

# BABBLER

## ORNITHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION OF ZIMBABWE

*A PARTNER DESIGNATE OF BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL*

ISSUE #26 – SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 1998

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### **COMMITTEES**

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*FIRST OF ALL WE OFFER SINCERE CONDOLENCES TO JOHN PAXTON AND FAMILY WHO LOST THEIR DEAR WIFE AND MOTHER, LAURA, IN JULY. LAURA WAS LOVED BY ALL WHO KNEW HER AND SHE WILL BE SORELY MISSED*

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### **ACTIVITIES**

#### **MASHONALAND BRANCH**

##### Regular outings

##### NB – NOTE NEW TIMES

1. Mukuvisi Woodlands: Sundays 6<sup>th</sup> September and 4<sup>th</sup> October 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 13<sup>th</sup> September. Meet at Marimba Shopping Centre for departure at 6.30 a.m. Beginners are very welcome. Bring your chairs and tea. ANNUAL BREAKFAST – this will take place on 11<sup>th</sup> October 1998 at the regular monthly outing at Lake Chivero. Meet as usual at Marimba Shopping Centre for departure at 6.30 a.m. Breakfast will be provided after the walk and will include tea/coffee. The cost is \$25 per person. Please bring your own chair, plate, cutlery and teacup. Unfortunately, it has not been possible to cater for special diets but it is hoped that if you fall into this category you will still come along and perhaps bring your own food. For catering purposes please complete the slip provided at the end of the newsletter.

##### Saturday afternoon outings

**Please note that the Saturday outing for September has been moved to the 4<sup>th</sup> weekend, whilst the Sunday outing has moved to the 3<sup>rd</sup> weekend in the month.**

1. 26<sup>th</sup> September 1998: Harare Botanic Gardens. Meet at the car park at 2.30 p.m.
2. 17<sup>th</sup> October 1998: Marlborough sewage works. Meet at the works at 2.30 p.m. Directions: turn off Princess Margaret Drive from Harare Drive and go to the bottom of the road. Turn right into Newstead Rd and then left at the 'Department of Works Workshop' sign.

Sunday outing

1. 29<sup>th</sup> November 1998: Mbizi Game Park. We have asked to do a bird count at the game park and therefore Mr Mervyn Senior has agreed to waive the entrance fee normally charged. Mr Senior has, however, requested that a list of names be given to him the day before so that his man on the gate will know who to let in free. Please telephone Di Rushforth (741765) by 7.00 p.m. on Friday 18<sup>th</sup> September so that the list can be prepared and given to Mr. Senior. There is a tea garden available (where light meals are served) but it is possible that this will be open only at 12 noon. Perhaps some members might like to make use of the facilities for lunch. Meet at Trojan Corner, Queensdale Shopping Centre, Chiremba (Widdecombe) Road for departure at 6.30 a.m.

OAZ Birdwatch – Saturday and Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> /25<sup>th</sup> October 1998

Details are given under NOTICES.

Thursday Evenings

1. 17<sup>th</sup> September 1998: Roger Howman has been invited back to talk further on his study of the Southern Masked-weaver. Don't miss this most interesting speaker and subject.
2. 15<sup>th</sup> October 1998: Rolf Chenux-Repond will give an illustrated talk on his experiences with birds and other aspects of wild life.

Venue for both evenings: Alexandra Sports Club, Sable Room – 6.00 p.m. for 6.30 p.m. A cash bar will be available.

Rifa Educational Camp – 25<sup>TH</sup> TO 28<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 1988 FULLY BOOKED

**EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB**

Chairman: Mr. Bill Chadder ☎ 020-63828, Secretary Mr. Ken Dixon ☎ 020-65819

**Outings**

<u>Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> September 1998</u>	Cynara	2.00 p.m.
<u>Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> November 1998</u>	Juliasdale	6.00 a.m. bring packed lunch
<u>Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> October 1998</u>	Drifters	2.00 p.m.
<u>Weekend 24<sup>th</sup> /25<sup>th</sup> October 1998</u>	OAZ BIG BIRDING DAY	6.00 a.m. select your team

We assemble at the Museum in Aerodrome Road at the time stated. Transport and binoculars are available if prior notice is given. Contact Bill Chadder or Ken Dixon. 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 ☎ 064-630220

**Outings**Rydings School Interpretive Centre

Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> September 1998 6.00 a.m.  
Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1998 6.00 a.m.

Other outings

Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> September 1998 Conniston Farm 6.00 a.m.  
October outing still to be arranged

OAZ BIRDWATCH COMPETITION – WEEKEND 24<sup>TH</sup> /25<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 1998

**MATABELELAND BRANCH**Evening Meetings

Friday, 4<sup>th</sup> September 1998 – Gavin Stevens and the Matopos – Gavin Stevens of the Matopos Conservation and Natural History Society has kindly agreed to give an illustrated presentation. Venue: 49 Heyman Road, Suburbs at 8.00 p.m. Contact Julia for details.

