

# BABBLER

## BirdLife Zimbabwe

A PARTNER DESIGNATE OF BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL

ISSUE #43 – JULY/AUGUST 2001

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### 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 741775 (home) or at the office 490208

#### Addresses:

P O Box CY 161, Causeway  
[birds@zol.co.zw](mailto: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](mailto:dirushft@zambezi.net)

[adrienne@mweb.co.zw](mailto:adrienne@mweb.co.zw)

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### ACTIVITIES

#### MASHONALAND BRANCH

##### Regular outings

Mukuvisi Woodlands: Sundays, 1 July and 5 August, 2001. Meet at the Paget Road entrance at 7.00 a.m. There will be a vehicle guard in attendance.

Of great concern now is the security of persons walking in the woodlands. John and Ann Sievi were brutally attacked recently whilst they were walking and we wish them both a speedy recovery. It is not recommended therefore that people walk alone in the woodland. Try to make up a group at least six people. Editor

Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary: Sundays, 8 July and 12 August 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

21 July 2001: Crundall Brothers, Glen Forest. Meet at 2.00 p.m. at Wingate Golf Club, Teviotdale Road. Bring chairs and refreshments.

18 August 2001: Harava Dam, Seke Rd. Meet at Harare Main Post Office, Julius Nyerere Rd at 2.00 p.m. Cars will be driven to [?]cure area after which transport can be shared. Bring chairs and refreshments.

**Sunday outings**

29 July 2001: Double Ro Ranch, Kariba Road (Nyabira area). There is a vulture restaurant on the farm. Meet at 7.00 a.m. at 2 Helena Road, Marlborough where cars can be safely parked and transport shared. Bring chairs and refreshments.

26 August 2001: Kutsaga Research Station, Twentydals Road area. Meet at 7.00 a.m. at the offices of BirdLife Zimbabwe, 35 Clyde Road, Eastlea where cars can be parked and transport shared. Bring chairs and refreshments.

**Thursday evening meetings**

19 July 2001: Dick Pitman from Zambezi Society will give an illustrated talk.

16 August 2001: Richard Macdonald will talk about the interesting subject of spiders.

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.

**Thursday outings to Marlborough Vlei**

These are on the second and fourth Thursdays of each month. Meet at 4.30 p.m. Directions: drive down to the very bottom of Princess Margaret Road, turn left and continue until the new houses begin. Parking is in a cul-de-sac where a caretaker lives in a fenced off area. As Ian's transport is a bicycle, he needs to be told whether people intend visiting the vlei. If he doesn't hear from you, he won't be there. Telephone Ian on 339716, or E-mail [gemsaf@mango.zw](mailto:gemsaf@mango.zw) Dates: 12 and 26 July, 9 and 23 August.

**Bookings for Rifa weekend 28 September to 1 October 2001**

There are still places available for the weekend at Rifa Camp. Please complete the booking slip included.

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**MATABELELAND BRANCH****Evening Meetings**

Friday 29 June & Friday 27 July – Hillside Dams Ramble. Please note we are combining the winter meetings with the Hillside Rambles. Meet at the Lower Dam Car Park at 4.00 p.m. or contact Martin.

**Monthly Outings**

Sunday 15 July – Aisleby Waterfowl Count – We hope to be waterborne for this count, which will make it easier to record totals on the Umgusa Dam. We also require "bodies" to cover the smaller dams, pastures and lands so please do come and help. Meet at the Boom at 7.30 a.m. or contact the Chairman.

Sunday 22 July – Fort Rixon Dam Waterfowl Count. This dam always manages to produce a number of surprises and is good for snakes and hippos, a sleepy, rope-like python being seen at the last winter count. This will be an all day outing and those interested should contact Penny Feather.

Sunday 19 August – Verreaux's Eagle Outing – Following on from the May outing we intend to make this a combined effort and are planning a similar event. Meet at Retreat or do your own "thing", followed by a debriefing session at the Yacht Club to finish. Meet at Retreat at 8.00 a.m. or contact Martin.

**Aisleby**

Sunday 15 July – mid-month count. Meet at the boom at 7.30 a.m. or contact Martin.

Saturday 25 August – Meet at the boom at 7.30 a.m. or contact Julia.

**Hillside Dams** – our month end rambles continue. Meet at the Lower Dam Car Park at 4.00 p.m. on the last Friday of every month, forthcoming dates being: 27 July and 24 August.

