

BABBLER

BirdLife Zimbabwe

A PARTNER DESIGNATE OF BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL

Member of IUCN, The World Conservation Union

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COMMITTEES

<u>Mashonaland Branch</u>	☎	<u>Matabeleland Branch</u>	☎
Chair:	Jennifer Carter 300082	Martin Smith	282474
Members:	Richard Dennison 747567	Julia Dupree	232401
	Liz Hudson 883251	Penny Feather	244034
	Ian Riddell 339716	Clive Townsley	244617
	Di Rushforth 741765	Jean Tucker	241079
	Ken Wilson 745231	Peter Tucker	241079
Executive Officer:	John Paxton cell 011608138 or at the office 490208		
Conservation and Development Officer	Chip Chirara 490208		
Addresses:	P O Box CY 161, Causeway 35 Clyde Road, Eastlea, Harare	3A Holdengarde Aye, Hillside, Bulawayo Bulawayo	
Web site:	http://site.mweb.co.zw/birdlife	Office email:	birds@zol.co.zw
Editors:	Di Rushforth 741765 5 Colenbrander Road, P O Belvedere, Harare	Martin Smith 282474 3A Holdengarde Ave. Hillside, Bulawayo	
Editors' e-mail:	dirushft@zambezi.net	adrienne@mweb.co.zw	

SUBSCRIPTIONS – SENIOR CITIZENS' RATE

It was agreed at the AGM held in April 2001 that with effect from 2002 a special rate of one-third the normal subscription be offered to senior citizens, provided they were over the age of 70 and had been members of the Association for at least 10 years. If you qualify for this concession please pay \$225 for individuals and families and indicate that you fall into this category. If you have already paid the amount of \$675 please contact the office if you require a refund. We apologise for the fact that this was not made clear in the previous issue of *Babbler*. Should you have any queries please contact the office.

ACTIVITIES

NATIONAL

Annual General Meeting 2002

Notice is hereby given that the National AGM will be held on Saturday, 20 April 2002 at Kyle National Park. The entire camp has been taken for the period 18 to 21 April and, if you wish to book a lodge, please complete the booking slip included. The venue was chosen at the previous AGM as it is more or less equidistant for Mashonaland, Matabeleland and Manicaland members and close to the Midlands. The booking has been made subject to there being no security problems at the time but members will be advised of any changes. The agenda will be sent out with the March/April issue of *Babbler*.

MASHONALAND BRANCH

Regular outings

Mukuvisi Woodlands: Sundays, 6 January and 3 February 2002. Meet at the Paget Road entrance at 6.30 a.m. There will be a vehicle guard available.

Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary: Sundays, 13 January and 10 February 2002. 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 morning outing

26 January 2002: Marlborough Vlei walk with Alex Masterson. Meet at 6.30 a.m. Directions: drive to the end of Princess Margaret Road, turn left and continue to the new houses. Parking is in a cul-de-sac where a caretaker lives in a fenced off area. Bring some small notes to pay for security and a reminder that it could be very wet underfoot so bring suitable footwear.

Saturday afternoon outing

16 February 2002: Greystone Park Nature Preserve. Meet at 2.30 p.m. in the car park which is off Halford Road. Bring chairs and refreshments.

Sunday outings

27 January 2002: The second Marlborough Vlei walk with Alex Masterson. Meet at 6.30 a.m. at the Vlei. In order to keep numbers to a minimum please attend only one of these popular walks.

24 February 2002: Gosho Park, Marondera where miombo specials can be seen. Meet at 6.30 a.m. at the offices of BirdLife Zimbabwe, 35 Clyde Road, Eastlea where cars can be left in secure parking.

Thursday evening meetings

17 January 2002: Branch AGM which is on an informal basis when the Committee for 2002 will be decided. Reports will be given by John Shaw (Mukuvisi) and Richard Dennison (Lake Chivero). Pies will be available but there will also be a variety of salads. Please bring your own plate, knife and fork.

21 February 2002: Dr Sue Frost who will talk on the ecology of the Marico and Pale Flycatchers.

Venue: Bowls Pavilion, Old Hararians Association, Drummond Chaplin Street, Milton Park. Time: 6.06 for 6.30 p.m. A cash bar and pies will be available. Security is provided.

