

BABBLER

BirdLife Zimbabwe

A PARTNER DESIGNATE OF BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL

ISSUE #40 – JANUARY /FEBRUARY 2001

COMMITTEES

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ACTIVITIES

MASHONALAND BRANCH

Regular outings

1. Mukuvisi Woodlands: Sundays, 7 January and 4 February, 2001. Meet at the Paget Road entrance at 6.30 a.m. There will be a vehicle guard in attendance.
2. Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary: Sundays, 14 January and 11 February 2001. 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 outings

20 January 2001: The first of Alex Masterson's Vlei Walks. Meet on Princess Margaret Drive (cnr. Harare Drive), Marlborough at 3.00 p.m. Bring wellies and \$5 towards a tip for the security guard.

17 February 2001: 12 Welston Road, Glen Forest. Meet at the BP service station, Helensvale Cnr. Crowhill/Borrowdale Roads at 2.00 p.m. Bring chairs and refreshments.

Sunday outings

28 January 2001: Alex Masterson Vlei Walk. Meeting place as for 20 January but at 6.30 a.m.

As these walks are very popular please select which one you wish to attend and go to only one.

25 February 2001: Imbwa Farm, Harare south area. These are settling ponds from a sewerage works and are good for waterbirds. Meet at Harare Central Post Office, Julius Nyerere Way at 6.30 a.m.

Thursday evening meetings

18 January 2001. MASHONALAND BRANCH AGM. Please attend this informal and social meeting. Reports will be given on the Mukuvisi Woodlands and Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary. Three new committee members are required for 2001 and it is hoped that members will volunteer their services at the meeting. Work on this committee is not onerous and only six meetings a year are held. Pies will be on sale as usual and these will be served with gravy and salads. Please bring a dinner plate and cutlery.

15 February 2001: Dr Philippa Marett will give an illustrated talk about one of her recent trips.

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.

MATABELELAND BRANCH**Evening Meetings**

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 Vumba – a brief glimpse of Swynnerton's Robin and others. Venue: 3A Holdengarde Avenue, Hillside at 8.00 p.m. Contact Martin for further details.

Friday 2 February 2001 – Matabeleland Branch AGM – this year's Branch AGM will be held at 3A Holdengarde Ave. Hillside. The meeting will be held at 6.00 p.m. before the braai and social. As in previous years braai fires will be provided. Please bring your own food, drink and eating utensils.

Monthly Outings

Sunday 14 January 2001 – Aisleby Waterfowl Count – we now have the use of a canoe which will certainly help counting waterfowl on the Upper Dam. We will, however, still need plenty of help with all the smaller water-bodies and pastures. Please do come and support us. Meet at the Boom at 7.30 a.m. or contact the co-ordinator – **Martin Smith**.

Sunday 21 January 2001 – Fort Rixon Dam – despite the country's troubles we managed to conduct the census in July 2000 and hope to be able to visit the Dam again in January. Those interested, please contact Penny Feather nearer to the time.

Away weekend – 17/18 February – we have yet to finalise this outing but are hoping to visit Chipizi Ranch, circumstances permitting! We may well end up with a local option and have Tshabalala planned as an alternative. Would those interested please contact Penny Feather.

Aisleby – Sunday 25 February 2000

This continues to offer some excellent birdwatching but sadly support for our monthly outings has waned. We will, however, continue to visit the property on a monthly basis but please do contact the co-ordinator (Martin Smith) if you wish to go.

Hillside Dams

Monthly walks will continue. Meet at the Lower Dam Car Park at 4.00 p.m. on the last Friday of every month. Forthcoming dates are: 26 January and 23 February 2001.

See Martin's comments under Reports for details of the October and November visits.

EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB

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

Outings

Please contact either Tony Curtis or Ken Dixon regarding possible outings in 2001.

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

ACTIVITIES**Rydings School interpretive Centre**

Walks take place on the first Saturday of each month at 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 gjconway@icon.co.zw
Gweru Please contact Gavin for details of outings which may be planned.
Masvingo Contact Lynne Wilkins ☎ 039-63657
Kadoma Outings will be held at 7.00 a.m. on the third Saturday of each month commencing in January 2001. Contact Margaret Parrock ☎ 068-3644 for details.

REPORTS**NATIONAL****FROM THE EXECUTIVE OFFICER****Strategic Planning Workshop**

As mentioned in the last issue of *Babbler*, this was held over the weekend 23/24 September 2000. The objectives of the Association were re-examined and a set of outputs and activities needed to achieve the goal was drawn up. These then formed the bases of an action plan with various indicators included to assist with the monitoring of progress.

The long term or high level goal remains:

“To promote the survival of bird life in Zimbabwe and elsewhere for its intrinsic value and the enjoyment of future generations”.

