

BABBLER

BirdLife Zimbabwe

A PARTNER DESIGNATE OF BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL

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COMMITTEES

Mashonaland Branch

Chairman: John Saunders	490167
Members: Jennifer Carter	300082
Richard Dennison	747567
Helen Fraser	481316
Di Rushforth	741765
Pat Saunders	490167
Nigel Steyn	776993
Bette Riddle	303679

Matabeleland Branch

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

Executive Officer:	John Paxton	011 608138
Project Officer:	Sue Childes	011 604849

Addresses:

P O Box CY 161, Causeway
e-mail: birds@zol.co.zw

3A Holdengarde Aye, Hillside, Bulawayo
adrienne@acacia.samara.co.zw

Editors: Di Rushforth	741765	Martin Smith	42474
5 Colenbrander Road,		3A Holdengarde Ave. Hillside,	
P O Belvedere, Harare		Bulawayo	

ACTIVITIES

MASHONALAND BRANCH

Regular outings

1. Mukuvisi Woodlands: Sundays, 2 July and 6 August, 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, 9 July and 13 August 2000. Meet at Marimba Shopping Centre for departure at 7.30 a.m. Bring your chairs and tea. Beginners are most welcome.

Please contact Richard Dennison before going to the Bird Sanctuary as there have been reports of visitors occupying the Safari Lodge next door.

Please note that no other outings have been planned for July. For August, outings have been arranged but, if members are in any doubt about visiting the areas, please contact a member of the committee.

Saturday afternoon outing

19 August 2000: Stockade Farm, Old Mazowe Road. Meet at 2.00 p.m. on the Old Mazowe Road (turn right at the circle at Westgate Shopping Centre, Lonngundi Road). The farm is approximately 25 km from Harare. Bring chairs and refreshments.

Sunday outing

27 August 2000: Crundall Brothers, Glen Forest. Meet at the BP Service Station Helensvale Shopping Centre (right hand side of the Borrowdale Road at 6.00 a.m.). Bring chairs and refreshments,

The organisers of the Bird Festival 2000 (Bird Indaba) which was due to be held over the weekend 24/25 June have regretfully had to postpone the event. The provisional new date is 19/20 May 2001. Thank you to all of you who offered to assist with the running of the event. Your names will be kept on file as you will be needed next year.

Note: change of day for the July evening meeting

1. Tuesday 18 July 2000: Peter Ginn will give a slide presentation of birds of the Vumba. Peter has however indicated that there is a slight possibility that he may have to cancel should he be required to take clients on a bird safari. In that event, another speaker will be made available.
2. Thursday 17 August 2000: John Paxton, our Executive Officer, will talk to us about the Council for African Partnership meeting held in June at a resort on an island in the Mediterranean, which he and Susan Childes attended.

Venue for both evenings: 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. Security is provided.

Weekend outing to Esigodini

Firm dates for this visit are the weekend 10 to 14 August 2000. If you wish to participate, please contact John Saunders. Early indications are that the cost of accommodation will be approximately \$400 (maximum) per person per day for full board. This outing is not restricted to Mashonaland Branch members only.

MATABELELAND BRANCH

Evening Meetings

Friday 7 July 2000 – Video evening on Bird Identification. We intend to show further footage of Dave Gosney's identification video, this time looking at waders. I will also show some of my own videos on local birds. Venue: 3A Holdengarde Avenue, Hillside at 8.00 p.m.

Friday 28 July 2000. In place of our usual month end visit to Aisleby and our Friday evening meeting, members are invited to join us on our monthly identification walk at Hillside Dams. Meet at 4.00 p.m. at the Lower Dam car park or contact Martin.

Outings

Sunday 16 July 2000 – Aisleby Waterfowl Count. The May outing yielded plenty of interest with a number of unusual sightings (see report) and hopefully we will again find plenty to count. Meet at the boom at 7.30 a.m. or contact the Chairman.

Saturday 19 August 2000. Mabukuwene Aloe Garden – This is another area in town which we have visited in the past. Hopefully we will find some aloes still in flower but if not there is usually plenty to see. Meet at the Aloe Garden at 3.00 p.m. or contact Penny Feather.

Aisleby

There will be no end of month outing in July due to the mid-month count.

Saturday 26 August 2000. This will be an afternoon outing so meet at the boom at 2.30 p.m. or contact the co-ordinator Clive Townsley (44617)

Hillside Dams

We are continuing with our sunset ramble around the Dams and have made an effort to see that this has been publicised. We have managed to attract a number of prospective new members and hope that they will continue to come. Meet at the Lower Dam car park at 4.00 p.m. on the last Friday of the month.

EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB

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

Outings

<u>Saturday 8 July 2000</u>	Vumba Botanical Gardens	2.00 p.m.
<u>Sunday 30 July 2000</u>	Burma Valley	6.30 a.m.

Saturday 12 August 2000 No outing – Public Holiday
Sunday 27 August 2004 Mapor Estate 6.30 a.m.

Please note that it would be advisable to contact either Tony Curtis or Ken Dixon prior to each visit.

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 PO Box 398, Karoi ☎ 064-7010 (office) 7725 (home)
 Secretary: Mrs M Mitchell PO Box 398, Karoi ☎ 064-7014 Fax: 064-7010

Rydings School Interpretive Centre

No outings will be arranged for the Interpretive Centre or anywhere else until further notice

MIDLANDS BRANCH

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

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 EDUCATION COMMITTEE

The demand for the Bird Awareness Programme outstrips the rate at which the Education Committee can deliver the product. Constraints are manpower and written material – chiefly field guides. Intimidation of teachers in two schools has brought their project to a halt. Hopefully this will only be a temporary set-back. Schools in the Honde Valley are undertaking bird studies with vigour. What is needed now is the consultation with local communities so that they can provide guidelines on how we should proceed on conservation of birds, habitats and biodiversity. By combining with BirdLife Zimbabwe's proposed project in the same area we will be able to cut down on expenditure for this vital base-line survey. Two recent events have made a big difference to the running of this project. The first is the opening of the BirdLife Zimbabwe office and the second is the acquisition of a sturdy truck.

The launch of the school book "Enjoy the Birds of Zimbabwe" which was written by members of the Education Committee was held in March. About 120 people attended the event which was held at Astra Corporation's head office at Astra Park, Borrowdale. The evening was a big success, especially from the promotional angle. Thanks are due to members of Council, the Education Committee, Susan Childes, the artists, Peter Lovemore (the auctioneer) and many other people who all assisted in one way or another. Approximately \$60 000 was raised from the art auction (artwork had been donated for the auction), the sale of all work and time sale of some of the school books.

Marlborough vleij

Marlborough vleij work has led to the drafting of a constitution for conservation procedures. Two school groups, including one from the Emerald Hill School for the Deaf, have recently visited the Marlborough ponds to look at the birds.

Leslee Maasdorp – Project Co-ordinator

FROM THE EXECUTIVE OFFICER'S DESK

Council for African Partnership (CAP) meeting — Kerkennah, Tunisia — 3 to 10 June 2000

This meeting was attended by Susan Childes and myself. The venue was a hotel on the island of Kerkennah, one hour by ferry from the port of Sfax. It was a busy week but the conference was as always very successful and a great deal was achieved. Susan, along with all the other partners and representatives, gave

a presentation on progress that has been made in the implementation of BirdLife strategies since CAP met in Burkina Faso in June last year. The meeting went on to routine business such as the election of representatives to the various working groups, both regional and global.

Various strategies and plans were presented. These included the plan to develop a strategic approach to cross border endangered species conservation, the development of fund-raising capacities and a structure of African Region focal points for advocacy issues.

Naturama Burkina Faso was approved for recommendation to Global Council to become a full partner following a presentation by them. (We will be going through this process at the next CAP meeting which will be held in South Africa next year).

A lot of the time at the meeting was taken up with progress reports on the large project involving IBA conservation in 10 African countries under the auspices of the Global Environment Facility of the United Nations. This five-year project has reached its mid-term and it was most interesting to listen to reports of the review team. We are not directly involved in this project.

The Africa Division of the BirdLife Secretariat is presently based with the rest of the Secretariat in Cambridge. CAP endorsed the recommendations of the Secretariat Relocation Working Group, that a regional Secretariat be based in Africa, with project management, fund-raising and database services provided by Cambridge. The location will be decided at the next CAP and relocation in the following year. Susan Childes was appointed to membership of the CAP Technical Advisory Committee which advises the Council on a range of technical issues.

Kerkennah Island itself is not a very good area for birds. Only a few species were seen. The most interesting of these were Barbary Partridge, Stone-curlew (a European Thick-knee), Spotless Starling, Greater Grey Shrike and Spanish Sparrow. On the ferry going over we saw Cory's Shearwater. For our mid-conference excursion, we were taken to an area of saline pans (adjacent to a salt works) where we saw many nesting gulls and terns. There were also several hundred Greater Flamingos feeding in this area. A good sighting was that of a pair of Marbled Teal.

