

BABBLER

BirdLife Zimbabwe

A PARTNER DESIGNATE OF BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL

ISSUE #39 – NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2000

COMMITTEES

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ACTIVITIES

MASHONALAND BRANCH

Regular outings

1. Mukuvisi Woodlands: Sundays, 5 November and 3 December, 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, 12 November and 10 December 2000. Meet at Marimba Shopping Centre for departure at 6.30 a.m. Bring your chairs and tea. Beginners are most welcome and spare binoculars will be available. We encourage members with children to attend these outings when their needs will be catered for. Parents must however attend with their children.

Saturday afternoon outing

18 November 2000: Crowborough Sewage Works – good for summer migrant waders. Meet at Marimba Shopping Centre, off Samora Machel Avenue, at 3 p.m.

Sunday outing

26 November 2000: Goshu Park, Marondera. Meet 6.30 a.m. at the bottom of Harare Drive where it abuts Mutare Road (just before Jagers roundabout). Bring chairs and refreshments (could be an all day affair).

Evening meeting

Thursday, 16 November 2000: Dr Graham Child, former Director of National Parks and a world authority on wildlife, will give an illustrated talk.

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. Security is provided.

THERE WILL BE NO OTHER OUTINGS OR EVENING MEETING IN DECEMBER.

MATABELELAND BRANCH

Evening Meetings

Friday 3 November 2000 – Dr Peter Mundy and ORU – Peter has recently formulated a future strategy for ORU and will brief us on the unit's approach in the new century. This will be combined with a soup and rolls evening at CBC from 6.30 p.m. onwards. Please do let Martin Smith know whether you would like to attend and please bring your own eating utensils.

Friday 1 December 2000 – Christmas Social – we are planning a re-run of a “Bring and Share” social. Penny Feather has kindly offered to host the Social and we hope that members will not only contribute food, but also something feathery – calls, slides, pictures, special sightings, poems, etc. Venue: 92 Arnold Way, Burnside from 6.00 p.m. onwards.

Friday 5 January 2001 – Vumba Birds and Attenborough in Paradise – we are planning to show David Attenborough's outstanding “Birds of Paradise” followed by some video footage that I took whilst I was at the recent Workshop in the Bvumba – a brief glimpse of Swynnerton's Robin and others. Venue: 3A Holdengarde Avenue, Hillside at 8.00 p.m. Contact Martin for further details.

Outings

Saturday/Sunday, 18/19 November 2000 – The Goosen's Farm, Gwanda – we visited this property a short time ago and have been invited back again. Details have yet to be finalised so please contact Penny for more information.

Aisleby

Saturday 25 November 2000 – this will be an afternoon outing so please meet at the Boom at 2.30 p.m. or contact the co-ordinator – Martin Smith.

Sunday 31 December 2000 – last year a small number met over the New Year period for birding at Aisleby. We are planning a similar event this year – if you are keen, please contact Clive.

EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB

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

Outings

Saturday 11 November 2000	Premier Estate area	2.00 p.m.
Sunday 26 November 2000	Juliasdale	6.00 a.m.
Saturday 9 December 2000	Grange Road (Ewan Kay)	2.00 p.m.

No Sunday meeting in December

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

Outings 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 ☎ 064-7010 (office) 7725 (home)

E-mail: mitchell@zimweb.co.zw

Secretary: Mrs M Mitchell P O Box 398, Karoi ☎ 064-7014 Fax: 064-7010

Unfortunately, once again fuel shortages and “incidents” have curtailed the activities of the Club. We are, however, hoping to arrange something for the end of October and November. Please contact Kevin or Merle for further details.

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
FROM THE EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Crane Field Worker

Friday Maozeka joined us as Crane Field Worker on 1 September 2000. He is already known to many of our members having given talks at branch meetings. Friday has been active in crane conservation for many years including a captive breeding programme. He has visited the International Crane Foundation (ICF) in the United States and the Durrell Institute in Jersey. ICF are funding Friday's work studying the Wattled Crane in Zimbabwe and Mozambique. This bird is one of our eight globally threatened species and is also specially protected in terms of Zimbabwean law. The project is being supervised by Susan Childes and is running in conjunction with the South African Crane Working Group.

