

# BABBLER

## BirdLife Zimbabwe

*Formerly Ornithological Association of Zimbabwe*  
**A PARTNER DESIGNATE OF BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL**

ISSUE #33 – NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 1999

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### **COMMITTEES**

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Richard Dennison	747567
Dave Gray	885406
Ida Gray	885406
Bette Riddle	303679
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### **ACTIVITIES**

#### **MASHONALAND BRANCH**

##### **Regular outings**

1. Mukuvisi Woodlands: Sundays 7 November and 5 December 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 14 November and 12 December 1999. Meet at Marimba Shopping Centre for departure at 6.30 a.m. Bring your chairs and tea.

##### **Saturday afternoon outing**

1. 20 November 1999: 12 Welston Road, Glen Forest. Meet BP service station, Helensvale – Cnr. Crowhill/Borrowdale Roads – at 2.00 p.m. Bring chairs and refreshments.

##### **Sunday outing**

1. 28 November 1999: Searson's Farm, Beatrice. Meet Harare South Country Club at 7.00 a.m. Bring chairs and refreshments. Good for woodland and water birds

##### **Evening meetings**

1. Thursday 18 November 1999: Ngoni Chiweshe, National Parks ORU - "Birds of Hawk Mountain Sanctuary". Bowls Section Pavilion, Old Hararians Association, Drummond Chaplin St., Milton Park. Time – 6.00 for 6.30 p.m. A cash bar and pies will be available. There is a security guard.
2. Saturday 27 November 1999: The final in the series of videos "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.

THERE WILL BE NO OUTINGS OR MEETINGS IN DECEMBER, APART FROM THE Mukuvisi Woodlands AND Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary WALKS.

**MATABELELAND BRANCH**Evening Meetings

Friday 5 November 1999 – Birds and Folklore – Warren Goodwin has been collecting tales from around the country connected with birds. He will give a presentation on what he has found. Venue: CBC Staffroom or Library at 8.00 p.m. Contact Martin for details.

Friday 10 December 1999 – Christmas Social – Penny has kindly offered to host our end of year social which will be a “bring and share”. We hope that members will not only contribute food but also something feathery – calls, slides, pictures, special sightings, poems, etc. Those interested should contact Penny no later than Friday, 3 December to arrange catering. Venue: 92 Arnold Way, Burnside from 6.00 p.m. onwards.

Outings

Saturday 20 November 1999 – Cascades weekend – we hope to camp on a property not far from the Cascades which will enable us to explore this area fully with the hope of seeing a number of Miombo specials. For further details, contact Penny – Tel: 44034.

Saturday 27 November 1999 – Due to popular appeal, we are varying the dates of our Aisleby outing (but not 7.00 p.m. as stated in the last *Babbler!*). Sorry about the slip-up (Editor). This month's outing will be on a Saturday afternoon and will be led by Clive – either meet at the boom at 2.30 p.m. or contact Clive.

Sunday 26 December 1999 – There will be no organised outing in December but, for those suffering from “withdrawal symptoms”, Clive will lead a Boxing Day outing to the sewage farm. He will finish at the platform with real sundowners as opposed to the normal tea. Those interested should contact Clive or meet at the boom at 2.30 p.m.

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**EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB**

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

Outings

*Please note change in programme for 31 October: morning only*

<u>Sunday 31 October 1999</u>	Bvumba	6.00 a.m.
<u>Saturday 13 November 1999</u>	Old Mutare	2.00 p.m.
<u>Sunday 29 November 1999</u>	Juliasdale	6.00 a.m. – packed lunch
<u>Saturday 11 December 1999</u>	Mountain Home, Penhalonga	2.00 p.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.

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**Karoi Bird Club**

Co-ordinator: Mr K Mitchell P O Box 398, Karoi ☎ 064-630220  
 Secretary: Mrs M Mitchell P O Box 398, Karoi ☎ 064-630216

Rydings School Interpretive Centre

Saturday 6 November 1999 6.00 am.

Other outings

Saturday 27 November 1999 – This outing still to be arranged. Contact Kevin for further details.

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NO OUTINGS WILL BE ARRANGED FOR DECEMBER

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**MIDLANDS BRANCH**

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

Day Outings

**Gweru:** a day outing is being planned for Sunday 14 December 1999. Please contact Gavin for details

**Masvingo** Contact Lynne Wilkins ☎ 039-63657  
**Kadoma** Contact Margaret Parrock ☎ 068-3644

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## REPORTS

### NATIONAL

#### NEWS FROM YOUR COUNCIL

The Council has been actively involved in many projects – brief details of which are:

Ecotourism project – The RSPB (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds) in the UK has approved a grant of £10,000 to cover the costs of employing a Project Officer for one year to undertake a feasibility study for a possible ecotourism project in conjunction with the CAMPFIRE Association. BirdLife Zimbabwe is pleased to announce that an ecologist – Ms Sue Childes – has been appointed Project Officer. Ms Childes is working on proposals for an ecotourism project which will involve IBAs (Important Bird Areas) of Zimbabwe. She is also undertaking many other tasks on behalf of BirdLife Zimbabwe.

