

BABBLER

BirdLife Zimbabwe

A PARTNER DESIGNATE OF BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL

ISSUE #42 – MAY/JUNE 2001

COMMITTEES

Mashonaland Branch

Chairman: Jennifer Carter	300082
Members: Richard Dennison	747567
Helen Fraser	481316
Liz Hudson	883251
Ian Riddell	339716
Di Rushforth	741765
Ken Wilson	745231



Matabeleland Branch

Martin Smith	282474
Julia Dupree	62401
Penny Feather	244034
Clive Townsley	244617
Jean Tucker	241079
Peter Tucker	241079



Executive Officer: John Paxton 011 608138 or at the office 490208

Addresses:

P O Box CY 161, Causeway
birds@zol.co.zw

3A Holdengarde Aye, Hillside, Bulawayo

Editors: Di Rushforth 741765
5 Colenbrander Road,
P O Belvedere, Harare

Martin Smith 282474
3A Holdengarde Ave. Hillside,
Bulawayo

e-mail: dirushft@zambezi.net

adrienne@mweb.co.zw

ACTIVITIES

MASHONALAND BRANCH

Regular outings

NB Note new times

1. Mukuvisi Woodlands: Sundays, 6 May and 3 June, 2001. 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, 12 May and 10 June 2001. Meet at Marimba Shopping Centre for departure at 7.30 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

1. 19 May 2001: Christon Bank Botanic Reserve. Meet 2.30 p.m. at 2 Helena Road, Marlborough (Carter's residence) where there is secure parking and possible lifts. Directions: Jennifer Carter on 300082. Bring chairs and refreshments.
2. 16 June 2001: Rainham Dams. Meet Belvedere Shops, Princes Road 2.30 p.m. Bring chairs and refreshments.

Sunday outings

1. 27 May 2001: Mbizi Game Park. Meet at 7.00 a.m. at Queensdale Shopping Centre, Chiremba Road. Bring chairs and refreshments or if preferred there is a very nice restaurant at the Lodge area where lunch will be served.
2. 24 June 2001: Haka Game Park. Meet in the car park (next to Cleveland Dam) at 7.00 a.m. There will be an entrance fee payable. Bring chairs and refreshments.

Thursday evening meeting

17 May 2001: An illustrated talk will be given by Alastair Cowan — a well-known butterfly expert. Venue: Bowls Pavilion, Old Hararians Association, Drummond Chaplin Street, Milton Park. Time: 6.00 for 6.30 p.m. A cash bar and pies will be available. Security is provided.

NO MEETING IN JUNE AS MANY PEOPLE WILL BE AWAY FOR THE SOLAR ECLIPSE

Thursday outings to Marlborough Vlei

These are on the second and fourth Thursdays each month. Meet at 4.30 p.m. on Newstead Rd. As Ian's transport is a bicycle, he needs to be told whether people intend visiting the vlei. If he doesn't hear, he won't be there! Telephone Ian on 339716, or Email gemsaf@mango.zw Dates: 10 and 24 May, 14 and 28 June.

Advance notice of Rifa weekend

Rifa Camp at Chirundu has been booked for the weekend 28 September to 1 October 2001. A booking slip as well as information about the weekend is included in this issue. Numbers are limited.

Environmental Education Expo – 1 and 2 June 2001

The Branch has again been asked to support this important educational event. Members of the branch are asked to please volunteer to give 1-2 hours of their time to help man the stand. Contact Jennifer Carter.

MATABELELAND BRANCH**Evening Meetings**

Friday 4 May – Video Evening – Probably Puffins and Condors depending on the arrival of the video! Venue: 3 Bouchier Wray Ave. at 8.00 p.m., contact Barbara Cromar – Tel: 281983.

Friday 1 June – Botswana Birds – hopefully this will feature video footage and pictures of Botswanan birds including flamingos. We will also combine Audrey Msimanga's talk on the House Sparrow which had to be postponed from April. Venue 3A Holdengarde Ave. at 8.00 p.m. or contact Martin for details.

Monthly Outings

Sunday 20 May – Verreaux's Eagle Survey Outing – This will be a Branch outing to which all are invited. We intend to survey an appreciable number of territories by dividing into appropriate teams. This will also act as an introduction for new Survey members. We are then aiming to meet at the Yacht Club for tea and debriefing. Meet at Retreat Shopping Centre at 7.30 a.m., or contact the Chairman.

Sunday 17th June – Umgusa Nature Reserve – Education outing, contact Penny Feather for details.

Aisleby

Month end outings continue, but please contact the co-ordinator if you wish to attend – dates are:

Sunday 27 May Clive Townsley Saturday 30 June Penny Feather

Hillside Dams

The rambles continue, meet at the Lower Dam Car Park at 4.00 p.m. on Friday 29 June.

EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB

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

Outings

Sunday 27 May 2001	Dorowa Minerals	6.00 a.m.	A Christie	64197
Sunday 24 June 2001	Castle Beacon, Vumba	6.30 a.m.	B Holland	61369

Outings will set off from the Museum at the arranged time and, if organised in advance, transport and binoculars can be made available.