Thursday outings to Marlborough Vlei

As there will be two walks in late January with Alex Masterson only one will be led by Ian Riddell in that month, namely on the 10th. In February the dates will revert to the 2nd and 4th Thursdays (14th and 28th) provided Ian is available. Meet at 4.00 p.m. Bring cash to pay for security. For confirmation contact Ian on 339716, or E-mail gemsaf@mango.zw

MATABELELAND BRANCH

Evening Meetings

Friday 1 February 2002 – Branch AGM. The Branch AGM will be held at 3A Holdengarde Avenue, Hillside, commencing at 8.00 p.m. As in previous years, it will be preceded by a braai and social from 6.00 p.m. onwards – fires will be provided, but please bring your own food and utensils.

Monthly outings

Sunday 20 January 2002 – Aisleby Waterfowl Count. At the time of writing the Upper Dam was already spilling, which will make a waterborne approach essential. Please do come and assist – the count is now entering its tenth year of data collection. Meet at the boom at 7.30 a.m. or contact Martin Smith.

Saturday/Sunday 26/27 January 2002 – Fort Rixon Dam Waterfowl Count. We continue with the count at this dam. All interested should contact Penny Feather.

Saturday/Sunday 16/17 February 2002 – proposed away weekend to Plumtree. The Calverts have invited us to join them on their property just outside Plumtree. All interested to contact Martin closer to the date.

Aisleby

Sunday 24 February 2002 – All interested to contact Martin

Hillside Dams Rambles

Monthly walks continue, meet at the Lower Dam at 4.00 p.m. dates being:

Friday 25 January Friday 22 February

EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB

Contacts: Ken Dixon ☎ 020-658 19 Jane Clegg ☎ 020-65610
 For information on outings please contact Jane Clegg or a committee member

Karoi Bird Club

Co-ordinator: Mr K Mitchell P O Box 398, Karoi ☎ 064-7010 (office) 7725 (home)
 E-mail: mitchell@zimwebintenet.com
 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

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 ☎ 068-22005 for details.

REPORTS**NATIONAL**Membership of IUCN

At a recent meeting of IUCN, the World Conservation Union, BirdLife Zimbabwe was accepted for membership.

Founded in 1948, IUCN brings together more than 900 membership organisations, and some 10000 scientists and experts from 181 countries in a unique worldwide partnership. Its mission is to influence, encourage and assist societies throughout the world to conserve the integrity and diversity of nature and to ensure that any use of natural resources is equitable and ecologically sustainable. Within the framework of global conventions IUCN has helped over 75 countries to prepare and implement national conservation and biodiversity strategies. IUCN has approximately 1 000 staff most of whom are located in its 42 regional and country offices while 100 work at its Headquarters in Gland, Switzerland.

Executive Officer's Report

BirdLife Council for the African Partnership Meeting Summary Report

A total of 48 members of the BirdLife family from 16 network countries in Africa with observers from four supporting European Partners and Secretariat staff met at Wakkerstroom, South Africa from 24 — 28 October 2001. Council for the African Partnership (CAP) was convened under the chairmanship of Dr Muhtari Aminu-Kano, Executive Director of the Nigerian Conservation Foundation, and the meeting was ably and efficiently hosted by BirdLife South Africa, the BirdLife Partner in South Africa. Seventeen of the eighteen BirdLife network organisations in Africa and all country programmes and regional projects reported on their activities over the past year.

Various strategies and plans were discussed and some of those were:

- A Species Action Plan Format and Action Planning Process.
- Information on fund-raising needs.
- The African Region Advocacy Working Group outlined plans for the World Summit on Sustainable Development and for further development of advocacy and policy work in Africa in general.
- A small committee would be formed to review CAP bye-laws and amend or modify them if appropriate, particularly with respect to the holding of business meetings. Members of the Committee approved were — John Paxton of BirdLife Zimbabwe, Sam Nyame of Ghana Wildlife Society and Paul [name missing] antongo of NatureUganda.

- The merging of the Business Plan with a concept note/proposal for relocation of the Africa Division to the African continent. Six alternatives for the location were considered and after a ballot the following three were recommended for possible locations in descending order of priority: Kenya, Cameroon and Tanzania.

