

THE BABBLER

(Incorporating The Sunbird and The Barbet)

ORNITHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION OF ZIMBABWE NEWSLETTER

Mashonaland Branch

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ISSUE: 2 September/October 1994

MASHONALAND BRANCH ACTIVITIES

Regular Monthly Outings

1. Mukuvisi Woodlands: Sunday 4th September and 2nd October 1994. Meet at Paget Road entrance at 6.30 a.m. There will be a vehicle guard in attendance.
2. Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary: Sunday 11th September 1994 and 9th October 1994. Meet at Marimba Shopping Centre at 6.30 a.m.

Saturday Afternoon Outings

1. 17th September 1994. Blair Park Dam Ballantyne Park (off Addington Lane Borrowdale). Meet at Blair Park at 4.00 p.m. Bring your chairs and sundowners to watch egret, heron and African Sacred Ibis come in to roost.
2. 22nd October 1994. Mr Robin Gilmour's farm Double Ro (Nyabira). Meet at Avonlea Shopping Centre, Lomagundi Road at 2 p.m.

Sunday morning outings

1. There will be no Sunday outing in September because of the Rifa weekend.
2. 30th October 1994. Chivaza Rock (Mr John Hough's farm) Mvurwi. Meet at Ashbrittle Shops, Golden Stairs Road at 6.30 a.m. You have seen his raptor videos now see the live actors.

N.B. the party leaves the meeting place at the time stated. Please be punctual.

Evening Meetings

1. Thursday 15th September 1994. Mr Jeremy Talbot from Australia will give an illustrated talk on 'Birds of Western Australia'. He lived in Zimbabwe before emigrating and is a very keen birder.
2. Thursday 20th October 1994. Mr Alex Masterson will give one of his informative talks.

Meetings are held at the Harare Museum at 6.30 p.m. A vehicle guard will be in attendance.

EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB

Chairman: Mr. K. Dixon 62882 Mutare
 Secretary: Miss G. Henning 4 Mimosa Court 2nd Street Mutare
 Recorder: Mr. A.B. (Tony) Curtis 60281 Mutare

Outings

Saturday 10 th September 1994	Mutare Heights	2.00 p.m.
Sunday 25 th September 1994	Odzani Falls area	6.30 a.m.
Saturday 8 th October 1994	Cynara	2.00 p.m.
Sunday 30 th October 1994	Dorowa	6.30 a.m.

Meet at the Museum at the times stated. Any queries contact one of the above Eastern Districts Bird Club committee members.

MATABELELAND BRANCH

Future Programme

Evening Meetings

1. 2nd September 1994 Friday. Video evening. Two topical films entitled 'The Ostrich – the impossible bird' and 'Hummingbirds – Birds of the Sun God'. Venue: 3 Bouchier Wray Avenue, Hillside. 8.00 p.m.
2. 7th October 1994 Friday. Matopos. Richard Mirtle will give a presentation on Matopos wildlife illustrated with slides.

Outings

1. 24th September 1994 Sunday. Verreaux's Eagle outing. George Banfield will lead us on our annual Verreaux's Eagle outing. Hopefully we will see plenty of youngsters. Bring your lunch and tea. Meet at Retreat Shopping Centre at 7.30 a.m. of phone George on 71624.
2. 16th October 1994 Sunday. Esigodini Valley outing. The route has not been finalised yet. We will most probably go to Falcon College and see Ron Hartley's raptors and lunch at Quietwaters. Those interested contact Martin Smith 42474.
3. Aisleby. We have changed to Sunday early mornings.
30th October 1994. Co-ordinator Martin Smith 42474. Either contact Martin or meet at Aisleby boom at 7.30 a.m.

From the Chairman

As a result of a number of favourable comments *The Babbler* continues to babble. Perhaps the most significant event ornithologically was our recent 'cold snap' with Bulawayo plunging to a few degrees. Not only must our birdlife contend with soaring summer temperatures but also cope with the danger of exposure.

Sunbirds seemed to be particularly at risk with a number being found dead; perhaps this is due to their small body size and active way of life. It would be interesting to hear whether anybody noticed significant effects of our unusually cold weather. Martin Smith

REPORTS

1. MATOPOS Raptor Research Group

This year without the Aumanns in the field for five days per week for a six month period, the sightings of the other raptors, excluding those the subject of a special study, i.e. the Verreaux's Eagle, the African Fish-eagle, the Peregrine Falcon and Lanner Falcon and the Cape Eagle-owl, has been of much less intensity.

To date, 24th July, the sightings of the Augur Buzzard have been of less numbers than would have been anticipated; the same applies to the Black-chested Snake-eagle. Contrarily both the African Hawk-eagle and the Brown Snake-eagle have been seen in increasing numbers. The African Crowned Eagle pair is active at their nest in a gum tree along the Circular Drive; breeding is anticipated this year. It will be remembered that their last breeding in 1992 resulted in the death of the young eagle, picked up below the nest in January 1993. Other eagles sighting have been the Martial Eagle, the Tawny Eagle and the Bateleur.

