

BABBLER

BirdLife Zimbabwe

A PARTNER DESIGNATE OF BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL

ISSUE #36 – MAY/JUNE 2000

COMMITTEES

<u>Mashonaland Branch</u>	☎	<u>Matabeleland Branch</u>	☎
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Richard Dennison	747567	Penny Feather	44034
Helen Fraser	481316	Warren Goodwin	62237
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We are very grateful to the very talented Sue Bell for her twenty-first century Babbler! The previous drawing was getting a bit long in the tooth and, in keeping with the many changes within our organisation; it was felt it was time for a new drawing.

ACTIVITIES

MASHONALAND BRANCH

Regular outings NB *Note new times!*

1. Mukuvisi Woodlands: Sundays, 7 May and 4 June, 2000. Meet at the Paget Road entrance at 7.00 a.m. There will be a vehicle guard in attendance.
2. Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary: Sundays, 14 May and 11 June 2000. Meet at Marimba Shopping Centre for departure at 7.30 a.m. Bring your chairs and tea. Beginners are most welcome.

Saturday afternoon outings

1. 20 May 2000: Marlborough Sewage Ponds. Meet at the gate at 3.00 p.m. Directions: Turn into Princess Margaret Road from Harare Drive, travel to the end of the road and turn tight. The entrance to the ponds is on the left.
2. 17 June 2000: Crest Breeders, Waterfalls. Meet at the gate (just past the orange kiosk) on the right-hand side of the Beatrice Road (Simon Mazorodze Road) – approx. 15 km peg, at 2.30 p.m. Bring chairs and refreshments.

Sunday outings

1. 28 May 2000: Double Ro Ranch, Kariba Road (Nyabira). Meet at 7.00 a.m. at Greencroft Shopping Centre (left-hand side of the road). Bring chairs and refreshments.

No organised Sunday outing for June as the Bird Festival 2000 (Bird Indaba) will be held over the weekend 24/25 June – don't miss it.

Please note that the outings have been arranged subject to the availability of fuel and without knowing what the security situation will be, particularly on the farms. Members are urged to share transport wherever possible. It is also recommended that you telephone Richard Dennison on 747567 (home) before making arrangements for any of the visits to farms.

Thursday evening meetings

1. 18 May 2000: Ms Kate Wood will give an illustrated presentation of her recent trip to Antarctica.

Venue: 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 will be a security guard.

2. 15 June 2000: Mrs Helen Granville has agreed to tell us about her journey to the Himalayas. The emphasis will be on birds and there will be a video shown. Venue: 5 Star Close, Chisipite. Bring drinks and a finger supper.

Possible weekend outing to Esigodini

Tentative arrangements are being made with staff at Falcon College for a visit later on this year. The dates being considered are the long weekend in August (11 to 14). It is hoped that the school will offer us the use of their dormitories and will provide catering, but if this is not possible there is a camping ground in the nature area – Quietwaters – which will cater for a very limited number of people. If you are interested in visiting this “magic” birding area please contact John Saunders. Once firm arrangements have been made, those people will be contacted on an individual basis. During the days of “atlassing” the Esigodini area recorded the highest number of species in Zimbabwe.

MATABELELAND BRANCH

Evening Meetings

Friday 5 May 2000 – Verreaux's Eagle Briefing – Our annual Verreaux's Eagle briefing will be held at 49 Heyman Road, Suburbs commencing at 7.00 p.m.

Saturday 2 June 2000 – Greyville – this is a slight departure from our normal monthly meeting and we hope to be able to visit Greyville, whose property boasts a small dam. This has yet to be finalised so please contact the Chairman closer to the date.

Outings

Sunday 21 May 2000 – Tshabalala Game Sanctuary – We used to visit the Sanctuary on a regular basis and with our current fuel problems it seems an ideal venue. The area is predominantly *Acacia* and best first thing in the morning. We aim to park at the entrance and walk. Meet at the entrance gate at 7.00 a.m., bringing morning tea. Contact the Chairman for further details.

Sunday 18 June 2000 – Anglesey Farm, Matopos – This is a farm on the western edge of the Matopos which we have been given permission to visit. This will be an all day outing so bring lunch and tea. Meet at Retreat at 7.30 a.m. or contact Penny Feather.

Aisleby

Saturday 27 May 2000 – This will be an afternoon outing, so meet at the boom at 2.30 p.m. or contact the co-ordinator – Penny Feather.

There will be no Aisleby outing in June due to the Bird Festival being held at Lake Chivero.

Hillside Dams – as part of our educational programme we are aiming to hold monthly bird walks at Hillside Dams for a couple of hours on the last Friday of the month. We intend to advertise and invite members of

the public and any help from our members would be greatly appreciated. Meet in front of the Bird Display at the Lower Dam at 4.00 p.m. or contact the Chairman.

EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB

Contacts: Tony Curtis ☎ 020-60281, Ken Dixon ☎ 020-65819, Jane Clegg ☎ 020-65610

Outings

<u>Saturday 13 May 2000</u>	Partridge Hill, Vumba	2.00 p.m.
<u>Sunday 28 May 2000</u>	Far Forest, Vumba	6.30 a.m.
<u>Saturday 10 June 2000</u>	La Rochelle	2.00 p.m.
<u>Sunday 25 June 2000</u>	Bazeley Bridge	6.30 a.m.

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

Karoi Bird Club

Co-ordinator: Mr K Mitchell P O Box 398, Karoi ☎ 064-7014}
 Secretary: Mrs M Mitchell P O Box 398, Karoi ☎ 064-7010} *Note new numbers*

Rydings School Interpretive Centre

Saturday 6 May 2000 6.00 a.m.
Saturday 3 June 2000 6.00 a.m.

Other outings

Members will be notified of these when arranged.

MIDLANDS BRANCH

Co-ordinator: Gavin Conway ☎ 054-24058 (home) 24666 (work) e-mail giconway@icon.co.zw

Day outings

Gweru Please contact Gavin for details of outings which may be planned.

Masvingo Contact Lynne Wilkins ☎ 039-63657

Kadoma Contact Margaret Parrock ☎ 068-3644

REPORTS

NATIONAL

NEWS FROM COUNCIL

Appointment of Executive Officer and Secretary

BirdLife Zimbabwe is pleased to announce the appointment of John Paxton as Executive Officer. John was selected out of several candidates for the position and comes to us with excellent administrative skills obtained in both the public and private sectors. John, as you know, was President of the Association for five years and has a good understanding of the requirements of BirdLife international. The office will have the services of a Secretary who is Alice Chamunorwa. We wish you both well in your new roles.

NEW COUNCIL AND REPRESENTATIVES ELECTED AT AGM

The following members were elected at the AGM held on 25 March 2000.

President:	Mr D Gray	Vice-President:	Mr J Saunders
Secretary:	Mrs D Rushforth	Treasurer:	Ms E Elliot-McColl
Research and Conservation:	Mr A Cizek		
Education and Extension:	Mrs L Maasdorp		

Co-opted members

Public Relations and Fund Raising: Vacant

Publications: Mr M P S Irwin

Branch representatives

Mashonaland: Mr J Saunders Midlands: Mr J Barry

Matabeleland: Mr M Smith Eastern Districts: Mr K Dixon

Karol Bird Club: Mr K Mitchell

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

The second phase of the Bird Awareness Programme called “Children, Birds and Biodiversity” has got underway. Our co-ordinator and trainers were recently “blown” into the Honde Valley for a workshop and teachers from 3 schools turned up despite the wind and rain. It was found that birds are used as a food resource and teachers suggested that the children should be taught how to identify the special birds of this IBA so as to avoid killing them. For the benefit of new members of BirdLife Zimbabwe who may not be aware of our project, we buy second-hand binoculars and field guides for the schools.

A workshop was also held for schools adjacent to the Marlborough vlei in Harare which is home to special birds during the wet season. School groups will visit the vlei in the middle term. **Leslee Maasdorp**

THE EXECUTIVE OFFICER’S DESKCouncil of African Partnership meeting – 2 to 11 June 2000

Sue Childes and I will be attending the annual meeting of the Council of African Partnership which will be held on an island in the Mediterranean off the coast of Tunisia. The meeting is being hosted by Les Amis des Oiseaux, the BirdLife International Partner-Designate in Tunisia. A full report of the meeting will be given in the next issue of *Babbler*.

A new species for the Zimbabwe list

Rain and floods weren’t all that Cyclone Eline blew into Zimbabwe. Whilst on a nip in the southeast Lowveld, Kit Hustler and Derek de la Harpe sighted a Greater Frigatebird on the Zimbabwean side of the Mozambique border. This is a bird often seen off the Mozambique coast and has been seen only rarely inland during or after cyclonic conditions. Frigatebirds are opportunistic scavengers and are renowned for their habit of harrying other seabirds until they regurgitate their stomach contents which the frigatebirds then cleverly catch and eat.

