

# BABBLER

## ORNITHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION OF ZIMBABWE

### A PARTNER DESIGNATE OF BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL

ISSUE #28 – JANUARY/FEBRUARY 1999

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#### **COMMITTEES**

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Dave Gray 885406  
Ida Gray 885406  
Pat Saunders 490167  
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Editors: Di Rushforth 741765

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#### **FROM THE PRESIDENT**

##### BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIP

I am pleased to announce that the OAZ has been approved as a Partner Designate of BirdLife International. The news was recently received by me via e-mail from Dr Michael Rands, Director and Chief Executive of BirdLife International, and reads as follows:

“It is with great pleasure that I write to confirm that the Council of BirdLife International has approved the recommendation from the Council for the African Partnership that the Ornithological Association of Zimbabwe should become a Partner Designate.

It is with great excitement that we welcome the Ornithological Association of Zimbabwe into the Partnership. It has been a pleasure working with you as a Representative for Zimbabwe and I look forward to increased collaboration on a whole range of issues important for bird conservation.” **John Paxton**

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#### **ACTIVITIES**

##### **MASHONALAND BRANCH**

##### Regular outings

1. Mukuvisi Woodlands: Sundays 3 January and 7 February 1999. Meet at Paget Road entrance at 6.30 a.m. There will be a vehicle guard in attendance.
2. Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary: Sundays 10 January and 14 February 1999. 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. 23 January 1999: Crest Breeders, Simon Mazorodze Road. Meet at 2.30 p.m. at the turnoff to the left, just past the orange/chicken kiosk – approx. 13 km from GPO. Bring chairs

and refreshments. For security reasons, we have been requested to provide details of names of people attending as well as vehicle registration numbers. PLEASE therefore telephone your intention to attend to either Dave Gray on tel: 885406 or Di Rushforth on tel: 741765 by no later than 16 January 1999.

2. 20 February 1999: Teviotdale Riding School. Meet in the car park of Vainona High School, Alpes Road for departure at 2.30 p.m.

#### Sunday Outings

1. 31 January 1999: Alex Masterson's annual vlei walk. Meet on the corner of Princess Margaret Road and Harare Drive, Marlborough at 6.30 a.m. Be prepared for wet feet!
2. 28 February 1999: New Retreat Farm, Beatrice. Mr and Mrs Searson. Meet for departure at 7.00 a.m. at Harare South Country Club, Beatrice Road. The farm is about 52 km from Harare. Bring chairs and refreshments.

#### Thursday Evenings

1. 21 January 1999: Branch AGM. Reports will be given by the Mashonaland Branch Chairman and the co-ordinators of the Mukuvisi Woodland and Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary. This year, it is planned to have a fish 'n chips supper and make a social evening of it. Cost will be \$30 each, payable in advance. Please complete the tear-off slip included.  
Certain members of the committee will not be standing for re-election in 1999 and new volunteers are needed. Duties are not onerous and meetings are held bi-monthly. Please consider giving a little bit of your time. A nomination form is available with of this issue.
2. 18 February 1999: Jacko Williams has agreed to tell us all about her recent trip to Ecuador and the Galapagos Islands.

**Venue for both evenings: Alexandra Sports Club, Black & White Room (downstairs) 6.00 for 6.30 p.m. A cash bar will be available. A charge of \$5 is payable at the door.**

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### **MATABELELAND BRANCH**

#### **Evening Meetings**

Friday 5 February 1999 – Matabeleland Branch AGM – this will take place at 3A Holdengarde Avenue, Hillside at 8.00 p.m. and will be preceded by a braai and social from 6.00 p.m. onwards. We will supply fires and punch, please bring your own food and chairs.

#### **Outings**

Sunday 17 January 1999 – Aisleby Waterfowl Count – this survey is now in its seventh year and data is beginning to show a number of trends, please do come and support us. Meet at the Boom at 7.30 a.m. or contact the Chairman for details.

Sunday 24 January 1999 – Fort Rixon Dam Waterfowl Count – this is an interesting area and worth travelling to during the rainy season with the possibility of some worthwhile sightings on route. This month, we are intending to camp overnight and explore a little more of this interesting area. Contact Penny Feather for more details. Tel: 44034.

Sunday 31 January 1999 – Tshabalala Game Sanctuary – this used to be a regular venue for the Club with a monthly checklist. It is a particularly rewarding area of *Acacia* bush which has its own typical avifauna. We are catering for both the early risers and those who prefer a sedate exit from bed on Sunday mornings. Meet at the Entrance Gate at either 6.00 a.m. or 8.00 a.m. bringing morning tea.

Friday 19 to Sunday 21 February 1999 – Away weekend – we have been invited to Chipizi Ranch in the West Nicholson area to draw up a checklist. Some accommodation is available in chalets but most will have to camp. All interested should contact Penny Feather, Tel: 44034.

