

BABBLER

ORNITHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION OF ZIMBABWE

A PARTNER DESIGNATE OF BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL

ISSUE #25 – JULY/AUGUST 1998

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ACTIVITIES

MASHONALAND BRANCH

Regular outings

1. Mukuvisi Woodlands: Sundays 5th July and 2nd August 1998. Meet at Paget Road entrance at 7.00 a.m. There will be a vehicle guard in attendance.
2. Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary: Sundays 12th July and 9th August 1998. Meet at Marimba Shopping Centre for departure at 7.00 a.m. Beginners are very welcome. Bring your chairs and tea.

Saturday afternoon outings

First of all, my sincere apologies to those of you who missed the outing to Lyndhurst Farm because of the confusing directions given in The Babbler. Di Rushforth

1. 18th July 1998: Christon Bank area – home of Mrs Beachy-Head. Meet Ashbrittle Service Station, Golden Stairs Road for departure at 2.00 p.m. Bring chairs and refreshments.
2. 22nd August 1998: Bill Clark's property at Ruwa. Meet TM car park, Kamfinsa Shopping Centre, Greendale for departure at 2.00 p.m. Chairs will be provided at the venue but bring refreshments.

Sunday Outings

1. 26th July 1998: Haka Game Park (next to Cleveland Dam). Turn off just before the Cleveland Dam car park at Haka Game Park signpost. Meet for departure at 7.00 a.m. at the Haka Gate where fees of \$10 per adult and \$5 per child are payable. Bring chairs and refreshments.
2. 30th August 1998: Home of Sue and Ken Worsley, Glen Forest area. Meet AMC (Shell Garage), left-hand-side of the Borrowdale Shops for departure at 7.00 a.m. Bring chairs and refreshments.

Thursday Evenings

1. 16th July 1998: Duncan Parkes will be our speaker for the evening. Venue: Alexandra Sports Club, Sable Room – 6.00 p.m. for 6.30 p.m. A cash bar will be available.

2. 20th August 1998: Michael Irwin has kindly invited us to his home – 6 Balmoral Road, Vainona – for the evening (6.00 for 6.30 p.m.). He has a collection of bird paintings which he would like to share with us. For logistical purposes, it is essential that you let us know whether or not you will be attending as space will be limited: Contact Di Rushforth – 741765 by 19th August. Directions: Going north along the Borrowdale Road, after Borrowdale School take the second turning to the left which is Balmoral. The house is the second on the left and has white stones outside it. Bring a folding chair and your own refreshments.
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Rifa Educational Camp – 25TH TO 28TH SEPTEMBER 1998

The Branch is again organising a weekend trip to Rifa Educational Camp, Chirundu. The dates are 25th to 28th September 1998 and a booking slip is included in this issue. Numbers are limited so don't delay in taking up a place for this most popular and worthwhile venue.

EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB

Chairman: Mr. Ken Dixon ☎ 020-65819 Recorder Mr. Tony Curtis ☎ 020-60281

Outings

<u>Saturday 11th July 1998</u>	Cecil Kop Game Park	2.00 p.m.
<u>Sunday 26th July 1998</u>	Burma Valley	6.30 a.m.
<u>Saturday 8th August 1998</u>	Imbeza Valley	2.00 p.m.
<u>Sunday 30th August 1998</u>	Dorowa Mine	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 Surveys of Cynara and Osborne which are conducted every three months.

Karoi Bird Club

Co-ordinator: Mr. K. Mitchell P O Box 398, Karoi ☎ 064-630220

Secretary: Mrs. M Mitchell P O Box 398, Karoi ☎ 064-630216

Outings

Saturday, 4th July 1998 Rydings School Interpretive Centre 6.30 am.

Saturday, 1st August 1998 Rydings School Interpretive Centre 6.30 a.m.

Weekend outing

Having just had three outings within one week in May, when usually we barely manage one a month, we are left rather breathless. Nevertheless, once we have gathered ourselves, we will arrange July and August outings and advertise them locally or contact Kevin or Merle. If anything special is to be arranged we will let Mashonaland Branch know.

MATABELELAND BRANCH

Evening Meetings

Friday, 3rd July 1998 – Aisleby Birds – Clive and I will provide an introduction to bird life at our local birding hot spot. Venue: 3A Holdengarde Avenue, Hillside at 8.00 p.m.

Friday, 7th August 1998 – Video evening – We will be showing the latest BBC production on Eagles, featuring Verreaux's Eagles in the Matopos and African Crowned Eagles at Nyangombe Falls amongst others. This is narrated by David Attenborough and includes some outstanding photography. Venue: 3 Bouchier Wray Avenue, at 8.00 p.m.

Outings

Sunday, 19th July 1998 – Aisleby Waterfowl Count – numbers of waterfowl should have increased from January with most of Matabeleland now being fairly dry. Meet at the boom at 7.30 a.m. or contact Martin Smith.

Sunday, 26th July 1998 – Fort Rixon Dam Waterfowl Count – The count at this dam normally produces some interesting sightings, including Black Stork. Please do join us. Meet: Fort Rixon Education Centre or contact Penny Feather ☎ 44034.

Away weekend

Saturday, 15th/Sunday 16th August 1998 – We are planning a camping trip to a nearby venue (within 60 km of Bulawayo). Details are still to be finalised but those interested should contact Julia on ☎ 62401.