This interesting report was sent via the ZIMBIRNET BirdLife Zimbabwe’s e-mail chat group which would welcome new members and particularly contributors. All that is needed to join is to send your name and e-mail address to birds@zol.co.zw **John Paxton**

MASHONALAND BRANCHHARARE BOTANIC GARDENS – Saturday 19 February 2000

A total of 36 pitched up for the afternoon walk in the Botanic Gardens, leading to an unexpected bonanza for the gate attendant and overcrowding in the parking area. Two groups were formed, but action was slow during the first half of the walk, the birds seemingly fleeing the onslaught of so many watchers. However, as discipline broke down in the groups with many laggards getting distracted by the luxuriant trees, the birds took courage and reappeared. By the end of the day the two groups, whose final composition bore relatively little semblance to initial assignments, had observed 53 species. These included good sightings of Brubru, various sunbirds, Whyte’s Barbet, Abdim’s Stork, baby Red-knobbed Coot, Spotted Flycatcher, Tropical Boubou, Thick-billed Weaver, Steel-blue Widowfinch, European Bee-eater and a female Black Cuckooshrike. **Alan Keller**

Alex Siemers – The Schoolboy Expeditions of the period 1950 to 1980 – 16 March 2000

“Our bigger and better society is now like a hypochondriac – so obsessed with its own economic health as to have lost the capacity to remain healthy. The world is so greedy for more bath tubs that it has lost the stability necessary ... to even turn off the tap.” Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*, 1948

This is probably not what Zimbabweans want to hear right now given the state of our economy — a bit of economic health wouldn't be such a bad thing. But clearly there are people in the west (and here?) who are dissatisfied with the excesses of affluence and with the waste and environmental degradation associated with a consumer culture. Mashonaland Branch members of BLZ were privileged to have the opportunity to hear Mr Siemers' informal account of the schoolboy expeditions which he inaugurated in 1951 and was involved with for the next 30 years. Today, this period seems like the "golden years of natural history" in this country. The list of people involved with training the schoolboys before their epic adventures reads like a roll-call of 'who's who' in central African natural history. Smithers, Wild, Irwin, Broadley, Drummond, Pinhey, Jackson, Brooke, Phelps, Poynton and many more gave of their time to train the pupils, and, in so doing, inspired enthusiasm. John Ball and Keith Coates-Palgrave were amongst those who had the opportunity to go on an expedition. *The Trees of Southern Africa* will always stand as a landmark natural history work for the whole of the southern African subcontinent.

"There was one chap – Robert Henney – who, after a few days, developed a red swelling on his leg. Being worried about sleeping sickness, I 'phoned (Michael) Gelfand and he said to get him out of there and to a hospital as soon as possible. But I explained to Henney that if there was a larva in his leg it wasn't tsetse fly, since they lay their eggs in the ground, and asked him if he wanted me to cut it open and see if there was a larva. If there wasn't, we would go back, but if there was, the expedition would carry on. He said yes, so the next day I took a sterilized razor and cut it open – less than ¼ of an inch, but more than ½ of an inch deep. Out popped a larva – I cleaned the wound up and put a plaster on it, and we carried on. By the time we had reached the end of the expedition it was almost completely healed..."

Sixteen sixth-formers were selected from around one hundred applicants, four boys from previous trips, bringing experience to the remaining places. New members were chosen after a careful selection procedure, which included trial trips. Schoolboys were involved in the procedure so that a team-unit was the end result. Good cooks, administrators, academics, athletes, naturalists, mechanics, photographers – all had a role to play. Being able to handle stress was obviously an asset – a canoeing trip down the Zambezi River involved searching for and recovering the 1½ tonne raft which had been washed off its overnight mooring on a sandbank by Kariba floodgate waters.

These expeditions were more than just adventures. The CHIRONI (Chimanimani Haroni) trips in the 1960's produced, amongst other things, a species of legless lizard new to science, as well as two new species of birds for Zimbabwe from the Haroni-Rusitu forests – Pallid Honeyguide and African Olive-pigeon. Mr Masterson fully appreciates the importance of the most significant (ornithological) discovery made by the schoolboys – the first specimen of a Bokmakierie north of the Limpopo and, in addition, a new and highly restricted sub-species. Mr Masterson and Graham Child, who was later to head the Department of National Parks, visited the mountains in the late 1950's on a university expedition with a mission to collect as many species of birds and plants there as they could. Fellow expedition members from Cape Town said that they thought they had seen a Bokmakierie, but no attempt was made to search for it since 'Bokmakierie do not occur outside of South Africa'. The first anyone knew of the significant find (shot by an unknowing schoolboy) was when Mr Siemers went to check the specimens and found one nestled in cotton wool in a specimen box!

But these expeditions were about even more than good natural history. The concept that the strength of the team is greater than the sum of the individual parts was no doubt fully tested and appreciated. Schoolboys learnt to commit to the team, which found itself in the middle of the bush and reliant on the skills and initiative of all its members. One wonders what social skills teenagers learn playing computer games and surfing the Interact in a 'virtual' world'. There is a real need to pass on some of the spirit inherent in naturalising to this generation of Zimbabweans. I firmly believe that many will respond to this important part of our heritage.