After the birdwatching, we were taken to an old Roman walled city which contains an absolute rabbit warren of market stalls for shopping. **John Paxton**

MASHONALAND BRANCH

GREYSTONE PARK Nature Reserve HARARE – Easter Saturday 22 April 2000

Twelve people turned out on a cloudy and stormy afternoon at Greystone Park Nature Reserve. The conditions were not conducive to good birding and only 25 species were identified. There were few waterbirds – 2 Reed Cormorant, 2 Common Moorhen and an African Jacana were seen. In the grassy area above the dam wall, three pairs of Red-collared Widowbirds – males in breeding plumage – did their best to avoid detection by fluttering up briefly and disappearing again into the grass. A Black-headed Heron stood proud on the top of an Acacia and two Cattle Egrets flew over. Cisticolas were seen but not near enough to be identified. Two pairs of African Stonechat perched on top of the reeds.

After sheltering from a brief shower, we moved below the dam wall where a pair of Speckled Mousebird was seen. On tall trees in a garden next to the Reserve, about 20 Violet-backed Starling of both sexes fraternised with about 30 Miombo Blue-eared Starlings (a juvenile aiding in identification of these). A single Barn Swallow flew over as well as 5 African Palm-swifts. About 15 Red-eyed Dove, a few Laughing Doves, a pair of Black-collared Barbets and 1 Crested Barbet, 5 each of Dark-capped Bulbul and Pied Crow, a few Bronze Mannikins and one each of White-browed Robin-chat (heard), Kurrichane Thrush, Southern Black Flycatcher, Fork-tailed Drongo, Golden Weaver and Common Fiscal made up the numbers before the storm came and we had to abandon the walk.

The day before at the same venue but in bright sunshine, we saw 3 Orange-breasted Bush-shrikes, Golden Weaver, 10 or so Common Waxbills and at least 50 Bronze Mannikins. There was also a Malachite Kingfisher at the water, a Cardinal Woodpecker, 4 Southern Masked-weaver and a Variable Sunbird. **Jennifer Carter**

Antarctica expedition – Kate Wood – Thursday 18 May 2000

We were treated to a wonderful evening with excellent quality slides when we learned about the bottom of the world and its fantastic scenery and wild life.

In February 1998, Kate joined one of Tony Soper's expeditions, picking up a Russian ice-breaker at the port of Ushuaia, Argentina, the most southerly place in the world. Ushuaia was a penal colony from 1902 to 1947 but is now purely a tourist town. Kate was amongst 39 passengers plus the Russian crew on the ship.

The 18 day voyage began by crossing the Drake Passage which took 48 hours and the ship arrived at one of the many research stations of the area. Passengers were transported in "zodiacs" (rubberised boats) where they were able to explore places inaccessible by the larger vessel. The scenery is magnificent with spectacular ice-bergs of all shapes and sizes being seen, as well as glaciers. Gentoo Penguins were photographed by Kate at one of their breeding areas, as well as 3 Hump-backed whales. They visited Deception Island, famous for its now-abandoned whaling station. Also visited was Elephant Island, so named because of its abundance of Elephant Seals. They then went across the Weddell Sea to South Georgia where the whaling station Grytviken in Cumberland Bay was visited. A handful of people still live there together with a small garrison of British Soldiers. On South Georgia, where the stately King Penguins breed, is the area famous for the rescue by Shackleton of his men who were stranded in pack ice after an epic journey by Shackleton taking four and a half months to find help. Then the expedition moved on to the Falkland Islands (Stanley Port) where Steamer Duck, Kelp Goose, Magellanic Penguins was seen. The habitat is barren with tough tussock grass being the only vegetation. A species of dolphin abound in the waters around the bay and escort the zodiacs into harbour. The final place visited in the Falklands was home to nesting Albatross who share their sites with African Penguins. Rockhopper Penguins also occur here together with the rare Striated Caracaras. Thank you so much Kate for a most interesting and enlightening evening. Thank you also to Jacko Williams and Deborah Varden for bringing along their photographs of their recent journey to Antarctica. **Di Rushforth**

Sunnyside Farm CONCESSION – Sunday, 30 April 2000

Reports of problems on some farms probably discouraged some members from attending this outing so it was not unexpected that only 3 of us turned up. However, as long as the present crisis persists, every effort is made to ensure that we do not visit properties occupied by invaders. As the grass was long and wet, we decided to stick to farm roads on our walk and did not visit the Acacia forest near the gliding club. Many of the birds identified were in the Southey's garden where most of the sunbird species were seen. 56 species were identified and the highlights included 8 Whyte's Barbets, 1 Green-backed Honeybird, 6 Terrestrial Brownbuls, 2 Black-throated Wattle-eyes, 1 late African Paradise-flycatcher, 30 Violet-backed Starlings and 1 Magpie Mannikin. Thanks to Lex and Lorna for their usual generous hospitality. **Richard Dennison**