Friday 5 to Sunday 7 March 1999 – **National AGM at Maleme Rest Camp**

#### **Aisleby**

Sunday 26 February 1999 – this month, we are intending to hold a mini Birdwatch competition within the Aisleby complex. This will be from 7.00 a.m. to 1.00 p.m. and will finish with a braai at the Yacht Club with a prize being awarded to the winning team. It may well be possible to score over 200 with a little bit of effort! Meet at the Boom at 7.00 a.m. or contact the Chairman for details.

**EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB**

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

**Outings**

<u>Saturday 9 January 1999</u>	Premier Estate	2.00 p.m.
<u>Sunday 31 January 1999</u>	Rusape	6.00 a.m. (Packed lunch)
<u>Saturday 13 February 1999</u>	Bvumba (Seldomseen)	2.00 p.m.
<u>Sunday 28 February 1999</u>	Stapleford	6.00 a.m. to 12 noon

We leave from 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.

**Garden Bird Survey**

According to my calculations, our 12 months of study are complete and the findings shouldn't take long in appearing. Please make sure you send in your completed lists to Jane Clegg for entering. We thank you for your keen participation in this study. BUT DON'T STOP KEEPING THOSE RECORDS! If you need species lists, I have hundreds at Z\$1.00 each which works out at about 2 pence if you think in Sterling! Ken Dixon

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**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 6 February 1999 6.00 a.m.

Other outings for January and February 1999 to be arranged.

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**MIDLANDS BRANCH**

Co-ordinator: Gavin Conway ☎ 054-24058 (home) 24666 (work)

**Day Outings**

**Gweru** Contact Gavin ☎ 054-24666/24058. No plans have yet been made for 1999. Please contact Gavin nearer the time.

**Masvingo** Contact Lynne ☎ 039-63657

**Kadoma** Contact Margaret ☎ 068-3644

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**REPORTS****MASHONALAND BRANCH**

Visit to Mbizi Game Park, HARARE Sunday 20 September 1998

We were a group of about 25 who entered into Mbizi Game Park to carry out the first bird count of the area. The morning was cool to begin with but got rather hotter later on and some of the ladies really felt fatigued after the walk through the dry, dusty game area. A total of 98 species were identified and it is hoped that once counts have been done in the hot, wet season and the cool, dry season the numbers will increase thus making the area a desired destination for birding visitors. Highlights seen were; Purple Heron, African Black Duck, Red-chested Cuckoo (not yet calling), Mocking Cliff-chat, White-throated Robin-chat, Chestnut-vented Tit-babbler, Orange-breasted Bush-shrike and Grey-headed Bush-shrike, Violet-eared Waxbill and Golden-breasted Bunting. The woodland adjacent to the picnic site yielded most of the species seen or heard but in the time available we were not able to cover the whole of the game area. Breeding birds seen were Streaky-headed Seedeater, Red-headed Weaver and Golden-tailed Woodpecker. Our grateful thanks go to Mervyn Senior for allowing us free access onto his property. **Editor**

HARARE BOTANIC GARDENS – Saturday 26 September 1998

On a hot, still afternoon, nine of us – five OAZ members and four visitors from the USA, Holland and South Africa gathered at the Botanic Gardens for a walk under the leadership of Pat Saunders. We began and finished at the lake where the Southern Masked-weavers were very busy

building and noted, among others, African Jacana, Common Moorhen, Black Crake and White-breasted Cormorant. There was also a Kurrichane Thrush with badly deformed legs lurking in the undergrowth. Walking through the gardens we came across a very large tree where many different birds – bulbuls, starlings, White-bellied Sunbirds, Common Waxbills, etc. were busy feeding on the flowers. It was also interesting to note how many types of birds were attracted by two *Combretum molle* in flower – a good shrub for birders with large gardens. A woodpecker gave us some thought but we finally decided on a female Cardinal Woodpecker. Altogether 30 birds were recorded and a pleasant walk was enjoyed by all. **Bette Riddle/Pat O'Neill**

Rolf Chenaux-Repond – Thursday 15 October 1998

Rolf's reputation as a fine speaker and photographer filled the Sable Room at Alexandra Sports Club with about 34 members, who were entertained with eloquent commentary and superb slides of wild life places ranging from Kenya to Switzerland and back to Africa via Mozambique and Zimbabwe. His slides also ranged from birds and animals, flowers and trees, to fruit bats in his garden. The presentation was notable for its contrasts, with thought given to cooling off the audience on a warm, October evening with snow scenes as a starter, while Rolf's evident enthusiasm for nature in all its forms infected his audience. Fifteen years ago he visited Kenya with the bird club: amongst others, he took slides of Foster's Beach, south of Mombassa, the Rift Valley, Lesser Flamingos on Lake Naivasha and D' Arnaud's Barbet in the geysers there. In Samburu, Lesser Grey Shrike, Reticulated and Grevy's Giraffe and Oryx were photographed. One May, he visited an education centre in Switzerland (a sort of Swiss equivalent of Rifa Camp), and saw Mute Swans and Chamoix. The building was originally constructed as a private villa by an Englishman on a superb site near a glacier. Swiss slides showed us Alpine flowers, Golden Eagle and Bearded Vulture and Beizona in the south.