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 gconway@adtech.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 3rd Saturday of each month.

Contact Margaret Parrock ☎ 068-3644 for details.

REPORTS**NATIONAL****FROM THE EXECUTIVE OFFICER****Library**

We have been given a good computer programme by UNESCO. The library will be maintained to professional standards. Ms D Wakeling is putting our publications on disk – this is an enormous task. When complete, the library will be a most useful tool for members and researchers. Funds are being sought for a purpose built library as part of a research, conservation and education centre to be built.

Strategic Plan

The detailed plan of activities that was the outcome of the Strategic Planning Workshop held in September last year has been completed and submitted to Council for approval.

Website

This is being hosted by MWEB. At present the news on the site is mainly restricted to local activities as appearing in *Babbler*. Later this month we will be posting more information on the background to BirdLife Zimbabwe, progress reports on our projects and excerpts from *Honeyguide*.

The page can be visited at <http://site.mweb.co.zw/birdlife>

Sponsored Members Fund

There is a balance in the fund of \$2 625. Three new members have been fully sponsored (one adult and two juniors) and three senior members have received part sponsorship.

Income 3 700

Disbursements 1 075
2 625

This is a most worthwhile project and further donations would be most welcome. Please send to the Executive Officer, PO Box CY 161, Causeway

Building Fund

This now stands at \$1 115 196. The target is \$1 600 000. Receipts for the first 3 months of 2001 are

New donations received: thank you!

January	28900	SD Bean	\$1100
---------	-------	---------	--------

February	7 000	Lloyd Skinner	\$ 550
----------	-------	---------------	--------

March	<u>1600</u>	Ken Dixon	\$ 500
-------	-------------	-----------	--------

37 500

If you would like to contribute please complete the attached form.

World Birdwatch

This will be held on 6-7 October this year. The theme is “The Inspiration of Birds.” This year BLZ will be organising special events which will involve members, the public, schools and so on in these.

RSPB Institutional Support

We have pleasure in announcing that the RSPB have agreed to continue their support for the basic organisational costs of BirdLife Zimbabwe for the next financial year — April 2001 to March 2002. The grant has also increased from £15 000 to £20 000. It covers the administrative staff salaries and office running expenses.

Subscriptions

145 members have failed to renew this year — slightly more than usual at this time of the year. Personal reminders have been sent to all of those people and it is expected that 80 to 100 will respond. Subscriptions collected to date amount to \$238 619 as compared to \$163 118 at this time last year.

New Stocks of Merchandise

Fresh stocks of T-shirts have been received. These are available from the office and from Branch Committees. We still hold stocks of hats, caps, badges and jackets.

Digitalisation of Data Base

Following the Research and Conservation Workshop held in August 2000, Council has allocated funds for the digitalisation into a central data base of all the data collected by members over many years. Ian Riddell has started on the project and is presently working on the Special Species Survey. Funding is being sought from donors to expand and continue this very important work. Please would members continue to submit cards for the various projects? These should be sent to PO Box CY 161, Harare and not to the box numbers previously indicated.

EDUCATION PROJECT — from the Education Co-ordinator

It is always exciting to visit the Honde Valley and the latest trip by the Education Committee was no exception. We started first by running two quiz competitions at separate venues; the first was won by St. Colombas Primary and the second by Honde River Primary. The junior participants were better informed than their senior counterparts.

A successful workshop was held at Aberfoyle which brought in teachers from the tea plantations. Several schools had made a search for the “Wamba” bird (Anchieta’s Tchagra). The endless gravel roads and tracks winding through the tea bushes are favourite haunts for the Blue-spotted Wood-dove which is an easy target for boys with catapults and men driving tractors. A campaign to conserve them will be launched. Katiyo School has started a keen bird club and they are within a stone’s throw of a natural forest. They, together with the other targeted schools, were delighted to receive second-hand binoculars from the German Bird Club, field guides from a United Kingdom organisation and posters and calendars from BLZ members. Our trainer group saw Short-winged Cisticola and Red-winged Warbler while on a walk along the Pungwe with one of our trainers – the bird guide, Abasi Jana.

We are grateful for the Canadian support for the programme and look for similar funding for another IBA – Chimanimani – to continue our programme there as well as modest resources for the Harare schools close to valuable wetlands.

