details. Tel 44034.

Friday 6th June 1997 - Birds of Hwange National Park. Viv Wilson of Chipangali spent 1990 assessing animal populations in the Park, and also bumped into some birds. He has kindly agreed to give a presentation of birds of the Park which will include some slides. Venue: Probably CBC staff room but yet to be confirmed. Contact the Chairman on 42474 for details.

Outings

Sunday 18th May 1997 - Quietwaters, Falcon College. This game stocked area is renowned for its raptor populations, hopefully given a clear winter's day there will be plenty to see. Meet at Ascot car park at 7.30 a.m. bringing morning tea and lunch. Co-ordinator Martin Smith Tel 42474.

20th - 22nd June 1997 - Away weekend, Gwanda. An Outward Bound camp has been established on Longueville Ranch close to Gwanda. The area is stocked with game and includes a wide range of different habitats, kopjes, dams and a section of the Lumani River offering interesting and diverse birding. Those interested should contact the Chairman.

Aisleby. We have reverted to winter times, meeting at the farm boom at 2.30 p.m. on the last Saturday in the month.

Dates and Co-ordinators are:-

	Co-ordinator	Tel.
Saturday 24th May 1997	C. Townsley	46617
Saturday 20th June 1997	P. Feather	44034

Either meet at Aisleby boom at 2.30 or contact co-ordinator.

From the Chairman

Our Branch AGM proved to be popular with an attendance of over 30 people, plenty of convivial twitter ensued with meat being cooked on fires that worked! After a brief postponement to allow our honourable doctor to swallow his sausage, the meeting was permitted to commence. A variety of Committee changes took place and we thank retiring members Tim and George and welcome new members Pete Ditchburn and Clive Townsley. The full Committee for the coming year is noted at the beginning of this issue of *Babbler*.

Future projects include completion of the Aisleby hide and a re-run of the Paint a Bird competition, any assistance with sponsorship would be most welcome.

We were also privileged to be graced by the presence of the President OAZ, who briefed us on developments with BirdLife International, suggested a name change and proposed an increased role in education for the Society. It was extremely worthwhile to be able to hear first hand of proposed developments and we thank John Paxton for taking the trouble to visit us. Good Birding - **Martin Smith.**

MIDLANDS BRANCH

Co-ordinator: Mr B. 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. Meet outside G & T Contracting at 0745 for 0800 departure.

Sunday 29th June 1997; Sunday 31st August; Sunday 19th October; Sunday 16th November 1997.

DAY OUTINGS Masvingo - Sunday 26th October 1997. Contact Lynne 139-63657.

DAY OUTINGS Kadoma - Contact Margaret 168-3644.

CAMPING WEEKENDS - Contact Bernard for further information

Friday 2nd	- Sunday 4th May	Shangani area
Friday 6th	- Sunday 8th June	Chiredzi
Saturday 9 th	- Monday 11th August	Sebakwe Poort
Friday 10th	- Sunday 12th October	Chatsworth
Friday 28th	- Sunday 30th November	Central Estates

REPORTS

National AGM held over weekend 21st - 22nd March 1997

Twenty five members, having braved the weather and roads, attended Mike Soroczynski's talk and slide show on Friday

evening. It was excellent and it certainly whetted the appetite to visit Namibia. Sadly it was Mike's swansong as he is returning to Namibia and we thank Mike for his interesting talks and magnificent slides and we wish him a safe trip and happy landings.

Saturday afternoon saw a fairly good turnout of 37 for the AGM. We missed our regular members from the various provinces but were happy to welcome their representatives and particularly pleased to have Karoi members with us.

The President reported on Birdlife International and OAZ status as a representative as well as some of their projects and also the PAOC in Ghana. He spoke on the IBA (Important Bird Areas) project stating that OAZ has entered into a contract with BLI to compile an inventory of IBAs in Zimbabwe. Other subjects were the Atlas Project, Field Cards, Grants and a new Nest Record Card Scheme (NERCS) brought out by ADU in Cape Town.

The Council was re-elected en bloc and the meeting was followed by tea and social braai.