Research and Media Work

We were glad to have Anthony Cizek join us in August to do work on Research and Conservation with special emphasis on Media Relations. He will be with us until the end of the year when he leaves to further his studies in Cape Town. Anthony is also known to many of our members having addressed a branch meeting in September. He has been a leading spirit in the Marlborough Vlei Conservation project. His major interest is Conservation Biology – presently the effects of fragmentation of miombo woodland on the avifauna. He hopes to see the continued excellence of natural history studies in this country. Anthony attended the Pan African Ornithological Conference in Uganda in September where he presented a poster on Zimbabwe's Dambo avifauna. His report on the conference will appear in *Honeyguide* next year.

Strategic Planning Workshop

This was held at Seldomseen in the Vumba over the weekend of 24/25 September 2000. It was a follow-up to the last SPW held in February 1998. The purpose was basically to revisit the objectives and timetable drawn up then and to work out a fresh set of outputs and activities to cover the next three years. The 21 participants paid attention to the aspects of advocacy, membership, fund-raising, publications, research and conservation and programme management. The workshop was facilitated by Dr Russell Taylor of WWF. His detailed report will be produced shortly and copies will be available for perusal by members. A summary will appear in the next *Babbler*. The next step will be for Council and staff to produce a work plan (action document). The workshop was funded by our UK partner, the RSPB.

Permanent Office Premises

An opportunity has arisen for us to purchase the house and stand that we are presently occupying at 35 Clyde Road, Eastlea. Council weighed up the pros and cons of taking this up as opposed to building at the Mukuvisi Environment Centre (MEC). It was decided that it would be better to buy. These are some of the reasons for this decision

1. We would have our own title deed and thus more secure tenure than at the MEC where we would be part of a complex held by the Mukuvisi Woodland Association on a 99 year lease (90 years to run) from the Harare Municipality.
2. There is a good deal of ground for expansion (about an acre) at Eastlea. At MEC we would have only the ground on which we had built and we would need to negotiate for more when needed.
3. We would immediately have a much bigger building than we could build for the same money. We are really feeling the need for more space especially for the project and education staff as well as the various volunteers and the library.
4. The present office is situated in tranquil surroundings. It is only 5 km from the city centre and 800 metres from the MEC.
5. The donor is our Dutch partner, Vogelbescherming Nederland (VBN) and their board has indicated a preference for buying existing premises on the grounds that this is less disruptive to staff and avoids the problem of increasing building costs.
6. It is expected that City Council approvals will be easier to obtain for the Clyde Road stand and we can build to our own wishes, subject to usual planning approval. At the MEC one has to build to match the appearance of other buildings in the complex.

On the contrary, the main advantage to building at the MEC is that we could gain a higher profile if located with other environmental NGOs already situated there.

The Board of VBN have approved a grant of the guilder equivalent of USD20 000 (about Z\$ 1 million). The owners of the stand have accepted our offer of Z\$ 1.6 million - \$1 million down and \$600 000 over 5 years, interest free (\$10 000 per month). We can use the money we have raised from members to finance a proposed second building which will probably be a good quality prefab.

This is exciting news and I hope will lead impetus to the Buy-a-Brick Campaign (presently standing at \$45 610). Please keep the donations rolling in.

Appeal for Shelving

Our librarian, Michael Irwin, has moved to a smaller house and a large part of the Association's library is now at the office. In order to get the books and journals out of the cardboard boxes and make them accessible to the members, we are in urgent need of bookshelves or suitable cupboards (particularly metal or glass fronted). If anyone can help, please could they give me a ring on the office number 490208 or at home 741775. **John Patton – Executive Officer.**

RARITIES COMMITTEE

The details on how to submit records of rarities as well as a list of those birds considered rare are still being worked on – please bear with us. The information will be published in a future issue of *Babbler*. In the meantime if members feel they have identified a rare bird please make as many notes as possible for future submission. **Anthony Cizek, Research and Conservation Committee**

RESEARCH AND CONSERVATION WORKSHOP – AUGUST 2000

BLZ's Research and Conservation Committee held a workshop over the weekend of 18-20 August at the McIlwaine Recreational Park. The committee worked HARD, and we would like to thank everyone who attended and gave up their weekend for the effort. We made headway concerning the way forward for our research and conservation efforts and it was great to have ornithologists from all over the country together in one spot discussing the problems we face, both in administration/funding, etc. as well as threats to Zimbabwe's environment.

