

# BABBLER

## BirdLife Zimbabwe

A PARTNER DESIGNATE OF BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL

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### COMMITTEES

#### Mashonaland Branch

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Members: Keith Barrow	723547
Richard Dennison	747567
Dave Gray	885406
Ida Gray	885406
Bette Riddle	303679
Pat Saunders	490167
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#### Matabeleland Branch

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Wishing you a joyous festive season and a wonderful New Year

Congratulations to Martin and Adrienne Smith on the recent arrival of a baby boy

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### ACTIVITIES NATIONAL

The National AGM will be held over the weekend 24-26 March 2000 at Kyle National Park. The whole camp has been taken for this purpose and, if you wish to book a lodge, please complete the booking slip included. Accommodation will be allocated on a first come first served basis. There is no need to book for camp sites. The venue has been chosen because it is more or less equidistant for Mashonaland, Matabeleland and Manicaland members and close to the Midlands.

The notice of meeting and agenda is enclosed with this newsletter.

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### MASHONALAND BRANCH

#### Regular outings

1. Mukuvisi Woodlands: Sundays, 2 January and 6 February 2000. 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, 9 January and 13 February 2000. Meet at Marimba Shopping Centre for departure at 6.30 a.m. Bring your chairs and tea.

#### Saturday afternoon outings

1. 22 January 2000: The first of two Alex Masterson vlei walks at Marlborough vlei. Because these walks are so popular, Alex has agreed to do two this season in an endeavour to split the number of people attending. Fewer people will mean better birding and will be kinder on the birds. Please, therefore, choose which one you would like to go on and go to ONLY one. Meet at 4 p.m. at the vlei. Go down Princess Margaret Road, turn left into Newstead Road where there is adequate parking.
2. 19 February 2000: Harare Botanic Gardens. Meet in the guarded car park at 3 p.m.

#### Sunday outings

1. 29 January 2000: The second Alex Masterson vlei walk. Meet at Marlborough vlei at 6.30 a.m.
2. 27 February 2000: Mbizi Game Park (near Harare Airport). Good for Miombo woodland and water birds. Meet at Rushforth Service Station (Shell Garage), Airport Road, at 6.30 a.m. There is a restaurant for those of you wishing to have lunch after the walk.

#### Thursday evening meetings

1. 20 January 2000: Mashonaland Branch AGM. Please make every effort to attend this important meeting. Reports will be given on various projects and there will be a supper of pies and salad available. For catering purposes we need advance notice of your order for pies. A slip for completion is included.
1. 17 February 2000: Wattled Cranes – a representative from Pine Farm Conservancy will give a presentation on the work that they do with these endangered birds.

Meetings are at the Bowls 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.

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### **MATABELELAND BRANCH**

#### Evening Meetings

Friday 7 January 2000 – Video Evening – We aim to show the last two episodes of the Life of Birds entitled “Problems of Parenthood” and “The Limits of Endurance”. Venue: 3A Holdengarde Avenue, Hillside at 8.00 p.m. Contact Martin for further details.

Friday 4 February 2000 – Branch AGM – Our annual branch AGM will be preceded by a social from 6.00 p.m. to be followed by a slide show. As in the past we will provide braai fires for members to cook supper and if anyone wishes to swim they are welcome to do so. The AGM will commence at 8.00 p.m. at 3A Holdengarde Avenue, Hillside. Contact Martin for further details.

#### Outings

Sunday 16 January 2000 – Aisleby Waterfowl Count – this will be the first count of the new century and as always we can expect some interesting totals. Please do come and support us as the more people we have to help the easier and hopefully more accurate the count. Meet at Aisleby boom at 7.30 a.m. or contact Martin for details.

Sunday 23 January 2000 – Fort RIXON Dam Waterfowl Count – this nearly always manages to produce plenty of rain as well as some interesting sightings. In the past, Lesser Kestrel and Pallid Harrier have been seen from the road to the dam. Those wishing to help should contact Penny Feather.

Sunday 20 February 2000 – we hope to visit a property on the Khami Road, roughly 20 km from town. Details have yet to be finalised so please contact Martin closer to the date.

#### Aisleby

Due to the two counts in January there will be no month end visit but that in February will take place as usual. Meet at the boom at 7.00 a.m. on Sunday, 27 February 2000.

**EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB**

Secretary: Mr Tony Curtis ☎ 020-60281

## Outings

<u>Saturday 8 January 2000</u>	2.00 p.m.	Murahwa's Hill
<u>Sunday 30 January 2000</u>	6.30 a.m.	Premier Estate
<u>Saturday 12 February 2000</u>	2.00 p.m.	Cynara
<u>Sunday 27 February 2000</u>	6.00 a.m.	Mapor Estate

We leave from the Museum in Aerodrome Road at the time stated. Transport and binoculars are available if prior notice is given.

