

BABBLER

BirdLife Zimbabwe

Formerly Ornithological Association of Zimbabwe
A PARTNER DESIGNATE OF BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL

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Revising southern African common bird names

Many of you would have heard that several of the common names of our birds will be changed in the re-write of *Roberts' Birds of Southern Africa*. The rationale is that there should be one common name for the same bird internationally. There is confusion amongst birders who bird in Africa and farther afield because of there being several different names for the same bird and, whilst the introduction of the new common names may initially cause some difficulty, it will be better for all birders in the long term. Instead of publishing the full list at this stage, the new names will be gradually introduced in *Babbler* reports by including the new names (where applicable) in brackets. Those of you who own Sasol field guides will already be familiar with some of the new names and, if we all get used to the new common names over the next few years, once the new *Roberts'* is finally available, we will be familiar with them.

Editor

ACTIVITIES

MASHONALAND BRANCH

Regular outings

NB - NOTE NEW TIMES

1. Mukuvisi Woodlands: Sundays 5 September and 3 October 1999. Meet at the Paget Road entrance at 6.30 a.m. There will be a vehicle guard in attendance.
2. Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary: Sundays 12 September (annual breakfast*) and 10 October 1999. Meet at Marimba Shopping Centre for departure at 6.30 am. Beginners are very welcome. Bring your chairs and tea. NOTE: The gate will be kept locked after entry and again on exit.

* There are a few places left for the breakfast so you still have time to make a booking.

Saturday afternoon outings

1. 18 September 1999: Lyndhurst Farm, Ruwa area. Meet Queensdale Shopping Centre, Chiremba Road at 2.00 p.m. Bring chairs and refreshments.
2. 23 October 1999: Crowborough. Meet Marimba Shops, off Samora Machel Avenue 2.30 p.m.

Sunday outings

1. 26 September 1999: Atlanta Farm, Enterprise Valley area. Meet on the left-hand side of the Enterprise Road at the Grange Service Station at 6.30 a.m.
2. 31 October 1999: Esmerdale Farm, Norton (Lake Manyame). Meet at Marimba Shops, off Samora Machel Avenue at 6.30 a.m.

Bring chairs and refreshments for both outings.

Evening meetings

1. Thursday 16 September 1999: Dr Peter Mundy - "Vultures in Europe". This will be good!
2. Thursday 21 October 1999: The third in a series of ID courses for beginners. Details of the course are included in this issue. For this session (waterfowl and waders) any members not booked on the course but who would like to join in are most welcome – there will be a small fee payable.

Venue: for both evenings is the Bowls Section Pavilion of Old Hararians, Drummond Chaplin Street, Milton Park where there is a security guard. Time – 6.00 for 6.30 p.m. A number of beef and chicken pies will be sold on a first-come-first-served basis after the meetings. A cash bar will be available.

Saturday 4 September 1999: Special evening meeting – A continuation of the series of the 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 8.30 p.m. The final part will be shown on a date to be advised.

Away weekend – Mavuradonha Wilderness Area – 5 to 7 November 1999

The Branch has booked accommodation in this wonderful area. There are 25 bashes and 4 camp sites available. Those members interested in taking advantage of this opportunity are asked to complete the booking slip provided.

Thank you to the 47 people (10% of Mashonaland Branch members) who returned questionnaires. The most common reason for non-attendance is that people are too busy or live too far away. This has at least told us that it is not the venue of the outings or the subjects of the meetings arranged by the committee that are the problem. Evening meeting preferences are: bird speakers, slide/video shows of birds, wildlife speakers or other general subjects, identification courses. Some other suggestions have been bird sound identification, bird/wildlife quiz and travelling with a bird bias.

MATABELELAND BRANCHEvening Meetings

Friday 3 September 1999 – Video Evening – Life of Birds – Another two episodes from this magnificent series, narrated by David Attenborough, entitled "How to find a Partner" and "Nesting and Protection of Chicks".

Friday 1 October 1999 – Waders and Water birds – A look at waders and water birds, with a variety of skins, calls and slides, the latter being drawn from Peter Ginn's Mobil Oil Slides, presented by your Committee. Venue for both evenings: 3A Holdengarde Avenue, Hillside at 8.00 p.m. Contact Martin for further details.

Outings

Sunday 19 September 1999 – Verreaux's Eagle outing – Warren Goodwin will guide us on our annual tour of the Verreaux's Eagle nest sites. This will be an all-day outing, so bring lunch and tea. Meet at Retreat at 8.00 a.m. or contact Warren for further details.

Sunday 17 October 1999 – Thandanani Farm – This is an attractive property 52 km from Bulawayo, accessed from the Falls Road. Again, this is an all-day outing, so bring tea and lunch. Meet at the Falls Road Garage at 7.30 a.m., or contact Martin for further details.

