

# BABBLER

## ORNITHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION OF ZIMBABWE

*A PARTNER DESIGNATE OF BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL*

ISSUE #20 – SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 1997

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### **COMMITTEES**

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### **ACTIVITIES**

#### **MASHONALAND BRANCH**

##### Regular outings      NB Note new times

1. Mukuvisi Woodlands: Sundays 7<sup>th</sup> September and 5<sup>th</sup> October 1997. Meet at Paget Road entrance at 6.30 a.m. There will be a vehicle guard in attendance.
2. Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary: Sundays 14<sup>th</sup> September and 12<sup>th</sup> October 1997. Meet at Marimba Shopping Centre at 6.30 a.m. Beginners are very welcome. Bring your chairs and tea.

Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> October 1997. This day has been set for the **annual breakfast** which was previously held at the end of the year. It has been decided to hold it in a dry month this year and breakfast will be served after the usual walk around the Sanctuary. Cost of the breakfast is \$10 per head (includes breakfast and tea) and members are asked to please bring their cutlery, crockery, cups and chairs. For catering purposes, please complete the tear-off slip at the end of the newsletter. Don't miss this event which in the past has proved to be very popular.

Saturday afternoon outings

1. 20<sup>th</sup> September 1997: Marlborough Sewage Works. Meet at the Works at 2.00 p.m. Directions : Turn into Princess Margaret Drive from Harare Drive and continue right to the bottom of the road. Turn right into Newstead Road and then turn left at the "Department of Works Workshop" sign.
2. 18<sup>th</sup> October 1997: Home of Peter Creswell – 37 Glen Lorne Drive. Meet Grange Service Station, Enterprise Road at 3.00 p.m. Bring chairs, drinks, etc. Tea will be provided by Peter. Retz's Helmet-shrikes and Spotted Creepers can be seen in the garden.

Sunday Outings

1. 28<sup>th</sup> September 1997: NO OUTING – Rifa Camp Weekend (SEE BELOW)
2. 26<sup>th</sup> October 1997: Sunnyside Farm, Concession (65 km). Meet Ashbrittle Service Station, Golden Stairs Road, 6.30 a.m. Miombo/Acacia woodland. Any members requiring transport or who can offer transport please contact a committee member. An alternative is to leave your car at Ashbrittle Service Station, where the petrol attendants will watch it, and share transport from there.

Thursday Evenings

PLEASE NOTE: VENUE FOR 21<sup>st</sup> AUGUST EVENING MEETING HAS BEEN CHANGED TO DAVE AND IDA GRAY'S HOUSE, 14 FISHER AVENUE, BORROWDALE – 6.30 P.M. SHARP

1. 18<sup>th</sup> September 1997: Roger Howman – Weavers.
2. 16<sup>th</sup> October 1997: John Hough – illustrated presentation on raptors. This popular speaker assures us that new footage will be shown.

Venue for both evenings: - Alexandra Sports Club (Sable Room). Time 6.00 for 6:30 p.m. There will be a cash bar available.

REMINDER – Rifa Education Camp, Chirundu 25<sup>th</sup> – 29<sup>th</sup> September 1997

There are still a few places available for this camp. This weekend is open to ALL OAZ members and if you have not been before this may be your last chance. At a cost of only \$600 per person, the weekend is highly recommended and most worthwhile. Contact Dave Gray ☎ 885406 for details.

**EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB**

Chairman: Mr Ken Dixon ☎ 65819 Mutare Recorder: Mr Tony Curtis ☎ 60281 Mutare

Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> September 1997 Osborne Dam 2.00 p.m.

Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> September 1997 Rusape area 6.30 a.m.

Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> October 1997 Musangano Lodge, Odzi 2.00 p.m.

We assemble at the Museum in Aerodrome Road at the time stated. Transport and binoculars are available if prior notice is given. Contact Ken Dixon or Tony Curtis. In addition to these outings there are regular events like the International Waterfowl Survey of Cynara and Osborne which is conducted every three months and we will be participating in the National 24 hour Birdwatch 4<sup>th</sup> and October 1997.

**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  
 Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> September 1997 Rydings School Interpretive Centre 6.30 a.m.  
 Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> September 1997 To be arranged  
 Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> October 1997 Rydings School Interpretive Centre 6.30 a.m.  
 Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> October 1997 To be arranged

**MATABELELAND BRANCH****Evening Meetings**

Friday 5<sup>th</sup> September 1997 "Birds of Cape Town and other places" 8.00 p.m.  
 The Chairman has filmed a variety of Southern African birds.  
 Bring your bird books and see if you can identify them!  
Friday 3 October 1997 Fun Identification Quiz: this will include 8.00 p.m.  
 slides, bird-calls, video footage and specimens. All designed to test  
 your knowledge in a fun, informal way. Bird books allowed!