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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 and other outings

Outings will commence at the end of January. Please contact Kevin or Merle for details.

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**MIDLANDS BRANCH**

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

## Day Outings

**Gweru** Please contact Gavin for details of outings which will be planned in 2000  
**Masvingo** Contact Lynne Wilkins ☎ 039-63657  
**Kadoma** Contact Margaret Parrock ☎ 068-3644

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**REPORTS****NATIONAL**

## NEWS FROM COUNCIL

BirdLife International – Global Conference and Partnership Meeting (10-16 October 1999)

John Paxton gave a presentation to members of the Mashonaland Branch on 2 December 1999 when he reported on the recent meeting of the BirdLife International Partnership in Malaysia which he and Sue Childes attended. John Paxton was funded by the RSPB and Sue Childes' expenses were met by the BirdLife International Secretariat.

We were shown Sue Childes' interesting slides of the venue and the BirdLife Zimbabwe display at the exhibition which enabled us to visualise much of what was spoken about.

The theme of the conference was "Together for Birds and People" and was attended by delegates from Africa, the Americas, Asia, the Middle East, Central Asia, Europe and the Pacific Rim. The Honorary President of BirdLife International, Queen Noor, participated fully in the programme and she is a very strong supporter of birds and their conservation. The BirdLife strategy for the new millennium was launched – called "BirdLife 2000". The strategy has been developed as a result of a report highlighting alarming statistics relating to the plight of birds worldwide -

- 12% (1200 species or one in eight) of the World's birds are threatened with extinction within the next 100 years.
- Another 600 – 900 species (so-called near-threatened species) are close to being added to the threatened list.
- Birds are strong red light indicators of environmental degradation.

- Many common bird species are declining as a consequence of high environmental impact of agriculture and other land-use practices.
- Birds and people share the same problems and solutions.

At the conference a plan of action was developed with the following objectives being agreed -

- Rescue from extinction all globally threatened species.
- Keep common birds common and protect the wider environment.
- Action for sites – identify and protect “Important Bird Areas”.
- Action for habitats – maintain and restore the quality and extent of natural habitats.
- Raise awareness and people’s support.
- Benefit people’s quality of life through birds.

The Zimbabwean delegates participated in several of the 25 workshops which were held during the conference and were able to “network” with representatives of bird conservation groups from all parts of the world.

BirdLife Zimbabwe will be involved in the Africa Programme 2000 – 2004 which was developed in Malaysia with seven conservation objectives and four themes for the continent being worked on. With regard to Zimbabwe’s IBA inventory this has been produced but the active side of the work has yet to be started.

#### Visit to Lusaka, Zambia

John Paxton was invited to Lusaka, Zambia by the Zambian Ornithological Society for the weekend 4/5 December 1999. At a meeting held on the Saturday, John explained the procedure that the OAZ had followed to move from being a Representative of BirdLife International to that of a Partner Designate. He gave details of each step – the Strategic Planning Workshop, the presentation to the Council of African Partners, the Consultation Paper to members and meetings with all of the branches. As the Zambian Ornithological Society is at present Representatives of BirdLife International they believe that they need to know Zimbabwe’s experience in the advancement to Partner Designate status as well as the implications. The meeting had been very successful and on the following day John was taken on a bird walk in magnificent Miombo woodland which was followed by a social brunch.

#### Update on National Bird Awareness Programme (BAP) in Phase 1 Schools

When the Education Committee of BirdLife Zimbabwe started this programme a year ago, we could not have guessed that it would turn out to be the success it is today. All schools are still in the programme and have sent in bi-monthly bird records. The teachers have banned all shooting of birds within the school precincts. Constant vigilance is needed in some schools, e.g. at Chireke recently some boys were caught trying to knock young Red-winged Starlings off their ledge. At the other end of the scale, a very poor, ten-year old boy brought an old plastic bag with munga from his folks for the birds at Shundure, MUTARE district. Near RUSAPE, at Chireka, an eagle for the second time has nested in a tall blue gum in the car park. Matabeleland education members in Bulawayo have done fine work in getting birds identified for the three schools – Ntepe at Gwanda has an excellent list of over a hundred birds. Also assisting this project has been Jon Barry – Midlands, Kevin Mitchell – Karoi and Ken Dixon and club members in Manicaland.