Aisleby

<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Co-ordinator</u>	<u>Telephone</u>
Sunday 26 September 1999	7.30 a.m.	Martin Smith	42474
Sunday 31 October 1999	7.00 a.m.	Julia Duprée	62401

(Note new time)

Either contact the co-ordinator or meet at the boom at the time given.

The October outing will be combined with a camping weekend with members of the Botswana Bird Club. They will probably arrive on Friday afternoon and spend Friday and Saturday nights at the Yacht Club.

Branch support would be most appreciated and help cement cross-border ties.

Those wishing to camp should contact Martin.

EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB

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

Outings

<u>Saturday 11 September 1999</u>	Murahwa's Hill, Mutare	2.00 p.m.
<u>Sunday 26 September 1999</u>	Seldomseen, Bvumba	6.30 a.m.
<u>Saturday 9 October 1999</u>	La Rochelle	2.00 p.m.
<u>Sunday 31 October 1999</u>	Juliasdale	6.00 a.m. – packed lunch

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

OutingsRydings School Interpretive Centre

Counts continue each first Saturday of the month, thanks mainly to the ladies at the School and in part to one or two members joining them on occasion.

Saturday 4 September 1999 6.30 a.m.

Saturday 9 October 1999 6.30 a.m.

Other outings

Weekend 2/3 October – Birdwatch – We will be participating in the 24 hour count for BirdLife Zimbabwe and the 48 hour count for World Birdwatch.

MIDLANDS BRANCH

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

Day OutingsGweru

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.

REPORTSNATIONALBird Awareness Programme (BAP) in Schools run by BirdLife Zimbabwe (BLZ)

Why has BLZ become involved in this project? The primary reason is that this association believes that one of the best ways of improving the lot of birds in Zimbabwe is to target the youth and interest them in birds and the problems they face. Thus a project proposal was put to the

Royal Society for the Protection of Birds in England suggesting that BLZ initiate a pilot project in 12 schools and one agricultural college to raise awareness of and appreciation of birds as important elements in the country's ecosystem. The Education Committee of BLZ won a small grant of £5 000 for this project to be run and completed in 1999. For it to become sustainable and even extended, further funding, preferably from local sources, will be needed. The teachers were trained at a workshop in March and were motivated to start teaching their classes about birds and all have so far recorded birds in the grounds and put out food and water for them. The children in certain classes at the target schools are being taught identification of birds, conservation methods and how birds contribute to the well-being of the farming and natural systems at the schools. The project has been implemented in schools participating in the SCOPE programme (a permaculture project) and so already have had their awareness of environmental issues raised. Much of the success of BAP depends on the active participation of BLZ members, helping the teachers and pupils to identify and encourage birds to the grounds. There has been a good response to this segment of the project and the input from the various branches has made a significant contribution to progress so far, but more help from additional members would help share the load. Participating schools are: Batanai Secondary (Kwekwe), Chereka Primary (Rusape), Chireka Primary (Bindura), Glenview 6 Primary (Harare), Katanga Secondary (Chiredzi), Loziba Primary (Turk Mine), Mavela Secondary (Tsholotsho), Mlezu College (Kwekwe), Nyahode Secondary (Chimanimani), Ntepe Secondary (Gwanda), Sadzi Primary (Magunje), St. Vincent Secondary (Ruwa), Shundure Primary (Bazeley Bridge).

The Committee for BAP is: Leslee Maasdorp (Co-ordinator), Pat Saunders, Dorothy Wakeling, Geoff Lowe and Patrick Smet. They have produced a book for the children and this is being printed for distribution to the schools in October. If you feel you can assist with visiting one or more schools, please contact Leslee Maasdorp on telephone 883316, or your branch chairman.

MASHONALAND BRANCH

GREYSTONE PARK Nature Preserve, HARARE – Saturday 17 April 1999

About 10 of us ventured out to this area on a cool, overcast afternoon. We were met by Roger Fairlie, the current Chairman of the Preserve, who explained to us how the association had managed to obtain a lease from the City of Harare and about the educational work they did in the area. They depend largely on support from residents abounding the Preserve but welcomed membership from other concerned citizens. The area consists mainly of riverine vegetation, large acacias and a small dam. Water birds were few with Black Crake, Common Moorhen and African Jacana being present. We were fortunate to have good views of five African Green-pigeon eating fruit from several unidentified trees. Of amusement were a party of Speckled Mousebirds who were clambering amongst the low vegetation. 4 species of barbet were seen – Black-collared Barbet, Whyte's Barbet, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird and Crested Barbet. At the end of the walk, a tally of 52 was considered fair for an autumn afternoon.