Then the slides swung back to Africa, to a bundu camp at Mana Pools, Chimanimani and some huge yellow Fever Trees on the Masapas Ranch in the Sabi where the African Pygmy-goose breed in the pans. Then we were taken to Mozambique to the Gossamer Falls, where, despite the amazing steepness of the terrain, elephants had made paths to collect fruit. Towards the end of his talk, Rolf mentioned that fifteen years ago there were plenty of rhino in the Valley; here a Crested Guineafowl was shown, together with the "inverted chandelier" of *Kigelia* flowers. Then we saw a picture of Peter Steyn holding a Blue Swallow's egg; this was the first time it had been seen in Zimbabwe. Thanks to Rolf for an evening with a difference! **Colette Wiles**

MARLBOROUGH Sewage Works – Saturday 17 October 1998

On a warm but blustery afternoon, 17 members and 2 visiting Falcon schoolboys visited the ponds and surrounding vlei. There was a small variety of water birds, plovers and sandpipers in and around the ponds with the familiar large flock of White-faced Ducks. From the higher vantage point of the ponds a single Spur-winged Goose was sighted in longer grass on the edge of the vlei area but unfortunately it did not move. Amongst other smaller species seen were Familiar Chat and African Stonechat, Capped Wheatear, Levaillant's Cisticola, Common Waxbill and Orange-breasted Waxbills and a flock of Red-billed Quelea. The long walk by both groups across the dry and crisp vlei was rewarding with numerous close sightings of both Rosy-breasted Longclaw and Orange-throated Longclaw and African Pipit. However, for all twitchers the highlight of the afternoon was the close encounter with separate Marsh Owls which were flushed out of their day roosts on the ground as the groups made their way across the vlei. The super afternoon was rounded off with a flypast of African Sacred Ibis. A total of 48 species were recorded, with not a single Topple" in sight! **Dorothy Waddilove**

**MATABELELAND**

*From the Chairman*

Our rainy season has at last arrived and with it a multitude of migrants making this a particularly interesting time of the year for birds. Magnificent thunder heads offer scenic skies to scan for migrant raptors and swifts, both Steppe Eagle and Common Swift have been seen over BULAWAYO as well as a group of unidentified kestrels. At ground level, cuckoos seem particularly noticeable this year with a very noisy Red-chested Cuckoo whose clockwork failed and felt it

necessary to call throughout the night. Its call was changed to "Shoot that bird"! Finally, I have received a report of Common Mynas in Bulawayo. Can anybody confirm this? **Martin Smith.**

#### Stephanie Tyler and Ringing – 23-25 October 1998

We were most privileged to be able to draw from Stephanie Tyler's experience of Africa through a variety of activities. Our weekend feast began with a presentation on "Birding in Ethiopia and Ringing". Slides revealed the considerable beauty of the country with forays into the mountains and Rift Valley. The talk finished with ringing at Ngulia in Kenya and Botswana. The former must rank as one of the Continent's premier ringing sites with over 200,000 birds banded over 25 years. Saturday morning began considerably early with nets being put up shortly after dawn out at AISLEBY. Some 10 – 15 people attended the demonstration which yielded a good number of Willow Warblers, actively foraging in the Acacia to the north of the Ibis Dam wall. All were able to see this common migrant in the hand, appreciating its definitive features and small size, marvelling at its ability to regularly perform round trips of over 10,000 km. Sunny conditions and a light breeze quickly reduced the capture rate, although we did manage a number of specials, including a magnificent male Diderick Cuckoo whose brilliant red eye gave him an appropriate "angry" look. On Sunday, we ventured out into the MATOPOS and, despite a late start and hot conditions, managed to find a number of "goodies" for our Botswanan visitors. A careful search of the undergrowth fringing Effifi produced Cape Batis and a small party of Terrestrial Brownbuls, whilst at Maleme the distinctive call of a Purple-crested Turaco was heard. High overhead, a range of raptors provided entertainment with Verreaux's Eagle, African Hawk-eagle and Wahlberg's Eagle all being recorded. At ground level, a warthog named Billy introduced himself, lying down at our feet and demanding fleas and ticks be removed. He even went to the extent of raising a hind leg in the air to enable all parts to be reached! Sadly, the weekend seemed to draw to a close all too quickly with border deadlines having to be met. Our thanks to Stephanie for a memorable time. **Martin Smith**