The timely appearance of the book for schools, “Enjoy the Birds of Zimbabwe”, written by the BAP committee has given impetus to this Phase 1 programme as it enters its second year. The book has received praise from all sectors including education authorities and the RSPB. The latter, our funders, have been impressed with the achievements of the programme in the short time it has been running and to show their confidence they have given a second grant for work in 2000. Phase 2 will involve clusters of schools located close to Important Bird Areas (IBAs) in the Honde Valley, Chimanimani and Haroni-Rusitu districts as well as the wetlands of Harare. The teachers with their classes will focus not only on school birds but on special birds and their habitats in the forests and grasslands. By learning something of the habitats, they may come to appreciate the importance of forest and wetlands not only to birds but to other animals and resources like soil and water. More help will be needed in this expansion programme. School visits are only part of the work; bird records have to be analysed, booklets on Eastern Districts forest and Harare wetlands written

and illustrated and accounts kept. If you have spare time, we would appreciate your input. Thanks to Pat Saunders, Dorothy Wakeling, Geoff Lowe and Patrick Smet for their big contribution this year. Many people and institutions gave advice and illustrations for the school book and Julia Dupree and Dr Peter Mundy gave valuable help. Sales of the book are going well at \$140 per copy. Could anyone wanting to sell a truck (e.g. 1800 or 2200) with a known history in January contact me at telephone 883316. It is needed for the project. **Leslee Maasdorp**

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### **MASHONALAND BRANCH**

The Grove (Enterprise area – Sunday 26 September 1999 QDS 1731C2

Only 9 of us attended this outing on a fine, warm morning that soon turned hot. During our survey about 2 weeks earlier, we expected this to be an outing largely restricted to water and vlei grassland birds as we would be walking around a large farm dam. However, we also picked up quite a few woodland species in our total of 81 recorded. Water birds were plentiful and waders were also well represented. Highlights of these were 5 African Spoonbill, 1 Greater Painted-snipe, 1 Little Stint and 10 Black-winged Stilt which were exhibiting breeding territory agitation at our presence. In the sky and in the isolated clumps of trees on anthills, the highlights were 6 different raptors, including a pale form of Wahlberg's Eagle, and 4 Copper Sunbirds which were feeding on the flowers of a short tree with pink and white flowers which was not an exotic Bauhinia nor an identifiable highveld species. Longclaws were abundant in the vlei grassland as 10 Yellow-throated Longclaws and 2 Cape Longclaws were seen. It was also interesting to hear the calls of European Bee-eaters. **Richard Dennison**

### ID course for beginners

The Branch organised an ID course for beginners during October and a worthwhile and pleasing number of people participated – 40 altogether with 35 attending all segments. Subjects covered were:

Introduction to birding and garden birds	Woodland birds
Water birds	Swallows, martins and swifts
Raptors	

Water birds were covered on the Thursday evening which is normally set aside for the monthly talk and the organisers would like to thank you for being so understanding about the change. The final part of the course was held at the Mukuvisi Woodlands when Ngoni Chiweshe who had travelled from Bulawayo gave a most informative and interesting introduction to raptor identification. This was followed by a scrumptious breakfast making it a perfect end to the course. Thanks to Ida and Dave Gray for organising the course and to all the speakers. It is intended that further, more advanced courses will be run next year.

### Esmerdale Farm, NORTON – Sunday 31 October 1999

This was a new area for the branch and 15 people took the easy drive through Norton on full tar and very good dirt roads. The farm is on the shores of Lake Manyame and there is also quite a lot of Miombo woodland in pockets surrounding the dam and fields. We started off walking through some woodland and highlights identified there were a Pearl-spotted Owlet which Richard's sharp eyes picked up, Broad-billed Roller, a family of Green Wood-hoopoe, Bearded Woodpecker, Southern Black Tit, Stierling's Wren-warbler and Copper Sunbird. We then moved to the shoreline where water birds were rather few but whilst sitting, enjoying a breeze coming across the water other species of birds flew in. Good sightings were Yellow-billed Egret, Goliath Heron, African Openbill, Saddle-billed Stork and Yellow-billed Stork, Ruff and Collared Pratincole. Our total count for the day was 95 species. We are grateful to the Skea family for allowing us access to the farm. **Di Rushforth**

### Weekend outing to MAVURADONHA Wilderness Area – 5 to 7 November 1999

On 5 November, about 30 members left others to celebrate Guy Fawkes and headed for the hills of Mavuradonha. To provide grazing when the Zambezi Valley suffers its annual scorched earth state the Department of National Parks had earlier burnt the surrounding area and there was not as much water as on the previous occasion but sufficient small pools existed to attract several kudu, a couple of bush buck and a duiker. Some birders saw part of a herd of 38 mothers, aunts and baby elephants which were passing through – the campsite in the Wilderness Area, incidentally, is now electrically fenced unfortunately to keep elephants at a little distance. Despite a cool breeze, it was very hot and, being an idler, I joined one or two others in enjoying the birds in the immediate vicinity of this lovely area. The energetic went further afield

and during the three days a total of 116 species were identified, including a nesting African Wood-owl pair and two chicks. A get-together snack evening was held on Friday, followed by a braai/sundowners on Saturday beneath spreading acacias and typical velvet black African night skies. Highlights of birds seen or heard were: Peregrine Falcon, Mottled Swift, African Pygmy-kingfisher, Southern Carmine Bee-eater, Trumpeter Hornbill and Crowned Hornbill, Red-faced Crombec, African Dusky Flycatcher, Ashy Flycatcher, Grey Tit-flycatcher and Pale Flycatcher, Mountain Wagtail, Red-throated Twinspot and Red-backed Mannikin. The Carters seem to have the ability to spot snakes and two species which were identified were a Snouted Night Adder *Causus defilippii* and two Savannah Vine Snakes *Thelotornis capensis* which were found in the same tree as one had been seen on the previous trip. Another most enjoyable weekend and our thanks to the organisers. **Rita Mills**