Editor

Visit to Vulture Restaurant Viakfontein Estate – 24 April 1999

About 30 members travelled from Harare and spent a very pleasant day at this venue situated in the midst of a ranching and game conservancy area. The morning was spent looking for birds in the extensive thornveld and grassland. Some of the typical acacia birds were seen including Acacia Pied Barbet, Ashy Tit, Marico Flycatcher and Marico Sunbird. Unfortunately, we were unable to find the Wattled Cranes and Kori Bustards which also occur there. After a braai lunch at the new Musiamwa Camp we proceeded to the vulture hide where a feast had been put out for the vultures. This hide provides excellent opportunities to observe and photograph vultures at close quarters. About 300 White-backed Vultures, 10 Hooded Vultures and 4 Lappet-faced Vultures, Marabou Storks and numerous Pled Crows were in attendance. Also present were 2 immature Cape Vultures! The highlight was provided by the arrival in the late afternoon of a Black-backed Jackal which stole some scraps and was harassed by the vultures. A few people who camped or slept overnight in the chalets at the camp were taken on a night drive which revealed an abundance of wildlife including Kudu, Impala, Duiker, Steenbok and Spring Hares but no birds! A Sunday morning return to the vulture restaurant provided a close-up observation of the Lappet-faced Vultures

feeding on the non-fleshy remains. Thank you to the O'Neils and our other hosts for their hospitality and a very interesting visit! **Geoff Lowe**

Arthur Dunkley – Falcons – Thursday 20 May 1999

Only 20 people attended this excellent presentation by Mr Arthur Dunkley, a well-known falconer and expert on raptors. Arthur gave us a brief background of falconry and then went on to tell us about the wonderful Taita Falcon which was discovered relatively recently at the Victoria Falls by some ornithologists who were at a conference. Evidently they were familiar with the bird which occurs in the Taita Hills in Kenya. The birds range was known to extend from Tanzania to Zambia but it had not been identified in Zimbabwe until then. Arthur explained to us that the extremely fast flying, confident Taita Falcon had captured his imagination and he then set about trying to study its breeding habits and distribution in southern Africa. Their breeding was affected by DDT and, under the supervision of Tom Cade, Professor of Ornithology at Cornell University in America, falconers in Zimbabwe set up a breeding facility and to date two pairs have successfully raised chicks. Arthur travelled extensively in the early 1980's in the Zambezi River gorges looking for suitable habitats for Taitas. In 1983 he found three breeding sites. Today it is known that Taitas also occur in the Eastern Districts on both the Zimbabwean and Mozambican sides as well as in the south eastern Lowveld where there are isolated sites. He estimated that there could be between 50 and 70 breeding pairs in Zimbabwe. Taitas have also been found in the Eastern Transvaal. Arthur found after extensive research that the incubation period of Taita eggs is between 22 to 27 days whilst other falcons take between 30 to 32 days to hatch. After this fascinating talk, Arthur tested our knowledge on raptors – I didn't think we did well at all! Our very grateful thanks to Arthur for fitting us into his busy schedule! **Di Rushforth**

GOSHO PARK – 30 May 1999

About twenty of us, including two visitors from New Zealand, had a very pleasant day out at Goshu Park. The bush was very quiet and appeared to be rather devoid of bird life so we only managed to spot a total of 49 species. The highlights were White-breasted Cuckooshrike, Familiar Chat, a party of White-crested Helmet-shrikes and a first for at least one member – Southern Hylia. We were joined at lunch-time by a very tame, obviously hand-reared female Kudu who insisted on sharing several people's lunch! **Deborah Varden**

David Hartung – 17 June 1999

At our evening meeting, David Hartung, the well-known and excellent amateur photographer gave us a very pleasant evening of slides, which he suitably called *A Zimbabwe Walk About* with the focus on nature. There were also a number of prints displayed, many of which have received prizes. Since there were a few photographers in the audience, he gave us some information on the kind of camera and films, etc. which he uses, together with some technical talk on light and speed. It is obvious that much patience is necessary if one is going to be successful at this hobby. Many of us are unaware of the little gems of beauty which can be seen in our own gardens and immediate vicinity. David's slides make us conscious of these. His pictures included flowers, trees, spiders, frogs, dragonflies, snakes, birds and mammals. His descriptions were frequently interspersed with delightful touches of humour. My own favourite pictures included the "knobbies" taking off from the water, the Chilojo Cliffs, the seldom seen Blue Duiker and the lone buffalo. Thank you David for a thoroughly delightful show. **Sally Perrett**