MARLBOROUGH Sewerage Works – Saturday 20 May 2000

The sewerage works do not cover a large area and it was not easy to access the surrounding vleis at this time of the year. This may explain the low turn-out of only 7 people. However, we were blessed with near perfect weather for May and some unusual birds were seen. After the bird list was called most of our group stayed until the sun had almost set to try and see Marsh Owls. Fortunately, we had very good views of 2 Marsh Owls, one of which flew up to us and perched in an exposed position about 20 metres away. A total of 49 species was identified and which included 14 Spur-winged Goose, 1 African Marsh-harrier, 1 Water Thick-knee, 1 Wood Sandpiper, 1 Black Coucal and 2 Hottentot Teals. It was also interesting to see that both the Black Coucal and the Wood Sandpiper were over-wintering.

Richard Dennison

DOUBLE RO Ranch, Nyabira – Sunday 28 May 2000

Although the turn-out for this outing was very low at only 5 people, the birding was very pleasing as the place was full of birds. Robyn Gilmour took us on a circular walk around her son's house in order to avoid the low lying, extensive moist areas. This was followed by a short drive to the vulture restaurant near the main dam complex. We therefore spent about 2 hours walking through cattle grazing paddocks, dotted with anthills, covered with trees and shrubs and another 2 hours were spent near the main dam complex.

A total of 73 species was recorded but it was the large numbers of certain species that was impressive. The highlights included Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters, Pale Flycatcher, Cape Longclaw and Copper Sunbirds in the grasslands and around the house and 90 Marabou Storks, 77 White-faced Duck, White-backed Vulture, Hooded Vulture and Lappet-faced Vultures and 3 Grey Crowned Cranes near the dams. The Grey Crowned Cranes appeared to be a family group and could have bred on the property.

Richard Dennison

MATABELELAND

From the Chairman

Firstly, thank you to those of you who took the time and trouble to fill in the questionnaire. Your comments have been discussed fully by the committee and we hope to be able to follow up a number of suggestions. Sadly, the total return was a little disappointing with only seven completed forms arriving through my post box.

We assume the rest of you are perfectly happy with our programme and activities. One suggestion which we have been able to put into practice is the introduction of a brief talk about each venue and what it is hoped will be found. This will hopefully generate a better sense of achievement for members. Secondly, it was proposed to rotate the venue and nature of evening meetings with more members being actively involved. Are you willing to help host and organise a meeting? If so please do contact us. Under education, most people felt that this was a good idea and a number offered to help. The concept of guided walks at Hillside Dams was well received with the further suggestion of walks in the Park from the Museum. All seemed to be reasonably happy with surveys and publicity was best dealt with through notices in shop windows and in Bulawayo's "What's On", rather than through the Press. Hopefully we can deliver a programme that appeals to most of the membership and you will continue with your support. Good Birding, **Martin Smith**

Chipchase Farm – Sunday 16 April 2000

We arrived at about 2.40 p.m. and started a walk towards the compost piles, but the really black skies suddenly descended right over us and the thunder and lightning started so we made our way straight back to the cottage. We assembled in the interestingly-decorated lounge of Lisbeth and Henrick and decided to have our communal tea with plenty of plates of goodies being passed around. The rain pelted down and we were glad we were secure inside. I suggested that we have a general quiz as we were on a "birding outing" so we took it in turns or at random to ask questions about the behaviour or calls of different birds. This was rather difficult for those who needed glasses to read their bird books to find interesting questions as no one had thought we would need reading glasses!

When the rain had finished, we departed outside to a shining world of droplets of rain on all the trees and bushes. We proceeded along a very wet and slippery track to the dam and there spent quite a length of time watching the different birds and being well informed by Julia. The Marico Flycatcher sitting on the outside of the Acacia across the dam was a wonderful example of the definitive white of its body and for some of us (including me) it was a Lifer. Our thanks to Jimmie for the super BirdLife signs he made. Our thanks also to Lisbeth and Henrick and to Mrs Maclean the owner whom we met whilst she was walking her dogs just before the rain started. **Barbara Cromar**