Mashonaland Branch

End of Year Breakfast, LAKE CHIVERO. December 1996

Apologies for the tardiness of this report, but the challenge was not taken seriously at the time. "Better late than never". Not having attended this OAZ event previously a pleasant, totally unexpected surprise lay ahead. The day dawned fine and over 40 members were divided into five groups, a total of 107 species were recorded including a Lesser Jacana and Allen's Gallinule. By 9.00 a.m. we were becoming hot, thirsty and hungry so we headed for breakfast under the large, shady trees - goodness what a spread awaited us! First Bucks Fizz - luckily not served earlier - imagine the sightings! and for the less depraved there were fruit drinks. Then followed eggs, bacon, sausages, tomatoes, corn fritters, mushrooms, rolls with butter and marmalade and coffee. All thanks and appreciation to Dave and his helpers Pat Saunders, Deb Gundlach and Jean Riddell not only for the prior preparation but for staying behind to "slog over the hot stove" and serving, it to the starving multitude. See you at the next breakfast - a MUST on the OAZ calendar! **Rita Mills**

Vlei Walk 28th January 1997

QDS 1731C3

As per tradition (the last Sunday in January), Alex Masterson (accompanied by his 8-month-old faithful Labrador Shava) produced his usual master-piece. This year in the form of the sighting of an African Crake in the squelchy (repeat squelchy) MONAVALLE vlei, and secondly in perfect views of numerous Black Coucals in the vlei behind Mabelreign Drive-In. Despite a cacophony of Streaky-breasted Flufftails, Shava failed in his novitiate trials as a professional flusher despite his unbounded eagerness. In addition to the usual widows, whydahs, warblers and cisticolas, a Bat Hawk allowed us a lengthy inspection of his anatomy for which most of us are extremely grateful. Many thanks to Mr Masterson for the

time, patience and diligence spent in his endeavours to instil in 25 members of the birding community his knowledge and enthusiasm for our feathered friends.

Deb Gundlach

GOSHO PARK, 23rd February 1997 QDS 1831B1

A group of about 18 of us 'flew' out to Gosho Park and only started out on our walk at about 7.45 a.m. We split into two groups and it was amazing what each group saw. Only 56 species were recorded but a few of the specials were seen. The Southern Hyliota, Miombo Rock-thrush, Spotted Creeper and Collared Flycatcher, Boulder Chat and White-breasted Cuckooshrike. We were surprised at the lack of water birds - there were dams, streams but none of the waders or ducks. Rock Martins were flying round the lovely huge rock outcrops and balancing rocks - no raptors either. The one group saw Eland, Impala, Zebra, Sable and Waterbuck.

All in all it was a lovely day out and Gosho Park is well worth a visit - one keen birder thought she'd seen a fairy flycatcher!

Robin Gilmour

Eastern Districts Bird Club

DOROWA Mine, Sunday 26th January 1997 QDS 1931B4

Another resounding success for EDBC despite inclement weather and a rather late arrival because of stopping to wonder at the swollen Macheke and Save rivers and a few birds on their banks. We were delighted to meet Eric and Una Bowker and grateful to Eric for leading our expedition. The magnetic appeal of Dorowa had worked on Bernard and Nome Beekes from Shurugwi who were well rewarded for their 4 a.m. start by a list of 107 species.

Emma Holland our 11 year old star birder, who for the second time at this venue again kept us all on our toes and wrote the following account within hours of getting home.

At 5 a.m. Mutare was rainy and overcast so how possibly could this day turn out so rewarding? Well miracles happen. There was a good attendance to begin with and we were greeted by Mr & Mrs Bowker, Harold the Club manager and Mr & Mrs Beekes at 7.30 a.m. In the gardens near the club we gathered Grey-headed Bush-shrike, African Green-pigeon, Yellow-bellied Greenbul and other more common garden birds. We headed for the dam but halted many times to look at birds such as Black-throated Canary, Greater Blue-eared Starling, Mottled Swift, Cut-throat Finch and plenty of Scaly-feathered Finch. On reaching the dam it was frustrating to hear Black Crake but not see them. On the telephone wires were Barn Swallows, Wire-tailed Swallows and White-throated Swallow, European Bee-eater and White-fronted Bee-eater, Lesser Grey Shrike and Magpie Shrike and Yellow-mantled Widowbird and nearby an African Cuckoo. The water produced Black Heron, Little Bittern, Squacco Heron, Allen's Gallinule, Little Stint and most of the common waders. Up the vertical road we were able to over look the sludge pan and with the assistance of Jane Clegg's telescope we identified Red-billed Teal, African Spoonbill nesting Blacksmith Lapwings and a large heronry. En route to lunch we visited the airstrip and sighted Crowned Lapwing,