If anyone has a telescope for sale please contact me or the BLZ office. **Leslee Maasdorp**

ZIMBABWE CRANE WORKING GROUP NEWSAttachment Programme in Environmental Education

From 5 to 14 February I participated in an Attachment Programme in Environmental Education at the SADC Regional Environmental Education Centre in Howick, South Africa. The programme was participatory and centred on the ideas of active learning with reference to the needs of the participants. It comprised two phases, 1) a 4-day Environmental Educators’ Course and 2) the Attachment Programme. The Educators’ Course focused on “locating theory and resources within practical activities.” We examined and analysed how and why a diversity of environmental education materials, methods and techniques are used as they are. The attachment phase focused on curriculum/programme and resource development, and adult learning. During the last 5 days of the programme, participants worked on their individual projects, developing/producing programmes, resources or curricula. I produced an environmental education programme framework for community-based crane and habitat conservation in Zimbabwe, which is a working document. My goal for participating in the Environmental Education Attachment Programme was to acquire knowledge and skills on environmental education methods, techniques and processes so that I can adapt and apply them in my own work context. **Friday Maozeka**

MASHONALAND BRANCH**REPORTS**MUKUVISI WOODLANDS Report 2000

At the Branch AGM John Shaw presented his report for 2000:

Only 11 visits took place during the year as the January visit had been cancelled because of rain. A total of 156 people attended the outings compared with 150 people for 11 outings in 1999. 128 different species of birds were recorded compared with 134 in 1999 and 130 in 1998.

Highlights during the year were: in March an African Cuckoo Hawk – a bird seen fairly regularly in the Woodland – seemed to keep appearing just in front of the group for part of the walk and certainly did not seem to be too worried by the presence of people. At least two Eurasian Hobby and a White Stork were perched on top of a gum tree which was an unusual sighting for most. In April an unusually confiding pair of Miombo Rock-thrush was seen and the sight of a Black Sparrowhawk being pursued by two Pied Crow was an exciting event. During the year good mixed bird parties had been seen which included Miombo Rock-thrush and Miombo Tit and on one occasion the sight of a White-browed Scrub-robin bathing in rain water held in an upturned cactus plant was a reminder of how quick some birds are to take advantage of very temporary food or water supplies. In July, a lone Meyer's Parrot had been seen by John Sievi which was his first record for thirteen months. He had also seen a pair of Giant Kingfisher. At the September outing the baubinia trees at the Wilmington Park end of the footbridge were in full flower attracting large numbers of Copper Sunbirds and Amethyst Sunbirds, a *Scotia* was also in flower and was full of feeding Amethyst Sunbirds and Miombo Double-collared Sunbirds. Further upstream a fig tree which was covered in fruit held Crested Barbet, Black-collared Barbet and Whyte's Barbets, Miombo Blue-eared Starlings, African Yellow White-eye and Dark-capped Bulbul. In October five Red-backed Mannikins were seen, this being the first sighting of the species since 1987. During the November walk a Steppe Buzzard was seen – an irregular visitor to the Woodland. In December two new birds were added to the list with sightings of Common Swift and a Cuckoo Finch.

John Shaw has led the outings to the Woodland for 19 consecutive years and feels that he would like a replacement to be found. Well done John for a wonderful contribution to birds and birding. **Di Rushforth**

LAKE CHIVERO BIRD SANCTUARY Report for 2000

Richard Dennison presented his report at the AGM:

Significant rainfall had been recorded in every month except July 2000 in Harare so the situation was probably similar at Lake Chivero. Therefore, it was an exceptionally wet year with the vegetation cover being good. The total number of species recorded was 192 – a bit lower than the previous 2 years. However, the total number of species recorded since 1992 rose by 8 to 285.

Highlights were undoubtedly the 8 new species recorded – Rufous-bellied Heron, Marsh Owl, White-rumped Swift, Half-collared Kingfisher, Brown-backed Honeybird, Marico Sunbird, Thick-billed Weaver and Cuckoo Finch. Other highlights: Black Heron, Little Bittern, Saddle-billed Stork, Hottentot Teal, African Purple Swamphen and Allen's Gallinules, Water Thick-knee, White-backed Vulture, European Honey-buzzard, 8 African Fish-eagle, Western Marsh-harrier, African Marsh-harrier, Osprey, Spotted Eagle-owl, Green-backed Honeybird, c.600 Barn Swallows (November 1999), White-breasted Cuckooshrike, Southern Hylia, Pale Flycatcher.

Dr P Marett — Thursday 15 February 2001

Once again we were treated to a quality slide show further demonstrating Philippa's artistic skill as a photographer. She had decided that we needed cheering up and to be reminded that there are still wonderful places to visit in Zimbabwe.

We were taken on a pictorial tour of special places from the Zambezi Valley – Kariba and Chikwenya – to Chizarira and the Mucheni Gorge with its spectacular views, to Nyanga and the Nyamziwa Road area where Philippa had captured the magnificence of the flush of new leaves of the Msasas.

We shared Philippa's adventure by raft from the Victoria Falls to Deka Mouth which was extremely hard work with plenty of white water but beautiful scenery.

Views from Eagle's Crag at Mavuradonha and the contrasting rock formations of the Chimanimani covered with different colours of lichen looking as though they had been painted. Further south to the Matobo Hills and north again to Ngomakurira at Domboshawa an area of awesome views and so close to Harare. Speaking of Harare it still is a beautiful sunshine city when viewed from above. Philippa showed us lovely pictures of the avenues lined with Jacarandas. Thank you very much Philippa for giving us your time and sharing your memories with us. **Di Rushforth**

IMBWA Sewerage Ponds — Sunday 25 February 2001

After several weeks of rain we were apprehensive that the outing would have to be cancelled. It is about 6 years since I last visited this venue, although one of the BirdLife teams competing in the annual Birdwatch competition found some good birding there in October 2000. Fortunately, for the 9 of us, both the rain and the war vets stayed away, although the cloudy conditions did reduce visibility.

