

BABBLER

ORNITHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION OF ZIMBABWE

A PARTNER DESIGNATE OF BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL

ISSUE #29 – MARCH/APRIL 1999

COMMITTEES

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ACTIVITIES

MASHONALAND BRANCH

Regular outings

1. Mukuvisi Woodlands: Sundays 7 March and 4 April 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 14 March and 11 April 1999. Meet at Marimba Shopping Centre for departure at 6.30 a.m. Beginners are very welcome. Bring your chairs and tea.
NOTE: The padlock from the Sanctuary gate has gone missing and will therefore be replaced. Keys for the new lock will be issued only to those people who are directly connected with co-ordinating outings to the area. Should any members, however, feel that they require a key of their own, please contact Dave Gray on telephone 885406 to make arrangements. In addition, as there have been incidents of robbery in the area of the Sanctuary, the Mashonaland Branch committee has decided that the gate to the Sanctuary should be locked after entry and again on exit on the Sunday outings. It would be preferable therefore if all members wishing to go to the Sanctuary for the monthly outing meet at Marimba shopping centre at the time advised. It is hoped that National Parks will provide a guard for our visits. Those members who have their own key should also ensure that the gate is kept locked. Any queries should be addressed to Richard Dennison, telephone 747567.

Saturday afternoon outings

1. 20 March 1999. Ythan Park, Ruwa. Meet at 2.00 p.m. at Ruwa Supermarket on the Mutare Road. Bring chairs and refreshments.

2. 17 April 1999: Greystone Park Nature Sanctuary, Cnr. Gaydon and Halford Roads. Meet at the gate of the sanctuary, which is a little way up Halford Road, at 3.00 p.m.

Saturday morning outing NB - NOT SUNDAY

24 April 1999: Vulture Restaurant, Featherstone. Mr O'Neill has built a hide which can take a number of people, affording excellent views of a variety of vultures feeding. Meet at Harare South Country Club, Beatrice Road for departure at 7.00 a.m. Bring chairs and refreshments.

Sunday outing

28 March 1999: Robin Gilmour's farm. Meet Greencroft Shopping centre (left-hand side) on the Lomagundi (Kariba) Road for departure at 6.30 a.m. Bring chairs and refreshments.

Thursday Evenings

1. 18 March 1999: Richard Bell, a butterfly collector and enthusiast will talk to us on his favourite subject. A charge of \$5 per head is payable at the door.
2. 15 April 1999: SPECIAL GUEST SPEAKER In conjunction with On Safari International, we are fortunate enough to have as our speaker Prof. Mornay du Plessis, head of the Percy Fitzpatrick Institute in Cape Town. There will be a charge of \$20 per person for the evening. Proceeds will go towards funding a Zimbabwean ornithological student who is currently undertaking a study on Miombo woodlands.
Venue for both evenings: Old Hararians Sports Club, Bowls Pavilion (at the entrance to the club, turn sharp right) – 6.00 for 6.30 p.m. A cash bar will be available.

MATABELELAND BRANCH

Evening Meetings

NO MARCH MEETING DUE TO THE NATIONAL AGM AT MALEME

Friday, 2 April 1999 – Video Evening – “The Life of Birds” – we will be showing a couple of episodes of this amazing series presented by David Attenborough. The photography is excellent and each episode packed with a wide range of birds from around the World. Do come and join us. Venue: 3A Holdengarde Avenue, Hillside at 8.00 p.m. Contact Martin for further details.

Outings

Sunday, 21 March 1999 – Alice Farm, Esigodini – Eileen has “cased” the joint and strongly recommends this outing to an attractive venue in the Esigodini Valley. Please contact Martin first as we are still awaiting confirmation.

Saturday 19 April 1999 – Matopos – Warren will lead this outing which should hopefully produce some interesting Verreaux's Eagle sightings. Meet at Retreat at 7.30 a.m. bringing lunch.

Aisleby. Either meet at the boom at 7.30 a.m. or contact the Co-ordinator.