TSHABALALA Game Sanctuary – Sunday 21 May 2000

This outing was designed to beat both the fuel crisis and other unpleasant happenings, which have curtailed our visits to farm. Tshabalala was visited by the Branch on a regular basis during the 80s and a substantial amount of knowledge has been accumulated about its avifauna. It is a special place in that it is one of the few conserved regions of Acacia within the country supporting a typical range of habitat-linked species. A small group of six met at the entrance gate and walked down the road to the Umganin River. Plenty was to be seen, despite considerable grass cover. Our first lengthy pause was close to the staff accommodation, where the more open bush allowed good views of a number of species – Black-faced Waxbill and Scarlet-chested Sunbird looked particularly attractive in the early morning sun. Beside the road, some dry khaki weed was being given a thorough inspection by Cape Penduline-tit, whilst above in the Acacia a Pearl-spotted Owlet was being mobbed by a number of species including an Ashy Tit which was particularly pleasing to see although not unexpected. Moving on, substantial numbers of seed-eaters posed considerable identification problems with Euplectes now in winter plumage. We were able to pick out the more obvious Yellow Bishop, although immatures and females left us with a number of question marks. At the watercourse, thick grass provided suitable cover for both Natal Spurfowl and a pair of Senegal Coucal, whilst above in a dead tree a Bearded Woodpecker was hard at work enlarging a hole. We were also introduced to a family of Magpie Shrike, which Llewellyn has been studying and we were able to use his expertise to sort out males and females.

Making our way back, looking to the west, a considerable number of vultures were taking to the air. Most were White-backed Vultures but we did see a number of Lappet-faced Vultures, white leggings being clearly visible. Presumably this was part of the flock which regularly descends on the York Butchery on the Plumtree Road – whether there is a Saturday rush linked to the Butchery's activities remains to be discovered.

On our way back to the entrance gate, after a considerable search, we managed to see Black-chested Prinia and had a brief glimpse of a suspected Kalahari Scrub-robin which will have to be confirmed on some future outing later in the year. **Martin Smith**

AISLEBY – April/May

Aisleby in April yielded a number of sightings worthy of note. It seemed to be an outing filled with juveniles with both young Diderick Cuckoo and Jacobin Cuckoos present. With late sightings such as these, it does raise questions about movement. Do the young bother to migrate and if so how far and to where? Moving on to the Ibis Dam, we found three Pink-backed Pelican which have been resident for the past two months. A low flying Air force jet caused considerable panic and we were able to see the backs of two of the birds, one pink and the other a grey-white, which we assumed to be immature. Again it would be interesting to know where they came from – possibly Botswana? Less obvious to see were two juvenile Allen's Gallinule which were picked out with the aid of a telescope. Young were first seen in February and subsequently recorded in March. These now appeared adult size and had an attractive dark green sheen to their plumage, the frontal shield showing little colour and had still to develop. No adults were present and had presumably moved.

Again it raises questions over juvenile movement – when and to where do they move?

In May, we were offered a feast of interesting sightings, including several species which can only be considered as vagrant to the Highveld. We began with the UMGUSA Dam and a shoreline walk. Plenty of cormorants, duck and Little Grebes were present including a single Black-necked Grebe which we were able to view with the sun behind and compare with the numerous Little Grebes. Overhead an African Fish-eagle called and then descended from a considerable height to pluck a fish from the water. To the north of the dam, three vultures circled low over the ground and with the aid of the scope we were able to see the white underparts of White-headed Vulture, the others being dark and slightly smaller which we assumed were Hooded Vultures, both of which are unusual for the Highveld and have been seen only at Aisleby a limited number of times in the past. Towards the head of the dam, two terns were visible with one possessing noticeably darker underparts although the distance was considerable. The grey body and time of year suggested Whiskered Tern – again a species only occasionally recorded for the dam. Moving on to the Yacht Club, we managed to see and hear two Hadedda Ibis, this follows an absence of about six months, during which time, despite looking for them, we had failed to see. Also present was a Meves's Starling which was first recorded a couple of years ago.

Finally, at the Ibis Dam, we were able to find a single Allen's Gallinule, along with an appreciable number of African Purple Swamphens and hundreds of Cattle Egret flying in to roost and engaging in considerable squabbles as they disputed favourite perch sites. Our total for the afternoon was just over 90 species which, given our Dam orientated outing, really does show what Aisleby has to offer.

Martin Smith

EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUBCYNARA Farm, Old MUTARE – Saturday 8 April 2000

Our planned destination having been pre-booked by the war veterans, Tony and I opted for a Cynara visit in the company of Trust and Tatenda, our latest recruits. It was a lovely afternoon offering superb light and visibility. For once we began by surveying the old dam, attracted by the 40 Egyptian Geese of all ages and their adopted clan member, the Grey Crowned Crane. With them were a Water Thick-knee, 2 Malachite Kingfisher and 2 Hadedda Ibis. In the nearby trees were a Meves's Starling and a few Greater Blue-eared Starlings, Groundscraper Thrush and flocks of Pin-tailed Whydah.