Friday, 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1998 – Stephanie Tyler – Bird Ringing – Stephanie has kindly agreed to give the Branch an introduction to ringing. At present she is living in Botswana but has plenty of experience of the rest of the continent and its avifauna. Venue: CBC Staffroom at 8.00 p.m. Contact Martin for details.

Outings

Sunday, 20<sup>th</sup> September 1998 – Umgusa Dam Nature Reserve – This is always a rewarding area to visit with plenty of waterbirds and dry land species to find. Meet at the Study Centre at 7.30 a.m. bringing morning tea. Contact Martin for further details.

Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> October 1998 – Ringing Demonstration at Aisleby – Stephanie Tyler will give a ringing demonstration at Aisleby, hopefully catching a variety of warblers and perhaps some waders. Meet at the boom at 7.00 a.m. or contact Julia.

Aisleby

We have now reverted to early morning outings, either meet at the boom or contact the monthly co-ordinator.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Co-ordinator</b>	<b>Telephone</b>	<b>Time</b>
Sunday 27 <sup>th</sup> September	Clive Townsley	46617	7.00 a.m.
Sunday 1 <sup>st</sup> November	Clive Townsley	46617	7.00 a.m.

**MIDLANDS BRANCH**

OAZ Co-ordinator: Gavin Conway ☎ 054-24056  
 OAZ Council Member: Kevin Barry ☎ 054-27316  
 Club Co-ordinator: Bernard Beekes ☎ 052-6422

Day Outings

Gweru Contact Gavin ☎ 054-24666/24058. It is advisable to confirm with the organiser before each outing.

Sunday, 30<sup>th</sup> August 1998 ( Meet outside G & T Contracting, Second Street  
1<sup>st</sup> November 1998 ( at 7.45 for 8.00 a.m. departure

**Masvingo** Contact Lynne ☎ 039-63657 for details

**Kadoma** Contact Margaret ☎ 068-3644

Camping weekends Contact Bernard ☎ 052-6422 or Gavin Conway for further information.

2<sup>nd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> October 1998 – Nyororo Farm, Chatsworth (Wattled Cranes and longclaws)

20<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1998 – Central Estates (Southern Carmine Bee-eaters)

**BOTH OUTINGS TO BE CONFIRMED**

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**FROM THE PRESIDENT****IMPORTANT NOTICE****BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIP**

BY THE TIME YOU READ THIS ISSUE OF *THE BABBLER* YOU WILL ALL HAVE HAD A CHANCE TO:

- STUDY THE FACT PAPER SENT TO ALL MEMBERS
- ATTEND ONE OF THE MEETINGS WHICH HAVE BEEN HELD AT ALL BRANCHES TO DISCUSS THIS TOPIC

- SPEAK ABOUT YOUR FEELINGS WITH REGARD TO THE PROPOSED BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIP BY THE OAZ.

IF, HOWEVER, ANY OF YOU WERE UNABLE TO TAKE UP THE OPPORTUNITY WHEN THE PRESENTATIONS WERE GIVEN AND IF YOU OPPOSE THE ADVANCEMENT OF THE OAZ TO PARTNERSHIP STATUS WITHIN BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL PLEASE SUBMIT YOUR OBJECTIONS IN WRITING TO COUNCIL BEFORE 25TH OCTOBER 1998. REPLIES SHOULD BE SENT TO THE SECRETARY, OAZ, P O BOX CY 161, CAUSEWAY, HARARE.

Notes on the Conference of African Partners meeting of BirdLife International Hosted by the OAZ and held at Mazvikadei from 8<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> June 1998

The meeting was attended by 29 delegates from 16 African countries, plus support from Europe, mainly the UK (BLI and RSPB). Our delegates were Susan Childes and John Paxton. Conference organisation was done by Susan Childes and Dave and Ida Gray who all did a superb job. Susan undertook many days of pre-conference preparation and compilation of information packs for each delegate. Ida spent a good deal of time at Immigration HQ obtaining visas for delegates who would not otherwise have got them. As well as undertaking many other tasks, Dave Gray was responsible for organising the transfers from the Airport to Mazvikadei (delegates arrived on different flights at different times over a five day period). This job was complicated when the operator with whom we had contracted to do the transfers informed us the day before that "the money is not enough". I thank Tony Wood, Susan Childes and the Gray's son-in-law, Brian Hayes, for their trips moving the delegates out. We later had an excellent operator who provided the transport for the outing and to bring the delegates into town at the end. The mid-conference excursion was a great success. We took them first to Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary where the Mashonaland Branch provided a super champagne breakfast. There we did some birding with them and then went round to the other side to look for rhino, which obliged accordingly (we saw 7) and then to Bushman's Point for more birds, the paintings and snacks and drinks. It was obvious that the day was thoroughly enjoyed by one and all. Our heartfelt gratitude goes to Dave Gray, John Saunders and the Mashonaland Branch ladies who did such sterling work to make the breakfast so very enjoyable.