The immediate objective or purpose is:

“To contribute to the protection and conservation of bird species, Important Bird Areas (IBAs) and their habitats through the active involvement and participation of Zimbabwean people”

The outputs needed to achieve the purpose and contribute to the goal were built on the 1998 set of objectives as follows:

1. Conservation status of birds and their habitats in Zimbabwe improved with emphasis on key species.
2. Zimbabwean people's awareness of birds and involvement in conservation increased.
3. BirdLife Zimbabwe views on bird conservation well known, respected and influential.
4. BirdLife Zimbabwe research activities contribute to conservation biology of birds.
5. BirdLife Zimbabwe publications maintained and improved in quality, content and appeal.
6. Large and diverse membership well aware of aims and activities of BirdLife Zimbabwe.
7. Funds to meet needs of BirdLife Zimbabwe Programme secured.
8. Effective and efficient management of BirdLife Zimbabwe Programme functioning.

The workshop can be considered a success. Our thanks go to the facilitator, Dr Russell Taylor. He has produced a comprehensive report, a copy of which can be lent to any member who would like to see it.

South African Crane Working Group (SACWG) Workshop, November 2000

At the invitation of SACWG, I attended their bi-annual workshop at Umgeni Valley Nature Reserve in Howick from 21-24 November 2000. This was a very productive and enjoyable meeting with over 30 participants from within South Africa as well as Christine from BirdLife Botswana. On 20 November I attended a meeting of the captive breeding programme co-ordinators at Umgeni River Bird Park in Durban. SACWG is suspending its Wattled Crane supplementation programme for the next 5 years

following recommendations from a Wattled Crane Population and Habitat Viability Analysis (PHVA) carried out early in 2000. The focus of their captive programme will now be to build the captive population of Wattled Cranes to act as a genetic reservoir against catastrophic events. All birds held by SACWG are being re-housed by the Pan African Association of Zoological Parks and Botanical Gardens (PAAZAB) member facilities. SACWG will now concentrate more on addressing the threats to the cranes in the wild and understanding the biophysical requirements of the cranes. The PHVA modelling indicates that presently the supplementation will not improve the crane population, which will continue to decrease if threats are not addressed. After 5 years the impact of a supplementation programme on the wild population will be remodelled. There are two captive populations – birds originating from within SA and birds originating from North American zoos that are genetically different from the SA birds. The two populations will be managed separately with two co-ordinators. Practical sessions were held on 21 November at the Hlatukulu Crane and Wetland Sanctuary where protocols on handling cranes and field sampling techniques were discussed. On 22-24th the actual workshop convened with presentations 30 minutes long with another 30 minutes of action-oriented discussions. I presented an update of the status of cranes in Zimbabwe and an overview of the work of the Zimbabwe Crane Working Group (ZCWG), which was well received. Lindy Rodwell presented an overview of the future role of SACWG and activities and southern African crane work. Following recommendations from an African strategy meeting held at the International Crane Foundation, SACWG will expand its efforts to develop regional links with other southern African crane range states. Other topics presented and discussed included the outcomes of the Wattled Crane PHVA, techniques for conflict resolution on crop damage by cranes, illegal trade in cranes, techniques for censusing cranes, the ADU Nest Record Card Scheme, crane research priorities and Rod Doming presented a farmer's perspective of cranes in the Swartberg area. I spent 25-27 November with Janis O'Grady and Brent Coverdale, field officers in KwaZulu-Natal and learnt how to conduct farm worker workshops on cranes. I spent November 28 with Kevin McCann, National Research and Conservation Co-ordinator and discussed an aerial census protocol and protocol on conducting research on the biophysical requirements of cranes. We also made a preliminary review of the objectives of ZCWG's crane and habitat action plan. **Friday Maozeka – Crane Field Worker**

Birdwatch 2000

Fifteen teams (officially) entered this year's Birdwatch and it seems that the fuel shortage, together with possible security risks prevented more teams taking part. This is the first year it has been run as a fund-raising event, and the Research and Conservation Committee are very pleased with the ZW\$ 80 000 raised. Three teams together contributed the bulk of this total: "The Malilangwe Lunartics" led by Gary Douglas have pledged ZW\$ 24 475, "The Chipinge 'Wovet' Watchers" led by Peter Caldwell-Barr raised ZWS 23 000 and "Team Rynchops" led by Dave Dalziel totalled ZW\$ 17 070 and we are very grateful for these excellent efforts. We are grateful to everyone who contributed – this combined effort has been a great success. "The Chipinge 'Wovet' Watchers" (total 227 species) were pipped by "The Malilangwe Lunartics" (236 species) in the "Experienced" category. Both are excellent totals. As mentioned in *Babbler*, the funds raised were pledged to the conservation of the Anchieta's Tchagra and its lowland marsh habitat. We have printed A4 posters for distribution to schools in the area and we hope to begin a survey of the Honde Valley to look at the current status of this species there before the end of the year. In addition, the Red Data List of Zimbabwean birds will be produced using some of this money. This is a very valuable exercise for focusing our conservation efforts and we hope to have the list completed in early 2001. A full report on Birdwatch 2000 will appear in *Honeyguide*.