Everyone agreed that the priority right now is to get the data that has been collected by BLZ members (over many years in some cases) digitised and analysed and for reports to be written for *Honeyguide*. The data collected is invaluable and the membership has to realise this. The Verreaux's Eagle Project, for example, is the longest-running raptor study in the world. All of the projects are suffering from limitations and many of these are common to all. The lack of membership participation is the most serious and we began the analysis of the causes for this. One of the suggested causes is the fact that the projects do not have a definite "life span". We will be evaluating all of the projects, assessing their suitability given the current limitations and most likely bringing to an end at least a few. It is clear that there has not been enough feed-back to the membership of the results of their co-ordinated efforts. This has to change – annual reports will be made by project co-ordinators through *Honeyguide* and papers published after analysis of the results. However, this is very time-consuming – consider that Matthew Bokach, an American Peace Corps volunteer, took 3 months just to collate and digitise the data available on the Wattled Crane, i.e. before even doing any analysis. It is clear that it is going to take a very long time to get the mountains of data that have been collected over the years by BLZ membership analysed.

The importance of this data cannot be emphasised enough. For example, the Mukuvisi Woodlands Survey run by the Mashonaland Bird Club for over 25 years was initiated in response to the potential development of the area. The monthly walks there have accumulated a pile of data which today is invaluable to our understanding of the effects of the fragmentation of miombo woodland on the avifauna. The Woodlands have become increasingly isolated within a sea of development and the effects of this have been recorded by all the birdwatchers who have taken part in the walks over the years. This mass co-ordinated effort which started as a survey has become a monitoring programme and is one of our most important projects given the current losses of miombo all over the Country and the lack of any other data recording the effects of this. There are conclusions which can be drawn immediately, such as the extinction of communal breeders, but the data needs a full analysis before we make sweeping recommendations to managers of miombo woodland reserves or suggestions of where these should be. We are looking to students at the University of Zimbabwe and elsewhere for this analysis. It is wrong that these invaluable data, which hold some of the keys to the future conservation of an entire group of birds in this country – the miombo specials – are not being fully

analysed for this information. Importantly, whilst one or two analysts may be responsible for gleaning this information, there would be no data if it were not for the co-ordinators and the many, many birdwatchers who faithfully visit the site on a regular basis. In general, members must realise that the data they collect for BLZ projects is valuable and that, although it might take some time before it is analysed fully, they have contributed to a project which will help the conservation of birds and habitats in this country and beyond. Watch this space for details of the current restructuring of the BLZ research programme and find out how you can contribute to the conservation of birds and their habitats in this country, whilst having a great time! We are very grateful to the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), the BirdLife International partner in Britain, for funding the workshop. **Anthony Cizek and Susan Childes – Research and Conservation Committee**

BIRDLIFE ZIMBABWE STAND – ST JOHN'S COLLEGE FAIR

Sue Childes and I, with a considerable amount of help from Luka Mabvuta, Graham and Jenny Carter, Les Cizek and Mrs Maasdorp, set up and ran a stall at the St John's College Spring Fair over the weekend 30 September/1 October. It was very successful – we sold a lot of hats, caps, t-shirts, *Honeyguides*, etc. and also enrolled about 10 new members. Having handed out many of our pamphlets and membership forms we hope to gain even more new members. There was a lot of interest in the stand (it was packed with people for much of the time) and it definitely helped in raising the profile of BLZ and our activities. We made a few valuable contacts which should help in funding our activities in the future. We apologise to those who would have liked to have seen the stand had they known about it, but it was a last minute decision and we missed the opportunity to advertise in the *Babbler*. We look forward to seeing you next year! **Anthony Cizek**

SCHOOLS BIRD AWARENESS PROGRAMME UPDATE

The workshop at Chimanimani was held at the fine primary school in the village from 19-21 September. Nineteen teachers from eleven primary schools attended. The location of the schools was mainly along the foothills and valleys of the impressive Chimanimani range, from Chikukwa near the corner to Vhimba School at the southern end of the range, almost at the junction of the Haroni-Rusitu. Schools from organisations such as Government, Border Timbers, Forestry Commission, Missions and Charleswood Farm were represented.

The delegates who included a Headmaster and 18 teachers were a lively group. Most had a good working knowledge of birds having grown up in rural areas of the district. They seemed keen to implement the awareness programme in their schools and were pleased with the free issue of a set of "Enjoy the Birds of Zimbabwe" for class use. They badly need a bird field guide and when funds become available each school will be given a copy of a bird field guide. It is a pity there are no BLZ members living in the Chimanimani area. Follow-up at schools is needed. The following week we joined the Bird Ringing Group at Gleneagles, near Honde Valley. Here two of the bird guides Abasi Jana and Coster Matora were upgrading their skills on ringing. They continue their good work visiting schools and encouraging teachers involved in our education programme. Abasi also assisted me and others in introducing the project into Aberfoyle Primary School and inspiring the higher grades to protect the Anchieta's Tchagra. We are fortunate to have the support of the landowners in this campaign – Eastern Highlands Plantations Ltd - in trying to protect this, the most threatened bird in Zimbabwe. A poster is being produced for schools and communities on the Anchieta's Tchagra appealing for the conservation of the "Wamba" Bird. It lives in the Wamba Marsh surrounded by tea plantations. **Leslee Maasdorp**