At the Conference, I gave a presentation on the OAZ as did the delegate from Burkina Faso on his organisation, Naturama, which was the other prospective Partner Designate. Afterwards both were approved for recommendation to the Global Council Meeting in October 1998. Other business included the adoption of plans and strategies for the African Programme 1998/9. Office bearers to represent Africa on the Global Council and to act as observers were elected. There were several presentations on topics such as the progress of the IBA programme, future international campaigns and possible future funding prospects for conservation work. Working groups on species and on Capacity Building and African Secretariat Location were set up. Secretarial Support throughout was very ably provided by the OAZ's own Vera Smith. It was a busy week but we had very positive feedback. The venue was excellent, good food and arrangements and the weather was superb throughout. Many useful new contacts were made, new friendships forged and old ones renewed. The meeting next year will be held in Burkina Faso. **John Paxton**

## REPORTS

### MASHONALAND BRANCH

#### DICHWE Lemon Forest – Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> May 1998

This turned out to be a well-supported outing, away from polluted Harare with 40 members attending, which included 8 members from Karoi and Dr Lewis from Chinhoyi. The first sign of activity in the treetops came from Purple-banded Sunbirds, feeding on the red flowers of the parasitic Wild Mistletoe (*Loranthus*). It turned out that the Purple-banded Sunbird seemed to be the most prevalent of the 4 species of sunbird recorded, the other 3 being Variable Sunbird, White-bellied Sunbird and Scarlet-chested Sunbird. Walking along the forest fringe, a group of 6 Trumpeter Hornbills

were encountered, as well as Black-collared Barbets emitting their usual chorus.

"Enchanting" is the word to describe Dichwe, as wild lemon trees are interspersed throughout the indigenous bush. Each tree seen was healthy, producing a ripe crop of fine lemons. It has to be noted that during lulls in birding, several butterflies were seen, surprisingly, especially for this time of the year. A new species for me which is unique to Dichwe was recorded, namely the "Eastern Palm Forester". Several parts of the forest were inaccessible, a thorny prospect which Richard Dennison and Geoff Lowe soon discovered. They were however rewarded with the familiar chatter of the Black-throated Wattle-eye. Stinging nettles were also an uncomfortable experience for the brave few wearing shorts. In conclusion 58 species were seen, specials recorded were Jacko's sighting of a pair of African Crowned Eagles displaying in mid air and 3 Black Storks. Indeed a pleasant outing to be repeated more often. **Richard and Sue Bell**

Dr Colin Saunders – Thursday, 18<sup>th</sup> June 1998

We were treated to a most enjoyable and interesting talk about human characters in the world of birds. Dr Saunders started by giving us his personal background and then went on to tell us about those well-known birdy people who have made names for themselves and contributed tremendously to bird conservation and scientific research over the years. From Captain Cecil D Priest, famous for his publication, *The Birds of Southern Rhodesia*, in four volumes (generally known as *Priest's*). We learned about other ornithologists and naturalists, some of whom are well-known to us, others not so well. He mentioned Darrell Plowes who, apart from being an excellent ornithologist, is a foremost botanist being an international expert on the *Stapeliads*. Other characters of note were Dr Reay H N Smithers, originally an entomologist, but latterly who earned a reputation as a source of good scientific and systematic ornithology. Dr Saunders informed us that he considers our editor of *Honeyguide*, Michael Stuart Irwin, to be one of the most enlightened ecologists he has ever met, and that he was currently engaged in a campaign to establish the Michael Irwin Ornithology Research Trust Fund which would hopefully be financed by the sale of some of the magnificent collection of antiquarian bird books which Michael had donated to the National Museums and Monuments some years ago. Other "birdy bods" talked about were Terence Coffin-Grey (an outstanding taxidermist), Ronnie Rankin (a tobacco farmer and vigorous bird man), David Reid-Henry (one of the greatest bird artists of all time), Cyril Fisher (a highly energetic Land Development Officer), Richard Brooke and Carl Vernon (both of whom built up excellent reputations and much new knowledge in South Africa after having left Zimbabwe), Dr Dick Harwin (co-author with Alec and Cecilia Manson and Peter Mwadziwana of the *Honeyguide* edition on the *Birds of the Vumba*), Alex Masterson (a former President of the Association), Des Jackson (an international expert on nightjars), Graeme Arnott (one of southern Africa's leading wildlife artists), Peter Ginn (the principal editor of the monumental *Complete Book of Southern African Birds*), Dr Peter Mundy (Principal Ornithologist with National Parks and a vulture specialist), not to mention Derek Solomon, Dr Kit Hustler, Clive Stockil and Gary Douglas (all involved in the safari business, specialising in birding tours), and so many other people who have distinguished themselves in the field of ornithology in this country. Thank you very much, Colin, for an entertaining and enlightening evening. **Editor**

