

BABBLER

ORNITHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION OF ZIMBABWE

A PARTNER DESIGNATE OF BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL

ISSUE #22 – JANUARY /FEBRUARY 1998

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P O Box 44, Bulawayo

WE WISH ALL OF YOU A VERY HAPPY CHRISTMAS AND A HEALTHY, PEACEFUL AND GOOD BIRDING NEW YEAR

IMPORTANT DATE FOR YOUR DIARY

THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE ORNITHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION OF ZIMBABWE WILL BE HELD ON SATURDAY, 28TH MARCH 1998 AT ECHO PARK, KWEKWE. ARRANGEMENTS HAVE BEEN MADE FOR ACCOMMODATION FOR THE WEEKEND 27TH TO 29TH MARCH 1998. FURTHER DETAILS ARE GIVEN IN THE TEAR OFF SLIP PROVIDED.

Echo Park is situated near Sable Park which is a small game park, Sebakwe Poort (famous for the breeding colony of Black Storks) and Dutchman's Pools Dam which is good for water birds. There will be something for everyone at this venue. .DON'T MISS IT!

SUBSCRIPTIONS ARE NOW DUE FOR 1998 – PLEASE SEND TO THE MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY, P O BOX CY 161, CAUSEWAY

Subscription rates are shown on the enclosed form

ACTIVITIES**MASHONALAND BRANCH****Regular outings**

1. Mukuvisi Woodlands: Sundays 4th January and 1st February 1998. Meet at Paget Road entrance at 6.30 a.m. There will be a vehicle guard in attendance.
2. Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary: Sundays 11th January and 8th February 1998. Meet at Marimba Shopping Centre at 6.30 a.m. Beginners are very welcome. Bring your chairs and tea.

Saturday afternoon outings

1. 17th January 1998: Crest Breeders, Harare South. Meet on the right hand side of Simon Mazorodze (Beatrice) Road at the Orange Kiosk (approximately 15 km peg) at 2.00 p.m. Bring chairs and refreshments.
2. 14th February 1998: Harare Botanic Gardens. Meet in the Car Park at 3.00 p.m. There is a security guard in attendance on weekends.

Sunday outings

1. 25th January 1998: Alex Masterson's annual vlei walk. Meet Princess Margaret Drive/Harare Drive (in front of Flame Lily Lodge), Marlborough at 6.30 a.m. Don't miss this worthwhile walk.
2. 22nd February 1998: Harava Dam (formerly Henry Hallam), Seke Road. Meet at 6.30 a.m. at Kentucky Service Station. There will be a small entry fee payable at the gate. Bring chairs and refreshments.

Thursday evenings

1. 15th January 1998: *MASHONALAND BRANCH AGM*. Venue: Alexandra Sports Club, Sable Room. 6.00 p.m. for 6.30 p.m. John Shaw will talk on birding in the Mukuvisi Woodlands over the last 20 years. Snacks will be provided and a cash bar will be available. **FOR CATERING PURPOSES, PLEASE COMPLETE THE TEAR OFF SLIP PROVIDED.**
2. 19th February 1998: Sue Worsley, who is the IBA (Important Bird Areas) Co-ordinator for Zimbabwe will give an illustrated talk. Venue: Alexandra Sports Club, Sable Room, 6.00 p.m. for 6.30 p.m. A cash bar will be available.

SOCIAL EVENING – Saturday 31st January 1998: This will be held at the home of Jacko and John Williams, 14 Harare Drive, Greystone Park, Harare at 6.30 p.m. An overseas speaker has been invited to address us but if this is not possible, a superb video on birding in the U.K. will be shown. **Bring chairs, a picnic supper and drinks!**

EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB

Chairman: Mr Ken Dixon ☎ 120-65819 Recorder: Mr Tony Curtis ☎ 120-60281

<u>Saturday 10th January 1998</u>	Cynara Farm	2.00 p.m.
<u>Sunday 25th January 1998</u>	Rusape Area	6.00 a.m.
<u>Saturday 14th February 1998</u>	Bvumba	2.30 p.m.
<u>Sunday 1st March 1998</u>	Stapleford	6.00 a.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.

By the way, our new programme for 1998 is available from Jane ☎ 65610 or Ken ☎ 65819

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

Rydings School Interpretive Centre walks remain the first Saturday of the month but do check before arriving. Our regular end of month outings for the new year have as yet not been arranged so please check with our Co-ordinator beforehand.

MATABELELAND BRANCH**Friday 9th January 1998**

Video evening. Ronnie Stuttford has kindly agreed to host this month's meeting and will show two videos.

Venue: 65A Clarke Road, Suburbs at 8.00 p.m. ☎ 71625.

Friday 6th February 1998

Matabeleland Branch AGM will be held at 8.00 p.m. but will be preceded by a braai. Bring your own food and utensils – fires and punch will be supplied. Venue 3A Holdengarde Avenue, Hillside ☎ 42474.