Mr Siemers recounted the story of an incident at Mana Pools (which is paraphrased here). "I watched one lad cutting bread for lunch. He tossed the outside piece away irreverently, and I went over and took him up for it, saying civilised people do not behave like that! Having carried on walking and now out-of-sight behind a tent, I heard the chap saying 'Foxy is a real bastard, but at least he is civilised..." Perhaps that is the true meaning of civilisation. **Anthony Cizek**

CHEDGELOW Farm – Saturday 18 March 2000

Although fuel is in short supply and Chedgelow Farm borders Harava Dam, we had an unexpectedly good turnout of 15 members. The farm has three areas which we usually visit to look at birds and these consist of a small dam and adjoining marsh land, the quarries and the miombo woodland close to Harava Dam. As the ducks are fed on the small dam they are usually numerous and 30 Comb Duck and 20 Red-billed Teal were counted. Although the main woodland is very scenic it is felt that the predominance of *Brachystegia glaucescens* trees tends to make it bird poor. However, a total of 57 species was recorded and the highlights included 2 Long-crested Eagles, 1 Grey Penduline-tit, 1 Spotted Creeper and 6 Southern Hyliota. **Richard Dennison**

HAKA Park – Sunday 26 March 2000

We had a good turnout of 16 members on this outing. As the vleis which bisect the park were very wet the access roads to the main picnic area were closed. This meant that our birdwatching was restricted to CLEVELAND Dam and the main miombo woodland area. The dam did not yield much in the way of good birding but we managed to see 2 Black-eared Seedeaters, a Spotted Creeper and a Red-backed Shrike on our drive from the dam to the woodland. Although we did not see a lot of birds in the woodland, we did manage to find some of the miombo specials. The highlights included Lanner Falcon, Whyte's Barbet, Black Cuckooshrike and White-breasted Cuckooshrikes, Miombo Tit, Southern Black Tit and Grey Penduline-tits, Spotted Creeper and Miombo Rock-thrush. **Richard Dennison**

MATABELELAND*From the Chairman*

It was with profound sadness and shock that we learnt of George Banfield's tragic death on Monday 21 February. He and Mary have been staunch and loyal supporters of outings and evening meetings over the years. His quiet and gentle manner, combined with considerable birding knowledge will be sorely missed. Our deepest sympathies and love go to Mary and all her family.

Members from other branches who have been privileged enough to join George on a visit to Verreaux's Eagle nest sites will well remember his wonderful knowledge and understanding of these magnificent birds and their breeding histories. We have lost a most respected man, a valuable specialist and conservationist. **Editor**

After a wet and soggy February, March dried up sufficiently to enable a clear view of the sky and with the current fuel crisis I resorted to some BULAWAYO deck-chair sky watching. The last weekend in March proved to be particularly productive with a tally of 45 White-backed Vultures, 3 Lappet-faced Vultures – 2 adult and 1 immature, 2 Wahlberg's Eagle and a pair of African Fish-eagle, all within an hour after lunch, all gliding over Hillside, which just shows plenty of good birding can be had from the front lawn. Also within town we are intending to hold regular monthly birding at Hillside Dams, its primary aim being to encourage interest in birdwatching and hopefully boost local Branch membership. It was particularly encouraging to bump into one of our ex Sixth Form Course attendees at the Dams taking an active interest in birds and showing plenty of enthusiasm for the idea of regular bird watching there. Please do come and support us. Good birding. **Martin Smith**

Naseby Farm – Sunday 20 February 2000

This was an outing to an area which we have neglected in the past, 46 km west of Bulawayo on the Khami Road. Our first stop was at the scenic new settling ponds bordering the KHAMI River. All were full and a number of strategically placed rocks provided suitable roosting sites for waders. Wood Sandpipers, Marsh Sandpipers and Common Sandpipers were present along with a green-legged Ruff which caused us to consult text books. In the lush regrowth adjoining the ponds Great Reed-warbler added its grating contribution to the morning calls, whilst perched prominently in the open a Red-backed Shrike looked particularly smart in fresh plumage. Leaving the ponds to gently bubble we moved onto the Hunt's property arriving in time for a late second breakfast. Vegetation and consequently avifauna was varied with "gusu" bordering the road, giving way to mopane closer to the river, whilst the Gwaai itself was bordered by a diverse range of riverine vegetation. The river was flowing strongly and it was delightful to be able to hear the roar of water as it swept over rocks. Flood water in the previous week had flattened plants and left a trail of debris at a considerable height in the surrounding trees. At ground level birds were hard to find as temperatures began to soar towards midday, however Pearl-spotted Owlet impersonations produced a party of inquisitive Retz's Helmet-shrike whilst across the river the thin call of a Grey Tit-flycatcher was a pleasing addition to the list. Away from the