EWANRIGG BOTANIC GARDENS – Sunday 27 June 1999 QDS 1731C2

Before we set out for our annual visit to Ewanrigg we were concerned about the cool, windy weather with clouds coming in from the southeast. Our fears were justified as the birding was not as easy or productive as last year. However, we had a good turnout of about 15 members and the clouds did not come over until about midday. The aloes were flowering but seem to have been less abundant in the last 2 years of good rains than in previous drier years. Should we time our visits to be later after good rains or not? A total of 50 species was recorded with the highlights being 4 Ashy Flycatchers in a group (possibly a family), Copper Sunbird, 20 Miombo Double-collared Sunbird and 12 White-bellied Sunbird, 60 Steel-blue Widowfinch and 2 male Purple Widowfinch. **Richard Dennison**

MATABELELAND

From the Chairman

The past month has been a busy one for the Branch with a variety of additional events for members. The July monthly meeting was based on Miombo birds and attracted a pleasing level of support. The Mobil Oil slides proved to be an excellent visual aid, despite being over 20 years old. Waterfowl counts were conducted at both Fort Rixon and Aisleby and it was useful to meet Dave Dicks from the RSPB's Scottish Office who accompanied us on the RIXON Dam count. His knowledge was particularly useful, given an appreciable number of Egyptian Goose corpses which suggested poisoning. In the UK, lab testing would have been able to identify the chemical responsible and thus possibly enable the cause to have been traced. We also spent a considerable time identifying a rather distant Chestnut-banded Plover, a new sighting for the Dam, and a rarity for the checklist. The AISLEBY count yielded over 6400 birds, representing 48 different species of waterfowl, probably the best count to date. This included 52 Maccoa Duck and 1800 Egyptian Geese, the latter must be causing considerable damage to the winter wheat on a scale of 25 geese to one sheep! At the end of the month, we used the Umgusa Yacht Club for our inaugural Schools' Birdwatch Competition. This attracted 26 pupils from 8 different schools, accompanied by 6 members of staff. Each team had a Branch member in charge and they were given 3 hours in which to identify as many birds as possible. A number of the teams had very little prior knowledge and it proved to be an educational activity with many requiring assistance on identification. Despite this, all showed plenty of enthusiasm and appreciated the prizes which were donated by the African Bird Club and the Branch. Thank you to all those who have helped with our July programme. Please do continue with your support. **Martin Smith**

Sandown North and Mananda Dam – Sunday 16 May 1999

This was a delightful outing to a beautiful property which was looking particularly attractive, having received a reasonable rainfall. Access has improved considerably with the tarring of the Solusi Road which only exposed us to a mere 8 km of gravel. Trees were still in leaf and the grass an attractive golden-brown, water lilies were in bloom on the dams which were almost full. Arriving at the homestead, Boulder Chats scattered across the roof, whilst Bar-throated Apalis called strongly from within the leafy garden. Following tea, we moved on to an attractive camp, located on the edge of a farm dam, surrounded by mixed woodland and broken kopjies. After plenty of positive mumbles and a suggestion that we might like to book it for a future weekend, we moved on around the dam. Overhead there was plenty to see with both raptors and *Hirundinidae* being well represented. Bateleur, African Hawk-eagle, African Fish-eagle and a juvenile Martial Eagle all drifted past which meant ground birds were a little shy with only Crested Francolin and Helmeted Guineafowl being recorded. Over the dam, a small flock of Grey-rumped Swallows fed and were joined by Brown-throated Martin and a single White-rumped Swift, the latter had us puzzled as birds were moving 'swiftly' in the blustery conditions. Further along, mixed woodland produced a tantalising glimpse of a party of tits which quickly disappeared. A Yellow-bellied Eremomela proved more accommodating and offered some diagnostic views of its belly. At the head of the dam, a small patch of mud supported a couple of Common Greenshank and gave some of us the unusual experience of discovering mud in a Matabeleland River. On the water, amongst the lilies, a pair of African Pygmy-geese and two young were seen. This stimulated plenty of discussion on breeding sites with a variety of offerings including reed-fringed rock faces. *Roberts* produced a more sensible answer of 'A hole in tree, termite mound or rocky ledge' all of which were available. Lunchtime entertainment was provided by a Bush Snake attempting to consume its lunch of Rock Agama. Fortunately it slithered away to pursue its ingestion elsewhere and not in view of our sandwiches. We were then given a guided tour of Peter's Pickles, a thriving home industry, still in its infancy but due to expand. A walk through the Rosenfels' lush garden proved rewarding and added thrushes and canaries to the list. Finally, we moved on to Mananda Dam, which we last visited in the drought years of the 80's. We were most impressed to discover a lengthy stretch of blue water, dotted with water lilies and surrounded by knee-high grass, a considerable change to our previous experience of a muddy channel and dusty plains. Time restricted us to a small section only but we did manage to see a pair of African Black Duck and pondered over some

flitting cisticola. In the evening light, the dam looked particularly attractive and provided a suitable scene for the end of an enjoyable outing. Our thanks to Max and Mary Rosenfels for hosting us and allowing access to their gorgeous property. **Martin Smith**

EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB

Nyamakari Farm, BURMA VALLEY (McGregor) – Sunday 25 April 1999

What a lovely selection of habitats we visited on Sunday, 25 April, and how lucky we were to have so many experts on hand to interpret every sighting, sound, tree, spoor we came across. Our final list was impressive, its length in direct proportion to the depth of knowledge of the participants. Our early hours were spent on a gentle circular walk in mixed woodland at the foot of a large kopjie. Wild fruits abounded and were identified for us by Dean McGregor on holiday from his guiding duties in Matusadona. Martin, our local expert, confirmed and tasted. Although we did not come across any major bird parties, Scarlet-chested Sunbird, Terrestrial Brownbul, Yellow-throated Petronia, tinkerbirds and prinias were around. Then a bird of prey was espied sitting high on the kopjie. From behind, it looked like a Long-crested Eagle but we were delighted to see, on moving a little, that it was an African Crowned Eagle. It obligingly rose to show us its wing pattern. Not long after that, a Bateleur appeared and Crowned Hornbill and African Grey Hornbill, then Shikra, a Rock Kestrel and a Lizard Buzzard called. A Green Twinspot was very welcome too. After a welcome rest and refreshments, the party of Mutareans and Burma Valley residents moved club wards in order to be near the eventual lunch venue. The fig trees there supplied lots of species missing so far like canaries, waxbills and mousebirds and the thick undergrowth held Red-faced Cisticola, Grey Waxbill, Yellow-bellied Eremomela and a Boomslang. For this part, we were joined by the Holland family who had spent the early period on a successful African Finfoot hunt and also had seen an Osprey on the dam. Ben now introduced us to the Short-winged Cisticola singing persistently 5 metres from the ground. Looking up for a moment, we had both Black-chested Snake-eagle and a young Martial Eagle above us. What a chance to compare size and markings. A White-backed Vulture also put in an appearance. Then Quinn and Dean found a Dwarf Bittern. The last bit of excitement, as we dawdled back to the club, was a party of three Purple-banded Sunbirds just above us.

Many, many thanks to our hosts, Verna and Alan McGregor, guides Dean, Quinn and Davie, and all participants for a super morning's activity. We counted some 67 species on the main walk and another 20 were added by the dam party – a great debut for BirdLife Zimbabwe. **Ken Dixon**

Wiermouth MUTARE – Saturday 8 May 1999

Attendance was distinguished more by quality than by quantity. Four only – Martin, Simba, Rex and your reporter. The venue was, rather vaguely, advertised as Wiermouth. Martin being the only person present who claimed some knowledge of the area was elected leader which proved to be a wise choice. His first helpful move was to persuade the constable in charge at the Wiermouth ZRP post to allow us to park our cars there. Martin led us back along the road – Simba spotted a White-backed Vulture circling above Dangamvura and we tried without success to locate a (?) warbler singing a long and very varied song from a thicket beside the road. A footpath leading towards the railway line and a short walk beside the track produced a Green-winged Pytilia, White-browed Robin-chat, Bar-throated Apalis and a small group of tiny birds which fled into thick cover before we could identify them (Blue Waxbills?). Martin found a large brown bird of prey at rest on top of a tree some three or four hundred metres up the mountain-side beyond the railway, too distant for positive ID but probably a juvenile African Harrier-hawk (this guess relying heavily on JIZZ – General Impression Size and Shape). We then recovered our vehicles from police custody and drove westwards to the lands below the prison farm where Martin hoped the mealies would have been cleared, making a suitable habitat for the small seed-eaters. Unfortunately, the plants were still standing and birds were scarce. Plenty of African Palm-swifts, an excellent sighting of a pair of Black-shouldered Kites and also a distant large raptor which just could have been a Verreaux's Eagle. The rough track continued parallel to the railway and then back across the line, becoming even more rough towards Valley Bricks and the Feruka Road. This stretch produced several *Euplectes* type birds, females or non-breeding males, perhaps Red-collared Widowbirds, Little Bee-eaters, an unidentified lark (?) and an immature and

very late Diderick Cuckoo. Our total count, after a very pleasant two hours, was 29 species. Thank you, Martin. **Tony Curtis**

