

BABBLER

ORNITHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION OF ZIMBABWE

A PARTNER DESIGNATE OF BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL

ISSUE #21 – NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 1997

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ACTIVITIES

MASHONALAND BRANCH

Regular outings

1. Mukuvisi Woodlands: Sundays 2nd November and 7th December 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 9th November and 14th December 1997. Meet at Marimba Shopping Centre at 6.30 a.m. Beginners are very welcome. Bring your chairs and tea.

THERE WILL BE NO OTHER OUTINGS IN DECEMBER

Saturday afternoon outing

22nd November 1997: Sand Sales, Seke Road. Meet Kentucky Service Station (right hand side of road) 2.00 p.m. New area with the prospect of finding some interesting birds – very close to the city.

Sunday Outing

29th November 1997: Mazowe Dam area. Meet Ashbrittle Service Station, 6.30 a.m. There are all types of habitats and birds here – bring chairs, tea and lunch and make a day of it.

Thursday Evening

20th November 1997: Video evening at John and Pat Saunders' home, 3 Star Close, Chisipite. Starts sharp at 6.30 p.m. Directions: Turn left into Drew Road off Enterprise Road, first left into Merlewood Drive, first right into Star Close. Tea/coffee available but bring your own drinks if you prefer.

EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB

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

Outings

<u>Sunday 26th October 1997</u>	Burma Valley	6.00 a.m.
<u>Saturday 8th November 1997</u>	Vumba Heights	2.00 p.m.
<u>Sunday 30th November 1997</u>	Dorowa	5.30 a.m.
<u>Saturday 13th December 1997</u>	Mountain Home, Penhalonga	2.00 p.m.

NO SUNDAY OUTING IN DECEMBER

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.

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

<u>Saturday 8th November 1997</u>	Rydings School Interpretive Centre	6.00 a.m.
<u>Saturday 22nd November 1997</u>	To be arranged	6.00 a.m.
<u>Saturday 6th December 1997</u>	Musango Lodge, Kariba	6.00 a.m.

[To arrive Friday evening preferably and return Sunday evening or Monday morning – bird walks, Falconry demo, tapes and we understand Mr Monks (Mana Pools' ecologist) will be joining us]

Rydings School count for early December to be liaised with the Co-ordinator, Shirley Babcock.

MATABELELAND BRANCH**Evening Meetings**

Friday 7th November 1997 Migrants – Ron Hartley recently attended a conference in Israel on Migrants. He will brief us on what was discussed and show a video on flying with migrants. 8.00 p.m.

Venue: CBC Staffroom. Contact the Chairman for directions (☎ 42474)

Friday 5 December 1997 Brown Raptors, Malawi and Cape travels. 8.00 p.m.
Warren Goodwin will discuss identification of the large brown raptors with the help of specimens from the Museum. The Chairman will give his postponed talk/video on birds of the Cape and Malawi.
Venue: 3A Holdengarde Avenue, Hillside. ☎ 42474

Outings

Sunday 16th November 1997 Matopos Eastern Borders 7.30 a.m.
Penny Feather will lead this all day outing along the Old Gwanda road to a particularly attractive part of the Matopos.
Meet at 92 Arnold Way, Burnside or contact Penny Feather for details ☎ 44034

Saturday 13th December 1997 ****Christmas Social****

This year we are planning to hold our Christmas Social at Umgusa Yacht Club. Meet at the Yacht Club at 4.00 p.m. for tea and late afternoon birding. This will be followed by a braai. Bring your food and utensils fires will be provided. For details contact Martin Smith

Aisleby

Meet at Aisleby boom at 7.30 a.m. or contact the co-ordinator for details.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Co-ordinator</u>	
Sunday 30 th November	Martin Smith	42474

PLEASE NOTE THERE WILL BE NO DECEMBER OUTING

From the Chairman

Our unusual wet spell in September (59 mm for Hillside BULAWAYO) has hastened trees into bloom and with this a number of migrants have returned – African Paradise-flycatcher (20/9) and European Bee-eater (23/9) in Hillside so far. Warblers have yet to appear. The Atlas has now been published and the Branch has its own copy for loan to members. It is definitely a landmark in Southern African ornithology and vital as a reference. Anyone wishing to borrow it should contact me.