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## **MATABELELAND**

*From the chairman*

Interest at the end of the year focussed on AISLEBY as falling water levels and a rich supply of grain had attracted a considerable number of birds. Migrants abounded with a good number of swifts and swallows to puzzle over, whilst exposed mudflats offered suitable habitat for good totals of waders. In November numbers of Pied Avocet had risen to over 300 whilst at least 20 Chestnut-banded Plover were present, an all time high for records from the 80s and '90s. The low water also revealed a crocodile, which was sufficiently confident of its size to bask at the water's edge in full view of fishermen and birdwatchers. This confirmed last year's rumours which we had been inclined to dismiss as a large monitor.

Our involvement with the education project has continued with Penny, Julia, Jennifer and Ngoni visiting the three schools within our region. All responded positively with considerable enthusiasm being shown by both pupils and staff. Finally, I would like to thank the committee for their support during the past year and encourage you all to participate in our programme for the new century. **Martin Smith**

### Verreaux's Eagle outing MATOPOS – Sunday 19 September 1999

Severely unstable weather made this a day for coats and brisk walks with the temperature only just managing to rise a little over 12 for most of the day. Despite this, the outing was well supported with 14 birders heading south on the Matopos Road. Our first avian entertainment was in the form of a Wahlberg's Eagle which was perched close to the road giving us an excellent view. This was followed by a Verreaux's Eagle and a Tawny Eagle on opposite sides of a kopjie. Our next avian delight was provided by a family of Southern Ground-hornbill foraging beside the road in the communal land. They seemed totally unfussed by a posse of cars and we were all able to see them. It was a large family composed of four adults and two immatures, which were presumably from different years, one looking distinctly pinker. One managed to provoke a communal land cow which ran at it forcing it to fly whilst the remainder of the party looked on with interest. Our next stop was Njelele, home of the Mlilo and rain making shrine. With the low, scudding clouds and the scream of a raptor it was easy to conjure up images of ancestral spirits. We appeared to have arrived a little too late to view the Verreaux's Eagle chick which we suspected to have fledged, plenty of white wash being in evidence around the nest site. On looking back at the kopjie we were able to identify the source of the Mlilo's scream with a pair of Peregrine Falcons swooping across the hill to alight on a grass-covered ledge. Careful observation through the telescope suggested breeding with a bird sitting low at the back of the ledge. Moving on along an excellent dirt road, we were able to find a Lanner Falcon perched conveniently on a rocky outcrop which enabled good comparison with the previous species. Further on, a rocky ridge yielded a Verreaux's Eagle and Wahlberg's Eagle both of which circled low under the cloud base and gave us excellent views. The road was particularly attractive and wound through a steep-sided valley forming part of Hendrik's pass. Pausing to view an old African Hawk-eagle's nest, produced good views of Purple-crested Turaco with a pair foraging for food in a fig tree beside the water course. Lunch was taken on a rock in front of Nest No. 5, which should have held a large eaglet but, despite careful observation through the telescope, no bird was seen until our dessert stage when the chick moved into view. This showed how easy it was to overlook the bird despite good visibility and a reasonable view of most of the nest. After lunch, we moved on through the Khumalo Communal Land to join the Plumtree Road and head back to Bulawayo. It was really most encouraging to discover communal land which held a considerable population of raptors with grass and [word?]. **Martin Smith**

Thandanani Farm, Hilda's Kraal Road – Sunday 17 October 1999

This was an interesting outing to the Sankey's farm on the Nyamandhlovu aquifer, some 50 km from Bulawayo. The majority of the farm is arable with basalt derived soils being used for vegetables. The homestead is located on a basalt ridge which had an appreciable covering of natural vegetation including a good number of mature Pod Mahogany which supported a good range of bird species. Our first stop was at a small dam which yielded a lone Wood Sandpiper and a flock of 10-12 Red-billed Buffalo-weavers. Pied Kingfishers were busy over the water, whilst Red-breasted Swallow swooped low drinking from the surface. Moving on to the kopjie we managed to find plenty to view with Grey Penduline-tit and Yellow-bellied Eremomela being amongst the more unusual species. A rather nondescript cisticola caused problems until its distinctive call labelled it as Rattling Cisticola. Overhead the ridge proved to be an excellent position to view raptors as they used it to gain height, the highlight being an Ayres's Hawk-eagle whose heavily marked body and strongly barred under-wings were visible to all from just over 30 metres. A further session of bush bashing in the heat of the day produced yet another cisticola, not often seen in dry Matabeleland. Following a mysterious call, we eventually managed to find a Croaking Cisticola calling from dry bush at the edge of the lands. As the temperature began to rise, we were able to join the fish in the Sankey's attractive pool and after a relaxed and lengthy lunch were able to wend our way borne with a car full of onions and a goose. **Martin Smith**

