

BABBLER

BirdLife Zimbabwe

Formerly Ornithological Association of Zimbabwe
A PARTNER DESIGNATE OF BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL

ISSUE #31 – JULY/AUGUST 1999

COMMITTEES

Mashonaland Branch

Chairman: John Saunders	490167
Members: Keith Barrow	723547
Richard Dennison	747567
Dave Gray	885406
Ida Gray	885406
Bette Riddle	303679
Pat Saunders	490167
Deborah Varden	861239
Editors: Di Rushforth	741765



Matabeleland Branch

Martin Smith	42474
Peta Ditchburn	45635
Julia Dupree	62401
Penny Feather	44034
Warren Goodwin	62237
Ann Perry	
Clive Townsley	46617
Martin Smith	42474



Postal Addresses:

Committees: P O Box CY 161, Causeway
Editors 5 Colenbrander Road,
P O Belvedere, Harare

3A Holdengarde Ave, Hillside, Bulawayo
3A Holdengarde Ave. Hillside, Bulawayo

e-mail: birds@zol.co.zw

NEW LOGO – your council has decided to adopt the winning logo of the recently held logo competition – a Verreaux's Eagle in flight

VERY MANY CONGRATULATIONS TO JAMES AND KATHY SPROWSON ON THE RECENT ARRIVAL OF IDENTICAL TWIN BOYS!! JAMES DOES A LOT OF WORK FOR BIRDLIFE ZIMBABWE WITH REGARD TO MEMBERSHIP AND ADDRESS LABELS.

ACTIVITIES

MASHONALAND BRANCH

Regular outings

1. **Mukuvisi Woodlands**: Sundays 4 July and 1 August 1999. Meet at the Paget Road entrance at 7.00 a.m. There will be a vehicle guard in attendance.
2. **Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary**: Sundays 11 July and 8 August 1999. Meet at Marimba Shopping Centre for departure at 7.30 a.m. Beginners are very welcome. Bring your chairs and tea. **NOTE**: The gate will be kept locked after entry and again on exit.

Saturday afternoon outings

1. **17 July 1999**: Stockade Farm, Old Mazowe Road. Meet at 2.00 p.m. on the Old Mazowe Road (turn right at the circle at Westgate Shopping Centre, Lomagundi Road). The farm is approximately 25 km from Harare. Bring chairs and refreshments.
2. **21 August 1999**: Lowdale Farm. Meet at Ashbrittle Shops, Golden Stairs Road for departure at 2.00 p.m. Bring refreshments and chairs.

Sunday outings

1. 25 July 1999: Thetford Estates, Christon Bank/Mazowe hills area. Meet Ashbrittle Shops, Golden Stairs Road for departure at 7.30 a.m. Bring refreshments and chairs.
2. 29 August 1999: Dichwe Lemon Forest, Doma area. A full day outing as it takes about 2½ hours to get there. Meet at Greencroft Shopping Centre (left-hand side of Lomagundi Road) for departure at 6.30 a.m. Take drinks, lunch (or have a braai if you wish) and chairs.

Evening meetings

1. Thursday, 15 July 1999: Dr Karl van Laeren has agreed to give a slide presentation of Mount Kilimanjaro and the Maasai Mara. This should be most interesting.
2. Thursday, 19 August 1999: Dr Philippa Marett – slides of Madagascar. Her slides are reported to be outstanding.

Venue: for both evenings is the Bowls Section Pavilion of Old Hararians, Drummond Chaplin Street, Milton Park. Time - 6.00 for 6.30 p.m. \$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 sold on a first-come-first-served basis after the meetings. A cash bar will be available.

Saturday, 10 July 1999: Special evening meeting – A continuation of the series of the acclaimed video "The Life of Birds" (narrated by David Attenborough). Hosted by Jacko and John Williams at 14 Harare Drive, Greystone Park. Bring chairs, glasses, plates, drinks and a finger supper. Time: 6.00 for 6.30 p.m. The final part will be shown on a date to be advised.

OFTEN AT OUTINGS OR EVENING MEETINGS WE SEE THE SAME, FEW FACES – WHY ARE MOST OF YOU NOT THERE? PLEASE HELP US ORGANISE EVENTS WHICH MIGHT SUIT YOU BETTER BY COMPLETING THE QUESTIONNAIRE PROVIDED.

Rifa Weekend – 17 TO 20 SEPTEMBER 1999. All places have been filled.

ADVANCE NOTICE OF ANNUAL BREAKFAST – SUNDAY, 12 SEPTEMBER 1999

It has been decided to hold the annual breakfast at Lake Chivero even earlier than usual but, for catering purposes, it will be necessary for those of you wishing to attend to book and pay in advance. Due to ever increasing prices, the breakfast will cost \$60 per person and numbers will this year be limited to 60 as cooking breakfast for more than 60 people puts quite a strain on our ever-willing, volunteer chefs! If you wish to attend this popular event, please complete the tear-off slip provided. Hurry, as places will be filled fast.