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**EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB**

Contacts: Ken Dixon ☎ 020-658 19

Jane Clegg ☎ 020-65610

**Outings**

Sunday 29 July 2001 Burma Valley 6.30 a.m. B Holland 61369

Sunday 26 August 2001 Odzi (Evans) 6.30 a.m. J Clegg 65610

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](mailto:mitchell@zimweb.co.zw)

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

**ACTIVITIES**

Rydings School Interpretative Centre

Walks are conducted on the first Saturday of each month at 6.30 a.m.

Other outings

To be arranged.

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**MIDLANDS BRANCH**

Co-ordinator: Gavin Conway ☎ 054-24058 (home) 24666 (work) e-mail [gconway@adtech.co.zw](mailto: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 am. on the 3rd Saturday of each month. Contact Margaret Parrock ☎ 068-3644 for details.

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**REPORTS****NATIONAL****AGM OF BIRDLIFE ZIMBABWE HELD AT ECHO PARK ON 21 APRIL 2001**

Despite fuel problems 28 people attended the AGM. The new council is:

President	David Gray	Vice-President	Dave Sheehan
Secretary	Di Rushforth	Treasurer	Peter Lawrence
Member	Rolf Chenaux-Repond	Member	Kevin Barry
Education Committee	Leslee Maasdorp	Public Relations	Terry Fallon
Research & Conservation	Ken Wilson	Publications	Michael Irwin

**Branch representatives**

Mashonaland	Jennifer Carter	Matabeleland	Martin Smith
Midlands	Jon Barry	Eastern Districts	Ken Dixon
Karoi	Kevin Mitchell		

**Resolutions which were adopted at the meeting:**

The following changes to the Constitution were approved:

Section 6(a)(iv) by the addition of the words “and students below the age of 30 years attending recognised educational institutions.” after the word “members.”

Section 6(c) by the deletion of the words “Notice of any amendment shall be communicated to all members not later than THREE (3) months prior to such amendment becoming effective.”

Section 9(a) by the deletion of the words and numbers “TWELVE (12)” and the substitution of the words and numbers “FIFTEEN (15)” therefore.

Section 9(e) by the deletion of the words and numbers “FOUR (4)” and the substitution of the words and numbers “FIVE (5)” therefore.

Section 12(g) by the deletion of the words and numbers “FIFTEEN (15)” and the substitution of the words and numbers “TWENTY (20)” therefore.

### Pensioners' subscription rate

It was agreed at the meeting that, with effect from 2002, a pensioners' rate of subscription be introduced whereby those members who are at least 70 years of age and who have been members of BirdLife Zimbabwe for at least 10 years be given the option of paying one third of the cost of the ordinary subscription.

## SUMMARY OF PRESIDENT'S REPORT TO THE AGM

### Administration

In April 2000, John Paxton was appointed BirdLife Zimbabwe's Executive Officer and Ms Alice Chamunorwa joined as Administrative Assistant. Other members of staff are Friday Maozeka (Crane Working Group), Ian Riddell (Database Project) and Anthony Cizek who was employed from August to December 2000 (Public Relations and Research). During that period Anthony had been requested by the Environmental Liaison Forum (ELF) to prepare a report on the impact of the Land Reform Programme on the environment. Ms Sue Childes (Project Officer) was funded by RSPB.

The BLZ office which had started off in John Paxton's home relocated to the Mukuvisi Woodland office complex in June and in July moved to the premises at 35 Clyde Road, Eastlea. A grant to purchase the house and land has been obtained from a BirdLife Partner – Vogelbescherming Nederland. Michael Irwin has loaned BLZ some superb bird paintings which have brightened up the offices. In addition, Michael and Nancy Irwin have kindly donated a beautiful oak bookcase.

### Research and conservation

Anthony Cizek, who had been elected to Council as Chairman of the Research and Conservation Committee in 2000, resigned during the year but in his term of office he set up a new Rarities Committee and organised the very successful sponsored Birdwatch 2000.

### Publications

In 2000, two issues of *Honeyguide* and six *Babbler* had been published.

### Education and extension

Mrs Leslee Maasdorp and her Committee continued to do a sterling job with the Bird Awareness Programme in schools. There were now 53 schools involved.

### Projects

Ms Sue Chides was thanked for her tremendous input towards projects being run.

Mrs Maasdorp and Mr Cizek had been instrumental in setting up a working group to conserve the Marlborough Vlei and proposals had been submitted to the Municipality for a lease over the land.

### Workshops

Two workshops were held during the year – a Research and Conservation Workshop in August at Lake Chivero and in September a Strategic Planning Workshop at Seldomseen, Bvumba.