Outings**Sunday 18th January 1998** – Aisleby Waterfowl Count

This should prove interesting with plenty of waterbirds to count and provide an opportunity to use the new hide. Please do come and support us; larger numbers make the count easier and more worthwhile. Meet at Aisleby boom at 7.30 a.m. or contact the Chairman ☎ 42474.

Saturday 31st January 1998 – Ken Blake – Richmond

The Branch has visited Ken and Betty's property in the past and found lots to see. Meet at 3.00 p.m., bringing afternoon tea.

Sunday 15th February 1998 – Mbalabala Sanctuary and Umzingwane Dam

Our last visit to this area produced a number of interesting sightings and hopefully we can find plenty to see. Meet at Ascot Car Park at 7.00 a.m. or contact the Chairman for further details.

Sunday 22nd February 1998 – Aisleby

Meet at Aisleby boom at 7.30 a.m. or contact the co-ordinator for details. Martin Smith ☎ 42474.

From the Chairman

Summer migrants have returned adding interest to our local bird watching. BULAWAYO skies have filled with a variety of swallows, martins and swifts, whilst a number of non-descript warblers are to be found within the trees. Of particular note are birds on passage which are rarely seen. In Bulawayo two records of African Pygmy-kingfisher were obtained within a week. I managed to catch one in mist nets whilst Tim English had a window casualty which fortunately survived. Breeding migrants are also of interest and we are currently watching two Yellow-billed Kite nests within the urban area. If anybody knows of additional nests, please let me know. At Aisleby, considerable development has taken place with the erection of a magnificent viewing platform which enables all of the Ibis Dam to be seen. We are indebted to Dudley Hubbard, Harry Erwee and Tim English for the time and effort they have put into this worthwhile project. Hopefully we can now manage the Ibis Dam in order to attract a wide variety of waterfowl. Finally I would like to thank members of the Branch for their support in 1997 and wish everybody a Happy New Year. **Martin Smith.**

MIDLANDS BRANCH

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

Outings

The 1998 programme has not yet been formalised but please contact your area co-ordinator later in December for dates. The Midlands Branch newsletter will be published soon and will contain details of future outings.

REPORTS**MASHONALAND BRANCH****OAZ and World Birdwatch Competitions 1997 – 4th/5th October 1997**

Jacko Williams reports that 28 teams entered the OAZ Birdwatch this year but alas 13 have had to be disqualified as they had no, or only one, OAZ member in it. A reminder that the rules are (See *The Babbler*, Issue 20) at least two paid up OAZ members in a team. However, all plus a few more teams contributed hugely to the World Birdwatch. 476 species were recorded and the NTT whole month record was 490 species, raising a lot of funds for Birdlife International projects world-wide. Thank you all, and next year join the OAZ and win the trophy! Results of qualifying teams are

<u>Place</u>	<u>No. Species</u>	<u>Team</u>	<u>Leader</u>
1	162	Gleneagles	Abasi Jana
2	158	Bumi Hills	A Williamson
3	154	Gweru	B Beekes
4	151	Mutare	K Dixon
5	144	Eastern Districts	E Holland
6	130	The Creeper Spotters	D Gray
7	122	Main Camp	R P Accorsi
8	119	Felixburg	RK Harvey
9	117	Harare	J Paxton
10)	113	Lalapanzi	C R Hartley
10)	113	Charara	R Petzer
12	111	Zinyoni	S Long
13	76	Aberfoyle	J Dalziel
14	43	Dorwoods Farm	S Perrett

The other teams' results are:

1	171	Mahenya	M Homan
2	162	Matusadona	G Douglas
3	135	Njiwa	A Davidson
4	134	Water Wilderness	D Martin
5	131	Marondera	B Johnston
6	123	Wedza	Ogilvie
7	116	Chikwenya	R Benzies
8)	100	Munda	3 Keith
8)	100	Fothergill	M Pelham
10	92	?	C De Beer
11	89	Mhorwe Mission	R Probart-Morgan
12	55	Marondera	S G Lees
13	38	Tsanga	3 Williams
14	37	Kariba	R Gilmour

Well done to all of the participants. The World Birdwatch results for Zimbabwe were certainly very pleasing.