MATABELELAND BRANCHEvening Meetings

Friday, 2 July 1999 – Mobil Oil Slides – Miombo specials and other Woodland Birds

Having had the opportunity to use this excellent set of slides for the Sixth Form Course last year and now in possession of a projector, these are well worth showing to the Branch. This will be a "multimedia" presentation and will include both specimens and calls, so do come.

Venue: 3A Holdengarde Avenue, Hillside at 8.00 p.m. Contact Martin for further details.

Friday 6 August 1999 – Winter Social and Peter Mundy – We are aiming to hold a soup, rolls and pudding evening at which Peter will give a presentation on his recent trip to the south of France for the World Vulture Conference. We will provide soup, rolls and pudding but bring your own eating utensils. Please complete the enclosed form to assist with catering and return no later than 15 July to Martin. Cost \$25.00 per head. Venue: CBC staffroom at 6.30 p.m.

Outings

Sunday 11 July 1999 – Fort Rixon Dam Waterfowl Count – this count usually produces some interesting sightings and is certainly worth supporting. Those interested should contact Penny Feather, telephone 44034 or meet at the Education Centre at 9.00 a.m.

Sunday 18 July 1999 – Aisleby Waterfowl Count – water levels are high and support a good concentration of waterfowl so there should be plenty to count. Please do come and help with this worthwhile project. Meet at the Boom at 7.30 a.m. to commence counting at 8.00 a.m.

Sunday 25 July 1999 – Educational Birdwatch at Aisleby – we are intending to hold a mini-Birdwatch competition for schools and junior wildlife groups. This will run from 9.00 a.m. to 1.00 p.m. and we would be most grateful if members could volunteer to assist either with tea after the competition or as monitors. We will require one per team to ensure fair play. All those willing to help, please contact Martin as soon as possible.

Away weekend, 14/15 August 1999 – Shangani area – we are planning an away trip to the Shangani but have yet to finalise the arrangements. Please contact Martin for further details.

Aisleby

<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Co-ordinator</u>	<u>Telephone</u>
Sunday, 25 July 1999 (Mini Birdwatch Competition)	9.00 a.m.	Martin Smith	42474
Saturday, 28 August 1999	2.30 p.m.	Martin Smith	42474

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 10 July 1999</u>	Game Park, Mutare	2.00 p.m.
<u>Sunday 25 July 1999</u>	Dorowa (<u>not Nyahode</u>)	6.00 a.m. – lunch at club
<u>Saturday 14 August 1999</u>	Chikundu Game Park, Odzi	2.00 p.m.
<u>Sunday 29 August 1999</u>	Pathacres Farm, Odzi	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 ☎ 064-630216

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

Outings

Rydings School Interpretive Centre

Saturday 3 July 1999 6.30 a.m.

Saturday 7 August 1999 6.30 a.m.

Other outings

Saturday 24 July 1999 – Rydings School Interpretive Centre – 6.30 p.m. Guest speaker will be Dave Gray. Bring braai pack and drinks.

Weekend 20 and 21 August 1999 – Mavuradonha Camping – Contact us as soon as possible if you wish to come.

MIDLANDS BRANCH

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

Day Outings

Gweru

Day trip – Sunday 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.

Masvingo Contact Lynne Wilkins ☎ 039-63657

Kadoma

Sunday 5 September 1999 – Contact Margaret Parrock ☎ 068-3644 for details of place and time.

REPORTS

MASHONALAND BRANCH

Talk on butterflies by Richard Bell – Thursday 18 March 1999

Richard introduced the more than 30 of us to the world of beautiful butterflies. His knowledge is excellent and his slides demonstrated the many and varied species that are found in Zimbabwe. One of the most interesting aspects about certain butterflies is that they have evolved colours and markings which mock species which are poisonous and thus they are able to trick would-be predators. One of these insects is the Common Diadem which mimics the African Monarch. Camouflage is also apparent in certain species of butterfly. The Commodore, a common garden butterfly, has different colouration depending on whether adults have emerged in a wet season or a dry season. Sizes vary considerably from the False Scarlet, the size of a one cent piece to the huge Swallowtails, the size of a man's hand span.

