

BABBLER

ORNITHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION OF ZIMBABWE

A PARTNER DESIGNATE OF BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL

ISSUE #23 – MARCH/APRIL 1998

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P O Box 44, Bulawayo

A REMINDER THAT YOUR SUBSCRIPTIONS ARE DUE AND THAT THIS WILL BE YOUR LAST BABBLER IF YOU HAVE NOT RENEWED BY THE END OF MARCH

For the benefit of those staying at Echo Park for the National AGM, the directions are: approaching from Harare, turn off left \pm 5 km before Kwekwe (within $\frac{1}{2}$ km of the Gokwe turn-off). The road left is sign-posted "Sable/Echo Park". Carry on for about 5 km to Sable Park entrance where the sign for the Echo Park campsite will be seen.

ACTIVITIES

MASHONALAND BRANCH

Regular outings

1. Mukuvisi Woodlands: Sundays 1st March and 5th April 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 8th March and 12th April 1998 (Easter weekend). Meet at Marimba Shopping Centre for departure at 6.30 a.m. Beginners are very welcome. Bring your chairs and tea.

Saturday afternoon outings

1. 21st March 1998: Crowborough sewage works. Meet at Marimba Shopping Centre at 2.00 p.m. There is a possibility of seeing Yellow Wagtails, a variety of waders, swallows and swifts, etc.
2. 18th April 1998: Rainham Dams. Meet at Belvedere Shopping Centre at 3.00 p.m. Bring chairs and refreshments. All of the Longclaws have been seen at this venue and usually African Snipe, Marsh Owls and Black-crowned Night-herons can be found.

Sunday Outings

1. March: There will not be an organised outing as the National AGM will be held on that weekend at Echo Park, Kwekwe.
2. April: The Branch is organising an away weekend (24th-26th April 1998) to the Mavuradonha Wilderness Area. Bookings have to be made by mid-March so don't delay. There will be a communal braai on the Saturday. Details of the area and the facilities available are on the booking slip which is enclosed with the newsletter.

Thursday Evenings

1. 19th March 1998: Keith Harvey has kindly agreed to come to the City to give us a talk which will undoubtedly be very worthwhile.
 2. 16th April 1998: Darryl Plowes will give an illustrated talk on wildlife in the Sudan and Chad which should prove to be most interesting.
Venue for both evenings: Alexandra Sports Club, Sable Room, 6.00 p.m. for 6.30 p.m. A cash bar will be available.
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EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB

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

Outings

| | | |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------|
| Sunday 1 st March 1998 | Stapleford (Bring lunch) | 6.00 a.m. |
| Saturday 14 th March 1998 | Premier Estate, Old Mutare | 2.00 p.m. |
| Sunday 29 th March 1998 | Imbwa Mwenje, Odzi | 6.00 a.m. |
| Saturday, 11 th April 1998 | Osborne Dam | 2.00 p.m. |
| Sunday, 26 th April 1998 | Eastwood, Old Mutare | 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.

Karoi Bird Club

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

Outings

| | | |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| Saturday 7 th March 1998 | Rydings School Interpretive Centre | 6.00 a.m. |
| Saturday, 21 st March 1998 | Rydings School Interpretive Centre | 6.00 a.m. |
| | We are going to do a more extensive walk here with a slide show afterwards. Bring breakfast to cook. | |
| April 1998 (date to be confirmed) | Visit to the Lochinvar Bird Sanctuary, Zambia. An exciting area which we believe will be very worthwhile. Interested parties to contact Kevin Mitchell for arrangements to be made. | |

MATABELELAND BRANCHEvening MeetingsSaturday 28th February 1998

Maleme Rest Camp – the Chairman and family are staying in a lodge at Maleme and we are inviting members to join us for an afternoon's birding, followed by a braai. This will be in place of the March evening meeting. All interested should contact the Chairman for further details – ☎ 42474.

Friday 3rd April 1998

Birds and Bird Photography. Kevin Wilson of Chipangali has kindly offered to conduct this meeting and will show some of his slides and discuss bird photography. Venue: CBC library at 8.00 p.m. For details ☎ 42474.

Sunday 22nd March 1998 – Khami Ruins

This is an attractive area and always seems to have plenty to offer. It will be a half-day outing, so please bring morning tea. Meet at the City Hall car park at 7.00 a.m. or contact the Chairman.

Sunday 19th April 1998 – McKinneys, Rouxdale Farm, Airport Road

We last visited this property during one of the many drought years and found plenty to look at; hopefully this visit will prove equally interesting. As this will be an all day outing bring lunch. Meet at the Umgusa River Bridge on the Airport Road at 7.30 a.m. or contact the Chairman.

AISLEBY: These will be no March outing as the National AGM will be held at Echo Park, Kwekwe

Sunday 26th April 1998 – Meet at the Aisleby boom at 7.30 a.m. or contact Clive Townsley, ☎ 46617.

MIDLANDS BRANCH

Coordinator: Mr. Bernard Beekes P O Box 55 Shurugwi ☎ 152-6422

Day Outings

Gweru Contact Gavin ☎ 154-24666/24058 or Bernard ☎ 152-6422 for further information

Saturday 22nd February 1998 Meet at B W Beekes' Princess Farm, Shurugwi 8.00 a.m.