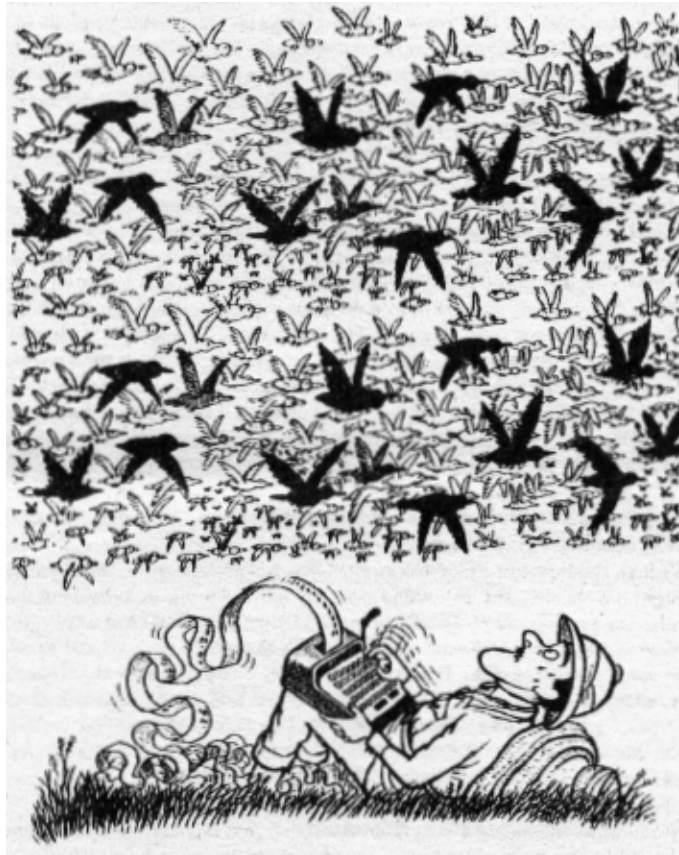
Future Birdwatches

There has been some debate as to whether or not members are happy with the OAZ Birdwatch being combined with the World Birdwatch (only every two years). Some members have found it a bit complicated having to complete two cards, whilst others seem to prefer to do both over the one weekend. The Committee would, however, appreciate your completing the simple questionnaire at the end of the newsletter so that future Birdwatch events can be timed to suit the majority of the members.

Keith Harvey has kindly sent an account recently taken from an overseas publication

Many thousands of birdwatchers in all the states of the United States and in all the provinces of Canada take to shore, desert, forest, and field, in what is probably the world's greatest cooperative survey of wildlife, to count all the birds they see according to kind. A rank beginner – and a myopic one at that – might see only one or two sparrows. But a more experienced bird-counter might see a whole group of them – that is, a host of sparrows. (Precisely how many sparrows there are in a host is his problem; he's doing the counting!)"

Further reports on the **World Birdwatch** weekend from other parts of the country will be included in the next issue of *The Babbler*.



Annual Breakfast: Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary 12th October 1997

There was a wonderful turn-out of members – about 64 – who enjoyed a good morning's birding (126 species identified), followed by a most excellent breakfast which was served under a canopy of trees in the Sanctuary. Grateful thanks to John and Pat Saunders, Dave and Ida Gray, Mr and Mrs Riddell and Basil Rushforth for providing us with such a super meal.

Deborah Gundlach has written as follows :

"To the Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer and her husband, Editor and her husband, relevant members of the OAZ committee and volunteers. With the verbal communication system, which is meant to run through underground cables, in a complete state of degeneration and impotence, one is forced to rely (hopefully) on the age old method of correspondence to express one's appreciation of all the effort which went into ensuring the annual breakfast cookout was such a success. Many thanks to all of you for your input in both the organisation and catering aspects of such an event. Your transmissions with El Nino made for perfect timing in what otherwise might have been a downright soggy affair. You must have wondered four days prior to the occasion if your decision to "hold it in a dry month" was the correct one. Perfect day! Well done!!"

John Hough – Thursday 16th October 1997

John Hough came to show us his own video pictures of predators and other birds in the MVURWI area. Many of you missed a real treat. We enjoyed an hour of superb and unusual photography, well edited, and with some extraordinary scenes of bird life. The more memorable pictures included a cat which had befriended a Spotted Eagle-owl and of a Wahlberg's Eagle being dive-bombed by Fork-tailed Drongos. Egyptian Goose sometimes builds nests high up in trees, and the young, when only a few hours old, drop down to the ground following a parent bird. John's picture showed the adult and young in a nest, some 120 ft up and then the young dropping off the nest to join the parent on the ground below and running after it through the grass. Clever timing to get such a picture! The final footage depicted the "Cain and Abel" struggle of young Verreaux's Eagle chicks. As usual, the parents produced two eggs which successfully hatched. One young bird was removed from the nest and hand fed for some days. It was then put back into the nest to join the twin. All went well until a parent brought some food and this sparked off the battle. The chick which had been in the nest all the time was determined to fight to the kill. Meanwhile the parent seemed not to have noticed what was going on it had not realised that there were now two birds in the nest and was quite unperturbed at the fighting. This episode was a remarkable bit of filming. John obviously has much patience and determination when out with his video camera. Thank you very much for sharing with us the results of your skill and love of your hobby. **Sally Perrett.**

Visit to the home of Peter Creswell, Glen Lorne, HARARE – 18th October 1997 QDS 1731C3

Eight people attended this outing on a day when the sun was breaking through cloud that had been fairly solid the previous day. Peter's home is in Glen Lorne and has a splendid view of a valley with a stream flowing through it. Our walk took us through Miombo woodland and stream – rank vegetation and a total of 44 species was recorded. The cloudy and windy conditions probably reduced the count significantly but we managed to see Klaas's Cuckoo and Terrestrial Brownbul and to hear a Black Cuckoo. The highlight of the afternoon was the magnificent tea provided by Peter Creswell and Jeanette Burger. Our gratitude goes to the ladies on the Mashonaland Branch Committee who donated some delicious cakes and of course to Peter and Jeanette for their hospitality. **Richard Dennison.**