The "Paint a Bird" competition has now been judged and prizes were presented by the Deputy Minister of Education at the official opening of Scholastica '97. The competition attracted over 350 entries from 20 different schools with the Senior age group yielding some beautiful work. We gratefully acknowledge the kind sponsorship of Inkerman Enterprises and the Wildlife Society for providing prizes which included Ken Newman's Field Guides and bird posters. We also thank Grafotype for producing our advertising poster. All winners were invited to attend some practical bird watching at Umgusa as part of our efforts with Worldwide Birdwatch. Perhaps this might yield some keen young members. 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 16th November. Further day outings and full details will be notified in due course.

Day outings – Masvingo

Contact Lynne ☎ 139-63657.

Saturday 25th October – Lake Mutirikwe shoreline waterbird count.

Day outings – Kadoma Saturday 13th December 1997. Contact Margaret ☎ 168-3644.

Camping weekend – Contact Bernard for further information.

Friday 28th – 30th 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. At the same time last year, the breeding colony of Southern Carmine Bee-eaters was still active. Hopefully they will be in residence this year. Special thanks to Cathy and Gary Sharpe and the management of Central Estates for making this weekend possible.

This outing is 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 DOUBLE RO Brahman Stud, Nyabira – 31st August 1997 QDS 1730D2

A larger number than usual of 30 people were lucky enough to experience a most enjoyable visit to Robin Gilmour's farm which is a cattle concern with an abattoir and which provided us with an opportunity to see three species of vultures (White-backed Vulture, Hooded Vulture and Lappet-faced Vulture), as well as Marabou Storks feeding on scraps especially put out for them. In spite of trying very hard, we were unable to turn one of the White-backed Vultures into a Cape!

The Gilmours also farm crocodiles and we were able to view some huge, ugly specimens whilst we watched Capped Wheatear unconcernedly sitting on one of the fence posts.

A total of 74 species were seen, highlights apart from the vultures and marabouts, being: Lanner Falcon, Malachite Kingfisher, Bennett's Woodpecker, Dark-capped Yellow Warbler, and Cape Longclaw, Rosy-throated Longclaw and Yellow-throated Longclaw.

Whilst walking across the dam wall, Richard Dennison came across a small python and very bravely grabbed it by the tail, holding it up so that we could all have a good look at this beautifully marked snake. There was another larger one lying beside the pathway and it slowly hid itself in the long grass being in no hurry to get out of the way of our feet! Also seen on the farm in the Miombo woodland were a family of 5 Greater Bushbabies, a male Reedbuck and 2 Duiker. Thank you very much to Robin Gilmour for accompanying us on the walks and for hosting the outing. **Editor**

MARLBOROUGH Sewage Works – Saturday 20th September 1997 QDS 1730D2

It was good to see that some members could give up Davis Cup Tennis or a Cricket Test Match to go birding, even if there were only 8 in number. Despite the wind, we saw 44 species which included Greater Kestrel, 4 European Bee-eaters (the first this season), 4 Rosy-throated Longclaws, 15 African Quailfinch and 8 Capped Wheatears, to name just a few. The vlei area just beyond the fence was most productive, even producing 5 Reedbuck as well. The ponds had White-faced Duck, Red-billed Teal and Southern Pochard. It was an interesting afternoon and my thanks to those who turned out. **Dave Gray**

Mr Roger Howman – 18th September 1997

As many members unfortunately missed this fascinating talk on the breeding behaviour of the Southern Masked-weaver, it is considered worthwhile publishing the full report:

Mr Howman had observed the nest building activities of three male Southern Masked-weavers (Dombwa in Shona) over a period of 24 years in his garden in Sentosa/Mabelreign HARARE with great patience and unswerving interest – his “retirement hobby” as he called it. The study produced some astonishing results and revealed the fact that birds – like humans – exhibit much individualism in their behaviour, often departing from commonly held concepts found in the relevant literature. Some of the results of this study have been published in *Ostrich* 66 and in *Honeyguide* Vol.33 No.3 under the joint authorship of Mr Howman and Dr George Begg, his ecologist son-in-law.

