

BABBLER

ORNITHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION OF ZIMBABWE

A PARTNER DESIGNATE OF BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL

ISSUE #30 – MAY/JUNE 1999

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NEW NAME

At a Special General Meeting of members held on 15 April 1999, it was unanimously agreed that the name of the Association be changed from Ornithological Association of Zimbabwe to BirdLife Zimbabwe. The change will be effective immediately.

HAVE YOU RENEWED YOUR SUBS FOR 1999? IF YOU HAVE NOT, THIS WILL BE YOUR LAST BABBLER. IF YOU HAVE SIMPLY FORGOTTEN, PLEASE SEND YOUR CHEQUE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE TO THE MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY – SUBS ARE \$200 FOR INDIVIDUALS AND \$220 FOR FAMILY MEMBERSHIP (HUSBAND, WIFE AND CHILDREN UNDER 18).

ACTIVITIES

MASHONALAND BRANCH

Regular outings

Note new times!

1. Mukuvisi Woodlands: Sundays 2 May and 6 June 1999. Meet at Paget Road entrance at 7.00 a.m. There will be a vehicle guard in attendance.
2. Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary: Sundays 9 May and 13 June 1999. Meet at Marimba Shopping Centre for departure at 7.30 a.m. Beginners are very welcome. Bring your chairs and tea.

NOTE: The Sanctuary gate will be locked after entry and again on exit on the Sunday outings.

Saturday afternoon outings

1. 22 May 1999: Harava Dam – a walk through Mbizi Camping and Picnic Site. Meet at

2.00 p.m. at Kentucky Service Station, Seke Road. There will be a small charge payable at the Municipal gate. Bring chairs and refreshments.

2. 19 June 1999: Rainham Dam. Meet outside Belvedere Trading Company, Princes Road for departure at 2.30 p.m. Bring drinks, chairs and something warm to wear. Again, for security reasons, the gate will be locked once the convoy has entered the property.

Sunday outings

1. 30 May 1999: Goshu Park, Marondera. Meet at Ruwa Supermarket on the Mutare Road for departure at 7.30 a.m. This will be a full day outing, so bring chairs and something for lunch. There will be a fee of \$30 per vehicle payable at the gate.
2. 27 June 1999: Ewanrigg Botanical Gardens. Meet at The Grange Service Station (left hand side of the Enterprise Road) at 7.30 a.m. Bring chairs and brunch. National Parks entry fees will be payable at the gate.

Evening meetings

1. Thursday 20 May 1999: Dr Arthur Dunkley will give an illustrated talk on breeding Taita Falcons in captivity.
2. Thursday 17 June 1999: David Hartung, well-known wildlife enthusiast and photographer, will entertain us with a mixed bag of slides entitled "Zimbabwe Walkabout".

Venue: for both evenings is the Bowls Section Pavilion of Old Hararians Association, Drummond Chaplin Street, Milton Park. Time – 6.00 for 6.30 p.m. A charge of \$5 per head is payable at the door (includes a guard for cars). A number of beef and chicken pies at \$15 each will be ordered and sold on a first-come-first-served basis after the meetings. A cash bar will be available.

Saturdays 15 May and 12 June 1999: Special evening meetings – Jacko Williams has kindly agreed to show (in 2 parts) the acclaimed video "The Life of Birds" (narrated by David Attenborough) at 14 Harare Drive, Greystone Park. Bring chairs, glasses, plates, drinks and a finger supper. Time: 6.00 for 6.30 p.m.

BOOKINGS FOR Rifa – 17 TO 20 SEPTEMBER 1999

Advance bookings can be made by completing the tear-off slip enclosed.

MATABELELAND BRANCH

Evening Meetings

Friday 7 May 1999 – Video Evening – "The Life of Birds" – Following on from the April meeting we are aiming to show a couple more episodes of this outstanding series. Venue: 3A Holdengarde Avenue, Hillside at 8.00 p.m. Contact Martin for further details.

Friday 4 June 1999 – Ngoni Chiweshe – "Birds of Hawk Mountain Sanctuary" – Ngoni of ORU, National Parks, was lucky enough to be able to spend 5 months on an ornithological course in America for the latter part of last year. He will talk and show slides of his activities in the States.

Venue: 49 Heyman Road, Suburbs at 8.00 p.m. Contact Julia (☎ 62401) for details.

Monthly Outings

Sunday 16 May 1999 – Mananda Dam, Marula – we last visited this Dam as part of the Atlas project and found plenty to study. This will be an all day outing so bring both tea and lunch, meet at Bellevue Service Station at 7.30 a.m. or contact Martin for details.

Away weekend 26-28 June 1999 – Milibizi Fishing Resort on the Zambezi – we are hoping to spend this weekend at Milibizi. All interested should contact Martin as soon as possible in order to finalise arrangements. Accommodation has yet to be booked and, being half term, it may well be popular.