Sand Sales, Seke Road – 22nd November 1997 QDS 1731C3

Seven of us, including a lady from Australia, met Ian and Bob McCallum upon our arrival at Sand Sales. Bob joined our walk which began at the lecture room and ended at the dams on Mr Danckwert's farm which is next to Sand Sales. The area around the lecture room is a tree and bird sanctuary which covers a significant area and contains some large trees. This being an afternoon walk, not as many birds were evident as on the morning survey the week before. However, we managed to see several Broad-billed Rollers and Grey-headed Kingfishers and African Pygmy-kingfishers. We then drove back to Mr Danckwert's dams which were closer to the Seke Road and we managed to pick up water and marshland birds. White-backed Ducks, Southern Pochards and many White-faced Ducks were seen. A total of 90 bird species were recorded and the area definitely warrants a day visit which should start early in the morning. The lecture block has toilets facilities and an overhead projector, a video cassette player and tea urns can be provided upon request. This conservancy has a lot of potential and is close to Harare. **Richard Dennison**

MAZOWE Citrus Estates – Sunday 30th November 1997

Nine birders under the leadership of Geoff Lowe travelled to Mazowe where we met up with Sue Fawcett, wife of the General Manager, whose local knowledge was invaluable. We started off in the riverine forest below the dam wall where, although the sun was shining, was wet underfoot. Walking along the canals the air was full of song but spotting was difficult due to the dense undergrowth. We heard and had fleeting glimpses of Black-throated Wattle-eyes and a White-throated Robin-chat. Highlight in this area was the sight of four or five pairs of Purple-banded Sunbirds busily feeding on the blossom of a *Mimusops zeyheri*. Moving into the woodland areas and then to the shoreline the eventual count was 79 species including African Crowned Eagle, Steppe Buzzard, African Pygmy-kingfisher and Spotted Flycatcher. With Mazowe Dam at 78.9% there was no shoreline exposed and so there were very few water birds to be seen. **John Saunders**

EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUBImbwa Mwenje, Odzi – Sunday 28th September 1997

The Bird Club's Sunday outing in September was advertised as being at Rusape but the small attendance of 3 people plus the fact that someone had omitted to make the required arrangements at Rusape (one red-faced recorder) forced a change of plan and we went instead to Imbwa Mwenje where, under Jane's guidance, we had a most successful morning seeing and hearing about 75 species, literally going through the check-list from A (Accipitridae) to Z (Zosteropidae). The large total was made possible by the variety of habitats which included two small dams with reedbeds and an abundance of floating plants; arable lands lying fallow; open, mixed woodland with short, dry grass; a wonderful rocky kopjie, well-wooded and having a magnificent view from the summit as well as some Msasa woodland on the lower slopes of Mwenje Mountain. Two large Cape Fig trees full of fruit also contributed and so did the gardens surrounding the recently-built house and cottages. We are most grateful to Mrs Lippmann for allowing us to explore this excellent new birding "destination". The 75 species logged included: the first Violet-backed Starlings this season, African Green-pigeons, Swallow-tailed Bee-eater, Greater Honeyguide, Lilac-breasted Roller, Brubru, Klaas's Cuckoo, Red-necked Spurfowl, Purple-crested Turaco, Red-headed Weaver – a real rainbow collection! One or two gave us trouble like the pair of large raptors cruising along the flanks of Mt. Mwenje – African Hawk-eagles or Black-chested Snake-eagles? Voting was two to one. And some glossy starlings, some of which seemed to have brownish under-parts and failed to "bleat" as good Greater Blue-eared Starlings should. But they had no speckling – so were they possibly Miombo Blue-eared Starlings? Not impossible, but it would have been a first, as far as I can remember, for this area. Needs more investigation perhaps.

To finish this report, or rather to embellish it, here's an extract from Joyce Grenfell's memoirs. Perhaps you have to be of a certain age to remember this unique entertainer, but even if you are unfortunate enough never to have heard her inimitable monologues, I hope you will enjoy her writing style in this anecdote from the days when "bird-watching" was still considered (by some) an eccentric activity. Joyce Grenfell and her husband were both enthusiastic birders; this was in the 1960's and Joyce was touring "down under".

"In New Zealand I was to speak as guest of honour of some women's organisation at the time when being a bird-watcher was still considered eccentric by those who weren't used to the idea. Botany was respectable, flower-finding plausible, but watching birds was too peculiar. There were a number of fancy-hatted women present. The President introduced me and, as if she were revealing a shameful secret, said; 'And I believe Miss Grenfell is a 'bird-watcher!' Cue for titters. I smiled bravely. 'Later when I get her in private I am going to ask her just what it is that a birdwatcher does!' Laughter. I couldn't wait for privacy. After thanking her for her kind welcome I said I'd like to relieve her anxiety right away. 'Bird-watchers,' I said, 'watch birds because they are interesting; because they are often beautiful; and because they are part of life.' This outspoken revelation caused embarrassment. Down went the eyes and everyone appeared to be counting the buttons on their blouses. To speak so freely in public, at ten thirty in the morning, about life was as startling as if I had said a rude word or my knickers had fallen off. It took a little while before the audience trusted me not to go further than good manners allowed." **Tony Curtis**