The first male occupying the nest site (a *Combretum* tree conveniently growing 15 paces from the house which permitted observations to be made from cover) built no less than 240 nests between 1975 and 1982, sometimes starting as early as July, of which only 17 produced broods, with never more than four females present. This bird exhibited very strong territorial behaviour, chasing away females which came to investigate. It became obvious that it was the male which “accepted” females of his choice, rather than the females accepting particular nests as is often quoted in the literature. This first male would completely destroy all nests prior to departing so that not a shred of evidence was left of his impressive building achievements – between 25 and 30 nests in a season, a third of which remained up for less than three days.

A new male made his appearance in 1983, taking over the site for five years, but building his nests on different branches to the ones the first bird had used with unflinching regularity, and leaving 6 nests up when he left at the end of the breeding season. When this bird returned the following season, he shredded all the old nests, subsequently building new ones on exactly the same twigs. No breeding took place during this season. The same pattern was recorded during the following year, but then reverted to what Mr Howman calls "normal habitual preference" for the following two years.

In 1988 a male appeared which chose a branch much higher up, and to the south, which was deemed to be a different bird, building 29 nests during the 1989 season and shredding them all in due course before departing. The same happened in 1990, although "only" 16 nests were built. However, this bird exhibited a totally different behaviour during the following three years, in contrast to what Mr Howman calls the "persistent pattern" observed during most of the previous 15 years of the study. Having built the first 8 nests in the "normal" progression of construction and subsequent destruction, the bird then built 12 more without shredding any. It then took to partly destroying the old nests, leaving the ring, top and spirals or stirrup untouched and then proceeded to use these remains as a basis for building a (partly) new structure, i.e. recycling most of his old nests, one of them twice! In subsequent seasons one nest was recycled or renovated seven times over three seasons, serving two broods during this period. This third male produced a record number of 52 nests in the 1992 season, of which 19 were built in succession without any destruction taking place. Having repeated the recycling process during the following season, this bird then reverted to the pattern observed during the first 15 years of the study, that is it built and subsequently shredded nests, leaving none up at the end of the breeding season. This male bird had up to seven females "in residence" during the 1992 season, and perhaps it just did not have sufficient time to totally destroy old and then build completely new nests due to this, and therefore adapted his behaviour by only partly demolishing the old nests, and incorporating the basic frames into new ones.

Mr Howman's meticulous observations over a long period of time provided an appreciation of how quickly and successfully the weavers managed to adapt to new situations, and Mr Howman closed his interesting and sometimes humorous address with the words: "Once an observer is not dominated by a view-point involving 'automatic instinct' and 'behaviourism', I suggest that our Southern Masked-weaver presents to us a Wonderland of Behaviour". **Rolf Chenaux-Repond**

Birding Along the ZAMBEZI (RIFA trip) – 25th-29th September 1997

36°C at CHIRUNDU must have looked fairly daunting on the TV screen, but a steady, north-easterly wind (gusting at times) kept the temperature tolerable for the 31 members of the Association who enjoyed a rewarding five days of birding on the banks of the Zambezi under the able and knowledgeable leadership of Dave Gray. Arriving on Thursday, 25th September, members checked in at the Rifa Environmental Education Camp, some five kilometres from Chirundu village, to be treated to a well-organised programme of bird watching which was spiced with a number of game sightings. In attendance were four members of the Hunters' Association who between them and Dave Gray provided vehicles to convey people to the various observation points. They also acted as armed escorts which at first sight seemed a little incongruous for bird watchers to need such protection, but this illusion was quickly dispelled on the first evening walk when a pride of 4 lions was observed drinking from the river some 500 metres away. We are most grateful to the hunters who always give so willingly of their time and knowledge. On the way back to camp a frumpy old male let it be known with an unmistakably hostile growl that we were invading his domain. Next morning, the lesson was driven home even more forcibly when a "kill" (a bush buck) was observed within half a kilometre of the camp where three lions were enjoying their breakfast with innumerable vultures in attendance. In all, 3 groups of lions were seen – so we "got the message". Worthy of particular mention, not only as an armed escort, but also as a very well-informed birder was National Parks scout Derrison who recently attended a Derek Solomon bird course. Derrison was most helpful and fitted in admirably with the party; it was a pleasure to see a member of government service discharging his duties and his contribution was much appreciated.