AISLEBY and the BBC – 29 to 31 October 1999

No, not quite, the Botswana Bird Club who spent the weekend camping at the Yacht Club and were able to appreciate the delights of our birding hot spot, gaining the full flavour of its heady atmosphere. Camping at the Club enabled us to see the property at both dusk and dawn and lent itself to deckchair birding. Saturday was spent investigating the different habitats on the farm, with a good total of both dry land birds and waterfowl, the latter had begun to concentrate as a result of the falling water level and made interesting viewing. Species of note included 13 Yellow-billed Stork, a single Black-winged Pratincole and a small group of 5 Chestnut-banded Plover. Migrants had arrived and a ringing session early on Sunday morning netted Willow Warblers, African Reed-warblers and a single Garden Warbler, all of which could be studied in the hand. Cuckoos had returned with Diderick Cuckoo being particularly vocal, whilst a lone Red-chested Cuckoo was seen quietly observing a pair of Black-backed Puffbacks engaged in nesting, which made us wonder whether they were about to receive an unwelcome addition. In the evening we were able to watch the waterfowl head off to roost and on Saturday were entertained with a humorous look at Namibian vultures presented by Dr Peter Mundy. All enjoyed the weekend and we valued being able to camp at the Yacht Club with its excellent view of the dam. **Martin Smith**

Morning Glory, Old Gwanda Road (close to Matobo Mission – 19 to 21 November 2000)

This was a wonderfully soggy weekend, which heralded the beginning of the rainy season. The property covers 1200 ha and consists of a series of granite ridges, interspersed with sandy vleis. The highest point is an impressive granite kopjie, Silote, beyond which the land drops almost vertically into the Mtshabezi Valley. On Saturday, a lengthy shower of rain made birding a little frustrating and produced some extremely wet "birders", binoculars, glasses and clothes being thoroughly washed. The best viewpoint was from a narrow stoep from which we were able to watch a variety of birds hawking termites as they emerged into the damp atmosphere. It was pleasing to be able to record Spotted Flycatcher, Garden Warbler and Lazy Cisticola amongst the more familiar canaries. Nightfall produced very little by way of nocturnal calls, apart from a communal land cockerel and a braying donkey, although it was delightful to be able to listen to the soft patter of rain on the thatch.

The morning brought a slightly bedraggled dawn chorus with White-throated Robin-chat and Cape Batis being particularly active around the camp. After a rather slow start, we decided to stay on the farm rather than move on to the Miombo at the Cascades, which had been our original plan. We made our way northeast, heading towards Silote and crossing a number of granite ridges. Cuckoos were plentiful and vocal with Black Cuckoo, Red-chested Cuckoo, Klaas's Cuckoo and Diderick Cuckoo all calling strongly. Pipits were also active with a number performing flight displays falling to earth and alighting on both the rock and grassveld. Call and white outer rectrices suggested they were all African Pipit. On reaching Silote, we were able to look down into the Mtshabezi Valley with its patchwork of vegetable plots adjoining the water course and extensive Miombo woodland covering the northern side. This looked particularly attractive with the trees only just coming into leaf and showing a wonderful variation in colour. The steep valley side proved to be ideal for watching raptors and we were able to see 4 Yellow-billed Kites contest a boundary and later see a bird carrying twigs,

a Wahlberg's Eagle drifted past and a single, large, brown eagle circled over the kopjie, possibly a Steppe Eagle. Swifts were also seen although frustratingly far away and left a question mark on the list with either African Black Swift or Mottled Swift being favoured. Back on the farm most of us managed to find our way back to the camp for lunch and a quick run through the checklist, our final tally included Mocking Cliff-chat, Boulder Chat and Familiar Chat and 3 species of bunting, including Cape Bunting. Hornbills were noticeable by their absence with only Southern Ground-hornbill being seen and the only water bird seen was a lone Hamerkop. Following lunch, fresh storm clouds began to gather on the horizon and we made our way back to Bulawayo along a wet and slippery road. Our thanks go to the Fergusons for allowing us to use their camp and roam their delightful property. **Martin Smith**