Sunday 22nd February 1998 Meet at Somabhula village at the turn-off from the narrow tar road to Shurugwi 8.00 a.m.

Sundays, 22nd March,) Meet outside G & T Contracting 7.45 a.m.
and 10th May) for departure 8.00 a.m.

Masvingo Contact Lynne ☎ 139-63657 for details

Kadoma Contact Margaret ☎ 168-3644

Camping weekends Contact Bernard ☎ 152-6422 for further information

27th & 28th March 1998 OAZ National AGM at Kwekwe/Sebakwe Poort camping at Echo Park
16th-19th April 1998 Nata Sanctuary, Botswana – a limited number of visitors to this venue may be accommodated. Anyone interested in going should contact Bernard or Julia on ☎ 19-62401 *NB – campers must be **TOTALLY** self-sufficient, food, fuel, water, etc.*

19th-21st June 1998 Whitewaters Dam near Gweru – Gavin has a Cottage here allowing access to toilet/bathroom facilities, otherwise camping is available but *one has to be completely self-sufficient.*

REPORTSMASHONALAND BRANCH

Sunnyside Farm, Concession – Sunday 26th October 1997 QDS 1730B4

9 of us took the lovely drive out to CONCESSION, passing the almost full Mazowe Dam on the way. The morning walk started in a grove of large *Acacia polyacantha* trees, one of which provided a sleeping place for a Larger Bushbaby. We were extremely privileged to have in our company "CC" the gliding club cat and it is not often that birdwatchers are joined by a feline!! We were hoping to find Red-throated Twinspots and Green-winged Pytilia in this area but they were not around and we had to be satisfied with hearing and catching only a fleeting glimpse of a Black Cuckoo, whilst overhead we saw a Brown Snake-eagle. Other cuckoos seen or heard during the walk were Red-chested Cuckoo, Klaas's Cuckoo and Diderick Cuckoo. A pair of Broad-billed Rollers seemed to be taking up a nesting site and Violet-backed Starlings were nesting in the same dead tree. Other nests found were Fork-tailed Drongo, African Paradise-flycatcher and Brubru. Our final walk on the farm was up an old road to see if the previously sighted occupant of a nest could be identified. It was a very hot climb but we were rewarded by finding the nest with a Wahlberg's Eagle sitting on it. Also seen in this Miombo woodland were African Green-pigeon and Meyer's Parrot. We lunched at the homestead of Lax and Lorna Southey who were most charming hosts and whilst sitting in their lovely garden we discovered a Yellow-throated Petronia nest where the parents were actively feeding a couple of very vocal chicks. Thanks Lex and Lorna Southey for the day. **Editor**

BirdLife international Conference – Lake Naivasha, Kenya: 17th - 22nd November 1997

I was able to attend this interesting conference which I found useful for the establishment of links and contacts with other African bird organisations. During the meeting, the Council of African Partners (countries already in partnership with BirdLife International) agreed that Zimbabwe should be elevated from the status of "Representative" to that of "Partner-Designate". Gary Allport will be visiting us early in 1998 to discuss the prospective partnership and to meet OAZ Council and members. Lincoln Fishpool (who visited us in August) gave a review of the IBAs in Africa and the expected production date for the continent's directory. He also demonstrated the IBA Database on his computer. It is hoped that Zimbabwe will still form part of the Southern African Regional IBA Directory, to be printed early in 1998. There were also extensive discussions on funding, project suitability, financial control and reporting. Although not immediately relevant, this was useful background for OAZ's future applications.

Susan Childes, IBA Coordinator for Zimbabwe

Branch AGM – 15th January 1998

This was fairly well-attended with the AGM business being quickly dealt with. A report was given by Richard Dennison on the monthly visits to the Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary during the period 9th August 1992 to 13th July 1997 and the statistics given were very interesting. The National President, John Paxton, informed members that the OAZ would shortly hold a strategic planning workshop which would assess the questionnaires recently circulated to members as well as the future of the OAZ which might perhaps be focused more on research and conservation.

The main speaker of the evening was John Shaw who was able to give us the background to the OAZ's involvement in the MUKUVISI woodlands over the last twenty years or so and he highlighted those species which had not fared so well over the years. In particular, he mentioned that many raptors which once were quite common were now seldom, if ever, seen in the area. Certain birds which formerly bred in number in the woodlands were now in decline and he offered several reasons why he thought this was so, one theory being that whilst the woodlands themselves offered much the same vegetation over the years, the surrounding areas had changed causing the woodlands to become isolated. John advised that a total of 244 different species had been recorded in the woodlands over the last twenty years.