Points of interest visited were the Bream Farm, the old sugar mill pumping station, Willie Reed's riverside chalets, Vulture point and Tiger point. In addition of course much open bush was covered either on foot or in the vehicles. 152 species were sighted, those worth mentioning being two Verreaux's Eagle-owls, numerous Southern Carmine Bee-eaters who were at their nearby nesting site, Broad-billed Roller and Bronze-winged Courser. No account of the outing would be complete without reference to the very excellent "commissariat" arrangements provided by the professional skills of Meryl Rautenbach and Maggie Eastwood. Their fare was quite outstanding and much appreciated. A big "thank you" is also due to Dave and Ida Gray and Leslee Maasdorp whose efforts made the visit such an enjoyable occasion. **Barbara Stableford**

EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB

From the Chairman

For this month's reports I am indebted once again to Emma Holland, aged 12, who, without being requested, offers to do reports. As Mozambique begins to attract more and more Zimbabwean tourists (many enthusiastic about the excellent fishing, others keen to return to that gorgeous coastline which was such a draw in colonial times) I receive reports of exotic birds observed in the course of these excursions. I am sure Emma's contribution to "Tail Feathers" will whet the appetites of many for both birds and beach.

EDBC Garden Bird Survey – this will last two years and begins this month (October). If you live in or near Mutare and would like to take part, please get in touch with one of the local representatives as soon as possible. Thank you. **Ken Dixon**

Save Drift – Saturday 20th July 1997 1931B2/1932A1

It was a glorious morning for the 14 watchers and our first taste of the birding to come was at ODZI where we pulled up briefly to re-group. From the vehicles we were able to see many species pecking at roadside seeds and a group of White-crested Helmet-shrikes passing noisily through the bushes. A little further on, Jane picked out a trio of Klipspringer on a hillside. When we stopped for these, all sorts of birds were identified including Trumpeter Hornbill and Red-breasted Swallow. The first semi-official stop was at a small dam in the large resettlement area. A Yellow-billed Stork was the star there, although the Kittlitz's Plover was also welcome. Some friendly locals then, through our interpreters, Martin and Simba, led us to another reedy dam nearby which yielded a few more ticks (on the card). We finally reached Save Drift at about 8.30 and were thrilled to see the river running so healthily. As we stood on the causeway, we were surrounded by Wire-tailed Swallows and African Black Swifts. Six Red-faced Cisticolas, calling loudly, puzzled us for a time as we combed the reeds. Our walk through the bush and tree covered dunes brought us a wide variety of familiar birds. Grey-backed Camaroptera scurried about and an Ashy Flycatcher led us quite a dance. It was all great stuff and we were disappointed when lunchtime came. The afternoon saw us exploring in the opposite direction but still producing new species ending with a Dickinson's Kestrel. Tony is still puzzling over 2 white-rumped, Grey-rumped Swallow, or were they were early Common House-martins. I didn't see them, fortunately. Final score 80 for the hot, tired and dusty ED team. **Ken Dixon**

Far Forest, VUMBA – Sunday 31st August 1997

With quite a large party of 11, we left Mutare in the crisp morning for a day's birding in Mr and Mrs Daniels' forest which lies past Leopard Rock Hotel, thus earning the name "Far Forest". After a few problems finding our destination, we arrived at about 7.00 a.m. Our first walk of the day (guided by Mr Daniels) yielded not many species, apart from Dark-backed Weaver, Olive Sunbird, Stripe-cheeked Greenbul and the ever-elusive Gorgeous Bush-shrike which was calling. We were presented with the Kurrichane Thrush, Cape Canary and Cape Robin-chat, while the ubiquitous Variable Sunbird chattered away near the forest edge. We then set off in another direction. This path proved much more successful with Chirinda Apalis, Yellow-throated Woodland-warbler, Black-fronted Bush-shrike, Olive Thrush, Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird, Olive Bush-shrike and Yellow-bellied Greenbul showing themselves. The Chirinda Apalis being one of the two only near-endemic bird species to Zimbabwe was an exciting discovery. Another interesting find was a Crowned Hornbill swallowing one of the rare, forest inhabitants Marshall's Leaf Chameleon! We returned home at lunch-time with a few lifers for the book and a hefty bird-list! **Emma Holland**

