

BABBLER

BirdLife Zimbabwe

A PARTNER DESIGNATE OF BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL

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ACTIVITIES

MASHONALAND BRANCH

Regular outings

Mukuvisi Woodlands: Sundays, 4 November and 2 December 2001. Meet at the Paget Road entrance at 6.30 a.m. There will be a vehicle guard available.

Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary: *Please note new meeting place.* Sundays, 11 November and 9 December 2001. Meet at 6.30 a.m. at Marimba Shopping Centre, Samora Machel Avenue West. Bring your chairs and tea. Beginners are most welcome and spare binoculars will be available. We encourage members with children to attend. Parents must however be there as well.

Saturday afternoon outing

17 November 2001: Crowborough Sewerage Works where there is a good possibility of seeing summer migrants such as Yellow Wagtail and waders. Meet at 2.30 p.m. at 5 Colenbrander Road, Milton Park (opposite Old Hararians cricket fields). Cars can be safely left there.

Sunday outing

25 November 2001: Masembura in the Chinamora Communal Lands where there is a Mottled Swift nesting site and good woodland. Meet at 6.30 a.m. at Wingate Golf Club Car Park, Teviotdale Road (from where transport can be shared). Bring chairs and refreshments.

Thursday evening meeting

15 November 2001: Mr Mike Duncan will give a talk on oxpeckers. He is a good naturalist and an interesting speaker. There is a lot of interest in re-introducing oxpeckers onto cattle ranches where they have been exterminated by the use of highly toxic, persistent and regular dipping probably

going as far back as the toxic arsenical dips. Mike is very well versed with the literature on oxpecker trials both here and in South Africa and it is not all in favour of the oxpecker! This would be a good opportunity for farmers and environmentalists and anyone else interested to debate the issue.

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.

APART FROM THE REGULAR Mukuvisi Woodlands AND Chivero Bird Sanctuary THERE WILL BE NO OUTINGS OR EVENING MEETING IN DECEMBER.

Thursday outings to Marlborough Vlei

These are provisionally on the 2nd and 4th Thursdays of each month provided Ian Riddell is available. Meet at 4.30 p.m. Directions: drive to the end of Princess Margaret Rd, turn left and continue to the new houses. Parking is in a cul-de-sac where a caretaker lives in a fenced off area. For confirmation contact Ian on 339716, or E-mail gemsaf@mango.zw. Dates: 8 and 22 November, 13 and 27 December.

MATABELELAND BRANCH

Evening Meetings

Friday 2 November – Verreaux's Eagle Debriefing – this will be a report back to members and participants on progress of the survey this year. Venue – 3A Holdengarde Ave., Hillside at 8.00 p.m.

Saturday 8 December – Christmas Social – Whitestone School. Meet at 4.00 p.m. for a stroll around the grounds or join us later for a braai. All those interested should contact Jean or Peter Tucker: 241079.

Monthly Outing

Sunday 18 November – Tshabalala Game Sanctuary – Hopefully the weather will be a little less hostile to birdwatching than the September outing. All interested should contact Martin Smith. Meeting point and time to be arranged and dependant on the weather!

December – no Outing

Hillside Dams

Our Dams rambles continue, meeting at the Lower Hillside Dam, in front of the display at 4.00 p.m. The dates are: Friday 26 October, Friday 30 November. There will be no December ramble

Aisleby

Dates and co-ordinators are as follows:

Sunday 25 November – Martin Smith

December anyone interested in birding at Aisleby over the Christmas period, should contact Clive Townsley, who has plans to visit the Farm over the weekend. Outings continue on a fuel efficient basis, and all interested should contact the Co-ordinator to confirm participation and transport.

EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB

Contacts: Ken Dixon ☎ 020-65819

Jane Clegg ☎ 020-65610

Outings

Sunday 28 October 2001 Rusape 6.00 a.m. K Dixon

Note change of venue

Sunday 25 November 2001 Juliasdale/Nyanga 6.00 a.m. K Dixon

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

Other Outings

To be arranged.

MIDLANDS BRANCH

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

Note: Gavin will be leaving Zimbabwe at the beginning of December.

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.

REPORTS

NATIONAL

Executive Officer's Report

Purchase of building

The subdivision of the stand has been approved at last. It is now up to the Surveyor General to prepare the diagram for the Registrar of Deeds to issue a separate title deed for the stand. Once this formality has been finalised the property will then be transferred to us and it is expected that the process will take a few months. Getting the subdivision approved was the biggest hurdle.