The Rock Kestrel and the African Harrier-hawk are seen regularly. Other raptors include the African Goshawk, Shikra, Lizard Buzzard, Ovambo Sparrowhawk and Black-shouldered Kite.

An increasing number of vultures have been reported in recent years perhaps because the Group is more conscious of their presence and search the skies more thoroughly. Six sightings have been recorded almost entirely of the White-backed Vulture, but one Lappet-faced Vulture was reported in a group of ten birds. Another sighting of approximately 70 vultures included at least one Cape Vulture. A third sighting was of 25 White-backed Vultures.

Next issue we will bring you up-to-date on the Verreaux's Eagle 1994 breeding.
George Banfield

2. Waterfowl Counts at RIXON DAM and AISLEBY

Having suffered so much severe weather this winter, we were fortunate to choose two beautiful days for our waterfowl counts in July.

The first was on Sunday 10th July at Rixon Dam near Fort Rixon. The level of the dam was very low and the surrounds open and bare so it was a comparatively easy task to record what water birds were around.

About 250 Egyptian Goose swelled the total figure and there were good numbers of Kittlitz's Plovers and Three-banded Plovers. We heard an African Fish-eagle and saw four Water Thick-knees and one Grey Crowned Crane, whilst a Yellow-billed Stork flew overhead. The dam's resident hippos (7 or 8 adults and 3 youngsters) lay in a heap on a sandbank, sunning themselves. We have now done four counts at Rixon Dam and the comparative figures are as follows:

	Totals	Species
January 1993	314	31
July 1993	399	25
January 1994	760	39
July 1994	405	16

The following Sunday 17th July, we conducted our count at Aisleby Farm on the northern outskirts of Bulawayo. This is a complex area of wetlands and dams and we split into four groups to cover the whole area. A variety of ducks was recorded as one expects at Aisleby, including Fulvous Duck, Cape Teal and Cape Shoveler. Amongst the Kittlitz's Plovers and Three-banded Plovers was a lone White-fronted Plover.

1500 Egyptian Goose were recorded on the Upper UMGUSA Dam – a large proportion of which took to the air as an African Fish-eagle chased the single Pink-backed Pelican to try and make it disgorge its catch. The fish-eagle then landed beside the one Great White Pelican. Having no success there either it decided to take a paddle instead! Sitting in the middle of a cattle pasture was an unusual visitor to Aisleby – a Marabou Stork! However the highlight of the morning was an Osprey which soared and circled above the Ibis Dam for several minutes.

The results of the latest count are best compared with totals of previous counts — a number of species are listed below:

<u>Species</u>	<u>July 1993</u>	<u>January 1994</u>	<u>July 1994</u>
Little Grebe	264	64	282
White-breasted Cormorant	12	35	9
Reed Cormorant	25	35	63
African Darter	1	7	0
Cattle Egret	192	447	94
African Sacred Ibis	90	169	128
Comb Duck	329	0	57
Egyptian Goose	1284	107	1601
Red-billed Teal	832	134	157
Grey Crowned Crane	70	23	105

A comparison of dry and wet season totals reveals some significant trends. Numbers of Egyptian Goose and Comb Duck increasing dramatically in the dry season. In contrast numbers of African Sacred Ibis and Cattle Egret fell in the dry season. Grey Crowned Crane numbers also fluctuate with a 'low' in the wet; season and a 'high' in the dry, the latest number being the highest number of Cranes yet recorded. It will be interesting to study these trends over a longer period of time and useful to compare results countrywide.
Penny Feather

EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB REPORT

Cold-dry, hot-dry, hot-wet; our new programme has them all. The regulars amongst us are confident that bird numbers really are increasing again in our area. Species counts of 80-100 in half-day outings in recent weeks augur well for the coming months. Would that our membership and excursion parties were growing at the same rate. A warm welcome, help from local experts, transport and even binoculars await you. Do join us and see for yourself.

Sunday 26th June 1994. BURMA VALLEY

Our destination was Amsterdam Farm, an excellent venue offering a range of habitats and more importantly, an expert guide.

We arrived early and set off for the large dam where we spent the first 3½ hours. There were no Temminck's Coursers on the tobacco fields we crossed in the early morning but later under a hot sun we were able to find a fair number with the Red-capped Lark. En route to the dam we found a wide variety of birds in the grass and woodland. A small raptor sitting on the side of a trench and hunting along it was eventually identified as a Little Sparrowhawk when it was seen taking a Red-billed Quelea.

There were few birds on the dam apart from breeding Hamerkop, African Darters and Reed Cormorant, Little Grebe, Three-banded Plover, Malachite Kingfisher and Giant Kingfisher. As we followed the dam bank we came across an interesting party containing African Dusky Flycatcher, Green-capped Eremomela, Long-billed Crombec and an unexpected African Paradise-flycatcher. Crowned Hornbills and Trumpeter Hornbills were present everywhere, and an African Harrier-hawk was inspecting all the dead stumps in the dam.