Aisleby

Sunday, 29th August 1998 – Clive Townsley will co-ordinate this afternoon outing. Meet at the boom at 2.30 p.m. or contact Clive on ☎ 46617.

MIDLANDS BRANCH

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

Day Outings

Gweru Contact Gavin ☎ 154-24666/24058 or Bernard ☎ 152-6422. It is advisable to confirm with the organiser before each outing.

Sunday, 30th August 1998 Meet outside G & T Contracting at 7.45 a.m. for 8.00 a.m. departure

Masvingo Contact Lynne ☎ 139-63657 for details

Kadoma Contact Margaret ☎ 168-3644

Camping weekends Contact Bernard ☎ 152-6422 for further information

2nd to 4th October 1998 – Nyororo Farm, Chatsworth (Provisional dates, subject to confirmation)

FROM THE PRESIDENT

By the time you will have received your copy of *The Babblers*, the OAZ will have hosted the BirdLife International African Partners' Meeting and details of that meeting will be given in the September/October issue. Further progress on the OAZ's application to become a Partner-Designate in BirdLife International will also be reported upon.

As a separate publication, members will receive a copy of a paper which will be the beginning of the consultation with membership prior to the final decision as to whether we are to become a BirdLife International partner. **John Paxton, President**

REPORTS**NATIONAL****ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION EXPO**

The OAZ had a small stand at the recently held Environmental Education Expo at the Mukuvisi Woodlands in Harare. A lot of interest was shown in the OAZ and birds and it is hoped that contacts made with members of the teaching profession and other organisations involved in environmental awareness and education will prove valuable for our future educational thrust. Thank you to all of you who helped with the stand. **Editor.**

THE GOVERNMENT ORNITHOLOGIST, DR PETER MUNDY, HAS REQUESTED THAT WHEN SUBMITTING REPORTS OF OUTINGS OR SIGHTINGS OF BIRDS, PLEASE IF POSSIBLE GIVE THE QDS FOR THE AREA CONCERNED.

MASHONALAND BRANCH

Darrel Plowes – Thursday 16th April 1998

On this evening we were delighted to have a visit from Darrel Plowes, a well-known Zimbabwean naturalist. Darrel has recently spent four years in the Sudan and we were rewarded with a chat and slides showing different aspects of life there. There were views of vast desert wastes bordering the Blue and

White Niles and of ancient structures. The game park pictures were of more green and fertile parts where there were many of the antelope group, unfamiliar to us. Their buffalo and monkeys are similar but different. If you think you've seen large flocks of quelea in this country, they are small compared with the clouds of them abounding in some parts of the Sudan. Their bee-eaters reminded us of our own Carmine and White-fronted ones [Northern Carmine Bee-eater & Red-throated Bee-eater?]. In the moister areas, were flocks of storks and pelicans. Pictures of storks rising in a thermal on the first stages of migration were especially good. The last part of the programme showed pictures of the local people in their colourful apparel at both a wedding and engagement celebrations. The pattern painting of hands, wrists and ankles was especially interesting. It was a most unusual and fascinating evening. Thank you, Darrel, for taking us out of Zimbabwe for a short while. **Sally Perrett**

Leslee Maasdorp – Thursday, 21st May 1998

About 30 people turned out to the Branch's monthly evening meeting which was on this occasion to be a talk given by Leslee Maasdorp. Leslee explained to us that the OAZ was a member of ELF (Environmental Liaison Forum) which had been formed fairly recently in an endeavour to co-ordinate the work being done in Zimbabwe by several organisations involved in environmental work.

Leslee described how she, as chairman of the Education Sub-Committee of the OAZ Council and her committee were embarking on an educational programme from which it was hoped more interest would be generated about birds and the OAZ. We learned that a course had recently been held where student teachers were being trained in the study of birds and that the course had proved very popular. It was hoped that more would be held throughout the year.

We were then told us about some of the educational work done at Rifa which had been going for eleven years. Throughout the years, many changes in the environment at Rifa had been witnessed and in particular monitoring the rate of loss of the river bank had revealed that it receded 3 metres every year. Students attending courses at the camp were taken to sites of birding interest and they particularly enjoyed the larger birds, such as Vultures, which could be seen with the naked eye. She said that certain birds in the area were also monitored such as eagles, storks, Southern Carmine Bee-eaters, Red-billed Oxpeckers, Collared Pratincoles and African Skimmers and that data on their breeding was kept. Leslee informed us that members of the OAZ were particularly welcomed on their annual visit to the area as they contributed much worthwhile information about birds. **Editor**

Lyndhurst Farm – Saturday 23rd May 1998

QDS 1731C3

There was a good turnout of about 18 people on this Saturday afternoon outing. The weather was fine and warm and there was evidence of plenty of moisture still in the ground, as some of us discovered when we got our feet wet walking through the vlei grassland. An excellent total of 88 species was identified in about a 4 km circular walk. The resident pair of African Fish-eagles has a nest in a large Msasa tree within 100 metres of the farm homestead and John Stoltz, the farm owner, reported that they successfully raised a chick in it last year. John also reported that a Bateleur Eagle has recently become a regular visitor to the farm, which is very close to Harare for this raptor!