Appointment of Conservation and Development Officer

We are pleased to announce the appointment of Dr Chipangura Chirara to the new post of CDO. He successfully completed his PhD with Utrecht University in the Netherlands in April 2001 and it will be officially awarded to him in a public session on Monday 22 October 2001. He also holds a BSc Honours Degree in Biological Sciences, having majored in Ecology and Microbiology. Upon completion of his PhD studies, he joined the Institute of Environmental Studies as a research associate and is presently working on a project on Enhancing Rural Livelihoods and Resource Sustainability. From 1996 — 2000 he worked on his PhD on bush encroachment in a semi-arid ecosystem in south-western Zimbabwe. During this period he attended and presented his work at workshops in southern Africa, the Netherlands and in the UK. From 1993 — 1995 he worked on range degradation in semi-arid ecosystems while being attached to Matopos Research Station on a University of Utrecht University of Zimbabwe Higher Degrees Fellowship Programme. He has interests in ecology and nature conservation.

Dr Chirara officially begins his work with BirdLife Zimbabwe on 1 November 2001.

Subscriptions for next year

The Executive Committee has set the level of subscriptions for next year. Unfortunately, due mainly to high printing costs and vastly increased postage, there has to be an increase but the Committee has been able to keep this down to 50% which is below the inflation rate. The new subs are therefore:

Individuals and Schools	\$675
Juniors	\$150
Institutions	\$1125

Invoices will be sent out in early December.

BLZ Education Programme

October is the month for the World Bird Watch and the World Bird Festival in Taiwan. One of the events is a schools competition 'The Inspiration of Birds'. Entries for this are arriving on a daily basis. Most are stories or poems in the written form but one school in the Honde Valley has prepared a song and drama entry which they want us to video!

Children have been inspired by birds in various ways, one of which has been from a reading in the book 'Enjoy the Birds of Zimbabwe'. A learner from Kushinga Primary School was touched by reading a story and writes 'I read of an Italian man. This man was well loved by many animals and birds. The little birds did not fear him at all. They would go up to his hat or even rest on his hands or head. This book taught me to love animals and birds'.

Please do not kill birds because they might disappear like dodos. **Leslee Maasdorp**

If anyone would like to help with judging competitions please contact Leslee Maasdorp - 883316

MASHONALAND BRANCH**DOUBLE RO Ranch — Sunday, 29 July 2001**

A group of 11 braved icy winds to enjoy a full morning's birding at Double Ro Ranch. A respectable 78 species were listed. Three Red-capped Larks caused the first stir of excitement, including a juvenile who stayed close to the parent on the ground. 4 each of Rufous-naped Lark, Yellow-throated Longclaw and African Pipit were also seen. Later a sighting of 2 Buffy Pipit confirmed the differences between these very similar pipits. Many vultures have temporarily left the area but 20 White-backed Vultures and 60 Marabou Storks were around the settling ponds with 20 African Jacana, about 30 African Sacred Ibis and half that number of White-faced Duck. Cattle Egrets were in abundance but the only herons seen were 3 Black-headed Herons. A small, grey bird among five Yellow-bellied Eremomela and three Bar-throated Apalis caused much discussion but, although a Burnt-necked Eremomela was suspected, it couldn't be confirmed. Shrikes were represented by Tropical Boubou (4), Black-backed Puffback (3), Brubru (2) and Orange-breasted Bush-shrike (2) and 40 Wattled Starling were the only starlings seen. Four Copper Sunbirds were in the garden and Miombo Double-collared Sunbird (6), White-bellied Sunbird (2) and Scarlet-chested Sunbird (1) were also seen. An African Fish-eagle and a Lizard Buzzard were the only raptors spotted. A very good morning was enjoyed by all. We were pleased to welcome Julia from the Australian VSO and we would like to thank Robin Gilmour for allowing us to visit and finding the birds for us. **Jennifer Carter**

Lindy Rodwell — South African Crane Working Group Tuesday, 31 July 2001

This was a "special" evening meeting because Lindy Rodwell from the South African Crane Working Group (SACWG) was visiting Zimbabwe and had agreed to talk to us about her work. We learned that the SACWG, which was founded in 1993, was involved in the conservation of three species of crane in South Africa – the Blue Crane, the Wattled Crane and the Grey Crowned Crane. All three species were now on the Red Data list although the birds' decline had been noticed only in the late 1980's and early 1990's and in fact the Blue Crane population had reduced by almost 90%. Major issues concerning the decline of cranes were poisonings, both deliberate and accidental, fences and power lines. Another danger to the birds is the taking of young birds for pets and the killing of birds for food.