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

##### MOUNTAIN HOME, PENHALONGA – Saturday 9 October 1999

Cool and windy but a clear sky and magnificent light made for a pleasant if unexciting afternoon's birding. Eight of us took part and our composite count was 35. Our first stop was the beautiful new dam, perfectly reflecting the cloudless sky. Few water birds greeted us, just a Grey Heron, Little Grebe and Reed Cormorant but an African Fish-eagle sat in a waterlogged Acacia. A lone White-throated Swallow sat on the wall, African Stonechat and Lesser Swamp-warbler on the fringes and a Yellow-billed Kite over-flew. A walk along the dam side produced little of note so we moved into the Game Park where we were at least sure of Common Ostrich. Some swifts flew over – early Common Swift or resident Mottled Swift? Tony's researches pointed to the former. Longclaws were all around but little else of note except some beautiful Golden Weavers. The cool wind no doubt reduced the count but what a lovely walk we had. It was especially pleasing for me as I've missed so many recent outings for various reasons. By the way, if you're near the police camp at CECIL KOP this month there's a good chance of seeing the Gorgeous Bush-shrike. We did today with a party of displaying Grey Waxbills.

**Ken Dixon**

##### Far Forest, Upper VUMBA – Sunday 31 October 1999

Happily our numbers were slightly boosted by a visiting couple from Karoi, but it was still a disappointing turnout for such a lovely venue. There was a fair amount of mist on the way up but good birding was possible and was had. The usually busy garden was quiet apart from many Variable Sunbirds and Olive Sunbirds and Cape Robin-chats and White-browed Robin-chats. A Shikra appeared briefly, obviously fancying a sunbird for breakfast, but did not want spectators. So we set off along the track to the forest along which much felling of gums, wattles and pines had been taking place within the umbrella of TEAM Vumba dedicated to the eradication of intruder species in the area. A few common species like Cape Canary, African Dusky Flycatcher, Bar-throated Apalis were in evidence but nothing of note. The path into the forest, leading to Leopard Rock Hotel I believe, was more interesting. African Emerald Cuckoo were all around competing with the Red-chested Cuckoo and giving good views to some of us. White-eared Barbet, Cape Batis, Tambourine Dove, Chirinda Apalis, Stripe-cheeked Greenbul and Grey Tit-flycatcher and White-tailed Crested Flycatcher had soon joined the list but we had to walk a long way to find them. Yellow-throated Woodland-warbler flitted restlessly through the creepers beside the path but it wasn't until we were on our way back that Tony spotted a White-starred Robin but no Narina Trogon was heard. Back in the sunlight, lots of common species awaited us – Singing Cisticola, Rattling Cisticola and Wailing Cisticola, African Firefinch, Striped Pipit, Willow Warbler were all found on George's "tennis court". The garden, now in sunlight, helped us to a total of 46 species with which we were well satisfied. Many thanks to Barbara and George for hosting us once again. **Ken Dixon**

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#### **Karoi Bird Club**

##### Protea Farm – 24 October 1999

This area is a favourite venue where we have often seen African Skimmer, but did not do so on this occasion. 87 species were, however, seen which included some unidentified waders – probably young ones. Common Sandpipers and Wood Sandpipers, Common Greenshank, Kittlitz's Plovers, White-faced Duck and Comb Ducks and African Pygmy-goose were on the dam, whilst White-winged Widowbirds were in the reeds, with Giant Kingfisher, Brown-hooded Kingfisher and Pied Kingfishers and a family of Black-crowned Night-herons along the river line. In the woodlands we saw Trumpeter Hornbill. Thank you to Pam and Alex.

We also visited Chengeuwe Hill which is in the same area where we saw a few different species – Alpine Swift, Rock Martin, Familiar Chat, African Golden Oriole, African Hawk-eagle, Red-winged Starling, White-breasted Cuckooshrike, Racquet-tailed Roller and Spotted Eagle-owl with two chicks.

**Merle Mitchell**



### RYDINGS Interpretive Centre

Some interesting sightings recently were Black-winged Stilts which have not been recorded here before. The cuckoos are back, there are lots of Crowned Lapwing chicks, eggs of Blacksmith Lapwing have been seen on the shoreline and Trumpeter Hornbills have also been identified. **Merle Mitchell**

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### **MIDLANDS BRANCH**

Overview of 1999

Although several outings were arranged during the year, not many actually took place. Being such a large area that we cover it is difficult to get people to attend a planned outing. However, Margaret Parrock in Kadoma had a few day outings and Lynne Wilkins organised a trip to Keith Harvey – Nyororo Farm in Chatsworth. Gweru had a weekend at Whitewaters Dam. Our day outings were not supported and were generally converted into home chores or water-skiing days! However, we had a very busy time during the Black Stork breeding season with some ringing being done. This also came to a premature end due to business and school commitments. A full report on Black Storks will be sent in for publication once all the information has been collected from our observers. **Gavin Conway**