OAZ and World Birdwatch Competitions – Results of Questionnaire

Responses to the questionnaire regarding these two events worked out more or less evenly with the IN and NOT IN favour of a combined watch. There were 25 in favour, but 8 didn't want October, so that reduces to 17 those who would do it, as World Birdwatch is a bi-annual event. 19 were not in favour of a combined watch and 12 of those would have preferred a February/March competition. However, 24, whether IN or NOT IN favour would have liked October. 7 of those didn't mind which of the seasons. So the easy solution is – every other year we do a combined count and the other year a February/March OAZ Birdwatch. BUT 1998 will be October again, the weekend 24th/25th when more migrants are back as it is too short notice now for a February/March date to be publicised. All your comments have been noted and taken into consideration. Thanks for your response. **Jacko Williams**

International Results of World Birdwatch and NTT count

Thanks to the co-operation of so many countries (88) and people around the world (184 376) which of course includes us in Zimbabwe, the 5 935 species recorded raised 5 935 000 Yen (US\$48 185) which was the contribution from NTT for BirdLife International to help its conservation activities worldwide. Zimbabwe's total was 480 species. Thank you all again. I think we did very well and hope we might have more participants in the field in 1999. I also feel this is one good reason for combining this event with the OAZ competition – it makes the weekend more meaningful. **Jacko Williams**

CREST BREEDERS – 17th January 1998

QDS 1730D4

14 members joined Pat Bellingan at the Crest Breeders' farm for what turned out to be a delightful afternoon's birding around one of the dams. There were not many waders to be seen – just 2 types: Three-banded Plovers and about 25 Wood Sandpipers – these had us all guessing until the light changed. One member even tried to make a couple of them Green and almost convinced some other members of that identification until they flew off showing their characteristic markings and their unmistakable call. A family of Striped Kingfishers kept us entertained for a while with their calling and displaying. We saw 77 species but had we followed Jacko Williams into the woodland area we could have added a few more. Thank you, Pat, for organising with the new owners for OAZ members to visit this area, for leading and for being a delightful hostess. **Dave Gray**

Alex Masterson's Vlei Walk – Sunday, 25th January 1998

About 40 people collected for a vlei walk with Alex Masterson. I hadn't been near the place since Gary Hocking and Jim Redman raced motor bikes there in the 1960's but it was fascinating just below the MARLBOROUGH Sewage Works. I think we all went to see flufftails but the weather wasn't wet enough for them. There has to be persistent rain over a prolonged period for flufftails. In a 40 ha block we saw about 8 Black Coucals, 3 African Crake, 1 Corn Crake, 2 Black-rumped Buttonquail, 2 Blue Quail and earlier in the week Alex had seen a Striped Crake. Corn Crakes are very rarely seen and it was on higher ground away from the wet soils and in taller grass than other crakes and flufftails occupy. Shava (Alex's dog) found a nest of a Common Waxbill and we had good views of many finch-like birds, including Cuckoo Finch, Yellow-mantled Widowbird and Red-collared Widowbirds. About 8 Rosy-throated Longclaws were seen and only one Cape Longclaw. Cisticolas were fewer than expected but we saw Rattling Cisticola, Pale-crowned Cisticola, Levaillant's Cisticola and Zitting Cisticola. A Great Reed-warbler sat atop a bush drying itself and Sedge Warbler, Broad-tailed Warbler and the more common Lesser Swamp-warblers were seen. A Marsh Owl was identified and a suspected Western Marsh-harrier was seen along with a "ringtail" harrier. Other birds noted were a flying Purple Heron, a Diderick Cuckoo, a Southern Red Bishop attacking a Black Coucal trying to drive it away and a Reed Cormorant fishing in a drain. The only animal seen was a Scrub Hare. Do yourself a favour, listen to the call of the Black-rumped Buttonquail on tape and go birdwatching at this spot. Some of these birds are seen only rarely and it needs a vlei expert and his dog to show you them! **Dave Rockingham-Gill**

EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB

From the Chairman:

1998 promises to be a busy year for the EDBC: at the end of January we will have started to collate all the information from the first four months of the Garden Bird survey. We have a visit from Derek Solomon on the same theme followed by our own courses on identification by sight and sound. Hopefully, the OAZ will gain many new members through this heightened activity.

Stonechat Cottage, VUMBA Heights – Saturday, 8th November 1997

We had an amazing turnout of 16 birders for our afternoon trip to the Bvumba where Stonechat Cottage was our base. The forest provided Olive Sunbird, Olive Bush-shrike, Olive Thrush, White-starred Robin and White-tailed Crested Flycatcher while on the forest edge some noteworthy species were Roberts's Warbler and Dark-capped Yellow Warbler. Julie thought she had sighted a Cape Wagtail which would have been a new species for the Holland property. Near Castle Beacon, an Eastern Bronze-naped Pigeon was heard only once, pity that it didn't call longer so that we could really confirm this record. It was an extremely enjoyable trip to what will hopefully become a regular club destination. **Emma Holland**

MOUNTAIN HOME – Saturday, 13th December 1997

Sixteen of us set off for the Meikle's "Mountain Home" in PENHALONGA. This historic farm straddles the border with Mozambique and has some beautiful grasslands, forests and groves of *Acacia abyssinica*, the flat-topped thorn trees of high altitude areas. It is in these moist, montane grasslands that we found the agile Blue Swallows, flying with Barn Swallows. Some birds had us confused for a while, thinking that perhaps the Black Saw-wings had extended their range, but eventually we got a glimpse of tiny outer rectrices extending beyond the tail, and we realised we had young Blue Swallows with the others. Cecilia helped some of us with the call of the Wailing Cisticola, another lifer for many of us. European Bee-eater, African Stonechat, Malachite Sunbird, Speckled Mousebird, Horus Swift, White-browed Robin-chat, Bar-throated Apalis, Roberts's Warbler, Yellow-fronted Canary, African Crowned Eagle and Olive Bush-shrike and Gorgeous Bush-shrikes (heard) made up a respectable list. Thanks again, John; we do appreciate the opportunity of seeing the Blue Swallows of "Mountain Home".