One of the most important aspects of the work of the SACWG is education and awareness. Most cranes are found in agricultural areas where they can be a major pest. Farm workers were key to the conservation of cranes not only for their protection but for their observations in the field due to their tremendous knowledge. Some individuals have been selected from the farm workers' group and have been provided with binoculars and books and they were now mentoring other farm workers. SACWG was involved in the protection of habitats for cranes. It is estimated that 50% of South Africa's wetlands and 80% grassland have been lost. Forestry and agriculture were largely to blame for the loss of these habitats and the indiscriminate construction of dams had been a major factor in the loss of wetlands. Various research programmes are being carried out by SACWG and a data base has been developed.

A successful captive breeding programme has been developed for the breeding of Wattled Cranes. It was estimated that there were presently only 250 birds in the wild in South Africa.

At a recent workshop a regional strategy had been put together to monitor the movement of birds throughout the region. There were 10 states through which Wattled Cranes moved.

The Zimbabwe Crane Working Group (ZCWG) was established in March 2000 and funding for their work had been obtained.

Lindy commended Friday Maozeka, the ZCWG's Project Manager, for his outstanding work with cranes. It was estimated that there were between 190 and 200 Wattled Cranes in Zimbabwe, whilst the population of Grey Crowned Cranes was estimated to be between 3-5 000 birds. **Di Rushforth**

Richard Macdonald — Spiders — Thursday 16 August 2001

I must admit that I was rather worried when I heard that Richard Macdonald did not need slides or photographs to illustrate his talk as I thought he might produce some LIVE subjects! He did not, however, bring along any spiders, dead or alive but was able to give us a most fascinating and informative talk. Richard's knowledge of these arachnids is amazing and he imparted his knowledge in a most delightful and interesting manner.

Spiders have lived on the planet for about 500 million years (insects have been around for a mere 300 million) and they have not evolved a lot in that time.

Approximately 200 000 insects in the world have been identified whilst only 30 000 spiders have been identified, 8 to 9 000 of which are found in sub-Saharan Africa. Spiders live in a very diverse range of habitats — did you know that in every hectare of arable ground there is a total population of about 250 000 spiders! Their sizes vary from less than ½ a millimetre to those large creatures such as the Baboon Spider.

We learned about the unique attributes which spiders have such as their ability to kill their prey and then digest it outside the body simply sucking up the digested fluids. All spiders have fangs but there are differences — the Aranaemorphae have fangs which curve inwards and are normally web bound whilst the Mygalomorphae have backward facing fangs (usually the jumping spiders). Generally speaking spiders have 8 eyes and different species can be identified by the eye pattern on their faces. They, however, have poor vision. Spiders have different types of hairs on their legs, one type can detect the slightest alteration of wind current, others are sensitive to odour, some heat sensitive all of which help in detecting prey or predators. Certain species have specialised hairs on the rear legs and these are hooked for use as knitting needles to knit silk together to make it stronger.

Spiders produce three different types of toxins in their fangs – neurotoxins, haemotoxins and cytotoxins which cause the worst damage. The sac spiders (which are common in our homes) contain a cytotoxin in their bite and 92% of serious spider bites are from this species. The bite itself is painless but after a few days the tissue begins to break down and the wound requires treatment. There is only one lethal spider in Africa — the Six-eyed Sand Spider whose venom is as lethal as that of a Mamba. Its fangs have both cytotoxic and neurotoxic poisons. They are found in arid areas.

In passing, Richard mentioned that there are certain species on this earth that are not susceptible to cancer. Amongst those which include sharks are spiders and research is being done to see why.

Editor

Harava Dam – Saturday 18 August 2001

A group made up of about 15 members and 7 guests from the Chitungwiza Environmental Action Group visited the Bass masters Site at Harava Dam. Although we had been unfortunately delayed the afternoon turned out to be most worthwhile as we were able to introduce our guests to the pleasures of birdwatching and we are grateful to them for making the effort to join us. Thanks to Jennifer and Graham Carter for arranging to get the guests to us.

The dam water level was high and did not contain many water birds although it was a most pleasant sight towards the end of our visit when hundreds of Cattle Egret flew low over the water on their way to their roosting spot. Walking in the woodland area surrounding the dam proved difficult for birding but we picked up a few species, the highlights being Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird, Greater Striped Swallows and Lesser Striped Swallows, Southern Black Tit, Mocking Cliff-chat, Little Rush-warbler, Lazy Cisticola, Brubru, White-crested Helmet-shrike, both Greater Blue-eared Starlings and Miombo Blue-eared Starlings and Amethyst Sunbird. **Di Rushforth**

KUTSAGA Research Station

There was a good turn-out of about 20 observers some of whom took advantage of leaving their cars at the BirdLife offices. It was a warm, sunny day with a slight breeze coming off the dam. As I had just got over a bout of bronchitis I elected not to trek around the dam and was kept in good company by Graham Gilmour who was suffering from a sore head (not a hangover, I was assured).