The small dams held the usual selection of waterbirds, including 40 White-faced Duck and a few African Darter and Reed Cormorant. Waders were few and far between – half a dozen Three-banded Plover and one Wood Sandpiper. Meanwhile the regular common species mounted up; especially welcome were Violet-eared Waxbill. The only raptor of the trip was a distant African Fish-eagle. Extensive boggy areas and deep grass restricted speed and range so we left out the woodland walk and the new dam but still managed a count of 50+. **Ken Dixon**

Mount Joy Farm, Old Mutare – Sunday 30 April 2000

A calm, overcast morning saw the three faithful and Geoff from the UK make the first visit to what is intended to be a new tourist facility in Old Mutare comprising attractive wooden tree houses in a well wooded, fenced area on the property which contains a great diversity of trees.

Despite the cool breeze and heavy clouds, birds were soon seen. A Dark Chanting-goshawk dashed past and a mixed party of Green-capped Eremomela, African Yellow White-eye and sunbirds twittered away in the tree tops although the poor light made them difficult to identify. As we made our way through the reserve, the common birds were regularly spotted. Yellow-throated Longclaw are much in evidence on local farms at the moment and Common Waxbills were abundant. We heard the Hadedda Ibis from nearby Cynara and then found three Yellow-bellied Waxbills – for us usually a bird of higher land. In the thicker bush we heard Terrestrial Brownbul and Red-necked Spurfowl whilst White-browed Scrub-robin sang their repetitive song all around us but were difficult to see. Geoff

and I managed to get a view of a Grey-headed Bush-shrike deep in a thicket before our attention was drawn to a passing Lizard Buzzard. Minutes later we saw our first Black-shouldered Kite of the week which caused us to muse on the way in which many resident birds tend to disappear for a time at the end of the breeding season. Another raptor then appeared in the clearing sky – a Long-crested Eagle. After tea, muffins and a tour of inspection of the houses, we slowly wended our way back to the entrance picking up a Long-billed Crombec, lots of Grey Go-away-birds, Rattling Cisticola and a party of Little Bee-eater. Our final count was 48 – not bad for late April. Thanks to Colin who accompanied us and Vera who was on hand with refreshments. **Ken Dixon**

Far Forest, VUMBA – Sunday 28 May 2000

Only Rex, Alistair and ABC turned out on a chilly, misty morning for this meeting. Barbara Stableford joined us en route and we were birding at Far Forest by 0730. The Vumba was still shrouded in mist and it was decidedly cool but we hoped the clouds would lift as the sun rose higher. We began with a stroll along the track through an area where a plantation of gums was clear-felled a year or two back and which is now covered with coarse grasses, young wattles and miscellaneous scrub – very suitable habitat for the seed-eaters, we thought. And so it turned out, a lone male Pin-tailed Whydah was almost the first sighting, only part-way into his moult to non-breeding plumage, no long tail feathers, but still with some black and white on the mantle. Also seen were Yellow-fronted Canary, Streaky-headed Seedeater and Brimstone Canary, Yellow-bellied Waxbill and Bronze Mannikin. In one of the few remaining trees a Stripe-cheeked Greenbul showed himself briefly and a large dead pine had a number of Red-winged Starlings waiting for the sun to warm them.

This area also gave us a rare opportunity to observe duetting behaviour between a pair of Tropical Boubou with a third one interacting with them. It is unusual to be able to see these birds performing the duets for which they are so well-known and on this occasion we were close enough to them to hear the “flute” notes, the strange metallic clicking which precedes the flute notes, to hear the snarl very clearly and to see which bird was singing each part. We’d speculated about the third boubou – was it an interloper or perhaps a youngster in the process of being persuaded to leave the family estate and make his own way in the world? Later, a walk down a very steep path through montane forest and a stiff climb up again produced only a Collared Sunbird and, although several bird calls were heard, only the Gorgeous Bush-shrike’s call was identifiable. In and around Barbara and George Daniel’s garden Variable Sunbird and Amethyst Sunbirds were active. Two of the Amethyst Sunbirds were immature males and this gave use to a discussion as to whether any sunbirds change their plumage in winter (or in ornithological terms have an eclipse plumage) as the widowbirds and whydahs do. Only one sunbird in our area does this – the Malachite Sunbird. Several other species were seen and a Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird was heard in the garden area. Once again we are grateful to Barbara and George for their hospitality. **Tony Curtis**

Karoi Bird Club

Unfortunately, Karoi Bird Club outings have had to be cancelled but we hope in the latter part of the year that the situation will have improved.