MASHONALAND BRANCH

Sue Childes – Blue Swallows – Thursday, 17 August 2000

Sue filled in for John Paxton who had been scheduled to talk about the CAP meeting in Tunisia but who was away overseas.

Sue's subject – Blue Swallows – was fascinating. These intra-African migrants are unfortunately globally threatened due to loss of habitat (mostly by afforestation and invasion by exotic trees) and BirdLife Zimbabwe is participating in a regional project to monitor the numbers of Blue Swallows which visit and breed here. This is a bird found in parts of South Africa, Swaziland, Zimbabwe (eastern highlands), Malawi (Nyika Plateau) where they visit and breed in summer and in winter they move up to Zambia, Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda. Their feeding habitats is exclusively montane grassland and as these birds are specially adapted to coping with the weather – their feathers are able to repel moisture (up to 98% more than other

species of Swallows). Their breeding cycle is linked to misty weather with periods of sun. In Zimbabwe their grassland habitat is threatened by invasion of wattle and pine trees and also more recently the cultivation of potatoes. To the north of us their habitat is threatened by the introduction of pyrethrum plantations and mining activities (also in South Africa).

Sue is co-ordinating a Blue Swallow Survey (see previous *Babbler*) from which it is hoped much information will be gained on the status of these birds in Zimbabwe. Factors required from the survey are: the distribution and key core areas where they breed, monitoring of bird numbers during the season, population estimates in Zimbabwe and the migrant population from South Africa, nest data, breeding successes, level of threats, priority conservation. Birds arrive in Zimbabwe in mid-September and leave again from mid-March into April. The survey requires volunteers to report on sightings as well as breeding records of Blue Swallows who favour old antbear holes to breed but also nest inside road cuttings and occasionally inside buildings.

The Blue Swallow is a flagship species which represents a habitat where there are a vast diversity of animals, insects and plants. Work is being done on the control of wattles and pines, particularly within National Parks, but a major conservation strategy is required with all stakeholders becoming involved.

Di Rushforth

MARLBOROUGH Vlei and Sewage Works – Saturday 19 August 2000

This last minute alternative to our scheduled visit proved to be most interesting as none present had visited the vlei during the winter. We had to work hard for the 38 species recorded, but we did not feel this was too bad for a very specialised habitat in the “off” season. Capped Wheatears were in abundance, crowning nearly every anthill. Two Black-chested Snake-eagles, one immature, obligingly circled us at low altitude and an uncooperative Red-capped Lark was spied by a few of us. At least 10 Wood Sandpipers were seen around the puddles from the overflow from the sewerage works and large numbers of non-breeding, drably dressed, Yellow-mantled Widowbirds were present. **Nigel Steyn**

Willesden Farm (Crundall Brothers) GLEN FOREST – Sunday 27 August 2000

With the current fuel and farm invasions crises this proved to be an ideal outing as it is reasonably close to Harare and the natural environment of the farm is well conserved and quite bio-diverse. Ken and Sue Worsley who are both ex National Parks and as active conservationists have followed through their philosophy in the way they have managed Willesden Farm.

Ken took us on our walk which went past two dams, through grasslands, past granite kopjies and through Miombo woodland. Sue looked after the children and prepared tea for us on our return to the homestead. Although a good total of 91 bird species was recorded, a brisk cold wind in the early part of the day probably significantly reduced this number, as some of the common species were not recorded. The highlights included 7 White-backed Duck, 7 Red-billed Teal – ducklings included in the total of 30 seen, 1 juvenile White-backed Vulture, 1 Tambourine Dove (heard), 1 Barn Owl, 6 Whyte’s Barbets and 8 Yellow-fronted Tinkerbirds, 1 Brown-backed Honeybird, 2 Ashy Flycatcher, 2 Buffy Pipit, 2 Yellow-throated Longclaw and 30 White-winged Widowbirds. This was altogether a very enjoyable day for the 11 of us who were so well looked after by Ken and Sue. **Richard Dennison**

Anthony Cizek – Thursday 21 September 2000

There was a fairly good turnout of about 30 people who were given a very enlightening talk on vleis in Zimbabwe. Anthony focused on Harare’s vleis, giving the reasons as to why they are so important in ecological terms.