DATE	CO-ORDINATOR	TELEPHONE
Sunday, 28 March 1999	Martin Smith	42474
Sunday, 25 April 1999	Clive Townsley	46617

EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB

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

Outings

<u>Saturday, 13 March 1999</u>	Odzi	2.00 p.m.
<u>Sunday, 28 March 1999</u>	Save Drift	6.00 a.m. (Packed lunch)
<u>Saturday, 10 April 1999</u>	Partridge Hill (Blue Swallow survey)	2.00 p.m.
<u>Sunday, 25 April 1999</u>	Burma Valley	6.30 a.m.

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.

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

Rydings School Interpretive Centre

Saturday, 6 March 1999 6.00 a.m.

Saturday, 10 April 1999 6.00 a.m.

Other outings

Saturday, 20 March 1999 6.00 a.m.

Saturday, 24 April 1999 6.00 a.m.

Venues still to be arranged. Please contact Kevin or Merle Mitchell for further details.

MIDLANDS BRANCH

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

Day OutingsGweru

Day trips – Sundays 21 March and 20 June – meet outside G & T Contracting, 53 Second Street, Gweru at 7.45 for 8.00 a.m. Please confirm with Gavin if you will be attending these day outings.

If no contact is made, Gavin leaves from his home and does not have to travel 12 km into town.

Masvingo Contact Lynne Wilkins ☎ 039-63657

Kadoma Contact Margaret Parrock ☎ 068-3644

Camping weekend

30 April 1999 – Whitewaters Dam, Gweru. Starting on a Friday and finishing at lunch on Sunday. For planning purposes please confirm with Gavin if you will be attending.

REPORTS

MASHONALAND BRANCH

Video evening – Thursday 19 November 1998

About 15 of us made ourselves comfortable in the Grays' lounge where we were entertained with the showing of three videos, the first entitled "Hunters of the Sky". This was filmed by a father and son team in Australia who set about trying to photograph all of Australia's species of goshawks and falcons. One of the goshawks – the White Goshawk – is particularly beautiful and the filmmakers were lucky enough to find a nest of a White male who had paired up with a Brown Goshawk. The hybrid chicks fledged into birds looking like the female but unfortunately there was no follow up to find out whether or not the offspring were able to breed themselves. The photography was spectacular with shots of breeding birds being taken from a hide precariously balanced at the top of a metal tower some 10 metres high. The tower was so cleverly constructed that it folded, telescope-like, into a 3 metre length which was strapped to the top of the men's motor car.

The second video was brought to us by Jacko Williams, fresh from her trip to the Galapagos Islands. The scenery was stunning and the wildlife of the archipelago is most interesting. I particularly enjoyed watching the courtship antics of the Blue-footed Booby and Red-footed Booby.

The final video of the evening was of footage taken by Janet Joyce's brother-in-law of the recent OAZ trip to Rifa – lovely views of the late evening overlooking the river with the chorus of hippo in the background. Thank you very much all of you who provided an enjoyable evening. **Editor**

CHEDGELOW Farm – 21 November 1998

Only 4 members met on an overcast and muggy afternoon for this visit. First stop was the small dam where the owner feeds the waterfowl. This yielded a number of birds including about 100 Red-billed Teal, 145 White-faced Duck and 50 Comb Duck. An unusual sight was of 2 Hamerkops squatting on the shoreline among the resting duck. The call of a Black Cuckoo had us wandering around for quite a time on the edge of the vlei and in the gum plantation. Needless to say, it was not found but we did find 5 very active Yellow-throated Longclaws and 4 African Golden Orioles. We also put up a Duiker, a Steenbok and a Hare. Next stop was the old quarry where it was hoped to find Speckled Pigeons. No such luck, but we did find a family of Giant Kingfishers and some 20-odd Lesser Striped Swallows. From there, it was into the most attractive, rocky woodland adjacent to Harava Dam where the birding was disappointing, the first bird party materialising only late in the afternoon when it was close to dark. Notable sightings were 4 Common Scimitar-bills together and a number of African Sacred Ibis over flying. Total count was 61 species and the afternoon was deemed well worthwhile by the few who attended.

John Saunders

Branch AGM – Thursday, 21 January 1999

There was a record attendance at the AGM – John Saunders commented that he wasn't sure whether the attraction was the fish and chip supper or a renewed keenness on the part of members. Reports were received from the Chairman, John Shaw (Mukuvisi Woodlands) and Richard Dennison (Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary) and two of them are summarised. The evening was most enjoyable and the supper very tasty.