Anthony Cizek

MASHONALAND BRANCH

REPORTS

GOSHO PARK Sunday, 26 September 2000

There was a good attendance of 16 members, with 6 coming from the Marondera area. Special thanks go to Damian Newmarch for ably leading us through this attractive park. Although an 8 a.m. start was a bit late for the early morning bird activity, we did manage to find one good bird party which kept us busy for about half an hour. A total of 171 species was recorded and the highlights included 1 African Black Duck, 1 Brown Snake-eagle, 1 Barn Owl, 1 Broad-billed Roller, 7 Eastern Saw-wings, 3 Mocking Cliff-chats, 2 Boulder Chats, 4 Southern Hyliota and 5 Stierling's Wren-warblers. **Richard Dennison**

Gary Stafford (KUIMBA SHIRI) – Thursday 19 October 2000

A reasonable number of people attended this evening meeting. Gary shared with us his love of falconry and told us how he, as a young man, had become interested in the sport. He was very much self-taught initially but later on learned much of his skills from members of the Falconers' Club, one of whom had been Dr Arthur Dunkley. We heard about a pair of Peregrine Falcons which Gary had reared from about 15 days old. The pair learned to hunt co-operatively and as a result was past masters at catching doves.

Gary is involved in a successful captive breeding programme of falcons which has seen the release into the wild of several birds of different species. Falcons, like many other raptors, are threatened in the wild as they often lose their breeding sites to more aggressive species and the statistics for young birds reared in the wild is not good with approximately 75% of birds never reaching sexual maturity. We were then shown a video of Kuimba Shiri where a remarkable amount of development has taken place in the short two years of its existence. Some of the birds have still to be moved to better cages and improvements are being made all the time. Kuimba Shiri offers the opportunity to novice birders to be able to study birds in detail and therefore be able to more easily recognise them in the field. Thank you very much Gary for travelling to Harare to talk to us – it was most enjoyable. **Di Rushforth**

Dr Graham Child — Thursday, 16 November 2000

There was a good turn-out of about 50 people to hear Dr Graham Child speak on “Why Zimbabwe is a leader in wildlife conservation”.

Dr Child, who was the Director of the Department of National Parks and Wild Life Management from 1971 to 1986 and is now a consultant on wildlife parks and related conservation policies, said that many leading figures in wildlife management have commented favourably on Zimbabwe's parks and our excellent conservation policies. The establishment of the Matobo and Nyanga National Parks by Cecil Rhodes was an early example of the long-sighted policy on conservation which had inspired those who followed. The National Parks' staff in the 1950's analysed their available data and planned ahead, and were not afraid to change their plans if they made a mistake. This policy of “advancement by trial and error”, or what is now called “adaptive management”, put our management 20 years ahead of most other nations and was a great achievement for a country of our population. Men such as Ted Davison at Hwange and Col. Brodie, who fostered the legislation to develop Hwange – the first park since the Rhodes Estates, Reay Smithers in the Museum and Archie Fraser, who came to the Parks Department from the Treasury, understood the new paradigms proposed by the three Fulbright scholars – Thane Riney, Ray Dasmann and Archie Mossman and were able to adapt them to our conditions. “Operation Noah”, the animal rescue exercise that was planned while the Kariba dam site was filling and the men who did the rescuing, especially Rupert Fothergill, awakened the public's interest in wildlife. This created a political climate conducive to accepting the new ideas introduced to southern Africa by the Fulbright scholars, which provided an enormous boost to conservation policies throughout the region. This country was one of the first to try commercial game ranching. However, in its early days it was not a success as it was found that wild animals did not produce more meat per hectare than cattle and were much more difficult to manage.

The implementation of increased hunting charges by legislation inspired by Archie Fraser and Graham Child, with the right of the landowners to charge for hunting on their land, introduced the profit motive and this new policy of “Proprietorship and Profit” was advocated by the Parks Department's economists. Lowveld ranchers, such as the Hendersons, Styles and Peter Johnson, realised that, with game safaris for hunting and viewing, combined with the commercial harvesting of animals, game ranching could now be profitable. Conservation of game animals and all other wildlife improved because there was now money to be made from it. From this realisation, the Campfire programme was developed to ensure that the poorer, rural communities could find a financial advantage in conserving game, which had previously only been seen as crop- and domestic animal-destroyers. So, by trial and error, the policy of sustainable use of wildlife with profit to the owners and occupiers of land was developed. A policy of which we should be proud. **John A Shepherd**

MATABELELAND

From the Chairman

At the time of writing, dark storm clouds loom over BULAWAYO and herald the beginning of the rainy season. Termites have begun to emerge and the sky offers plenty of avian interest. Migrant raptors, swifts and

swallows pose plenty of interesting identification problems, partially because most are seen from some distance and in the case of swifts move horribly quickly. Things are a little better at tree level with Willow Warblers and Garden Warblers being comparatively easy to identify. The former provided a real ornithological wonder in the garden with a re-trap of a bird first ringed in December 1998. It is truly amazing to think that a mere 9 grams of Willow Warbler is capable of flying at least 30 000 kilometres and is able to locate the same bush on its return. Presumably, this offers an explanation for the vigorous calling following their arrival in the country – are they establishing and holding wintering territories?