water within the mixed mopane scrub, a number of confusing calls posed identification problems until some vigorous spushing yielded a Neddicky, after which we managed to find plenty more. Overhead, comparatively clear skies enabled us to see a variety of raptors – Black-chested Snake-eagle, Wahlberg's Eagle and Martial Eagles were all added to the list. Vultures were also recorded with a reasonable number of White-backed Vultures drifting past but no unusual Lowveld strays. We made use of the Hunt's cottage for lunch and were treated to a delicious spread to celebrate Julia's birthday – just a few years past 21! After lunch, those of us that could still move, tramped through the mopane and found more calling Neddicky in addition to impala and tortoises. Returning to the watercourse, a melanistic Gabar Goshawk being mobbed by a Fork-tailed Drongo completed our checklist bringing to an end a relaxing and pleasant outing. **Martin Smith**

AISLEBY – Sunday 27 February 2000

Aisleby always has plenty to offer and with our current fuel problems has to be the best birding venue close to town. February's outing had much to offer beginning with a mixed flock of waders at the night storage ponds. Little Stint, Curlew Sandpipers and Wood Sandpipers, Ruff and appreciable numbers of Marsh Sandpiper were present as well as a tally of 95 Hottentot Teals. An immature Gabar Goshawk caused confusion to all, until its striking white rump was seen as it sped away. Moving on to the Acacia surrounding the Jacana Dam, plenty of warblers were active, the most obvious being Willow Warbler whose plumage appeared to range from almost uniform grey to yellow. Cuckoos were still active with both Diderick Cuckoo and Jacobin Cuckoo calling strongly, the former providing evidence of who had been deceived with a Diderick Cuckoo fledgling being fed by a diminutive female Southern Red Bishop. Are the females solely responsible for raising this rather large offspring? Wading through flooded vegetation, Clive managed to spot a nightjar perched on a horizontal branch, location suggested a European Nightjar and after careful study from a distance of a few metres we were all convinced this was the case and added another species to the Aisleby checklist. Moving on to the extremely soggy lands a fleeting glimpse of a female/immature ring-tailed harrier left us puzzled over whether it was Pallid Harrier or Montagu's Harrier. Sludge spreading had attracted plenty of insect life which was being consumed by large numbers of Barn Swallows and a few Yellow Wagtails.

At the Ibis Dam, high water levels and flooded vegetation had produced ideal conditions for both Allen's Gallinule and Lesser Moorhen, with both young and adults of both species being recorded. Pink-backed Pelican had returned with a tally of three individuals present but, despite waiting for an hour, we failed to record the Western Marsh-harrier. Finally, we all managed to see an attractive African Rail who spent at least ten minutes endeavouring to cross an open patch of water in full view of the platform. This was delightful sighting and a suitable end to a morning which yielded 123 species, with noticeable absentees being Egyptian Goose and Grey Crowned Crane.

EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB

PREMIER ESTATE – Old MUTARE – 30 January 2000

This was the venue for our morning meeting which started at about 7.00 a.m. in the bright sunshine at the old quarry/mine workings along the Premier Estate Road, which is usually a productive spot. There were numerous Little Swifts (which nest under the bridge across the Mutare River on the Nyanga Road) milling around overhead and several Eastern Saw-wing in and near the quarry. We wondered whether they were nesting there, but decided the quarry walls would be too hard for them to construct their tunnel nests. We kept a sharp lookout for the Mocking Cliff-chats which are usually to be seen there and eventually saw one solitary bird.

A little further along the road the power lines were thick with what we assumed to be Barn Swallows. They were actually Common House-martins and we estimated that there were more than 3 000 birds. This was certainly the most interesting observation of the day. A walk down to the "causeway" across the Mutare River was unproductive except for a White-throated Robin-chat and a pair of African Black Duck found standing in the water rushing across the flooded road-way. In spite of the evidence of its shallowness we decided not to cross the stream and retraced our steps.