At RYDINGS Interpretive Centre a pair of Pearl-spotted Owlets was seen near the school buildings and a pair of Verreaux’s Eagle-owls was calling across the dam. The resident pair of African Fish-eagle as well as a juvenile were still around and a pair of Giant Kingfisher were seen flying back and forth over the school being very vocal. Sunbirds are beginning to gather in numbers in the area now that the aloes have started flowering. **Merle Mitchell**

MIDLANDS BRANCH

Monitoring of Black Storks has again started with quite a lot of activity seen at the nest sites which we are able to visit at present. Unfortunately, sites on farms cannot be visited. **Gavin Conway**

TAIL FEATHERS

Hamerkop, Hammerhead (*Scopus umbretta*) – Cherrybank Farm, KADOMA (mid-May report)

In the September/October 1995 issue of *Babbler* I wrote about a family of Hamerkop who were nest building. Since then, no nest had been seen or recorded in the area until, at the end of November last year,

there were signs of a nest being built again. This new nest, which was large and strong, was placed in the same mnondo tree at the dam but was built in a fork higher up the tree about 1.5m from the ground and which hopefully will be out of eyesight of people. The tree is surrounded by a wet vlei and long grass which makes it arduous to reach. Hamerkops have been seen at the golf club and at Cherrybank Farm which is about 3 km away and could be the same family. A nest had been seen at the golf club in 1995 but it, as well as the one on our farm, was burnt to the ground. African people have a fear of the Hamerkop and believe that the shape of the head makes it look very wise. Admittedly a Hamerkop can look ghostly as it sometimes feeds during twilight hours and their nests are often decorated with bleached bones – no wonder there are many myths related to it.

I will monitor the nest and watch for juveniles appearing and I hope that this time around the nest will be safe. Do they use the same nest over and over again? Are these birds threatened? Truly they are a most advanced nest builder. **Margaret Parrock**

Editor's note. Whilst the Hamerkop is not at present endangered, like many birds, it is threatened by loss of habitat such as wetlands where it does its feeding. The Hamerkop has been known to use the same nest over and over again and disused nests often provide homes to other species such as owls and Egyptian Goose.

Comment regarding sighting of Greater Frigatebird

In the Executive Officers report in *Babbler* issue No. 36 mention was made of the Greater Frigatebird being “a new species for the Zimbabwe list”. I feel that in the interests of scientific credibility it should have been noted that it is subject to submission to and acceptance by the Rarities Committee. **Tim English, 31 Esigodini Road, Matsheumshlope, Bulawayo**

Yellow-crowned Bishop in KARIBA and Yellow Wagtails in HARARE

On a recent trip to Kariba, I saw a lone Yellow-crowned Bishop. I see from the Bird Atlas that this bird does not normally occur in the area and I wonder whether the sighting is of interest. The bird was seen on 7 March 2000 in the garden of one of the Wild Heritage houses at Charara.

Back in Harare I saw 2 Yellow Wagtails in my garden on 2 April 2000, I assume the birds were moving on their way north but I am unaware as to how common they are in the Harare area. **Liz Travis, 38 Clairwood Road, Alexandra Park, Harare**

Unusual sightings in HARARE

In April, I experienced two unusual sightings in Harare suburbs which I thought were worth mentioning. At about 10 a.m. on 8 April 2000, I was waiting for someone to meet me outside the Motor Sports Club behind Haddon Motors in Eastlea when I observed a pair of White-fronted Bee-eaters. Although I did not have binoculars with me I recognised the monosyllabic call and got close enough to see the white forehead and the pink breast.

At about 9.20 a.m. on 16 April 2000, my wife and I counted about 40 White Stork circling over our house in Upper Hillside. I presume this was a pre-emigration congregation. **Richard Dennison**

NOTICEBOARD

Buy a brick campaign for BirdLife Zimbabwe's Headquarters building

To date a total of \$13 750 has been received for the “Buy a brick” campaign. A lot more money is still needed to assist with the costs of building our own headquarters. We thank the following for their donations which have been received since publication of the previous issue of *Babbler*.

Cindy Cahill	\$200	Brian Gratwicke	\$1000
I Louw	\$100	James Scorgie	\$250
Mrs N Shaw	\$200	Jan & Fiona Teede	1000
P B Cockburn	\$1000	Colin & Jenny Saunders	\$1000
JA O'Hara	\$500	Rolf Chenaux-Repond	\$2000
Cecilia Manson	\$100	Cathy Sharp	\$500
Sally Perrett	\$500	Richard Dennison	\$2000
John Cunningham	\$400		

Birdwatch 2000

One of the primary aims of the Research and Conservation portfolio of BirdLife Zimbabwe is to motivate and increase the centralisation of records. In a bid to try and involve professional people in the tourism industry with BirdLife Zimbabwe's activities, and to encourage them to centralise their records, Birdwatch 2000 will be run over a period of one week, so that those guides who have work commitments over weekends can also take part and submit records from a chosen 24-hour period during that week. So the format for this year's Birdwatch is as follows:

Birdwatch 2000 will be run over a period of one week, from 12 midnight on Friday, 3 November 2000 to 12 midnight on Friday, 10 November 2000.