Lowdale farm – Saturday, 20<sup>th</sup> June 1998

25 enthusiastic "birders" set forth on a warm, June afternoon – not a very good time for seeing lots of birds. However, the two groups were fairly quickly rewarded by several sightings of groups of Magpie Mannikins. The viewing improved as the afternoon wore on; Dave Gray wasn't sure if he saw a trillion of "toppies" or a billion of "Dark-capped Bulbuls", but there were certainly plenty. A bird group included Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird, African Yellow White-eye and Thick-billed Weaver. A very friendly Brown-hooded Kingfisher sat on a low branch and watched us file past in very close proximity – he obviously hadn't seen many humans before. The other group saw a Gabar Goshawk with a Red-billed Quelea in its beak – there were live ones around as well. The count was 34 at tea, but 3 more were added before we left, one being a single Green Wood-hoopoe – we looked in vain for any companions. **Barbara Silk**

Duncan Parkes – Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> July 1998

The 30 or so members who attended the talk were confronted by an array of nests and challenged to say who they originally belonged to – a novel way to begin a talk! When Duncan came to tell us the answers, the first nest (and one other) turned out to belong to a mouse! Among the others were Jameson's Firefinch, Green-winged Pytilia and Red-billed Firefinch, Common Waxbill and Blue Waxbill, Bronze Mannikin, Southern Red Bishop and Southern Masked-weaver nests. Some had been taken over when the builder had moved out. Duncan gave details of where each was found, in particular, how high above the ground and the vegetation, and the different materials used in nest-building, depending on where the nest was found. Duncan's knowledge and interest in the nesting habits of birds comes from his hobby of egg-collecting. I hadn't given a lot of thought to egg-collecting before, beyond indignation at those who have put their own interests before those of the birds they robbed, but many people feel that it is wrong and unnecessary and shouldn't be allowed. I am sure that no one who attended the meeting came away still thinking that. Duncan explained the scientific value of careful and scrupulous collecting. Where possible, entire clutches of eggs are removed; firstly, a bird that loses a whole clutch will lay again in a short while, thus not suffering any detriment and, secondly, taking the whole clutch and compiling statistics of all the eggs in it mitigates against misleading information being held as to the usual size of the eggs laid by a particular species. The collector also makes careful notes about the find; location, date, environment, etc. Data is also obtained about birds which parasitize other birds' nests, including how parasitic birds of the same species lay differently coloured eggs, depending on the host bird they victimise. There is also variety in the colour of eggs laid by different birds of the same species, although a particular bird always lays eggs of the same colour. This information is invaluable to scientists in understanding birds and their requirements if they are to continue breeding successfully. It was obvious from Duncan's talk that egg-collecting is a demanding hobby which requires a lot of hard work and a love of birds. If we are lucky to have Duncan back for another talk, I, for one, won't miss it! Thank you, Duncan. Come again. **Jenny Carter**

**EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB**MURAHWA'S HILL, MUTARE – Saturday, 13<sup>th</sup> June 1998

A small group of 6 stalwarts, plus Benjy, another ornithological prodigy from the Holland family, visited this local National Trust Reserve. I am always struck by the devastation caused to this lovely kopje by the drought; whole areas now have a very different aspect from when I first became familiar with it in 1991. We opted for the Bird Bath route first which produced Red-throated Twinspot, Grey-backed Camaroptera and the usual Terrestrial Brownbulb, Yellow-bellied Greenbulb and Dark-capped Bulbul and Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird. Then, on to the Eastern Ridge path to the summit, through deep shadow out into glorious sunshine. Rex caught up with us at this point and brought news of good sightings from the car park – Bearded Scrub-robin for example and Collared Sunbird were welcome as we rarely see them in the garden. As the path became steeper, one group tailed off claiming a prior engagement but reported later some good sightings from the car park. Another short stage and Rex too had to return, leaving Joan, Martin and myself as the summit assault party. In the mountain Acacia, the only bird seen was a putative (means I think it may have been) Shikra. The summit itself produced Red-winged Starlings, White-necked Ravens and Pied Crows. The less said about the precipitous, almost pathless, almost birdless descent the better. But it was a lovely afternoon out and we had about 40 species when all reports were in. I must admit the most exciting birds were reported by those who returned early. They saw some real forest species like Dark-backed Weaver, Yellow-throated Woodland-warbler, Grey Tit-flycatcher and Cape Batis. **Ken Dixon**

Cecil Kop MUTARE Outdoor Meeting led by Derek Solomon – Sunday, 5<sup>th</sup> July 1998

About 30 of us spent a most interesting, even exciting day in the company of Derek Solomon and his On Safari International members. We met at 10.30 for the serious business of identifying Little Brown Jobs and other birds which became LBJs in winter. Derek led us through field descriptions in the most popular guides, pointing out the most helpful diagnostic features of these difficult species. Lunch for most of us consisted of a delicious roast beef buffet laid on by the

Kiosk staff and a relaxed chat with other birders from all over the province punctuated by lots of "Oh, look at that" as birds flew into and out of the surrounding trees and bushes. In the afternoon, the Wildlife Society kindly lent us Nesbitt and Farai to lead us on a walk inside the Game Park in search of some of the species we had been discussing earlier. One of these turned out to be a VLGJ (very large grey job), namely an elephant which required the letting off of a couple of magazines before it could be persuaded that it was not a welcome member of our party. In comparison to this, even the sighting of African Goshawk and Augur Buzzard was pretty tame. A lovely walk though, especially the stroll along Bushbuck Ridge with its excellent views. Thanks to all who participated and to Derek and Sarah whose visit helped us to raise much-needed funds for both the Wildlife Society and the Bird Club. **Ken Dixon.**