After returning to the farm at 11.30 for refreshment and rest while recording the garden birds, including a beautiful Red-capped Robin-chat, we proceeded to the weir in an overgrown river course near the farm. We strolled down to the foot of the dam wall, where we immediately came across a Half-collared Kingfisher, giving generous prolonged views as it fished. Just as we were recovering from this pleasant surprise Martin called us to identify a bird in the tree above him. As I clambered up the bank, the noise disturbed the bird which flew out over Tony and was identified as a Narina Trogon. We went off in search in the hope of a better view and, on the way, saw another rarity in the bushes along the water, a Black-throated Wattle-eye. No sign of the Trogon though, until we returned to where we first saw it. There it sat, patiently awaiting us and quite content to be viewed by one and all. A great day with 30+ on the list and not a single Pied Crow. Many thanks to Pi and Mutula for inviting us again. Ken Dixon

MASHONALAND REPORT

Chinyeka Farm 31st July 1994

A disappointingly small number of people who braved the early morning chill (or could afford the fuel after the Bank strike) travelled out to this farm in the BROMLEY district. An excellent private collection of waterfowl from all parts of the world was seen. Most of these birds were bred in captivity and the artificial hatching and rearing methods were explained. Excellent views were had of a male Red-chested Flufftail in a study aviary. Other highlights seen in the garden were nesting logs, a nesting tower which has provided nesting sites for swallows, swifts, Rock Pigeons [Rock Dove or Speckled Pigeon?] and rollers, amongst other species and a pit used by bee-eaters and kingfishers. Our sincere thanks to Colin and Cathy Wintle for their hospitality and for a most interesting morning. GeoffLowe.

TAIL FEATHERS

We are proud to have a lone Grey Crowned Crane who shares his life with the Peacocks (predominantly) but the ducks, chickens and pigs are also his friends. The Marabou Storks are too big and eat a different diet. He arrived early morning November 1987 and has remained ever since as he obviously lost his mate and so found the Peacock calls similar and landed here. Chegutu ponds have a pair from time to time but otherwise I haven't seen any other in this vicinity.

He has become very tame, although troublesome to the Peacocks at times. He circles the males and they attack each other with their feet. Three male Peacocks have died as a result of gouged eyes. He loves to dance on a cool morning or evening or when the Peahens are in bloom but no one responds. He tries to be protective of the Peahen when she has chicks but a warning call and the chicks take cover and lie still for ages.

He eats bread with the Peacocks on the lawn and gets so close one can observe his most unusual eyes. Large, grey and almost jelly like and working almost like a chameleon, turning round and round.

His spectacular white winged flight and loud call as he flies tells us he is always around. Even the dogs are his friends as he strides between them looking for bits of sadza. Truly a special bird to have around.

Margaret Parrock. Cherrybank Farm, Kadoma.

Two lady members who gave a talk and slide show at Ariel Junior School, Ruwa, sent in copies of some appreciative cards.

Dear... and..... Thank you for your talk, it helps quite a lot to know (now?) most of the birds in the wild but I still don't know all the birds but it doesn't matter. I thank you very much for helping me out to know most of my birds. Yours sinserley...

Dear... and..... Thank you for coming to our Bundu Watch. I enjoyed watching your slides. Please come again! We recognised some birds! It was interesting. I think I learned a lot! P S Please come again...

Dear Mas.... and Mas.... thack you for cumen to or Bonduwach I preshat showing the slides. I thick you for shownen us the baidis on the t v. I thick it was very nics for shownen us (No name)

Dear... and..... Thank you for teaching us about birds and what they eat, do and there colours. We appreciate your trouble of coming here, hope you come again. Love from. . .

Dear ... and ... Thank you for coming to our Bunduwatch last week. I learned a lot about birds when you came. I discovered new birds that I have never seen befor or herd of. Thank you for all your trouble to bring the slides for us to see I hope you come again. Love from.....

FOR SALE

Miranda Binoculars 8 x 82
Brand new
Rubber Eye pieces
Prices \$600.00 onco
Phone evenings Mr or Mrs Miller Cranko.
Bulawayo 41274

SPECIAL SPECIES SURVEY REMINDER

The species survey includes the following species:

Common Ostrich, White Stork, Black Stork, Saddle-billed Stork, Secretarybird, Yellow-billed Kite, Verreaux's Eagle, Martial Eagle, African Crowned Eagle, Bateleur, African Fish-eagle, African Marsh-harrier, Wattled Crane, Grey Crowned Crane, Kori Bustard, African Skimmer, Lilian's Lovebird, Southern Carmine Bee-eater, Southern Ground-hornbill, Blue Swallow, Yellow-billed Oxpecker, Red-billed Oxpecker and Red-billed Quelea.

Cards are available upon request from the Ornithology Research Unit, Box BE 60, Belvedere, Harare. Complete cards should be returned to the same address.

WANTED

Someone with access to a Computer to do OAZ accounts in conjunction with the Membership Secretary. This is a once a year job. PLEASE.