In 1988 Bullock described a vlei or dambo as a “grass covered, generally treeless, periodically inundated valley bottom of hydromorphic soil containing a poorly defined stream channel which is associated with wooded, generally undulating plains of the post African planation surfaces”. We learned that there are different types of vleis in Zimbabwe, ninety percent of which occur on sandy soils of granitic origin. Other vleis occur on clay soils of mafic origin and these contain a high diversity of plants and other wild life.

Of particular interest was Anthony’s description of the habitats within vleis which different species of birds prefer – crakes and flufftails live in the “squelch” zone whilst Lesser Moorhen likes pools and Striped Crakes and Corn Crakes are happy in the drier parts. Vleis are only one type of wetland – other types are floodplains and pans which also change with the seasons. Crakes and flufftails can be found in any wetland provided their particular needs occur there. Harare’s MARLBOROUGH Vlei, which is part of the Gwebi River system, is a clay vlei on mafic soils and this unique wetland often abounds with crakes and rails. Streaky-breasted Flufftail is a special bird which can be found at Marlborough Vlei when conditions are right. A working

group has recently been formed to try to lease a portion of Marlborough Vlei and turn it into a Bird Reserve. Wetlands are continually being drained for development and therefore species living in these areas are threatened. **Di Rushforth**

Walks into Marlborough Vlei will take place on the second and last Thursdays of November and December. Anthony Cizek will be pleased to lead visitors on these days from 4.30 p.m. Meet along the end of Newstead Road.

Garden Expo – 22 to 24 September 2000

Volunteers from Mashonaland Branch manned an information desk at the Garden Expo held at Harare's Exhibition Park. Mama Nurseries kindly let us have a corner on their stand and we are most grateful to them for allowing us the opportunity to be there. There was some interest shown in the activities of BLZ. Thank you very much to John Shepherd, Joan Newton-Howes, Rita Mills, Jacko Williams, Janet Joyce, Pat and John Saunders and Eric and Dorrie Bowes who manned the stand and special thanks to Helen Fraser who co-ordinated the stand. **Di Rushforth**

MATABELELAND

From the Chairman

Support over the last few months has been understandably thin, although it has been pleasing to see a number of new faces on our BULAWAYO HILLSIDE Dams ramble which always seem to produce something of interest. Flowering trees seem to be exceptional this year with the *Acacia galpinii* covered with a heavy blossom and humming with the sound of bees. The marula have just begun to flower and it is the time of year when migrants begin to add interest to our avifauna. So far we have seen a good range of waders, Klaas's Cuckoo (Hillside, 26/9), and European Bee-eater (Hillside, 29/9). Raptors have returned, with Yellow-billed Kite being recorded in Hillside on 13 September and Wahlberg's Eagle breeding at KHAMI Railway Dam on the 17th. At AISLEBY the water level in the Ibis Dam has dropped with conditions now suitable for waders – Pied Avocet and Black-winged Stilt have returned in good numbers along with a number of migrants. As a result of discussions at the Research and Conservation Workshop we now have the use of a canoe for the Waterfowl Count, which will be a great help and hopefully will not attract the attentions of our resident crocodile! Please do continue with your support. Good Birding **Martin Smith**

Woollandale Farm – Sunday 17 September 2000

We last visited this farm during the drought years and found very little water in the Dam but this year's visit was a complete contrast with the water still only a metre below the spillway. A small and very select group spent the morning slowly walking around the dam, which was fringed by a mixture of natural Acacia and exotic gum trees. The first avian highlight of the morning was a Pearl-spotted Owllet which responded rather scornfully to my attempts at communication in owl language. The water had backed up sufficiently to flood the Eucalyptus producing a "Crocodile Dundee" atmosphere minus the crocodiles, or so we hoped. Here we did manage to find a few waders with Common Sandpipers and Wood Sandpipers being added to the list. Overhead Wahlberg's Eagle had commenced breeding with an active nest positioned high up in the fork of a gum tree. At the head of the Dam, the gum trees gave way to Acacia which held plenty of interest with an appreciable range of species present. Rattling Cisticolas called strongly and were relatively easy to identify, a second species was also present, being heard only and remained a puzzling question mark. On the north side of the dam we found a large African Fish-eagle's nest high up in some particularly tall gum trees – careful study revealed a fully feathered chick, which we were just able to see. A search for prey remains below the nest found nothing but mutes and we wondered whether scavengers were particularly active or had the remains been carried away by the parents.