Venue for both evenings: - 3A Holdengarde Avenue, Hillside. ☎ 42474 for further details

**Outings**

Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> September 1997 "Verreaux's Eagle Outing". 7.30 a.m.  
 George Banfield will lead this annual outing to the Matopos and we hope there will be plenty to  
 see. Meet at Retreat Shopping Centre and bring tea and lunch. Further details from George  
 on ☎ 71624.  
 Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> October 1997 Umgusa Open Day. 8.00 a.m.  
 This will be our contribution to Worldwide Birdwatch and we will invite the public to join us on  
 guided walks. All interested contact Penny Feather ☎ 44034 or meet at Umgusa Nature  
 Reserve Interpretive Centre at 8.00 a. m.

Please note that this will be our October outing.

**Aisleby**

We have reverted to our summer timetable and outings will take place on Sunday mornings again. Meet  
 either at the Aisleby boom at 7.30 a.m. or contact the co-ordinator for details.

| <u>Date</u>                        | <u>Co-ordinator</u> |       |
|------------------------------------|---------------------|-------|
| Sunday, 28 <sup>th</sup> September | Clive Townsley      | 46617 |
| Sunday 26 <sup>th</sup> October    | Martin Smith        | 42474 |

**From the Chairman**

The winter term at school, with its many rugby fixtures, provides ample opportunity to study wide open  
 spaces in a variety of different parts of Matabeleland. At CBC BULAWAYO a small flock of non-  
 breeding whydahs posed a number of identification problems. The resident flock of Helmeted  
 Guineafowl have increased in number to over 20, despite the efforts of a rather wayward Form 3 boy  
 who chased them on his bicycle! On the edge of the fields, a Kenya Coffee shade tree has burst into  
 flower, providing food for a flock of Wattled Starlings

as well as a variety of sunbirds. At Milton, rather erratic mowing has produced plenty of seed which in turn has attracted some interesting species not normally seen in town. A flock of Red-capped Larks and Chestnut-backed Sparrowlarks called and flew into a biting, north-easterly wind on being disrupted by a stray rugby ball. Our trip to Plumtree was a complete contrast, being a hot, June day with a trace of frost first thing in the morning. Plenty of Crowned Lapwing attempted to avoid the action, whilst overhead a flock of vultures soared in search of food. Back to town and life at HILLSIDE Dams is worth mentioning. A single Saddle-billed Stork was seen on the fringes of the Upper Dam in early July. The Aloe Garden is now in flower and worth a visit, but please do take care and look out for loiterers. Now that the warmer weather is drawing nearer, do join us at the Evening Meetings and Outings. Your branch needs your physical support! Good birding! **Martin Smith.**

### **MIDLANDS BRANCH**

Co-ordinator: Mr Bernard Beekes P O Box 55 Shurugwi ☎ 152-6422

#### 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 7.45 a.m. for 8.00 a.m. departure. Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> August; Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> October; Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> November. Further day outings and full details will be notified in due course.

Day outings – Masvingo Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> October 1997. Lake Mutirikwe shoreline waterbird count. It is hoped at least 5 boat parties can be organised, each covering a section of the lake. If you wish to participate, or, even better, if you can provide a boat, please contact Lynne ☎ 139-63657.

Day outings – Kadoma Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> August, 4<sup>th</sup> October, 13<sup>th</sup> December 1997. Contact Margaret ☎ 168-3644.

Camping weekends – Contact Bernard for further information.

Friday 10<sup>th</sup> – Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> October. Chatsworth – Wattled Cranes.

This weekend will be at Keith Harvey's farm. The weather should be warm and hopefully not too windy. Camping and self-catering with ablution facilities available in a nearby cottage. Thanks to Keith Harvey for once again agreeing to host this outing.

Wattled and Grey Crowned Cranes are a feature here, as well as other wetland and grassland birds.

Friday 28<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> November. Central Estates, Mvuma – Southern Carmine Bee-eaters.

Directions: The camp site turnoff is about 25 km on the Harare side of Mvuma, near the 167 km peg, on the east side of the road. There is a small sign saying "ZHA", next to a buffalo skull. Proceed about 5 km to the camp site along a good dirt road. Bring all of your own food, equipment and camping gear. Toilet and shower facilities are available. On the Saturday night, a wild life slide show may be organised.