Shundure School near Bazeley Bridge and Nyahode Learning Centre near CHIMANIMANI

As part of the BirdLife Zimbabwe educational project, visits were made to the two schools in our area. Unfortunately contact was not made with the teachers involved but compiling basic lists of the birds seen in the area for comparison with lists made by the pupils has at least been done. I missed the Shundure visit through illness but the faithful few – Tony, Rex, Martin and Stanislas, accompanied by a newish arrival in the area, Edna – identified 39 species in a varied and attractive school campus. Most notable was Violet-eared Waxbill in the permaculture garden. Nyahode is a school that I have known well for some years. My recent visit produced only 36 species but I have seen a much wider variety over the years. Let's hope this initiative is fruitful and bird clubs are founded and conservation encouraged in more than just these 2 local schools. Do drop in and help if you are passing. **Ken Dixon**

CYNARA Farm, Old MUTARE – 12 June 1999

It was some considerable time since the club had visited Cynara but little had changed; all dams were still full and there was a good variety of birdlife in all habitats. There were 7 of us on a perfect afternoon and in the course of our 2+ hour stroll, we saw 56, perhaps 57 species. I say perhaps because there was a possible Bennett's Woodpecker seen by Rex and Terry but which did not stay long enough for us all to form an opinion. Certainly this species, although a possibility, has not been recorded at Cynara before. We shall follow it up as there was a clear and fresh elongated hole in a tall acacia, indicating regular visits from said bird. The farmyard area contained a large flock of Cattle Egret and another of Helmeted Guineafowl plus Fork-tailed Drongos, a bored looking coucal, Yellow-breasted Apalis and plenty of Chin-spot Batis. The small dams yielded 8 Black Crake, Grey Heron and Black-headed Heron but little else except the expected Grey-rumped Swallow. Rattling Cisticola were everywhere along with a few African Pipit and longclaw. 1 African Sacred Ibis and 2 Hadedda Ibis probed the pasture among egrets and Wattled Lapwings. Rex joined us at this point, reporting African Green-pigeon which we were lucky to see for ourselves, later. The woodland was quiet but gradually our list lengthened as the commoner species put in an appearance. Then, on the bigger dam, we saw a Red-billed Teal with a Little Grebe, the former being an uncommon species here. By now it was getting cool so we called it a day, satisfied with our bird count but disappointed with the number of birders. **Ken Dixon**

Karoi Bird Club

Kevlyn Farm KAROI – Sunday 20 June 1999

For this meeting we decided to look at sunbirds. 10 of us gathered on this cold morning and, fortifying ourselves with hot coffee, we first listened to a short talk Kevin gave us on the most common sunbirds in our area. We then spent time watching the sunbirds feeding on the aloe flowers and the flowers of a Kenya coffee shade tree. The majority of them were females or juveniles, there being only four varieties – Amethyst Sunbird, Scarlet-chested Sunbird, Miombo Double-collared Sunbird and White-bellied Sunbird. We had hoped that Variable Sunbird would be there but that appeared only two weeks later, and then just one male as had been the case in the previous 2 years. Two weeks later was certainly a better time for the presence of numbers – at that time 10 male Amethyst Sunbirds were seen in one tree! They seemed to be in the majority, but outnumbered on the aloes by the Scarlet-chested, Miombo Double-collared, White-bellied and the lone Variable Sunbird. Although Copper Sunbird were present on the farm three weeks previously, there was and up until now – 30 July – no sign of it. Where does it go, or would it be here, but in eclipse plumage? After breakfast on the verandah, where we were able to view the resident African Mourning Doves, feeding on the grain provided, we dispersed, with thoughts in our minds of the utter beauty of our sunbirds. Thanks to Kevin for the work done for the talk.

A point of Interest – two Meves's Starlings have appeared with the other starlings to feed in the Kenya coffee shade tree and on the lawn and we have reports from Protea and Sangalala Farms of birds spotted there too – all Karoi north. **Merle Mitchell**

Rydings School Interpretive Centre – Saturday, 24 July 1999

It was a pleasure to welcome Dave and Ida Gray to our gathering on this cold evening at the water's edge. We had decided that it was time to learn something and forgo our normal, very pleasant ambling about the bush, twitching, so, 20 of us, with several layers of clothing on, gathered about the braai fires for a 'warm up' before seating ourselves for Dave's talk. Dave had brought the books *Confusing Birds* by Kenneth Newman and Derek Solomon and *LBJs* by the same authors as well as David Johnson and Alex Masterson. Dave proceeded to instruct us how to use the books, bringing out many points of interest in these very useful and informative works. After the talk, we enjoyed our braai, the cold wind having died down and indulged in the pleasure of swapping birding stories, and others! Thank you Dave for your time and to both of you for coming, to Shirley for readying the Centre for us and to Kevin for the splendid fires and to all of you who came. **Merle Mitchell**