The more unusual species seen included Levaillant's Cuckoo, Giant Kingfisher, Whyte's Barbet, Eastern Saw-wing, Grey Penduline-tit, Spotted Creeper, Red-faced Crombec and Long-billed Crombec, Stierling's Wren-warbler, Cape Longclaw and Yellow-throated Longclaw, Western Violet-backed Sunbird, Red-headed Weaver and Violet-eared Waxbill. **Richard Dennison**

Saturday, 20th April 1998 – RAINHAM Dams

QDS 1730D4

It was an unusually cool, April afternoon but the weather did not put off the 30-odd people who drove out to Rainham Dams. The dams were so full that a normal vehicle could not be driven across to the dam wall, so the Silk's 4 x 4 was commandeered and we were all ferried to the other side. Thank you very much Eric and Barbara for the use of your vehicle!

As Black-crowned Night-herons and Marsh Owls had been advertised, we had to find them, and fortunately they were there. Three immature Black-crowned Night-herons were preening themselves in a tree and at dusk the Marsh Owls glided over us – about four in all. Other notable finds were a single Lesser Jacana, two Grey Crowned Cranes, three Saddle-billed Storks, twelve White-backed Duck, several late Barn Swallows and a female Red-backed Shrike. Perhaps the good rains have produced an abundance of insects keeping these migrants in our country later than usual. **Di Rushforth**

MAVURADONHA Wilderness Area – 24th to 26th April 1998 QDS 1631A4

More than 40 people, including Dave Collis visiting from Melbourne, Australia (where, apparently, they don't have a huge variety of birds), enjoyed a long weekend in this lovely area at the north-eastern edge of the Zambezi escarpment, where 112 species were identified. On Saturday morning, 3 groups set out, one to Kemuvanga Falls (2.5 km), one to Eagles' Crag (4 km) and the most energetic to Bohore Springs (5 km), all up and down steep hills. The first group saw signs that elephant had recently preceded them and were relieved not to bump into them on the narrow paths, but the latter group did see 4 or 5 elephants. Although the walks were very worthwhile, the majority of birds were seen fairly close to the camp, including 3 widowfinches which were the subject of a great deal of discussion. With white bills and red legs, they were clearly Black Widowfinch, according to Roberts, but, with the host bird of the Black absent from the area, and on the birds' calls, it was finally agreed that they were Purple Widowfinch. The sighting of three rare Broad-tailed Paradise-whydahs also gave cause for excitement. All 3 mannikins, Magpie Mannikin, Red-backed Mannikin and Bronze Mannikin were seen as well as many sunbirds (Variable Sunbird, White-bellied Sunbird, Scarlet-chested Sunbird, Amethyst Sunbird and Western Violet-backed Sunbird, Brown-crowned Tchagra and Black-crowned Tchagra, Grey-headed Bush-shrikes, Red-throated Twinspots and African Black Swift, Mottled Swift and Little Swift to name a few. In spite of the visit to Eagles' Crag, only 2 Martial Eagles and 1 Verreaux's Eagle, 3 Augur Buzzards and a Gabar Goshawk were identified as well as a Barn Owl and 2 African Wood-owls. On Saturday evening a communal braai was held for those who wished to socialise and Pat Saunders was thanked for her hard work in organising the weekend. **Jennifer Carter.**

EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUBMount Mwenje Lodge, ODZI – Sunday, 29th March 1988

Although we set off a little earlier than usual, it was a very hot, still day and possibly, as a result, the birding was not that good. We welcomed Darrel and Anita Plowes, and Never Jana to our regular group. The first dam yielded no water birds but we listed a fair number of others, such as Tawny-flanked Prinia, Blue Waxbill and Common Waxbill, Golden Weaver, Common House-martin, African Palm-swift, Zitting Cisticola and Black-headed Oriole. Moving through the ploughed fields, we added the likes of Brown-crowned Tchagra, Golden-breasted Bunting, African Stonechat and we heard Purple-crested Turaco and Crowned Hornbill. The little river bed gave us Red-backed Shrike and Yellow Bishop and, as we reached the power lines, we saw European Bee-eater, Black-shouldered Kite and the seemingly resident Black-chested Snake-eagle. The kopje, which is usually abundant with birds, bulked up the list somewhat, with the best "tick" of the day being a Boulder Chat: We also saw Mocking Cliff-chat, African Rock Martin, White-crested Helmet-shrikes and Striped Kingfisher. The historical value of the area was highlighted when Darrel pointed out a hand-hewn stone implement of a bygone era which caught his eye because it was different to the granite common to the surrounding area. One of the great delights of these outings is that if the birding is "off", we always have something else to busy ourselves with, and we then picked Darrel's brains about the wild flowers prolific on the kopje. After coffee on the delightful lodge sundeck, we headed for the large dam where we added only African Jacana, Malachite Sunbird and a host of Barn Swallows. Thanks again to Ms Lippman for the opportunity to bird in this beautiful area. **Ken Dixon.**