Richard rounded off his fascinating talk with slides of the International Ornithological Congress which he and Sue attended in Durban in August 1998. Sue exhibited her art work at the congress, some of which was sold to overseas collectors. **Editor**

Ythan Park, Ruwa – 20 March 1999

QDS 1731C3

By Saturday afternoon standards, we had a good turnout of 14 members on another typically overcast day for this very wet summer around Harare. Ythan Park is an approximately 60 acre plot with much gum, pine and jacaranda in Miombo woodland. There is also a small dam on the property. The ground was saturated and the stream was flowing too strongly for more than 5 of the fitter members to cross. A total of 48 species was recorded with the highlights being a Broad-tailed Paradise-whydah male, 4 Whyte's Barbet, 1 Lesser Honeyguide, 2 Spotted Creeper, 2 Black Cuckooshrike, 4 Abdim's Stork, 4 Steel-blue Widowfinch and 1 Diderick Cuckoo. Kevin Fick, our host, also reported that a Verreaux's Eagle-owl was a regular visitor to the garden at night. We are very grateful to Kevin for providing us with refreshments and for cutting the grass on the pathways. **Richard Dennison and David Rockingham-Gill**

Derek Solomon – "LBJs" – Thursday 15 April 1999

Derek started his talk by commenting that it was a pleasure to be talking to the first evening meeting of BirdLife Zimbabwe.

We learned of the background and thinking before publication of the book on LBJs and what criteria was used to select which birds were considered to be LBJs. Derek led us through the different aspects of how to use the book *LBJs – Little Brown Jobs*. He stressed the importance of behaviour and call, as well as particular habitats which birds were found in. He recommended that the birds in a birder's area be listed and that, when looking at difficult birds, notes be made of bill size and shape, etc. Some of the birds which were considered difficult to identify included warblers, chats, larks, pipits and non-breeding males, females and juvenile seed-eaters. One example of ways to identify larks was that larks never hop; they run through grass, whilst pipits run over the grass. Pipits also have white or buffy outer tail feathers which is a diagnostic feature of the group. By the end of the evening, some of us were even more confused and realised that it is essential to have the book and to really make an effort to study it so that we can get to grips with LBJs. Many thanks, Derek for an entertaining evening. **Di Rushforth**

Harava Dam, HARARE – Saturday 22 May 1999

12 of us visited the eastern shore of Harava Dam where there is protected Miombo woodland. Very few species of water birds were seen although in the late afternoon we saw over 1000 Cattle Egret flying home to roost up river. 4 African Black Duck were seen as well as Reed Cormorant, African Darter, Black Crake and African Jacana. A walk along a road surrounded by beautiful Mountain Acacia yielded many birds not often seen close to Harare such as Swallow-tailed Bee-eater, Common Scimitarbill, White-breasted Cuckooshrike, Miombo Tit and Southern Black Tit, Mocking Cliff-chat, White-throated Robin-chat, Southern Hyliota and White-crested Helmet-shrike. We puzzled over a group of swallows perching on power lines and finally concluded that they were immature Wire-tailed Swallows as there were some adult birds amongst them. 6 male Steel-blue Widowfinch were seen and one of them aggressively chased a single Purple Widowfinch. We are grateful to both Mervyn Senior of Mbizi Game Park and Bass masters Capital City Chapter for allowing us access to the area. **Di Rushforth**

MATABELELAND*From the Chairman*

This year instead of holding a Paint a Bird Competition we are intending to hold a mini Birdwatch at Aisleby for schools and junior wildlife groups. Teams of three will be invited to participate, the aim being to see or hear as many species as possible in a four hour period. Our role will be to act as monitors, each team having its own recorder who will ensure species are really seen and enable us to quickly arrive at a winner. Depending on the level of interest, we may extend the competition next year to include adult teams. It will be interesting to note species totals and the event will hopefully give us some much needed publicity. All those willing to help should contact me as soon as possible. Good Birding – **Martin Smith.**

Bonisa Farm, Redbank – Sunday 21 March 1999 QDS 2028A2

This proved to be a rewarding outing to a particularly attractive area, adjoining the Khami River. The large, shallow dam was almost full and the surrounding acacia held plenty to peruse. The morning began with a group of mombies gently herding birders along the track – fortunately, they proved to be merely inquisitive and not violent. Conversation with the farmer later in the day revealed that the more hostile elements had paid a visit to the CSC. Despite soaring temperatures, plenty was to be seen and we spent a considerable time puzzling over a number of calls, at first a loud, strident shriek posed an identification problem which we never did solve. This was followed by a lengthy session with a skulking Marsh Warbler, which again refused to be viewed, but was finally identified on call with reference to tapes. A walk along the flooded watercourse yielded a number of ducks and waders, despite the thick coating of suffocating green weed, but a family of Red-billed Teal found it particularly hard work although they used it as an effective cover with only heads visible and bodies immersed in weed. A small patch of open water attracted a number of waders, including Ruff and Curlew Sandpiper, with one or two of the latter just beginning to moult into breeding plumage. A lone Black Heron added interest to the group, bright yellow feet contrasting strongly with its dark body. Adjacent to the watercourse, a tall *Acacia galpinii* offered some relief from the sun and it was here that we found a Pearl-spotted Owlet, glaring down at us with fierce yellow eyes. Emerging through a thick tangle of Mexican Sunflower, we were all able to see a Lesser Honeyguide perched on a bare Jacaranda branch – a species not often seen clearly. At the dam, surprisingly little was present, the most interesting sighting being a tight knot of 17 Fulvous Duck which made every effort to bunch up as closely as possible on landing after a brief flight, again actively flocked. It would be interesting to know the reason behind this behaviour. A post-tea session of “mad dogs” under a hot, midday sun flushed a Green-backed Heron from the fringing reeds. On perching in a dead tree, it was immediately mobbed by a demanding youngster clamouring for food. Towards the head of the dam a pair of African Fish-eagles circled and it was fitting to be able to end the morning listening to their evocative call. **Martin Smith**