Jane Clegg

Eastern Districts Bird Club Outing to CYNARA – 10 January 1998

This was the Club's first event this year and we used it to cover the waterbird count at this prolific series of dams on the Bennett's farm. In all, we were fairly successful, seeing 67 species for the day. We started well with a pair of African Hawk-eagles near Old MUTARE and, a bit later, a Lizard Buzzard. The first dam produced 19 Ruffs and Reeves, 2 immature Green-backed Herons, Common Greenshank, Common Sandpiper, Wood Sandpiper and Marsh Sandpiper, African Darter, African Wattled Lapwing and Blacksmith Lapwing, Egyptian Goose and White-faced Duck, Three-banded Plover, Malachite Kingfisher and Pied Kingfisher. The second dam added African Jacana, African Green-pigeon

and a Striped Kingfisher. At the upper dam we saw African Fish-eagle, White-breasted Cormorant and Reed Cormorant, Hamerkop, African Darter, a Giant Kingfisher and we heard a Black Crake. A bush island in a field yielded Scarlet-chested Sunbird, Long-billed Crombec and Chin-spot Batis. A maize field was peppered with Southern Red Bishops, African Stonechats and some Red-collared Widowbirds. Nearby, we added Yellow Bishops and Zitting Cisticolas and from the dam wall we had magnificent views of Yellow-throated Longclaws. Tick of the day, however, must go to Emma who saw 3 Yellow-bellied Eremomela in an Acacia near the dam wall. **Jane Clegg**

KAROI BIRD CLUB

Saturday, 22nd November 1997 – Sangalalo Farm

8 of us were ready to go by 6.00 a.m. and Peter led us off. We had a good look at the dam and saw Wood Sandpiper, Squacco Heron, White-faced Duck, African Darter and Pied Kingfisher. Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird, Groundscraper Thrush, Levallant's Cuckoo, Blue Waxbill and Jameson's Firefinch were in the woodland, together with Willow Warbler. Through the vlei, which was alive with birds, we were for a moment puzzled by some unfamiliar darkish coloured birds, until we realised they were Red-collared Widowbirds, just coming into breeding plumage. Pin-tailed Whydahs were here, as were Common Waxbill and a juvenile Black Coucal foraging in the grass. A "definite" identification of a Pale Flycatcher, on closer inspection, turned out to be a female Red-backed Shrike! A Peregrine Falcon also had us guessing, until after much dodging through the trees, we had a good view. But the find of the morning was 4 Cape Buntings! They were feeding on the ground as we approached them. No record of them on this farm before and, I might add, that we also saw two on our farm for the first time! We went back to the homestead for a welcome and hearty breakfast – thank you Tawny – after which we were able to add White-crested Helmet-shrike, African Pipit, European Bee-eater and a lone African Openbill to our list – 100 species in all. Thank you Pete and Tawny, always an interesting venue. **Merle Mitchell**

Weekend 31st January 1998

Unfortunately the weekend was well and truly washed out – it rained solidly the whole weekend!

RYDINGS Interpretive Centre – 7th February 1998

This outing was a little more successful – a little – our co-ordinator and one other member braved the threatening weather, which turned out to be not so bad. They did the usual walk through the woodland and around the dam, very wet this time of year. The rest of us took one look at the weather and abstained, much to our regret when we learned that they had had a splendid view of an African Emerald Cuckoo. They deserved it! **Merle Mitchell**

MATABELELAND

Christmas Social – 13th December 1997

This was combined with the opening of the Hide at Ibis Dam AISLEBY and enabled us all to use this magnificent platform. Originally a railway water tower, Dudley spent many hours converting it into a viewing platform, with a guard rail, floor and 2 flights of steps. Having been altered it was attached to the foundations with the aid of a crane to lift it into position. Finally, thatch was added to the roof using a 4x4 winch to raise it. We thank Dudley Hubbard, Harry Erwee and Tim English most sincerely for their time and effort they have put into the project. Over 30 people were at the opening, snacks and liquid refreshment being consumed whilst flocks of African Sacred Ibis and Cattle Egret flew into roost, the platform providing a clear view of the whole dam and also a view to the west, so we could watch the sun set. Waders, ducks and egrets provided avian interest to the conversation, a fitting end to the year. **Martin Smith**