Prices are as follows:

	<u>Per person per night</u>
Camping	\$ 93.60
Chalet (facing the water)	\$ 234.00
Chalet (away from water)	\$ 175.50
Camping room (per night)	\$ 198.00

Aisleby continues to yield totals of over 100 species and it is well worth supporting our monthly outings. Dates and co-ordinators are as follows.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Co-ordinator</u>	<u>Telephone</u>
Sunday, 30 May 1999	7.30 a.m.	Clive Townsley	46617
Saturday, 26 June 1999	2.30 p.m.	Clive Townsley	46617

Please note the change to Saturday afternoon outings for the winter months. Either contact the co-ordinator or meet at the boom at the time given.

EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB

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

Outings

<u>Saturday 8 May 1999</u>	Wiermouth	2.00 p.m.
<u>Sunday 30 May 1999</u>	Shundure School, Bazeley Bridge (Education Project)	6.30 a.m. to 12.00 noon
<u>Saturday 12 June 1999</u>	Old Mutare	2.00 p.m.
<u>Sunday 27 June 1999</u>	Hot Springs area	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 1 May 1999 6.00 a.m.

Saturday 5 June 1999 6.30 a.m.

Other outings

Weekend 29-30 May 1999 – the Banana Farm at Chirundu or join us for the day. Contact Kevin for further details.

Sunday 20 June 1999 – Kevlyn Farm – Sunbirds in the Aloes – time 6.30 a.m.

MIDLANDS BRANCH

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

Day Outings

Gweru

Day trips – Sundays 20 June and 5 September – 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 the outing.

Camping weekend

1 and 2 May 1999 – WHITEWATERS DAM, GWERU. There is a lot of camping space and ablution facilities are available at the Gweru Boat Club. A small fee of \$10 per night per person will be charged. We should have a good time with lots of water birds present on the dam and a good moon for a night trip on the water. We will also be checking on a few Black Stork nesting sites which already had a presence of birds on 22 March. Starting on a Friday and finishing at lunch time on Sunday. Please confirm with Gavin if you will be attending.

Masvingo Contact Lynne Wilkins ☎ 039-63657

Kadoma Sunday 20 June 1999 – Contact Margaret Parrock ☎ 068-3644 for details of place and time.

REPORTS

NATIONAL

AGM Held at Maleme Dam, MATOPOS – 6 March 1999

Well over 50 people attended the meeting which had to be held in Black Eagle lodge because of the rain. Most Mashonaland members were unprepared for rain as we had been told that "it seldom rains in Bulawayo!" In his report, the President outlined BirdLife Zimbabwe's current status as a Partner Designate of BirdLife International and gave details of the funds which had been forthcoming from that organisation for the purchase of a computer programme, two slide projectors, an overhead projector and a grant for an educational project which was being introduced into schools countrywide. Reports were given by the co-ordinators of Publications, Education and Extension, Research and Conservation and Public Relations committees as well as from each of the Branch Chairmen. Prior to the AGM, on the Friday evening, members were given a most interesting, illustrated talk by Gavin Stevens of the Matopos Conservation and Natural History Society. We learned about all aspects of the Matopos from the flora and fauna to the rock formations and the rock art. Luckily, the rain held off for the evening but the Saturday evening braai and entertainment had to be cancelled due to incessant rain and to top it all there was a power cut which left the ill-equipped totally in the dark! The day we had to pack up and leave, we had wonderful sightings of No 1 pair of Verreaux's Eagles and an African Hawk-eagle sitting in a tree overlooking Maleme Dam. Our grateful thanks must go to the Matabeleland Branch for organising a super weekend. **Di Rushforth**

MASHONALAND BRANCH

CREST BREEDERS – Saturday 23 January 1999 QDS 1730D4

On this Saturday afternoon outing, after dodging potholes and muddy puddles that threatened to sink our vehicles, 14 Mashonaland Branch Bird Watchers arrived at the Crest Breeders farm. The afternoon was very pleasant and enjoyed by all. In the woodland, grassland and marsh habitats around the dam, 52 species were recorded. Among these were at least 100 Amur Falcons heading home to their roost, 2 White-faced Ducks, 50 Abdim's Storks and 50 Cattle Egrets. We saw the three insectivorous kingfishers – Striped Kingfisher, Brown-hooded Kingfisher and Grey-headed Kingfisher and we remarked how especially beautiful the latter is. Our warm thanks go to Mrs Pat Bellingan for showing us around this lovely area. **Roxayne Hayes**