By this stage, the sun was high overhead and most of the bird life had retired to the shade. We followed suit and were treated to a variety of delicious edibles from Jean Pierre. Our checklist totalled just over 60 species drawn from rather a restricted habitat excluding the area around the farmhouse. It was refreshing to bump into an enthusiastic Toby, from England, who was busy encountering new species for the first time both Marabou Stork and Crimson-breasted Shrike being greeted with enthusiasm – the latter really did look magnificent against the dry Matland bush and provided a fitting end to the outing. **Martin Smith**

AISLEBY – Sunday 24 September 2000

Visits to Aisleby always result in interesting sightings. On this occasion we saw a variety of eagles including African Fish-eagle, Brown Snake-eagle and Black-chested Snake-eagle, an immature Bateleur and an immature Martial Eagle. The Black-chested Snake-eagle plummeted to the ground sight beside our car and snatched, not a snake, but what looked like a mouse. We had excellent views of Cape Longclaw and watched one

Marabou Stork in flight. At Ibis Dam, the water level had dropped considerably, leading to the return of several Black-winged Stilt and around 60 Pied Avocet; there were also 35 or more Spur-winged Goose, resting on a sand spit. Four Southern Carmine Bee-eaters flew along close to the UMGUSA Dam and two pairs of Grey Crowned Crane were seen. Waders are starting to return with several Ruff viewed.

Since August we have been hearing one or two warblers singing strongly from waterside vegetation and believe them to be the African Reed-warbler.

Last month's outing (26 August) produced a pair of Maccoa Duck and a Goliath Heron at Ibis Dam, and a flock of 13 Grey Crowned Crane but the numbers are small compared with previous years.

Penny Feather

EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB

BURMA VALLEY – Sunday 30 July 2000

There was a comparatively small turn-out for this outing, perhaps because of the early start and the chilly weather. It would perhaps have been wiser to have made this trip a month or two later when we could have been sure that a few migrants would have arrived – next year's Committee please note!

Nevertheless, we had a very pleasant morning and logged well over 50 species. The best birding was during the first hour and a half in the vicinity of Amsterdam Farm homestead and barns where small birds were plentiful and included African Yellow White-eye, Red-billed Firefinch, Southern Grey-headed Sparrow, a small loose flock of Tawny-flanked Prinia and a pair of Grey Penduline-tit. There were several Lesser Striped Swallow cruising around and perched, but this species is known to over-winter in Burma Valley.

At this stage, the party split up when the Holland family drove off to view a Verreaux's Eagle's nest. The rest of us intended to follow them, but missed a vital turning and after some confusion decided to do our own thing. Regrettably the two groups failed to get together again.

Raptors were scarce – we heard the resident pair of African Fish-eagle at Amsterdam Farm but failed to see them. It is possible that the female was on the nest which is still plainly visible high up in a lone gum tree within a hundred metres of the homestead – Pie Hildebrand believes that they are nesting, although this would be earlier than in previous years. The farm suffered severely when cyclone Eline swept through the valley, but the African Fish-eagles' tree and the nest were undamaged. The only other raptor recorded (by the splinter group) was an African Goshawk doing his customary early-morning flight around the farm – perhaps hoping for a small chicken for his Sunday lunch!

Around the large dam, birding was sparse – we added African Darter, Reed Cormorant, Malachite Kingfisher, African Jacana and African Pied Wagtail to our list plus Trumpeter Hornbills and Crowned Hornbills and an African Pipit. The banana plantations and the still fast-flowing river produced very little except for a rare sighting of a Sombre Greenbul. Finally, we visited the area of the Country Club where we completed our list with Brimstone Canary and a possible Pale Batis. **Tony Curtis**

MAPOR ESTATE – Saturday 27 August 2000

The 10 kilometres from ODZI village to the Mapor turnoff adequately shook off any residual drowsiness of an early start and we were thoroughly awake when we began birding around the main homestead and the camp site at about 0730 hours. The weather was clear and chilly and the birds less fully awake than the birders. Mrs Jenny Holman showed us a pair of Spotted Thick-knee roosting, appropriately enough, in the camping ground. We almost certainly would have overlooked them – their almost perfect camouflage making them difficult to see against the dead leaves and dry grass even after having their position pointed out. The sunbirds were already busy on some magnificent aloes in full flower and Southern Black Flycatchers were unusually numerous in the garden area. A trek through the low boulder-strewn kopjie beyond the campsite was unproductive – a few more Amethyst Sunbird and four Green Wood-hoopoe. On the walk back toward the garden an Orange-breasted Bush-shrike was found near the top of a tall tree, where the early morning sun showed his colours to excellent advantage.