Eastwood, Old MUTARE – Sunday, 25th April 1998

This was our first visit as a club to Eastwood but it won't be our last! Very close to Cynara, this property has much in common with the latter; much of the land has not been cultivated for a long time, having returned to bush and no pesticides have been used. We were fortunate that paths had been cut through the thick grass and undergrowth on the routes Mrs Maas uses to inspect the birds on a regular basis. Even so, most of the group of 8 collected a few unwelcome ticks. Even as we arrived from Koodoosberg Road, we saw our first Black-shouldered Kites which are ever present in fair numbers. Another regular here, but out of context, was the Cut-throat Finch, the first garden bird. The bushes and grass along the track were alive with mannikins, canaries and Blue Waxbills and Common Waxbills. A Bearded Woodpecker drummed loudly on a dead gum tree and Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters swooped around the live ones. Then 2 Grey Waxbills sped past. On the reedy pond we saw Common Moorhen, Black Crake and Thick-billed Weaver. Where the thorn bush was really dense, we heard Orange-breasted Bush-shrike and Grey-headed Bush-shrike and both White-throated Robin-chat and White-browed Scrub-robins. A party of 5 Barn Swallows seemed rather late to me. Then an African Harrier-hawk entertained us and annoyed Fork-tailed Drongos and Green Wood-hoopoes and the

Bearded Woodpecker's prominent nesting-hole looked very vulnerable. The grassy areas held Rattling Cisticola and Singing Cisticola and Tawny-flanked Prinia but it was getting hot by now and fewer birds were in evidence as we approached the other reed and water-lily covered dams. The African Pygmy-goose Rex and I had seen a year ago has not appeared again and only White-faced Duck were noted, with Sedge Warbler¹ in the reeds.

After we'd spent some time trying to convince ourselves 3 noisy, displaying Striped Kingfishers were Woodlands, Tony drew our attention to a greenish-yellow, red-rumped little bird in a small Acacia – an Orange-winged Pytilia. Despite the general hue and cry, it was not seen again and we had to make do with a total of 64 species for the morning. Many thanks to our absent hosts Sharon and Chris Maas.

Ken Dixon

CYNARA Farm, Old MUTARE – Saturday, 9th May 1998

Not even Tony Curtis can remember seeing so much water in Cynara's dams. Such was the situation that our well-worn route around the property had to be modified to avoid the marshes. It was also one of the hottest May days in Tony's experience too. A bit too hot for some of the birds it seems as our count of 51 species was well below average, and those we saw were not all in their usual locations. The farmyard surrounds held a small flock of Red-billed Quelea which swirled around us as we wandered towards the shallow, lily-covered dam. There we found the usual White-faced Duck with a few Black Crake and a Common Moorhen. What we were not expecting was a group of a dozen Black-headed Heron and a few Grey Herons too. A clear Lanner Falcon was an exciting sighting but there was nothing except Red-billed Quelea in the reeds and woodland. The next 2 dams were disappointingly devoid of birds as was the riverine bush and woodland lower down except for the common regulars. Martin finally winkled out his Kurrichane Thrush to the delight of Alyce while the rest of us started a long walk though long grass to avoid the marshy area. Long grass means lots of enigmatic little brown birds – Zitting Cisticola and Rattling Cisticola I concluded but I'm not sure if the others agreed with me. At the new dam, Gail surprised a nightjar, or vice-versa and we saw Water Thick-knee and 14 White-breasted Cormorant, a few Three-banded Plover, Reed Cormorant and African Darter. Later Reg Bennett, the owner, told us he had seen 300 Egyptian Goose earlier in the afternoon. Across the munga field to the final dam with a Malachite Kingfisher looking magnificent in the evening light. As we stood and slaked our thirst and chatted to keg before leaving, Cynara revealed its trump card; from high in a nearby gum tree first one and then another Spotted Eagle-owl floated down and took up hunting position side by side on a low branch. It was still so light, we all had excellent views and could marvel at their great size. What a contrast to that pathetic bunch of feathers we so often see on the Mutare-Harare Road.

Ken Dixon

Karoi Bird Club

22nd to 25th May 1998 – Lochinvar, Zambia

Our Lochinvar trip eventually came about – originally planned for April, we finally got away at the end of May. Thanks to Shirley Babcock for arranging it all, with Zambian farmer friends, Ant and Mary Colett. We were 8 adults and two children from Karoi and we were delighted to have Ida and Dave Gray join us from the Mashonaland Branch. We left on Friday at break of School and travelled in convoy, choosing the route through the Kariba border post. The drive from the border to the main Chirundu/Mazabuka road was most enjoyable, with some lovely scenery and mainly untouched bush. We arrived at the Coletts late afternoon, where Mary had tea and scones generously provided for us.

We had all planned to camp on the lawn, but in the end the "older" people were kindly offered the guest cottage, while the younger ones had the lawn!

The Coletts invited neighbours for the evening to meet us and in particular Rory MacDougall, who was to guide us into Lochinvar and show us the spots – an area he knows very well. Lochinvar, or part thereof, was originally a farm and the old brick homestead, Dutch gables and all, still stands and is used as a lodge. The camp site, further away, is pleasant with a hand pump for water. We were shown the hot springs – there are a string of them – and the fabulous Chunga lagoon. The prettiest of the springs had Ilala Palms where the Collared Palm-thrush has been seen – we heard it at the camp site. Some of the birds seen here were Meves's Starling, 8 resplendent male Long-tailed Paradise-whydah with their harem on a single small bush, Coppery-tailed Coucal, Hartlaub's Babbler, Yellow-breasted Apalis, Swallow-tailed Bee-eater and a White-winged Black Tit, not seen south of the Zambezi. On top of a *Sterculia quinqueloba*, sat a White-backed Vulture on its nest! There were Lilac-breasted Rollers everywhere and we also saw