OSBORNE Dam, Saturday 13th September 1997

There were only 5 of us for this pleasant stroll along the western foreshore of the new dam. The cloud and drizzle in Mutare which had kept others at home, however, disappeared as we descended the Pass and the sun shone. But the wind continued to blow, keeping the birds down. In the clear air, views were spectacular and there was only one speedboat to disturb the peace. Luckily it wasn't Bird Count Day as we saw only Hamerkop, Reed Cormorant and Common Sandpiper from that list. The shoreline is mostly scrub on a sandy base left from the work of the earth movers during construction. This was home to Green-winged Pytilia, Violet-eared Waxbill and both Brown-crowned Tchagra and Black-crowned Tchagra. Larger bushes and thorn trees held Grey Go-away-birds, African Hoopoes, Variable Sunbirds and Scarlet-chested Sunbirds. On a few occasions we had ample opportunity to watch the resident Black-chested Snake-eagle hovering over the hills. I am now, after mature reflection, pretty sure we saw an Osprey but we lacked a raptor specialist in the party. We also lacked a cisticola fundi, so I won't mention the cisticolas. Even so, we managed about 50 species including a fairly uncommon Cabanis's Bunting. **Ken Dixon**

KAROI BIRD CLUBRYDINGS School Interpretive Centre

Walks each month continue. In the region of 112 species have been seen there, averaging approximately 60 per month. We hope for a few more with migrants coming in now.

Saturday 30th August 1997 – Elephant's Walk, Tengwe

We had 15 participants for our visit to this most interesting venue, including Derek and Sarah Solomon, who joined us and Derek's knowledge was of great value. Our walk commenced near the homestead where a small dam led down to a series of weirs with well-wooded banks – a paradise for all species. At the dam, Buffy Pipit and Yellow-throated Petronia were identified for us by Derek. Common Sandpiper and African Pied Wagtail were present too with White-crested Helm et-shrike in the woodland. Along the series of weirs were Green-backed Heron (a juvenile included), Purple-crested Turaco, Green-capped Eremomela amongst others in the trees, and a pair of Giant Kingfishers were feeding a youngster. After refreshments on the patio of the homestead we left this soothing place for a wilder area. We were driven down to the river for a long walk along a sandy riverbed, still with pools of water and smooth, black rocks on the one side and well-wooded dry bush on the other. The usual woodland birds were spotted here and Derek pointed out an African Cuckoo Hawk across the river against the hillside and further on a Wood Pipit! A sighting which was rather sad was of a disorientated racing Pigeon who was perched conspicuously in a tree and who would take off and fly in a large circle returning again to his perch. We had a wonderful view of a Grey Penduline-tit nest and Derek gave us the whole story of the false entrances, etc. of this beautifully-fashioned little dwelling and at the end of it we were rewarded by one of the birds popping out! This was a highlight and the other was an early morning call of the African Broadbill, identified by the overnight campers in the group. 97 species in all were seen. This was a most fruitful and rewarding outing for us all and we warmly thank Clive and JJ for their time and hospitality in making this outing so special. **Merle Mitchell**

MIDLANDS

SEBAKWE POORT – Black Storks QDS 1829D3

Echo Park – 9th to 11th August 1997 QDS 1829D4

We had a total turnout of 24 over the weekend with families coming from Bulawayo, Kadoma, Masvingo, Mvuma, Shurugwi and Gweru. 125 species were seen.

On the first day, we climbed up the mountain at the Poort and camped at the top. We met Nick and Gift who are spending two months observing the Black Storks and they showed us a road up to the top which made life a lot easier. The Black Storks were again breeding with five nests active. Activity ranged from birds incubating to a newly-fledged youngster. We were privileged to see the first flight of the very first fledgling of the season – it flew from the nest at 10 a.m. on Sunday and spent the rest of the day trying to

get back to the nest. It finally managed this feat at about 3 p.m. which effort was accompanied by much chattering from its family and applause and relief from the assembled birders! A pair of Lanner Falcons was in occupation of one of the Black Stork's nests and a pair of Peregrine Falcons was active on scrapes on the cliff.

A reminder that this National Trust property is a unique spot. Not only is it the only known breeding colony of Black Storks in the World but the cliff face is also a unique location of a subspecies of a penduline form of *Aloe chabaudii*. Regrettably it appears that this site (which, in my opinion, should have World Heritage Status) is under threat from mining activity.