The numbers and variety of duck were much reduced compared to previous visits which had taken place in the dry season. However, we did manage to see large numbers of waders and ibises when they were put up from the irrigated pastures. Highlights included 10 White Stork, 100 African Sacred Ibis and 30 Glossy Ibises, 5 Hottentot Teal, 200 Amur Falcon, 100 African Jacana, 5 Marsh Sandpiper, 200 Ruff, 10 Black-winged Stilt, 2 Black Coucal, 1 Brown-throated Martin, 8 Sedge Warbler, 20 Magpie Shrike and 1 Cuckoo Finch. The total species count was 75. **Richard Dennison**

James Varden — Thursday 15 March 2001

About 40 members braved another wet night to be rewarded with an extremely interesting and excellent slide presentation on Mana Pools by James Varden, who is in his tenth safari season in the area. We saw what effects good and bad – the opening of Kariba’s flood gates (2½ at present) has on the environment. Previous small, canoe-negotiated channels, full of duck weed and water hyacinth are now a wide river – nesting and feeding sites, trees, embankments and some roads being either submerged or washed away, with Little Egret, waders and Southern Carmine Bee-eaters being the birds worst affected. We were urged to be aware of our surroundings when birding – trees and cacti have differing flowering times and, on seeing frogs, agama lizards, caterpillars, moths, butterflies, etc., we should try mentally to place them in the food chain and link them to their predators which are likely to be nearby. Of interest, to avoid being ‘noshed’, the female Diadem butterfly mimics the African Monarch, leaving her male counterpart to fend for himself! We were shown the beauty of the mopani woodlands which shed their leaves in early October, acquiring a new mantle by the end of it. During the leafless, sap-rising period there are numerous insects, and a type of caterpillar covers entire acacias with webs of silk extending to the ground (where they bury themselves; the eggs hatching out at the onset of the rains), attracting many birds such as honeyguides, rollers, orioles and shrikes. The mopani pans, having water lilies and oxygen-bearing plants, attract herons and flufftails, with ducks breeding on them from April to June. Water Hyacinth can cover and completely kill all life in the acacia pans despite elephant, hippo and baboon eating large quantities as they do not destroy the bulbs. Other birds shown were a Black-chested Snake-eagle, Crowned Lapwing, Southern Ground-hornbill, Great White Pelican, White-fronted Bee-eater, African Openbill (large flocks to be seen mid-year) and Marabou Stork – and a lioness stalking an Egyptian Goose! Among his anecdotes James mentioned that: baboons have been witnessed catching egrets; Egyptian Goose are very aggressive birds, having many fights and that, presumably for safety, they frequently drive their chicks among pods of hippos; a confrontation between Verreaux’s Eagle-owls and Wahlberg’s Eagles ended with the latter as clear winners; groups of stationary Black-headed Heron have been seen all gazing up at the sun; and Yellow-billed Stork chicks are very submissive towards their adults to the extent of risking their lives by remaining in the open at night – they apparently also take up to six years to fully mature. Apart from the elephant and hippo, impala also abound, plus a healthy wild dog population, kudu, warthog, water buck, eland (providing good pickings for Red-billed Oxpeckers) buffalo, attended by egrets and Wattled Starlings and James feels that the area is not fully utilised by birders – but beware the Yellow-billed Kites while enjoying lunch! He had sneaked in a few “trick” slides to test us – e.g. a Skimmer chick, a Cardinal Quelea and – one which would have delighted Dr Peter Mundy – griffons at a carcass on the Serengeti Plains!

To end on a sobering note, very grave concern is being expressed on the present exceptionally high water levels of both Kariba and Cabora Bassa dams. The latter apparently has all of its flood gates open but the inflow is still greater than the outflow. It would appear to me that “something’s gotta give” soon – just let’s hope it is not the walls! **Rita Mills**

MATABELELAND

From the Chairman

The past month has seen a considerable change in rainfall and, from a potentially disastrous season with the prospect of drought, we have now moved into a surplus. Locally, HILLSIDE Dams have spilt for the second year in a row with the surrounding bush looking really attractive; birds continue to hold our interest with usually something out of the ordinary each month and generally a tally of over 50 species. Support has continued to range from excellent to poor, with a very small number participating in the month end outing to Aisleby. In contrast, the Verreaux’s Eagle meeting was well supported and I hope this will continue throughout the year, despite fuel and other problems.