¹ Sedge Warbler probably refers to Little Rush-warbler?

the beautiful Racquet-tailed Rollers and Purple Rollers. In the burnt grass areas were Dusky Lark – exciting to see and Buffy Pipit, Chestnut-backed Sparrowlark, Capped Wheatear and further along, amongst the bushes, Spotted Thick-knee and Bronze-winged Courser. A most exciting find was Denham's Bustard at which we had a long look. An incredible sight is the Chunga Lagoon which is vast, flat land as far as the eye can see and most of it covered with shallow water, the rains having been good, there were a feast of birds in all directions, thousands of Lechwe – it has to be seen to be believed – herons, terns, plovers (Kittlitz's Plovers in their hundreds), hundreds of Collared Pratincole, geese, duck, storks and a couple of Wattled Cranes and two Grey Crowned Cranes were amongst the Lechwe. An African Marsh-harrier and a Montagu's Harrier were also seen. On our way back to camp on our last day we had a great view of a Red-necked Falcon which rounded off a fabulous birding weekend. 126 species seen in all. Our thanks go to Ant and Mary Colett for their warm hospitality and to Rory MacDougall for sharing his knowledge with us and taking time to show us around – it was very much appreciated. **Merle Mitchell**

Thursday, 28th May 1998

This evening was spent with Derek Solomon at the home of Pete and Tawny Stidolph. There was a good turnout of 20 altogether. Derek gave us a most interesting talk on night birds. Owls and Nightjars in particular. It was most enlightening and enjoyed by all – and here we thought Owls hunted by sight alone! We see them every day but we didn't know about their ears! Thanks to Derek and to Pete and Tawny for organising it all. **Merle Mitchell.**

MATABELELAND

Sunday, 19th April 1998 – Rouxdale Farm

This outing brought the first hint that winter was on its way with a rather chilly start. Merely waiting beside the road yielded some interesting sightings with a Lesser Grey Shrike in fresh plumage and a number of Marico Flycatchers consuming breakfast.

Arriving at the farm, a clear blue sky produced some good raptor observations, including Martial Eagle, Black-chested Snake-eagle and African Hawk-eagles. Swifts also flitted past, along with the tail-end of the swallow migration, all chattering considerably on their way north. Moving on to the dam, we were a little disappointed to discover it drained to watercourse level, with just a few Little Stint and plovers to be seen. Spirits rose considerably amongst the thick Acacia beneath the dam wall, mimicking a Pearl-spotted Owlet produced one and a group of noisy Grey Go-away-birds revealed a Verreaux's Eagle-owl. Smaller "stuff" included a considerable variety of sunbirds, feeding on flowering parasites and at least three species of bulbul/greenbul. Moving downstream (dust – as the watercourse was dry) flushed a noisy party of Arrow-marked Babblers and it was useful to compare their cackle with Green Wood-hoopoes, two calls which always seem to produce confusion. Finally, on our return to the picnic site, a Dark Chanting-goshawk posed briefly on a treetop before diving out of sight below the skyline. Our thanks to the McKinnays for allowing us access to their property. **Martin Smith**

Visit to WABAI Hill, Debshan Ranch – Weekend 23rd to 25th May 1998

Where is it, you say? Well, the "shan" refers to Shangani and the "Deb" has nothing to do with debutantes! It refers to a diamond mining company which shall remain anonymous for security reasons. The ranch is some 30 km wide or long and in one location there is a very large rock – not as big as Ayer's Rock in Aussie – but nevertheless impressive. It is upon this rock that vultures, particularly Cape Vultures, gather to roost. Maybe they nest too but the only nest around was that of a Verreaux's Eagle which ruled the roost as it were. The vultures were slightly (there is another word) scared of the eagle and flew away at the least pretext or so it seemed.

About twenty birders were invited through the Matabeleland Branch for the purpose of counting these vultures and we were led by Dr Peter Mundy. It was all very serious stuff and I cannot think why I was invited! Perhaps it was because vultures are so large, even I could see them! However, I did not object and was exceedingly pleased to be one of the party. For accommodation, the hardy birders camped in the woodland area below the rock to be on the spot for action whilst the less hardy ones, of which I was the least hardy, were taken 20 km down the road to the homestead of Richard and Colette Cloete where we stayed in a cottage.

There were four of us who stayed in luxury and you could say we became a bird splinter group because we did not actually contribute towards the well-being of the vultures nor seriously counted them. With others, I was invited to climb the hill but, after looking towards the peak some 150 metres upwards, I

declined and those of you who had seen me hobbling around Mavuradonha recently with a walking stick will understand why! I am very good at calculating and figured that it would take me 2 hours to get to the top by which time it would have been nearly dark and I might have had to spend the night with the vultures. Now we all know what vultures feed on!!! Because we were split up from the main group of birders, we had to do "our own thing" and here are a few of the birds which we saw: Secretarybird, Verreaux's Eagle, Purple Roller, Marico Sunbird, Marico Flycatcher, Pearl-spotted Owlet (which completely ignored mobbing attempts of 8 White-crested Helmet-shrikes, a Scarlet-chested Sunbird and others). Also seen was a Half-collared Kingfisher which raised a few eyebrows and questions but, after much discussion, the Half-collared won! We all heard Acacia Pied Barbet many times but could not even manage a glimpse. The Cape Vultures appeared as juveniles – over 50 of them – and not one adult did I see. Can I tick this bird off as a lifer? My conscience is troubling me!