A wide selection of birds was seen at Echo Park. Thanks to Gavin Conway, who brought his boat, and made some spectacular water birdwatching possible. A particularly impressive sighting was a good, very close range look at a pair of Black Crake. **Bernard Beekes**

KADOMA day outing – Saturday 23rd August 1997

Hove Farm, the home of Bruce and Carole Newman, is situated 7 km from Kadoma along the Harare Road and boasts mixed woodland of Mopani, Msasa, Mukwa and Acacia thornveld. There were seven of us, including three school children and a total of 33 birds were seen, with most species seen around the homestead and the dairy area. A fair number of White-bellied Sunbirds were around and a Spotted Eagle-owl was seen perched high in a thorn tree, being harassed by Fork-tailed Drongos and White-browed Sparrow-weavers. Thanks to Bruce and Carole for a splendid day. **Margaret Parrock**

MATABELELAND

Annual Verreaux's Eagle Outing 1997, MATOPOS National Park – Saturday 20th September 1997

This year we were joined by twelve members of the Botswana Bird Club who travelled from Francistown and camped for the weekend at the Maleme Dam camp site. As usual, George Banfield, who coordinates the Verreaux's Eagle Survey gave us an excellent tour of selected Verreaux's Eagle sites. We were fortunate to see the first two fledged youngsters of the season; both perched in full view, close to their nest-sites. Other younger eaglets were viewed on their nests and one much younger chick (still with white down amongst its brown feathers) was watched as it was being fed by its parent. Although we concentrated on the Eagles, many other birds were to be seen – a total of 90 species during the weekend. Sightings of interest included two African Green-pigeons and a pair of White-backed Ducks with three ducklings at Mesilumi Dam. Those from Francistown were excited to see Miombo Double-collared Sunbirds and a Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird – rarities for them. We had excellent views of Purple-crested Turacos at Maleme camp site and one Yellow-billed Oxpecker was seen on a Sable antelope. There have been several sightings of oxpeckers recently in the Matopos area, which is encouraging.

In May last year, we enjoyed a wonderful weekend with the Botswana Bird Club at Nata Sanctuary, beside the Sua Pan. We then invited them back to Bulawayo in November but unfortunately we picked one of the wettest weekends of the entire season! This time round the weather was much kinder to us. We greatly enjoyed their visit and hope that we may share more such weekends in the near future.

Martin Smith

TAIL FEATHERS

African Olive-pigeon in HARARE BOTANIC GARDENS

Late in August this year an African Olive-pigeon was seen in the Harare Botanical Gardens by a Mrs Frances Allan and three of her friends. **Mike Marriott**, Harare

Great Egret's attempt to rob a Reed Cormorant

During our outing to RAINHAM Dam on the morning of 31st August, I noticed a Great Egret chasing after a Reed Cormorant. They were about 100 metres away and about 1 metre above the water. I continued to watch the two birds and realised that the Reed Cormorant had a fish. According to Mr John Paxton the egret's behaviour is called kleptoparasitism (after the Greek word for thieving). I looked at the birds again and still the egret was following the cormorant. The cormorant then plunged into the water possibly because it was exhausted or tried to escape. Undaunted, the egret flew over to where the cormorant had plunged in and then set off after a few seconds realising that the cormorant would not come out. After the egret had gone the cormorant re-emerged. It was certainly spectacular watching this event. **Prince Gangarabwe**, Mount Pleasant.

Rosy-faced Lovebirds

I am fascinated by the daily visits of three or four Rosy-faced Lovebirds to my aviary. They perch on the wire and have prolonged conversations with the one I have inside. Obviously these free-ranging birds are escapees but since they are so very fit and strong I wonder that they are not establishing themselves in the wild. This has been going on for two years. These visitors are fast fliers and as they move around the trees on my property show every indication of being well adapted to the wild. All my bird books show that they are not resident in this country and yet I wonder whether they might establish themselves. If any reader discovers a pair breeding in the wild please let me know as I would be interested. They are so full of personality and are so colourful that they are a delight to see, even if their chatter is rather noisy.