#### Comment on report of outing to UMGUSA Nature Reserve

I feel that I must add a rider to Martin Smith's report of the outing to Umgusa Nature Reserve on Sunday, 27 September 1998 (see *Babbler* issue #27 – November/December 1998) as I was one of the 5 birders who were there and as it was a "first" for 3 of us (covering a total of some 60 years experience of birding and detached at the time from Martin and Penny Feather), Margaret Stone, George Burne and "selfo" had a very good and lengthy sighting of a pair of Lesser Honeyguides. This "lifer" sighting made our day. Finally, I can assure readers that if, as Martin states, "a considerable number of flies, swiftly changed their attention from dung to us", this did not happen to us 3 birders, detached from Martin and Penny, and I really must put it down to the attraction of that formidable, leopard skin hat that Martin wears! With apologies to the Matabeleland Branch Chairman. **Ron Stuttaford, Bulawayo**

### **EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB**

#### JULIASDALE, Gomo Remiti Protea Nursery – Sunday 27 September 1998

This excellent opportunity to visit a new and interesting area was missed by all but 8 of our members who spent a pleasant morning exploring its diverse habitats. The day began with an early start and a difficult drive through thick mist but this was soon forgotten with Val Cameron's warm hospitality at her delightful cottage where the sun had been shining since 5.30 a.m.

The garden, kopje and protea fields were alive with birds and a gentle stroll around the environs was most fruitful, most of the common birds soon ticked off. The Groundscraper Thrush which Val says spends much time attacking its reflection in her bathroom window and displaying to the local female sat and sang to us. The Red-winged Starlings were vocal around the high rocks and a Lizard Buzzard sat patiently awaiting breakfast on a bare tree. White-browed Robin-chat and White-throated Robin-chat delighted all of us and Klaas's Cuckoo became more and more persistent as the morning wore on. Early European Bee-eaters were then identified high above us.

When the tour of the kopje was completed we were offered a welcome cool drink before getting into John Andrew's vehicle to go down to Brondesbury Dam. On a minor pool nearby, we found Southern Pochard, <sup>1</sup>Red-knobbed Coot among others and had good views of Reed-warbler in the reeds.

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<sup>1</sup> A species name missing

The main dam held more White-faced Duck, Teal and 4 Egyptian Goose. From there we were transported to the miombo woodland hiding John's beautiful new thatched house where we saw few birds except for Familiar Chat but thoroughly enjoyed the view, our packed lunch and a drink to celebrate the Chairman's birthday. When the clouds got really dark and threatening we said our thanks for a lovely morning's birding and headed home. Our final tally was 65 species which did not include the Wattled Cranes but we'll go back for those. **Ken Dixon**

CYNARA Farm, Old MUTARE – Saturday 10 October 1998

A small but select group of us had the usual pleasant afternoon's birding here but the eventual tally of 68 species may have been reduced by the fairly strong wind which prevailed. As the visit coincided with the Waterfowl Census, we concentrated mainly on the series of dams. Eventually, most of the expected birds were found but not without difficulty. 32 White-faced Duck was a low total as was 10 African Jacana and there was only a single Comb Duck. The common waders were all present but only in small numbers and widely dispersed. The sole species of raptor were two African Fish-eagles, one of which seemed more interested in paddling than fishing.

The grassland produced African Pipit and Yellow-throated Longclaws and in the *Acacia* scrub the Rattling Cisticola gave us ample evidence of its identity. All the common species were recorded as usual here despite the heat and we were quite satisfied with the results of our stroll.

**Ken Dixon**

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**Karoi Bird Club**

Saturday 19 September 1998 – Conniston Farm, KAROI

Five of us gathered for this outing, and had a feast of birds just walking around the dam which was shallow with a wide margin of short grass and weed, some mud banks, a marshy area below the dam wall and included a ploughed land on one side and a skeleton forest on the other, together with some woodland. We saw numbers of White-faced Duck c120, 15 Blacksmith Lapwing, 35 Comb Duck, 25 Egyptian Goose, 12 Spur-winged Goose, 13 Glossy Ibis, 30 Red-billed Teal, 7 Grey Heron, together with White-breasted Cormorant and Reed Cormorant, Three-banded Plover, African Jacana, African Darter, Wood Sandpiper and Common Sandpiper, Little Grebe, Malachite Kingfisher, Pied Kingfisher, Brown-hooded Kingfisher and Striped Kingfisher, Black Crake, Common Pratincole, Squacco Heron, African Fish-eagle, African Sacred Ibis, Black-winged Stilt, African Pygmy-goose and Common Greenshank to name the waterbirds. Black-chested Snake-eagle and Black-shouldered Kite above, Lesser Honeyguide, Violet-backed Starling, Southern Black Tit, African Stonechat, three different cisticolas, Black-crowned Tchagra, to name a few in the woodland. In the marshy area below the wall, a Senegal Coucal, Helmeted Guineafowl and Swainson's Spurfowl were in the ploughed land with two Duikers in the background! A most rewarding morning's walk and it was good to see the numbers we did – 72 species in all. **Merle Mitchell**