These outings are not restricted to Midlands Birding Club members, and ALL OAZ members are welcome to participate. Numbers are, however, limited. If you would like to join in please contact Bernard Beekes ☎ 152-6422.

**REPORTS****MASHONALAND BRANCH**Visit to "Vulture Restaurant", Featherstone – Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> April 1997

Several OAZ members visited the farm of Mr Boetie O'Neill at Featherstone [Vlakfontein Estate 1830D3]. The whole area offered a wide variety of habitat, but the highlight of the visit was undoubtedly the "Vulture restaurant", at which a hide offered those members prepared to wait for two hours a remarkable view of some 200 vultures feeding on discarded cattle offal. The majority were White-backed Vultures, but also seen were 3 Cape Vultures, 5 Lappet-faced Vultures and 4 Hooded Vultures. Also in the fray were 5 Marabou Storks and a jackal! A Black Stork was spotted high up, overlooking a gorge. Magpie Shrikes and Southern White-crowned Shrikes were seen, as were a Tawny Eagle, Lesser Masked-weavers, Acacia Pied Barbets and a Kori Bustard. It was a super outing! **Collette Wiles.**

Dr Jane Lyons and Hans Pieters – 19<sup>th</sup> June 1997

We were fortunate to have the opportunity of being spoken to by Dr Jane Lyons, who is Head of the Americas' Division of BirdLife International and who lives in Ecuador and Hans Pieters who is from Vogelbescherming Netherlands which organisation is a BirdLife International Partner.

The two of them were in Zimbabwe for the CITIES meeting. It was pleasing to see such a good turn-out of members and their guests.

Dr Lyons gave a slide presentation and outlined the structure of BirdLife International which is an organisation concerned with bird conservation throughout the world. She gave details of the objectives of BirdLife in South America, where the habits and status of many species there are unknown.

Mr Pieters advised us that Vogelbescherming Netherlands will celebrate its centenary in 1999. He explained that there are 250 bird clubs in the Netherlands. Of the 350 bird species in the country all year round, 56 are endangered and we learned of the programmes being run by volunteers who are trying to protect those birds in the "Red Data Book". **Editor**

Visit to RAINHAM Dams – 21<sup>st</sup> June 1997

20 or so birders gathered under the leadership of Di Rushforth on a cool and breezy Saturday afternoon to visit the very full Rainham Dams. The bottom dam yielded large numbers of Comb Duck and White-faced Duck, Red-knobbed Coot and African Jacana, while also present were Little Grebe, Spur-winged Goose and Egyptian Goose and Red-billed Teal. The coots were very active, building nests. Due to the high water levels waders were conspicuous by their absence with only the Three-banded Plover being present. Highlight of the afternoon were six very active African Snipe with their drumming and aerial displays. Only one longclaw (Rosy-throated Longclaw) was seen. Those that braved the cold to see the sun go down were well-rewarded with 6 Marsh Owls. The total count of 42 species was a little disappointing but overall a very worthwhile outing. **John Saunders**

Dr L. ("Fish") Fishpool and Keith Barnes – 17<sup>th</sup> July 1997

Dr Fishpool is the Co-ordinator for Important Bird Areas (IBAs) Programme in Africa which is organised by BirdLife International in Cambridge, U.K. Keith Barnes is with the Avian Demography Unit at the University of Cape Town and his responsibilities include work on the IBA project for BirdLife International, and the SAFRING project.

Dr Fishpool briefed us on the structure of BirdLife International which was formerly known as the International Council for Bird Protection and explained that Zimbabwe is a representative of BirdLife International. He then outlined characteristics of IBAs globally which are: globally threatened species which are in the "Red Data Book"; restricted range species; biome-restricted assemblages (e.g. Miombo woodland birds) and congregations (concentrations in large numbers). He stressed the importance of bird habitats being protected so that species peculiar to those areas could be conserved. The OAZ, as a BirdLife International representative, is currently working with BirdLife International to produce surveys which will establish IBAs in Zimbabwe.