### Public Relations

Mashonaland Branch had manned stands at the Environmental Education Expo and the Garden Expo. A stall had been set up at St John's College Spring Fair where a number of lapsed memberships had been renewed as well as new members enrolled. Promotional items had been sold at the Fair.

Recently Mr Terry Fallon had volunteered his services to run the Public Relations and Fund Raising Committee.

### Branches

Branches continued to run various projects. Matabeleland – the Verreaux's Eagle Survey; Midlands – the monitoring of the Black Stork population and Eastern Districts Birds Club – a Garden Bird Survey. Karoi Bird Club's activities had been hampered by the farm invasions.

Thanks

Grateful thanks were extended to Graham Carter for the many hours he had devoted to setting up a number of computer programmes and to Mr Lex Ogilvie who had audited and produced the accounts, free of charge.

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**MASHONALAND BRANCH****REPORTS**GREYSTONE PARK Nature Preserve — Saturday 17 March 2001

This lovely greenbelt in Greystone Park, which is cared for by a Trust comprising mainly local residents, offers sanctuary to both humans and bird-life in these stressful times. The dam was spilling quite vigorously and the walk was accompanied by the sound of rushing water. The Trust has done their best to eliminate exotic plants and there are lovely indigenous trees, both in the Preserve and surrounding gardens, particularly some splendid acacias. A good turn-out of about 20 people, including some members of the Trust, were accompanied by Roger Fairlie, Chairman of the Trust, who will be delighted to hear that we identified 64 species during the afternoon, including a pair of Giant Kingfisher which, he told us, had recently moved in. A single Purple Heron was seen at the dam, plus 2 Black-headed Heron, several African Jacana, a pair of Common Moorhen, juvenile Thick-billed Weaver and parents, Southern Red Bishop, African Stonechat, Red-collared Widowbird and Common Fiscal. Other shrikes identified were Tropical Boubou, and Orange-breasted Bush-shrike. The only starling seen was Red-winged Starling (three of them) which flew overhead. Other aerial identifications were African Goshawk and Gabar Goshawks, Eurasian Hobby, Amur Falcon, African Palm-swift, Barn Swallows and Wire-tailed Swallows. Warblers were well-represented with Lesser Swamp-warbler, Sedge Warbler and Little Rush-warbler, Dark-capped Yellow Warbler and Willow Warbler seen. Of the sunbirds, 8 Variable Sunbirds, a White-bellied Sunbird and a Miombo Double-collared Sunbird were identified. As well as Thick-billed Weaver, Spectacled Weaver, Southern Masked-weaver and Golden Weavers were about, with Common Waxbill, Pin-tailed Whydah, Bronze Mannikin and Speckled Mousebird also being seen. It was a good afternoon in lovely surroundings.

**Jennifer Carter**National Herbarium and HARARE BOTANIC GARDENS: 25th March 2001

Seventeen people attended the walk in the gardens. There was good early morning bird activity in a variety of habitats and the ramble through the magnificent indigenous trees was delightful. At the small dam we saw several Common Moorhen, Red-knobbed Coot, 2 Black Crake and an African Jacana who was enjoying his morning walk across the water hyacinth. A total of 50 species was recorded and the highlights included a close view of 3 Levaillant's Cuckoo, 1 Grey-headed Kingfisher, 1 Lesser Honeyguide, Miombo Double-collared Sunbird, Violet-backed Starling, Purple-crested Turaco, and 4 species of barbet – namely Black-collared Barbet, Whyte's Barbet, Crested Barbet and Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird. Special thanks to Richard Dennison and Ian Riddell for their valuable assistance. **Helen Fraser**

Little England – Sunday 29 April 2001

Ten of us set out for the entrance to Little England Farm at the 52.5 km peg on the Lomagundi Road – about 2.5 km later we arrived at Changamire Game Sanctuary Lodge where we were warmly welcomed by Juliette Elliott-Wilson, the Acting Manager. Highlights on the journey in were Magpie Shrike and an Oribe in the open grassland.