The party set off around the dam and the walk was to take about 2 hours. Not much in the way of water birds was seen with the only duck being a Southern Pochard. Eight Purple Heron were identified with two Great Egrets, one Little Egret and three Cattle Egrets being seen. A Little Grebe, three Black Crake and two African Jacanas and a Wood Sandpiper finished off the water birds. A variety of raptors were there with two Black-chested Snake-eagles, a single Wahlberg's Eagle, a Black-shouldered Kite, and a Steppe Buzzard being identified. Thankfully there were some expert eyes amongst us as this group of birds so often causes identification problems.

Woodland species were very vocal – perhaps enjoying the sudden, warmer weather and the highlights here were two Namaqua Doves, two Brown-hooded Kingfishers and one Striped Kingfisher, five Little Bee-eaters, four Lilac-breasted Rollers, two Yellow-fronted Tinkerbirds, two Rufous-naped Larks, one Black-headed Oriole, two White-browed Scrub-robins, one Red-faced Crombec and five Long-billed Crombecs, two Stierling's Wren-warblers, one Pale Flycatcher, two Yellow-throated Longclaw. Only three species of sunbird were seen— Miombo Double-collared Sunbird, Variable Sunbird and Amethyst Sunbird.

Overhead flew White-rumped Swifts, Little Swifts and African Palm-swifts, Wire-tailed Swallows, Lesser Striped Swallows and Grey-rumped Swallows.

We are most grateful to the Director and management for allowing us access to the Research Station.
Di Rushforth

Dr Peter Frost — Melodious Larks — Thursday 20 September 2001

During the days of data collection for the bird atlas Drs Frost and Hustler set about trying to fill in some gaps in the data for Zimbabwe, both with regard to species and localities. They found that habitat where the Melodious Lark had occurred in the 1950's was no longer there and they therefore needed to find out where the birds had moved. In 1993 Alex Masterson and Duncan Parkes had discovered a breeding locality for Melodious Larks in the FELIXBURG area and also on the SOMABHULA Flats. Peter Frost described the Melodious Lark as being the smallest of all the southern African larks, apart from the Sabota. The bird has distinct features which he believes are not adequately shown in field guides. The most distinctive feature in identifying these larks is its flight song. Once known it was easy to distinguish the flight display from that of the Red-capped Lark. To begin with one could easily be confused between the calls of different larks as they all mimic other bird calls. The Melodious Lark in fact mimics between 18 and 27 other bird calls. They sing only in the breeding season which makes identification in the non-breeding season difficult. Melodious Larks are very choosy about the types of grassland they inhabit and they prefer moist areas with a sward half to one metre tall with no bushes or trees. Altitude is also important and they do not occur in the Nyanga grasslands.

Many conservation issues need to be addressed such as how large is the current population in Zimbabwe. The species is under threat – conversion of grassland into cultivated land, overgrazing, encroachment of grassland by shrubs and trees, urban development and changes in species occurring in grasslands. Peter feels that the call of the Melodious Lark is similar to the European Skylark which is also declining due to loss of habitat. Perhaps BirdLife Zimbabwe should be lobbying for the statutory protection of grassland sites. He is of the opinion that the Melodious Lark is the most threatened bird species in Zimbabwe. More information is needed to prevent it becoming the first bird species to become extinct in Zimbabwe.

We are so grateful to Peter Frost for his excellent presentation on the status and biology of the Melodious Lark – a much overlooked and little known LBJ. Thank you for a most enlightening and enjoyable evening. **Di Rushforth**

Mazowe Sailing Club (LAKE CHIVERO) — Sunday 23 September 2001

Although other members of our Association have visited this area in the past, the last time I was there was in February about four years ago at the National AGM when I was struck by the significant numbers of Familiar Chat and Grey Penduline-tit in proximity to the clubhouse. Alas, no Familiar Chats were found this time although Grey Penduline-tits were seen in the woodland.

The turnout of only five members was low compared to some recent very good attendance, especially when one considers that this venue is a new one since I joined the Association and, I believe, a good one for the future. I say that it is a good one because it covers a fairly large area of climaxed miombo woodland on a hillside with good views of the lake and the dam wall and very little sign of environmental degradation such as wood harvesting.

The differences between this area and our regular Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary walk include the age of the trees, the steep, relatively barren shoreline and the terrain. The trees here are generally much older than those at the Bird Sanctuary, where most of them are estimated to be less than fifty years old. The Sanctuary is also much flatter in terrain with much more shoreline vegetation.