World Birdwatch Weekend – 4th and 5th October 1997

Two teams of keen birdwatchers had a 24 hour bird “binge” – a marvellous experience. On Saturday, Jane and Bill Clegg, Bridget and Emma Holland and Geoff Botha were up with the Dark-capped Bulbuls and off on an Odzi tour; Imbwa Mwenje for a start then along the back road to the Osborne Dam, Cynara of course and home. Next morning, in the mist, up to the Bvumba for a short session from 5 a.m. to 6.30 a.m. to complete the 24 hours. Guess how many species! 144! The following day which dawned cloudy and cool, Cecilia Manson, Geoff Higgott (a visitor from the U.K. with lots of experience) and myself were up with the Spotted Eagle-owl and the Fiery-necked Nightjar. Expecting the Bvumba to be shrouded in mist, we spent the first hour or so on the Game Park fence, near Cecil Kop. Then we moved to Seldomseen and the Bunga Forest for the “specials” found nowhere else in Zimbabwe. From there a speedy descent to town for a delicious lunch at the now recovered Bill and Jane’s and a change of personnel – Simba for Cecilia – before the Old Mutare leg. We were seen off from CYNARA in the dusk by both a Spotted Eagle-owl and a Barn Owl at about 6 p.m. Our calculations on the return journey produced a total of 151 different species. The combined total with possibly a few more to come from other sources stands at 194 different species for the weekend. This will be sent to the OAZ for integration into the national list which will attract sponsorship for conservation projects from various international companies. **Ken Dixon**

Musangano Lodge, ODZI – Saturday 11th October 1997

Another new venue for the club and how popular it proved to be, occasioning our largest turnout since Dorowa. Perhaps some had foreknowledge of the drinks and snacks which awaited us at the end. We were obliged to split into 2 groups; one was to go down to the Mutate River and the other to explore the woodland and hills within the boundaries of the property. This, by the way is a very attractive development with tastefully designed and equipped thatched rondavels sited on hills not far distant from the reception and restaurant building. As it turned out, the heat of the afternoon slowed down one of the groups to such an extent that they did not reach the river. On the river walk there was much more to be heard than seen; both Brown-crowned Tchagra and Black-crowned Tchagra, Orange-breasted Bush-Shrike, Village Weaver and Spectacled Weavers. We had plenty of opportunity to identify the Jameson’s Firefinch who ran along the path before us but, as usual, no one was 100% certain. The grassy areas yielded Rattling Cisticola and the usual Red-billed Quelea. At the river there was nothing at all so we went back to the lodge as quickly as the heat would let us. The garden and Msasa woodland held lots of White-bellied Sunbird, Southern Black Tit and White-crested Helmet-shrikes among others. Unfortunately, we didn’t have time to explore all the well-marked trails or climb up to the beacon but it is good to leave something for next time. My last bird of the trip was a Brubru, a relatively uncommon species hereabouts, and number 40 on the list for the day. Many thanks for the warm welcome from Gerd and Brigit and the welcome refreshments. **Ken Dixon**

Amsterdam Farm – BURMA VALLEY – Sunday 26th October 1997

A few minutes after our arrival, we were sipping tea, admiring the salient features of the garden, the African Fish-eagle’s nest in a large Eucalyptus, which exceptionally this year had been home to two offspring (the first time more than one had been produced) and the huge colony of Village Weavers with their attendant parasites, Diderick Cuckoo. A tour of the garden and yard was fairly productive thanks to a wide variety of habitat. Both Livingstone’s Turaco and Purple-crested Turaco were present and easily seen as was a Greater Honeyguide. As we walked down towards the river, the resident Lizard Buzzard sat on a telegraph pole while on the wires alongside were a tailless Pin-tailed Whydah and a family of Common Fiscals.

The dense riverine bush was not as exciting as it has been in the past but we saw the two young African Fish-eagles on a secluded stretch which also yielded a Malachite Kingfisher, Dark-backed Weaver and Thick-billed Weaver, two more Honeyguides and Amethyst Sunbird were seen and a Garden Warbler sang loudly from a bush. After a break for tea and sandwiches, we transferred to the dam where we have usually seen so many birds. The high water level this year, while good for Pi, was bad for the EDBC. All we saw was Hamerkop, Water Thick-knee, Great Egret and a few Reed Cormorants. However, by the time we were hot and tired enough to stop for lunch we had a total of 60 species. Many thanks to Mirtula and Pi for looking after us so well. **Ken Dixon**

Karoi Bird ClubRydings School Interpretive Centre

The Co-ordinator, Shirley Babcock, continues to monitor this area each month and is joined erratically by club members. For the last one, seven pitched up.