Thomson's Vlei MUTARE – Saturday, 11<sup>th</sup> July 1998

Only 6 days later we were back in the Game Park, but this time in the usually jumbo-free area. There were only 5 of us in Nesbitt's party, perhaps the perfect size for such a walk but what a shame that more didn't take up this rare opportunity to walk in the lovely park. Much of our time was spent on the forest fringes where we concentrated our attention on the numerous small birds foraging among the dry leaves. There were Green-winged Pytilia, twinspots, mannikins, Pin-tailed Whydahs and waxbills galore. In the interior were Terrestrial Brownbul and a bit higher up Yellow-bellied Greenbuls. On the smaller trees were lots of Variable Sunbirds, Amethyst Sunbirds, Scarlet-chested Sunbirds and Miombo Double-collared Sunbirds. Of the less common species it is worth mentioning the beautiful Grey Waxbills and Grey Tit-flycatchers, Southern Black Flycatchers and African Dusky Flycatchers. The only bird of prey seen was a Lizard Buzzard. A total of 46 species was recorded. Of the park's mammals we saw Giraffe, Nyala, Bushbuck, Eland and Baboon. How lucky we are to have such a facility on the doorstep. **Ken Dixon**

BirdLife International presentation – Friday 24<sup>th</sup> July 1998

A very well attended meeting was held at the Mutare Club for the presentation about BirdLife International which the OAZ is considering affiliation. Thanks to the team from Harare (Dave Gray and John Saunders), Darrell Plowes (last minute loan of a projector) and Jane (who organised the comfortable venue). **Tony Curtis**

General meeting – Friday 24<sup>th</sup> July 1998

We took advantage of the BirdLife International presentation to hold a brief general meeting at which a new committee was elected. You may now direct your bouquets and brickbats at:

***WJ (Bill) Chadder (Chairman), Ken Dixon (Secretary), Tony Curtis (Treasurer), Jane Clegg and Bridget Holland.*** **Tony Curtis**

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**Karoi Bird Club**

Rydings School Interpretive Centre

Our walks on the first Saturday of the month continued, very chilly in June and July around the dam and for the most part quite quiet with no unusual sightings from the norm.

Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> May 1998 – DICHWE Lemon Forest

We spent a most enjoyable day here, together with members of the Mashonaland Branch. We met at the Twin River Inn at 6.00 a.m. and had a pleasant drive, turning off onto the Mhangura Road from the main Chinhoyi/Karoi Road. A few km down the road we spotted a couple of Saddle-billed Storks and the vehicle behind us had a view of a pair of Wattled Cranes. We arrived at the forest at about the same time as the Harare members, parked under the many *Acacia* trees, split up into groups and took our walk. A fascinating spot, where a spring, the start of a river is surrounded with indigenous forest trees and all these rough-skinned lemons growing in amongst them – full of fruit. Just don't try them if you don't wish to have a puckered mouth for the next two hours! There were birds to see, although we were told not as many as at other times. For us the Purple-banded Sunbird was good to see – we don't get him in Karoi – and there were many here. We had a really good view of an African Crowned Eagle at its nest site in a very tall tree. We returned to our vehicles and had a late brunch and enjoyed the opportunity to speak with Harare members. **Merle Mitchell**

**MIDLANDS BRANCH**

*Editor's note: I have received two reports about the trip to Nata Sanctuary, both worth printing. The second, excellent report covers the trip in full as well as the Conway's visit on to other parts of Botswana and Hwange National Park but because of limitations of space I have had to keep it for the next issue of Babbler.*

Visit to Nata Sanctuary, Botswana – April 1998

OAZ members from Midlands (8), Matabeleland (9) and Mashonaland (3) Branches were joined by 5 Botswana birders for this outing. The meeting place was at the Marango Hotel, Francistown before driving the 170 km to the Sanctuary Campsite where we had three days of great birding. To some, it was a familiar place; to others all was new and exciting. Vast grassland plains, interspersed with dried pans, or water as far as the eye could see. We had come to see flamingos and pelicans and we weren't disappointed, they flew, glided, landed, swam and fed while we watched enthralled by their stately movements. Other birds of the water included: herons, African Spoonbills, Saddle-billed Storks, Yellow-billed Stork and Marabou Stork, Egyptian Goose, Blacksmith Lapwing and Kittlitz's Plovers, Caspian Terns and African Sacred Ibis. In the grassland we saw a pair of Kori Bustard, Northern Black Korhaan, Double-banded Courser, sandgrouse, larks, cisticolas and Grey Crowned Crane. Near the campsite Magpie Shrike, African Red-eyed Bulbul, Cape Crows, hornbills, Tawny Eagle, Greater Kestrel, francolins, doves and scrub-robin were seen and heard, as well as bee-eaters and owls. Bateleurs, Black-chested Snake-eagles and vultures were also seen. A few were lucky enough to see the Eurasian Curlew and Cape Shoveler but most of us looked in vain. In all, 130 birds were counted in the 3 days, despite the dust (no wellies were needed this time) and being stuck in soft sand (4 x 4 vehicles!). We are all keen to be part of the next visit. Our thanks to Julia Duprée for organising the trip.