The lodges face onto a weir dam on the Gwebi River and from here two of our group accepted the kind offer of a canoe ride while the rest of us walked up the riverine woodland upstream. Probably because of the large amount of *Diospyros lycioides* fruits in the area, we encountered significant numbers of African Green-pigeon and other fruit-eating birds. We also came quite close to three Giraffe. A total of 84 species of birds and 8 species of mammals were identified and the bird highlights included 2 African Black Duck, 6 White-backed Vultures and 1 possible Cape Vultures, one female African Finfoot, 15 African Green-pigeon, 3 Meyer's Parrot, 3 Swallow-tailed Bee-cater, 2 White-throated Swallows and 3 Eastern Saw-wings and 2 Cape Longclaw. **Richard Dennison**

CHRISTON BANK Botanical Reserve — Saturday 19 May 2001

In spite of the fuel shortage and the Super 12 rugby semi-final we had a good turn-out of 15 members for this afternoon outing. This reserve was a new venue for most of us and has been overlooked in recent years. It appears to be quite extensive and consists of hilly slopes, granite boulders, well preserved climax Miombo woodland, the Mazowe River valley and riverine vegetation. The paths were numerous and recently trimmed and we were impressed by the beauty of the place. On our walk down to

the Mazowe River only a few species of birds and some dassies were seen. However, on our return journey we passed through flatter ground in the river valley and came across some bird parties. One of them consisted of about 20 Violet-backed Starlings and about 15 Miombo Blue-eared Starlings. On the granite boulders on the hillside we found a pair of Mocking Cliff-chat and a pair of Boulder Chat associated with another bird party. None of these birds had been recorded when we had passed earlier on our walk down the hill. Other highlights included a pair of Brown Snake-eagles, 8 Grey Pendulinites, 7 Retz's Helmet-shrikes, 1 Purple-banded Sunbird and a Red-backed Mannikin. Although the total species count of 51 was not exceptional the general feeling was that our next visit should be for a whole day. **Richard Dennison**

#### Mbizi Game Park – Sunday 26 May 2001

Only 12 of us enjoyed a wonderful morning at Mbizi Game Park – it was warm enough for shorts and jerseys were discarded within the hour. Birding began in the car-park by the dam with 4 Lesser Striped Swallow being seen on the telephone wires. A number of Steel-blue Widowfinch (10 pairs), Pin-tailed Whydah (30) and 2 Long-tailed Paradise-whydahs were close by with Grey-rumped Swallow flying overhead. Five species of kingfisher were seen – Striped Kingfisher (4), Pied Kingfisher (2), Giant Kingfisher (1), Brown-hooded Kingfisher (4) and Malachite Kingfisher (2). A juvenile Malachite Kingfisher got us excited for a while until he came close enough for us to be sure he wasn't a Half-collared. The shrikes were out in force with Common Fiscal, Tropical Boubou, Black-backed Puffback, Brubru, Orange-breasted Bush-shrike and Black-crowned Tchagra being seen or heard. Greater Honeyguide and Brown-backed Honeybird were seen but only a single woodpecker – a Cardinal Woodpecker. Green-capped Eremomela and Yellow-bellied Eremomela were in the car park, with Red-billed Firefinch and Blue Waxbills and Common Waxbills. Six Long-billed Crombec were identified and 2 pairs of the lovely Violet-eared Waxbill. As we walked we heard the cry of an African Fish-eagle and later saw 2 adults and a juvenile. The only other raptor identified was a juvenile African Hawk-eagle. Water birds were few – 3 Reed Cormorant, 2 African Darter, 2 Purple Heron, 5 each of African Jacana and Black Crake and later 5 Hamerkop and 1 Three-banded Plover. Five Comb Duck and about 12 Pied Crow flew over as well as 2 Crowned Lapwings and 3 African Wattled Lapwings. Nine Miombo Double-collared Sunbirds and 2 Variable Sunbirds brightened the morning. In total 75 species were identified, many of them in or close to the car park. It was a wonderful day to be in the bush and our thanks go to Mervyn Senior for his hospitality. Mbizi is well worth a visit.

**Jennifer Carter**

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#### **MATABELELAND**

##### From the Chairman

The winter months are now upon us and with it a considerable change in bird-life – our garden has emptied of summer migrants with only the locals remaining and even those seem a little sparse at the moment. A number of species have arrived or have merely become more noticeable – the Black-headed Oriole has reappeared and a pair of Brown-hooded Kingfisher has been making plenty of noise. African Hoopoes have also returned and a group of two males and a female were busy calling and squabbling – possibly a prelude to breeding – although why this should occur during the dry season remains a mystery. Still vocal and presumably without a mate is the BULAWAYO Hillside Purple-crested Turaco which has now been resident for the past eighteen months and the two good rainy seasons must have provided plenty of food. The Matopos still remains the closest source for a mate. Our Hillside Dams rambles have continued to attract appreciable support and rather than have two fixtures close together, we are aiming to combine a number with the monthly meeting. Please do come and join us at this attractive and convenient venue. Good Birding, **Martin Smith**