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### **TAIL FEATHERS**

KARIBA Visit – 24/27 September 1999

We enjoyed seeing "Kariba Birds" once again, boating the shoreline from Lomagundi Lakeside Association to Charara and around Antelope Island. We picked up 104 species. Highlights were a great view of a Purple Heron, clouds of terns [White-winged Tern] and two Collared Palm-thrush in the grounds of Lomagundi Lakeside. We ventured into an inlet on the west side of Antelope Island and were taken by the number of African Fish-eagles. When we got down to counting them there were 15 in all, 11 of them being sub-adults which spent most of their time on the shoreline or on the ground under the Mopane trees. A coucal was raiding a nest of a White-browed Sparrow-weaver on a thorny bush in the water. It was very determined and spent much time at the task. **Merle Mitchell** – Karoi Bird Club

MBAZHE PAN Bird sanctuary – Nkayi

Mbazhe is the most amazing place that I have ever been to as far as birdwatching goes. Mbazhe is situated about 40 km northwest of Nkayi across the Shangani River and is just above the confluence with the Gweru River. We visited the pan in June and set up camp about 20 metres from the water's edge. The pan was a wonderful sight as there were about 1000 ducks literally crowding the water, all honking and whistling and squabbling. The most numerous were White-faced Duck and Comb Duck. There were also Egyptian Goose, Spur-winged Goose and African Pygmy-goose and Red-billed Teal. The "campfire" warden, Rabson, told us that many more birds arrive at the pan in November and December. The cherry on the icing was the presence of 60 or so Grey Crowned Crane. What magnificent birds they are, prancing and preening in the courtship rituals. Their cries are a cross between a howl and a hoot and seemed to go on all night. There were also 3 Woolly-necked Storks and 4 Saddle-billed Storks. One of the highlights was a "dog fight" between one of the Saddle-billed Storks and a Grey Heron who had caught himself a small barbel which the stork fancied. After an almighty aerial tussle the heron dropped the barbel which the Saddle-billed Storks then pounced on, carried off promptly lost and spent another dejected 10 minutes or so fishing around. Anyway, the injured fish was eventually located and promptly swallowed whole. The night was most pleasant as there was no noise apart from the distant yapping of dogs and we were the only people at the pan and probably the only visitors for the last few months. A word of warning to those who intend to visit the pan, the roads are abominable, the nearest garage is Kwekwe or Bulawayo and there is no cell phone network. You need a four wheel drive vehicle and need to be completely self-sufficient, water, fuel and a first aid kit being essential. **John Kinnaird**, Charama Lodge

Jacana Lodge

We are grateful that Dr Colin Saunders went to the trouble of negotiating a 15% discount for members at the southeast Lowveld safari camps. We took the opportunity of staying at Jacana early in November 1999. It was our second visit. Albert and Georgina Paradzai are excellent hosts. Nothing is ever too much trouble

for them. We liked the informality and friendly atmosphere of this small camp. Albert took us on early morning and late afternoon drives. The one morning we had a 3 hour walk in the vicinity of the camp. Birds were in profusion, including a White-throated Robin-chat, Yellow-bellied Greenbul, Red-backed Shrike, Orange-breasted Bush-shrike and Grey-headed Bush-shrike, Grey Penduline-tit and a Barn Owl flew out of a tall creeper. The wetland was a profusion of crakes, herons, ducks, storks and Greater Painted-snipe. We also did a river walk and saw a variety of waders and several Black-headed Herons. Our 3 night stay was a joy and our final bird count was 138. For us the Black-throated Wattle-eye, Green-backed Honeybird and Lemon-breasted Canary were lifers. **Auriel Hansen**, Mhangura

#### Recent sightings in the MUTARE area

Recent sightings worth recording include a Common Cuckoo seen at CYNARA on 7 November. This bird alighted and remained for some time on a fencing post where it was clearly visible at comparatively short range. A Red-capped Robin-chat was found in a Bordervale garden on 29 October, having apparently flown into a (closed) window. Happily it flew away when an attempt was made to pick it up. Finally, Martin Matende is confident that he saw a White-starred Robin which perched and allowed him good views for several minutes in the same garden in early July. **Tony Curtis**, EDBC

#### Babblers with white rumps at RAINHAM Dams?

On 3 July 1999, I went out to Rainham Dams on the old Bulawayo Road and saw about 40 obvious babblers, all with white rumps [Wattled Starling]. They were feeding and moving about on the lawn of the house. Did anyone else see them? **Ruth Hutchinson**, Belvedere, Harare