OAZ Birdwatch KAROI – Saturday 24 and Sunday 25 October 1998

For our Birdwatch, we decided to do the Rukomechi River from its source, down river, covering four dams on four different farms, some of the riverine bush, adjacent woodland, grassland, vlei and ploughed land. Eight of us took part, four of us the first afternoon and eight of us the next day thoroughly enjoyed by all and always something to be learnt and seen. In the large vlei at the source of the river, we started off with a Brown Snake-eagle, together with some Reedbuck, Sable and Eland! A few waders here, notably Common Ringed Plover and Black-winged Stilt. Greater Honeyguide, Green Wood-hoopoe and a flock of 15 Grey-headed Parrots in the woodland.

White-rumped Swift and Barn Swallow were overhead and we saw a single Purple Heron. No Little Grebe, but we saw them the next day. There were also both Black-headed Herons and Grey Herons breeding in sticky bushes on one of the dams, chicks and eggs. Cisticola, pipits, Orange-breasted Bush-shrike, Southern Masked-weaver, Cardinal Woodpecker and Golden-tailed Woodpeckers, an Egyptian Goose atop a Hamerkop's nest, White-winged Widowbird and Yellow Bishop, Green-capped Eremomela amongst some of the woodland and grassveld birds. A find for us after much peering and craning into a thicket on an ant heap revealed a black version of the Jacobin Cuckoo – we were pleased to see that! On the sandy spillway of one of the dams, two Collared Pratincole and four Kittlitz's Plover, Red-breasted Swallow overhead. Our last dam was time for lunch – a

picnic under cool shade overlooking the water. We had brought a boat, so after lunch, took a ride around this rather large dam and additions to our list were Yellow-billed Stork, Saddle-billed Stork and a flock in the weed of the beautiful little Orange-breasted Waxbills that we had been looking for all morning. Time to stop at 3.00 p.m. and we had found 139 species, a total that we were happy with, although some we had expected to see never turned up, notably the Red-chested Cuckoo who chose to remain silent over all our 24 hours! A last cool drink at our picnic site, where we watched a gathering of 15 African Jacana, many on this dam, on the weed in front of us. Much fidgeting about, when a fight developed, pretty fierce, between two birds. They got tangled up in the weed, their bodies under water and only heads out – we thought we would take a closer look as they might be hurt. The one got clear of the water as we approached – the rest took off, but the other one could not lift himself out of the water, and much to our surprise swam at least two hundred metres only his head out to the other shore, hopped out onto the weed, shook itself and started feeding. Reading up afterwards, we saw that they are adept swimmers, in spite of their spindly legs and long toes! Thanks to all the farmers who allowed us a walk-about on their properties!

#### RYDINGS School Interpretive Centre

Walks continue here every first Saturday of the month, monitored by Shirley Babcock. All the cuckoos are back. Black Cuckoo heard, Levallant's Cuckoo, Klaas's Cuckoo, Diderick Cuckoo and Red-chested Cuckoo. The African Paradise-flycatcher has had its first hatching and Violet-backed Starling, Spectacled Weaver and Southern Masked-weavers are nesting – both Purple-crested Turaco and Grey Go-away-birds are in full force and the African Fish-eagles are still there. Verreaux's Eagle-owls bred and reared one chick and a Pearl-spotted Owllet is a regular caller. A nest was spotted of a Three-banded Plover out in the open with no protection and placed next to a cow pat! Two eggs were laid but only one chick hatched. **Merle Mitchell**

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### **MIDLANDS BRANCH**

#### Camping Weekend – CHATSWORTH

This is only a brief report as the full report has not yet been received from Bernard. A good weekend was held at NYORORO Farm with about 12 people attending. Keith Harvey took a few drives and is doing well. Lots of Marsh Owls, Rosy-throated Longclaws and Yellow-throated Longclaws were seen in the valley and also some Wattled Cranes and Crowned Cranes. A full count was done at Widgeon Pan which will be reported on later. **Gavin Conway**