**Wendy Gilmour**

June camping weekend at WHITEWATERS DAM

The weather was very cold and a bitterly cold "sparrows" boat trip with frozen boat seats did NOT produce our African Finfoot!! Thanks to the members who attended. A good few days birding were had which included watching the Black Stork eggs hatching over two days. A trip to Fort Gibbs was also enjoyed. Total species 97. **Gavin Conway**

Day trip to WHITEWATERS DAM – 12<sup>th</sup> July 1998

This coincided with a Boat Club meeting so we did not have a lot of birding time. However, it was quite productive considering the cold weather. Nothing special was seen – 58 species were logged on the dam and around the surrounding Dwalas. We also checked on our local Black Storks – see report on storks. A big welcome to a new member – Donna Le Brun. **Gavin Conway**

Camping at Kadoma – July

Thanks to Margaret Parrock who organised this trip and to the Jelliman's whose camp was used. The weather was bitterly cold and overcast which made birding difficult. The ice had to be brushed off the birds before a positive identification could be made!! This is a definite venue to be re-visited in the summer. Only ± 50 birds seen. **Gavin Conway**

Sorry about the lack of species – all entered on our home computer which is on the blink.

BirdLife International presentation

Unfortunately, due to the vast area we cover as a Club, we only had 8 members attend. Thanks to Dave and Ida Gray for this interesting presentation and to attending members.

**MATABELELAND***From the Chairman*

As our dry and rather mild winter draws to a close, avifauna continues to arouse interest with a number of unusual records. In mid-June a Narina Trogon was seen in the Henderson's garden in HILLSIDE, BULAWAYO obviously equating their lush green property with more tropical conditions. Out at AISLEBY, waterfowl have begun to concentrate with numbers of Egyptian Goose rising and a total of 25 Maccua Duck seen in July. On the Ibis Dam, egrets, African Sacred Ibis, Grey Crowned Crane and Reed Cormorant are roosting in considerable numbers and it is particularly rewarding being able to perch on the Hide and watch birds fly in to roost. Finally, a plea for more support. Outings to Wabai and the Matopos produced some excellent birding but it's a pity so few were present to appreciate this. Please do join us. **Martin Smith**



Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> June 1998 – MATOPOS southwest

This was a delightful outing to an attractive part of the Matopos, entering the Hills from the west along the Ravenswood Road. This was essentially a Verreaux's Eagle Survey outing with checks on 3 nests, all either in or close to Communal Land. The first territory showed a few signs of activity with a number of fresh mutes but no adults to be seen. Moving on into Communal Land the scenery became more impressive with a number of large whale-back kopjies and valleys that had traces of water. The next site was positioned on the edge of Fumukwe and we were able to see a parent feeding a downy chick. An extremely inquisitive pair of Black Storks who seemed to have designs on her nest then disturbed the parent. The final site was accessed between a pair of large kopjies and again signs of breeding were in progress with an adult sitting on the nest. Whilst eating our lunch a pair of Lanner Falcons caught theirs, with an exhilarating stoop to catch a small bird in flight. The pair then circled back to the kopjie top with one partner calling vigorously – perhaps more signs of breeding. After lunch we drove through the Khumalo West Communal Lands past Njelele and, at a muddy seep, managed to find an Augur Buzzard consuming a frog. Finally, we made our way back past an active pair on the La Concorde Road to complete an enjoyable raptor-filled day. **Martin Smith**

AISLEBY Notes

Recently, Aisleby has produced a number of interesting sightings. Water has been released from the Upper UMGUSA exposing a muddy shoreline with substantial "goodies" for waders. On 14<sup>th</sup> June, mild weather encouraged plenty of insects to take to the air attracting a mixed flock of swallows to the Ibis Dam. A few Barn Swallows, Wire-tailed Swallows and Lesser Striped Swallows were seen in the company of 15-20 Pearl-breasted Swallows, which conveniently perched on a dead tree in front of the Hide. A small number of Brown-throated Martin and 2 species of swift were also present adding to the confusion caused by this considerable variety of aerial feeders. A visit on 28<sup>th</sup> June produced some 50 Three-banded Plovers and 47 Kittlitz's Plovers foraging close to the Club. At the top end of the Dam, a pair of Hadedda Ibis was seen, glossy wings reflecting the afternoon light. On the water, numbers of ducks had increased substantially with a small party of Maccua Duck visible through the telescope. Moving on to the lands, plenty of birds were found – Grey Crowned Crane numbers had increased to 129 with only one first year bird present. 2 different species of kestrel were seen, an immature Rock Kestrel on a tree in the centre of the lands and a Greater Kestrel which perched close to us enabling good views through the telescope. Driving back to Ibis Dam produced a considerable number of Fork-tailed Drongos, with over 30 being spread out along a kilometre section of fencing. Aisleby continues to yield some excellent sightings! **Martin Smith**

TAIL FEATHERSRecent sightings of note in BULAWAYO

8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> November 1997 – an African Pitta was sighted at Garden Park in Bulawayo by Audrey Edington and Andy Hope who had good views of the bird. This report has taken so long to arrive in print that it's almost time to look for a return sighting!