It would be a pity not to mention some of the animals seen. They were: impala, kudu, tsessebe, steenbok, a terrapin and two otters who gave a "water world" show for ten minutes in a nearby dam. Steve Alpe was lucky enough to see two cheetahs which ran in front of the Landrover he was in. Finally, from the "spoiled" birders, Ken and Jean Wilson, Steve Alpe and myself we give heartfelt thanks to Richard and Colette for a great weekend and to the Matabeleland Branch for organising the outing and to Peter Mundy and John Dalziel for inviting us along. **Keith Barrow, Mashonaland Branch.**

From the Chairman

The Easter holidays were a busy time for the Branch with our usual programme and the Sixth Form Course at Falcon College. Members kindly offered to help with transport, loan of binoculars and assistance in field work. Though most students had little pre-knowledge of the subject, all enjoyed themselves and by the end of the course were able to identify a number of species. Plenty of enthusiasm was shown for some form of follow up which is very much up to us to pursue.

At a Junior school level we now have funds to proceed with our information pack, which can hopefully be distributed at the beginning of next term. We would be most grateful for any assistance with this project which may involve considerable clerical work! Finally, a rather disturbing note on our birding "Mecca" Aisleby. Birds are becoming increasingly wary of the Hide which may be in use as a catapult shooting platform. As yet we have no proof and would appreciate some evidence. Please be aware of the problem. Good birding – **Martin Smith**

TAIL FEATHERS

Some birding highlights from a trip to Botswana and Namibia in August 1997

At Baines' Baobabs in Botswana, we found some very tame birds at the camp site, obviously very used to being fed by campers. Kalahari Scrub-robin, Helmeted Guineafowl, with very long and accentuated curved "helmet", Acacia Pied Barbet, Violet-eared Waxbill and Cape Glossy Starling were very friendly and photogenic. At Maun, every "bulbul" had to be checked carefully to see if it had a red or a black eye. About 30% were African Red-eyed Bulebuls. Also at Maun we had our first sighting of Southern Pied Babbler and Wattled Starling – mostly females.

As we approached Windhoek, we had our first sightings of the nests of the Sociable Weaver festooning the roadside trees. In this area of Central Namibia the colonies are not too common, being on the fringe of their range, but in the south of Namibia, the colonies are more common and trees less numerous, thus they use the telephone wires to nest. The colonies are so big and their weight so destructive to the telephone wires that special frames are attached to the poles to encourage the birds to attach their nests to the poles instead of the wires.

Our next stop was the stunningly beautiful area known as the Spitzkoppe. Here the reddish rocks appear almost to be on fire in the dawn or evening light. Apart from many familiar friends, such as Cardinal Woodpecker, who didn't seem to have enough trees, Rock Martin, Red-billed Hornbill, Speckled Pigeon, Verreaux's Eagle, we saw Monteiro's Hornbill, Dusky Sunbird, Layard's Tit-babbler, Alpine Swifts and Bradfield's Swifts, Long-billed Lark, Pale-winged Starling, Short-toed Rock-thrush and Rosy-faced Lovebird. We then moved on to Amieb Ranch in the Erongo Mountains. A special treat here was the strikingly coloured White-tailed Shrike and the Great Sparrow. As always seems to happen to one in the desert, it rained here... sopping wet within 5 minutes and dry again in another 10!

Then on the Brandberg Mountains, rising to 2500 metres and visible from over 110 km away. We were in the desert proper here with *Welwitschia mirabilis* all around us, and with a daily water ration of 10 litres between two of us. It was very hot during the day and bitterly cold and windy at night. New to us were White-throated Canary, Double-banded Sandgrouse, a very pale subspecies of Yellow-bellied Eremomela and Pirit Batis.

We then moved on to Henries Bay on the Skeleton Coast. On the way, we stopped at a very desolate grassless spot to make some tea. Here we noticed a large bundle of grass under a rock which looked like a rodent's nest. However, its assertive owner was a Tractrac Chat – where it got the grass from in that sun-blasted oven defies belief. Afterwards, we frequently encountered this “survivor against the odds” in many desolate places. At Walvis Bay, the flamingos, both Lesser Flamingo and Greater Flamingo, are said to number up to 60 000. What a spectacle!!! In a day, I guess we saw up to 5 000 waders, Pied Avocet, Curlew Sandpiper, Black-winged Stilt, Chestnut-banded Plover, Wood Sandpiper, Little Stint, Ruddy Turnstone, Three-banded Plover and African Black Oystercatcher. Just north of Swakopmund is a salt works where they have erected platforms for guano collection. Here 200 000 cormorants are reported to live – it looked like Cormorant City, with “streets” of cormorants leading to and from the fish-rich Atlantic Ocean. As one drives north from Swakop, along the coast road, the vehicle is constantly driving over fresh mussel shells. These are brought inland by Kelp Gulls, dropped from a height sufficient to crack them open on the hard road surface, and then eaten by them. The last bird we saw in Namibia was a Kori Bustard. **Bernard Beekes, Shurugwi.**

Albinism in Dark-capped Bulbul

On 16th May 1998, we had a visit from an albino “Toppie” at our birdbath. I was quite mystified about its identity to start with as the bird had all the “stature” of a Toppie and had a yellow vent! Apart from an occasional brown feather on its back it was entirely white but with the yellow vent present and it had pink legs. Unfortunately, I did not get a clear view of its eye or beak colouration as it was busy having a bath and mostly had its back to me. **June Johnston, Mount Pleasant, HARARE**

Getting your priorities right!