AISLEBY Notes

A Boxing Day visit to the Ibis Dam at Aisleby yielded some interesting sightings. Very little rain had fallen in November and December, producing a significant concentration of waterfowl at Aisleby. On the Ibis Dam, some 235 male Comb Duck were present, no females being seen. Most birds were inactive, either asleep or preening, and were presumably feeding on the adjacent cropland later in the day or at night. Such a gathering raises some interesting questions, do females congregate in similar numbers and if so how do they meet? What takes place once good rains have fallen and how is a breeding site selected? The second species worthy of note was Pied Avocet, a visit on 13th December yielded a mere 7 birds, by the 26th a total of 127 were present. Since levels on adjacent dams had not altered significantly during this period the birds must have arrived from further afield – it would be interesting to know from

where? Since both these sightings, rains have fallen and the Ibis Dam level has risen, our waterfowl count on 18th January 1998 produced only one female Comb Duck and no Pied Avocet. **Martin Smith**

From the Chairman

The year began with a delightful spell of wet weather filling small pans throughout the Province. This must have caused considerable dispersion of waterfowl with plenty of movement away from AISLEBY. Our January count produced some interesting totals which are worth comparing with previous counts. Results for a number of selected species are:

| SPECIES | Jan '97 | July '97 | Jan '98 |
|--------------------------|---------|----------|---------|
| Little Grebe | 89 | 220 | 25 |
| White-breasted Cormorant | 32 | 17 | 103 |
| Reed Cormorant | 22 | 19 | 168 |
| Squacco Heron | 14 | 0 | 15 |
| Glossy Ibis | 3 | 5 | 59 |
| Egyptian Goose | 189 | 2498 | 237 |
| Red-billed Teal | 74 | 100 | 50 |
| Cape Shoveler | 23 | 23 | 4 |
| Southern Pochard | 39 | 32 | 79 |
| Red-knobbed Coot | 210 | 327 | 177 |
| African Jacana | 19 | 10 | 19 |
| Blacksmith Lapwing | 159 | 272 | 133 |

Numbers of Little Grebe, Egyptian Goose and Red-knobbed Coot show considerable fluctuations with a significant increase during the winter months. In contrast, Squacco Herons were absent in July, but present in similar numbers for both January counts. Other significant changes are the totals for cormorants with marked increases for both species, presumably a reflection on the number of fish in the dam. It was disturbing to discover a number of dead fish; hopefully these are not a sign of pollution which might have an effect on other members of the food chain. At the end of the count we collated the results at the new hide, with its fantastic view of the entire dam. Please do come and use this wonderful facility. Good Birding – **Martin Smith**

MIDLANDS

NYORORO Farm. CHATSWORTH – weekend 10th - 12th October 1997

QDS 1930B4

Nyororo Farm lies on Kalahari sands, at an altitude of about 1500m. It catches the SE winds and is consequently generally cool and wet. The sands hold a lot of water which is released year-round into an extensive system of sponges, perennial streams and associated wetlands. These wetlands are the home of a wide variety of wetland and other birds, most notable of which is a major breeding population of Wattled Crane. October is the best time to visit this area as the late, dry season results in concentrations of birds and, no less important, the weather may be tolerably warm and dry. We had a good turnout, with visitors from Bulawayo, Masvingo, Shurugwi, Hunters Road and Gweru. Keith was generous again with his time and transport. We travelled over 200km on and around the farm. Wattled Cranes were frequently seen. At the farm, an immature bird was still with its parents. This immature was almost the same size as its parents whereas at Widgeon pan a chick half the size of its parents was being shepherded by two adults. The parents walked with the chick into some long grass and then re-emerged without the chick, leaving it hidden. Earlier in the year, this pair was reported with a chick of similar size to the one we saw near the homestead. The chick at the pan appeared to be the result of a second breeding attempt in the same season. About 12 Marsh Owls were seen in the area in front of the farmhouse. Rosy-throated Longclaw and Cape Longclaws put on glorious displays. In all we saw or heard 136 species. Thanks to Keith and Jeanette Harvey for making this wonderful weekend possible.

Bernard Beekes

Nyamafufu Dam – Day outing 31st August 1997

QDS 1930A4

Nyamafufu Dam is a new dam which nearly filled last season and is situated 10km west of MVUMA on the Gweru Road within Central Estates. Primarily flooded thornveld with patches of *Terminalia* and *Combretum* and some Msasa/Mnondo. Five members headed out to the Dam and by 9.30 a.m. we were on the water in the Conway's boat. On the way out we saw Lilac-breasted Rollers,

Southern White-crowned Shrikes and a few Yellow-billed Kites. While launching the boat, White-backed Vultures and an Osprey flew overhead. Our first stop was to watch some non-breeding Wattled Starlings without their wattles (a lifer for most of the party) which were at first mistaken for a type of shrike but after closer investigation we were able to identify them. Going up the main river we saw Green-backed Herons, Southern Pochards, Little Grebes and a pair of African Black Duck. Above us was a pair of African Fish-eagles with a juvenile and further up the river we saw two Giant Kingfishers shouting at each other, as well as an adult and an immature Brown-hooded Kingfisher. We continued with our journey in and out of the bays, dodging and scraping through thorn trees until we came upon a nesting colony of African Darters, White-breasted Cormorants and Reed Cormorants. There were lots of juveniles – all fluffy white balls – scrambling up and down the trees. Around the southern bank we saw a Common Greenshank, Wood Sandpiper, Southern Masked-weaver and a little Malachite Kingfisher. As the dam is new, there are no reeds or lilies present to attract other species. An interesting observation is *Combretum* trees in about two metres of water which are still in leaf and flowering although they have been flooded for the last eight months or so. We saw about 10 used Little Grebe nests just above the waterline. Overall we heard and saw 58 species.