Recommendations were made for people within the network to be appointed to various working groups.

CAP recommended to BirdLife Council the appointment of Nigerian Conservation Foundation and BirdLife Zimbabwe as Partners. BLZ's application will go to the Global Council meeting in May 2002.

Network development for Partner organisations in Seychelles, Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Madagascar and Malawi were considered.

Technical issues which were presented for discussion were

- A framework for standardised guidelines for monitoring IBAs across the Africa network. It was recommended that the guidelines be field-tested in pilot countries in the network before the CAP meeting in 2002.
- The main outputs of the Annual Planning and Review meeting of the regional IBA conservation project.
- A review of the successful completion of the African IBA directory.
- A training session on new World Bird Database software for IBA co-ordinators. It was recommended that all countries repatriate national IBA data for population of the World Bird Database. The next meeting of CAP will be held in October 2002 in Nigeria.

Launch of the Regional Directory for Africa

The IBA book was launched by the South African Minister of Environment and Tourism at an impressive ceremony at the Eskom Conference Centre in Midrand, South Africa. The section on Zimbabwe was written by Ms Sue Childes and Dr Peter Mundy.

There was a symposium on conservation issues held throughout the day and an exhibition of the work being done by all Partner organisations. BirdLife Zimbabwe's exhibition centred on the work done by the Education Committee, particularly in the Honde Valley which is an IBA.

Threatened birds to get their own ESAP

Endangered Species Action Plans – Report by Susan Childes and Peter Mundy

The BirdLife African Species Working Group was formed in 1998 to co-ordinate and implement a species-based approach to bird conservation that complements the IBA site-based programme. RSPB, in agreement with the Council for African Partnership, worked closely with the BirdLife African Species Working Group and developed a three year project to develop action plans for globally threatened species in Africa that occur in three or more countries. The UK Darwin Initiative provided co-funding for this project, which is now being implemented in 17 African countries. The BirdLife Partner in each country is expected to contribute staff time and internal travel and operating costs.

This project selected cross-border species in the participative training and planning exercise because they are difficult to conserve and they require concerted action in all important range countries. The project also aims to provide a number of people from a wide range of countries with workshop training and practical experience.

The first workshop was held in September in Uganda and successfully developed a species action plan format and process. BirdLife South Africa hosted the second workshop at Wakkerstroom Training Centre from 31 October – 4 November 2001. BirdLife Zimbabwe was represented by Susan Childes, while Peter Mundy attended as the important link with government, representing the Dept. of National Parks. Other countries represented were: South Africa, Zambia, Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda and Ethiopia. Travel and accommodation costs were met by RSPB and Darwin funding. The workshop covered:

- Different approaches to conservation
- When a species approach is appropriate
- Importance of flagship species
- Actions in species conservation
- Overview of species action planning
- Stakeholder involvement

- Skills for species action planning (facilitation, monitoring and evaluation, communication)
- Reviews of successful action plans e.g.: the Seychelles Magpie Robin

An initial 8 species have been selected for the international species action plans due to commence early in 2002. Of interest to Zimbabwe are the Lappet-faced Vulture and the Blue Swallow. The vulture occurs in low numbers over most of the country and the swallow is restricted to the montane grasslands of the Eastern Highlands. The vulture is threatened by poisoning from agricultural chemicals and the swallow's habitat is threatened by the spread of pine and wattle. Once the international plans have been developed, each country is expected to prepare its own national action plans.

BIRDWATCH 2001

There was a month-long Bird Festival throughout the World starting with a 48 Hour Bird Watch over the weekend of 6/7 October. The Festival ran through to the end of the first week-end of November and officially ended at the Taiwan Bird Fair on 2/4 November.

Zimbabwe participated in the 48 hour Birdwatch and our own 24 hour Bird Watch 2001 was held. Over 80 invitations were sent out to all corners of the country. It had also been decided to make this a sponsored event to raise money for an educational project in the Chimanimani Schools.