A letter to one of the local newspapers in May 1998 caught my eye. It reads: “Stop eating these birds – the rate at which birds are being caught in Dewedzo, Rusape area, has reached an unprecedented proportion. The birds move in big swarms. They easily get stuck and caught with a substance called ‘urimbo’. It is understood that these birds migrate from the swampy areas of Middle Save in search of favourable climatic conditions. On the way they eat fish and crops. It is not known whether they carry DNT (*sic*). This chemical is dangerous when consumed in excess and over a period of time. It causes lung cancer and other diseases. People are at risk and should stop eating these birds. It is rather better to have a vegetable garden than endanger our lives. **Siphelani Musungu, Harare.**” I should think so too! Editor.

A birding weekend at Mahenya Safari Lodge – 24th to 27th April 1998

After having been rescued when our vehicle was stuck in ten foot of sand in the Save River, we were driving back from Chilo when we saw four raptors on the horizon. A closer look enabled us to identify three of the birds which were immature Bateleur Eagles but we were still left puzzling over the last of the quartet. It was small in size, had a pale but quite streaked breast and had a long, thin tail. Soon enough, ‘though, all our problems were solved when it turned towards us, showing its white “landing lights” - **BOOTED EAGLE!!!**

Birdlife in the stunning surroundings of Mahenya Safari Lodge, which has “Shangaan” styled chalets overlooking the mighty Save River with huge Natal Mahoganies gracing the river bank, is not to be ignored. Specials such as Purple-banded Sunbird, Southern Banded Snake-eagle and Pel’s Fishing-owl may be seen. One afternoon, we set off for the Save/Runde Junction which was very rewarding from a birding point of view with Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters and Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters, Bennett’s Woodpecker, Klaas’s Cuckoo and Retz’s Helmet-shrike. Whilst having a sundowner at “Gayiseni Pool”, we were treated to a brief sighting of a Pel’s Fishing-owl, which was flushed from its perch by a rowdy group of Hadedda Ibis and also a flock of about 400 Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters.

The next morning we set off at dawn for the Mahenya Village sandveld forest which is unique to Zimbabwe, as through the years it has grown up in an ancient river bed. Some species of flora and fauna found there are found nowhere else in the whole of southern Africa. The cold was paralysing and the forest birds must have felt it too for we did not hear or see any species until the first rays of sunlight

flickered through the forest. We were kept awake by the tempting call of the African Broadbill which changed direction so often that it was difficult to discern whereabouts it was calling from! Eventually though, we sighted a male perched on a dead branch nearby. Also seen on the way back to the lodge were three Racket-tailed Rollers and a regal African Cuckoo Hawk displayed itself from the crown of a Baobab tree.

Later in the day, my brother and I followed a path which hugged the river bank and the diversity of birds was amazing with Orange-breasted Bush-shrike, Black-throated Wattle-eye, Red-capped Robin-chat, African Pygmy-kingfisher and Purple-banded Sunbird being easily seen. Secretive birds like White-throated Robin-chat and Sombre Greenbul were, however, a bit harder to find. By the time it came for our afternoon walk, my lifers from the trip had already reached 12 and I didn't really expect many more. IF ONLY I KNEW!!! We walked to "Lesser Tamboharta Pan" where we sighted Senegal Lapwing, Rufous-winged Cisticola, Brown-throated Martin and Black Coucal with Mottled Spinetail being seen near their nests. The following morning, at Tamboharta Pan we were treated to the sighting of about 150 buffalo huddled together and with them both Yellow-billed Oxpeckers and Red-billed Oxpeckers which could be told apart by the colour of their rumps. A pair of Woolly-necked Storks and a family of Southern Ground-hornbills wandered aimlessly in the dry pan while a majestic Lanner Falcon perched conspicuously on a dead tree. As we approached the Chilojo Cliffs, the bird life became harder and harder to find. Those seen were Red-crested Korhaan, Double-banded Sandgrouse and White-headed Vulture. As we surveyed the endless land from the cliffs' viewing point, we were surprised to see a small group of Black Storks as they sailed through the sky. Raptors are prolific in Gonarezhou and we encountered five different species – African Hawk-eagle, Martial Eagle, Tawny Eagle, Bateleur and Wahlberg's Eagles. On our last morning we set off for Pokwe camp in search of Collared Palm-thrush and Lemon-breasted Canary. A Collared Palm-thrush was spotted by our guide but most of us just saw its rufous tail as it flew into the undergrowth. We were more lucky with the Lemon-breasted Canary which we saw in the company of a noisy flock of Brown-headed Parrots on the top of an Acacia tree. Further along the track, we were thrilled when we came across a threesome of Verreaux's Eagle-owls, one of them feeding on a Large Spotted Genet, hidden in the foliage of a Wild Mango tree. By the end of our weekend our total bird list was a mighty 200 with 22 of those being lifers for me! Mahenya Safari Lodge is a birdwatcher's paradise and a worthwhile destination for anyone feeling the strain of city life!!!
Emma Holland (Junior Member)