AISLEBY notes – 25 April 1999

Clive and Julia were the sole supporters at this outing and Clive reports the following:

Julia and I started out at 7.30 a.m. to visit a series of holding dams. The water level had risen from previous visits in the first two dams but, despite this, 25 Three-banded Plover, 1 Common Sandpiper plus Black-winged Stilt, Wood Sandpiper and Hottentot Teal were present. It took 15 minutes to identify an elusive Sand Martin. An assumption that two hovering large birds of prey were Black-chested Snake-eagles was proved wrong when using the binoculars as they were Tawny Eagles, although we did see the Black-chested Snake-eagle later. At another drying holding dam, a further 45 Three-banded Plover plus 8 Glossy Ibis and Wood Sandpiper were seen. At the final holding dam we heard Hadedda Ibis and set off to search for the birds through the reeds, soggy ground, spider webs and scrub but no luck. We drove to the lands that are now cleared and burnt off. A single White Stork was spotted feeding amongst the scattered bales of lucerne. 19 Grey Crowned Crane accompanied by a single Abdim's Stork preceded the sighting of a circling Bateleur. At the Ibis Dam platform, a count on the open water and fringes revealed 65 Red-billed Teal, 12 Cape Shoveler, 16 Southern Pochard, 6 Comb Duck and 12 Little Grebe. The male Mallard is still present accompanied by 2 Red-billed Teal. A Squacco Heron obligingly flew

across in front of our position. Once again, time was spent identifying tricky martins but this time Brown-throated Martins and it was a relief to have a single, relatively easy to recognise, Barn Swallow fly past. We stopped to watch a flock of 9 Black-faced Waxbill on our walk back along the dam wall. In just over 4 hours a total of 80 species had been recorded. **Clive Townsley**

Adding to the above, I visited Aisleby on 9 May and managed to find a variety of species worthy of note. On the UMGUSA Dam, a single female Maccoa Duck was present along with plenty of Southern Pochard. Over the inlet, about 20 Wire-tailed Swallows fed on insects as well as 2 White-throated Swallows and a single Common House-martin. At the Bird Dam, 2 Hadedda Ibis were present and departed calling loudly – will they attempt to breed? At the Ibis Dam, the water level has remained high and attracted a considerable number of waterfowl. Also the dreaded *Polygonum* has begun to die off and a clear stretch of water now extends down the length of the dam. On the single remaining tree, 3 pairs of White-breasted Cormorant were attempting to breed, whilst on the mud beneath the tree a young African Purple Swamphen foraged in the company of a single adult. In the lands, Grey Crowned Crane totals have risen substantially and a total of 43 were present feeding on the cleared maize stubble. I recorded a total of 112 species, including Red-billed Hornbill, a vagrant to the area. All dams on the property were full and plenty of birdlife is present so please do make every effort to support our monthly outings. **Martin Smith**

EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB

Lawrenceville Road, Lower VUMBA – Saturday, 13 February 1999

Unlucky for some, they say. We certainly didn't have a lot of joy at the Patterson's property, where on other occasions I've had good birding. The dense vegetation inhibits exploring some areas but the weather was so much brighter than of late that we had high expectations. We were a party of 12 including visitors from Mozambique and old friends from Drifters. The river in spate kept us away from the usual paths but the reeds and bushes were full of widows, whydahs, a Southern Red Bishop and a Tropical Boubou. Bare trees were fairly lively with canaries, mannikins, barbets and bulbuls. Above, we had a distant view of an Augur Buzzard and Eastern Saw-wing but nothing else. Burchell's Coucal bubbled away and Thick-billed Weaver, Spectacled Weaver, Village Weaver and Golden Weavers appeared from time to time. **Ken Dixon**