Sunday 26th October 1997 – Kevlyn Farm

We invited David Rockingham-Gill for the weekend, and to join us on our bird walk and to share some of his knowledge – thank you David for coming. 14 of us set off at 6.30 a.m., a little later than we'd hoped, but the birds were still around. Kevin has paths cut through the bush, specifically for birdwatching, so we followed these – through Miombo woodland, along a stream, passing by a Hamerkop nest, and another occupied by bees; in the trees were Purple-crested Turaco, Violet-backed Starling, African Golden Oriole and through the vlei Common Waxbill whilst around the small dam, Three-banded Plover and 8 Hamerkop were seen. Downstream we heard Shelley's Francolin and Natal Spurfowl. Crossing over the stream and making our way to a small kopje we saw a Black Cuckoo disappearing into cover and heard Klaas's Cuckoo and Red-chested Cuckoos. Just as we approached the kopje one of our party spotted a raptor's nest, with a chick in it. We agreed on Wahlberg's Eagle and had the pleasure of watching it from the top of the kopje whilst sipping deliciously cool fruit juice and munching sliced apple, lugged up there by Vivienne! Fortified, we continued, only to discover that the birds had quietened down, though we did spy the lovely Broad-billed Roller and altogether we did see 97 species. Breakfast was the next stop, which turned out to be 'a la Sheraton Vivienne!' Served on the lawn and enjoyed by one and all. Thank you for spoiling us, Viv. David spoke to us a bit on the OAZ and fielded some questions. Thank you Kevin and Vivienne for a splendid morning.

I might add here, that we agreed that these outings are most useful as a learning exercise. There is often a remark passed whether it be on colour, habit, or call of a bird which helps to set in our minds the identification thereof. **Merle Mitchell**

MATABELELANDShumbashaba Mkulu (MATOPOS) – Sunday 16 November 1997

This proved to be a delightfully wet and soggy outing to a gorgeous property on the edge of the Mtshabezi valley. This is one of the highest points of the Matopos and has a significantly greater rainfall than elsewhere with an average of 750mm and totals of 1500 and 1125mm for the previous two seasons. As a result of this, the area supports a wide variety of vegetation, 175 species of tree have been identified including a number normally found in the Eastern Districts. We began the day with a visit to the perennial marsh and had good views of Cape Longclaw. After a pause to extricate one marsh-bound minibus, we moved further down the watercourse beside a vigorously flowing stream. Flora proved to be the main focus of interest with a colony of sundews and the rare royal fern, *Osmodum regalis*. Birds were harder to find, though we did flush a pair of African Black Duck and puzzled over a number of particularly unhelpful raptors, brown and viewed from the side ending in a steep dive behind a kopje. Moving into a thicker belt of vegetation, we encountered a bird party with Lazy Cisticola, Bar-throated Apalis and Southern Black Tit all calling strongly. In the distance the harsh call of a Purple-crested Turaco was also heard. Climbing upwards we flushed Natal Spurfowl and at the lookout on top we had excellent views of Familiar Chat. The rain now began to descend in a more determined manner restricting birding to a sound-only affair, binoculars being awash. In a marshy vlei, Croaking Cisticola called; whilst on the edge, a small party of Common Waxbills perched over some ripe youngberries which the baboons had failed to find. After lunch we trekked downhill to see a rare flowering orchid and some extremely well-hidden grain bins. Overhead, Lesser Honeyguide and Mocking Cliff-chat called, whilst perched on a rock a pipit in silhouette proved hard to identify. To finish the afternoon, a further shower of rain provided a refreshing end for us in our drought-prone district.

Martin Smith.

TAIL FEATHERS**Good Birding in the Midlands**

The venue was in the centre of the country at an exquisite setting on the water frontage of the Munyati River within the Midlands Black Rhino Conservancy. On our brief walk of just two hours we encountered a Cheetah kill, a herd of Sable antelope, a herd of Wildebeest, Warthog, Duiker, Impala, Black-backed Jackal, Slender Mongoose, Zebra, Waterbuck, Eland. The beauty of it was that we were looking for birds and the animals were easily approached on the walk. Early one morning, we found three small groups of Yellow-bellied Eremomela, a group of Grey Penduline-tits and Long-billed Crombecs all within sight of each other. Kavija Ranch is predominantly mixed woodland, with tracts of Mopane leading into Masasa/Mnondo and mixed Terminalia. Small open seeps allow for Magpie Shrike whilst the mature woodlands revealed Racquet-tailed Roller and Lark-like Bunting in the gravelly ecotones. Red-crested Korhaan, Secretarybirds and wild Common Ostrich were the larger birds we encountered, whilst Buffy Pipit, Stierling's Wren-warbler, Yellow-throated Petronia and Southern White-crowned Shrike were some of the interesting birds noted. On the Munyati River we saw an African Black Duck and kept our eyes open for African Finfoot and White-backed Night-heron which are known to occur the area. This property is well worth visiting and accommodation is available if required. Bookings can be made by contacting Mrs Elizabeth Masson, P O Box 220, Kwekwe, ☎ 155-2182 or Fax 155-2174. **Gary Douglas**, Fothergill Safari Lodge, Kariba

Recent sightings in the Midlands/Matabeleland area

The Conway family have reported the following sightings

Osprey

- 20th August 1997 Long Valley Farm, Hunters Road, GWERU. They are resident here where nearby is a big farm dam .
 27th August 1997 Maleme Dam, MATOPOS.
 Nyamafufu Dam, 10 km s outhwest of MVUMA on the Gweru/Mvuma Road.