Gordon Conway – Junior Member

TAIL FEATHERS

Interesting Behaviour of a Scarlet-chested Sunbird

At the end of October 1997, we paid a visit to our son and daughter-in-law in VICTORIA FALLS. I observed a hen Scarlet-chested Sunbird finishing off a nest. On our next visit the hen was brooding – I did not attempt to look into the nest but her head and beak were visible in the opening. The nest was not observed continuously. During the first week of January 1998 we visited our family again. The hen sunbird was not in the nest at any time, except one day I noticed she was at the nest and appeared to be trying to destroy the “old” nest. I observed her for about 45 minutes but was unable to make out what she was attempting to do and no bits of nest were falling. I left the area for a while and on my return the bird was not at the nest, but on the ground beneath was a wasp’s nest complete with caterpillars and pieces of the sunbird’s nest. If the nest was no longer in use why would she worry about removing the wasp’s nest? I presume the nest had been vacated because I had not observed any feeding activity and also it was about a month since I had seen the hen brooding. **Dave Gray**

Birds at Fothergill Island Safari Lodge, KARIBA

During my selection course between 15th and 17th December 1997 I was in Fothergill. Each of our groups had three members and in the afternoon of the 15th December we took a game drive. Our first stop was just before the lodge gate where we spotted about 10 Southern Carmine Bee-eaters sitting in a Zigzag *Terminalia stuhlmannii*, whilst a Flappet Lark flapped his wings above us. On the shores of the Lake, we saw Egyptian Goose, White-crowned Lapwings and Blacksmith Lapwings and a single hippo. As we drove towards *Colophospermum mopane* woodland we sighted Kittlitz’s Plovers and Caspian Plovers, Lilac-breasted Rollers, Marabou Storks and Helmeted Guineafowl. We continued with our drive when we sighted Woolly-necked Storks, African Sacred Ibis and a herd of elephants and in open country we saw a male Black-bellied Bustard. Again on the shoreline we spotted Yellow-billed Egrets, Great Egrets and Black Herons, White-winged Tern, Glossy Ibis, Black-winged Stilts, Squacco Heron, Common Greenshank, Collared Pratincole, Grey Plover, Saddle-billed Stork and Yellow-billed Storks. The following morning we went on another drive, taking the same route as the previous day, when we saw Long-tailed Paradise-whydah, a Steppe Eagle, African Spoonbill, and Pied Kingfisher and in the distance between the shoreline and the woodland we saw Temminck’s Courser whilst a Diderick Cuckoo was calling. In open areas we saw Zitting Cisticola, Peregrine Falcon and a raptor believed to be a Tawny Eagle followed by an immature African Fish-eagle. A Chestnut-backed Sparrowlark flew ahead of us and we could see far in the distance 3 lion, in the woodland we saw 15 White-backed Vultures and also a leopard. Our final drive enabled us to see Black-crowned Tchagra, Namaqua Dove, White-browed Scrub-robin, African Pied Wagtail and White-backed Night-heron. I enjoyed my stay at the lodge very much and thank Gary Douglas, Spike Williamson and Alfred Ngwarai for guiding us.

Taimu Kenneth Mtemwa, Harare

Birdwatching in Nvemba-Bikita-MASVINGO

After deciding to go for a holiday down to my rural area in Bikita-Masvingo, it was difficult for me to leave my birding equipment behind. Thanks to the help of Mr John Paxton, I was able to identify those birds which I knew from the small bundu's of Harare. My first new bird was a Retz's Helmet-shrike which was in the same tree with Black-backed Puffback and White-crested Helmet-shrikes which I knew. Walking down along a stream I was able to identify Broad-tailed Paradise-whydah, Long-tailed Paradise-whydah and Pin-tailed Whydahs as well as Red-collared Widowbirds. Flying overhead was a Shikra and I thought it was after something. A Grey Tit-flycatcher was sitting in a Msasa tree calling a distinctive call which impressed me. In the grassland was a good view of a Capped Wheatear. All these birds were new to my list. **Saul S Mabachi** – Snake Park, Harare