Sunday, 14<sup>th</sup> June 1998 – a Narina Trogon was seen by Keith and Colleen Henderson at the property in Kildare Road, Hillside. **Martin Smith**

Birding Holiday at Eastern Highlands – April/May 1998

Usually when I went home I would just sit with relatives but this time it was also a birding visit. On my first day, with the help of Abasi Jana, whilst sitting at his cottage, we identified a Red-necked Spurfiowl which I thought was a Swainson's Spurfiowl. A harsh call was heard high above us which Abasi said came from an African Crowned Eagle hunting monkeys. The monkeys were now making a noise, alarming others in the vicinity. I was lucky enough to see a Brown Snake-eagle catching a snake. We also heard the call of a Gorgeous Bush-shrike although we did not see it as it was in thick bush. The following day I went with Coster Matora, a promising young birdwatcher, to Nyamukomba and Nyanjeri. Birds seen on this visit included Mountain Wagtail, Square-tailed Drongo, Dark-backed Weaver, Red-backed Mannikin, Red-winged Warbler, Pale Flycatcher and Ashy Flycatcher. On our way back, Green Twinspot and Red-throated Twinspot called constantly, while several Burchell's Coucals were hopping from bush to bush. At Aberfoyle Golf Course we identified Tambourine Dove and Lemon Dove, Speckled Pigeon, Olive Thrush, Red-headed Quelea<sup>1</sup>,

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<sup>1</sup> Red-billed Quelea?

Collared Sunbird, Eastern Saw-wing, Narina Trogon and, after sitting for the whole day waiting, we finally saw a Palm-nut Vulture. Other sightings were Yellow-mantled Widowbird, Singing Cisticola, Wattled Starling, African Firefinch, Blue-spotted Wood-dove and Violet-eared Waxbill. Thanks to those preserving the forest which is wonderful. **Saul Mabachi, Harare (Jnr. Member)**

#### Birding in GORONGOSA

Over the first weekend in May, a group from the Natural History Society of Mutare visited the Gorongosa National Park in Mozambique. Forming the southern most part of the Great Rift Valley of East Africa, the Urema Trough is a valley 35-40 km wide which was so rich in game that it became natural to declare it a reserve in the 1920s. The borders of the National Park were formalised in the '60s and it flourished as a sanctuary until the civil war heated up in the late 70s. Game stocks are now decimated and about 3-6% of their original numbers. However, the vegetation looks in fine condition and bird life was prolific. There are diverse habitats ranging from forest to flood plain and we were able to record, over the 2 days, 105 species. In the skies, Bateleurs abound. At one point a loud cry heralded the passing through of a just-off-mature female bird. Three other female Bateleur escorted her through parcelled out patches of sky known only to these eagles. White-headed Vulture and White-backed Vulture were seen as well as African Fish-eagle and Brown Snake-eagles. Only 2 owls were heard, the African Scops-owl and Barn Owl. Down at the Pungwe River, near Chitengo Camp, were 4 African Skimmers, but the river was shallow and, if they nest there, they could be vulnerable to nest disturbance. The commonest hornbill by far was the African Grey Hornbill which we saw in large flocks (up to 20), but we also recorded Southern Ground-hornbill and Trumpeter Hornbill. The beautiful, tall Ilala palms gave only the chosen few a Collared Palm-thrush. We could claim many species for the forest patches but nothing too exceptional, and our best bird was reserved for the actual campsite where we recorded a pair of Black-and-white Flycatchers. The flood plains dotted with palms and fever trees gave us the most birds and we listed 5 species of plover including the Senegal Lapwing, Long-toed Lapwing and Wattled Lapwing. Great Egret, Goliath Heron, Grey Heron, Yellow-billed Egret and Cattle Egret and many Squacco Herons were seen. Also present were African Spoonbills, Pink-backed Pelicans, Grey Crowned Cranes, Black-winged Stilts, African Openbills, Woolly-necked Storks and Marabou Storks. The park is very beautiful and as long as one stays on well-used routes, never off the track, visitors should be safe.