Teams who wish to compete in the different competition categories are invited to nominate any 24-hour period during this week which must be submitted to the central recorder/scorer by 8 p.m. Wednesday, 1 November 2000.

In a bid to raise money for a "Research and Conservation Fund", we are going to ask teams to try to obtain sponsorship for their efforts. This is obviously a difficult year to try and initiate such an enterprise, but the same actions that are destroying this country's economy are also placing unprecedented pressure on the miombo woodlands and their avifauna on so-called undeveloped farms (which are termed "wastelands"(!) in the press). Decisions concerning the conservation of habitats, species and ecosystems can be made only once we have an understanding of how the ecosystems function. We need that knowledge now more than ever, but this costs money.

We hope to have several categories of teams, e.g. corporate, guides, schools, beginners, experienced, etc. and it would be great to have prizes for the winners of each, so if anyone has suggestions where and how we can get these, please contact me.

Full details of the rules and regulations of the competitive event will be printed in the next issue of *Babbler*, but the most important functions of the day will be to raise awareness of birds, their habitats and birding as well as to enjoy ourselves. If anyone has questions relating to Birdwatch 2000 please contact me.

Send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to the address below to get a Birdwatch 2000 field card and to enter a team.

SO FIND A CONVENIENT DATE, DIARISE IT AND CHALLENGE ANOTHER TEAM. IN PARTICULAR WE HOPE TO HAVE A RECORD NUMBER OF SAFARI LODGE/HOTEL, SAFARI COMPANY ENTRIES THIS YEAR.

Anthony Cizek 04-573575 (evenings) cell: 023-401914 email Cizek@trep.co.zw
P O Box MP 343, Mount Pleasant, Harare

Blue Swallow survey

Susan Childes is still looking for volunteers to record sightings of Blue Swallows in the Eastern Highlands. If you think you can help please write to her at P O Box BW53 Borrowdale.

For sale: Set of The Atlas of Southern African Birds

We are able to offer for sale a set (two volumes) of *The Atlas of Southern African Birds* (edited by J A Harrison, D G Allan, L G Underhill, M Herremans, A J Tree, V Parker and C J Brown) thanks to the very generous donation by Humphrey and Margaret Hayes of Chipinge. The set is offered at \$5 000 and all proceeds will go towards the second phase of the Bird Awareness Programme - "Children, Birds and Biodiversity". If you would like to purchase this publication, which is the culmination of six years enthusiastic and dedicated work by the birding public of southern Africa, please write to the Executive Officer, PO Box CY 161, Causeway or send an e-mail to BirdLife Zimbabwe.

Swarovski binoculars for sale

A pair of Swarovski binoculars is for sale. Magnification is 7 x 42 and they are individual focussing. Price \$3000 Contact Roger Cavill on Harare telephone 495826. Roger also undertakes repairs to binoculars.

Books for sale

The following publications are available for sale at reasonable prices. If you are interested in purchasing any of these please contact Mrs J Williams on telephone 882206 or write to her at 14 Harare Drive, Greystone Park, PO Borrowdale.

Highveld Birds	Sinclair and Goode	\$100.00
Birds of Prey	Sinclair and Goode	\$100.00
Discovering Birds	Berruti (illustrated M Newman)	\$200.00
The World of Birds	Malcolm Ellis	\$200.00
RSPB BirdLife Annual		\$ 85.00
RSPB Puzzle and Project Book		\$ 75.00
Bird watch Zimbabwe	D Solomon, J Williams	\$250.00

Number of issues of *Honeyguide*

In an endeavour to cut costs, Council has had to reduce the number of issues per year of *Honeyguide*. Regrettably therefore members will receive only two issues per annum.

Bird videos for sale

As mentioned previously 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 1 (revealing intimate, close-up viewing of over 30 southern African bird species)

Newman's Bird – 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.

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: Ms B Cooke, S Danks, Mr and Mrs Fairall, Mr and Mrs M J D Lawrence, B Mortimer, Mrs M Stanley.

Eastern Districts Bird Club (Manicaland Branch): Mr D Stevens

Matabeleland Branch: Mr and Mrs H McClelland

Botswana: Mr R Randall