MUKUVISI WOODLANDS

12 monthly visits were carried out to the Woodlands when a total of 129 different species were recorded compared to 138 in 1997. The highest total for one month was 68 in January, whilst the lowest was 50 in June. Every year in the Woodlands, one or more new species is recorded – in February, a pair of White-throated Robin-chats was calling at the Paget Road entrance but was never seen again; in May a pair of Orange-winged Pytilia was seen which had not been sighted since 1991. This species is host to the Broad-tailed Paradise-whydah which is seldom seen around Harare. In September, the Grey-headed Bush-shrike and Orange-breasted Bush-shrike were seen,

it being the first record of the Grey-headed Bush-shrike since 1989 and only the fourth record of the Orange-breasted Bush-shrike in the last twenty years. One of the highlights of the year is the popular walk with John Sievi who points out nests of breeding birds he has found. In 1998, nests or nesting holes of fifteen different species of birds were seen. Of particular interest was a Spotted Creeper on a nest, a Miombo Tit feeding young, the nest of a Miombo Rock-thrush with three beautiful blue eggs and a very obliging immature Green Wood-hoopoe which allowed people to watch it being fed in an open position by a number of different adults. John Sievi was thanked for his willingness to share his knowledge of the nests and also for lending his gardener each month to act as a car guard. A good sighting in December was of a Dwarf Bittern which sat on the branch of a tree giving everyone a clear view of its boldly marked breast.

LAKE CHIVERO BIRD SANCTUARY

As with the Mukuvisi Woodlands, twelve monthly visits were made but with a total of 207 species recorded for this area. Species of interest were: European Honey-buzzard, African Cuckoo Hawk, Western Marsh-harrier and African Marsh-harrier, Peregrine Falcon and Lanner Falcon, Allen's Gallinule, Southern White-faced Scops-owl, breeding, Southern Hyliota, Orange-winged Pytilia and Magpie Mannikin.

The existing committee of the Mashonaland Branch were re-elected en bloc and an additional member Mrs Bette Riddle was elected as a committed member. **Editor**

Birds of Mount Namuli in Northern Mozambique – Thursday, 23 January 1999

This unscheduled talk by Callan Cohen from Cape Town was most interesting and was attended by an excellent turn-out of 58 people. A party of ornithologists and other naturalists recently journeyed to a remote part of Mozambique to explore the forested parts of Mount Namuli. Mist nets were used to examine the species in the area and amongst those found were the Namuli Apalis, the Little Greenbul, the Dappled Mountain-robin, Eastern Olive Sunbird, Stripe-cheeked Greenbul, Yellow-streaked Greenbul, a warbler similar to our Barrett's, an Alethe and a Citril. DNA testing will be carried out on blood specimens taken from some of the birds in the area which are similar to southern African birds to establish whether or not they are genetically connected or entirely separate species.

We are most grateful to Callan for giving up his time to talk to us. **Di Rushforth**

Alex Masterson's vlei walk – Sunday 31 January 1999

Forty-eight people braved a drizzling early morning to venture into the very wet, squelchy, MARLBOROUGH vlei. We were, however, to be rewarded by spectacular bird watching. It was certainly weather for ducks and a few were around including White-faced Duck, Egyptian Goose and Red-billed Teal, the latter who, according to Alex, breed in the vlei. Raptors seen were Black-shouldered Kite, Black-chested Snake-eagle, African Goshawk, Western Marsh-harrier, Red-footed Falcon and Greater Kestrel. Wetland specials seen or heard were African Rail, Corn Crake, Black Crake, Streaky-breasted Flufftail, Lesser Moorhen and Wood Sandpiper and Marsh Sandpiper. Black Coucals were abundant and two Marsh Owls flew around looking annoyed at having been flushed from their roosts by Shava, Alex's dog. Five species of warbler were seen or heard and Zitting Cisticola, Pale-crowned Cisticola, Levillant's Cisticola and Croaking Cisticola were abundant. There were many Rosy-throated Longclaw displaying and calling and a nest with three eggs was found. **Editor**