**Jane Clegg, Mutare**

#### White Storks in the Borrowdale Vlei HARARE, 24<sup>th</sup> May 1998

At 5.00 p.m. on the right-hand side of the Teviotdale Road in the Borrowdale Vlei, I saw 11 White Storks, together with 3 Black-headed Herons feeding in burnt grass. They were unperturbed with the traffic in close proximity. **Richard Bell**

#### Slaty Egret, Ume River, KARIBA – June 1998

I was fortunate to have spent several days in June on a cruiser on Lake Kariba. For two of the nights of our stay we were moored in an area of the Ume River, east of the BRAVO Anti-poaching camp. The river takes a long bend at this point and a low, sand-bank type of island has been formed which the birds seem to flock to. The fishing is also very good here, so thy husband was happy whilst I was able to do my thing – Birdwatch! In this area, there were many of the usual birds which one would expect to see, Egyptian Goose and Spur-winged Goose, Blacksmith Lapwings, kingfishers, starlings, etc. but imagine my delight when I realised that I was looking at a Slaty Egret (*Egretta vinaceigula*). It was very distinctly grey with its rufous throat and pale patch on the throat below the eye visible. I was able to watch this bird for 2 days (p.m. on the 18<sup>th</sup>, all day on the 19<sup>th</sup> and a.m. on the 20<sup>th</sup> June) and also heard it call. My total count for this trip was 73 species. The wind was cold but the days sunny. **Natalie Adamson**

#### Mallard Duck at AISLEBY

On Sunday, 5<sup>th</sup> July 1998, 2 Mallard drakes were sighted by myself and Margaret Stone on the Ibis Dam at Aisleby Farm. The drakes were swimming amongst 11 Red-billed Teal and other waterfowl at the time of my sighting and they subsequently paddled over to a low bank where, together with some teal, they preened themselves in the sunlight. Apparently there was another sighting of Mallard some 4 years ago by Tim English on the Lower HILLSIDE Dam in BULAWAYO but I do not know of any other sightings in and around Bulawayo although of course there may have been some over the years. **W R L Stuttford, Matabeleland Branch**

Green-backed Woodpecker in MUTARE

Earlier this year while casually surveying the garden, composed mainly of miombo woodland which slopes away to the dense bush separating us from the Cecil Kop Game Park, I was delighted to see a Striped Kingfisher, a species new to the garden. However, a greater surprise awaited; low on the trunk of a nearby Mnondo was a small woodpecker, the size of a Cardinal but with a spotted breast, black fore-crown spotted with white and bright red hind-crown, the back was mostly obscured but the face had no malar stripe and was certainly not white. In the top of the same tree, a similar bird was working its way busily through the leafy canopy. All that could be clearly seen of the second bird was, once again, a bright red hind-crown. Unfortunately, both birds then flew away towards Mnondo on the edge of the dense bushy area and could not be found. It seems very probable that both birds were Green-backed Woodpecker, a species relatively common in the Aberfoyle Forest and also in the Chirinda Forest but we have never recorded it in the environs of Mutare. Both male and female were seen again in my garden on 9<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> July 1998 and I believe that subsequently this species was seen by an On Safari International group at Seldomseen, VUMBA. **Ken Dixon**

NOTICEBOARDOAZ Birdwatch – Saturday and Sunday, 24<sup>th</sup>/25<sup>th</sup> October 1998

Time to organise your teams. Results must be entered onto an Atlas card – these are available from Di Rushforth, 5 Colenbrander Road, Milton Park, Harare or Dave Gray, 14 Fisher Avenue, Rolf Valley, Borrowdale. Send a stamped, self-addressed envelope (long one to take an A4 sheet folded). Rules: teams can comprise any number provided that 2 are members of the OAZ. Birds seen or heard must be identified by at least 2 members of the team. Results should be for the best 24-hour period over the 2 days. Area of the site must not exceed a 50 km radius. Atlas cards to be sent to Mrs J Williams, 14 Harare Drive, Greystone Park, Harare.

OAZ Bird Slides

Some years ago, Mobil Oil, together with Peter Ginn, sponsored a series of bird slides. One of the sets is held by the EDBC, but it appears that there may be other sets held by members. If you do happen to have such slides or know who has please contact a member of the Mashonaland Branch committee. Failing the successful location of the slides and recognising the need for the Association to hold such material, would any member be prepared to donate or loan (for copying) suitable bird slides so that a collection can be produced for the OAZ. The Mashonaland Branch is embarking on an education project in the near future. **Editor**

Recent sightings in the Midlands area

A small flock of Yellow-billed Storks was seen on a dam in the GWERU area feeding on Barbel. 5 Red-billed Oxpeckers seen on cattle near Palwan (Ngezi) dam near Zvishavane. Yellow-billed Kite – Gweru City centre 30<sup>th</sup> July. Grey-headed Parrot 20 km east of Gweru in May.

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**BOOKING SLIP FOR MASHONALAND BRANCH ANNUAL BREAKFAST  
SUNDAY, 11<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 1998**

*The price for the breakfast, inclusive of tea/coffee is \$25 per person (payable on the day). Please bring your own chair, cutlery, plate and teacup/mug.*

*Please return this slip to Dave and Ida Gray, 14 Fisher Avenue, Borrowdale before 30 September 1998.*

NAME	No. PERSONS ATTENDING
ADDRESS	
TELEPHONE	