Schools' Bird Awareness Programme – As previously advised BirdLife Zimbabwe's Educational Committee was awarded a grant of £3,000 for the first phase of the BAP (Bird Awareness Programme). This grant covered the cost of a workshop for teachers from 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 recently submitted a proposal for further funding for Phase 2 of the programme and it has just been learned that the funding has been approved by the RSPB. BirdLife Zimbabwe has been very fortunate in receiving these grants as only two are offered each year. This success is due to the dedication and hard work of our Education Committee.

#### BirdLife International Conference of African Partners

Our President, John Paxton, attended this conference held in Burkina Faso in June. The venue was at a resort on the border with Benin and Togo and delegates had to cope with extreme heat. One of the main objectives of the meeting was to discuss plans for BirdLife International's initiatives in Africa.

#### BirdLife international Conference – Malaysia – October 1999

John Paxton and Sue Childes attended the annual conference of BirdLife International in Malaysia early in October. The conference was a very busy time for all delegates and a report on the meetings will be given in the next issue of *Babbler*.

All travelling expenses for our delegates for both the Conference of African Partners and the BirdLife International Conference were funded by BirdLife International.

#### Future funding

Further funding is being sourced for various conservation projects. Vogelbescherming in the Netherlands have asked BirdLife Zimbabwe to submit a project proposal for funding for IBAs and a response is awaited from them. The emphasis will be on the Blue Swallow survey which will focus on improving the habitat in the Eastern Districts for these endangered birds.

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#### BirdLife Zimbabwe – National 24-hour Birdwatch Preliminary Results

<u>Position</u>	<u>Team Name</u>	<u>No. of species identified</u>
1	Malilangwe Lunar Ticks	196
2	Bulawayo Bush flashers	181
3	Eleventh Timers	177
4	Committee Creepers	160
5	The Top Tits	132
6	Tick Birds	131
7	Birkdale Estates	106
8	Felixburg	102
9	Karoi Bird Club	85
10	Kadoma	78

## MASHONALAND BRANCH

### Dr Karl van Laeren – Thursday 15 July 1999

48 members and visitors braved the chilly weather to hear Karl talk and see slides of his trip up Mount Kilimanjaro. He took us by road to Tanzania with magnificent slides and amusing stories and then by foot up the mountain by the less-used route which took a day longer than the route more frequently used. Karl's slides made you feel as if you were actually there and, as his party neared the summit with all the glaciers, the breeze around one's legs made it even more realistic! After we had safely descended and arrived on level ground again he whizzed us off to the Maasai Mara and Ngorongoro Crater for some great shots of game and birds and also some terrific sound effects. It was a most interesting talk. Thank you Karl. **David Gray**

### Stockade Farm – Saturday 17 July 1999 QDS 1730D2

There was a nice turnout of 22 members on this lovely July afternoon when we visited the farm of Mr Richard Wiles on Selby Road, Mazowe. The mixed woodland area in which we started our walk gave us a number of birds. We were puzzled by a small flock of LBJs with red beaks and heavily marked backs. Eventually, we saw their legs which were red and we decided that they were Steel-blue Widowfinches (*Village Indigobird*). A good view of a Black Cuckooshrike was seen by most of us. All in all we identified 57 species. One member commented, on seeing a flock of Helmeted Guineafowl, that they are like the UN. They have blue helmets, make lots of noise and have no direction! Richard has kindly invited us back again. Next time we should make it a Sunday outing so as to be able to cover this wonderful area better. Thank you Richard for your hospitality. **David Gray**

### Dr P Marett – Thursday 19 August 1999

We learned from Dr Marett that she had been lucky enough to visit Madagascar with a party of bird and wild life enthusiasts from South Africa and Zimbabwe. They travelled to various areas on the island either by air or by road and were struck by the contrasts in vegetation and habitats. Madagascar is a most interesting place as it was until 2000 years ago uninhabited by man and, having broken away from the continent of Africa millions of years ago, many species of birds and animals occur only there. Dr Marett said that there are about 200 species of birds on Madagascar, 100 of which are endemic. Unique species of insects (like the Giraffe Beetle with its long neck), animals (beautiful lime-green geckos, strange-looking chameleons from the smallest at 2 inches to the largest – Parson's at 12 inches, the Tenrec which is the most primitive of all mammals and of course the endemic lemurs) and plants (such as the Traveller's Palm and Bird's Nest Fern) occur in the rain forests which receive about 1400 inches of rain annually. We were treated to the sound of the haunting call of the Indri which is the island's largest lemur reaching 3 feet high. Another lemur which is so fascinating is the nocturnal Aye Aye, with its huge eyes and extraordinary, long middle finger which it uses to probe for insects hiding in crevices. Unfortunately, the forests are disappearing at the rate of 10% per year due to pressure from people who are very poor and who practice "slash and burn". Thank you, Dr Marett, for sharing with us your beautiful slides and for a most interesting talk. **Di Rushforth**

### Lowdale Farm, Saturday, 21 August 1999

16 of us gathered for this pleasant, if not very rewarding, afternoon. We walked a couple of kilometres through a stretch of riverine forest with cultivation on either side. Only 44 species were identified. Of interest was the abundance of Green-winged Pytilias and very good sightings of those usually skulking Terrestrial Brownbills. Both Brown-hooded Kingfisher and Grey-headed Kingfisher were seen and a Tambourine Dove was heard calling. One member saw a Red-throated Twinspot. **Nigel Steyn**

### DICHWE Lemon Forest, Doma – Sunday 29 August 1999

After the recent cool, moist weather it was a pleasure to be out in the country on a fine, warm day. In recent years, we have visited Dichwe when the migrants, both local and intercontinental, are about so this winter visit yielded only 65 species – most of them being recorded in the more open parts of this forest. The ground was still very moist after last season's good rains as some of us discovered when we participated in what one member described as an Amazon jungle walk! 18 members attended this outing and unfortunately two of them overturned their car on the loose gravel on the return journey. Thankfully, they were not injured.