Grand Reef Road, MUTARE – Saturday, 13 March 1999

We shall know better another time; never go birdwatching near a military installation on a day that three American "missionaries" are appearing in court in Harare. Fortunately, Tony and I were accompanied by 4 Shone companions who were just about able to convince the military that our binoculars were not arms for Ugandans that we wanted to fly out of Grand Reef Aerodrome! It all started very innocently. Our first stop on the ARDA estate took us into a mixture of Acacia woodland and well-grazed scrub, quite heavily populated. As we wandered through the Acacia, we found a multiplicity of common birds; Rattling Cisticola, Brubru, Willow Warbler, Cardinal Woodpecker, Black Cuckooshrike, Little Bee-eaters and European Bee-eaters. The only raptor was a Black-shouldered Kite. At the huts in the compound, we were finally able to identify the swooping swallows – Wire-tailed Swallow – and tick off Rock Dove. Driving on, I missed the airstrip as the surrounding grass was so tall it obscured it and ended up at the barrier marking the entrance to the military camp. We were greeted with some suspicion but Martin managed to divert attention to the Black-chested Snake-eagle perched on the radio masts and we turned around and proceeded with our birding, having parked again just out of sight of the camp. Minutes later the guard caught up with us with a superior officer who made it very obvious that they thought we had an ulterior motive, being the second group of whites seen there that day. Unable to interest the two in their Snake-eagle, we retreated with dignity, I thought, and made for the vlei on the Harare road where Black-winged Bishops had been seen on a previous occasion. We weren't able to identify these this time but added more vlei birds to our list and a Wahlberg's Eagle, our final count being 40 species. **Ken Dixon**

KAROI BIRD CLUBSaturday 20 March 1999 – Kevlyn Farm

We had a good attendance for this meeting. Fourteen of us turned up for an early start on a cool clear morning, and, although the number of species seen was only 69, the walk through the fresh, green woodland and up the only kopje was very pleasant and refreshing. Kevin had cleared the birding paths, so it was plain sailing through the bush, apart from some nimble footing required on the seepage patches! We saw Blue Waxbill, Common Waxbill and Orange-breasted Waxbill, Red-collared Widowbird, Pin-tailed Whydah and Long-tailed Paradise-whydahs in the open, grassed area with European Bee-eater overhead and Common Fiscal on the power line. At the small dam, were White-faced Duck, Hamerkop, African Pied Wagtail and a female Giant Kingfisher – wearing the pants! Through the woodland, African Golden Oriole, African Grey Hornbill and Greater Honeyguide were seen, a Red-chested Cuckoo heard and, after much concentrated effort, a Cape Bunting identified. Overhead were Black-chested Snake-eagle and a Yellow-billed Kite. Back in the garden, we had a look at the Spotted Eagle-owl in her roost, noted the African Palm-swifts and found the culprit of much urgent “chirping” – a Bar-throated Apalis. Vivienne treated us to a splendid breakfast in the garden, after which we had a mini AGM. Kevin was able to give some report back on the recent National AGM and some discussion took place regarding activities and the future direction of the club. Thank you to Kevin and Viv for hosting this meeting. **Merle Mitchell**

Weekend 29-30 May 1999 – The Banana Farm at CHIRUNDU

Eleven of us participated in a most enjoyable birding weekend at Chirundu, arranged by Shirley Babcock with friends on the Banana Farm. The Timmers kindly allowed us to camp on the lush green grass at their Chirundu Cottage, overlooking the river and with the weather warm, the setting was perfect. Up at 5.30 a.m., we drove to the Banana Farm and took a walk inside the perimeter fence, where we found the Jesse on the other side alive with birds and an “Ele” or two! Red-billed Firefinch, Blue Waxbill and Green-winged Pytilia, Yellow-fronted Canary and Red-billed Quelea were feeding on the ground and, flitting in the bushes, Long-tailed Paradise-whydah with Steel-blue Widowfinch atop the trees. Meves’s Starlings were everywhere and a Hamerkop flew overhead with White-bellied Sunbirds feeding on the *Leonotis leonorus*, a favourite with sunbirds, and we collected some seed to plant on the farm. On the power lines were Cut-throat Finch, Wire-tailed Swallows and Lesser Striped Swallows. We then walked around the crocodile pens and found Variable Sunbird and Purple-banded Sunbirds, Burnt-necked Eremomela, a first for some, Violet-backed Starling and many more. Our hosts then took us to a pan on the estate for brunch. On the way, we saw White-headed Vulture and White-backed Vultures and Marabou Storks feeding on crocodile carcasses. At the pan, picturesque with water lilies, huge trees and a giant baobab, we had a most interesting time, with much discussion, identifying what could only have been a Lesser Moorhen. It gave us plenty of opportunity, swimming amongst the water lilies, flicking its tail and resting on the shoreline under an overhanging bush. In the bare-leafed baobab, Retz’s Helmet-shrike, Southern Grey-headed Sparrow, a Golden-breasted Bunting and Lilian Lovebirds visited. Adult and sub-adult Bateleurs were overhead. We had now reached a total of 99 birds, so it was imperative that we found one more and, as luck would have it, on the way out, on the power line there sat a Brown Snake-eagle! To cap it, as we drove away from the camp we had a great view of a Tawny Eagle. Something which is of interest, our hosts showed us a baobab with a plaque on it, honouring Freddy Cruse, a hunter who had been killed by a lion in 1902. In 1953, two workers on the sugar estates told the story of the event which they witnessed as youngsters up a tree. The family hadn’t known what had happened until then when the two daughters and a son visited the spot and installed the plaque. Our thanks to Malcolm and Steph van der Riet, to our hosts Jon and Chooks Langerman and Shirley for organising. **Merle Mitchell**