MATABELELAND

From the Chairman

The rainy season continues to yield considerably erratic rainfall with a large variation in totals in the BULAWAYO area. Hillside has only just managed to pass the 300mm mark whilst on the

western side of town totals of over 350mm have been recorded. Despite this, the area is looking lush and green with an appreciable growth of grass and foliage offering cover to many of our migrants. As always January has proved to be an interesting month for birds with some good sightings. My ringing activities in CBC's woodlot have yielded 2 Thrush Nightingales with an additional 4 calling close to the nets. I have also managed to glean a couple of Common Whitethroat and a small number of Marsh Warblers as well as a re-trap for a Garden Warbler, first caught in December 1997. Out on the school fields, insect life has taken advantage of the top dressing of sunflower husks and attracted a flock of about 50 Abdim's Storks which add an interesting diversion to athletics practice. Finally, our Pied Crow population is much in evidence with at least 150 birds congregating on the school roof prior to break, followed by plenty of communal flying, not noted last term. **Good Birding – Martin Smith.**

Sunday, 15 November 1998 – Carmines at the Randalls – Ngenile Farm, Umgusa Valley

This year, after a lengthy absence, Southern Carmine Bee-eaters returned to the Randall's property on the UMGUSA River. A rather unfortunate incident with a million dollar burst dam had scoured out a fresh cliff face and it was here that the new colony had been established. A count yielded 250 holes with roughly 50 adults in attendance. In previous years, the assumption has been that only half the holes were active – obviously, with all being new, perhaps different statistics apply. No nestlings were seen at the tunnel entrances but a number of adults were seen delivering food – presumably breeding was still at an early stage. Away from the colony, the Umgusa River provided a focus for avian activity, with cuckoos being particularly well represented, six species being seen or heard. Willow Warbler were common, gleaning insects from within the canopy of some beautifully green *Acacia galpinii*, whilst lower down Spotted Flycatcher hawked insects. High overhead, an African Fish-eagle called and the characteristic silhouette of a Wahlberg's Eagle enabled its identification. At the end of the lands, we were able to see a Wahlberg's Eagle nest with a parent in attendance but no sign of prey remains, suggesting it was comparatively early in its breeding cycle. Back to the watercourse where a Vervet Monkey impersonating a Yellow-bellied Greenbul caused confusion with plenty of crossing out on the check list. To complete the morning, we moved on to the Randall's delightful home and picnicked on the lawn with its scenic view of pastures and weir. It was an ideal spot to scan the watery fringes for elusive African Finfoot which could well have been present. We were also able to 'network' with the farm management and discovered that we'd missed a group of Steppe Eagles which were present the week before. Our thanks to the Randalls for allowing us access to their beautiful property and prolific bird life only 25 kilometres from the City centre. **Martin Smith**

AISLEBY Bird Count – Sunday 17 January 1999

This year's count produced some rather modest totals with considerable dispersal to breeding grounds within the province. The Upper UMGUSA Dam had risen significantly and was fringed with a mixture of *Polygonum*, sedge and reeds offering excellent habitat for "skulkers". Given a little encouragement, we managed to persuade Allen's Gallinule, Little Bittern and a Purple Heron to emerge from the vegetation. The Bird Dam was surrounded by some attractive flooded pasture which held an appreciable number of waders including an attractive Common Greenshank with mottled grey plumage. Suddenly, all took to the air, flushed by an obliging Booted Eagle, diagnostic "landing lights" clearly visible as it circled the Dam. Approaching the northern end of the Umgusa Dam, entailed a drive and a walk through lush pasture, both Kurrichane Buttonquail and Harlequin Quail were put to flight and the highlight of the morning, a Corn Crake, was seen clearly by both Clive and I. It was flushed from rank grass at the paddock edge and we both had a good view of rufous wing coverts and long trailing legs from a distance of a few metres. At the Dam, a considerable concentration of Southern Pochard gave us plenty to count with a total of over 700 birds. Scattered amongst the Southern Pochard were a few other species but no Maccoa Duck or Black-necked Grebe and very few Little Grebe. Elsewhere, the pasture held reasonable numbers of Cattle Egret, but nowhere near the roost totals of up to 7 000 birds which Harry Erwee has been recording at the Ibis Dam at sunset, most must disperse to feed away from the complex.