Birding highlights included nesting African Crowned Eagles with a chick, 3 Senegal Coucals, 4 Trumpeter Hornbills, 2 Red-throated Twinspots, 6 Yellow-breasted Apalis, 1 Black-throated Wattle-eye, 4 Retz's Helmet-shrikes and 3 Purple-banded Sunbird males. In addition, Bearded Scrub-robin and Tambourine Doves were heard. 3 Bush Buck were seen and there were signs of Ant Bear, Porcupine and Civet. **Richard Dennison**

Dr Peter Mundy – Thursday 16 September 1999

Peter, who is a most entertaining and informative speaker, managed to draw a good number of people to hear his talk about the three types of griffons which occur in Africa. He also touched on his recent visit to the south of France where he attended the World Vulture Conference. The first griffon that we learned about was the Eurasian Griffon, the adults of which breed in Europe and Asia and do not leave their nesting area but their young move away from their birth place, travelling into the north of Africa where they remain until they are mature at about 5 years when they return to Europe to breed. South of the Sahara, the Rüppell's Griffon occurs but does not usually move further south into the Miombo belt, preferring the open savannah areas. There have, however, been odd sightings of Rüppell's Griffon in Zimbabwe and South Africa and in fact one was seen a couple of years ago at a vulture restaurant [Vlakkfontein] near Beatrice. A species that Dr Mundy has studied in depth is the Cape Vulture which breeds in South Africa, Namibia and at one well-known site in Zimbabwe – WABAI Hill near Shangani. Unfortunately, one nesting site in Namibia, a massif of approximately 400 km<sup>2</sup> in the Waterberg Plateau Park, seems to have been abandoned as no breeding has taken place since 1995. Young Cape Vultures, as with their cousins, leave their natal area and move around quite considerably. Currently the Vulture Study Group is monitoring the movement of birds throughout the region.

There is much concern that griffons may die out because changes in their habitat are taking place. Bush encroachment is a problem as these large birds need vast, open areas in which to look for food. Changes in farming practices have contributed to their plight by indiscriminate poisoning for jackals and other animals. Fortunately, several land owners in South Africa and Zimbabwe are now trying to encourage the return of vultures and griffons to their properties and are putting out carcasses - "vulture restaurants". Peter pointed out a very easy field identification feature when one is trying to decide whether vultures are Cape Vultures or White-backed Vultures. Adult Cape Vultures have PALE secondaries with a black line through them, whereas adult White-backed Vultures have DARK secondaries. Juveniles, however, are more difficult to distinguish in the field. Thank you, Peter, for coming to Harare and for a super evening. **Di Rushforth**

RIFA Camp – 17 to 20 September 1999

The annual Mashonaland Branch outing to Rifa Camp at Chirundu was a weekend well worth the effort for those who were able to attend. The early morning walks were very rewarding and the mid-morning brunch that followed was always welcome. The many drives provided opportunities to see the local game population in all its abundance and variety. The highlight of the wild life aspect was an incident where two of our number nearly walked into a pride of five lion – three adult females and two half-grown cubs. At a local pan in mature Mopani veld, we watched a Bat Hawk take a bat in full flight at dusk and also were able to see first-hand the activity of several hundred Lilian's Lovebirds that were nesting in holes high up in the nearby Mopani trees. During the weekend some 156 different birds were listed, with raptors featuring in a large way. On Sunday, a calf carcass and other abattoir offal were put out and, within two minutes, the first vultures arrived. In all, four species of vulture were identified along with Marabou Storks. They were White-backed Vultures, White-headed Vultures, Lappet-faced Vulture and Hooded Vulture. Sorry, Dr Mundy – no Cape Vultures! One wonders how the vultures communicate the presence of food so quickly.

A unique feature of Rifa is the Southern Carmine Bee-eater colony in the bank of the local river where several hundred birds were busy taking over the breeding holes of White-fronted Bee-eaters that were just finishing their breeding activities. Several pairs of White-fronted Bee-eaters were still active at the site but were not being well treated by the Carmines. Carmine Bee-eaters are spectacular birds whether seen clinging to the face of a sand cliff or in flight. For the "first timers" at Rifa this was an opportunity to add many new birds to their lists. The visit to the Bream Farm at CHIRUNDU was very fruitful and added many water birds to the list. An African Skimmer was sighted on an island in the ZAMBEZI River. Absent from the list, however, were many of the summer migrants, most of whom arrive only in October. The normally resident Livingstone's Flycatcher again eluded the efforts of all the birders present.