MIDLANDS BIRDING CLUBWHITEWATERS DAM and surrounding area – 30 April to 2 May 1999 QDS 1929B4

We arrived at our cottage at about four in the afternoon where the ever-common kingfishers, Egyptian Goose and White-faced Ducks were all present. Our favourite Scarlet-chested Sunbird which we see occasionally was on the tree in front of the cottage, showing off and a Blue Waxbill which nests close by was busy building its nest. After dinner, we went for a moonlit boat trip up

the dam which is approximately 5 km long. It was a lovely full moon and the spotlight was not used much. We went up the rivers where we kept on seeing little birds flying just above the water. They weren't bats because they had white backs and flew too direct – they were about the size of a Common Sandpiper, but they have left now. We eventually came to the conclusion that they were probably Little Stints as we had seen them during the day. Has anyone else seen these birds at night and been able to identify them? On Saturday morning we started early with a boat trip up to the top of the dam to look for an African Finfoot that we have seen before. Cattle Egrets and Great Egrets were seen constantly along the shore. Egyptian Goose were flying over in huge flocks going downstream to another dam or to the farmer's land. Unfortunately, we were unable to find the Finfoot but we did get some good views of Black Crakes and Common Moorhens skulking around in the reeds and African Sacred Ibis. At Linslade quarry, three adult Black Storks were seen standing on top of the big quarry, the nest in the smaller quarry having no new nesting materials. At Monteith quarry, where we stopped to walk to the site, three adults were seen flying above us, then four, then five and eventually six flying overhead. Upon arrival at the quarry, two adult storks flew out, possibly two of the six? Cannot say ... Lanner Falcons were seen at the quarry being chased by White-necked Ravens. After rattling our way back in the truck, half of the group went for a sleep, the other half went for a ski as the water was as flat as ice. In the afternoon we went for a ride on our pontoon raft, up the river we call the "delta" – a lovely scenic ride through thick reed-bedded river edges. We followed a pair of African Black Duck as well as a Malachite Kingfisher, plovers and egrets. It was so peaceful. After dinner, we went for another ride on the boat and again we saw the little white-backed birds. Underneath the main Mvuma road bridge a Little Swift flew towards the spotlight. It flew straight at me and I was able to catch it by sheer fluke. We were able to study it in great detail. Square-tailed Nightjars, Freckled Nightjars and Fiery-necked Nightjars were heard calling and six Little Bee-eaters were seen perched and tightly huddled together on a reed up the "delta" river. As always, lots of Water Thick-knees were present. It is so nice doing a night boat trip because we go for a time then switch off and drift just listening to all the night noises. On Sunday morning, we went for a walk up the granite dwala behind the cottage where we flushed a pair of Rufous-cheeked Nightjars which were identified by the white on the wings and tail. In a little pocket of trees up on the kopjie, a bird party containing Common Waxbills, Blue Waxbills and a couple of female sunbirds were seen. A total of 109 species were seen and heard. **Gordon Conway**

TAIL FEATHERS

BULAWAYO birds

I read with interest on ZIMBIRDNET Mark's sighting of a Common Whitethroat, having caught and banded several this season in CBC's plot of woodland within Bulawayo. The latest was an adult male in fresh plumage, caught on 20 March, possibly on northward migration, although regular captures throughout the season would suggest that they are resident but easily overlooked. This is the first year that I have caught Common Whitethroat at CBC and this may reflect the surrounding habitat destruction of the adjacent bush with the development of housing. CBC's wood plot is appreciably mixed with combretum, acacia and shrubby vegetation and supports a surprising diversity of birds. **Martin Smith**

The plurality of birds

I enjoyed the Plurality of Birds in the March/April *Babbler*. Here are some others, some well-known, some rather obscure and some quite picturesque

a charm of finches	a chattering of starlings	a colony of gulls
a convocation of eagles	a fall of woodcock	a Jubilee of eagles
a murder of crows	a mutation of thrushes	an ostentation of peacocks
a parliament of owls	a rookery of seabirds/rooks	a skein of flying geese
a sorde of mallards	a team of ducks	a building of rooks

Sources - *Roget's Super Thesaurus* – quoted in *The Canadian Birding Calendar 1999*. *The Students Companion* – *Wilfred D Best*