Finally, a note on Grey Crowned Crane whose numbers have fallen with the onset of the rainy season. Clive managed a tally of 13 at the beginning of the month but our count failed to yield a single bird and it will be interesting to follow totals for the remainder of the year. **Martin Smith**

EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB

MOUNTAIN HOME (E C Meikle) PENHALONGA – Saturday 14 November 1998

Ten of us braved the afternoon heat to climb up into the cooler atmosphere of Mountain Home. It is always difficult on such a vast property to choose which habitat to explore. The Blue Swallows are a big attraction but they're a long way up and the montane grassland which they favour is not prolific in other bird life. Hence, we accepted the owner's word that there are about 30 birds there this year, an excellent number, and headed instead for the huge new dam which should soon be full and ready to supply the needs of many farmers, mines, schools and homes. Despite its newness, water birds have already flocked to the dam. The fact it is still shallow and surrounded in part by dense vegetation no doubt accounts for this. Little Grebe were everywhere, Grey Heron and Purple Heron were nesting, African Black Duck came down the river and Egyptian Goose drew attention to their presence by loud honks. African Darters and Reed Cormorants sat in the half-submerged trees and African Jacana paddled through the grassy edges.

Our South African visitors were delighted with so many new birds, especially the Bronzy Sunbird and Olive Sunbird in John and Barbara's garden and a Stripe-cheeked Greenbul in the forest. Raptors seen were Long-crested Eagle and Steppe Buzzard. An African Crowned Eagle had attempted nesting in a gum tree but had been disturbed by the dam works.

Thirst and the prospect of the S.A. v Wales game dragged Bill and Jane home early and the rest gave up a little later for the same reasons. Our visitors enjoyed their afternoon but were frustrated that Leopard Rock hotel had no hints or help for birdwatchers; it seems binoculars, golf clubs and casino chips are not happy bedfellows. Certainly an educational exercise like that carried out by Bridget and Jane with the trees should be undertaken up there. **Ken Dixon.**

For Vumba read Morningside – Sunday, 29 November 1998

Shame about the MUTARE weather. After covering about 10 km through rain and heavy mist we realised that Forest Edge was not a suitable destination and returned to tea and biscuits *chez moi* in Murambi East. When visibility eventually improved slightly, we did a section of the game fence from Cecil Kop entrance past the ZRP Border Patrol Unit and up to the reservoir where it began to bucket down again. In that short walk we managed to compile a list of 38, many heard rather than seen which was to be expected in the circumstances. The Gorgeous Bush-shrike called on occasion, Common Scimitarbill, Tambourine Dove, a Lanner Falcon, four types of Bulbul/Greenbul and Green-winged Pytilia were kind enough to turn out and allow themselves to be identified. Both Rattling Cisticola and Singing Cisticola were clearly seen and Eastern Saw-wing swooped around us. Although there was nothing unusual, our UK visitor and two new recruits were not disappointed. **Ken Dixon**

CYNARA Farm, Old MUTARE – Saturday, 12 December 1998

It was hot and threatening to rain when we left the Museum. Cynara was green and lush and had already received a fair amount of moisture as evidenced by the full dams. So, on we went following our usual route. The feature of the day was undoubtedly the Abdim's Stork; there were some 50 feeding near the cattle pens as we arrived and more than 200 roosting in the bare trees in the new dams when we left at 5.30 p.m. Otherwise there was little of special note; only 55 species in all with nothing much to see in the woodland or the garden. There were a few puzzling sightings due to the large proportion of young birds abroad; this was especially true of the herons of which we had a good variety including Squacco Heron and Purple Heron. Waders were few through lack of broad mud fringes but all expected species were represented and also Water Thick-knee. At one point we retreated to the cars but were able to continue after a short pause. Our last stop at the new dam was lengthy thanks to the many Abdim's Storks, Reed Cormorant and African Fish-eagle. It was good to welcome Stanislau and we hope we shall soon meet him again. **Ken Dixon**

Premier Mine Road, Old MUTARE – Saturday 8 January 1999

It stopped raining long enough for Tony, Rex, Simba and I to spend a pleasant and rewarding afternoon in hot sunshine on the fringe of the PREMIER ESTATE. Unfortunately, we lacked a really experienced raptor fundi to confirm our sighting of 2 African Crowned Eagles and 2 Martial Eagles. The former were hunting above the cliff near the Nyanga road and the latter flying above a more remote mountain in the wilderness area. The most exciting of all was an easily identified bird on a bare branch at convenient height and distance from us; a Grey-headed Kingfisher. I've never seen one in the highlands before and it was Tony Curtis' first for 15 years! These three were on our list of 60 species; the rest being more commonplace, including the ever-present Mocking Cliff-chat which nests on the vertical cliff face peppered with old mine shafts. The abundant rain this season is going to make foraging into untrodden areas very difficult. Already the vlei area had 2m high grass and vegetation was generally dense. **Ken Dixon**