Keith Barnes told us that the Avian Demography Unit provides information for BirdLife South Africa and BirdLife International. He gave us an update on the Bird Atlas of Southern Africa project and emphasised the importance of the data collected in that it revealed facts regarding birds which would not otherwise have been known, some of it was bad news such as the White-bellied Korhaan which used to be widespread throughout Southern Africa but which had now virtually disappeared. As a result of the Atlas work many conservation decisions can be made. **Editor.**

CHEDELLOW Farm – Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> July 1997

QDS 1731C3

Twelve members braved the chilly, winter afternoon to visit Chedgelow Farm. The first stop was a small dam where we saw over 200 White-faced Duck, 50 Egyptian Goose, the same amount of Red-billed Teal and 30 Comb Duck besides a few other species. Although there was a good, muddy area only 2 Three-banded Plovers were seen. From the dam, we moved into the rocky, Miombo area near the top end of Harava Dam where we heard an African Golden Oriole and Spotted Creeper, but could not find either of them. The only raptor seen was a magnificent African Fish-eagle. Total species seen was 46.

**Dave Gray**EWANRIGG BOTANIC GARDENS – Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> July 1997

QDS 1731C2

A misty, Sunday morning saw ten arrive before the gates opened and visibility down to almost zero! Fortunately, the sun soon burned off the mist and under the leadership of Richard Dennison a very rewarding 3 hour bird ramble ensued. Although the aloes were past their best the sunbirds were very active with 6 species seen, including good views of the Western Violet-backed Sunbird. The Red-backed Mannikins were very obliging in showing off their distinguishing features as was a very vocal Grey-headed Bush-shrike who remained in the open for all to see. Good views were also had of Black Cuckooshrikes and White-breasted Cuckooshrikes. There was plenty of activity with only 2 of the 67 species recorded not being actually seen. An excellent venue and well worth paying the entrance fees.

**John Saunders****EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB**STAPLEFORD Forest – Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> June 1997

This was my first group outing since a holiday in the UK, where I was appalled by the reduction in numbers of birds everywhere. That said, I did get a "lifer", a Bearded Tit in North Norfolk. Anyway, our trip to Stapleford proved quite popular; we started off with 8, went up to 10, then, somehow slipped back to 8 again, although Rex did get home safely eventually and he and Alies did see a few birds we didn't. It was a long journey for an afternoon and despite some serious rallying by Jane and Ian we were only about halfway down to the Nyamkwarara Valley when the sun left us and we turned back. However, the trip did fulfil one of its objectives, finding some montane forest birds. The first took us by surprise; Chirinda Apalis in short, stumpy trees at the track side. Previously we had seen them only in the canopy where views are far less satisfying than here. There were Bar-throated Apalis alongside. Another typical bird was the Cape Batis but it too was not far from Chin-spot Batis. We could hear both Gorgeous Bush-shrike and Olive Bush-shrike. One rocky hillside was occupied by a large flock of Rock Martin who seemed to spend some time resting on bare trees or sunning themselves on the rocks. They were accompanied by a lone Greater Striped Swallow. At the turning point, we saw a firefinch, Tambourine Dove, Cabanis's Bunting, some yellowish bulbuls and a Tropical Boubou. A thoroughly enjoyable trip thanks to our tireless drivers though we only ran up about 20 species. **Ken Dixon.**

HOT SPRINGS – Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> June 1997

We'd originally timed this visit to give us an injection of warmth in the middle of winter. In the event, it wasn't necessary as it was warm even at 6.30 a.m. in Mutare. Not that this brought out the crowds; there were only the four of us. As usual, as we got out of the car, the birds were lined up waiting for us. It was fully fifteen minutes before we left the car park and then progress was very slow through the scrub surrounding the entrance. Red-billed Quelea and Laughing Dove were abundant all morning. The open areas were littered with ingenious Red-billed Quelea traps, not clever enough to catch the birds though as far as we could see. A Groundscraper Thrush sang brightly from the summit of a large tree while the bushes and grass held Long-billed Crombec, tchagra, waxbills, etc. One "dry country" bird we, until recently, rarely saw in Mutare was soon in evidence; the Cut-throat Finch. The parasitic Steel-blue Widowfinch sat up high keeping an eye on its charming hosts, the Red-billed Firefinch and nearby Lilac-breasted Rollers performed excitingly in the hot morning air. The Odzi River was flowing strongly, not deep enough to deter the locals from fording but not shallow enough to entice us across, so we opted for the near bank and a stroll through the sandy gardens under the baobabs. Wire-tailed Swallows flew around us as we stood on the "bridge" and Three-banded Plovers ran about among the stones. While Joan and Martin were collecting baobab fruit, we had great views of a

hunting Dickinson's Kestrel and a calling Lizard Buzzard. What looked like a Southern Carmine Bee-eater flashed past but did not reappear. A walk up the next stream brought us back to the entrance to the resort and a welcome drink. On the way home we detoured to Whitewaters Dam, still full and with myriad water lilies and dense bank vegetation. Green-backed Heron, Little Grebe and all the usuals were present and a Bateleur, a Rock Kestrel and an anonymous raptor, the second of the morning, were spotted by Martin as we drove back towards the tar. Super morning out, about 50 species and back home for lunch. Sorry you missed it! **Ken Dixon.**