TEVIOTDALE Riding School – Saturday 20 February 1999

As the weather had been very unsettled, it was not surprising that only 6 members braved the elements together with a visitor from England, Emma Johnson, the renowned clarinettist. We had a delightful afternoon in beautiful surroundings and the rain stayed away for the whole 2 hours. 43 birds were seen and it was good to appreciate our birds through a visitor's eyes. We saw three barbets in close proximity – Black-collared Barbet, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird and Crested Barbet – Black Cuckooshrikes, a Grey-headed Bush-shrike and Long-crested Eagle amongst others. Thank you to the Verwoeds for allowing us the privilege of exploring their surrounds. **Shirley Harrison**

MATABELELAND

From the Chairman

BULAWAYO'S erratic rainy season now appears to be over and the ground has returned to its normal bill damaging state. Migrants were a little disappointing this season and certainly fewer appear to have been present in Bulawayo gardens. Within our garden, Spotted Flycatcher was only recorded at the beginning of the rains and I failed to catch any warblers, although a Garden Warbler did spend a month or so buried in a thick tangle of bougainvillea, identified by call. It will be interesting to compare Garden Bird Survey results for this year with other years and see whether this apparent change has any factual basis.

We have continued our involvement with the National Education Programme and visited schools at Turk Mine and Ntepi, 40 km south of Gwanda. The latter school was surrounded by mixed woodland which held a considerable variety of birds. Black-chested Prinia were particularly common and we recorded both Common Whitethroat and Icterine Warbler. We are planning follow-up trips later in the year and it will be interesting to see what dry season species are present.

Finally, we continue to look for both speakers and new venues for outings, and any suggestions would be most welcome. Good Birding – **Martin Smith**.

Chipizi Ranch – West Nicholson area – weekend 26-28 February 1999

Twelve Matabeles (well, eleven plus a German Rotary Exchange Student, to be precise) travelled from Bulawayo to spend the weekend at Chipizi Ranch, with the objective of compiling a checklist of birds to be seen in the area at that time of year. Our hosts were Ken and Bobbie (Mrs) Goosen and we stayed at their beautifully maintained and situated safari camp close to the Umzingwane River. Ken and Bobbie were most hospitable and were very keen to take us on walks and drives to see their wildlife, bushman paintings and scenic views. At night, there was a large variety of antelopes gathered around the camp, particularly on the airstrip, but the most impressive animals were the giraffes, which were always to be found in their home area. The ranch consists of undulating mopane woodland, interspersed with rocky outcrops. It is a wonderful, wild place; when we climbed the prominent dwala called Kubungwe there was virtually no sign of human interference in any direction – and the most noticeable sound was a veritable chorus of Monotonous Larks from the trees far below us. At mid-morning on the 27th, we had the good fortune to view a large flock of White Storks which circled higher and higher on a thermal then made their way northward – possibly following the line of the Umzingwane River? We estimated their number to be around 700. On the 28th, we spotted a further flock of about 100 from the top of Kubungwe; they climbed very high before moving off to the north. Several vultures were seen, including one Cape Vulture and, at the other end of the scale, there were many thousands of Red-billed Quelea! It was good to reacquaint ourselves with species seen only occasionally in Bulawayo, such as the Hadedda Ibis, Woodland Kingfisher, Broad-billed Roller, Meves's Starling and Spectacled Weaver. Other birds of interest were White-backed Ducks and Maccoa Ducks, Ashy Flycatchers and Yellow-crowned Bishops, Red-faced Cisticolas and a Thrush Nightingale sang from waterside vegetation close to the camp, the Burchell's Coucal was heard as well as the Senegal Coucal and Eurasian Golden Orioles were glimpsed in the taller trees. A party of Southern Pied Babblers was spotted – they are on the eastern edge of their range here. We tend to associate them with Hwange National Park. By the end of our stay, our checklist had reached a total of 164 species. Very many thanks to the Goosens for providing us with such a memorable weekend. **P J Feather**

EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB

January outing – 31 January 1999

The Sunday outing in January was to have been to Rusape but our plans went awry, just as Burns warned us they often do. We decided instead to make a leisurely reconnaissance along the Harare road, stopping first near the Mutare River Bridge where a small vlei with reeds attracted our notice. We found several Red-collared Widowbirds and two or three Southern Red Bishops of which one pair turned out to be Black-winged Bishops. This caused some excitement, being a first for several in the party. We thought it might be a new bird for the area but Irwin's *Birds of Zimbabwe* says "Also around Mutare and on the Odzi River westwards to Tsungwesi". In the same area, a Thrush Nightingale was heard in full song from a Lantana thicket. We moved on from there to Mt Mwenje, noting two Eurasian Hobby perched in a dead gum tree by the roadside as we drove. Birds were rather scarce. Black-crowned Tchagra were calling as were Black-backed Puffback and Orange-breasted Bush-shrikes and Crested Barbets. We took our tea-break at the summit of the kopje behind Imbwa Mawenje from which there is a spectacular view northwards across fairly flat country with Osborne Dam wall in the distance. The stiff climb to the summit was well worthwhile and produced the day's star turn – a male White-breasted Cuckooshrike which we watched for some time moving about near the tops of the trees until it settled at a fork in a branch of a Mukwa. We then realised that it was sitting on a nest, perfectly camouflaged with lichen so as to be impossible to distinguish from the tree itself. In fact everything was exactly as described in *Roberts'* including the fact that the male was sharing incubation duty. Well, not quite everything – all the literature tells us that the breeding period for this species is from August to December, peaking in September and October. This was 31