Following the Branch AGM in February we have a number of changes on the Committee and would like to thank Anne Perry for all her hard work in her role as Treasurer over the past eight years and we welcome Peter Tucker, who takes over her role. **Martin Smith**

HILLSIDE Dams – Friday 26 January 2001

The first monthly outing of the year was attended by a total of five, which made for a pleasurable cohesive unit with much to be seen and discussed. We began at the Lower Dam and the afternoon light was ideal for picking out the colours on some attractive looking European Bee-eaters – they really were golden-backed. Barbets, as always, were well represented with four species present and we had an excellent view of an Acacia Pied Barbet entering a hole. Walking upstream – and the most significant feature of this months outing were the trees – with *Pappea capensis* in heavy bloom, each tree humming with the sound of foraging bees. *Acacia karroo* were spectacular, each tree being a mass of yellow blossom attractively picked out against a clear, blue sky. Birdlife was concentrated in the mixed bush to the north of the watercourse with waxbills, canaries and cisticola to puzzle over and identify. We all had good views of a Spotted Flycatcher and a young Chin-spot Batis with a parent – its begging call attracting our attention. Overhead, we were lucky to see an immature African Fish-eagle circling the Upper Dam, whilst a Steppe Buzzard took longer to identify – wing markings being harder to see.

We finished our ramble with a total of 54 species and despite the impending drought found the dams most attractive and suitably rewarding. **Martin Smith**

AISLEBY — Sunday 26 February 2001

This proved to be one of our wettest outings to the property ever, with 50mm of early morning rain flooding the pastures and streams. Access to the farm had to be via Sauerstown, with the small creek on the Falls Road in full spate covering the lower level bridge by at least half a metre. Waders and even ducks had moved onto the flooded pastures and it was extraordinary to drive along the tar road pursuing Kittlitz's Plover and Marsh Sandpiper, which ran along in front of the vehicle. Out in the pasture Hottentot Teal and Red-billed Teal foraged amongst the grassy tussocks, whilst on the deeper water a small group of Southern Pochard were present – a species normally associated with the main dam. The flooded shallows held plenty of interest with a good variety of Ruff's and Reeves to puzzle over and even a Black Heron, whose wing canopy act seemed rather misplaced in the middle of the field! Overhead, a Black-chested Snake-eagle hunted and then descended parachute style causing momentary panic amongst the waders. Most flew forming a tightly knitted swirl of rapidly beating wings, this action heralded the arrival of a second raptor in the form of a Peregrine Falcon, which stooped on a lone wader and narrowly missed its breakfast. This clearance act effectively removed most of the waders and ducks from the fields, so we moved on to the Acacia at the head of the dam. Here, we were rewarded by a variety of warblers, including the harsh grating call of the Great Reed-warbler. The dam was over 100% full and had a noticeable current passing through it which made birding rather frustrating with all sorts of calls emerging from the thick, fringing vegetation. Moving on to the dam wall and causeway revealed a wonderful torrent of brown, muddy water hurtling downstream, making the north of the property totally inaccessible. The Ibis Dam and the lands would have to wait for a drier day. Finally we finished with a brown raptor puzzle with a mixed group of eagles and buzzards soaring overhead – Steppe Buzzards and Steppe Eagles were added to the list.

Martin Smith

TSHABALALA

The mid-month outing took place after our first bout of drought-breaking rain and consequently the bush was looking delightfully green, although the grass had yet to grow to head height. A small group of us joined Llewellyn and his wife for their last visit to the property prior to departing for England. Over the past year Llewellyn had identified at least 13 different families of Magpie Shrike and followed their breeding success. He had confined the study of the area to the north of the Umganin River, which could easily be covered on foot within a morning. We followed this circuit and were introduced to a number of shrike families. Following the extremely hot and dry spell in January, all had stopped breeding although some still had dependent fledglings. Llewellyn pointed out their begging call, which was very characteristic and carried a considerable distance. The fledglings were almost fully grown, although slightly smaller and browner than the adults. Shrikes were obviously the focal point of the outing, but Tshabalala always has plenty to offer and we spent an appreciable amount of time watching Bearded Woodpeckers foraging within the trees along the watercourse. In the tall grass Croaking Cisticola called strongly and from underfoot both a Kurrichane Buttonquail and a Harlequin Quail were flushed.

Willow Warblers were plentiful and, amongst the taller watercourse trees, an Icterine Warbler was sighted, this species not being over-common within the Bulawayo area. Our circuit then took us along the northern edge of the property with its thicker bush and, amongst a variety of species present, a White-throated Robin-chat was noticeable by its call and a number of Neddicky were also heard and added to the list. The last part of our route took us across the open area, which had been cleared of Acacia the previous year leaving a number of piles of branches, which were ideal for Red-backed Shrike and also in use by a number of cuckoos - Diderick Cuckoo and Jacobin Cuckoo being recorded. Our tally for the morning was just over 70 species, most of which were “dry-land” species with no waders and only one raptor on the list. **Martin Smith**

EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB

Leopard Rock VUMBA – Sunday 25 March 2001

A good showing of birders (14) joined together to visit Leopard Rock Hotel on Sunday, 25 March. This hotel embraces a policy of utilising indigenous flora on the golf course and gardens; all the pine plantations were removed to extend and improve the course 10 years ago and were replaced with representatives of the Vumba vegetation. Walkers can enjoy an educational experience as many of the trees are labelled. This philosophy serves also to improve conditions for local bird populations, butterflies etc., so while staying at the hotel tourists can learn a lot about the natural history of the Vumba. Although it was fairly wet in Mutare, we had great hopes for good weather on the mountain. Early on the mist seemed well set and it looked as if we would be doing most of the bird identification by call, but at around 9:00 a.m. the visibility improved. We slowly walked up the tar road and found a bird party which included Stripe-cheeked Greenbul and Dark-capped Bulbuls, Red-winged Starling, African Yellow White-eye, an unidentified honeyguide, a pair of Black Cuckooshrike, Singing Cisticola, Bronze Mannikin, Willow Warbler and Cardinal Woodpecker.

We then wandered along the golf course, hugging the forest at the base of Chikwanyaremba and soon had listed Chirinda Apalis, White-tailed Crested Flycatcher, Red-faced Crimsonwing, White-eared Barbet, Livingstone’s Turaco, African Crowned Eagle and Silvery-cheeked Hornbill.

The mist thickened and sent us down to the clubhouse for a hearty breakfast, where suddenly the sun won the day. The very beautiful golf course is guarded by two African Fish-eagles and they seemed elated by the good weather. We were able to add White-breasted Cormorant, Malachite Sunbird, Common Sandpiper and African Pied Wagtail (over coffee) to our list.

The second part of our walk saw us visiting the proposed new game park and we all had a good sighting of Black Sparrowhawk, African Olive-pigeon, Eastern Saw-wing and Yellow-throated Longclaw. At about 11:30 we called it a day and headed for the hotel balcony for an early lunch. Our full list was 58 species, justifying the area as a good birding destination. Our thanks go to the management of Leopard Rock for allowing us to visit this unique spot. **Jane Clegg**

TAIL FEATHERS

Extreme Birding

To distract ourselves from the sadness of being away from family over the holidays, we took an eight-day break in the Cape Town, South Africa area. Inspired by an article in *Honeyguide*, we decided to dedicate five of the eight days to viewing birds found only in South Africa. Three of the five days were just your standard bird watching, during which we recorded about 40 birds we had never seen before in some of the most spectacular settings imaginable. One of the other days, however, involved the pursuit of the elusive Victorin’s Warbler – a tiny bird inhabiting “thickets” according to our bird book and our bird guide. Now a South African’s idea of a “thicket” most Americans would describe as “the mother of all sticker bushes” and the thing about Victorin’s Warblers is that they don’t come out of the “thickets”. You have to go in after them. To enhance your chances of success your guide plays a tape of the Victorin’s Warbler’s calls. In theory, this causes the little guy to move excitedly about within the “thicket”. Here is how it really works. You get down on all fours and crawl into the “thicket”. Your guide plays the tape. The warbler responds but then retreats further into the “thicket”. Your guide urges you to crawl even further into the “thicket”. The warbler who, until then has been answering the tape, goes silent. You crawl laterally for ten more feet, play the tape again, and note that the warbler is now responding from where you just came from. After twenty more minutes of antics to outsmart the

bird, during which every imaginable type of grass and bush sticker has penetrated your shirt, jeans, socks, and eventually your underwear, you declare defeat and retire to pick the thorns out of the most sensitive areas of your body. Then you debate the ethics of declaring the Victorin's a "life bird" just because you heard it.

The final day was devoted to a pelagic tour – to see birds of the sea rarely or never visible from land. At 7.00 a.m. 17 birders and four guides boarded the 50 foot retired Navy tender which was to take us 30 miles out in the shipping and fishing lanes south of Cape Town. We were slightly nervous, having seen a ship wreck map at our hotel detailing at least 800 much bigger ships that had gone down in that general area during the 20th Century alone. However, no one else seemed at all concerned – probably not being map-readers themselves – until it was noticed that all four guides were donning wet suits. Anyhow, we travelled uneventfully from Simonstown harbour to just beyond the Cape of Good Hope. There the currents of the Atlantic meet those of the Indian Ocean and try to force their way past each other. Not wishing to exaggerate, let us be the first to admit that this does not result in The Perfect Storm. In fact, on our day, it didn't generate a storm at all, just normal, randomly moving 20 foot waves every ten seconds or so. Hence for the next two and a half hours as we went looking for trawlers and the birds attracted to them we bounced, bobbed, and soared to the sounds of the keel cracking and the propeller searching for water as we crested the waves. The instructions we had received earlier, never to move about without holding on, were rigorously obeyed. In fact, no one dared move at all except for last second lunges to the spot reserved for those needing to throw up. And as for holding on, it was impossible to work up the courage even to reach for a tissue to clean one's glasses. Any attempt to "go below" to retrieve the sun block left there on boarding was simply out of the question, even when one realised how badly he/she was burning. Finally, however, we were rewarded by the sight of a trawler completely surrounded by thousands of albatrosses, skuas, petrels, gannets, Arctic Terns and Antarctic Terns. So we slowed and observed the birds, sometimes from a vantage point higher than the mast of the trawler when it was in the trough between waves, sometimes from a point beneath their water line when we were in the trough. At this point the wet-suited guides sprang into action excitedly pointing out each species and sub-species as they flew past. Of course, they were flying past in the company of thousands of their fellows, mixing indiscriminately. To track any given bird required frantic pivoting of the head while hanging on to the rail with at least one hand – each such manoeuvre rewarded by a several second view of the bird and another wave of nausea. And so it went for an hour or so during which we recorded 21 "life birds" before undergoing the two and a half-hour journey back.