CYNARA Farm Old MUTARE – Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> July 1997 QDS 1832D3

Whatever the weather, Cynara is always the best choice. Saturday was cool and cloudy but we still managed a count of 50+. Water is still arriving in the dams from all directions and Tony Curtis reckons the area is wetter than he has known it for years. The dams are each developing their own character; one resplendent with water lilies and attracting lots of African Jacana and Grey-rumped Swallow, another almost completely choked with hyacinth and reeds, home to the Red-knobbed Coot, Black Crake and Common Moorhens and, maybe others like Allen's Gallinule; a lower dam with some muddy shoreline usually holds the White-faced Duck and Comb Duck and a handful of Three-banded Plover. The larger dams attract Reed Cormorant, Egyptian Goose and heron. As you may have guessed by now it was Waterfowl count day. Elsewhere were the usual variety of smaller birds which always make Cynara an exciting venue; never a dull minute. This day it was the thorn bushes near the compound which detained us. They were full of Blue Waxbills, Chestnut-vented Tit-babbler, eremomelas, canaries, a Brubru, Green-winged Pytilia and others. As we wandered down to the woodland we saw Augur Buzzard and then a Long-crested Eagle, rarely seen here. One regular winter visitor on display was the Capped Wheatear. Just as the 10 of us reached the cars it began to rain but we didn't mind, having thoroughly enjoyed our outing. **Ken Dixon.**

#### **Karoi Bird Club**

Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> June and Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> July 1997 – RYDINGS Interpretive Centre QDS 1629D3

We continue with a walk at Rydings each first Saturday of the month. 8<sup>th</sup> June was a Sunday though and four of us turned up. Our usual walk around the dam and through the woodland yielded 63 species. The Grey-headed Kingfisher was absent this time, but we did spot the delightful little Green-winged Pytilia. On 5<sup>th</sup> July only our faithful co-ordinator, Kevin, was there! He had, together with Rydings co-ordinator, Shirley, cleared a further walk in the woodland and, taking this, was rewarded, apart from 62 species observed by seeing some of the animals in the Rydings game park. **Merle Mitchell**

Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> June 1997 – Good Hope Farm QDS 1629D1

We had a turnout of 9 for our usual early morning start, 6.30 a.m. A lot of mist on the road before we got to the farm, but once there cold and clear. Fortified with coffee, we set off through woodland, vlei and back through woodland. The vlei yielded the usual cisticola and Tawny Flanked Prinia, but in the woodland we found the African Barred Owlet in full view on a dead tree, and further on the Pearl-spotted Owlet, also conspicuously in the open, maybe catching some sun before going to roost. They were not being worried either by other birds. We puzzled over two yellow birds with grey heads, until we realised they were juvenile Orange-breasted Bush-shrikes, and confirmed by the appearance of their parents. A pair of Green-winged Pytilia and a pair of Jameson's Firefinch were feeding on the road ahead, four squirrels were in the trees as we passed, and we heard the Levillant's Cuckoo further on. A Black-chested Snake-eagle was overhead and perched in the sun atop a dead gum tree, a most interesting sighting of a partial-albino Black-collared Barbet. It had the same lemon wash as the breast on the wingtips. Back to breakfast in the garden of Kay and Rob Baer, we had succulent sausage, rolls and marmalade, and with steaming coffee in hand, what better way to watch the Amethyst Sunbird in the flowering Erythrina. Thank you Kay and Rob, we will be back to your lovely bush. **Merle Mitchell.**

Caversham – Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> July 1997

A record 13 turned up for this visit. We were greeted at the gate by a small flock of mixed Wattled Starlings and Miombo Blue-eared Starlings. On the lawn, where Danny greeted us and Jackie handed out welcome, hot coffee, the resident Crested Barbet, injured when a chick and now caged, gave us the trilliest of greetings!