#### AISLEBY — Sunday 25 March 2001

In contrast to the previous month this outing began dry and ended wet with a steady, soaking rain bringing birding to a halt shortly after 11.00 a.m. We began with a flock of about 80 White Stork, conveniently loafing in the pastures close to the boom – they were carefully scanned for aerials, but none were to be seen. At least three of the South African satellite tracked juveniles had passed through Zimbabwe and it would be quite something to actually find one of these in the field. We moved on to the night storage dams, which held a little water allowing plenty of sedge growth. Here we found a good variety of waders to peruse including Curlew Sandpiper, Marsh Sandpiper and Common Sandpiper, Little Stint and Ruff. Light was good and, with the aid of the telescope, it was interesting to compare the range of plumage

within a species – some Curlew Sandpiper were beginning to show attractive red-brown underparts, whilst some of the Marsh Sandpiper were beginning to show mottled plumage on the upperparts. This led to a discussion on the age at which adult plumage is attained by waders – presumably second year? This line of conversation continued whilst studying Red-backed Shrike, the males also showing a considerable range of variation. In addition to this species, it was also pleasing to see a number of Lesser Grey Shrike looking particularly smart in fresh plumage or was it merely freshly washed by the rain? After a look at the dam and spillway, we moved on to the lands where a tractor ploughing in a crop of weeds acted as a focal point for avian activity. At ground level Cattle Egret, Black-headed Heron and White Stork pursued fleeing insects and rodents, whilst overhead a large number of Barn Swallow flew back and forth gleaning aerial prey. Amongst them were two pratincoles, first picked out as dark silhouettes against the grey and moist conditions – fortunately they proceeded to fly directly overhead affording some view of under-wing colours which were dark and diagnostic of the Black-winged Pratincole. This was a notable sighting as most of the previous records of this species have been at the height of the rainy season. At the extreme north of the property a loose flock of kestrels was seen over the lucerne and maize crops. Again light and visibility was poor but close views allowed all to be identified as Lesser Kestrel with a total count of just over 50. The rain then began to descend in earnest and after a brief pause at the Ibis Dam to record 5 Pink-backed Pelicans we headed for home with a checklist of just over 100 species. **Martin Smith**

#### Verreaux's Eagle Outing – Sunday 20th May

This outing was both a briefing for new members and a check on a considerable number of pairs of Verreaux's Eagles. It was well supported with a group of twenty meeting at Retreat, where forces were divided into two. One group headed south to the Communal Lands around Njelele, whilst the second team covered the western area of the MATOPOS including Bambata and Mesilumi. The weather was still and humid with an appreciable build up of cloud and a suggestion of rain later in the day. Conditions were ideal for soaring raptors and at one point we had a group of five eagles circling upwards. This was on route to Bambata and we had trouble deciphering which pair belonged to what. This was further complicated by one pair gliding northeast at high altitude. A second pair headed north towards "The Farmhouse" with a suggestion that there might be an occupied territory within that area. The remaining bird flew towards Bambata, where it was joined by its mate. All three territories within the Bambata area were occupied with birds being particularly visible, breeding activity was still at the nest building stage and no birds were seen sitting. A similar pattern was found at most of the other territories – birds at Mesilumi were busy rebuilding the nest with both adults seen bringing sticks, whilst at 111 a bird was seen perched on the nest consuming a dassie, its partner having already fed, flying past with an extremely heavy crop.

All teams met at the Yacht Club to report on progress and to allow everyone to discuss the day's sightings. Members participating had checked 20 occupied territories and found only two birds sitting? The peak laying period derived from Val's work is mid-May and breeding activity certainly appears to be delayed this season. This may well be linked to the dassie population, which was influenced by the prolonged dry spell at the beginning of the rainy season. We will wait and see how things develop.

**Martin Smith**

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#### **EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB**

##### FERN VALLEY – Sunday 29 April 2001

The company was good, the weather was kind and it was close enough to Mutare not to put a noticeable dent in our fuel stocks but the birding, on the other wing, was maybe not quite as exciting as we might have hoped for. Six of us were at the Museum at 6.30 a.m. We were joined for the first time by Peter Westrop who had that morning travelled the 80 km from Nyazura – now that's enthusiasm!