The best support came from the south-eastern part of the country. Peter Caldwell-Barr's "Wovet Watchers" achieved an incredible double — raising the most money (\$37 000) and also recording the highest number of species seen. Second in the fund-raising was Dave Sheehan's "Flora Falcons" (\$27 000) but they recorded only a relatively small number of species. Third place in the fund-raising (\$26 850) and second in the number of species recorded was Gary Douglas' "Malilangwe Lunartics" —very nearly a double second place. Fourth position for both fund-raising (\$8 800) and number of species recorded was Harry Erwee's "Thirteenth Timers". A great record for Harry and his team. Congratulations to the top four fund-raisers but also well done to all members who participated in the event and for their very generous donations received. 92 people or companies donated to the education project — an excellent performance!

The total amount raised was ZW\$ 114 120. This was a wonderful effort for BirdLife Zimbabwe. The Education Officer — Mrs Leslee Maasdorp — has already visited the Eastern Districts and she was very encouraged by the support given by local people.

Indications received from Zimbabwe participants are that more species would be seen if the event could be held in November. This information has been passed on to the BirdLife International Secretariat. I hope everybody had fun and that next year we get an even better coverage.

Terence Fallon — Chairman Publications Committee

Top Ten Teams in Birdwatch 2001

Position	Team Captain	Team Name	District	No. of species
1	Peter Caldwell-Barr	Wovet Watchers	Chipinge	205
2	Gary Douglas	Malilangwe Lunartics	Chiredzi	195
3	Harry Erwee	Thirteenth Timers	Bulawayo	190
4	Clemence Muzenda	Harriers	Chipinge	164
5	Roberto P Accorsi	Dete Darters	Hwange	156
6	Ken Wilson	Harare Harriers	Harare	152
7	Mark Brightman	Thetford Therianthropes	Mazowe	144
8	Kevin Mitchell	Mwami Twitchers	Karoi	139
9	Richard Dennison	Committee Creepers	Harare	136
10	Vernon Dickinson	On Safari	Darwendale	132

MASHONALAND BRANCH

Saturday, 15 September 2001 — HARARE BOTANIC GARDENS

On a cold, blustery, overcast day with the thermometer at 13 degrees centigrade two members of the Mashonaland Branch of BLZ met at the National Botanic Gardens at the appointed time to do a bird count.

The dominant trees were in fresh new leaf, already providing a feast for the newly emerged caterpillars and beetles which in turn fell prey to leaf gleaning avian predators. The most abundant bird species in the Gardens on the day were Kurrichane Thrush, Southern Grey-headed Sparrow and Dark-capped Bulbul.

Feeding on the ground were several flocks of seed eaters – Bronze Mannikin, Black-throated Canary and widowfinches in eclipse plumage, probably Steel-blue Widowfinch, with red beaks and red legs. The flowering trees and shrubs attracted large numbers of sunbirds, predominately “black-throated” juveniles but adult White-bellied Sunbird, Variable Sunbird and Miombo Double-collared Sunbird were also seen. In the tree canopy were Bar-throated Apalis and African Yellow White-eye and in mid strata were African Paradise-flycatcher and Southern Black Flycatchers and several shrikes. Whyte’s Barbets were conspicuous in the canopy of leafless trees and Crested Barbets were more often on the ground feeding in the leaf litter. Around the pond were Common Moorhen, Red-knobbed Coot, Black Crake and a Little Grebe, whilst in the fringing reeds were Thick-billed Weaver, Spectacled Weaver, Southern Masked-weaver and Golden Weavers. Wire-tailed Swallows and Grey-rumped Swallows hawked over the water and two Reed Cormorants were fishing. Although no great sightings were made there was continuous foraging activity going on at all trophic levels and all during the walk there were the constant sounds of varied bird songs. The two “hardies” spent a very pleasant birding afternoon which yielded a total of 42 different species. **K J Wilson**

12 WELSTON ROAD — Saturday, 20 October 2001

Nine of us attended this outing on a hot and partly cloudy afternoon. Sue Hollaway, our hostess, had warned me months ago that about two-thirds of the property had been burnt. When we went on our walk we found that those trees that had their leaves killed did not contain any birds. As most of the trees had no green leaves the number of birds seen was reduced. However, the views on the walk are enough to justify the visit alone. A total of 37 species was identified with the highlights being: 1 Steppe Buzzard, 3 African Golden Oriole and 10 White-fronted Bee-eater. White-fronted Bee-eater are seldom seen this close to Harare as, in my experience, they are usually found at lower altitudes.