An interesting venue, this smallholding has a garden catering for birds, feed tray and "fruit bowl", with half a pawpaw I could have happily had for breakfast! A tray of sadza was provided for birds partial to it – mostly the Village Weaver, and a large bird bath for those who preferred it to dipping in the dam at the bottom of the garden. This, covered in water lilies, gum trees reflected on the far bank, and ducks convinced us is paradise. White-backed Duck with half-grown chicks, Southern Pochard, a lone Red-billed Teal and a handful of African Pygmy-goose were on the dam. Danny has seen as many as 58 African Pygmy-goose here at one time. African Black Duck, African Jacana, Malachite Kingfisher and Pied Kingfisher were seen and Black Crake were heard. Two Red-breasted Swallows were on the power line, the male with a chicken feather in his beak, nicked from the run, was convinced the female would be impressed. We then went over the dam, well into the woodland which was very quiet, and only heard a Grey-headed Bush-shrike and a chortling White-browed Scrub-robin. Two rabbits were flushed by the dogs, and on the top of the kopje among flat, granite rocks, several nightjars were flushed. On the way down, drama! Two ladies nearly stepped on a Black Mamba. A heart-stopping moment as we watched the snake slither down a hole in an ant heap. Then around the next boulder, shoulder height, was a swarm of bees! Breakfast in the garden was most welcome after that - braaied banana in their skins, served with a good sherry dripped onto them once slit open and the rest of the sherry had with each mouthful of bacon! Orange-breasted Bush-shrike, Brubru, Amethyst Sunbird and Black-chested Snake-eagle were seen here. 75 species in all. Thank you to Jackie and Danny for a delightful morning. **Merle Mitchell.**

## **MIDLANDS**

### **KADOMA Day outing – Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> June 1997**

This was the first official day outing for Kadoma. Six local birders attended, also the Beekes family from Shurugwi and Gordon Conway from Gweru.

We met at Cherrybank Farm, the home of Margaret Parrock, 5 km from Kadoma Town. Having set forth at 8.00 a.m., we walked towards the bush and tree area to the east of the homestead, keeping to the road. Because of the crisp, clear day, the bird activity was good. A Chin-spot Batis called a lot, also the Black-collared Barbet. Two varieties of waxbill, lots of firefinch and Cut-throat Finch were seen. When we reached the dam on the Mashuma River, a 100 plus flock of White-faced Duck circled around. Comb Duck, Squacco Heron, African Darter, Black-headed Heron, Black Crake were also seen. A large Hamerkop nest was seen in the fork of a dead tree in the river. Giant Kingfisher, Malachite Kingfisher and Brown-hooded Kingfisher were also seen. Back at the farmstead, after having walked about 7 km, a couple of Marabou Storks were seen and of course the resident family of Grey Crowned Cranes who live with the Peacocks. A total of 56 species were recorded. A lovely, friendly morning and we look forward to the next day outing on Saturday, 23<sup>rd</sup> August at 7.30 a.m. – same location. **Margaret Parrock.**

### **Grasslands Ranch, SOMABHULA – 29 June 1997**

QDS 1929D1

On the way to the farm we saw Cape Crow, Grey Go-away-bird and a Lilac-breasted Roller. We drove to the dam where the pelican had been released and we saw Red-winged Starlings. We also saw two African Pipits engaged in a duel, they would charge at each other and then run back until one eventually started to hide behind a piece of grass. At the dam we saw Black-headed Heron and Grey Heron, the Great White Pelican and his two Egyptian Goose "buddies". We walked to the end of the wall where we saw Red-capped Lark, Scaly-feathered Finch and Red-billed Quelea. We went for a walk around the dam where we saw a Malachite Kingfisher, Levaillant's Cisticola and the pelican high in a thermal with White-backed Vultures and Lappet-faced Vultures. Then we couldn't see the pelican any more so we thought she had decided to leave home. After the dam we drove to the Vungu River where we saw Pied Kingfisher, an African Stonechat and a few fishermen. We had lunch in a patch of thornveld where we saw 7 Spotted Thick-knees, hundreds of Chestnut-vented Tit-babblers and sparrows, Red-faced Mousebirds and a pair of Green-winged Pytilia. On the way home at the dam we found the pelican and some Cape Wagtails. Total count for the day was 71. **Gordon Conway** (Junior Member)