We then tried the woodland (mixed Acacia on one side of the track and mainly miombo on the other and up the hillside) beyond the Pioneer Cemetery and found a fair number of birds typical of this type of habitat. Various bush-shrikes were heard, Common Scimitar-bills, Southern Black Tit, sundry flycatchers, and a Fork-tailed Drongo. By this time the sun was well up and it was becoming uncomfortably hot and humid – the birds retired for their midday siesta. Several large birds of prey were seen including an Augur Buzzard. The others, disgracefully, we failed to identify. **Tony Curtis**

CYNARA – Saturday 12 February 2000

This was the Club's first outing to Cynara since November last year and in spite of fuel shortages six members turned out, including Brian – good to see him again! The weather, 'though threatening, remained dry until quite late in the afternoon when a thunderstorm seemed to be brewing. But we were by that time ready to return to Mutare and our sundowners. The dams at Cynara are all, except one which has been deliberately emptied for de-weeding, very full and this was reflected in the lack of waders. Only a group of eight Three-banded Plovers and two or three Wood Sandpipers were taking advantage of a small patch of mud on the rim of one dam. Other water birds were equally scarce, a few Reed Cormorants, two or three White-breasted Cormorants and some African Darters, a dozen or so White-faced Ducks were the only ducks present apart from some Egyptian Goose; herons were represented by one Grey Heron, two Purple Herons and one Black-headed Heron; only Cattle Egrets represented their genus. Three African Sacred Ibis were seen – even African Jacanas were sparse and not a single Black Crake was recorded. Cynara's oldest avian inhabitant, the Grey Crowned Crane was there.

The small woodland birds were seen only in ones and two's and we decided that the well-developed grass and other vegetation had enabled the birds to disperse over a wider area. We logged about forty species of passerines and near-passerines, but not even the Barn Swallows were very numerous and no other swallows or swifts were seen. **Tony Curtis**

CECIL KOP fence walk – Saturday 11 March 2000

A combination of too much rain and too little diesel forced a late change in programme. Instead of driving up to the Vumba we took a stroll along the game fence and through the new suburb of Murambi East. The 6 of us, including 2 young beginners from Dangamvura High, managed to see or hear a total of some 45-50 species on a very unpromising afternoon.

Mud underfoot, tall, wet grass and dense vegetation made the first half hour hard work and pretty unpleasant. And there were no birds apart from Dark-capped Bulbuls and Common Fiscal. However, our persistence was rewarded as we squelched our way up the fence and the common species began to appear. Little Bee-eater were a common tick. Where have they been lately? Then European Bee-eater overhead and two Crowned Hornbills. At the top of the bill we were surprised to find three forest species – Dark-backed Weaver, Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird and Yellow-throated Woodland-warbler. A Jacobin Cuckoo sat dejectedly in an Acacia. Lower down we found Bronze Mannikins, Common Waxbill, the lovely little Grey Waxbill and lots of African Firefinch with the attendant parasitic Black Widowfinch.

Coming out into the open again we saw two Rock Doves, a rare tick for the EDBC. Then a Eurasian Hobby swooped past and a Steppe Buzzard circled the Game Park. **Ken Dixon**

Bexhill Farm, RUSAPE – Sunday 26 March 1999 [2000?]

After a two year absence from this area we looked forward to visiting our fellow Rusape enthusiasts again. Unfortunately, because of fuel and other problems, only two from Mutare were able to make the trip but it proved well worth it. We were greeted by fine, blue skies and available petrol in Rusape! Our hosts, Jane and Ray Musto greeted us with coffee and sandwiches before we set off on a walk around the farm. We were joined by Des and Mrs Munch from a neighbouring farm, so for once the Mutare contingent was outnumbered. With Cape Turtle-dove and Black-collared Barbet calls in the distance, Chin-spot Batis were seen and there was an early encounter with an African Harrier-hawk in the same vicinity, flocks of Common House-martin and unidentified swallows flew restlessly beside old tobacco lands. Shortly afterwards, White-fronted Bee-eater (regularly seen on the farm, we were told), Common Fiscal, Brown-crowned Tchagra, Emerald-spotted Wood-dove and Bar-throated Apalis were encountered. Then we had a good sighting of a Wahlberg's Eagle flying overhead. Soon afterwards, Ray showed us some ancient pit structures. We had been walking for the most part through typical miombo woodland and sandveld which was waterlogged in places after substantial rain on the previous afternoon. Definitely the going suited my gum boots in contrast to our host who wore his best shoes. Calls of Black-headed Oriole, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird and African Grey Hornbill were heard while we paused on rocky outcrops. Moving on we encountered the first real bird party of the morning comprising Grey-headed Bush-shrike, Fork-tailed Drongo, Kurrichane Thrush and Southern Black Tit. Our route then followed the swiftly flowing Lesapi River. Grass was waist high but no ticks were found. Bird activity along this stretch was provided by Variable Sunbirds and Miombo Double-collared Sunbirds, Common Waxbills, European Bee-eater, Rattling Cisticola, Black-crowned Tchagra and noisy Arrow-marked Babblers. Lurking along the river bank were Tawny-flanked Prinias while Tropical Boubou, Black-backed Puffback and Crested Barbet called from dense foliage. Beside a high, pitted bank was a Brown-hooded Kingfisher,

At the end of our three hour ramble other members of our party added African Paradise-flycatcher, White-browed Scrub-robin, Rufous-naped Lark and Blue Waxbill to the list.