Finally, a further plug for Hillside Dams and our month end walks. These continue to attract new faces and have plenty to offer – both the October and November walks recorded over 50 species of birds in just over an hour. With both dams still holding an appreciable amount of water, an interesting range of both dry land and water birds are to be seen making this an excellent low cost venue for learning your birds. **Martin Smith**

Kloof Farm — Sunday 21 October 2000

We have always found this an interesting property with a diverse range of habitats to search. We began with a climb to the top of the basalt ridge which offered an excellent view of the surrounding bush. The Terminalia had just emerged into leaf, producing an attractive carpet of soft green, amongst which scattered violet trees were in full bloom. Black Cuckooshrike, canaries and Willow Warbler were some of the species present, whilst at the base of the kopjie a Lesser Honeyguide was heard and seen, calling strongly from within the canopy. Our route back took us along the fringe of a park-like area with a scattering of large trees and, within the canopy of a mature *A. galpinii*, we found at least 20 Willow Warblers calling strongly and actively gleaning insect life – presumably all had recently arrived. We then moved into an area of sandstone which supported a mixture of Teak and Terminalia, before pausing for lunch in a grove of Acacia close to the railway line. Here, we managed to see and hear an African Cuckoo with its hoopoe-like call and hawk-like flight, whilst at the base of a kopjie a Wahlberg's Eagle nest held an adult, which flew and, a short time later, displayed with a dipping flight consisting of stoops, interspersed with stalls and its tail held high. This brought the outing to a close with a pleasing variety of species on the checklist despite the hot, October conditions. **Martin Smith**

HILLSIDE Dams — Friday 27 October 2000

The October month end ramble saw some cool and blustery conditions, which were a pleasant contrast to the high temperatures of the preceding week. A few spots of rain, the first of the season, had dampened the dust and seemed to suggest that it was time to breed with plenty of avian activity to study. In the car park, a combination of Black Cuckoo and Black Cuckooshrike presented some identification problems until both calls clearly established the identity of the two species. On the water, over 100 White-faced Duck were present, whilst overhead it was pleasing to be able to see a pair of Yellow-billed Kite, although we have yet to confirm breeding activity. Upstream, along the watercourse, we managed to find a pair of Spotted Eagle-owl with three fluffy fledglings, the nearest being only a couple of metres above the ground and clearly visible to all. Next, a combination of thrushes, robins and bulbuls kept us busy below the dam wall before returning through the dry land bush to the north, recording a number of seed eaters. In all, a total of 55 species were recorded in just over an hour – not bad for an urban area and with minimal fuel consumption. **Martin Smith**

EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB

MOUNTAIN HOME, PENHALONGA — Sunday 29 October 2000

Cold and damp it was but was that a sufficient excuse for missing one of our best outings? Where were you all? We really needed extra eyes and ears to make our list respectable on this misty morning.

First we visited the dam, which seems to get longer every time we visit it but no more attractive to birds if that day was anything to go by. Hundreds of Common Waxbills were in the reeds, Giant Kingfisher, Malachite Kingfisher and African Pygmy-kingfishers, 2 African Black Duck, Common Moorhen and Reed Cormorant. Then a damp-looking Long-crested Eagle was seen sitting out the drizzle on a fence and nearby were some African Wattled Lapwings. The scrap of indigenous forest was quiet and dark so we drove on to the small dams which were more rewarding, probably as it was by now a few degrees warmer. The main interest there were swallows – both Greater Striped Swallows and Lesser Striped Swallows, Wire-tailed Swallows, Barn Swallows, Grey-rumped Swallows, Eastern Saw-wing and – we were almost certain (Tatenda, Rex and I) – one Blue Swallow. Possibly a refugee from the mist-shrouded montane grassland above. In the same grassy valley were

Cape Longclaw and Rufous-naped Lark. We also heard our first Diderick Cuckoo of the millennium and saw a Steppe Buzzard in the eucalyptus plantation. In all, the lazy stay-at-homes missed 60 species and a good morning out. **Ken Dixon**

Birdwatch 2000 around MUTARE – Sunday 5 November 2000

A beautiful day beckoned in Mutare and we – Bridget Holland, Jane Clegg and Ken Dixon were so keen to get going that we spurned Bill's offer of scrambled eggs and got to work on the garden while he prepared sandwiches for us. Within half an hour we had 20 species and were ready to move on. On Park Road, a Greater Blue-eared Starling caused us to stop and we immediately found a House Sparrow (not too common here), a Brimstone Canary and others – 30 already.