Our special thanks to the Hunters' Association and to the three hunters who gave of their time and expertise to make the weekend a stimulating and rewarding experience. Our thanks also to Merryll and George for the excellent catering. **Jeanette Cross**

**MATABELELAND**

*From the Chairman*

Our summer seems to have come and gone frequently in the past month, with temperatures see-sawing from

the mid 30's to the low teens, almost overnight. These "cold snaps" must make conditions particularly difficult for our returning migrants and a considerable number must succumb to these extremes of weather. Barn Swallows always seem to be particularly vulnerable but fortunately appreciable numbers have yet to return. Warblers have begun to reappear and plenty were found in the vegetation surrounding the bird dam on our month-end visit to AISLEBY. Most seemed to be Marsh Warbler, which were calling strongly despite a temperature of over 30 degrees. Aisleby, as always, had plenty to offer and we managed to record over 120 species in the morning. In contrast to the previous month, support was a little thin, this being a Sunday morning outing as opposed to a Saturday afternoon. Perhaps members would like to offer an opinion on the best time for our monthly outing. Good birding. **Martin Smith**

#### Milibizi weekend – 26 to 28 June 1999

A small group of us escaped Bulawayo's cold weather and spent the Half Term weekend at Milibizi ZAMBEZI Resort, joining Steve and Sue, who now manage the camp. The arid nature of the land surrounding the resort made birding hard work, despite the fact that Lake KARIBA was at its highest level for the past 20 years. On Friday afternoon, Steve took us to an open area which had formerly been cotton fields. This was productive and yielded some good sightings of Temminck's Courser with young, as well as Double-banded Sandgrouse. A classic Zambezi sunset filled the sky with pink and caused problems with swallow identification – were the Lesser Striped Swallows pink and Mosque Swallows like? A not so early tramp around the resort produced three species of bulbul, a couple of species of robin and a small bird party which included Yellow-bellied Eremomela, Crowned Hornbill and Grey-headed Parrot were pleasing additions to the list. A lunchtime cruise enabled us to get closer to large masses of floating vegetation with good views of both Purple Heron and Goliath Heron. It was surprising to discover *Acacia* specials still active in a flooded grove, Chestnut-vented Tit-babbler being one of the more interesting sightings. We landed on a small island for lunch which was accompanied by snorts and splashes from a herd of wallowing hippo. Back on board the raft, we attempted to force a passage through a narrow, vegetation-filled channel and discovered how strong and sharp the grass was. Fortunately, a group of fish poachers were able to help us free it, failing which we may well have been able to study the night life! The following morning we returned to the cotton fields and managed to find Dickinson's Kestrel perched on a dead tree and we were able to watch Grey-rumped Swallow entering nest holes with food. Along the watercourse, a careful search of the vegetation failed to produce Livingstone's Flycatcher but we did have good views of a pair of Bearded Scrub-robin. Our total for the weekend was just over 100 species and it was interesting to note what wasn't seen – despite plenty of water, only a single White-breasted Cormorant and one Three-banded Plover. Starlings were poorly represented with only Red-winged Starling and Meves's Starling present, whilst only two species of sunbird were recorded – White-bellied Sunbird and Scarlet-chested Sunbird – presumably a reflection on the arid nature of this section of the Zambezi Valley. **Martin Smith**

#### AISLEBY – Saturday 28 August 1999

This proved to be a popular outing and perhaps suggests that we should make Saturday afternoons our regular time, although, with the hot, dry approaching, there is always more to be seen in the morning. First, we visited the Jacana Dam and found a small pool of water and plenty of mud where a Grey-backed Camaroptera was searching for food. It was unusual to see this species out in the open. On the UMGUSA Dam, there was plenty to see with a good total of Little Grebe, cormorants, ducks and Egyptian Goose but, despite considerable effort, we failed to find any Black-necked Grebe. On the exposed muddy shore, appreciable numbers of Kittlitz's Plovers, Three-banded Plovers and Blacksmith Lapwings were to be seen and the discovery of a nest provoked plenty of discussion – reference to *Roberts* still left us undecided over ownership, although Kittlitz's Plovers seemed most likely. Driving back through the pastures produced 8 Yellow-billed Egret and it was useful to be able to pick out diagnostic features and compare them for size against the resident Cattle Egret. The Bird Dam failed to produce the Hadeda Ibis, although we didn't walk through to check their favourite roost point. On the Ibis Dam, water levels had dropped and a reasonable area of mud was exposed. This held small numbers of Little Stint, Common Sandpiper, Marsh Sandpiper and Wood Sandpiper, Ruff, Common Greenshank and Pied Avocet – about 80. The Black-tailed Godwit wasn't seen, despite plenty of effort and it may well have moved on. Cape Shovelers were present with several roosting on the mud in front of the platform – orange legs standing out vividly in the evening light. Finally, we left just a little too early for the Grey Crowned Crane who flew in as we were departing with the sun setting. Numbers seem a little lower than last year with a total of just under 60 which may well be due to poisoning. We managed to find at least 5 corpses last year which suggests that

farming is becoming a little less benevolent. Hopefully, with the wheat now in ear and the cranes restricted to fallow land, there will be less incentive for control. **Martin Smith**

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#### **EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB**