Red-capped Lark and Rufous-naped Lark, Abdim's Stork and Lilac-breasted Roller minus long tail feathers. THANK YOU to Dorowa residents for wonderful hospitality - it was a BRILLIANT day." **Emma Holland**

Mutare - Saturday 8th February 1997 QDS 1832D3

Conditions were not ideal for birdwatching but Tony and I went anyway. We discovered all those watercourses which hadn't appeared for years but frustrating not seeing because of high grass and raindrops on specs and binos - and the rain played havoc with Tony's hearing-aid. We rattled up the species near Cecil Kop along the edge of the game park when the rain started - I'd reached 30 then the paper became too sodden so we returned home to plan for future drier outings. **Ken Dixon**

MAPOR ESTATE, ODZI - Sunday 23rd February 1997 QDS 1932A2

It was almost 3 years since we had last visited this lovely tobacco farm with kopjies and the Odzi River. Instead of parched lands and a barely flowing river we were faced by flooded roads, a breeched dam wall and a roaring torrent unwilling to remain within its banks. The birding was disappointing owing to various factors - shortage of insects, excessive vegetation and dispersal of birds. The camp site and kopjie were busy with bulbuls, barbets and bee-eaters but the best was excellent views of a Spotted Eagle-owl. The dam yielded little - Egyptian Goose and a Wood Sandpiper - a Long-crested Eagle was more exciting. With the stream in full spate we were forced to walk but as a result paid more attention to the fewer birds. Raptors soaring overhead were African Hawk-eagle, Tawny Eagle, and Dickinson's Kestrel. The river was apparently unattractive to birds - only an African Pied Wagtail and 3 Wire-tailed Swallows. The total was 46 mostly heard but not seen. Thanks to Sally Holman. **Ken Dixon**

MOUNTAIN HOME, PENHALONGA Saturday 8th March 1997 QDS 1832D3

As a result of our midweek planning meeting 10 members met for this outing. We welcomed Ian Mander, who is working on the Pungwe project and Mr Masango, who is in charge of the aviary in the Museum. When visiting this venue for a short afternoon outing it is difficult to choose which of the many habitats but with John Meikle guiding us we opted for the high altitude of montane forest and grassland temporary home to the Blue Swallow. It is comforting to have someone who knows his way through the minefields as this area contains the bauxite mine which is actually in Mozambique. Those of us who experience the delays and multiplicity of fees at Forbes Border Post were amazed to cross the frontier for nothing more than a cheery wave to the lonely official. Back to birds; not too plentiful on a hot sunny afternoon but the Blue Swallows were seen with Eastern Saw-wings. John estimates there are at least 6 pairs but has located only one nest - 3m down a prospecting hole. Given the panorama of similar habitat there must be a large number but the land mines discourage further exploration. The grass also attracts Cape Grassbird, Wailing Cisticola and in the marshy areas plenty of widowbirds and whydahs. On the protea were Malachite Sunbird and Variable Sunbird were abundant. In the small areas of dark, quiet forest we heard the

Stripe-cheeked Greenbul and Yellow-bellied Greenbul, Cape Robin-chat, Livingstone's Turaco, Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird among others. Scrubby areas offered Amethyst Sunbird, mousebird and lots of African Firefinch - the taller trees produced African Olive-pigeon, Dark-backed Weaver and Southern Black Tit. In all only 38 species but it was fascinating and the views of Chicamba, the Himalayas and the Chimanimani were unforgettable. Thanks John. **Ken Dixon**

Karoi Bird Club

An enthusiastic group of 15 people met at the Rydings Interpretive Centre at 6.30 a.m. on Sunday 6th April 1997 and enjoyed a fairy tale misty walk around the Rydings Dam. Walking through the woodland, water and mud 82 species were recorded. This was followed by the inaugural meeting of this club at which many topics were discussed and decisions on the number of outings etc. were made. Dave Gray came from Harare to inform the members of OAZ projects and to assist in the formation of the club. Kevin Mitchell was voted in as Coordinator and Merle Mitchell (his mother) as Secretary.