### **High Syringa Game Park, TRIANGLE – 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> June 1997**

We had a nice turn out of 13 people. In the mornings we went for walks along the rivers and on the first morning Andrew Allen and I saw the magnificent Half-collared Kingfisher. It seen the next morning



by Berny and company. On the way back to camp we saw a pair of Natal Spurfowl with about 5 chicks. One "jetted" off into the bush but the other one ushered the chicks into hiding a few metres off the road and then fluttered onto the road where she faked being injured. She put her wings out and then tried to fly but nose-dived straight into the dirt. She then had both wings in the stance of a Black Heron and charged towards the car a few meters at a time. After a few minutes she flew off. At night we went on drives with a spotlight but we heard only a Fiery-necked Nightjar, this being the only nocturnal bird recorded on the trip. On Sunday we went to Croc rock which is on the Mutirikwe River and we saw a Goliath Heron which flew into a bay and shortly after that a pair of African Fish-eagles started to dive bomb it. The eagles bombed the Heron about 4 times and after a while they got tired and flew off. Some other specials of the trip were Variable Sunbirds, a Spectacled Weaver, Purple Roller and an African Finfoot. **Gordon Conway.**

### **TAIL FEATHERS**

#### **Birding in Gabarone, Botswana**

If ever any of our members find themselves in Gabarone, Botswana, either on a stop-over or on business, I recommend them to visit the Grand Palm Hotel just outside of town. I hasten to mention that this is not an attempt at free advertising! Within the hotel grounds, there is an approximately 10 ha area of bush and a dam where the biodiversity is something to be seen to be believed. I spent several days there on business during January and consequently time for birdwatching was somewhat limited. The "little brown jobs" therefore took a back seat but nevertheless 40 different species were positively identified, including a Lesser Spotted Eagle who conveniently circled overhead for several minutes. One particular subject of interest was a mixed, breeding colony of weavers, some 60 nests being suspended over water from an old willow tree. Lesser Masked-weaver, Southern Masked-weavers and Village Weavers were definitely active and on one occasion the presence of Spectacled Weavers was noted. There were undoubtedly nests within the colony sporting vertical, long entrance spouts. However, overnight the colony was completely deserted, presumably because of predation. Notwithstanding, within three days, Southern Masked-weavers were observed building once again, but in isolation! The only other event that really intrigued me was that I actually witnessed a Fork-tailed Drongo catch in flight a Blue Waxbill. There are consistently at least two Drongo pairs resident in my garden in Borrowdale, but over the years I have never recorded the taking of small birds. Trevor McGuire, a birdwatcher from New South Wales, Australia, was my regular companion during my visit until the quality of the light deteriorated too far and "happy hour" began! **R J Fenner**, Harare.

#### **Sightings in the CHIMANIMANI and Mount Selinda [CHIRINDA FOREST]**

On a recent trip to the Chimanimani and Mount Selinda we recorded the following sightings: a pair of Blue-spotted Wood-doves feeding alongside the edge of a forest road en route to the northern end of the Chimanimani. This was a very exciting sighting for the four of us (Richard and Sue Bell, J High and D Schafer, 25<sup>th</sup> April 1997 at 10.00 a.m.). A dozen White Storks mainly sub adults were seen on a farm near Moodies Grave site en route to CHIPINGE (26<sup>th</sup> April 1997 at 9.00 a.m.). Whilst we were having lunch under a fig tree in the Mount Selinda campsite, a pair of Silvery-cheeked Hornbills flew into the tree and started feeding on the fruit, totally unaware of us below. About ten minutes later, a pair of Trumpeter Hornbills flew into the same tree and we immediately noticed that the two hornbill types tolerated each other. With all the butterflies, birds and Samango Monkeys, Mount Selinda is aptly known as "Zimbabwe's last Eden". **Richard and Sue Bell**, Harare.

#### **Kalahari Scrub-robins in Waterford, BULAWAYO**

When in Bulawayo in April 1997 and staying with our friends in Waterford, I had a couple of early morning walks in the Acacia veld and what should I bump into but plenty of Kalahari Scrub-robins. Now this bird had always been on my "wanted list" and it certainly wasn't there when I lived in Waterford in the sixties. If anybody wants them, here's the "buzz" – go to the junction of Park Road and Umgusa Parkway. A short distance down Park Road is the bridge over the UMGUSA (60 – 70 metres) and JUST past this is a bridle path taking off to the left. After about 100 metres along this, you'll pass through a sort of restriction made with railway sleepers and the bush immediately opens up with lots of bare soil patches. DAT'S (sic) THE PLACE! Be careful as the White-browed Scrub-robin is also present. **Dave Collis**, Australia.