MIDLANDS BIRDING CLUBBlack Stork Report

A quick summary of our 1999 season up to 12 August carried out by Ian Cannell and the Conways. A total of 36 nests have been monitored and visited over the past months. To date we have had quite a successful season but as ever have had losses. 60 eggs laid – 10 lost, 40 hatched – 8 chicks lost, 11 to fledgling size so far. Skipper Mine nest abandoned after an Egyptian Goose took over the nest and laid 10 eggs. A brand new nest at La Rochelle Quarry outside Gweru had 3 eggs to start and when measured they were the smallest of the season. This is possibly due to a new breeding pair. This nest failed – abandoned after chicks disappeared. Two nests have had a second laying. Empress Mine lost 2 chicks and now has 4 late eggs, whilst Peak Mine East lost 4 eggs and re-laid and hatched 3. We checked the nest on the day of actual hatching – quite an experience to see our babies hatching. Thank you to all members for information received on Black Storks – please keep it coming.

Gavin Conway

TAIL FEATHERSFamily trio to KARIBA (Eastern Basin) 22-24 May 1999

QDS 1628D2

We had three nice days on our boat birding with a bit of fishing at Kariba. The Lake is so full and looks great and should be visited by all bushwhacker members. On this trip, we were able to go by boat through the Kuburi shore line flats where we previously used to go by vehicle – this was such a fantastic feeling and we hit only one stump!! We covered quite a vast area comprising Kariba town, Mopane Bay area, Antelope Island, Kuburi Wilderness shore line and Gachegache River Safari Camp area. Our total species count was 104. Specials were a pair of Saddle-billed Storks, Martial Eagle, an African Fish-eagle swooping down to take a dead Tiger Fish, White-crowned Lapwings, Pearl-spotted Owlet and African Scops-owls, Crowned Hornbill, Bearded Woodpecker hammering on a distant Mopane tree, stacks of Grey-headed Gulls, White-winged Terns, Mosque Swallows.

We also did a trip to Fothergill Island (QDS 1628D1) where we saw thousands of Collared Pratincoles – what a sight when seen on the shore all standing facing one way and then flying in such a huge flock. Also a Hooded Vulture was present here at the water's edge. **Gordon Conway**

Visit to GOSHO PARK, MARONDERA

On 19 April 1999 we visited Goshu Park for the first time. It is no wonder so many 'specials' were encountered in this pristine woodland. In the first 'bird party', we saw a pair of Miombo Tits, Southern Hyliota, Whyte's Barbet, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird to name just a few. The highlight of the day had to be the delightful Rufous-bellied Tit who was working his way through the tree-tops towards us. On leaving the park, we came across a solitary Wood Pipit feeding next to the road. **Richard and Sue Bell, Harare**

SELDOMSEEN – VUMBA

The highlights of our stay during June in this natural, forested area were several elusive Red-faced Crimsonwing, Yellow-throated Woodland-warbler, Chirinda Apalis, White-tailed Crested Flycatcher, Roberts's Warbler, Eastern Saw-wing, Dark-backed Weavers and an intrepid African Olive-pigeon sunning himself on a dead tree. Seldomseen is truly a birdwatcher's paradise.

Richard and Sue Bell

Matabeleland sightings of note

Black-tailed Godwit – a single individual has been resident at the Ibis Dam at AISLEBY for most of June and July, having first been seen by Clive Townsley on 20 June 1999. Chestnut-banded Plover – Fort RIXON Dam waterfowl count 11 July 1999 – seen by members of the Branch. African Red-eyed Bulbul – a pair were recorded by a new member – Sandy McAdam – in her Hillside garden on Montgomery Road on 22 July 1999. This is the second sighting of this species in BULAWAYO in the last five years – perhaps a sign of global warming? Mottled Swift – a small party of Mottled Swift (about 10) were seen in flight and drinking at AISLEBY on 25 July 1999. These were identified independently by both Clive and I and have not been seen since the early 1990's.

Flock of Storks in KARIBA

In reply to Natalie Adamson (refer *Babbler* issue #30 May/June 1999) yes, we did see “all those storks!” A week later, 15 March, we were in Palm Bay and following a pride of 11 lions in the small boat, when our attention was drawn to “all those birds” in the trees with more and more coming in from all directions. They settled in the trees and on the ground. As Natalie said “at least 1000”. It was a wonderful sight. Having our binoculars with us, we could easily identify them as White Storks, and, being the middle of March, we presumed that they were congregating for their flight up north (as the editor also said).