As we drove up the Vumba Road, each short stop produced new birds, Black-crowned Tchagra and Brown-crowned Tchagra, European Bee-eaters, Common Scimitarbill and Green Wood-hoopoe, but not the expected White-necked Raven. Our first bird of prey was a Long-crested Eagle. After 20 kilometres, we pulled off the road in a forest area at about 1 500 metres and immediately our VUMBA expert, Bridget, came into her own – identifying Red-faced Crimsonwing, African Olive-pigeon, Chirinda Apalis and others. From there, we went back down to Stonechat Cottage and followed the well marked paths down into the Forest. It was now about 800 a.m. and already hot so the dense canopy was welcome. A Swynnerton's Robin awaited us by the little weir, a species not seen for a year or so in this vicinity and mercifully not yet victim to the local cats. Other specials on hand were Buff-spotted Flufftail, White-starred Robin, Red-capped Robin-chat and Cape Robin-chats and White-eared Barbet. Orange Ground-thrush called continually but failed to appear. Back out in the open, we found Wailing Cisticola and Singing Cisticolas and Dark-capped Yellow Warbler.

From Vumba Heights, we started the descent to the BURMA VALLEY via Jack Hulley (local hero) Road. The miombo we passed through yielded little but a Striped Pipit. The precipitous drop was more productive where we saw African Goshawk and Steppe Buzzard and, by the time we reached the valley bottom, our tally was 80. Our plan was to spend time at Nyamakari Farm (McGregor's) visiting the garden area and dam. There were a few African Pipit on the ploughed land with lots of Red-billed Firefinches. High up on the Vumba Mountains we could distinguish clearly a Verreaux's Eagle. The garden had a large, busy colony of Village Weavers watched by the inevitable Diderick Cuckoo. On the little dam were a Malachite Kingfisher, African Pied Wagtail and nesting Thick-billed Weaver.

As we were hot and hungry it was great to find a big fishing contest just finishing on the main dam and braai packs awaiting us. While the meat was cooking, we took the McGregor's canoe and paddled off into quieter waters to extend our list. It was raining now but this was a relief rather than a hindrance. An African Finfoot had been seen earlier but the noisy crowd had driven it away before we had arrived. The usual common water birds were there but few in number. Our century was reached with a pair of Giant Kingfisher and we were on 114 before we landed for lunch.

Driving back to the road, we found 2 Trumpeter Hornbills, only rarely seen in this area nowadays. At Altham Suttcliffe's garden we at last saw some sunbirds, Southern Black Tit and Grey-backed Camaroptera. We were loath to leave the fascinating, cool and shady garden but time was getting on. Then came the drive home. It had become quite humid in the course of the afternoon and we stopped twice to observe mixed parties of birds gorging themselves on hatching termites. At the last stop there were 2 Lesser Spotted Eagle strutting their stuff and lots of swallows, swifts and widowbirds getting their dose of protein. Further on it was the turn of weavers and Red-billed Quelea and our only woodpecker of the day.

Back in town, we had a cup of tea before making our last sortie along the Game fence reinforced by other family members. This brought another 5 species. In all we had 134 confirmed sightings over the day. Sadly our resident Fiery-necked Nightjar failed to show but we were more than satisfied with what we had. Many thanks to Bridget for driving, Jane for food and to the Burma Valley farmers for their generous offers of help. **Ken Dixon**

KAROI BIRD CLUB

Caversham – Saturday 21 October 2000

At last, after months of "starvation", we had a feast – in more ways than one – at Danny and Jackie van den Berg's home. Eight of us arrived, rearing to go and, after fortifying ourselves with coffee and home-baked biscuits (and – was I seeing right – a bowl of chocolates which we ate for energy), we set off. We were welcomed by the caged Crested Barbet at the back door as we set out. He had been rescued and caged until recovered but, when he was let out in the garden, the resident Barbets chased him when he had hightailed it back to the safety of his cage! Red-headed Weaver had built three nests on a tree in the yard and were

happily breeding. The small dam here is the main attraction as, apart from quite a variety of duck and water birds, it usually is the abode of a good number of African Pygmy-goose. But, this day, they made no appearance. So too, the Grey-headed Parrot which had been seen flying over each day. But there was plenty more to see. We walked along the waters edge of the dam, the only waders being Wood Sandpiper and Three-banded Plover, whilst a single Grey Heron, a Great Egret, Black Crike and African Jacana whilst, on the water, were a single Red-billed Teal, several Common Moorhen, Little Grebes and White-faced Duck flew overhead. We paused to watch two African Green-pigeons building a nest, admiring their beautiful colours and the markings under the tail. Crossing above the dam, we wandered into the woodland and here we spotted a nightjar fly up. There was also a slight movement in the leaf litter and we discovered it was a Rufous-checked Nightjar with two chicks! But what a time we had looking for the chick, so unbelievable was their camouflage against the leaf litter they had chosen to roost in. Kevin was able to photograph the chick. The adult moved a short distance away when approached and did a decoy flutter to put us off the chicks. On approaching it further it perched on a low branch for a short while. Continuing, we came across a Serval midden very tidily placed in a convenient hole – an interesting find. Green-capped Eremomela were very vocal in the tree canopy, Broad-billed Roller too, claiming their territory. European Bee-eaters were back and overhead was a fly-past of Wattled Starlings and a single Black-chested Snake-eagle. We saw Wire-tailed Swallow, Red-breasted Swallow, Grey-rumped Swallow and Lesser Striped Swallows wheeling over the dam and, on a small mud bank where bream nests had been exposed, we spotted a delightful little African Quailfinch having a drink. 70 species seen in all – our first feast! Back to the garden we settled down with fruit juice while the men cooked breakfast – a White-browed Robin-chat with her nest in a Bougainvillea, an arms length away was totally unconcerned about us whilst a Scarlet-chested Sunbird feeding her chicks in a nest under the eaves kept us amused while we waited. And waited quite happily too, for we knew we were in for our second feast of the day – a most scrumptious breakfast topped off with braaied bananas and chilled sherry! Can't beat that. Thank you Danny and Jackie for a great morning all round. **Merle Mitchell**