We were then chauffeured to another section of the estate to check out the small dams (Three-banded Plover, Reed Cormorant, White-faced Duck, Little Grebe and Grey Heron). We continued to do well with the more colourful species – there were Swallow-tailed Bee-eater, White-fronted Bee-eater and Little Bee-eaters. Also noted were Rock Martins collecting mud for house building.

Raptors were scarce – we logged only a Long-crested Eagle, Lizard Buzzard and a difficult-to-identify bird which was perhaps an immature Long-crested Eagle. A walk down to the Odzi River and a few minutes seated on the rocks on the river side was pleasant but unprofitable as to birds. Back at one of the small dams

we watched for several minutes a solitary Black Stork soaring and gliding overhead and then disappearing southwards. Seeing this increasingly uncommon species was probably the most memorable incident of a very pleasant day. Our total list – 60 species.

Eating our sandwich lunch and drinking tea on their veranda with Frank and Jenny rounded off the morning very happily. We are again most grateful to them for welcoming us to Mapor and for their hospitality. Finally we welcome Andrew Cowell who joined us for this outing and who we hope to see as often as his other commitments will allow. **Tony Curtis**

KAROI BIRD CLUB

No reports on outings but I thought I would tell you about some of the activities of our feathered friends on the farm and immediate vicinity.

Wahlberg's Eagle arrived 26 July which we thought quite early. There was soon activity at their last year's nest and we in fact thought that the female might have laid, but for some reason they changed their minds and built a new nest in the same area and she is now sitting. It is good to see them return each year. A pair of Black-chested Snake-eagle have raised a chick, about to leave the nest now (6 October 2000) and a good hatching of 3 African Fish-eagle chicks took place. The fish-eagles had their nest in a tall Eucalyptus by the dam and the chicks were discovered at age 3½ weeks and thereafter monitored each week. One of them was quite a bit smaller and weaker although the crop always appeared to be full. It was interesting to monitor their growth, types of food brought to them and feedings per day. All have now left the nest and are strong healthy birds. A pair of African Hawk-eagle was also seen at their nest site in August. Breeding of many species is now in full swing – Egyptian Goose atop a Hamerkop's nest, White-rumped Swift and Spotted Eagle-owl in the crevices of the dam spillway. Green Wood-hoopoe under the eaves of the store-room roof and now the African Paradise-flycatcher has arrived and is very vocal in the garden. The African Mourning Dove pair in the garden raised 2 healthy chicks but we see only one of them about – the ring around the eye is still not fully coloured. Not all have been successful though – the Tropical Boubou laid eggs at the beginning of August but these were predated. They built a new nest almost immediately on the other side of the garden – interestingly in the same type of palm – which we watched carefully but alas 2 days before expected hatching something took their eggs again – they appear to be giving it a break now! Another pair of Spotted Eagle-owl laid on a rocky ledge in the other dam spillway and the shells were found near the nest – monitor lizard possibly? She laid again, 20 metres away on sloping ground – silly birds. One of the eggs rolled down the slope and 2 days later the other one joined it! Another point of interest was that the Dark Chanting-goshawk was seen and the beautiful Red-throated Twinspots visited us again.

RYDINGS Interpretive Centre

Shirley, Andriess and Richard have managed to do a bit of walking – lots of Crowned Lapwings and African Wattled Lapwings, a Klaas's Cuckoo heard, Orange-breasted Bush-shrike and Grey-headed Bush-shrike and Temminck's Courser were seen. Verreaux's Eagle-owl and Spotted Eagle-owl were heard as well as Barn Owl and Pearl-spotted Owlet. **Merle Mitchell**

TAIL FEATHERS

Observations at Rocara Park, LAKE CHIVERO QDS I730D4 TR672214

A fledgling Spotted Creeper *Salpormis pylonotus* was observed on 4 October 2000 being fed by an adult bird. The young bird was watched for about 15 minutes during which time it was fed on six occasions. On four of those occasions the food consisted of caterpillars. No sign of a nest or other young birds was seen. Also at Rocara Park arrivals of the following were: African Hoopoe – 10 July, African Golden Oriole – 16 August, Common Sandpiper – 16 August, Broad-billed Roller – 26 September and African Paradise-flycatcher (2 pairs) 2 October. A Grey Tit-flycatcher was observed on 8 October 2000. **Mike Marriott**

NOTICEBOARD

ZIMBIRDNET

This interest site is again up and running and for those wishing to participate please send an e-mail to BirdLife Zimbabwe for details of how to participate. In this way, up to date information on birds and birding can be communicated.