High-tech feeding by African Harrier-hawk

A few weeks ago, I watched an immature African Harrier-hawk alight on top of a satellite dish in the garden of my neighbour at the bottom end of my property. The bird landed on the cone at the centre of the dish and proceeded to investigate it, no doubt looking for lizards. Finding nothing of interest, the bird leisurely flew off to another dish and repeated the process. After that it visited a third – all in the space 20 minutes. What is amazing is how specialised these birds are in their feeding habits, particularly so as this bird had learnt or been taught this in such a short period. For the record: Grey Go-away-bird calling in our garden!

**Iain Macdonald**, Greendale North, HARARE.

Editor's note: Bronze Mannikins nest in the cone of my neighbour's satellite dish (doesn't do his reception much good though) and maybe the African Harrier-hawk has been lucky enough to find such nests and young in other dishes?

White Storks present in mid-July

On 16<sup>th</sup> July 1997 at ± 11.45 a.m., in a field of irrigated wheat – located 15-17 km north of HARARE, on the eastern side of the main road to MAZOWE, I saw what I estimated to be 16-20 White Storks! Apparently this out-of-season presence is of interest and Dave Gray will inform National Parks accordingly.

**Peter B. Munday**, Harare.

Editor's note: See the Bell's report above, and I saw about the same number of White Storks on a farm in the CONCESSION area in July last year and again on 22 June this year in almost the same vicinity saw 13.

Notes from Peter Ginn

1. I am interested in John Sievi's comments regarding the breeding of birds in the MUKUVISI WOODLANDS. Having observed a number of Shikra at the nest, I have never seen them catch or bring in anything other than lizards. I am surprised that the Shikra are feeding chicks and birds to their young. I would not have been surprised had it been either Little Sparrowhawks and in particular the Gabar Goshawks which play havoc with the birds breeding in my garden and elsewhere in MARONDERA.

2. The heron and egret colony at the 52 km peg on the Seke Road became very active during the last rainy season and breeding activity has continued there throughout the winter. Driving past there on 27<sup>th</sup> July, I noticed that the number of birds in the tree and apparently on nests has increased from my last trip past about ten days ago. It would appear that breeding activity is increasing again as the number of grasshoppers start to increase with the warmer weather. Anyone driving along this road should keep an eye open at this colony as it is really quite interesting and is visible from the road.

3. Recently, I have seen a number of Kittlitz's Plovers in ploughed lands. This is the first time I have noticed them in the lands and I presume it is because the dams where they would normally be nesting at this time are still full and there are no muddy margins for them to feed. Has anybody else noticed such activity this year? **Peter Ginn**, Marondera.

**NOTICEBOARD**Atlas Instruction Booklets

Jacko Williams will be away until the end of September but she has given a supply of Atlas cards and Atlas Instruction booklets to Dave Gray. If you require any of these, Dave's address is 14 Fisher Avenue, Borrowdale. Please send a stamped, self-addressed envelope ("Honeyguide size" for the instruction booklets which are A5 size and \$1.10 postage) to Dave.

OAZ Birdwatch Competition and World Birdwatch – 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> October 1997

A reminder about the two competitions. World Birdwatch is over the period 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> October and is not restricted to members. An Atlas card should be completed giving all species seen ANYWHERE during the 48 hours covered. The OAZ Birdwatch competition has a few rules – teams have to consist of 2 OAZ members and can be of any number of people over and above the minimum. The area covered should be not more than 50 km radius and the count should be for the best 24 hour period. Cards must be sent to Jacko Williams as soon as possible after the dates of the Birdwatch. Her address is: 14 Harare Drive, Greystone Park, Harare.

Guy Gibbon's audio and visual cassettes

Piu Mosso have been appointed agents for Guy Gibbons' audio and visual cassettes and CD's and currently have in stock "Southern African Bird Sounds" on both cassette and CD, "Gibbons' Birds of Southern Africa", "Gibbons' Birds of Southern Africa II" and "Birds of the Kruger National Park". Piu Mosso Music (Dorothy Wakeling) can be found at Shop P3 (Upper Level), The Pavilion, Westgate (between TM and the cinemas). Telephone/fax number 335592 or E-mail: [piumosso@samara.co.zw](mailto:piumosso@samara.co.zw)

Birding in the Cape

If any members are visiting the Cape and want to go on a birdwatching trip, Jill Mortimer is offering personalised tours. She can be contacted on ☎ (21) 852-3615, fax (21) 855-3620.

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

Thank you to all of you who have sent contributions for *The Babbler* – please continue to do so. **Di Rushforth**