Birdwatch 2000 KAROI area — 24-hour count weekend 4/5 November 2000

We were delighted to field three teams this year and we all thoroughly enjoyed ourselves and worked hard to find the numbers we did. Much walking was done and we all visited dams, vleis, woodlands, gardens and grassland (interspersed with a meal in the garden at the homestead, a picnic in the bush, tea-break at the dam's edge, a braai in the evening – all the while eyes and ears wide open). Some of the not so common birds seen were Red-throated Twinspot, Yellow-bellied Greenbul, and Lesser Honeyguide which had us guessing for a minute calling to each other and so hard to see. We also heard a whirring and grating sound and found a party of Retz's Helmet-shrikes bowing and beak snapping. At the dams, we saw African Pygmy-goose – one team saw 4 African Snipe, we saw 1 along the water's edge, playing hide and seek with us behind driftwood, a perfect camouflage given away by one wary eye visible – quite comical really, with that overlong bill – Collared Pratincole, Common Ringed Plover, African Openbill, Yellow-billed Stork, a single African Spoonbill and an African Rail – a first for some. Owls were Verreaux's Eagle-owl, Spotted Eagle-owl, Southern White-faced Scops-owl, Pearl-spotted Owlet and African Scops-owl. Amongst raptors seen were African Hawk-eagle, Long-crested Eagle, Black-chested Snake-eagle and Wahlberg's Eagles and African Cuckoo Hawk.

We had a tussle identifying a harrier – it was flying low over fallow, grassy land and landed on the road in front of the vehicle. While we stopped it flew off and returned twice more with its prey to consume on the road. The bird was brown, with a broad white band on the rump, the breast not streaked and, once we had the opportunity of having a good look at the facial markings, we came up with Montagu's Harrier – although the books tell us the females and juveniles of this bird and Pallid Harriers are very hard to separate. All the same, it is encouraging to see this bird and the more so as on our farm, two weeks later, we saw another, although not close enough to identify the facial markings. We saw more birds at this year's count than last year – maybe a better time of year? **Merle Mitchell**

RYDINGS School Interpretive Centre — November 2000

The walk at the centre in November yielded 95 species! Only 3 White Storks but always good to see them back together with the Barn Swallows. There were 12 White-backed Vulture feeding on a "mombie" carcass, White-faced Ducks and Comb Ducks, Wood Sandpiper, Giant Kingfisher, Pied Kingfisher, Brown-hooded Kingfisher, Malachite Kingfisher and Striped Kingfishers, African Fish-eagle along the dam. Capped Wheatears were in the field and Brown Snake-eagle and European Bee-eaters were overhead. A Variable Sunbird and Red-throated Twinspots were seen for the first time and Spotted Flycatchers and African Dusky Flycatchers, African Green-pigeon, White-crested Helmet-shrike, Crested Francolin and Red-chested Cuckoo, Levillant's Cuckoo, Klaas's Cuckoo, Diderick Cuckoo and Black Cuckoo. Shirley, Andreison and Danny hope to do a December walk before the Christmas Break. **Merle Mitchell**

MIDLANDS BRANCH

Masvingo Branch visit to NYORORO Estates/Widgeon Farm, FELIXBURG – 27 to 29 October 2000

Our annual camping weekend at Nyororo is normally held on the second weekend of October but had to be delayed until the end of the month this year which was a bit risky – sure enough, the rainy season decided to start on 26 October and, typical of the Masvingo Province, this very quickly turned into full blown guti! For those of you who know Nyororo and its wide open vleis, you can imagine how miserable it can get.

However, despite the weather and the fuel situation (we really missed you, Penny and Julia) 14 of us braved the wet and wind and had a great weekend camp. We were fortunate to have two visitors from Holland who are keen birders and their enthusiasm helped make up for the wet weather. A total of 120 species were recorded, the highlights being a flock of 48 Wattled Crane, a Black-bellied Bustard, Lesser Jacana, Spotted Thick-knee, Marsh Owl (we flushed 7 in the Nyororo vlei), Southern Ground-hornbill and wonderful sightings of Cape Longclaw and Rosy-throated Longclaws – these were of special delight to Eric and George, our Dutch visitors.