Karoi Bird Club

Sunday, 22 November 1998 – Protea Farm KAROI

Alex and Pam van Leenhoff were our hosts and we thank them for their hospitality. We have visited the farm before – the varied terrain is always fruitful. 12 of us were driven to our starting point and the pick-up left under a suitably shady tree. We commenced at a small dam, edged with some sedge, tall reeds and a clear, muddy shoreline. Here we found White-faced Duck and Comb Duck, Little Grebe, Common Sandpiper and Wood Sandpiper, Three-banded Plover, a Common Greenshank and a pair of Greater Painted-snipe among others. In the reeds were Orange-breasted Waxbills. Through the woodland, a pair of unidentified nightjars was seen and a good view of the Orange-breasted Bush-shrike. In the vlei, below the dam wall were Helmeted Guineafowl and Pin-tailed Whydah, whilst overhead on the way to the next dam were Red-breasted Swallows and Barn Swallows. Here on the mud banks, together with the duck mentioned, a single adult African Skimmer was seen. Pam had notified Kevin of an African Skimmer nestling on 28 October and he went to photograph it. We found a dead Comb Duck here – old age was the verdict. Also seen were Grey Heron and Black-headed Heron, a single Spur-winged Goose, Pied Kingfisher and overhead an African Fish-eagle. On the shoreline woodland, a Long-billed Crombec with its urgent 22, 22, 22 call was pointed out to us by Dave Gray (thank you Dave – good to have you and Ida with us). We continued over this dam wall down the river bed, where there was a series of magical water lily-covered pools surrounded by green grass. An African Jacana flew out of one and, on investigation Kevin found a nest with a clutch of four eggs, also photographed for posterity! Further on, we flushed a Dwarf Bittern and had a great view of it as it hid in a bush. Trees around a secluded pool offered five Black-crowned Night-heron, amongst them a couple of sub-adults. Black Cuckooshrike, Spotted Flycatcher and African Paradise-flycatchers, Grey-headed Parrot, Violet-backed Starling and Greater Blue-eared Starling, Green Wood-hoopoe and Common Scimitarbill were in the woodland, whilst on a tree over another pool White-fronted Bee-eater and Malachite Kingfisher were recorded as well as a 'just in time' glimpse of a Little Bittern. On to our last small dam where we saw White-winged Widowbird and a male Red-backed Shrike on the reeds. At the foot of the reeds, a male and female Greater Painted-snipe were seen wandering in and out and an African Jacana with four adorable chicks were there, sometimes picked up under the wings, Lesser Swamp-warbler were heard and after much debate a couple of African Reed-warblers were identified. From here, we were uplifted to the big dam where we were treated to a scrumptious breakfast by Pam and Alex who is a chef of note when it comes to cooking camp eggs! Thank you both. We had a good view of an Osprey here and saw a single Water Thick-knee and a single Red-billed Hornbill to round off a most enjoyable watch – 96 species seen. **Merle Mitchell**

TAIL FEATHERS

Bird tables – risks of poor hygiene – taken from the Internet by Edna Elliot-McColl

Keeping bird tables piled high with nuts, bread and dripping could be killing birds with kindness, according to a team of researchers. They say that overcrowded tables are rife with salmonella