These habitat differences would account for the sightings of four Spotted Creepers and a Wood Pipit, which probably need mature miombo woodland. The more exposed shoreline probably also accounted for the sightings of 3 Common Sandpiper and 4 African Pied Wagtail as these species are not at present being seen along the over-vegetated Sanctuary shoreline. Other highlights included 23 African Openbill, 1 early Red-chested Cuckoo, 200 Little Swifts, 1 Giant Kingfisher, 6 Golden-tailed Woodpeckers, 10 African Golden Orioles and 2 Black-headed Orioles and 5 White-crested Helmet-shrikes and 3 Retz's Helmet-shrikes. A total of 67 species was recorded. **Richard Dennison**

World Birdwatch and BLZ Birdwatch 2001

Having decided on a strategy for the two-day count our team set off for the MUKUVISI WOODLANDS early on Saturday morning, full of vigour and enthusiasm. About three hours was spent in this very productive woodland, the highlights being: pallid form Wahlberg's Eagle together with its normally coloured mate, African Cuckoo which was heard but only briefly glimpsed, a family party of Green Wood-hoopoe, Bennett's Woodpecker, African Golden Oriole, Spotted Creeper, Dark-capped Yellow Warbler,

Neddicky and Black-throated Canary. After some welcome refreshments, we headed out to Crowborough where we were able to pick up Yellow-billed Egret, Red-capped Lark, Capped Wheatear, Chestnut-vented Tit-babbler and African Reed-warbler. A lot of time was spent at the BIRD SANCTUARY at LAKE CHIVERO where the pond yielded less than usual but rewarding finds were Squacco Heron and a male Greater Painted-snipe, whilst the woodland area in the heat of the day made for very difficult birding. A bird party helped swell the numbers with Southern Black Tits and Grey Penduline-tits being good finds. Our final destination was MARLBOROUGH VLEI where we ticked Thick-billed Weaver as well as Purple Heron, Marsh Owl and Black-crowned Night-heron.

Our second day was not met with quite such enthusiasm and bodies were a little tired and strained. Nevertheless, once the number of species started to climb, we felt better but the count for the day was not quite as good as had been hoped. HAKA PARK gave us some good miombo birds such as Whyte's Barbet, White-breasted Cuckooshrike, Grey Penduline-tit, Spotted Creeper, Southern Hyliota and Stierling's Wren-warbler. Other good birds were Peregrine Falcon, African Green-pigeon, Fiery-necked Nightjar and Pennant-winged Nightjars, White-throated Swallow, White-throated Robin-chat and Pale Flycatcher. Our final venue – Sand Sales – yielded different birds, much needed for the list, and some of those we added were: African Black Duck, Southern Pochard, African Pygmy-goose, Long-crested Eagle, White-fronted Bee-eater and Brown-throated Martin. There were several, common species which eluded us and it was too early for many summer migrants. It was however a satisfactory count and was most enjoyable. Thanks to all team members for their participation. **Di Rushforth**

MATABELELAND

From the Chairman

September and October always seem to be particularly special months on the avian calendar, with the return of many of our migrants. Marula trees are in flower and these usually attract a good number of insects and potential food. Within our BULAWAYO Hillside garden, our marula always seems to be a focal point for small insect eaters and the return of Willow Warblers always adds interest to its avian life. This year, many migrants seemed to arrive with a cold snap of weather at the end of September, with European Bee-eater on 28/9, Willow Warbler 29/9 and African Paradise-flycatcher on the 30/9, all a little later than normal. Activity within the Branch has been rather low key with the Verreaux's Eagle Survey attracting the largest amount of participation. We aim to follow up this year's survey work with a debriefing in November, at which results and problems can be discussed. Finally, at the year end we are planning a Social at Whitestone School, which, with its attractive location should be an enjoyable way to complete the year. **Martin Smith**

Sunday 19 August – Verreaux's Eagle Outing MATOPOS

The first outing of the year in May had proved to be popular, but rather short on Verreaux's Eagle breeding so we were hoping that the August outing would produce more action. We began with a check on the Bambata pair. Last year the breeding attempt had failed and we felt this may have been due to disturbance, with the cave being one of the few places in the Hills to receive a regular flow of visitors. In the latter part of last year a 'frustration' nest was built a little to the left of the original site and it was on this nest that we were able to see a fully feathered large brown eaglet. This was pleasing to record after the failure in the previous season. This part of the Game Park holds an appreciable concentration of Verreaux's Eagles and we were able to observe a further two pairs on route to the cave, both of which were not breeding. We moved on to have lunch at Mesilumi, which was still full of water and looked particularly attractive, surrounded by a number of trees with belated autumn colours. Our lunch spot allowed us a clear view of 51, with the pair present, but no breeding attempt this year. We had higher hopes of finding some action at 105, whom we had seen nest building in May. A lengthy and dusty walk up the kopjie produced considerable damage to our group with a particularly prickly patch of scrub to negotiate before reaching the nest. Plenty of mutes suggested an attempt, but there was no trace of a chick or any prey remains and the pair was later seen in flight in the valley below. Rather belatedly we all gathered at the Yacht Club to compare notes, with a total of one chick only for the Game Park area. This is in contrast to the Mtshelili Valley, where a reasonable number of pairs have been successful and obviously poses a number of questions. Survey work continues with a follow up towards the year end on whether chicks have fledged and we still have a number of queries over the status of a few pairs. **Martin Smith**