January and, although we were unable to see into the nest, we all agreed that it had every appearance of breeding behaviour. While we sat enjoying our tea (thanks Janet) and recovering our breath we watched Little Swifts and Rock Martins. It's much easier to identify swifts when you can look down on them. After the break we explored the summit and some of us were fortunate to see Boulder Chats. Martin said he could hear Mocking Cliff-chats too. We visited two small dams on Mt Mawenje farm but neither was very productive. The first yielded a solitary female Southern Pochard and one African Jacana. The second was equally devoid of bird life. So we moved on along the main road to Pounsley and the dam at Pathacres Farm (the one the old-timers still call Bosch's Dam) where, before the rain descended on us, we saw a few Red-billed Teal, Comb Duck and White-faced Duck. We also had very good views of a Dwarf Bittern sitting in a thorn tree on the edge of the water, again just as the textbooks describe. Altogether a very pleasant and interesting morning. **Tony Curtis**

KAROI BIRD CLUB

Saturday, 20 February 1999 – Pelele Farm

February was very wet in Karoi and I think for that reason only 4 of us braved the conditions for this early morning walk – the farm had had 54 mm the night before and we were unable to cross the river to get to the other end of the farm. Nevertheless, there was another route over the small dam wall where we saw an upturned tractor on the one side and over the water two Wire-tailed Swallows. In the woodland we found Levallant's Cuckoo and a female Black Cuckooshrike allowed us a good view whilst further on her mate was atop a tree voicing his funny little cricket call! White-browed Robin-chat, Tropical Boubou and Black-crowned Tchagra were in the undergrowth and Chin-spot Batis, Black-backed Puffback and Red-faced Mousebird were in the canopy. Through the grassland to the big dam wall there were Yellow Bishop, Common Waxbill, African Stonechat and Rufous-naped Lark. From the dam wall we saw both Reed Cormorant and African Darter on dead trees in the water and Grey Heron and Green-backed Heron, Little Egret and Hamerkop were on the edge with two African Black Duck flying overhead. We stood for some time at the dam spillway, marvelling at the torrent of water passing over when a flight of Barn Swallow began ducking and diving over the turbulent water, feeding on something there. We traced our footsteps back to a hearty breakfast, and agreed that, in spite of the wet and the sombre skies, it was good to be out in the clean air atwitting. Thanks to Wendy and Spencer James for your hospitality. **Merle Mitchell**

Saturdays 6 February and 6 March 1999 – Rydings Interpretive Centre

The bridge at the top end of the dam was under water so the usual monthly walks were done in the woodland and along the dam edge, using the cleared pathways. **Merle Mitchell**

MIDLANDS BIRDING CLUB

KADOMA day outing – 21 March 1999

The outing, under the leadership of Margaret Parrock, was very wet. Only 49 species were identified at her Cherrybank Farm and nearby Hofman's Dam where a lovely Goliath Heron was seen. **Gavin Conway**

GWERU day outing – 21 March 1999

Six people logged 65 species on this outing. The main location was a small dam on Arcadia Farm just outside town. A number of Grey Herons and Black-headed Herons, Spur-winged Goose and various duck were present but waders were few due to the grassy edges of the full dam. Lots of Diderick Cuckoo, colourful bishops, whydahs and plovers were seen but nothing spectacular other than a Senegal Coucal on the lawn at the homestead. **Gavin Conway**

TAIL FEATHERS

Black Storks

Four pairs and a single bird have been seen (22 March) at a few of our sites so we are getting prepared for our 'gentle' hill climbs to start monitoring them. PLEASE, WE NEED REPORTS OF ALL BLACK STORK SIGHTINGS. Will all members try to monitor Black Storks throughout the year in all areas and report on any sightings and any findings of new nesting sites. The

information must include as much as possible including “no sightings” at known sites, etc. Be on the look out for a ringed bird – stainless steel ring on lower left leg and yellow ring on right leg. This bird was rescued, reared and ringed in 1997 by us and has not been seen since. Generally, information is only being gathered in the Midlands area but there are hundreds of nests countrywide which are not being monitored. All information to be sent to Midlands branch please. If anyone is interested in coming out with us on our Black Stork monitoring trips which start in May, please contact me on 📞 B 054-24666 or H 054-24058. **Gavin Conway**