##### Dambarare Farm – 27 June 1999

We were scheduled to visit the Hot Springs area but, being left largely to our own devices, Tony and I decided to give Dambarare Farm, in Old Mutare – of recent Streaky-breasted Flufftail fame – our attention. On a chilly but clear morning, four of us set out and encountered Blue Waxbill, Tropical Boubou, Emerald-spotted Wood-dove and Yellow-throated Longclaw on entering the property. Beginning at the dam, in front of the homestead, to the accompaniment of a Laughing Dove, we saw three Purple Heron, African Wattled Lapwing, African Jacana, Black Crake and Common Moorhen – considerably more than we saw at this spot on our last visit. Grey-rumped Swallows, White-browed Robin-chat and White-browed Scrub-robin, African Hoopoe, Black-collared Barbet and a lot of Cape Turtle-dove were also heard or seen in the vicinity. A little bit further on, we came across Tawny-flanked Prinia, Dark-capped Bulbul, Scarlet-chested Sunbird and Striped Kingfisher. Approaching the airstrip, we were privileged to see a lone Swallow-tailed Bee-eater. Pin-tailed Whydahs foraged in the burnt grass nearby as African Yellow White-eye flitted around a *Euphorbia*. We heard a Lizard Buzzard – having remembered this call from our trip to Shundure School – and then saw it alongside the airstrip. Walking down a fire-break with the strip on one side and woodland on the other, we met Streaky-headed Seedeater, Jameson's Firefinch and Terrestrial Brownbul. On the other side of the strip, we studied a large raptor for some time, against the light, without coming to any positive conclusion. Birds were somewhat scarce until we turned back towards the homestead. Then we listed Brown-crowned Tchagra, Brubru, Crested Barbet, Chin-spot Batis, Fork-tailed Drongo, Cardinal Woodpecker, Violet-eared Waxbill, Golden-breasted Bunting and Green-winged Pytilia. Most of these were in parties across the fence in a well-wooded area. It was there that we glimpsed a resplendent bird for a brief moment that we could only assume might have been an Orange-breasted Waxbill (one?). Nearer the paprika field, Speckled Mousebird, Common Waxbill and African Stonechat were seen whilst Purple-crested Turaco were heard. We decided to do a "360" around the dam but by this time we had had the best of the day and it was getting decidedly windy, the only addition to the list being Black-headed Oriole. Once we got back to the vehicle, however, we had a good sighting of a Black-chested Snake-eagle before deliberating at length on a Blue-eared Starling that had been feasting for some time, the lady of the house had informed me, on worms from her recent garden tillage. On checking the starling's call from tapes at home it was established that it was a Greater Blue-eared Starling. Having time in hand, we paid a quick visit to the "new" dam at Mkoko Farm. A Namaqua Dove allowed us to get very close to it on our arrival. A very blustery, cold wind greeted us up on the dam and only Egyptian Goose, African Palm-swift and Reed Cormorant were seen here. Our sightings ended for the morning just before the Premier Estates turn-off with the view of an African Crowned Eagle. "ABC" reckoned that the 50 or so species seen was reasonable for the time of year and conditions. Who am I to disagree with one of our most senior recorders in the area! **Rex Harrison**

##### CECIL KOP Game Park MUTARE – Saturday 10 July 1999

Although an interesting afternoon had been prepared, thanks to Rex Harrison, and despite the presence of the Chairperson of the Wild Life Society, only 6 birders took part in this scenically beautiful walk. While we were mustering at the Dam, we watched a Pied Kingfisher and identified Familiar Chat and Whyte's Barbet on an *Acacia*. Due to the continued "cheekiness" of the young bull elephant and remembering our last visit here, we were relieved to be accompanied by Nesbitt and his rifle. Even so, I found myself listening out for jumbo noises more carefully than usual. There was however no cause for apprehension as we walked up the lovely wooded valley towards Bushbuck Ridge. Not many birds of special note but plenty of Thick-billed Weaver and Dark-capped Bulbuls, a big flock of Helmeted Guineafowl and a Brimstone Canary. Amethyst Sunbirds were everywhere. We paused to regain breath at the top and spent a pleasant few minutes identifying parts of town and surveying developments in Mozambique. It's a fantastic view from the ridge! The only animals we saw were Eland and Bushbuck. Further along we were joined by the resident pair of Augur Buzzard floating along at our level. Then there was an Orange-breasted Bush-shrike and a Striped Pipit in the miombo. As we descended to the viewing area, we found more Amethyst Sunbirds and heard the liquid call of the Gorgeous Bush-shrike which is fairly abundant in the park. Thanks Wild Life Society for giving us this unique opportunity. **Ken Dixon**

'Stonechat Cottage' – Castle Beacon, VUMBA – Sunday 26 September 1999

On this day members of EDBC "took to the hills" – to be more precise, we went forest birding at 'Stonechat Cottage'. The property lies nestled at the base of Castle Beacon (the highest point in the Vumba, being just over 1900 metres above sea level). The climate dictates the evergreen Afro-montane vegetation, dominated by Forest Water berry *Syzygium guineense*. Similarly, this high altitude vegetation dictates the bird life present. We gathered at the Cottage at 7-ish – on a beautiful summer's morning. New members who joined us were Verna MacGregor from Burma Valley and Edna Elliot-McColl, latterly from the Vumba itself. We hope this was their first of many birding outings with our Bird Club. The more perennial members included Tony, Alistair, Never and myself.