Long-crested Eagle Middleton Ranch, SOMABHULA, QDS 1929D3

African Finfoot WHITEWATERS DAM, 15 km north of GWERU QDS 1929B4. 5th October 1997

Melodious Lark NYORORO Estate (FELIXBURG) 11th October 1997

Cape Vulture Mvuma/Masvingo Road just before the Nyamatikitiki River. Seen at a dead cow along with 4 Lappet-faced Vultures and lots of White-backed Vultures.

Cabanis's Bunting Maleme Dam, MATOPOS – 27th August 1997.

Gordon Conway (Junior Member)

MARLBOROUGH vleij

On Sunday, 28th September 1997, around 7.00 a.m. Jonathan Francis and I rode our bicycles into Marlborough Vlei. Our plan was to go down beyond the Gwebi River into the neighbouring farm. Our first sighting was a Capped Wheatear, followed by Red-capped Larks and Rufous-naped Larks. As we took the path overlooking the river we spotted a Black-chested Snake-eagle, although it later got chased away by Crowned Lapwings. A Rosy-throated Longclaw flew into the opposite direction and a small yellow bird sat on the ground picking up grain. It was very yellow on the belly with a conical bill which we both agreed was a Cuckoo Finch. More of these birds flew around the vlei. As we got near the reeds of the Gwebi River, Lesser Swamp-warblers kept us entertained by their usual calls. An African Marsh-harrier flew very low in the neighbouring farm and Montagu's Harrier also flew around the farm. A Greater Kestrel was spotted and identified by Jonathan as it flew high in the sky. Black-throated Canary, Brown-throated Martins, a female White-winged Widowbird and Helmeted Guineafowl were also seen all around the vlei. Magpie Shrikes sat in the *Acacia sieberiana* whilst European Bee-eaters called in the sky. Near the "castle" we could hear Orange-breasted Bush-shrike and African Pipits.
Taimu Kenneth Mtema, Marlborough.

Birders abroad – Malawi 17th to 23rd August 1997

My previous experience of this lovely country had been Lake, Lake, Lake, quick dash up to the huts on the Mulanje Mountains, Lake, a couple of nights on Zomba Plateau, then more Lake. This was to change drastically when I was lucky enough to join the '97 Martin Smith Expedition. The only lake we saw was Chilwa, a little visited, shallow piece of water well south of the real Lake. Instead we concentrated on the south of the country and its Parks.

Despite blood-curdling stories of banditry, murder and an inevitable brush with "The Highwayman", our passage through the Tete corridor was smooth and trouble-free both ways and we reached the camp site on Zomba Plateau in mid-afternoon on the first day. As we waited for the kettle to boil we were serenaded by both Cape Robin-chat and White-starred Robin from a nearby bush. Soon we were searching through our supplement to Newman to identify the Eastern Double-collared Sunbird and the Mountain Greenbul (Olive-breasted Mountain Bulbul) as well as the Black-headed Apalis, Yellow-throated Woodland-warbler and White-tailed Crested Flycatcher. At dusk two African Wood-owls came very close to listen to Martin's new CD. Next day, having failed to locate any local experts to guide us, we walked up one of the nearby hills until we were driven back by the smoke and flames of a firebreak burn. Later we set off in a different direction following a delightful path along the Mulunguzi River. The riverine vegetation yielded up a host of birds, mainly ones we had seen at home at a comparable height. African Citril (Finch), Livingstone's Turaco and Pallid Honeyguide were the most noteworthy. The waterfalls were still tumbling as though it were summer which is more than can be said for the Mulunguzi Marsh which Peter and Martin insisted on visiting. It held a saucer of water and almost no birds. The next morning, we left our chilly perch at 2000m and dropped to 600m at Lake Chilwa, a large, shallow stretch of water which occasionally dries up completely. Despite fishing boats, ferries and many local traders and fishermen, the shoreline was alive with birds; egrets, Black-winged Stilts, ibises and storks. Welcome sightings were Greater Painted-snipe and African Marsh-harrier and Rufous-winged Cisticola (Black-backed Cisticola). Whiskered Tern and Gulls were numerous. As we drove back to the tarred road, a flock of Chestnut-backed Sparrowlarks was spotted. By lunchtime we were at Liwonde National Park, a wonderful birding venue where one could never risk putting down the binoculars for fear of missing a new species. At last a vulture appeared to gladden Peter's heart; a Palm-nut Vulture no less. One of the specialities here was the Bohm's Bee-eater but we also saw a couple of Carmine Bee-eaters and, as it got dark, 3 African Skimmers and a Brown-throated Weaver. There were raptors aplenty, including a pair of Western Banded Snake-eagle, Martial Eagle, African Harrier-hawk, Wahlberg's Eagle; many on their way south down the Rift Valley. At dusk as we sat around the fire Martin's keen ear picked up Barn Owl, African Scops-owl, African Barred Owlet and African Wood-owls. In our 2 day stay we saw some 150 species.