Jeannet Zee, Macheke

Egyptian Vultures – ABERFOYLE Tea Estate

On 25 March 1999 at the Aberfoyle Tea Estate in the Honde Valley, where we were holidaying at the time, we saw a pair of Egyptian Vultures [comment: probably Palm-nut Vultures]. **S. Kaye-Eddie**

Black-chested Snake-eagle seen in Athlone, HARARE

At 0910 hrs on 8 March 1999 a beautiful adult Black-chested Snake-eagle *Circaetus pectoralis* was seen at the junction of Harare Drive and Latimer Road, Athlone, Greendale, Harare. This location is 750 metres east of the local bird sanctuary. **Mike Marriott**

Interesting display by Hamerkops

At about 0930 hrs on 3 June 1999, Margaret and I witnessed interesting behaviour by three Hamerkops on a timber pier, jutting out over one of the water hazards on the Leopard Rock Hotel golf course – an ideal birder's venue in the VUMBA. The biggest bird, which we took to be a female, was standing upright and sandwiched between two smaller birds who were parading up and down and to an fro, rubbing themselves against the bigger bird's sides, with their wings opening and closing at times. We were some 50 metres from the three and did not hear any noise from them, but we took it that this was a mating display by two male birds and one female. We felt this to be confirmed when one of the smaller birds mounted the bigger bird and then dismounted and flew off, followed by the bigger bird, leaving what we thought to be a jilted lover male, dejected on the pier. On consulting the “Bible”, *Roberts' Birds of Southern Africa* the description of habits given states: “Birds in groups display to each other with bowing and wing-spreading, sometimes standing on each other's backs”. So, what we took to be a consummation of a marriage by the lady bird and the courting man of her choice may only have been a trio group display! **Ron and Margaret Stuttford, Bulawayo**

Arrival of Yellow-billed Kites in the Midlands

On 12 August 1999 we saw a total of 9 Yellow-billed Kites between Gweru and CHEGUTU (DAVID WHITEHEAD Textiles settling ponds). **Gavin Conway**

Sightings at DAVID WHITEHEAD Textiles settling ponds

On 12 August 1999 at these ponds we saw Red-breasted Swallow, a flock of 36 Yellow-billed Storks, 10 Pied Avocets and about 20 Cape Teal. **Gavin Conway**

NOTICEBOARD**SPECIAL OFFERS FOR MEMBERS – ACCOMMODATION IN THE EASTERN AREAS TO CELEBRATE THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF ORGANISED BIRDING IN ZIMBABWE**

Dr Colin Saunders has been instrumental in obtaining special discounts for members at a number of excellent birding destinations in the southeast lowveld and eastern highlands of Zimbabwe. To quote him - "These areas are rapidly earning enviable reputations as top birding spots in southern Africa and we are most grateful to friends and well-wishers who have put together the special rates. Inns of Zimbabwe (Gordon Addams) Nduna Lodge (Malilangwe Trust) and River Lodges of Africa (Clive Stockil and ZimSun) are all offering bona fide BirdLife Zimbabwe members a 15% discount, provided that bookings are made DIRECTLY through the lodge or Inn and NOT through a travel agent. Grateful thanks to those concerned for their kind consideration. Proof of current membership is required in all cases. Here's hoping that many members of BirdLife Zimbabwe will take advantage of the generosity of the owners and enjoy fabulous birding in these fascinating places – what a way to celebrate our 50th anniversary and see in the new millennium!"

These offers are valid until 30 June 2000. Details of the rates and the accommodation are available from: Di Rushforth or John Saunders.

SPECIAL APPEAL!

Some of you, who are also members of the Wildlife Society of Zimbabwe, will know that Peter Ginn has generously offered BirdLife Zimbabwe and WSZ a number of his surplus transparencies from his personal collection. Once the transparencies have been selected we urgently need to have them put into slide mounts. We are therefore appealing to anyone who has re-usable plastic mounts in good condition which they would be prepared to donate. There is a lot of work to be done but this wonderful gesture will ensure that we have our own set of bird slides which can be used to educate future generations of birdwatchers. Richard Bell is co-ordinating the project and he can be contacted on Harare telephone: 746050.

Back issues of Honeyguide

A reminder that 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 Tracey and Ferdie Couto are available for sale at \$10 each. Contact Pat Saunders on ☎ 490167.

BirdLife Zimbabwe 24-hour Birdwatch, 48-hour World Birdwatch and NTT Bird Count

There are three events in October. BirdLife Zimbabwe's Birdwatch and World Birdwatch 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, whilst World Birdwatch will cover a 48-hour period over the same weekend. The NTT Bird Count covers the whole of the month of October so keep all records of birds seen in Zimbabwe in October. 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.

Reader's Digest books

Apparently some people have still not sent in their donations for books taken. Please do so as soon as possible. Cheques, made payable to BirdLife Zimbabwe, should be sent to PO Box CY 161, Causeway.

Wanted – cabinet suitable for egg collection

If anyone has a cabinet suitable for an egg collection, please contact Gavin Conway 054-24058 (home) or 054-24666 (work).

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