Fern Valley has a small dam within Suburbia and is surrounded by miombo woodland. There are a fair amount of reedbeds but no banks for the waders and water birds were sadly lacking. We had a good walk and, having recorded almost 50 species, by sight or sound, we drove the few kilometres to Dale Hanmer's home. Dale had trapped a few birds in her nets and it was fascinating to watch as she measured, weighed, sexed and aged the birds with the skill that can only come from many years of experience. The time spent with Dale certainly made the trip memorable. Although the birding may not have been as productive as on some of our other outings, it was a very pleasant way to spend a Sunday morning and, as always passing passed a few hours with the boffins, I came away having added to my

meagre knowledge of things ornithological – and was home in time to watch Michael Schumacher snatch a rather fortunate victory in the Spanish Grand Prix. Not a bad day at all. Highlights which were recorded: Augur Buzzard, Green Wood-hoopoe, Eastern Saw-wing, Black-headed Oriole, Southern Black Tit, White-browed Robin-chat and White-browed Scrub-robins, Grey-headed Bush-shrike, Miombo Double-collared Sunbird, Variable Sunbird, Scarlet-chested Sunbird and Amethyst Sunbirds. **Terry Browning**

#### Visit to DOROWA – Sunday 27 May 2001

One of the most eagerly anticipated outings in our birding calendar is to the Dorowa Phosphate Mine in Buhera North (approximately 60 km due south of Nyazura) and our visit to this venue lived up to the expectations of the group of 11 members who made the trip.

We were met on our arrival at the Mine Bowls Clubhouse with a very welcome cup of tea/coffee and sandwiches before we embarked on the business of the morning. The Mine's housing/club complex is situated on a well-treed kopje and before we had completed our descent to the level of the surrounding countryside below our tally had reached 70 including Klaas's Cuckoo, Brown-hooded Kingfisher, Green Wood-hoopoe and Common Scimitarbill, Black-collared Barbet, Greater Honeyguide, Fork-tailed Drongo, Black-headed Oriole, Arrow-marked Babbler, Kurrichane Thrush, White-browed Scrub-robin, African Paradise-flycatcher and a Levillant's Cuckoo. We proceeded to a dry stream bed nearby, and notable sightings were White-browed Sparrow-weaver and their nests as well as an Acacia Pied Barbet. Our wanderings then took us to the dam and slurry areas where there was an absence of waders when compared to previous visits there. Finally we made our way to the airstrip and dam near the Mine workings where a few more species were added to our list. On our return to the clubhouse at 12.30 and after a couple of welcome drinks, we were provided with a most acceptable lunch by the Mine management and our grateful thanks are extended to Alex Mafukidze and his team who made us feel most welcome. We returned home after lunch with a final tally of 105 after a most enjoyable day.

**Alistair Christie**

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#### **KAROI BIRD CLUB**

##### RYDINGS School Interpretative Centre

Conducted walks took place on the first Saturday of each month around the dam area. The last was on a freezing morning with heavy mist so only commenced at 7.00 a.m. with a total of only 52 species being recorded. Verreaux's Eagle-owl was calling through the mist with plenty of Crowned Lapwings, African Wattled Lapwings and Blacksmith Lapwings around and so too Green-backed Heron. Black-chested Snake-eagles were prominent and it is suspected that they are breeding in the area. African Darter is not often seen, but one has been present of late. **Merle Mitchell**

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#### **TAIL FEATHERS**

##### KARIBA, 2001

Like Trevor Edwards' experience with an African Pied Wagtail perching on a fishing rod, we have often had these wagtails perching on the spreaders of our yacht as we sail on Kariba and enjoying a free ride for considerable distances. Barn Swallows occasionally do the same. What was of interest to us this trip was two days of seeing a pair of Verreaux's Eagle displaying about a half mile up the Sengwa River. There were African Fish-eagles around but presumably the overlap of territory was not an issue. For some reason there seemed to be a profusion of fish-eagles at the lake – more than we had noticed in previous years. Four little Grey-headed Kingfisher shared a tiny bay at Milibizi.

On returning home to BULAWAYO, an African Grey Hornbill found its way into our garden. **Inger Slooten, 44 Leander Ave., Hillside.**

##### Some happenings around and about the KAROI Area, Rusape and Kariba

Unfortunately the Brown Snake-eagle, which in March had only two weeks to go before the one egg was expected to hatch, abandoned the nest. Whether the continual wet weather at the time was a factor or not is the question. Bronze Mannikin decided not to pass up the chance of breeding in a ready made home – a Red-headed Weaver nest – they had eight to choose from. Another pair placed their nest in the creeper against the wall by the lounge window. We spotted a Steel-blue Widowfinch male feeding on grass seed in the road, together with a female Red-billed Firefinch and what we presumed were the two offspring – colouration as female and juvenile. A Barn Owl laid 7 eggs in a Hamerkop nest and there is another



incubating in an air duct in the barns. We have a good population of Hamerkop in the area, hence healthy Barn Owl breeding. The African Fish-eagle nest which we monitored last year, where three chicks had been raised, is once more active, together with a sizeable beehive underneath it!