Would we do it again? Absolutely, but only when a thousand birders get together and rent an ocean liner! **Alan Keller**

More sightings at Rocara Park. LAKE CHIVERO QDS 1730D4 TR 672214

The writer was so impressed with a bird party seen in the afternoon of 8 February 2001 – not so much by numbers seen but the variety. It must be admitted that the attraction of bird baths and seed trays persuaded some species to stay longer in one area than normal but nevertheless the list to my way of thinking is impressive. The birds recorded are as follows:

African Paradise-flycatcher and Southern Black Flycatchers, White-breasted Cuckooshrike and Black Cuckooshrikes, Dark-capped Bulbul, Red-headed Weaver, Golden Weaver, Village Weaver and Southern Masked-weavers, Miombo Blue-eared Starling, Laughing Dove, Blue Waxbill, Bronze Mannikin, African Yellow White-eye, Southern Grey-headed Sparrow and Yellow-throated Petronias, Cardinal Woodpecker, Bar-throated Apalis, Willow Warbler, Southern Black Tit, Red-billed Firefinch, Common Scimitarbill, Spotted Creeper, Miombo Double-collared Sunbird. A total of 24 species, not a lot, but an interesting cross section of the birds to be found in the miombo woodlands of Rocara Park.

In January 2001 a family of 6 Arrow-marked Babblers were seen to be constructing a nest 2 metres above the ground in an exotic thorn creeper running along a wire mesh fence. Regularly every morning this nest building was "checked out" by a pair of Levillant's Cuckoo, much to the annoyance of the Babblers. This nest was eventually abandoned.

On the weekend of 10 and 11 March 2001 a family of Arrow-marked Babblers (possibly the same family) were seen to be building a nest approximately 90 metres from the previous site. This nest was being built on top of an old nest in a fork of a Msasa tree. On the 19 March 2001 a babbler was seen to be sitting on the nest presumably on eggs as the bird was seen on and off throughout the day. Two interesting points come out of this story. Firstly did the babblers abandon the first nest and wait for the cuckoos to depart the area (which they have done) before building again or was the sequence of events coincidental? Secondly, the

current nest is between 9 and 10 metres above the ground (nowhere near any flood lands) and is quite conspicuous to anyone looking up. *Roberts'* gives the nest figures as being 0.5 to 3.5 metres above ground. However, to quote Gary Stafford of Kuimba Shiri, "birds don't read books." As a matter of interest has anyone else come across a babbler's nest so high off the ground? **Mike Marriott**

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

More responses about the Garden Bird Survey

I just wanted to say how much I agree with Jacko Williams and her comments about the cessation of the Garden Bird Survey. To have an aim in one's birding is a great thing – and makes one work harder at it with purpose. There is a satisfaction of working hard to identify a new bird, e.g. in February I had an Olive Sunbird and a Yellow-bellied Eremomela – both new to this garden and also in February I was still hearing African Emerald Cuckoo and Gorgeous Bush-shrike – and an Amur Falcon also flew overhead. I won't be so good now that I do not have to send my reports into you!! No compulsion to do a circuit of the garden 3 x a day! **Gill Zambra**

I couldn't agree more with Jacko Williams' letter in the No. 41 *Babbler*.

My garden of 6 000 acres has welcomed so many nice people for the spring count over the years that my feathered friends refuse to give up, and being now old and infirm, I dare not risk offending them. In any case, for romantic purposes, I need to welcome all those beautiful ladies with exciting names like Di, Penny, Engela, Margaret, Nome, Julia, Nicky, Isabelle, Tracey and Jacko. To a lesser extent, I must also give some credit to the males with equally impressive names like Rockingham-Gill, Gavin, Martin, Peter, Kevin and Bernard. I also have four daughters threatening to have me disposed of. Please reconsider. The surveys help provide such a strong bond between all of us. **Keith Harvey**

Pensioners' category for subscriptions

I heard rumours that the BLZ had decided to do something to help members who are finding the constantly increasing costs of everything hard to cope with. Now I read in *Babbler* that such people are invited to "write to the Executive Officer, giving your reasons".

I wonder if I am the only member who considers the Committee's way of dealing with this matter to be patronising. When I find I can no longer afford the normal subscription I shall resign from BLZ. I shall certainly not beg to be considered for special treatment.