Now to the avian species! We wandered quietly down the many forest paths on the look-out for Red-faced Crimsonwings and a hoped-for sighting of Swynnerton's Robin. Forest birding definitely requires much patience and we were rewarded with a reasonable list of 29 species including Olive Bush-shrike, Olive Thrush, White-tailed Crested Flycatcher, Red-faced Crimsonwing, Rock Kestrel (seen against the steeply-sided, granite slopes of Castle Beacon), Collared Sunbird, Olive Sunbird, Livingstone's Turaco, Lemon Dove, Chirinda Apalis, Roberts's Warbler, the ever-present Cape Batis and an excellent sighting of a Lesser Honeyguide (a lifer for Alistair and Never, who nimbly scaled a high, single-standing granite rock about 40 feet high to get a good view of it!!). Interestingly enough, I have seen a Lesser Honeyguide on this particular *Syzygium* tree above an established beehive, at least 4 times – on reading the birding "Bible" *Roberts* I was amazed to learn that this species of Honeyguide plus a few others call from the same "call site" for months, or even years. Other species were heard during our forest meander – notably Tambourine Dove, Cape Robin-chat, Black-fronted Bush-shrike, White-starred Robin and Dark-backed Weaver. Good hearing definitely plays an important role when birding in forests, making life difficult for those of us who are tone deaf!

Back to the Cottage for a cup of tea, chat and compilation of our morning's bird list. An enjoyable morning for us all! **Bridget Holland**

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**Karoi Bird Club**

MAVURADONHA weekend – 20/22 August 1999

Five of us thoroughly enjoyed our first visit to this impressive wilderness area. The camp site, with its green lawns and running stream, is lovely and the birds thought so too as it was here that we had most of our sightings. We did come across a couple of bird parties on our walk to Eagles' Crag – a walk suitable for children and young people but torture for the over 60's who came back with wobbly legs and stiff muscles! But the view from the top was worth it all and we did see Black-eared Seedeater, Boulder Chat and either an Ashy Tit or Miombo Tit which didn't sit around long enough for us to identify positively. No eagles! Bird parties included the usual – White-crested Helmet-shrike and Golden-breasted Bunting being amongst them. We also saw Grey Tit-flycatcher and Long-billed Crombec with all the other usuals gleaning through the *Acacia* in the camp – certainly an area to visit again.

BirdLife Zimbabwe Birdwatch and World Birdwatch – Weekend 2/3 October 1999

For this watch we camped out on Vuka Farm in the KAROI North Area. There were 7 of us – 4 staying put and 3 coming and going. We did extensive walks, taking in three dams, woodland, riverine, open land, vleis and rocky outcrop areas. For the BirdLife Zimbabwe watch, we managed 85 species and for the World Birdwatch 104. Some of the birds seen were Little Grebe, African Jacana, White-faced Duck, Egyptian Goose, African Black Duck, Giant Kingfisher, Pied Kingfisher and Malachite Kingfisher, Black Crake, Southern Masked-weaver, Red-billed Quelea, White-winged Widowbird, Orange-breasted Waxbill, Lesser Swamp-warbler, cormorants and African Darter on the water and in the reeds. Three-banded Plover and Common Sandpiper were on the shore, whilst Chestnut-backed Sparrowlark were in the spillway area and in the grass Common Waxbill and Tawny-flanked Prinia. Other areas yielded Broad-billed Rollers and Lilac-breasted Rollers, Meves's Starling, Violet-backed Starling and Greater Blue-eared Starlings, Green Wood-hoopoes, Retz's Helmet-shrike, Crested Barbets, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird and Black-collared Barbets, Wood Pipit, Jameson's Firefinch, Green-winged Pytilia, Bronze Mannikin, Long-billed Crombec. Raptors identified were African Fish-eagle, Black-shouldered Kite, African Harrier-hawk and Lizard Buzzard. The night birds were Fiery-necked Nightjars and Square-tailed Nightjars and a single African Scops-owl. We enjoyed seeing all the animals on this game farm too – our thanks to Fyn and Jane O'Donoghue for their hospitality. **Merle Mitchell**



## **TAIL FEATHERS**

### Albino Collared Pratincole

At the AGM of the Wildlife Society of Zimbabwe held at Kuburi Wilderness – QDS 1628D2 – KARIBA over the period 11 to 14 August 1999, an albino Collared Pratincole was observed daily in a flock of up to about 80 normally-coloured birds. The albino had the same general appearance of Collared Pratincoles except that the feather colouring was white with patches of light brown in the central primaries and on the back. It was seen by at least 20 delegates to the AGM. A total of 120 bird species was counted over the weekend, including up to 8 African Mourning Doves within the Kuburi Headquarters camp site at one time, Greater Painted-snipe, Three-banded Courser and Yellow-billed Kite. **R J Dennison**, 11 Soden Avenue, Hillside, Harare