Species recorded in MARLBOROUGH Vlei – January 1997 to January 1998

Having carried out an exercise on the status of birds during the period the following observations are of interest:

| | |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Black Coucal | Very common during January to late March, being absent from mid-April to December, arriving again in January 1998. |
| Montagu's Harrier | Recorded from January to early March, becoming rare in mid-April. |
| African Marsh-harrier | Recorded flying in the marshy areas of the neighbouring farm. Has been present for the rest of the year. |
| Black-rumped Buttonquail | Recorded from January until late April when the vlei was burnt being absent until November. Present up to January 1998. |
| Streaky-breasted Flufftail | Seen early in the morning on 17 th January jumping up from flooded areas of the vlei. Present from January to mid-April when the vlei burnt, being absent for the rest of the year. |
| Corn Crake | Recorded from January to mid-March. Usually seen in weeds fringing streams. When flushed flies for a short distance of about 10 metres before dropping down. |
| Rosy-throated Longclaw |) Present throughout the whole year |
| Cape Longclaw | |
| Capped Wheatear | |
| Cuckoo Finch | Very common in late-May and later becoming the commonest bird in August. In mid-November none were recorded. Sighted near the Gwebi River in August, becoming more common in Mid-October until January 1998. |
| African Quailfinch | Present from September to January 1998. |
| Crowned Lapwing | Very common from August to November with a few remaining in December. |
| Blacksmith Lapwing |) Common from August to November. |
| African Wattled Lapwing | |
| Pale-crowned Cisticola | Present December 1997 to January 1998 |
| Black-bellied Bustard | Present late December 1997 and January 1998 |

Taimu Kenneth Mtema, Marlborough, Harare

Christmas Birding at ABERFOYLE with Abasi Jana

We arrived at Aberfoyle on Christmas Eve. Our family and Abasi Jana, the bird guide from Gleneagles Reserve, got down to birding on Christmas Day. We were guided through a small forest looking for the Pallid Honeyguide which lives there but to no avail. Blue-spotted Wood-doves ran along the path ahead of us and Singing Cisticola chattered away loudly from the tea-bushes. A pair of stunning Broad-billed Rollers perched themselves on top of a dead tree and later on we were taken by Abasi to the only piece of marsh left due to the construction of the new dam. Sadly though, the Anchieta's Tchagra did not show itself but a pair of Moustached Grass-warblers gave us a nice surprise! On the Aberfoyle Road we stopped to look at a Lesser Spotted Eagle soaring high above us. The next day proved to be the best birding experience I have ever had. We started at 5.30 a.m. and near the boom gate of Gleneagles Reserve, Abasi identified a flock of Chestnut-fronted Helmet-shrikes, which never stopped moving although immatures of this species gave us a better sighting. A Narina Trogon called continuously from far down

the valley and just when our concentration was wavering this gorgeous bird perched in full view in front of us! Later we headed for the reedbeds where the Black-winged Bishop dwelled and we were lucky enough to perceive it sitting conspicuously on a reed stem. After hunting for quite a long time for the Anchieta's Tchagra, my Dad finally spotted a female which we all gazed at for quite some time when it was joined by a male. In a tree nearby, a tiny Pale Batis watched us inquisitively and in the afternoon we saw a Palm-nut Vulture perched near the river – another lifer for me! That evening at Gleneagles we watched a brilliant bird party with Grey Cuckooshrike, Grey Tit-flycatcher, Black-fronted Bush-shrike and Red-faced Crimsonwing. Near the cliff-face a large group of Scarce Swift glided above us and we arrived home that evening with high spirits and topped life-lists. The following day we set off for the "Spice and Pepper" gardens in Gleneagles. The seed-eaters thrive on the pepper and cardamom seeds – African Firefinch, Common Waxbill, Red-throated Twinspot and Black Cuckooshrike were all present there. While on the way home, a small flock of Green Twinspot were feeding on the road and that afternoon we went to a waterfall where some Common House-martins flew above us and for a sundowner we joined the Little Rush-warbler. At the end of the day our list for Aberfoyle was 95 – a really special birding experience and the beauty of that land is incomparable. **Emma Holland**, Mutare (aged 12)

Pale-crowned Cisticola and Western Marsh-harrier in MARLBOROUGH Vlei

On the morning of 29th December 1997, I was watching several birds in the vlei. The birds included the Rosy-throated Longclaw, Southern Red Bishop, White-winged Widowbird and several others including Black-bellied Bustard. Among them was a small "LBJ". It sat in the medium-sized grass about 4 metres away from me and had the following features: a pale crown, longish tail, which was closed, and a faint white colour at the end of it. Its primary remiges were slightly dark and pale-like. The bird obligingly turned and clearly showed the greyish bill, the legs were flesh-coloured and the face was very dark and the breast looked creamy-white. Whilst in the process of searching for the bird in my field guide, two South African birdwatchers joined me. After introducing the bird to them, and giving my thoughts that the bird was a Pale-crowned Cisticola, they both agreed. The bird was a male in breeding plumage and the South Africans were quite pleased to see the bird which they said was rare in their Natal Province. According to my *Roberts' Birds of South Africa* by McLachlan, G R and Liversidge, R (1978 Edition) it says the bird breeds in "Rhodesia" from November to April.