TSHABALALA Game Sanctuary — Sunday 16 September 2001

Sensibly, we had aimed for an early start to avoid the heat of the day and with a cold “snap” of weather we certainly achieved that!

Having had a single phone call the night before, I wasn't expecting too much company and found myself alone for a walk around Tshabalala, underneath a grey, overcast sky and a stiff breeze with the threat of “guti”. With at least 25mm of rain the day before conditions were a little sticky and I was able to compare the adhesive properties of both red and black soils. Close to the gate at least three Kalahari Scrub-robins were calling, very different from the more common White-browed Scrub-robin. Walking around the open area produced Black-chested Prinia, Sabota Lark and an appreciable number of Marico Flycatchers. The road past the staff quarters always seems to yield a good range of species with three species of waxbill – Violet-eared Waxbill, Black-faced Waxbill and Blue Waxbill being added to the list. The Acacia seems to be particularly thick at this point and held some attractive Crimson-breasted Shrike and a Burnt-necked Eremomela, quietly foraging amongst the foliage. Given six months of minimal rainfall, it was hardly surprising the watercourse held no water; however the surrounding vegetation was greener than elsewhere and offered more cover. Two species of francolin/spurfowl made their presence known with a swift winged flight across the watercourse and a herd of Wildebeest snorted at me warily. Despite a search for oxpeckers, none were seen, with the closest known group still being some 25km away in the National Park. Returning via slightly higher land produced the only raptor of the morning, a Black-shouldered Kite, hovering into the wind – presumably most of the large raptors were waiting for blue sky to reappear.

A session of Pearl-spotted Owlet impersonations generated a flurry of avian activity with a group of Marico Flycatcher arriving to peer at me suspiciously and a pair of Ashy Tit, making a pleasing addition to the list. My total after a two hour stroll was a little under forty species, including many of the specials, which make this patch of Acacia so rewarding, its just a pity that it is not better used by the public with a couple of vehicles for the whole weekend. **Martin Smith**

EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB

Outing to BURMA VALLEY — Sunday 29 July 2001

Another version of the outing which is worth publishing

A seemingly cold day but lo and behold a total of twelve enthusiastic birdwatchers, some of whom braved the morning chill and walked ten kilometres to Burma Valley Country Club came for the day's fare.

We were expectant of a plethora of different bird species. First to be spotted in a large gum tree were Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters and a beautiful Scarlet-chested Sunbird twirping away. Later on, as we moved along the road on the farm, a Striped Kingfisher and a Fork-tailed Drongo were spotted. A Namaqua Dove silhouetted in a dry tree flew away instantly after being sighted. A Southern Black Flycatcher was identified flying about in a tree — we then saw what we believe to have been a Brimstone Canary. This was confirmed by our seasoned colleague, Mr Darryl Plowes. We also saw a Greater Honeyguide which attracted us with its inviting call. Later on we saw Red-billed Quelea and then an amazing spotting of a beautiful Western Violet-backed Sunbird in a mango tree. We then saw an African Yellow White-eye chattering about in a tree, a White-browed Robin-chat, a Crowned Hornbill and a Terrestrial Brownbul was spotted in the undergrowth of bushes.

We then went back to the club for refreshments after which we drove to the dam where unfortunately few water birds were seen. We saw a Reed Cormorant, an Egyptian Goose wading about, a Grey Heron basking on a stump of a tree and an African Darter.

All in all we saw sixty bird species. An excellent morning for birdwatching. **Tatenda Nhapi**

Birdwatch — HONDE VALLEY

This was my first Birdwatch. I went down to the Honde Valley and joined up with Abasi Jana, Sue Fawcett and a young man called Costa.

We did not have much variety of habitats, so our total of about 120 was not very high. However, we were able to tick off some real specials.