There ought to be a collective noun for vultures – is there one? If there isn't, I suggest a cortege of vultures. I thought about a council of vultures but vultures clean up rubbish and our Councils (particularly Harare) don't! **Joyce Simpson**

White-winged Terns harassing a White-breasted Cormorant – Upper Ncema Dam

At approximately 1730 hrs on Sunday, 14 March 1999 at Upper Ncema Dam (near ESIGODINI), close to the dam wall, I witnessed 6 White-winged Terns *Chlidonias leucopterus* harassing a White-breasted Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*. The cormorant was in deep water with only its head and neck and sometimes chest bobbing up above the small waves. The terns were flying and 'dive bombing' the cormorant, only to surface some way away, whereupon the terns would resume their attack and the cormorant would again submerge. This went on for some considerable time and at first I thought that perhaps the cormorant had a fish in its bill, which the terns were trying to steal, but on a closer look through binoculars, the cormorant was, in fact, defending itself and repulsing the attacks with its bill by opening, snapping and pecking at the flying terns. I was unable to witness the ultimate result of the encounter as I was called away but concluded that perhaps the terns were not happy with the cormorant invading their feeding ground and I wonder if any other birder has witnessed a similar incident. **Ron Stuttaford**

Northern Matabeleland – Easter 1999

We (Chris Bell, James Powell and me) set off on 2 April for the Easter weekend, our first stop being CHEGUTU DAVID WHITEHEAD Textile Ponds where we saw 670 or more Black-winged Stilts, 50 Hottentot Teal (the most I've seen at one place), 100 African Sacred Ibis and about 20 Blacksmith Lapwings (we found 4 clutches of eggs, three with three eggs and one with two), 100 Ruff and 13 Cape Teal. We picked up a Kentucky Fried chicken in Bulawayo and ate it, still piping hot, on the Ashton hide at AISLEBY where we saw African Sacred Ibis and Black-headed Heron (suspected breeding). There was a Cape Shoveler and 4 Great White Pelicans on a tree. It was windy so not much was showing itself. The following day we travelled to Lobesi Pan in Tsholotsho District (QDS 1927D3) where we found Whiskered Tern with successful chicks learning to fly and two who had to swim off their nest sites. We saw a Red-billed Teal fly up and hit a Saddle-billed Stork in the face! It was obviously defending a nest or chicks. Grey Crowned Cranes were also there. Later that day, we were at a series of the Ngamo Pans (QDS 1927A2) within sight of the Hwange National Park boundary where we saw more Whiskered Terns and a few White-winged Terns, 2 Woolly-necked Storks, a pair of Burchell's Sandgrouse, 2 Lesser Jacana and 3 male Shaft-tailed Whydahs. The next day at Dandanda Pan, Lupane District (QDS 1827B4), where little rain had fallen and the 7 x 2 km pan was just extensive grassland with 3 small pools, we saw a Slaty Egret looking lost, resting in the grass, 80 Collared Pratincole, a pair of Wattled Cranes and more Whiskered Terns and White-winged Terns. There was also a Grey Crowned Crane with two chicks. We then went to MBAZHE PAN, Nkayi District (QDS 1828D3) which was overgrown and completely choked with water hyacinth. However, Allen's Gallinules were seen with several broods of chicks and we saw our first African Fish-eagle. Overall, no Maccos Ducks which we had gone to look for but they may well be in Lobesi Pan. **David Rockingham-Gill**

Black Storks on Mount Dombo, NYANGA area QDS 1832A4

On 23 May 1999, a small group of us, while climbing Dombo Mountain, spotted a single Black Stork flying along the sheer cliff of the mountain. As we were climbing down, I noticed one alighting on a small shelf of rock on the southeast crag. A little later, the mate also appeared and settled in the same place. We decided it must have been a nest as there was a considerable amount of dropping splashes down the rock face below. As we watched the birds over a period of ten minutes, they came and went four or five times. We saw no sign of nesting material being brought or any sort of courtship. I have only ever seen one pair before and that was on the Shire River side of Zomba Mountain in Malawi circa 1982. **Iain Macdonald**

Black Stork Report

Some nests either have adults present, eggs or are about to lay, with some early breeders already having chicks as at 29 May 1999.