#### BirdLife South Africa – Birding Big Day - 15 November 1998

The only write-up received for this competition is from the Conway's team called "Gweru Storkers" which had a very productive 24 hour count with a total of 154 species seen. The sites visited were Antelope Park, Whitewaters Dam, Monteith Farm and a few local small dams. Antelope Park was low on vultures but the dam produced some interesting sightings of Diderick Cuckoo and Red-chested Cuckoo, a huge Monitor Lizard ± 5½ foot long, Pearl-spotted Owllet, Squacco Heron, a Cape Wagtail, White-faced Duck and White-backed Duck. Also what can only be identified as a Barred Long-tailed Cuckoo? All markings, etc. seemed conclusive that it was one with the exception of the previous sighting areas. This will be discussed with Dr Peter Mundy ASAP. WHITEWATERS also produced many water birds including a Green Sandpiper (one was also seen by the Conways at the new Bembezaan Dam ± 25km north in March this year). Owls and Nightjars which are usually present were, however, not there to be seen or heard this time. **Gavin Conway**

#### Camping Weekend – CENTRAL ESTATES – 20 to 22 November 1998

This trip to see the Southern Carmine Bee-eaters only had one camper for Saturday night and eight day-trippers on Sunday. The colony seems to be smaller this year. A report will be sent for the next issue of *Babbler*. **Gavin Conway**

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### TAIL FEATHERS

#### OAZ Birdwatch Results 1998

A total of 434 species were recorded by 15 teams. Most, but not some key areas of the country were covered. Results are as follows:

	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>TEAM</b>	<b>TEAM LEADER</b>
1	207	Kiledo	P. Caldwell-Barr
2	192	10 <sup>th</sup> Timers	H. Erwee
3	176	Spurwing	D. MacDonald
4	163	Committee Creepers	J. Saunders
5	156	The Top Tits	M. Saunders
6	150	Chifuti Chirpers	J. Jones
7	147	Gleneagles	A. Jana
8	139	Karoi	K. Mitchell
9	135	Ex Flatfooters	J. Williams
10	132	Matabeleland Branch	M. Smith
11	128	Good Deal	G. Carter
12	108	Gweru	C.R. Hartley
13	105	Gilly's Gang	G. Gilmour
14	95	Munda	J. Keith
15	91	Felix	K. Harvey

Notable omissions: Cape Teal, Brown-throated Martin, Peregrine Falcon, Lanner Falcon and Taita Falcon, Rock Kestrel and Greater Kestrel, African Skimmer, Lillian's Lovebird, Pel's Fishing-owl, Arnot's Chat, Cut-throat Finch, Magpie Mannikin, Lemon-breasted Canary. I feel we could have recorded these, and more, if we had cards from Kadoma area, Eastern Lowveld, Victoria Falls and Zambezi areas. NTT result of 488 species was very good. Thank you all for participating. **Jacko Williams**

#### Hamerkops in Highlands, HARARE

Although our garden is only a block away from the busy Enterprise Road, three Hamerkops chose to inspect it and that of our neighbour as a possible building site in early July this year. From the beginning, the local Pied Crows viewed the operation with great interest, even trying to discourage the Hamerkops at the outset when they came to 'view the site'. A small raptor joined forces with the crows in opposition to the building proposal. Despite all this, the Hamerkops chose their site in a fork high up in a neighbour's Msasa tree which I could overlook from my bedroom window from which, to my huge delight, I could see (and film) everything. Building commenced around mid-July. The Hamerkops would fly in, announcing their arrival with much squawking fanfare, at around 6 a.m. and would build for about two hours, then disappeared until about 4 p.m., flying off again at dusk. At first the task looked impossible: they would place twigs, etc. gleaned from the gardens, trying to catch them in the creeper that clung to the fork of the tree, but more debris dropped to the ground than remained in the fork and I despaired of any progress, particularly since the crows seemed determined to prevent it by chasing the Hamerkops away and knocking the twigs to the ground. However, the nest suddenly started to grow and by 10 August, the Hamerkops' heads were only just visible above the base. As they became busier they also became less vocal, with both birds sometimes 'weaving' simultaneously. They selected a wide variety of building materials and on one occasion one Hamerkop decided that the swimming pool net would make a good addition to the nest and one other he tried to pick up the garden hosepipe! All manner of materials were offered by our neighbours and us for



the nest; these included pieces of fabric, paper and dogs' hair, some of which were obligingly used. As the nest grew, the crows continued to monitor progress, often perching nearby and occasionally sitting atop it while the Hamerkops were scouring the gardens for material. The Hamerkops continued to take it in turns to fetch it, landing on the nest with a bill-full and a 'burrrrup' sound; the weaving operation was quite comical as the crested head vibrated rapidly from side to side to ensure the firm placement of the material.