### Raptor Food – Sinamatella – September 1999

A visit at the beginning of September to Sinamatella in HWANGE National Park provided some excellent bird watching, the most rewarding being during the early morning when thousands of Cape Turtle-doves and a selection of other birds flew to the pans for water. Raptors, namely African Fish-eagle, Tawny Eagle and Yellow-billed Kite took this opportunity to hunt the doves. First a Tawny Eagle was seen to chase and catch a dove in flight, then the Fish-eagle swooped in to take a dove from the water's edge and fly to the nearest tree. It was harassed by a Tawny Eagle until it flew away with its prey to a tree at a more comfortable distance. The Yellow-billed Kite was seen to swoop and strike an Emerald-spotted Wood-dove in mid-air. The dove fell to the ground, obviously stunned but, before the kite could return to its quarry, a baboon snatched the dove and quickly devoured it. A pair of Tawny Eagles was also seen to hunt and kill a Helmeted Guineafowl. The fowl was first struck from the air but it then managed to scramble its way into low scrub. The Tawny Eagles landed and after a few minutes dragged the dead Guineafowl out from the cover. One of the eagles flew for about two hundred metres with the fowl before landing at the base of their favourite perch tree when both eagles set about eating the guineafowl. Unfortunately, I was unable to see how much of the guineafowl was eaten at this first feeding. This is the first time that I have observed a Yellow-billed Kite attempting to hunt its own prey. I normally associate the bird with road kills or scavenging and stealing food from the plates of unsuspecting visitors to the Hwange Safari Lodge lunch time braai. Although I have seen African Fish-eagle hunting fish this was the first time I have witnessed one catching a bird. Due to the numbers of doves and other smaller birds concentrating on the water, opportunistic hunting seemed to pay off. Other raptors seen that did not attempt to catch prey but visited the water or perched nearby were Dickinson's Kestrel, Lanner Falcon, Bateleur, African Hawk-eagle, Gabar Goshawk, Ovambo Sparrowhawk, Shikra, Steppe Buzzard and Wahlberg's Eagle. **Clive Townsley**

### White-browed Sparrow-weavers and White-eared Barbets out of their ranges?

I have observed White-browed Sparrow-weavers nesting in *Acacia* trees in the Cumberland Valley which is directly below the Inn on the Rupurara and below JULIASDALE Village, NYANGA. My SASOL field guide puts their distribution as west of Harare.

Another observation which I have made is of White-eared Barbets flying in Greendale North in HARARE – around North and Hindhead Roads. In SASOL their distribution is shown as along the eastern border with Mozambique. I first saw them about 8 months ago and thought they might be Thick-billed Weavers but since seeing them again I am pretty certain about my identification. Maybe other members would like to comment on these possibilities? **Iain Macdonald** – P O Box 43, Juliasdale (telephone 029-223490)

### Controversy over new common names for some species

Since the announcement by the Percy Fitzpatrick Institute of Ornithology in Cape Town that the names of about 200 birds or groups of birds will be changed in the interests of global consistency, a furor has erupted and the Institute has been inundated with expressions of concern from avid birders in South Africa. The editor-in-chief of the latest revision of *Roberts' Birds of Southern Africa*, Phil Hockey, has been quoted as saying that "the process has generated an unnecessary emotional reaction. Even if we come up with standard common names, people will call the birds what they like – but it will be useful to have a standardised set of names".

So far, there has been very little reaction from Zimbabwean birders but I have received a communication from Brian Marshall of the University of Zimbabwe's Department of Biological Sciences. Some of his comments are:

It might be worth giving members of BirdLife Zimbabwe some details of these changes, since many of them will be unwelcome to most of us. The editors of *Roberts* seem to have forgotten that every bird

species already has an internationally accepted name governed by rules and conventions ... and that common ones evolve through usage and vary from one place to another ... reflect cultural and historical differences and the fact that African birds have different names south and north of the Zambezi is a result of the different colonial and cultural histories of these areas. The proposal to replace some distinctive names that reflect this history, like 'Lourie' and 'Dikkop' (to be replaced by 'Turaco' and 'Stone Curlew'\*) is particularly reprehensible, since it diminishes these cultural variations.

... many of these names seem contrived and are, from our point of view, inaccurate – sometimes to the point of absurdity. Take the case of *Cuculus canorus* for example. In the British Isles, the only part of its breeding range where it has an English common name, it is known simply as 'The Cuckoo'. British birders are not going to start calling it by the proposed name of 'Common Cuckoo' and nor should we. In southern Africa we call it the 'European Cuckoo' because this name conveys some accurate information about it, while the name 'Common Cuckoo' is highly *inaccurate* and misleading. Attaching the epithet 'common' to a bird that hardly anyone has seen or can reliably distinguish in the field suggests a lack of clear thinking. ... Since the vast majority of resident Anglophone African birdwatchers and ornithologists live south of the Zambezi, it would be more sensible to make our names the standard ones. One happy outcome would be that the East Africans would be able to abandon the dreary, longwinded name of 'White-shouldered Cliff Chat' which they give to *Thamnolaea cinnamomeiventris* and instead use the more euphonious and evocative 'Mocking Chat' that we use here. Sadly, if the editors of *Roberts* have their way it will be the reverse."

Editor's note - \* I believe the 'Dikkops' will change their name to 'Thick-knees'.

With regard to the epithet 'common', this name will also be applied to the Steppe Buzzard, the Kurrichane Buttonquail, the Scimitar-billed Woodhoopoe and the Fiscal Shrike. If room permits in future issues, I will publish the full list of changes and then you can let us know what you think.