While visiting in the RUSAPE area (QDS 1832C1), we had a good sighting of White-throated Robin-chat and a Black Cuckooshrike with a yellow spot on the top side of his head?

Visiting Rhino Safari Lodge, KARIBA (QDS 1628C4), we had a good viewing of 4 Dusky Lark on the "beach" feeding in the grass. **Merle Mitchell**

#### A new Odzani walk and picnic Spot

Odzani is a village 40 km north of Mutare where our water is stored. In a laudable effort to attract visitors interested in wildlife to their estates, The Wattle Company, represented by the accommodating manager of its Dunsinane Estate, Boet Cruger, has laid out a walk from the office, 4 km from Smallbridge Dam wall down to the dam shore, in and out of the pine lots to a picnic spot with an impressive view of the surrounding hills and the dam. As the area is predominantly fairly mature pine, the birding is rather restricted but there is plenty of scrub between the sections and the higher parts of the forest have perches for the birds of prey like Long-crested Eagle and Augur Buzzard which regularly hunt the area. Apparently, if these birds perch on young trees, they cause twisting which renders them unusable when they mature. We were shown examples to prove this point. Boet already has a quite impressive list of sightings and in the course of a quick, mid-afternoon tour we saw a score of species. The company policy, initiated in the interests of showing to overseas customers an environmentally sensitive image, is to become general among large timber producers. We trust that this will mean that indigenous trees will be spared wherever possible and may even be planted if enough pressure is brought to bear. In the meantime, we can recommend a visit to Dunsinane, where a warm welcome awaits and Boet and his family deserve praise for their initiative. To get there, take the Odzani road past Alexander, turn left at Smallbridge Dam onto the dam wall, cross and follow the signs to Dunsinane. The road is in fair condition all the way. **Ken Dixon**

#### Breeding reports

One pair of Long-crested Eagle has had another good breeding year in the MUKUVISI WOODLAND despite the usual fierce and constant harassment by many Pied Crows the first chick left the nest on 19 April 2000 while the second chick was fully grown by the end of January 2001. Unfortunately, it is becoming increasingly difficult for the observer to monitor the breeding process as the nest is recessed and hidden within a screen of gum tree leaves growing denser every year.

I also wish to report the rather unusual nesting activities of two pairs of Hamerkop in a friend's garden in Hatfield HARARE. One pair which built its nest in the fork of a Msasa has been joined by a second pair which built their nest right next to it, partly joined to the first establishment. Both pairs are now breeding. Another interesting feature of our area concerns the presence of Speckled Mousebird – they are now more numerous than the old established Red-faced Mousebirds. Could it be because their nests are far better hidden than the Red-faced? **John Sievi**

#### A little bit of nonsense – HARARE

During the first three weeks of March, my wife and I were astounded, and somewhat bewildered, at the intensity of the "dawn chorus" and the "sundowners" ensemble. The main contributors in the morning were Crested Barbet, Kurrichane Thrush and White-browed Robin-chat. In the evening, however, the latter was the prominent species. Furthermore, two pairs of White-browed Robin-chats often took up their respective offensive positions on either side of the now well-established territorial boundaries to render what must be the finest avian duets in the world. Nevertheless, we pondered the reason behind this increase in vocal activity but we came up with nothing better than the approaching autumnal equinox. We thought that the decreasing light intensity might have triggered off the desire to raise a final batch of young before winter set in. To test this hypothesis, we reached out for *Roberts'* and *Newman's* only to find it could not be applied to the White-browed Robin-chat as this species does not breed after January.

During this literature search, however, it was hard to ignore the onomatopoeic wording of the song of White-browed Robin-chat – think-of-it, its-up-to-you and don't-you-do-it being often quoted as examples of its dulcet call. We considered these illustrations do not do justice to the subtle variations in loudness, pitch and tone of which this bird is capable. Our collection of further sounds goes something like this:

Radio, radio, radio three  
 Girls, girls, girls  
 Stereo, stereo, stereo  
 Ninety, ninety, ninety-nine  
 Hold-your-hand, hold-your-hand, hold-your-hand  
 What're-doing, what're-doing, what're-doing  
 Where're-we-going, where're-we-going, where're-we-going  
 Where-were-you, where-were-you, where-were-you  
 Where-are-the-boys, where-are-the-boys, where-are-the-boys

We admit that trying to describe bird calls with words will always remain capricious, at least to others, but we think it is fun! We wonder if other birders become a little cuckoo at times?