By mid-August, the nest had reached about two feet in height and by now the Hamerkops ignored the frenzied sabotage attempts by our dogs on the ground and the crows above it, often looping over the dogs' sleeping forms to reach material. At the end of August, the sky was just visible through the top of the entrance, and some strips of loo paper were to be seen fluttering from the nest walls! The pair were great entertainers: they would drink from the swimming pool and one morning our English guests were tucking into their bacon and eggs when a Hamerkop produced a frog from the pool and proceeded slowly and inexpertly, to beat it to death for their breakfast. By the beginning of September, the building rate seemed to be about one inch per day and the third Hamerkop appeared occasionally. By now the humans' concern was the absence of mud for the lining of the tunnel and chamber. I left my own mud concoction in the back garden but this was spurned; the Hamerkop instead made a bee-line (bird-line?) for a steaming pile of dog dung. "Great" thought the Hamerkop, "Got all the necessary moisture content". So he plunged in and carried off a dollop with which to line the nest. And came back for more! Then stout sticks were used for the roof, as well as clumps of soft leaves. At this stage, the Hamerkops would perch on a Msasa in our garden, preening and mating, with the pressure of the building ops having lessened somewhat. Then... all quiet on the southern front (where the nest entrance was). It was assumed that eggs had been laid and hatched, but there was no evidence to support this. Once an adult was seen emerging from the nest like a bullet, and on another occasion one flew from the nest top into the entrance. It is now mid-November and although two or three Hamerkops regularly visit the gardens and rooftop, they have not been seen around the nest for a few weeks. **Colette Wiles**

#### Sightings of interest in the NYANGA area

A visit from 19 – 24 October 1998 to Nyanga, an area which must be considered one of Zimbabwe's birders' paradises, revealed three "lifers" for me in the sighting of a Tambourine Dove, a Red-faced Crombec and a Bronzy Sunbird (magnificent in the sunlight). Of interest also were a pair of Blue Swallows perched in a dead bush (killed by veld fire) overlooking the Nyamaziwa River. Other sightings, inter alia LBJs, included African Yellow White-eye, African Paradise-flycatcher, Cape Grassbird, Little Rush-warbler, Purple-crested Turaco, Variable Sunbird, a host of African Stonechat, Black-headed Oriole, Wahlberg's Eagle, Cape Crow and Pied Crow, White-necked Raven, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird, Yellow Bishop, African Black Duck, Little Grebe, a Freckled Nightjar (identified by its harsh call), White-browed Robin-chat, Kurrichane Thrush, Malachite Kingfisher, Giant Kingfisher and Grey-headed Kingfisher, Purple-banded Sunbird, Pale Batis, Golden-breasted Bunting, Yellow-billed Kite and Black-shouldered Kite and of course the inevitable Long-crested Eagle and the "Piet-my-vrou" haunting call of the Red-chested Cuckoo. They say that a change is as good as a holiday and, coming from drought-stricken Matabeleland to the greenery and change in birds of Nyanga, was a holiday treat. **Ron Stuttaford, Bulawayo**

#### Visit to NYANGA and HONDE VALLEY

We recently visited these areas and had some interesting sightings. ABERFOYLE Club produced a short view of a Palm-nut Vulture flying overhead, Eastern Bronze-naped Pigeon, Collared Sunbird, White-starred Robin, Grey Waxbill, African Dusky Flycatcher, Square-tailed Drongo and Red-backed Mannikin. At Rhodes Hotel we had good views of Whyte's Barbet, Stripe-cheeked Greenbul, Spectacled Weaver and Red-winged Starling, all eating the fruits off a fig tree. The stay at a Troutbeck timeshare and cottage at Connemara Lakes was quite productive with Blue Swallow and Eastern Saw-wing, African Olive-pigeon, Cape Robin-chat, Wailing Cisticola, Augur Buzzard, Variable Sunbird and Copper Sunbird and Cape Canary. **Gavin Conway**

#### Interesting sightings in November 1998 – all in QDS 1929B4 GWERU

Barred Long-tailed Cuckoo Antelope Park, Green Sandpiper, 2 White-winged Terns, 9 Hottentot Teals – WHITEWATERS DAM. **Gavin Conway**

**NOTICEBOARD****REMINDER OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING – MALEME REST CAMP, MATOPOS**

To date, only 33 people have made bookings for the AGM on the weekend 5/6 March 1999. If you have not already sent in your booking slip please do so. The accommodation at Maleme is very good and the birding excellent with the guarantee of seeing the spectacular Verreaux's Eagles which breed there. Closing date for bookings is 20 January 1999. A notice of meeting and agenda are enclosed.

**IMPORTANT NOTICE – RAINHAM DAMS, HARARE**

An unfortunate incident occurred on 1 December at Rainham Dams near Harare. Jacko Williams and an American tourist were accosted by three men who stole credit cards, money and binoculars amongst other items. Fortunately, although Jacko was thrown to the ground, she was not badly hurt but the incident highlights the dangers which are with us today. The gate to the dams will, therefore, in future be padlocked. Keys can be obtained from John Saunders, John Paxton, Dave Gray, Jacko Williams or Di Rushforth. Please do not go to any isolated areas alone, or even in small groups and be extremely vigilant about who is following you.