Peter Creswell, Glen Lorne, HARARE

Birding at Inhassoro (Southern Mozambique) – August 1997

On a recent trip to Inhassoro in the south of Mozambique, we perceived many interesting and exciting birds which I will share with you. Not many special birds were sighted on the way down but on the coastline we were enchanted by the variety. On our trips to the well-known Paradise Island (Santa Carolina) we spotted birds such as the Mangrove Kingfisher, Madagascar Bee-eater and Blue-cheeked Bee-eater in and near the mangroves, while at the Bartholomew Dias Island we were surprised with our acquaintance with the Osprey and a small flock of Caspian Terns. Down the Inhassoro beach we sighted Ruddy Turnstone, Grey-headed Gulls and White-fronted Plovers and in a nearby mangrove, Woolly-necked Storks. At the Inhassoro point we discovered a resident flock of Pink-backed Pelicans. Most definitely, Inhassoro is a rewarding and worthwhile birding destination. **Emma Holland**, Mutare

NOTICEBOARD

Sale of Carousel Slide Magazines

Mike Marriott (☎ 492059) has 11 Carousel slide magazines for sale at \$220 each: Each magazine holds 80 slides and all are in an as new condition.

The Southern African Bird Atlas

The Atlas is finally out and all who took part in the project should feel well pleased with the result. If you have a copy you might like to offer your observations on the magnum opus (applause and criticism). Please send your thoughts to D V Rockingham-Gill, P O Box 105, Chinhoyi who will try to incorporate them into a book review. The work is now a bench mark and all new data should be sent to The Editor, Honeyguide, P O Box CY 161, Causeway. **D V Rockingham-Gill**

World Birdwatch – 4th and 5th October 1997

When surfing the Internet, John Paxton, participated in an exchange of interesting data on the recently held World Birdwatch. Apparently 18 000 people were encouraged to go out birdwatching, an incredible number which just shows the appeal that birds can have. Some highlights of the event are (unofficial and incomplete results): from Cyprus, 15 participants, 113 species seen amongst which were 500 Red-footed Falcon, but the down side was the witnessing of the shooting of bee-eaters and finding some lime-sticks. These activities contravene all wildlife conventions and agreements in Cyprus; Ecuador, 4 participants, total number of species seen 138, highlights 23 species of hummingbirds and 19 species of tanager; Finland, number of

participants 600, number of species seen 170; total birds approximately 150 000, highlights, White-tailed Eagle, Golden Eagle, 1 600 Whooper Swans (the Finnish national bird); Kenya, number of participants 230, highest single team score 216 species (Kenya boasts 1 080 species); Madagascar, number of participants at least 1 000, total number of species seen 24; South Africa (not representative of their final total!) Number of participants 5, total number of species seen 102; Sweden, number of participants 400 (100 localities), total number of species seen 196; UK team (Minsmere RSPB nature reserve), number of participants 1 100, total number of species seen 107; USA best number seen 44 species; Zimbabwe (John Paxton and 3 students), total number of species seen 117, highlights, 5 African Pygmy-goose, Maccoa Duck, African Cuckoo Hawk.

NTT Bird Count – 1st to 31st October 1997

NTT, Japan has agreed to contribute US\$10 for each species of bird identified over the period 1st to 31st October 1997 throughout the world. Please send your list to Jacko Williams, 14 Harare Drive, Greystone Park, Harare as soon as possible after the 31st. What an easy and pleasant way to help bird conservation!

Cottage to let in the Bvumba

Newly built, self-catering cottage to let. Comprises 3 bedrooms, 1 double and 2 single beds (can sleep 5 people if you supply a camp bed). Cottage is on the same road as Seldomseen and has its own indigenous forest. Cost \$250 per night. Contact Edna on ☎ 464743 – home (party line and difficult!) Or leave a message with Joyce on ☎ 300667 (home).

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Important Bird Areas

During July we had a visit from Dr Fishpool, the IBA Co-ordinator for Africa with BirdLife International in Cambridge England. He was accompanied by Keith Barnes of the Avian Demography Unit at the University of Cape Town who is compiling the inventory for South Africa. A very useful workshop was held in Bulawayo attended by Dr Peter Mundy, Susan Worsley and myself from the OAZ together with two visitors. So far, about 32 sites have been identified for our inventory. This stage should be completed by the end of October. Sue Worsley has been appointed as our National IBA Co-ordinator.