and E coil, diseases fatal to birds. The three-year study found further danger in the stress triggered by scrabbling for food among a flock of hungry birds which can also kill species such as seed-eaters. Encouraging the congregation of large numbers of birds in a small area, researchers have found can be disastrous for birds. The small amount of feeding space available to each bird leads to aggressive behaviour and male dominance at the feeding stations, stressing the birds and increasing their susceptibility to infectious disease. House Sparrows and doves are vulnerable to diseases spread through droppings. Many of the infected birds die from lung or liver disease while others become weak and are an easy target for hungry cats. An author of a report in the scientific journal *Veterinary Record* suggests that what could be happening is that the bird tables are bringing together birds that are carrying agents causing infection and the bird table provides the potential for the spread of the disease. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) has, however, warned against abandoning the age-old tradition of feeding birds in winter. Instead they urge nature lovers to make their tables more hygienic by clearing up old food and removing droppings. A spokesman says that they certainly would advise people to continue to feed birds in their gardens but would advise people to treat bird tables as an eating place and to keep them as clean and tidy as possible. Experts suggest that instead of piling up food on one large table, bird lovers could leave out smaller amounts of food in several locations around the garden. Using trees to hang bird feeders full of nuts, mixed seed and bread can also cut down on the spread of disease. Water in bird baths needs to be changed daily and, to lower the risk of bacteria spreading to people, rubber gloves should be worn when handling and cleaning bird baths and feeders.

Interesting sightings – WHITEWATERS DAM, GWERU

Two Lesser Flamingos, 1 Green Sandpiper and 1 Black Heron over Christmas. Last year at the same time a Black Heron was also seen. **Gavin Conway**

Crimson-breasted Shrike in the Midlands near NGEZI Dam

Mrs E Lowe from Mazuri Safaris reports that she had a new arrival at the end of last year – a Crimson-breasted Shrike which arrived early one morning. She understands that a neighbour on the Sebakwe River has also seen one. She asks if anyone else in the area has had similar sightings. Also seen on the ranch is a Black-winged Stilt.

Journey to Mozambique

At the beginning of August 1998, we spent a few days in Mozambique to study the birdlife of the GORONGOSA National Park and the coastal region north of Beira. Once we reached the National Park, we found the central camp largely destroyed from the war and we were informed that almost all mammals had been shot. However, by means of an ongoing programme which is supported by the European Union, the camp will be rebuilt and everything possible will be done to allow regeneration of the wildlife. Apart from the lack of mammals, the Park is still a fantastic area for birdwatching. We found some interesting species such as the Black-and-white Flycatcher and Black-throated Wattle-eye, Brown-headed Parrot, Square-tailed Drongo, White-breasted Cuckooshrike, African Green-pigeon, Bearded Scrub-robin, Grey Sunbird and Livingstone's Turaco. We were told by "Senhor" Martinho, a veterinarian managing the reconstruction project, about the Green-headed Oriole which is endemic to the mountainous area north of Gorongosa village. As this area is extremely remote and far away from filling stations, Martinho organised some fuel for us which enabled us to reach the small village of Vundusi which is on the slopes of the mountains. Together with two of the locals we climbed to an altitude of about 900 m which is the habitat of the oriole. It, however, took several hours to see the bird after we had heard its frequent, melodious call. Another quite noisy fellow of the region was the Silvery-cheeked Hornbill. Whilst staying overnight in the area and supported by the light of the almost full moon, we had the chance of seeing a Fiery-necked Nightjar which was sitting on top of a large, bare tree. This bird regularly called about 5 to 6 times, made looping flights of about 2 metres in diameter followed by landing on precisely the same point where it had been sitting before. This ritual is not described in any of the literature available to us but perhaps it was simply an exercise needed to catch nearby

insects. I would be interested if anyone could give me an answer about this behaviour.

After leaving the Gorongosa area, we visited the swamps north of Beira. There were very few seabirds – just a few Grey-headed Gulls. However, there was a fairly good population of waders, kingfishers and birds which were new to us were Collared Pratincole, Yellow-throated Longclaw, Burchell's Coucal and Black-headed Apalis. Most interesting was the sighting of quite a number of Long-tailed Widowbirds (in non-breeding plumage) which is contrary to the distribution maps given in *Roberts*.