At lunchtime on Saturday, we were treated to a talk by our well-known and respected Dr Japie Jackson who is not only a vet and farmer but a wonderful naturalist. I have included a few extracts from his talk which help on identifying bird calls.

“It is amazing how much pleasure people get out of watching birds. I think God intended it to be so. One thing is certain and that is that the pleasure is doubled when you get down to identifying the birds. The pleasure can even be trebled by learning to recognise their calls. They call them ‘calls’ but only some are actually calls, others definitely are songs. The Black-headed Oriole has a beautiful call after which the Shona named the bird ‘gochiyo’ – a name no doubt derived from its call. The Black-collared Barbet has a wonderful husband and wife duet song ‘clean collar, clean collar, clean collar...’ The one calls ‘clean’ and the other ‘collar’ in perfect rhythm. *Roberts’* ranks the White-browed Robin-chat as one of the greatest avian singers in the world. These birds entertain us with the most beautiful song at sunset and sunrise and sometimes even in between. What a privilege. They usually start off softly and work up to a crescendo.

The stories they sing are variously interpreted: ‘Its up to you, its up to you, up to you, UP TO YOU, UP TO YOU...’ Also, ‘think of it, think of it, “THINK OF IT, THINK OF IT”, and ‘Don’t you do it, don’t you DO it...’ Its song is rich and melodious. In Afrikaans this bird is called a ‘Heuglinse Janfrederik’; Robins are Janfrederiks, obviously a name related to its song. Not all birds sing in English. The Fork-tailed Drongo sings in Sindebele in the early hours of the morning. It sings ‘folomani-folomani-vukavuka-goka-peka-sokusile.’ That means ‘foreman, foreman, wake up, wake up, get up, get dressed, make ready – the day is already breaking. I wish I had more of these birds on my farm! In the daytime they sing in Shona. They perch on a post and sing ‘mapirikwatcha-mapirikwatcha’. Then a hawk flies overhead and it takes off straight up into the air and goes for the hawk shouting ‘mesa aka chuka-ndiku pame-ndiku pame’. That means, ‘You red-eyed rascal. I will give it to you again. I will give it to you again’, as it pecks at the fleeing hawk. After the victory, it makes its descent as follows ‘bin win-bin win’ down the scale to perch again on the same post and repeat ‘mapirikwatcha-mapirikwatcha’. There is another bird that sings about a hawk. That is the Emerald-spotted Wood-dove. Its song is a long and drawn out lament followed suddenly by the sound of action ‘Do-Do-Do-do-do-do-do-do’ starting with a high note and running down the scale with increasing rapidity. What is the story of this bird’s song? Herdsmen on Eastdale Ranch revealed the secret to me one day. I will give you the English translation. The lament is - ‘that hawk has eaten my babies when I get hold of him I will beat him-with a stick-on his bottom. The action is Do-Do-Do-do-do-do-do-do.’”

Many thanks to Japie. Also thanks to Keith Harvey who made this weekend possible, to Kate for letting us use her camp and to Japie and Lynette Jovner for the wonderful birding on Widgeon. **Lynne Wilkins**

TAIL FEATHERS

The bird name changes saga

As a result of the ongoing debate about the proposed changes to the common names of birds in southern Africa, the following e-mail from Prof Phil Hockey from the Percy FitzPatrick Institute in Cape Town is reproduced

“A long (and in most cases very poorly informed) debate about bird name changes raged on the SA Birdnet for months. The essence of the story is this:

1. The IOC is producing a standardised world list of bird names. Those decisions that affect Africa are being

made by a specialist African sub-committee. There is no sound reason why we should ignore this listing and several good reasons why we should not fly in the face of it.

2. No southern African names will be lost – indeed, the new *Roberts'* will allow birders to look up any bird under a variety of names (all of which do appear in the literature, some of which are of local historical/cultural interest, and some of which have been lost in recent editions of *Roberts'*).

3. Where an IOC name differs from the current name in use in southern African, both the IOC name and the latest SA name will be given equal status.

4. The IOC names list is still being debated. For example, some of us are pushing re the new name for Green Coucal. This bird is NOT a coucal (so the existing name is taxonomically untenable), but the IOC proposal to rename it Yellowbill is not a good one either. *Handbook of the Birds of the World* correctly names the bird as Green Malkoha (a close relative but different genus – to the Asian malkohas).

The proposed changes are far in the minority. No one's favourite names will be lost if someone wishes to look up Moselikatse's Roller, Stark's Shrike or Shelley's Nightjar in the index, they will still then turn to the correct place in the book. And if they want to use the name Kwale Nightjar or Shelley's Nightjar instead of Fiery-necked Nightjar, nobody is going to stop them (except perhaps the editor of *Honeyguide!*)

I hope this allays some of the fears. We do have to accept that birding is becoming increasingly globalised and that a single standardised list of common names of the birds of the world is desirable. Whilst the point is regularly made that scientific names are the 'standardised' ones, unfortunately, only a miniscule proportion of birders actually uses them."