Top of the list was the Anchieta's Tchagra. Sadly, we will almost certainly be the only people to have recorded it this weekend because it is no longer found anywhere else in the country. And even more sadly, the tiny patch that is its home continues to shrink. We were shocked and furious to find that an area of this tiny, precious habitat had been cleared for a football field!!! Abasi, Sue and Birdlife

Zimbabwe are working together to try to save the bird for Zimbabwe, but things are not looking good right now.

But back to more pleasant things. Another special not found elsewhere in Zimbabwe, to my knowledge, was the Palm-nut Vulture. Then there were the Narina Trogons that were heard in two separate areas and one very kindly displayed itself on an exposed perch.

Added to that were sightings of Black-throated Wattle-eye and Blue-mantled Crested Flycatchers, a Half-collared Kingfisher, Olive Sunbirds and Purple-banded Sunbirds, Green Twinspot, White-starred Robin and Scarce Swift flying with Little Swift. Red-chested Flufftails and Buff-spotted Flufftails were given away by their calls.

The Honde Valley is a great place to bird. We are very fortunate to have a man of Abasi's knowledge as a guide in the area, as well as Costa, a waiter at the Eastern Highlands Club, who is Abasi's apprentice. And, if you need a base from which to do your birding in the Honde, you cannot do better than the revamped Eastern Highlands Club.

So, our species list was not remarkable for its length, but that was more than made up for by the "Specials" we were fortunate enough to see.

I look forward to hearing how other teams fared. **Terry Browning**

Karoi Bird Club

BirdLife Zimbabwe and World Birdwatch Count — 6/7 October 2001

We fielded two teams for this count, although only the Karoi team were able to continue onto the 48 hour count. The other team did their count at MANA POOLS where they recorded 70 species, the highlight being a pale colour morph Wahlberg's Eagle. Also seen were Red-billed Oxpecker, Dickinson's Kestrel, Long-toed Lapwing, Southern Carmine Bee-eater, White-crested Helmet-shrike and Retz's Helmet-shrikes, Grey-headed Gull, Spur-winged Goose, African Fish-eagle and Yellow-billed Kite which were plentiful as were Egyptian Goose and Southern Ground-hornbill, the latter very vocal in the early morning.

The team scouting the KAROI area covered several farms, dams, woodland and grassland with ploughed fields in between being scrutinised to come up with 125 species for the 24 hour count and 139 for the 48 hour count. We saw very few waders/water birds, and no crombecs, eremomelas, African Yellow White-eyes or Willow Warblers, the latter possibly to arrive. The Red-chested Cuckoo had only just arrived, announcing his return with an early morning call on the last day of the count and European Bee-eater obliged by making their appearance on the powerline as we turned into our gates that evening! Broad-billed Rollers had arrived only two days before the count. Other highlights were Black-crowned Night-heron with two juveniles, Cardinal Woodpecker feeding chicks, 3 Purple Heron, a single Collared Palm-thrush of a pair, and we were treated to a few notes of his beautiful song in the late afternoon — this pair are in a garden with several Washingtonia and Queen Palms. We saw Green-winged Pytilia, Red-throated Twinspot and a White-crested Helmet-shrike sitting on its exposed nest atop a branch, with the rest of the gang in attendance. Magpie Shrike, Meves's Starling and a sub-adult Saddle-billed Stork were also seen, so too a single Yellow-billed Stork. Night birds were Spotted Eagle-owl, Barn Owl, Fiery-necked Nightjar, Square-tailed Nightjar and a Pearl-spotted Owlet. **Merle Mitchell**

Rydings School Interpretive Centre

Walks on each first Saturday of the month were done and an extensive 4 hour walk was done on Saturday, 6 October — 70 species seen but none of the little ones to be found for some reason or another. **Merle Mitchell**

TAIL FEATHERS

Ringing recovery

A report has been received from SAFRING Recovery/Control of an interesting recovery of a ringed bird during Cyclone Eline. The bird recovered was a European Storm-petrel *Hydrobates pelagicus*, originally ringed as an adult at Ness of Duncansby, Highland Region of Scotland on 9 August 1997. The bird was recovered by Ignacio Mukozhora on 2 February 2000 at MASVINGO — a distance of 9 288 kilometres from where it was ringed.

“Birds, what a Wonderful Creature” written by Kudakwashe Gutu, Grade 7A, Tamuka Primary School, Chitungwiza

The following poem is the second of four written by children of Tamuka Primary School.