“Just like a Maasai man”

A Narina Trogon in the clearing, bobbing and cooing agreed with John Ole Kerore Parmasu as he spoke these words. We were walking in the forest area around Kichwa Tembo Camp in the Maasai Mara. John, the Maasai guide from the camp, had walked ahead of me down the forest patch cooing quietly until the bird replied. We stopped, retraced our steps around a bend and there he was sitting on a branch at eye level a few feet away. Truly like a Maasai man. The red front typical of the Maasai kilts, the soft cooing like the flutes the Maasai play but mostly the bobbing and tail flicking so like the Maasai dance. Of course I didn't have my camera but magical moments like these are best hoarded, like secret treasures, in the memory. **Joyce Simpson**

My experiences at National Parks Ornithological Research Unit, LAKE CHIVERO

I was lucky to be offered an eight-week internship with the Department of National Parks and Wild Life Managements Ornithological Research Unit at Lake Chivero for the period 11 January to 5 March 1999. During my first week, things were not on my side due to heavy rains. The weather prevented me from going out until the rains calmed down and from that moment everything was just fine. I would say most of my time was spent in the bush. Usually I would go out with Jack or Gift to study Miombo birds and bird parties. Of Miombo birds we recorded only species heard or seen within Miombo Woodland. I was very fortunate to do a Waterfowl Census around the whole Lake. We used a canoe and as it was my first time in a canoe I was very nervous at first. We saw lovely species which included Lesser Flamingo, Hottentot Teal and Black Herons. Sometimes I would remain in the office doing file work and working on the computer. When the ORU staff had their meeting I was invited to listen to a member of staff's talk on his trip to America where he had gone to study raptors. Together as a team we went to the Problem Bird Control Station where the officer in charge briefed us on their work. I also did a Common Ostrich census in the MCILWAINE Game Park where a lot of game was noted. I saw Giraffe, Wildebeest and Eland, none of which I had seen before. During my internship, I learnt a number of skills including canoeing, typing on the computer, identification of new bird species such as Little Bittern, Slaty Egret, White-breasted Cuckooshrike, White-winged Tern, Black Cuckoo, African Scops-owl, Retz's Helmet-shrike, Grey Penduline-tit, Southern Black Tit, Mocking Cliff-chat, Purple Widowfinch, Coqui Francolin and Steppe Buzzard. Towards the end of my internship, I had the opportunity to ring one female Southern Masked-weaver at the CHIVERO BIRD SANCTUARY and this was the moment that I enjoyed most during my stay. To conclude, I would like to thank BirdLife Zimbabwe for giving me a grant, Mr Paxton for transport and advice and the National Parks' crew for their support, cooperation and understanding during my internship. **Prince Gangarabwe**

Slaty Egret at LAKE CHIVERO (Harare Safari Lodge)

On 24 February 1999 around 10h00 near the shoreline at Harare Safari Lodge, we saw a Slaty Egret *Egretta vinaceigula* standing next to a Black Heron *E. ardesiaca*. The Slaty had a greyish body, dull yellow legs, blackish bill and a pale brown line running along its fore-neck to the upper-breast. It had been in the vicinity for a few weeks according to the people who work there. Gift Jonasi and Jack Amonie, both of the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Management, first saw this bird on 22 February. **Prince Gangarabwe**, 15862 Zengeza 5, Chitungwiza

Sighting of Barred Long-tailed Cuckoo in the Sanyati Gorge of Lake KARIBA QDS 1628D4

I recently had a sighting of a bird which I identified as a Barred Long-tailed Cuckoo *Cercococcyx montanus*. The bird was perched in the open which allowed us a long good look for proper identification. It was not calling so we cannot confirm our sighting on that basis but we are, however, confident from the visual aspect that this is what we saw. The bird was near the water line which is relatively thickly vegetated and very rocky. One of the common trees in the area near the water

line is a fig which after a time is what the bird flew up into. We did return to the site on two subsequent occasions with the bird call tapes to see if there was any response but unfortunately there was none. A point of interest is that it is suspected that the Barred Long-tailed Cuckoo parasitises the African Broadbill and this bird has been recorded from the Sanyati Gorge before. If anyone is fishing or sightseeing in the Gorge around the "floating rock" area which is right at the top, please keep a look out for Barred Long-tailed Cuckoos. **Doug Macdonald, Spurwing Island**