DATE	LOCATION OF NEST	NOTES
6.6.99	Camperdown Mine	1 adult sitting on nest – Lanner Falcon present
18.4.99	Ghoko Mountain Range	3 adults. Seen flying around; nest not checked
30.5.99	Guburi Farm 1	2 eggs
3.6.99	Linslade Quarry	5 eggs in old nest – Eastern quarry – moved from Western
1.5.99	Monteith Quarry	2 adults at nest – 6 flying overhead 15 minutes beforehand.
30.5.99	Monteith Quarry	Lanner Falcon sitting on the Stork nest – 1 Stork seen
19.4.99	Mount Guruguru	3 adults seen; nest still not been prepared
21.5.99	Nalatale Quarry	5 adults, 2 juv. seen; no nest seen – Verreaux's Eagles present, possibly on eggs
19.4.99	Peak Mine East + West	5 adults seen flying around; Mine not accessed – we got lost
16.5.99	Peak Mine West	Nest with 4 eggs, including 1 very small and 1 broken – checked again 6.6.99 and found nest destroyed and abandoned – 2 adults present. 2 Lanner Falcons present – very noisy
29.5.99	SEBAKWE POORT	4 nests with small chicks, 1 with eggs, 1 pair courting
6.6.99	Wanderer Mine 1	1 egg and 2 adults present
6.6.99	Wanderer Mine 2	2 eggs, 2 adults on nest and 2 flew out

Thanks to Iain Macdonald for his report of a sighting near Brondesbury Park Hotel on Mount Dombo, Nyanga and for the brief report from Ian Singlehalt Ward from the Chilojo Cliffs. Please contact us with more information. Thanks also to those readers who have notified us of breeding records and sightings. Please will all members keep their eyes open for Black Storks – we need all your input about this elusive bird. Gordon Conway – telephone H 054-24058

NOTICEBOARD

RECENT REPORTS IN *HONEYGUIDE*

I will be taking over the writing of Recent Reports in *Honeyguide* with effect from the end of May 1999. As you know, for many years, this was written by Tony Tree who has done a great job and Michael Irwin tells me that Tony has written 507 pages of Recent Reports in his time.

While I have not travelled to all the countries around us, nor do I have the in-depth migratory knowledge that Tony has, I will try to maintain a standard and I do have one advantage from the very beginning – I will have *The Atlas of Southern African Birds* to refer to.

I understand that *Honeyguide* is about to come out only twice a year in an endeavour to contain costs and Recent Reports will therefore not be so recent. I will however do my best to get your reports into *Honeyguide* as soon as possible. From an editorial point of view, contributions should be submitted as soon as possible after every three-month period (June-August, September-November, December-February and March-May).

To help with the compilation of Recent Reports, it would be much appreciated if you could include a note with your field cards telling me of anything special that you have noted or what you have

referred to. The notes section of the field card should be filled in if possible and if not with bird notes then with animals you may have seen.

There is no doubt that we can slowly improve on the squares missing from the bird atlas and expand the now-known range of birds such as the Western Violet-backed Sunbird which has 261 records – possibly we never really looked for the bird or is it now rarer than the Slaty Egret or the Palm-nut Vulture? We have to dig those rarer birds out of the bush because they are not going to fly into the bedroom window! For Western Violet-backed Sunbirds try looking in Faurea (Beechwood) and Mukwa trees. As I haven't yet tried my hand at Recent Reports I don't know how it will go but I intend to try and maintain the various observations in the currently recognised provincial boundaries and thereafter use the QDS system. As I have no computer skills, wish me luck – better still put pen to paper (don't worry about the quality – *Vultures of Africa* was written on the reverse side of already used A4 paper!) and send in your reports to me at P O Box 105, Chinhoyi.

Many thanks, **David Rockingham-Gill**

Second-hand binoculars needed for educational project

As you probably know, a successful workshop for teachers was held in March and much enthusiasm was shown. In order to keep up the interest of the teachers, we need to supply them each with a pair of binoculars. If anyone has a pair in reasonable condition which they would be willing to donate or sell please contact Mrs Leslee Maasdorp on telephone 883316

Back Issues of Honeyguide

If anyone would like back issues of *Honeyguide* at \$10 each, please contact Kevin Barry, Gweru telephone 054-27316

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

A reminder that 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.

Zimbabwe Falconers Club – annual field meet

Over the period 11 – 15 August 1999 the Falconers Club will be holding their annual field meet at Biri River Safari Lodge, Chegutu District. Camping sites are available with access to a deep freeze and refrigerator. Costs are \$100 per family or \$50 per individual. If you are interested in hunting with birds please feel free to join them.

New members

We welcome to BirdLife Zimbabwe, the following new members:

P S W Bradshaw and family, Mrs S Brookes-Ball, Ms R Benzies, M Birgel and family, A P Cox, J Francis, S Fynes-Clinton and family, Mr and Mrs C D Golding, Mrs H Granville, Dr C Humphreys, A Landau and family, Mrs D H Lombard, Mr and Mrs J A H MacKinnon, Mrs S McAdam, Mrs L Mckenzie, G I McMaster, Ms J Masama, Mr and Mrs C M Meredith, Ms K Noel, M J and J S Oliver, Mr and Mrs B O'Neill, Mr and Mrs J Small, Mrs A I Southey, Mr and Mrs D Summersgill, L Taipi, Mr and Mrs T 't Hart, S Wilkinson and family.

Institutional members: Kuimba Shiri, Sango Ranch