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| <p>1. I always walk in the forest
Adventuring day and night.
I admire the Birds,
What a God created creature?
Birds are wonderful creatures.</p> | <p>2. Dove, Owl and Kingfisher
Are all Birds that are good.
They always sing every morning,
Greeting a new day coming.
What a blessed creature it is!</p> |
| <p>3. I can't imagine an
Environment without Birds.
What a desert environment?
What a silent forest?
Birds what wonderful creatures.</p> | <p>4. Birds are threatened every day -
Some kill them for meat,
Some even trap them.
Trapping them for meat.
Please stop killing Birds,
Let's protect and conserve them.
Birds are life.</p> |
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NOTICEBOARD

Buy-a-Brick campaign

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

Jay Kay Publishing	\$1 000	D Scott	\$700	AC Alegria	\$500
Dave & Lynne Evans	\$ 275	B Edwards	\$250	Godfrey Mutingwende	\$ 75

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

Umfurudzi Wildlife Survey Game Count

Volunteers are needed for game and bird counts in this wilderness area only 150 km from Harare over the weekend 2-4 November. Hippo Pools are offering accommodation at half price for the weekend. The area has great potential to become Harare's easiest access to a National Park in the future. Apart from the wilderness and wildlife there are the scenic Mazowe River and mountain ranges such as Chizina. There is a large diversity of vegetation and wildlife and of historical interest are Portuguese forts and Shona defenses on the hill tops. It does however need more public interest and input which will generate increased support on anti-poaching, infrastructure and more game translocation into the area. For information on the count please contact Ian Jarvis on Harare 730123 or E-mail hippo@africaonline.co.zw

Legacies and Wreath Funds

A reminder that 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 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.

NTT-ME World Bird Count — October 2001

Again this year the Japanese telecommunication company, NTT-ME is sponsoring a World Bird Count. As in previous years, birdwatchers all over the world record the number of bird species they see during October. Lists are then compiled into one grand total of species seen and then NTT-ME makes a donation to BirdLife's Asia Programme for bird conservation.

Please submit your lists to the BirdLife Zimbabwe offices as soon as possible after 31 October.

Web site

For updated information on BirdLife Zimbabwe please visit our web site — see address on the front page. We are very grateful to MWeb for hosting our web site.

ZIMBIRDNET

This is similar to SABIRDNET but unfortunately is not as active. More reports of bird sightings and information on birds are needed to keep the interest going. The idea is for questions to be posed about birds and their behaviour and for answers to be found. If you would like to participate and have e-mail

please send your address to the BirdLife Zimbabwe offices. Please let's hear from those of you already on ZIMBIRDNET.

Merchandise for Sale

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

Embroidered badges	\$ 60
Hats	\$258
Caps	\$553
T-shirts	\$500
Sleeveless, hunting jackets	\$663
Golf shirts	\$740

Books for sale

The following are available from the BirdLife offices:

<i>The Atlas of the Birds of Sul Do Save, Southern Mozambique</i> by Vincent Parker	\$ 500
Back issues of <i>Honeyguide</i>	\$ 5 - \$50 (Depending on issue)
Lake Chivero checklists	\$ 10

Urgently wanted

Can anyone assist with identifying a robust, low-mileage pick-up truck for purchase by BirdLife for use by the Zimbabwe Crane Working Group. Please contact the BirdLife offices.

Keys Found

A set of keys on a key holder inscribed Standard Finance Limited which were found at Lake Chivero on the June Sunday Walk have still not been claimed. Owner please contact Alice Chamunorwa on 490208.

National Garden Bird Survey – Questionnaire

Included with this issue is a questionnaire regarding the possible reintroduction of the National Garden Bird Survey.

Symposium about succulent plants and how to grow them

The symposium will be held at the National Botanic Garden Interpretation Centre, Fifth Street Extension, Harare on Sunday 25 November 2001 from 8.30 a.m. to 4.00 p.m. The cost is \$100 per person and those interested should telephone 497586 or 494187 for information and registration forms. There will also be a sale of aloes, cacti, succulents, cycads, palms, bromeliads, tillandsias and bonsai on Sunday, 2 December 2001 from 9.30 a.m. to 3.00 p.m. also at the National Botanic Garden.

Projects

BirdLife Zimbabwe runs various projects which entail the collection of data on birds. If you would like further information on these please contact the Executive Officer at BirdLife Zimbabwe's offices.

Sightings or recoveries of ringed birds

Please would members be on the look out for ringed birds, either dead or alive, the details of which should be given to your local BirdLife Zimbabwe branch offices or Museum. See interesting recovery reported in Tail Feathers.

New Members

We welcome:

AC Alegria, R J Chittenden, Mr & Mrs V Dickinson, W Dickinson, K J Edwards, Dave & Lynne Evans, N Fernsby, Austin Gonese, B Holland, Mrs G Levey, Clive Meakin, E J Nelson, D J Scott, R Stjernstedt, Lawrence Trim, Mrs P L Young
Thetford Estate