Flock of Woolly-necked Storks in KARIBA

At approximately 11.45 a.m. on 7 March 1999, whilst awaiting the arrival of our guests at GDI Marina in Kariba, my husband directed my attention to an unending (it seemed that way!) flock of storks that had obviously flown over from the Matusadona mainland. Unfortunately, I did not have my binoculars with me at the time but after much deliberation and discussion I am fairly sure that they were Woolly-necked Storks *Ciconia episcopus*. There must have been 1000 plus and they circled around the GDI Marina and then went down behind the hill – towards the sewage ponds area, I presume. Has anyone else reported this sighting and if so I would like to know if they were definitely Woolly-necks? It certainly was a most spectacular sight. **Natalie Adamson**

Editor's note: In conversation with Michael Irwin, he doubts very much that the birds were Woolly-necked Storks because of their large number. Total numbers estimated to be in the whole of the southern African region are only about 1000. Possibly the flock was Abdim's Storks or White Storks congregating before their northward flight home. Next time, please remember your binoculars! Reports of large numbers of birds, whatever species, are of interest.

Bird migration – Israeli web site

The Israelis have a fascinating website on bird migration. A number of species have been fitted with satellite transmitters and their current position and previous travels can be downloaded in either map form or as co-ordinates. Seven White Storks are currently active and two travelled over Zimbabwe on migration. The route map shows a path almost over the top of BULAWAYO and it would be particularly interesting to be able to locate the bird in the field. Unfortunately, birds have now begun to move northwards with the nearest stork having been just south of Maun at the beginning of March, perhaps next year we might be able to find one in the field. If you have access to the web, the address is www.birds.org.il and it is probably best to download co-ordinates rather than maps, given the antiquated state of our telephones! **Martin Smith**

Interim report on Hamerkops nesting in a GWERU garden

The nest was begun, to our enormous surprise and pleasure, on 25 January 1999 in the midst of very wet weather. I observed a Hamerkop *Scopus umbretta* flying into the fork of a large msasa tree on the edge of our pool and noticed that it began to stamp on something in the fork. This was at about 6.30 a.m. and the pair continued to build every morning up to about 7.15 a.m., occasionally up to 8.00 a.m. but noticeably longer when it had been raining. Sometimes, they would return at about 6.00 p.m. but I did not notice them building at this time.

By 28 February the nest was about 1 metre thick and 1.5 metres wide. We believed that an entrance hole had appeared near one branch. The nest was about 6 metres above ground level, so placed that it could not be seen from any window of our two-storey house, about 20 metres away, much to our frustration – other msasas and mnonodos got in the way. The nesting materials included many pieces of grass from our fences and all sorts of things, including an old rubber sandal (mapatapata)! All the materials seemed to have come from our garden. Every minute or so a bird would glide down from the nest, alight on the ground and march around until a suitable item of nesting material was found and then the bird would fly back. Green materials then appeared at the nest edge. Two calls were identified. The commonest was an excited "Wick! Wick!" and when the two birds met at the nest a sort of trilled squawk was used as a greeting to each other. Have there been any other reports of Hamerkops building in suburban gardens? **C M Forder** – 90 Link Avenue, Ridgemont, Gweru

Editor's note: See Babblers, issue #28 – January/February 1999.

Raptor sighting in Belvedere HARARE

On Sunday, 10 January 1999 at 6.15 a.m. – a dull morning with steady rain – clouds of flying ants began appearing. Suddenly dozens of small raptors arrived, gliding and swooping silently over the houses. They caught the flying ants in their claws and transferred them to their beaks. This

continued for 30 minutes whilst we watched fascinated, binoculars glued to our eyes and reckoned a count of up to 50 birds. After much discussion and reference to every bird book we could lay our hands on we identified them as Eurasian Hobby. At 6.45 a.m. they all suddenly disappeared. Sheila also saw them at dusk the previous Sunday evening, 3 January, under the same conditions. **Pat O'Neill and Sheila Tattersfield**

Editor's note: judging from the time of day the birds were seen, they certainly would appear to be Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo* although they can be confused with female Amur Falcons *Falco amurensis*; both species of which often flock together. The latter were often seen hawking insects over my property in Milton Park during the many rain showers in January. *Reference:* *The Atlas of Southern African Birds, The Complete Book of Southern African Birds and Sasol Birds of Southern Africa.*