Albinism in Laughing Dove

A contributor to the Garden Bird Survey, Mrs L Mawhinney from Greystone Park, HARARE, has reported seeing an albino Laughing Dove in her garden. The bird's feathers are a pale cream colour but it is accepted by the other doves.

Tawny Eagle attacking Abdim's Stork

At about 4.30 p.m. on Monday, 23 October 2000 whilst standing in my Belvedere North, HARARE garden, I became aware of a commotion high above. I called to my husband to look up and tell me what he could see. He saw an eagle attacking an Abdim's Stork and dashed for his binoculars. My maid, who was removing washing from the line, quite excitedly told me that it was a "gondo" and that the sound it was making was that which she had heard in her home area of Hwedza when an eagle swooped down on chickens. Unfortunately, by the time my husband had returned with his binoculars the bird was spiralling upward into the sun. Nevertheless, we got out *Roberts'* and found that there are four eagles with the Shona name "gondo". I then played all 18 eagle calls from Guy Gibbons' Bird Sounds of Southern Africa and the only matching call was that of a Tawny Eagle. My maid shows an interest in birds in the garden and often assists me by recording their calls. **Ruby 't Hart – 7 Morecambe Avenue, Belvedere, Harare**

NOTICEBOARD

Corporate Relations Officer

We have a vacancy for a person to implement the corporate fund-raising strategy for BirdLife Zimbabwe. It is envisaged that the position will be part-time either mornings only or flexi-time but there may be potential for much of the work to be done from home. Remuneration will be based on a moderate salary plus a commission on funds generated.

Anyone requiring further details please contact John Paxton on 490208 or 011 608138.

Advertising in Honeyguide

We are looking for companies who would like to support our work by advertising in our Journal. There are spaces for full page ads available on the covers and inside. We are also able to take in full, half and quarter page ads in black and white. If anyone would like to encourage their companies to participate in this way, please contact John Paxton on 490208 or 011 608138.

Sponsored Membership Fund

Every workshop we have held has identified a need to widen our membership base. We must, in the future interests of the birds (and the Association) recruit members from the wider community. Some of these people may not be able to afford the subscription, at least at this period in their lives. To this end, it

has been decided to set up a fund. Council will then consider requests or nominations for sponsorship and make awards from the fund in deserving cases.

Members will note that there is a Message on the subscription invoices this year. If any of you wish to contribute, please add the amount to your subscription cheque with an appropriate notification to us.

Buy a brick campaign for BirdLife Zimbabwe's headquarters building

The total raised now stands at \$74 710 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.

| | | | | | |
|--------------------|---------|-------------------|---------|------------------------|---------|
| Dr H K Blackie | \$5 000 | Dave Hartung | \$5 000 | Pam and Dave Sheehan | \$5 000 |
| Volvo Cars | \$2 000 | S D Bean | \$1 000 | J D Roberts | \$1 000 |
| Paul Lewins | \$1 000 | D Rockingham-Gill | \$1 000 | Patrick Smet | \$1 000 |
| P B Cockburn | \$1 000 | Trevor Edwards | \$500 | Benny Steyn | \$500 |
| Gavin Hopley | \$500 | Dr R Hutchinson | \$500 | Mr and Mrs G Macdonald | \$500 |
| Mr & Mrs B Riddell | \$500 | Lesley Howland | \$500 | Mr & Mrs N E Kennaird | \$500 |
| Mrs C Sharp | \$500 | Peter Lawrence | \$300 | Mel Nicholls | \$300 |
| Mrs S Coughlan | \$200 | Lady Diana Miller | \$200 | Mrs D Vaughan | \$200 |
| Mr A D Widdows | \$200 | B D Hornby | \$100 | I Louw | \$100 |

New members

We welcome the following new members:

Dr A D Donohue, Uwe-Miachel-Leube, Mr and Mrs D Littleton, Gisela Locherer, Pamela Manyuchi, Grant Nealon, Mrs J Nicholson, Mark Skinner.

Free membership for one and a half years' subscription was won by the following at St John's Fair:

Master Graham Frost, Mr C Griffiths, Mr M Martin, Ms L Twiggs

Binoculars for sale

A pair of Field 6.5C, 8 x 40 binoculars in good condition is for sale. Reasonable offers are invited Contact Sylvia McCracken on Harare telephone 776145

ZIMBIRDNET

If you wish to participate, please send an e-mail to BirdLife Zimbabwe for details. In this way, up to date information on birds and birding can be communicated.

Pictures for Education Project

The Education Committee would be most grateful for donations of pictures of birds from old calendars or any other source as well as any southern African field guides. If you have anything to offer please contact Leslee Maasdorp on Harare telephone: 883316.

Printed by JAY-KAY PUBLISHING

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