#### Inhambane Trip 7-17 August 1999

Inhambane is a fairly large coastal town which dates back for many years in history, being once a centre for the slave trade in southern Mozambique. The buildings in the port itself are fascinating, showing a strong Arab/Portuguese influence. Inhambane nestles in the curve of the Inhambane Bay, which stretches northwards to form a peninsular. Here, the coast has been commercialised by South Africans and several lodges with upmarket facilities have been founded quite recently. We chose to stay in a slightly smaller complex with camping, self-catering lodges and casitas offered. All the lodges from the point down had been started as diving resorts for tourists, due to the abundance of coral reefs further out to sea. "Barra Reef" had been established a few years after the other lodges, and, for the simplistic traveller, is the perfect place for a few days relaxation away from the bustle and bustle of city life. Due to the torrential rainfall Mozambique had experienced in April, lots of surface water had been left on the land, leading to many marshes and vegetated pans being formed as havens for elusive waterbirds. We did not have much of an opportunity to bird in these wetlands, but from the side of the road we had excellent views of Allen's Gallinule, Black-backed Cisticola, Green-backed Heron and White-backed Duck. Without doubt, one could guarantee seeing scarce species of crakes, moorhens and rails if these areas were fully explored. For water-birding, the lagoon has large populations of flamingos and pelicans, whereas in the mangrove inlets one could expect to find several interesting birds such as Mangrove Kingfisher and Grey Sunbird. Unfortunately, we were not lucky enough to find the latter two on our trip due to lack of time. Certainly, the sea-birding at Barra knocks spots off anything else. While we were there, the migrants from Europe returned and we spent endless hours identifying them and keying them out. The birds had a partiality for roosting on the point itself, probably because it was the most isolated place in the entire bay. We set off from the camp at about four in the evening and returned just before sunset. The most exciting birds we found amongst the thousands included Grey Plover, Sand Plover [Greater Sand Plover?], Bar-tailed Godwit, Chestnut-banded Plover, Common Ringed Plover, Crab Plover and Terek Sandpiper. The Crab Plovers arrived in a flock of fourteen birds just before sunset, being largely crepuscular, and consisted mainly of non-breeding birds. It was very helpful to have all the birds in one huge congregation as this meant we could easily compare and contrast sizes, behaviours and breeding plumages. There was a significant lack of gulls and terns along the coast, with Swift Tern and Common Terns being the only species seen from the two groups. Definitely, the best time to go to Inhambane would be in late August, September or early October for birding, due to the arrival of the migrant species from abroad. Also, around this time, the whales travel northwards to calve, and it is a truly amazing spectacle watching these beautiful mammals drifting through the ocean. The Linga Linga reserve can be accessed directly across from the Barra peninsular and is well

worth a visit at the right time, being renowned for its dugong population. It can be reached by hiring a catamaran called the "Carpe Diem" from Barra Lodge, and going on a day trip in which lunch is provided. Besides the exceptional birdwatching in Inhambane, the lodges offer diving and snorkelling courses, catamarans to the Linga Linga point, horse riding, dhow rides, fishing or whale watching trips out to sea and many other activities. Certainly, Inhambane is the ideal place for a family holiday or simply to spend a few days away at the sea. The beach is pristine and wonderful for swimming, totally in contrast to the crowded and filthy sea resorts in South Africa. So, treat yourself and go now, before the infinite holiday-makers arrive!!!! **Bridget Holland**

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#### **NOTICEBOARD**

##### Donation received from Zimbabwe on Line

Zimbabwe On Line (ZOL) our e-mail service provider very kindly sponsored our name change for the purposes of our e-mail facility. This would normally have cost \$1500 and we are very grateful to them for this gesture. Those of us who handle e-mail are very pleased with the way ZOL have looked after us and we have experienced very few problems with down-time.

##### Bird videos for sale

We are offering for sale the following bird videos. Cost is only \$300.

*The Life of Birds.* There are seven titles in this series -

<i>To Fly or not to Fly;</i>	<i>The Insatiable Appetite;</i>	<i>Meat Eaters; Signals and Songs;</i>
<i>The Mastery of Flight;</i>	<i>Finding Partners;</i>	<i>Fishing for a Living</i>

*Attenborough in Paradise (featuring Birds of Paradise)*

*Birding – Volume 1 (revealing intimate, close-up viewing of over 30 southern African bird species)*

*Newman's Birds – an introduction*      *Newman's Birds Vol. 2 – Okavango Magic*

Contact Dave Gray – telephone 885406.

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

A reminder that 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.

##### Bird Festival 2000

The organising committee is working on the programme for this fun-filled weekend – 24/25 June 2000 – and three exciting British speakers have been invited to attend. They are Ian Wallace, a leading bird artist and author, Chris Whittles, founding Chairman of C J Wildbird Foods, Europe's largest manufacturer and seller of bird foods and John Wyatt, a popular public speaker, tour leader and regular author for Bird Watching magazine. Bookings for stands can be made now for a nominal rental and anyone who wishes to exhibit articles which are bird related can take a stand. If you are interested, please contact On Safari International on Harare 487703 or 486869. We are still looking for volunteer helpers to assist over the weekend directing traffic, manning the information desk or helping to setup displays beforehand. Please contact Di Rushforth on Harare telephone number 741765 or Cell: 023 404629.

##### Cabinet for egg collection

Gavin Conway is looking for a cabinet suitable to house an egg collection. Telephone 054-24058.

##### 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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