CHIRINDA FOREST

A recent family holiday to the Eastern Districts gave us the opportunity to spend a night in the Chirinda Forest. Emerging from drought-stricken Matabeleland into this lush, well-watered part of the country raised spirits considerably. The camp site was beautifully laid out and it was a joy to be able to push pegs in by hand, rather than the usual feeble attempts with a hammer and bent pegs. Set on the site of Swynnerton's house on the forest fringe, it was enchanting and allowed some birds to be seen as opposed to merely heard. At first light we were awakened by both Silvery-cheeked Hornbill and Trumpeter Hornbills, feeding in the magnificent Cape Fig above the tent. It was lovely to hear the swoosh of wings as they swept into the tree. Deeper within the forest, loud strident calls revealed the presence of other avian residents. Bulbuls were comparatively easy to pick out with both Stripe-cheeked Greenbul and Yellow-streaked Greenbul being particularly common. Square-tailed Drongo noisily advertised its presence and the harsher call of Livingstone's Turaco was easy to recognise. Clearings and roads enabled a clear view of the canopy and it was rewarding to be able to see Dark-backed Weaver, and Olive Sunbird and Collared Sunbird. Close to the ground, Swynnerton's Robins foraged for food along with an army of aggressive ants. Sadly, our trip seemed all too short and many calls remained unidentified despite the use of Guy Gibbon's tapes. Hopefully we can return as a bird club at a future date. **Martin Smith**

Birdwatching In the Matusadona Mountains – 12th April 1998

The new Matusadona tented camp, which is situated just after the Vlanduli River and overlooks the Ume River, is in a rugged and largely untouched wilderness with the vegetation consisting of *Combretum*, *Terminalia*, *Acacia nigrescens* and other thick Jesse type bush. In this area we saw Retz's Helmet-shrike, Green Wood-hoopoe and Common Scimitarbill, Grey-headed Bush-shrike, Yellow-bellied Greenbul and Red-billed Hornbill, Southern Ground-hornbill, Trumpeter Hornbill and Crowned Hornbill. In the mixed bushveld, we managed to see Ashy Flycatcher and Lesser Grey Shrike. At Maronga River we saw Narina Trogon and Black-headed Oriole and African Golden Oriole. Soaring above us were African Hawk-eagle, Bateleur, Martial Eagle and Brown Snake-eagles. Vultures seen were White-headed Vulture, Hooded Vulture and White-backed Vulture. I believe we heard

African Barred Owlet, White-browed Coucal and Thick-billed Cuckoo. Also at the river we saw a Pel's Fishing-owl and Bohm's Spinetail was another interesting sighting. Up the Ume River the birds we recorded were Grey-headed Kingfisher, Pied Kingfisher and Giant Kingfisher, Black Egret, Southern Carmine Bee-eater, White-fronted Bee-eater and Little Bee-eater, Purple Roller, White-crested Helmet-shrike, Crested Barbet and Black-collared Barbet, Purple-crested Turaco and Grey Go-away-bird. We were lucky to see a Freckled Nightjar and a Cinnamon-breasted Bunting sitting on its nest which was a small, rounded platform of grass on the ground. I enjoyed the only free music available in the bush – that of an Emerald-spotted Wood-dove who seemed as though he was saying "other birds lay 4 eggs, some lay 3 but I lay 2, 2, 2, 2, 2." It is a fantastic call! **Taimu Mtema, Fothergill Island Safari Lodge, Kariba.**

NOTICEBOARD

WARNING: It has been reported that incidents of armed robbery have occurred on the roads in and around the Postals area of Lake Chivero. Whilst it appears that foreign-registered cars have been targeted, please be very vigilant when travelling on the perimeter roads and ensure that your vehicles are locked, even when you are in them! It is recommended that you do not park on the road sides and do not stop for anyone.

Observations of Black Storks

Geoff Lowe has requested that observations of Black Storks and possible nest sites be reported. This species is listed under the OAZ's Special Species Survey and more information on these birds is needed.

It is important that the QDS is given as well as a description of nest sites. Cards are available from Tracy Couto who is with the Ornithology Research Unit of the Department of National Parks and Wildlife, P O Box BE 60, Belvedere, Harare.

OAZ Birdwatch Competition – 24th/25th October 1998

Jacko Williams will be away from mid-August to mid-October and she has asked that members send for Atlas cards for the Birdwatch competition as soon as possible. These can be obtained from her at 14 Harare Drive, Greystone Park. Please send a stamped, self-addressed envelope (a long one) to her.

Please DO NOT use field cards or sheets of paper for the competition. If you have not been able to get your Atlas cards by mid-August, please obtain them from Di Rushforth, 5 Colenbrander Road, Milton Park, Harare. Details of the rules have already been published. All completed cards are to be sent to Jacko as soon as possible after the event.

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.

OAZ hats for sale

OAZ hats are still for sale. These are ideal for members as they give us an identity. They are available in three sizes – medium, large and extra large and the colours are either khaki or green. They cost \$65.00 each. Bernard Beekes has a supply and can be contacted at Shurugwi on ☎ 152-6422 or phone Di Rushforth on Harare 741765 if you are interested.