During a splendid lunch, courtesy of the Musto's, we were able to witness much activity in the garden centred around the shrubbery and bird tray. This was provided by Yellow-bellied Greenbulbs and Dark-capped Bulbuls, Brown-hooded Kingfisher, Tropical Boubou and Black-headed Oriole, while Variable Sunbird and Miombo Double-collared Sunbirds were just the other side of the lounge window.

At the dam on Castle Base Farm there were tsessebe and zebra and we saw Cattle Egrets, African Jacana, African Stonechat, Hamerkop, Reed Cormorant, Pied Kingfisher, Red-billed Teal, Zitting Cisticola and Pied Crow. We lingered and remarked, not for the first time, why we did not do this more often.

On the way home we spotted Lilac-breasted Roller and Long-crested Eagle beside the road. We stopped at Pathacres Dam and recorded White-faced Duck, Reed Cormorants and White-breasted Cormorants and Red-billed Teal. As could be expected, the lack of mud flats yielded no waders. Despite no notable sightings and barely fifty species listed, days do not come better than this for therapeutic contentment. **Rex Harrison**

TAIL FEATHERS

Interesting observations from the KAROI area

We arrived home at midnight one evening and surprised a Dark-capped Bulbul helping himself to bugs attracted to the outside light at the front door! He retreated to a nearby tree, also lit by the same light.

On the farm we spotted a Lesser Grey Shrike and enjoyed scrutinising it – a first and a highlight for us.

Recently, having heard some commotion on the roof and racing upstairs to save the pigeons from the cat, I was surprised instead to find a party of Grey Go-away-birds sunbathing. Hopping from one foot to the other, they would then sit with wings outspread flat against the hot tin roof for as long as they could bear it. Then they would hop up into the nearby tree for respite before they did it all over again.

A Common Waxbill was seen collecting some material from Jackal droppings which were two to three days old. One wonders why such a beautiful bird would resort to such behaviour!

One of our members observed an African Fish-eagle and an Osprey, talons interlocked, high above a dam having a scrap. **Merle Mitchell**

Sighting of African Emerald Cuckoo at FALCON COLLEGE, ESIGODINI

On the morning of 9 January 2000, I was sitting sewing on my verandah when I heard a bird I had not heard before. I went into the garden to try to find it but unfortunately it had moved next door, where it continued to call, but out of my sight as it was now in thick bush. However, about half an hour later it returned to sit in a bare tree right above me and I was able to clearly see it through my binoculars. There was no mistaking its bright emerald green plumage, the brilliant yellow underparts and the barred tail. On checking my Newman's and Roberts' I knew there was no question that I was looking at an African Emerald Cuckoo. I subsequently got my daughter to ID it and listened to the call on tape to make absolutely sure!

Whilst Newman's, Roberts' and the Atlas of Southern African Birds do not record its presence in our area, Michael Irwin makes mention in his book of a sighting in Bulawayo. **Heather Macdonald**

Breeding in the MUKUVISI WOODLAND – successes and failures

Once again, I have to ask John Shaw's indulgence in commenting on his interesting and meticulous report about the Mukuvisi Woodland. I fully support his view that our bird population has taken a nosedive, but as I have mentioned before, this is due to the predation by mostly raptors and to a lesser extent by cobras and rats. Out of 9 Amethyst Sunbird nests this season none succeeded, eggs or young were taken. All 6 Southern Black Flycatcher nests known to me were robbed, a similar fate befell the 10 breeding attempts by Kurrichane Thrush, Lilac-breasted Roller and Meyer's Parrot became the victims of an immature African Harrier-hawk. The 3 nests of Black-headed Oriole met the same fate, so did 2 nests of Red-faced Mousebird as well as 2 nests of Spotted Creeper. Large numbers of Pied Crow prevented the pair of Wahlberg's Eagles from breeding. The last breeding attempt by our Black-chested Snake-eagles ended in tragedy as its small fluffy chick was killed by Pied Crow. As these eagles normally feed an enormous amount of snakes to their chicks, the unsuccessful breeding has meant that there are now an unusually high number of cobras in the Woodland.

However, all is not doom and gloom. Against the fiercest opposition from our local hoodlums – the Pied Crows – our pair of Long-crested Eagles is bringing up a second chick this season. Fork-tailed Drongos and African Paradise-flycatchers had some successes, as well as Fiery-necked Nightjar and Pennant-winged Nightjars. In all the forty years of a close relationship with the Woodland, I have never seen so many Miombo Blue-eared Starlings with many chicks as we have now. **John R Sievi**, 9 Inyanga Crescent, Wilmington Park, Harare.