Bronze Mannikins nest building on the banks of the UMGUSA River

One of my favourite birds is the Bronze Mannikin, which needs no introduction to birders, but I always seem to experience lucky sightings after seeing this delicate little *Spermestes cucullatus*. On Sunday, 21 February 1999 at about 10.30 a.m. on the banks of the Umgusa River just below the Upper Umgusa Dam, where the concrete causeway crosses the river on AISLEBY Farm outside Bulawayo, I saw what at a distance appeared to be a bird with a long tail with a 'blob' on the end, about the same size as the bird, flying from a grass bed up to a river-line tree, bordering the grass-covered ground and river. A closer inspection with binoculars determined a "Bronzy" with a stem of grass in its bill with the grass inflorescence hanging down which, at first sight, was what appeared to be the 'blob' at the end of the birds' long tail. Above the Bronzy in the tree, about 3 metres off the ground, was a ball of grass (not unlike, at superficial glance, that of a White-browed Sparrow-weaver's nest, about the size of a small football) which was the nest in construction of a pair of Bronze Mannikins (sexes are alike). In the next few minutes of observation, both mannikins flew down alternatively, from their nest, at about 10 to 15 second intervals, into the grass bed, then plucked a stem of grass with good inflorescence and returned to place it strategically in the structure of their nest. I had no idea, until this very pleasant sighting, as to what a Bronze Mannikins nest looked like nor that both the male and female birds were involved in its construction. Aisleby continues to be what must be considered an IBA.

W R L Stuttaford, Bulawayo

Observations on a breeding pair of Jameson's Firefinches *Lagonosticta rhodopareia*

The birds were first seen on a birdbath at Fallon Mews, Greendale, HARARE on 15 March 1998. They were seen in and around the property for the next few days. On 22 March, the male commenced nest building in a hanging basket containing a *Sinningia gesneriaceae*, 1.3 m above the ground in a courtyard measuring 26 m². Construction time took 6 hours 26 minutes spread over 3 days, with the moving of nesting materials taking 4 hours 53 minutes and shaping of the nest 1 hour 33 minutes. Nesting materials consisted of dried Beira grass *Paspalum notatum* and dried Kikuyu grass *Pennisetum clandestinum* totalling approximately 130 pieces of varying lengths. 9 pieces of Pampas grass *Cortadeira selloana* flower heads all collected off the ground and not of a living plant. One unidentified small dry leaf was collected during the early construction period. Finally, a total of 78 chicken feathers were counted. However, the majority of feathers were collected and taken to the nest during the incubation and chick feeding periods. The nearest poultry yard was approximately 70 metres from the nest site. One egg was laid on consecutive days on 25, 26 and 27 March 1998. Eggs were plain white and were not measured. Incubation: 12-13 days; nestling period: 16 days; conditions – nest site in permanent shade, minimum temperature – 14°C, maximum temperature 29°C. Rainfall – one fall of 5mm on 25 March – the day the first egg was laid.

At no time did the female assist in nest building

The female always sat on the nest at night

Adult birds were not seen to drink although water was available close by

Actual food fed to the chicks was never seen or identified

Chicks developed dark plumage (almost black) before changing to more adult type plumage before leaving the nest

The chicks had tubercles from a very early age and before the eyes opened

As stated earlier, the majority of feathers taken by the male to the nest were taken after incubation began. Is this a sign of bonding with the female or just to make the nest more secure for the forthcoming chicks?

Acknowledgements: my sincere thanks to: A C Allen of Allen Photographic for taking photographs, T A Conway for the loan of a Dictaphone, Theo 't Hart for assistance with a Dictaphone, Joe Ramos of Philips Electrical (Private) Limited for assistance with a Dictaphone, Mrs Di Rushforth for transcribing the writer's notes and Mrs M Bull for typing the final story and synopsis. **Mike Marriott**

NOTICEBOARD

ZIMBIRDNET

Unfortunately, John Paxton's home telephone has been out of order since 8 April. As this is the line for ZIMBIRDNET, no messages would have been received. It is hoped that normal services will resume as soon as possible so don't give up – keep the data. Apologies to all concerned.

Checklists for Robert Mcllwaine National Park

Checklists drawn up by Tracy and Ferdie Couto are available for sale at \$10 each. Contact Pat Saunders on ☎ 490167. Proceeds from the sale will go towards producing checklists for other areas.

BirdLife Zimbabwe 24-hour Birdwatch and 48-hour World Birdwatch

These two events will run over the weekend 2/3 October 1999. As usual, our own Birdwatch will be for birds identified during a 24 hour period over the weekend. World Birdwatch, however, covers a 48 hour period over the same weekend. Birds identified are to be recorded on Atlas cards (one for each event) and these can be obtained by sending a stamped, self-addressed envelope to Jacko Williams, 14 Harare Drive, Greystone Park or telephone her on 882206. These events are fun, so start giving thought to your teams and venue. Rules for the Zimbabwe Birdwatch are that at least two members of the team must be members, birds must be identified by at least two team members and observations can be carried out only within a 50 km radius of the starting point.

Reader's Digest books

There are still a number of the excellent publication – *Spectacular World of Southern African Birds*. If you have not seen this book with its wonderful photographs, please make an effort to do so – everyone who has seen it has bought a copy as they are irresistible. To order, please contact either your Branch Chairman or Dave Gray ☎ 885406 or Jacko Williams ☎ 882206.