“African Birding”

The African Bird Club has launched a new e-mail list called African Birding. The aim is to get people from all over the world talking and exchanging information about African birds. The list is totally free to join and anyone can post. To join send an e-mail, which can be blank, to:

AfricanBirding-subscribe@egroups.com

Buy a brick campaign for BirdLife Zimbabwe’s Headquarters building

The total raised now stands at \$45 610 and we thank the following for their donations which have been received since the previous issue of *Babbler*. For those members still wanting to give a donation, a form is included at the end of the issue. See the report of the Executive Officer regarding the change in plans for a building.

Val Cameron	\$2 000	W R Clarke	\$1 000
Dr Nigel Steyn	\$1 000	Mr A & Mrs C Keller	\$1 000
Mr D & Mrs M Lilford	\$1 000	Mary Jo & Joe Furgal	\$1 000
Mr & Mrs M E Fotter	\$ 660	Mr I Rowe	\$500
Eric Bowes	\$ 500	M & I Chance	\$500
Patricia Bellingan	\$ 500	J C Stinton	\$500
I M Dawson	\$ 250	P N Ineson	\$200
I Newton-Howes	\$ 200	June Allan	\$100

Donation of flat-bed scanner

Birdlife Zimbabwe is very grateful to Frank Paxton who generously donated a flat-bed scanner. This is of particular value to the Research and Conservation Committee for their work.

Birdwatch 2000

- Will take place between 12 midnight on Friday 3 November 2000 to 12 midnight on Friday 10 November 2000.
- Teams of three or four are asked to choose a 24-hour period and to register it with the co-ordinator by 8 p.m. on Wednesday 1 November 2000.
- See as many species as you can within an area with a radius of 50 km.
- Team record forms must reach the co-ordinator by Friday, 17 November, i.e. 1 week after the event.
- Entry forms are available from the co-ordinator at 04-490208; E-mail: birds@zol.co.zw
- There are great prizes to be won. The grand prize will be given to the team which raises the most money.
- Sponsorship money raised and team information forms must reach the central co-ordinator by 15 December 2000.

The money raised from Birdwatch 2000 will be used on a project aimed at conservation of the Anchieta’s Tchagra. At the moment, this species is on record as occurring at only one marsh in the HONDE VALLEY. The population was reduced from *c.*50 birds to *c.*8 by flooding of the marsh when a dam was built. The remaining birds could be suffering from unknowing schoolboys and their catapults. BLZ is looking to conduct a survey to identify other areas with suitable habitat and possibly other sub-populations. A poster campaign will be initiated to try and enrol the help of local communities as guardians of the species and its habitat.

So – get a team together, have some fun and raise money to help the conservation of the Anchieta’s Tchagra!

NTT-ME World Bird Count – October 2000

The Japanese telecommunications company, NTT-ME, is again sponsoring a World Bird Count this October. As in previous years, birdwatchers all over the world record the number of bird species they see during October and then send their final List of species seen to NTT-ME in Japan. These lists are compiled into one grand total of species seen and then NTT-ME makes a donation to BirdLife's Asia Programme. Anthony Cizek will be co-ordinating the Zimbabwe list and birdwatchers are urged to send in lists of all bird species seen during October in Zimbabwe. Field cards in respect of branch outings should also be sent to Anthony who will then forward them to the Field Card Organiser.

New members

We welcome the following new members:

Diana Anderson, Mwana Bermudei, Andrew Chigangawa, Bruce Davison, Dave Deighton, H M Fern, Mrs Brigitte Hermann, Mrs R L Homan, I Jones, R E N Kemp, C W Lloyd, Dr K Muir-Leresche, Kenneth Mutema, Musa Rukuni, Justin Seymour-Smith, Yvonne Stranix, John Sullivan, Peter Vanas, Louise Van Zanten

Congratulations to the following people who have won free membership for their entries in the competition held at the BLZ stand at St John's College Spring Fair:

M Martin C Griffiths Twiggs (Ms) G Frost

WE WISH YOU AN ENJOYABLE FESTIVE SEASON AND A SAFE AND HEALTHY NEW YEAR