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## **NOTICEBOARD**

### Advance notice for your diary – Annual General Meeting

The AGM of BirdLife Zimbabwe will be held on the weekend 24-26 March 2000 at Lake Kyle National Park. Lodges and camping will be available and further details will be given in the next *Babbler*.

### BirdLife Zimbabwe 2000 calendars

Peter Ginn has very generously donated a number of his sponsored calendars to BirdLife Zimbabwe. These calendars with beautiful colour photographs of a variety of birds are being offered for sale at the reasonable price of \$40.00 each, plus \$5.00 postage and packing. They are A5 size which is very convenient for posting to friends and family. If you would like to place your order please complete the enclosed slip.

### Discounts for members visiting facilities in the southeast Lowveld and Eastern Highlands of Zimbabwe

As outlined in the previous issue a 15% discount is being offered by Inns of Zimbabwe, Malilangwe Trust and River Lodges of Africa to bona fide BirdLife Zimbabwe members. These offers are valid until 30 June 2000. Details of the rates and the accommodation are available from: Di Rushforth or John Saunders.

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

Please would those participants in the bird watches and the NTT Bird Count send their forms in to reach Jacko Williams by 10 November 1999 at the latest. Jacko's address is 14 Harare Drive, Borrowdale.

### New members

We welcome to BirdLife Zimbabwe the following new members:

Mr and Mrs Abel, Mr and Mrs Arlety-Johnson and family, Mr and Mrs Barratt, Mr and Mrs Bowes, Mr and Mrs Caminada and family, Mrs Coughlan and family, Master John Dickens and family, Mr Dickinson, Mr Dooley, Mr and Mrs Drynan, Mr and Mrs du Plessis, Mr and Mrs Flowers, Mr and Mrs Fraser-Kirk, Mr and Mrs Hugo, Ms Kriedermann, Mr and Mrs Louw, Miss Lovell, Dr and Mrs Lovell, Mr Parker, Mr and Mrs Pereira, Mr Picherit, Mr and Mrs Rainsford, Mr Roberts, Mr Searle, Mrs Sheppard, R Stjernstedt, Mr and Mrs Thorburn, Mr and Mrs van Altena, Mr and Mrs Winch, Mr and Mrs Wursten

Photographic records

To commemorate 50 years of organised birding in Zimbabwe, BirdLife Zimbabwe would like to put together a collection of photographs of various functions and outings over the past 50 years. If any of you have photographs which you feel might be suitable and which you would be prepared to give away, please contact your Branch Chairman or a committee member.

Bird Festival 2000

In conjunction with On Safari International and Kuimba Shiri, BirdLife Zimbabwe is involved in organising a festival of birds to be held over the weekend 24/25 June 2000 at Kuimba Shiri (Lake Chivero). It is hoped that the event will be attended by between 1000 and 2000 people and will generate funds for conservation and education. Our share of the proceeds will be donated to BirdLife Zimbabwe's Bird Awareness Programme. Naturally, such an event requires a lot of hard work and we are therefore appealing to you as members to volunteer to assist with the organisation and running of the festival. If you are prepared to help, please contact Di Rushforth on Harare telephone number 741165 or cell: 023 404629.

All aspects of bird life will be catered for at the festival from caged birds to falconry. There will also be stalls available for people wishing to sell products that are strictly bird-related. The costs of hiring these stalls will be competitive and anyone interested in taking a stall is asked to please contact Di Rushforth.

Masendwa Tree and Bird Sanctuary – Mutare

Colin and Vee Lockie are building a group of tree houses on their farm which should be completed in December. Masendwa is situated 25 km from Mutare on the Osborne Dam road. Affordable and quiet self-catering accommodation will be available, comprising two, two-bedded lodges and another two-bedded deck above the main dining area. The accommodation is set off the ground in the trees with great views from of the Odzi river valley and Mt Jenya. Habitat is a continuation of Acacia scrub woodland and small riverine bush. The farm is next door to Cynara – well-known for its abundant water birds. They are hoping to hold workshops and field trips to try to promote the protection and nurturing of flora and fauna in the area and hope that BirdLife Zimbabwe members will support them. Telephone 020-63399/65546

Birding in Maun, Botswana

Roger Hawker has started a branch of the Botswana Bird Club in Maun. He has advised that if any BirdLife Zimbabwe members are visiting the area he would be happy to show them around. Nearby are also the Delta and Kalahari reserves. His address is P O Box 695, Maun, Botswana.

Rio Savane, Mozambique

James Nelson and his wife have set up a tourist camp on the mouth of the Savane River, 34 km northeast of Beira. The camp is located between the estuary and the open sea on a peninsula. They have had a number of birders visiting the camp and the checklist numbers 200 species. Specials are: Forest Robin, Wattled Crane, Locust Finch, Blue Quail, Palm-nut Vulture, Crab Plover, Silvery-cheeked Hornbill, Mascarene Martin, Black-headed Apalis, White-breasted Alethe, Black-and-white Flycatcher and Livingstone's Flycatchers, Anchieta's Tchagra, Chestnut-fronted Helmet-shrike and Plain-backed Sunbird. The Zimbabwe address for Rio Savane is P O Box HG 5, Highlands, Harare, telephone 04-495470. A full checklist is available from use. **Editor**

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.

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