Merle Mitchell

Editors note: We were treated to a magnificent spread and tea/coffee before and the after the meeting and the Mitchell family are to be congratulated on getting the Club going.

Matabeleland

UMGUSA Nature Reserve Sunday 18th March 1997 QDS 2028B1

This proved to be an extremely rewarding outing with plenty to see. We began with a visit to the small river that bisects the reserve, a particularly tuneful White-throated Robin-chat kept us staring into the bushes before a brief glimpse of tail feathers as it disappeared. On to the Umgusa and its fringe of riverine acacia which proved to be alive with a wide variety of species including sunbirds, barbets, flycatchers and woodpeckers. At the waters edge lush reed growth offered an ideal habitat for an assortment of warblers and we managed to identify Great Reed-warbler, Little Rush-warbler and Sedge Warbler and Lesser Swamp-warbler and hazard a guess at both African Reed-warbler and Marsh Warbler. Close to the bridge there was plenty to see - a pair of Red-faced Cisticola called loudly a few metres from us and a Giant Kingfisher was perched close to a freshly dug hole suggesting breeding; whilst overhead a Hamerkop was busy adding more sticks to its already mountainous nest. Finally we compiled a checklist over tea and noted what hadn't been seen or heard - no ducks, geese or francolin - a sign of good rains? **Martin Smith**

Midlands

Antelope Park - Saturday 9th February 1997 QDS 1929B3

It was cold and wet as we headed out for Antelope Park and on leaving GWERU we saw Rock Doves and lots of Pied Crows. In Antelope Park we stopped for a walk and got a close look at a Chestnut-vented Tit-babbler and some good views of a Brown-hooded Kingfisher.

Rufous-naped Larks were plentiful. Walking down to Barbel Dam we saw a flock of about twenty Scaly-feathered Finches with Red-breasted Swallows and Barn Swallows flying around. Brown-crowned Tchagra, Lappet-faced Vulture, Lilac-breasted Roller and Swainson's Spurfowl were seen and at the dam we found Cattle Egrets, Reed Cormorants and a Steppe Eagle. Walking near the water we flushed what looked like a White-backed Night-heron. Driving to the main dam we saw and heard Flappet Lark and crossing the river which was difficult, we saw female Southern Red Bishops and Common Waxbills. At the hide I played the Pearl-spotted Owlet tape because I've seen them there before but the only bird that reacted was a Marico Sunbird. We heard a Senegal Coucal and walking along the dam banks I saw about 8 Common Moorhens and Black Crakes. On our return to the house there were African Quailfinch on the road and at the house a Tawny Eagle was perched on the top of a big tree while Helmeted Guineafowl were screeching. On investigating some egrets - they were Cattle Egrets - we saw a black head and presumed it was Abdim's Stork but on closer inspection there was a pair of Black Storks. Walking around the lion cages we saw a Marico Flycatcher and a Southern Masked-weaver coming into breeding plumage and there was a Red-backed Shrike sitting on the fence. On the drive out crossing a river we flushed a crane and whilst I was trying to find it I heard a White-throated Robin-chat. We continued and on reaching the peak of a hill we stopped and saw a Black Kite and Dark Chanting-goshawk. On our return to The Midlands Christian College we checked a raptors nest I had found earlier that week and after cutting my way through the bush identified it as a young Wahlberg's Eagle. Total species seen 85. **Gordon Conway.**

TAIL FEATHERS

Comments on John Shaw's Mukuvisi Report for 1996.

I hereby ask for John Shaw's indulgence for commenting on his write-up in the *Babbler*, but I wish to make it clear that I fully support his conclusion in regard to the reduction of bird density in the MUKUVISI WOODLAND. Allow me to add a few more birds to the list:

White-crested Helmet-shrike - totally absent from a high of 16

Fewer Neddicky

Fewer Southern Black Flycatchers

The Southern Black Flycatchers modified their nesting habits to a certain extent, they now use nest sites of a much higher elevation due to predation. I firmly believe that our big drought of 1992 has a lot to do with the overall problem. Due to the prevailing dry conditions - worse still in other parts of the country - we had an influx of birds of prey. African Harrier-hawk, African Goshawks and Gabar Goshawks and Little Sparrowhawks had a negative impact on our Woodland birds for over two breeding seasons, reducing the success rate to a very small margin. The biggest culprits are the Shikra

as they are having two broods per season and are feeding very many chicks and adult birds to their young. Then there are the shrikes, mongoose, cobras and rats. Pied Crows are also responsible for a lot of mischief, preventing Black-shouldered Kites, Black-chested Snake-eagles and Wahlberg's Eagles from nesting and so reducing their numbers. Prior to the drought and its attendant repercussions the nest count per season reached a high of 260 nests but in the last few years it dropped to an average of 150 nests. To this despondent bird lover, the beautiful liquid song of a male Miombo Rock-thrush coming from a tall Msasa appeared to be a requiem for a breeding season gone wrong - or did it hold a promise a hope for a better future?
John Sievi

Trip to East London

During January 1997 a short holiday/business trip provided the opportunity to look at some bird life in that area. Generally speaking birding in coastal regions is a totally different ball game to our home ground and while numbers of different species were well down on our counts this could be attributed to lack of local knowledge. Birds of particular interest were Swift Terns and Kelp Gulls - fairly numerous - but Common Whimbrel were less common although a number of good sightings in river estuaries and rocky beaches were achieved. Ruddy Turnstones, especially in large numbers made particularly attractive sightings. Off the shorelines Black-winged Lapwings were found in family groups their behaviour and appearance is very similar to our Crowned Lapwing, however this species is very localised. Burchell's Coucal in the area lacked the white brow which their brothers have in areas overlapping the Senegal's range. The old iSakabula (Long-tailed Widowbird) took me back down memory lane when as kids we chased the males of this species for miles in the early mornings when the dew was heavy, under the mistaken belief that due to their wet plumage they would be unable to avoid capture. Yellow-billed Duck, Red-shouldered Widowbirds, Yellow-crowned Bishops, Jackal Buzzards, Common Starlings and Common Mynas were common species in those far off places but are seldom found in our area.

Peter Tourle of Somabhula

White Storks near MASVINGO

On 13th November 1996 we saw 13 White Storks on Mr A D Mitchell's farm adjoining Bushmead Township. They were on a wheat field amongst the rolled wheat. I have only ever seen as many on Mr J C Nichols farm at RAFFINGORA some years ago.

Joan Harrold of Masvingo

Black-chested Snake-eagle

On 4th March 1997 a Black-chested Snake-eagle was seen circling above North Road, Greendale North, HARARE at 16.00 hours at about 200 feet above ground level, moving in a south westerly direction. Peter Steyn's book on Birds of Prey states they move into the city from May to September. This fellow obviously got his dates wrong.

Iain Macdonald of Harare

Priests Eggs of Southern African Birds

This collector's item was first published in 1948 and was reprinted in 1971. Offers to purchase this book are invited. Contact Bernard Beekes, Box 55 Shurugwi or Phone 152-6422

1997 A4 Planner

For sale - Colour printed A4 size Planner showing all day and camping outings for Midlands for \$20. Contact Bernard Beekes

OAZ Sew-on Cap/Hat Badges

These are obtainable from all Branches at \$10.00 each.

WORLD BIRDWATCH AND OAZ BIRDWATCH COMPETITION 1997

The 48 hours World Birdwatch will be over the weekend of 4th and 5th October 1997.

As a representative of Birdlife International the OAZ will be organising this important event in Zimbabwe and will send out information to all interested organisations together with publicity material. The focus for the event will be the birds threatened with global extinction, linking our birds to the 1,111 worldwide. 1997 is the 75th birthday for international bird conservation.

At the same time the OAZ 24 hour competition will take place and you will be able to select your best 24 hours!

Start thinking about your teams, venues etc., and as we did so well last year as a country, try to cover even more areas this time.

There will be a donation to BirdLife International for each species recorded during the count - so "specials" are particularly important.

Send your name and team name to me as soon as you can together with the part of the country you hope to cover, preferably one or two QDS, if they overlap: Jacko Williams

Birdwatch 1997

P O Box CY 161

CAUSEWAY

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For Your Diary

The Mashonaland Branch Annual trip to Rifa Education Camp, Chirundu will be from Thursday 25th September to Monday 29th September 1997. Cost and details in next *Babbler*. This outing is open to any OAZ member who wishes to attend but is limited to 30 members.