After walking towards the Gwebi River, we saw a big bird which had a whitish head and dark ear covert patch. We were quite sure in fact that it was a Western Marsh-harrier. I welcomed the assistance of Mr Ian and Mrs Lisa Edwards, newcomers to the vlei but very experienced birders. **Taimu Kenneth Mtema**, 46 Adylinn Road, Marlborough

Increase in Pied Crow population in Chisipite HARARE

We live right behind the Sports Café in Chisipite, and up until recently have had lots of birds in our garden. However, the Pied Crow population is increasing at an alarming rate and we notice the smaller birds are not in evidence any more. The crows are extremely noisy and messy, dropping all sorts of rubbish in our garden. Do any members have any suggestions as to how to control the enormous increase in these birds? **Lynne Spong** – 38 Silwood Close, Chisipite

African Harrier-hawk/Southern Masked-weaver behaviour

It was just before six in the evening of Boxing Day when approaching the Ibis Dam at AISLEBY Farm outside Bulawayo that I noticed a raptor flying directly towards me across the dam. I stopped and identified it as an adult African Harrier-hawk which was making for some Southern Masked-weaver nests, hanging from a large, bushy growth. There followed about fifteen minutes of some of the most interesting birding that I have had the pleasure to experience. The African Harrier-hawk hooked its talons into one of the nests and, hanging upside down and ignoring the entrance, began to tear at the side of the nest with its beak until it was satisfied that the nest was not occupied by chicks. There were seven nests in the cluster and the performance of clinging and tearing by the harrier-hawk was repeated on three of the nests without any success of pulling out a weaver chick. The raptor then abandoned its raid, leaving four of the nests untouched and flying off to perch in one of the large Gum Trees overlooking the dam. I am now of the opinion that this could be why male Weavers, apart from learning how to weave initially and subsequently suiting their mates specifications, build a number in a cluster, with the intention of breeding from only one nest. **Ron Stuttford**, Bulawayo

Editor's comment: In December, I witnessed similar behaviour by an immature Gabar Goshawk who destroyed two Weaver nests in an endeavour to find food. It even carried one of the nests off to a nearby Paw-paw tree and totally demolished it. The entire time it took to carry out this pillage the bird called. I did not see it take any chicks.

CBC Woodland – 10 January 1998

This is a small plot of mixed *Acacia/Combretum* woodland within the school grounds. In the past this formed a continuous stretch of woodland forming part of BULAWAYO'S green belt. Recent development has, however, seen the area substantially reduced, isolating the CBC plot. Whilst ringing birds within this area, I had a fleeting glimpse of a honeyguide, the outer rectrices being clearly visible. Careful pursuit revealed a Brown-backed Honeybird, the thin decurved bill being seen. It appeared to be closely associated with a pair of Grey-backed Camaroptera and after a few minutes was seen to beg and solicit food from one of the adults. Both parents were foraging actively, calling frequently and moved off with the young honeyguide following. A short while later it was seen being mobbed by Rattling Cisticolas, perhaps this species may also play host to the Brown-backed Honeybird. **Martin Smith**

Greater Flamingo at Birkdale Farm. MVURWI

After a midday rain shower with some thunder and lightning but no wind, our son, Neil, radioed us to tell us that there was a flamingo at one of the farm dams. Anton and I jumped into our vehicle and sure enough there it was – the most beautiful Greater Flamingo feeding amongst the water lilies. We were astonished at how long the flamingo kept its head under the water – I timed one “dip” and it was 13 seconds. Not far from the flamingo we noticed another “unusual” wader which we decided was a Lesser Jacana, being more petit and less gangly than the usual African Jacana chick. The brownish crown and marked eye stripe were noticeable and its legs looked greyish. As we were about to leave, another large bird landed – an African Spoonbill – which we do see fairly often. Also in January we were surprised to see one Black Heron flying in to roost with a flock of >12 Cattle Egrets. **Irralie Howland**

NOTICEBOARD

1998 OAZ Birdwatch

Some people commented in the questionnaires that not enough notice was given for the OAZ Birdwatch, SO, the 1998 OAZ Birdwatch competition will be held over the weekend 24th/25th October 1998. Remember, the rules are that teams have to have a minimum of 2 OAZ members and participants have to choose their best 24 hour period over the weekend. Atlas cards can be obtained from Jacko Williams, 14 Harare Drive, Greystone Park. Please DO NOT use field cards or sheets of paper.

Colour dyeing/ringing of Wood Sandpipers

A large colour dyeing/ringing project is being carried out in various east European countries on the Wood Sandpiper and as many of these birds may well reach us in Southern Africa there is a strong possibility that we may be able to obtain some sightings. Many birds will be colour dyed (red or yellow) on the underparts and all birds will carry colour rings. Two rings of individual colours will be placed above the knee on both legs. If any birds are recovered, the rings should be read from the top downwards. This coding will indicate the site, season and year of ringing as well as the age of the birds at time of ringing. Please give date and exact locality of sighting and if possible the total number of “Woodies” present at the time. Similarly, details of sightings of colour dyed birds should be noted. All information collected should be sent to John Paxton at the OAZ.

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 MPS Irwin who can be contacted on Harare ☎ 882957.

Lost property – social video evening – 31st January 1998

A chrome-plated thermos top was left at Jacko Williams' house on the evening of the social. If it is yours, please contact Jacko on ☎ 882206.