**Elsbeth and Ron Fenner, Greystone Park, Harare**

A "swimming" Secretarybird

Being "off course" doesn't even begin to explain the predicament of a Secretarybird found waterlogged and nearly drowned 3 km off the False Bay coast.

Secretarybirds are definitely "land" birds, spending much of their time stalking through the veld searching for insects, small mammals or reptiles to eat. So Pieter Welgemoed, a fisherman from Strand, near Cape Town, was understandably surprised to find what he initially thought was an eagle floundering – and about to founder – off the Steenbras River mouth as he piloted his boat back to Gordon's Bay harbour one Sunday. Welgemoed bundled the bedraggled bird, which had probably been blown over the sea by the strong southeaster, into his boat. The bird was then taken to Jacky and Wayne Furno, who run the Helderberg Wild Animal Rescue Centre in Gordon's Bay. "It was in a very bad state, but I re-hydrated it for three solid days, and by the Tuesday it was able to stand", Judy reported. "The following day I took it to the vet for an injection of antibiotics and extra vitamins." The survivor was being fed about a dozen dead mice each day, as well as small snakes and Jacky was due to release it in the Caledon area the following week.

Bird expert Trevor Hardaker said that Secretarybirds occurred naturally in the Western Cape but were not common. "In fact, one that took up residence in the Cape Point section of the Cape Peninsula National Park one year caused quite a bit of excitement because they hadn't been seen on the Peninsula for a long time. **Published in Argus, Cape Town, March 2001**

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**LETTERS TO THE EDITOR**

Pensioners' rate for subscriptions

I read Tony Curtis' letter with interest. I had not heard the rumour but, if true, I find it unbelievable that the BLZ could think up such a scheme. To say it is patronising is putting it very mildly. Tony's letter expresses my feelings perfectly. The AA Zimbabwe and others give old age pensioners special rates without asking them to submit to a "means test". Why can't the BLZ do the same thing? **Tim English, Matsheumshlope, Bulawayo**

A decision was made at the A GM in April — see details under National Reports. Editor.

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**NOTICEBOARD**

Buy-a-Brick Campaign

Thank you very much to the following for their generous donations to the building fund:

CABS	\$5000	Duncan Parkes	\$1000
Mr & Mrs R H Moore	\$ 550	Mrs D Vaughan	\$ 200

If you would like to contribute, please complete the form included.

Merchandise for Sale

The following items are offered for sale and are available at the BLZ Offices:

Back issues of Honeyguide	\$5 - \$50 (Depending on issue)
Lake Chivero checklists	\$ 10
Embroidered badges	\$ 60
Caps	\$112
Hats	\$258
T-shirts	\$360
Sleeveless, hunting jackets	\$663
Golf shirts	\$740

Books for sale

The following books are available from the BirdLife offices:

1 copy of *The Black Eagle* by Valerie Gargett \$2 000

1 copy of *The Atlas of the Birds of Sul Do Save, Southern Mozambique* by Vincent Parker \$ 500  
(This book was reviewed in the March 2001 issue of *Honeyguide*)

Legacies and Wreath Funds

Many charitable organisations receive substantial income from bequests left to them by well wishers. For example, the RSPB, our Partner in the UK, receives about 25 % of its income in this way. If any of our members would like to remember BirdLife Zimbabwe in their wills and so make a contribution to our work in conservation and education this would be so greatly appreciated. Another way is to make a contribution in memory of a loved one by Wreath Funds whereby money is donated to the charity in lieu of flowers. Please contact the Executive Officer for further information.

Honorary Life Members

Congratulations to Dale Hanmer, Leslee Maasdorp and Tony Tree who were nominated for Honorary Life Membership at the AGM. All three have made outstanding contributions to the conservation of birds and to the work of Birdlife Zimbabwe.

New Members

We welcome:

Dr G Vale	B Dent	A Macdonald	Mrs Van Be1John
C R Hartley	Byron Black	Julie Edwards	B Golombick
Leonard Taipi	C Mackenzie	Brent Stapelkamp	G Mutingwende
Jane Clegg	Kaj Ostergaard	C Matora	Mr & Mrs B Manyuchi
Mr B Magwizi	Mr N Chiweshe		

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