A better way to deal with this problem would be to make a special category of membership with a reduced subscription for persons who reach a certain age (say 70) and who have been members of OAZ/BLZ for a certain length of time (say 5 years). No doubt the Committee will argue that some people who would qualify under such rules would be able and willing to pay a full subscription. Such fortunate people might very well be willing to make a donation to supplement the 'pensioners' subscription. I believe most of us are keen enough to see BLZ continue and succeed in all its worthy objects that we would not begrudge the full subscription if it was within our means. Perhaps the matter needs re-thinking and possibly discussing at the AGM. **Tony Curtis**

NOTICEBOARD

For Sale — *The Birds of Zimbabwe* by Michael P Stuart Irwin and binoculars

A signed copy of *The Birds of Zimbabwe* is offered for sale at \$2 000 as well as a pair of binoculars at \$7 000. They are Sunagor Super Zoom 10 x 40 x 50 with long focus, in a case. These are ideal for observing raptors or water birds. Please contact Nancy Irwin – telephone 882957.

Books and bird sound tapes for sale

<i>SASOL Birds of Southern Africa</i>	\$200
<i>Field Guide o the Birds of Southern Africa</i> (Ian Sinclair)	\$200
Carrying case	\$ 50
3 cassette tapes — Southern African Bird Calls (Len Gillard)	\$150
SASOL "Bird Whiz" (educational and fun card game)	\$200
Telephone: Mrs V Siebert 747979 (Harare)– after 1 May 2001.	

Free accommodation offered in the Chipinge area

Peter Caldwell-Barr is offering free accommodation to anyone who would like a break as well as the opportunity to do some birding in the Chipinge area. He could also possibly assist by making available for purchase up to 100 litres of petrol or diesel to his guests. Weekends would be most convenient with people arriving on a Friday afternoon. The offer of accommodation is for couples or groups of four who would be guests in his home. Larger groups could possibly take advantage of 3 guest houses on the Estate at very reasonable rates, children being half price. Should anyone wish to avail themselves of this generous offer, Peter would be happy to take them to the best birding spots in the area. One of the recommended places is Mapari Ranch which is an hour's drive from Chipinge, is situated in the extreme north-eastern corner of the Save conservancy and free from problems. Good birding can be had there with specials being a large population of Collared Palm-thrush, Three-banded Courser, Mottled Spinetail, Racquet-tailed Roller, Green Sandpiper, Thrush Nightingale as well as the possibility of seeing Pel's Fishing-owl which has been heard on the river. In the immediate Chipinge area Miombo woodland offers the normal specials but in particular frequent sightings of Rufous-bellied Tit and occasionally Thick-billed Cuckoo. Peter can be contacted on telephone (027) 4441/2 or Fax (027) 2908

BirdFest 2001

Please be advised that BirdFest 2001 which was to be held in Cairns, Tropical North Queensland, Australia from 14 - 19 October 2001 has now been postponed until August 2002. We will be in contact again when the new dates have been confirmed. All updates will be posted to the conference website at www.birdfest.net

New Members

We welcome:

G S Amyot	Glen & Patsy Brunwin	Frances Clark	W Davis
Chrissie Hassell	Mark Hatfield	Mr & Mrs Hobbs	Jane Hunt
Mr & Mrs Lock	Ms Gail Meyers	Albert & Aileen Potgieter	Sean Quinlan
M Rionda	D Simpson	Kathie Smith	Chris Tomlinson

The Peregrine Fund

Sponsored Members

Trust Manyuni Tatenda Nhapi Stanslas Chizipi

Challenge to birders – Southern vs. Northern Grey-headed Sparrow

Michael Irwin has challenged members of BirdLife Zimbabwe to try to determine which sparrow is which and what do we have where. In the next issue of *Honeyguide* is a paper on the spread of the Southern Grey-headed Sparrow *Passer diffusus* in Mashonaland and another on the occurrence of the Northern Grey-headed Sparrow *Passer griseus* in north-western Zimbabwe. It is also a new species for southern Africa.

The ecological differences seem to be well-marked but to distinguish between one and the other is very tricky. The northern bird, however, is chunkier, usually darker and with a heavier black bill which it retains throughout the year whereas the southern bird loses the black bill when it is not breeding in the drier months. The two birds occur together in southern Zambia where there is an overlap but they are segregated ecologically, the southern being a bush bird and the northern a commensal of man like the House Sparrow. It is not surprising therefore that the northern one should have reached Zimbabwe. However, it is very strongly suspected by Michael Irwin that it has arrived in Harare unseen and this is largely what happened with the southern bird as nobody thought these dull little sparrows particularly interesting! Anyway, it is over to all of us.

Solar eclipse gathering at Mukuvisi Woodland

Wildlife & Environment Zimbabwe are hosting a gathering at the Mukuvisi Woodland on 21 June 2001. There will be talks, discussions and observations of birds and mammals during the solar eclipse. Please contact Ann Taylor for more information – Harare 732440.