**PUBLIC RELATIONS****Web site**

The Association is developing a Web page and the Public Relations Committee proposed the following suggestions as to its content:

Meetings dates/reports	Articles from <i>Honeyguide</i>
More visual material – photos from members	Contact telephone/e-mail numbers
Offer links to professionals who offer bird safaris.	

If any member can offer other suggestions or suitable photographs, please contact a member of the PR committee.

**Membership**

The PR committee has discussed our membership, the reasons why many people do not join or why certain members do not attend outings. It is possible that lack of transport is a factor and we would like members' opinions on setting up a pool of people prepared to give lifts, perhaps from a central meeting point. One, two or more members could be appointed, maybe on a per meeting basis or per month. Their telephone numbers would be advertised against the meeting dates in *Babbler* and those who could offer lifts and those who required lifts could then be put in touch with one another. It has also been considered that certain people do not own binoculars and maybe some of our members might be prepared to lend out a spare pair of binoculars for meetings.

**PR Committee members:** Joyce Simpson Tel: 300677 e-mail: [jasmine@africaonline.co.zw](mailto:jasmine@africaonline.co.zw)  
 Anna Paraffin Tel: 224157 e-mail: [pshing@compcentre.uz.ac.zw](mailto:pshing@compcentre.uz.ac.zw)  
 Jennifer Carter Tel: 339688 e-mail: [gcarter@icon.co.zw](mailto:gcarter@icon.co.zw)

**MOZAMBIQUE BIRD ATLAS**

Members who visit Mozambique are requested to complete Bird Atlas field cards to assist with the Mozambique Bird Atlas which is being compiled by the ADU in Cape Town. Cards can be obtained by sending a self-addressed, stamped envelope to John Paxton, P O Box 470, Harare.

**E-MAIL MAILING LIST**

It has been suggested that as so many OAZ members now have e-mail it would be a good idea for some of us to form a discussion group on the lines of the SABIRDNET. We would call ours ZIMBIRDNET. The idea is to exchange news of interesting sightings, trip reports, good birding spots, interesting behaviour, requests for help in identification or with any other queries or questions, etc. Please would anyone keen to join drop John Paxton a line at [birds@harare.iafrica.com](mailto:birds@harare.iafrica.com).

**MIGRATING KESTREL GROUP**

We have been asked to join in a study of migrating kestrels (Lesser Kestrel, Amur Falcon and Red-footed Falcon). Please would all of you keep an eye open for these birds (with special

emphasis on Lesser Kestrels) and report date of first sighting, locality, number and activity at time of sighting, e.g. perched on telephone wire/fence, roosting in tree, hawking termites, etc. If anyone is aware of the presence of kestrel roosts this information is also needed. Please also check any road kills or hail mortalities for rings (metal and colour). Every contribution of information will be of help. Report all details directly to; **Dr Zephné Bernitz, P O Box 1276, Middelburg, MPU 1050, South Africa, Tell fax: 27-13-2451438(home) 27-13-2827211 (office), e-mail: bernitz@iatria.com.**

#### BLUE SWALLOW SIGHTINGS

Ms Sue Childes has requested all members to submit sightings of Blue Swallows, particularly in the southern part of the Eastern Highlands, e.g. Cashel, Chipinge or Chimanimani areas. Dates of sightings, numbers of birds seen and accurate locality are required by her. Sue's address is P O Box BW 53, Borrowdale, Harare.

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*WE WISH ALL OF YOU A VERY HAPPY CHRISTMAS AND BEST WISHES FOR THE NEW YEAR.  
GOOD BIRDING IN 1999!*

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### **ORNITHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION OF ZIMBABWE** **MASHONALAND BRANCH AGM – 21 JANUARY 1999**

I WOULD LIKE TO RESERVE FISH AND CHIP SUPPERS AT \$30 EACH.

NAME- TEL-  
NO. OF PERSONS MY CHEQUE IN THE AMOUNT OF \$ IS ENCLOSED.

*Cheques are to be made out in favour of Ornithological Association of Zimbabwe and should not be restrictively crossed.*

Please return slip to:  
(by Monday 18 January 1999)

Dave and Ida Gray  
PO Box CY 161, Causeway

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### **OAZ MASHONALAND BRANCH**

NOMINATION FORM FOR COMMITTEE 1999

I,  
NOMINATE  
COMMITTEE FOR 1999.

BEING A MEMBER OF THE OAZ WOULD LIKE TO  
TO STAND ON THE MASHONALAND BRANCH

CONTACT TELEPHONE NO  
I CONFIRM THAT

IS AGREEABLE TO STAND FOR

ELECTION TO THE COMMITTEE.

PLEASE RETURN FORM TO THE SECRETARY, 5 STAR CLOSE, COLNE VALLEY, HARARE.

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