Bird slides

Mashonaland Branch is still endeavouring to build up a slide collection. If you have any spare, clear slides of birds which you would be willing to donate, please contact Richard Bell on Harare ☎ 746050. These will be used for the Branch's educational project.

Projects and schemes

For the benefit of new members and perhaps a reminder for old members, the following are the projects and schemes which BirdLife Zimbabwe co-ordinates or participates:

Nest record scheme – co-ordinated by The National Museums and Monuments in Bulawayo. Cards can be obtained by writing to P O Box 240, Bulawayo. Information on breeding of birds is vital for their conservation.

Special species survey – this is an ongoing project which is dependent to a great extent upon members' participation. It is a study of a number of bird species which may be threatened or are otherwise of special interest. All the birds are easily identifiable and conspicuous. The 23 species on the list are – Common Ostrich, Secretarybird, Martial Eagle, African Crowned Eagle, African Marsh-harrier, Grey Crowned Crane, Kori Bustard, African Skimmer, Blue Swallow, Black Stork, Verreaux's Eagle, Wattled Crane, Southern Carmine Bee-eater, White Stork, Saddle-billed Stork,

Yellow-billed Kite, Bateleur, African Fish-eagle, Lilian's Lovebird, Southern Ground-hornbill, Red-billed Oxpecker and Yellow-billed Oxpecker and Red-billed Quelea. Specific information is required reporting the sighting of these birds which includes the number of birds seen, the presence of any young or breeding activities, and a precise description of the location of the sighting of the birds, their nest or breeding colony if applicable. The minimum description of the location should be a QDS. All this information is recorded on Special Species cards which are obtainable from your local branch committee or the Department of National Parks, Ornithologist, Bulawayo or the Ornithological Research Unit, Dept. of National Parks, P O Box BE 60, Belvedere, Harare. Completed cards should be returned to the Ornithological Research Unit.

National garden bird survey – co-ordinated by Di Rushforth. Records of birds in gardens around the country are kept monthly and data of this nature is important.

Quarter Degree Squares (QDS) as reference for reports of sightings

Please ensure that wherever possible the QDS reference is given when reporting sightings or visits to areas of interest. The QDS reference can be obtained by purchasing a 1:1,000,000 survey map from the Surveyor General's offices. If more detail is required for a particular area, a 1:50,000 map should be obtained.

May and June promotion – Natureways – Mana Pools National Park

A promotional rate of US\$220 per person per trip (4 nights/5 days) for canoeing and US\$165 per person per trip (3 nights/4 days) for walking trails is being offered by Natureways (James Varden is their professional guide). For further details please contact Safari Consultants on Harare telephone 700383/708972, fax 704603 or E-mail: safconnect@zol.co.zw

Musiamwa camp

This new camp has been built in the Featherstone area and offers three comfortable chalets and camping facilities, game drives where plains game can be seen, fishing in several dams, weirs and rivers, birdwatching in miombo and acacia woodland, open grassland riverine thickets and wetlands/pans. Attractions include Kori Bustard and both Wattled Crane and Grey Crowned Crane. Near the camp is the vulture and jackal 'sanctuary' where one of the largest resident populations of vultures in the southern hemisphere can be seen or photographed from a custom built hide. For further details contact Vlakfontein Estates, P O Box 154, Beatrice, telephone 056-2579/23208.

New members

We welcome to BirdLife Zimbabwe, the following new members who joined in 1999:

<u>Harare:</u>	Mrs L Beadon	Steve Barryl	Mr and Mrs K Boekestein
	Mrs S Brown	John Cunningham	Mr and Mrs J de Castro
	James Dryburgh	Mrs E A Fieldsend	A R Guthrie
	Liz Gardner	Brian Gratwicke	B Lombardo and M Litchfield
	Mr and Mrs I Loisel	Mrs B Lunt	D M Paget
	Mr and Mrs S C Phear	Richard Randall	A C Richmond
	Mr and Mrs J Scorgie	N & K Steyn	Mr and Mrs J Ward
	Madge and Joe Slavin	Zimbabwe Banking Corporation Limited	
<u>Bulawayo:</u>	Mr and Mrs A G M Born	Wendy Hunt	
<u>Mutare:</u>	Anne Gutridge	Mr and Mrs C A Lockie	Lon & Robert Newman
<u>Gweru:</u>	J Brand	P Edwards	Dr G James
<u>Vic Falls:</u>	Peter Dunning		
<u>Chiredzi:</u>	Gary Douglas		
<u>Mutorashanga:</u>	D V Kluckow		
<u>Karoi:</u>	Mrs J Wilson		
<u>Mhangura:</u>	Tchechenini Lodge		
<u>Botswana</u>	Mark Muller		