BirdLife International Partners' Meeting in Kenya

There is to be a five day Partners' Meeting and IBA Planning meeting for the African Partnership at Lake Naivasha in Kenya at the end of November. Should the necessary funding be obtained, the OAZ will be represented by Sue Worsley as the IBA project forms an important part of the Agenda. The OAZ is not yet a Partner but is BLI Representative for Zimbabwe.

Southern African Bird Atlas

This superb publication was launched at a ceremony in Johannesburg on 21st August 1997. I was invited but did not attend because of financial constraints. Most of our members who took advantage of the prepublication offer will by now have received their copies. Dr Kit Hustler is working towards completion of the Zimbabwean Atlas and hopefully this will come off the press next year.

Education Programme

In August the African Bird Club (based in the UK) made its first Conservation Fund award to the OAZ for funding of the proposed Ornithology training courses for A-level or undergraduate students. The first of the courses is being held at Rifa from 29th November to 5th December this year. The course content is being designed by Peter Mundy and Leslee Maasdorp and will include basic bird biology, migration, bird-human relationships, problem birds, conservation and law. They are aimed at students who have made a choice towards careers in the biological sciences and who show aptitude and enthusiasm. The purpose is to present the discipline of Ornithology to such young people in the expectation that this will foster a life long interest and awareness in the subject. The "first prize" would be to have one of them actually become a professional ornithologist as has happened in other parts of Africa. **John Paxton**

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

Pat Bellingan has kindly lent me her copy of "The Bee-eater and ECWBS News" (Eastern Cape Wild Bird Society) magazine as it contains an article about Tony and Maggie Tree. As many of you know Tony and Maggie, I thought I would reproduce the story.

"The Perils of Swallow Ringing" (Written by A P Martin)

In November 1996 I received a phone call from Tony Tree. In a sheepish voice he explained that his wife Maggie and he were in hospital in Port Elizabeth. His story is something of a ringing classic and goes as follows:

As a good bird ringing citizen, Tony had been itching to get into the swallow roost at the dam near his house in Bathurst to do his bit for the International Swallow Project. Rain and wind had been frustrating his efforts all week, but on Friday, 15 November he sallied forth. Tony was walking across the dam wall with Maggie (carrying the mist net poles!) behind him. As they approached the spillway, which was overflowing due to the recent rains, Maggie enquired whether it might not be slippery. "Guffaw guffaw – I've crossed here hundreds of times", replied Tony as he stepped onto the spillway and immediately disappeared over the edge, landing on the rocks three metres below. Maggie, who had seen Tony hit his head on the parapet as he went over and was wondering if his life assurance was in order, retreated a few metres back along the dam wall but then, taking her cue from the lemmings, jumped down to his rescue, shattering her leg as she landed amongst the rocks. Imagine the picture – Tony crouched with his chin resting on a rock to prevent him from drowning if he fainted, with about seven broken ribs, going blue, gasping for breath and muttering "Oh sh-!". Maggie, crawling back to the vehicle, trying to keep Rambo their dog from biting a local who had come to help after hearing the commotion.

Maggie managed to get the vehicle going in second gear and raced to the Pig and Whistle in Bathurst. The contents of the pub emptied to see which drunk had arrived as Maggie pulled up, horn blaring, amid a screech of brakes (you try stopping with only one foot!). Half of Bathurst, the local Commando, police, etc. came to view Tony, but no one dared touch him in case he had broken his back! So there he lay in the water for two hours until the ambulance arrived. At Port Alfred they took X-rays, but failed to give Tony oxygen, before despatching them to Port Elizabeth. On arrival, Tony was immediately taken to Intensive Care. Before Maggie went into surgery, they took her to say goodbye to Tony, who they feared may be brain dead due to the long period he had been without adequate oxygen. They need not have worried – ringers generally are a tough breed and there isn't usually much upstairs that needs oxygen!

Visiting the pair of them in hospital was, for me, a moment to cherish. The usually brash, exuberant Tree was meek and mild, having to suck into his oxygen mask after every few words, and making funny grating noises whenever I made him laugh. As visitors to the ringing workshop will have noticed, Tony is none the worse for his ordeal and, although Maggie still has various metal plates in her leg, she is well on her way to a full recovery. A good job really, for although I like to poke fun at them, the pair of them is quite an asset to the Eastern Cape.