The highlights of day 4 where the steep descent into the Lower Shire Valley gave us a 50 strong colony of Carmine Bee-eaters at Chikwawa, fields and fields of sugar cane and the site of Dale Hanmer's netting and ringing exploits at Nchalo. Elephant Marsh, which we were keen to visit, remained frustratingly on the wrong side of the river and the sugar barons refused to row us over. At first light, we were back in action and entering Lengwe National Park for our last 2 days. Like Liwonde, this was a rich area for birds but mammals were thin on the ground. We did though see 2 Suni engaging in a vicious scrap and some beautiful Nyala. Raptors included White-backed Vulture and Lappet-faced Vultures, many Bateleur, Wahlberg's Eagle, Western Banded Snake-eagle and a Martial Eagle. Other delights were a Green Malkoha, a Bronze-winged Courser standing beside a Senegal Lapwing and nesting Marabou Storks.

Over the 6 days we saw 226 species in the most attractive scenery. The Parks staff were helpful and friendly but lacking in knowledge about the birds on their patch, campsites were well-served with simple facilities and reasonably priced. Malawi is a destination to be recommended but do try to make sure you are in the company of two of our best birders as Pippa and I were. **Ken Dixon**

Reports of sightings in the BEITBRIDGE, Savuli and Aberfoyle areas – September/October 1997

On 22nd September 1997 at 11 a.m., about 30 km out of Beitbridge on the Masvingo Road, we came across a carcass of a donkey which was being swamped by vultures. There were at least 50 hovering above as well. This caused quite a commotion on the road with tourists pulling over and videoing the scene. Amongst the vultures feeding we managed to ID a Cape Vulture.

Whilst at Savuli in the Save Conservancy Area on 29th September 1997 (at midday in temperatures of 36°C in the shade!) we managed to locate a very hot and bothered Eastern Nicator making its way through the riverine thickets down to the Gwezi River – what a rewarding sighting!
 At ABERFOYLE early in October 1997, a Palm-nut Vulture graced us with his presence every day during our stay at Aberfoyle Club. **Richard and Sue Bell**, Harare

NOTICEBOARD

New members

The OAZ needs to boost its membership and the committee would very much appreciate an effort being made by each of you to try and recruit a new member for 1998. Most of us know people who express an interest in birds but who are not necessarily members of the OAZ. An application form is included so that you can hand it to your next-door-neighbour or anyone else who you think may wish to join the Association.

Volunteers needed to fill positions in the OAZ Council

The Membership Secretary and the Business Manager positions will fall vacant next year. If you feel you would like to make yourself available, please contact the President of the OAZ, John Paxton on Harare ☎ 884413, or the Vice-President, Dave Gray on Harare ☎ 885406. The position of Membership Secretary requires a person who can keep accurate records and who would be prepared to spend a certain amount of time on paperwork, especially when the annual subscriptions are due. No previous experience is necessary and there is no computer work involved. The position of Business Manager requires someone who is capable of selling advertising space for *Honeyguide* and undertaking other functions within the Association. PLEASE give this matter serious thought and join the team who work hard to ensure that we have a viable and worthwhile organisation.

OAZ Website address

The OAZ has a Website page and for those of you with access to Internet the Website address is:
<http://users.harare.iafrica.com/~birds/>

OAZ Library

A reminder that the OAZ has a comprehensive library of books and magazines of an ornithological nature for use by all members. The library is housed at the home of Mr M P S Irwin who can be contacted on Harare ☎ 882957.

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Educational programme

There were 16 (9 girls and 7 boys) A Level students, mainly school-leavers in the group which visited RIFA Educational Camp from the 29th November to the 5th December 1997. The course was run by Dr Peter Mundy, Mrs Leslee Maasdorp and Mrs Tracy Couto. The students learned bird identification, use of binoculars and field guides and they were also taken on several walks in the bush. Lectures were given on breeding, migration, etc., and practical work included dissecting a dove and ringing which was very popular. All the students handled at least one bird during the ringing – they weighed them, recorded measurements, placed the ring on and released them. Amongst the birds ringed were Red-capped Robin-chat and White-browed Robin-chats, Red-throated Twinspot, Brown-hooded Kingfisher, several Terrestrial Brownbuls and a Grey-backed Camaroptera, a few of which were actually recaptured in the same place. In the evenings the students were shown videos and each of them had to give a 5 minute presentation on a topic of their choice. They all performed well and confirmed that they enjoyed the course very much. The funding was by the African Bird Club and the assistance given by the Department of National Parks and the Zimbabwe Hunters' Association is very much appreciated. **John Paxton**

EDITOR'S COMMENT

I have received so many interesting reports from several members but unfortunately due to space am not able to publish them all in this issue. Those that I have had to leave out will definitely be in the next *Babbler*. Thank you for your efforts which are really appreciated. **Di Rushforth**