On our way back to Zimbabwe, we spent a day in the VUMBA Mountains where we had nice sightings like the White-starred Robin, Tambourine Dove, Lemon-breasted Canary, Red-throated Twinspot and Yellow-bellied Waxbill. **Tony Latz**

Martial Eagle and Banded Mongoose

On 4 January 1999, at Dom Pan, HWANGE National Park whilst watching the antics of a large male baboon, who was demonstrating a suitable disdain for visitors, we were lucky to be able to see a Martial Eagle attack a group of Banded Mongoose. When we arrived, baboons were spread out across the Pan and a lone adult Martial Eagle was perched on top of a nearby tree. Shortly afterwards, a group of Banded Mongoose moved in, making their way across an open area of the Pan. The Martial Eagle took to the air and swooped down towards the group, immediately those caught out in the open grouped together and stood on hind legs facing the oncoming eagle. It struck twice and both attempts merely yielded the loss of a few feathers, with the mongoose quick enough to avoid the striking talons. The eagle then perched on a low bush and was quickly chased off by the larger baboons, who were barking furiously, recognising the bird as a threat to their own young. It was interesting to see this communal response against our largest eagle, which might be expected to make an easy meal of a mongoose.

Martin Smith

NOTICEBOARD

ADVANCE NOTICE

Rifa Educational Camp: 17-20 September 1999

A booking has been made for this year's trip to Rifa. Those people interested might like to diarise the weekend now. Further details will be given in the next *Babbler*.

Field cards

Dave Rockingham-Gill is no longer living in Borrowdale. Members wishing to send field cards or other information to Dave should use P O Box 105, Chinhoyi.

GARDEN BIRD SURVEY

Those members who are also members of On Safari International will know that the Garden Bird Survey organised by them in 1998 will continue this year but will be co-ordinated by the OAZ. Should anyone wish to participate, please send a stamped (\$2.00), self-addressed (A5) envelope to Di Rushforth at P O Box CY 161, Causeway. Gardens in all areas of Zimbabwe are of interest.

PUBLICATIONS FOR SALE

The following issues are for sale. If you are interested please contact Jacko Williams on telephone 882206.

	Price	<u>Postage & Packing</u>
Birds of Swartboskloof, Jonkershoek Valley, Stellenbosch – A Mountain Fynbos Habitat	\$40.00	\$2.65
Where to See Birds in Kwazulu-Natal	\$40.00	\$2.65
Birds of the Botanic Gardens Harare	\$40.00	\$2.60

READER'S DIGEST BOOKS

The OAZ has been fortunate enough to have acquired a number of the excellent publication *Spectacular World of Southern African Birds*. This coffee-table book contains beautiful photographs of birds and members can obtain a copy for a donation of at least \$50.00. Branch chairmen do have copies of the book; if you would like a copy please contact your branch. For Mashonaland members, please contact Dave Gray on telephone 885406 or Jacko Williams on telephone 882206. Don't delay, as supplies are going fast.

Birding in the Chipinge Area

Peter Caldwell-Barr can offer great birding in the Chipinge area. Telephone 027-4441/2 or Fax 027-2908.

Tchechenini Lodge, Mhangura

This delightful lodge is situated in an idyllic setting with magnificent views and excellent birdwatching. Specials to be seen there are Narina Trogon, African Broadbill, Black Coucal and possibly African Pitta and Striped Crake. Special discounts are given for group bookings of 8 people or more. Contact Cathy Divans of Zilala Tours Highlands, Harare, telephone 7765141746325 or e-mail: cathy@trvl2000.icon.co.zw or contact the Lodge direct on 060-54414, or e-mail: tchechenini@abacus.samara.co.zw

CHANGE OF NAME

A reminder to those of our members who do not open their *Honeyguides!* Please send in your choices for the name change – deadline is 28 February 1999.

AVAILABILITY OF OXPECKERS

Mrs E Lowe from Mazuri Safaris would like to know where she could get some oxpeckers. Please contact her on 055-27423.

E-MAIL MAILING LIST

A reminder that those OAZ members on e-mail can join in a discussion group (ZIMBIRDNET) on the lines of the SABIRDNET. Please would anyone keen to join drop John Paxton a line at birds@zol.co.zw

A PLURALITY OF BIRDS

Over the years men have coined a host of special terms to describe birds in groups. Here is a selection of some [collective nouns] that still survive in the English language:

a siege of herons or bitterns	a plump of wildfowl
a gaggle of geese	a herd of swans, cranes or curlews
a spring of teal	a cast of hawks
a bevy of quail	a covey of partridges
a muster of peacocks	a nye of pheasants
a brood of chickens	a covert of coots
a congregation of plovers	a wisp of snipe
a flight of doves or swallows	a murmuration of starlings
an exaltation of larks	a host of sparrows

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