NOTICEBOARD

Buy a brick campaign for BirdLife Zimbabwe's headquarters' building

At the AGM in March it was proposed and agreed that, in keeping with BirdLife Zimbabwe's advancement into the new century, we need our own headquarters building which will possibly be built in the Mukuvisi Woodlands. The project will require a large sum of money and, to start off the fund raising, members are invited to participate in a 'Buy a Brick' campaign. Bricks can be bought for a minimum amount of \$100 and members prepared to pay \$1000 or more for a brick will be acknowledged within the new building. A form is included with this publication and we appeal to all of you who are able to support the project. Two amounts have already been received – thank you to Wendy Bourne \$2000 and to John Paxton \$1000.

Office space for Executive Officer and Secretary

John and Alice are at present working under very trying circumstances and we urgently need to find them an office. Please therefore contact John Paxton if you have a suitable room or cottage for rent or if you know of someone who might have something available.

Vehicle for Bird Awareness Programme

A reminder that a good second-hand pickup vehicle is urgently required by the committee of the Bird Awareness Programme so that regular visits can be made to the selected schools. If you have a vehicle which might be suitable please contact Mrs Leslee Maasdorp on Harare telephone 883316.

Roberts' VII Draft texts

The latest set of draft texts of species for the seventh edition of Roberts' available. For those members with access to the Web please visit the following page of the FitzPatrick Institute website:
<http://www.uct.ac.za/depts/fitzpatrick/docs/drafts.html>

The texts are well worth reading not only for their content but also to see how much information is still required – even common species such as the Dark-capped Bulbul need further input. **John Paxton**

Binoculars for sale

For sale – a pair of good, second-hand binoculars – 8 x 30 Hanimex. These are ideal for beginners. Offers are invited. Telephone **Edna Elliot-McColl** on Harare 339714

Bird videos for sale

As mentioned in the January/February 2000 issue of *Babbler* bird videos are offered for sale. Titles are:

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

To fly or not to fly;	The Insatiable Appetite;	Meal Eaters;	Signals and Songs,
The mastery of flight;	Finding partners;	Fishing for a Living	

Attenborough in Paradise (featuring Birds of Paradise)

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

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

The price of the videos is \$300 plus sales tax.

Contact David Gray on Harare 885406 to place your orders.

Marlborough Vlei Working Group

Interested parties have met on five occasions to discuss the possibility of establishing a Marlborough Vlei Bird Reserve. Most members belong to BirdLife Zimbabwe but the Aloe and Orchid Societies, Environment 2000 and the Marlborough Ratepayers Association have also been drawn in. The Harare City Council will be approached shortly to consider the plans.

Should you wish to join this group, please contact Anthony Cizek — Cell: 023 401914 or Dorothy Wakeling at Crake Cottage – telephone 304298.

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 Bird Indaba

The organising committee have been working hard to make this a memorable event. The programme is very exciting and will include early morning bird walks, ringing demonstrations, practical raptor identification, the management of sick and injured birds, practical rearing of waterfowl, etc. We have been assured by the management of Kuimba Shiri that fuel will be available for sale at the bird garden for those people who are short. Fast food and bar facilities will be available throughout the day. For those people out of town there will be limited accommodation available but there is a good caravan/camp site within walking distance of Kuimba Shiri. Charges are \$100 per night per tent or caravan (maximum 4 people) with an additional charge of \$25 per person over the maximum. The area is fenced, secure and has a lovely view of the lake.

Stands for those people wishing to sell their wares are still available for a rental of \$500 for two days. This is on the basis of ground area (3m²) only. Products of all description can be sold from the stands. 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 set up displays beforehand. Please contact Di Rushforth on Harare telephone number 741765 or Cell: 023 404629.

Checklists for Robert McIlwaine National Park

Checklists drawn up by Tracy and Ferdie Couto are available for sale at \$10 each. Contact Pat Saunders

New members

We welcome the following new members:

Mashonaland Branch

Mr and Mrs L Baudi, P Brogan, J Browning, T Edwards, Mr and Mrs M Matthews, Mrs C Milne, J van Ougevalle, Mrs H Young.

Karoi Bird Club (Karoi Branch)

E M Meikle

Eastern Districts Bird Club (Manicaland Branch)

A G Robinson

Matabeleland Branch

Dr I. Grimes, Ms M Pearce

Midlands Branch

Mrs C S Davy, Mrs C Evans, Mrs J M Everitt

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Shop 5, Patric Court, 113 Nelson Mandela Avenue, Harare. Telephone 733463/724754