Richard Dennison

KENT ESTATES — Sunday, 28 October 2001

Only eight of us set out on the approximately 60 km journey to our ultimate destination at the picnic site west of the lower of the two dams on Kent Estates in the Norton area. We turned off the Bulawayo Road at the 47.5 km peg onto a fairly good dirt road and, once we had reached the farm entrance, we travelled through about 2 km of large gum trees lining both sides of the road before we met our host, Rob Faulkner, at the main farm complex. Rob then led us through the game sanctuary where we saw plains game that included Tsessebe, Zebra and Giraffe. From the very attractive picnic site we walked about a kilometre along a road next to the dam through fairly open Acacia woodland and then into miombo woodland at the top of the dam. All of us agreed that this was a very pleasant venue and very well conserved. The dam contained a lot of dead trees and water plants that created an excellent habitat for water birds. We had a busy time trying to identify the many birds that were around and ended up with a good count of 93 species. The highlights included: 1 adult and 2 juvenile Saddle-billed Stork, Spur-winged Goose, White-backed Vulture, 2 African Cuckoo Hawk, 1 African Purple Swamphen, 6 Broad-billed Roller and 1 Yellow Wagtail. Those who missed this outing missed one of the best we have had for some time and we are grateful to Rob for going to so much trouble to make it a success.

Richard Dennison

Mike Duncan – Oxpeckers – Thursday, 15 November 2001

Mike quickly informed us that he was not an expert on the oxpeckers themselves but that his field was their food, namely ticks. It was, however, an interesting evening with much to learn about. We were told that cattle are very susceptible to tick-borne diseases and we learned about the problematic situations caused by these parasites. Oxpecker populations depend on the availability of trees with nesting holes for which there is competition with other species (wood-hoopoes and hornbills) and proximity to their main diet whether on wild or domestic animals.

We heard that a buffalo can have up to 1 000 adult ticks and an eland can carry up to 800 ticks. One oxpecker eats 14.7 grams per day which is equal to 7 195 larvae or 60 engorged female ticks, so a group of 12 birds would eat 720 female or 86 340 larvae.

Experiments in the Kruger National Park found that there were 60 million ticks per square kilometre while on a farm in Mushandike there were an estimated 120 million per square kilometre — what a horrifying thought! It was found that oxpeckers can reduce the numbers significantly on cattle but the residue population is still problematic with diseases being carried by the parasites. The female tick deposits an enormous number of eggs, sometimes 4 or 5 thousand on the ground, crawling up the grasses young larvae attach themselves to passing legs — animal or human. Finding a tick, after walking through the bush, remove by applying alcohol or the hot end of a match or cigarette to the tick which will be forced to free itself

Yellow-billed Oxpecker *Buphagus africanus* are usually seen with buffalo, rhino and domestic cattle, while Red-billed Oxpecker *Buphagus erythrorhynchus* are normally associated with giraffe or antelope in game reserves. (Reference *Newman's Birds of Southern Africa*.) **Wendy Gilmour**

CROWBOROUGH Sewerage Works — Saturday, 17 November 2001

The visit to Crowborough took place a few days after the arrival of the first rains of the season. Twelve people attended the walk and 56 species were recorded. The lush grazing land on the approach to the sewerage works provided a wealth of African Sacred Ibis, Black-headed Heron, Yellow Wagtail, Abdim's Stork, Blacksmith Lapwing and Capped Wheatear. Highlights were 1 Southern White-faced Scops-owl, high up in an Acacia, 3 White-throated Swallow, Lesser Swamp-warbler, Sedge Warbler and Little Rush-warblers, Black Crake, Diderick Cuckoo, Cape Wagtail and 8 Orange-breasted Waxbill. Amongst the other species recorded were Grey Heron, Hamerkop, Glossy Ibis, White-faced Duck, Black-shouldered Kite, Wahlberg's Eagle, African Jacana, Three-banded Plover, Wattled Lapwing, Common Sandpiper and Wood Sandpipers, Little Swift and African Palm-swifts, Barn Swallow, Red-breasted Swallow and Lesser Striped Swallows, African Stonechat, Cape Longclaw and Rosy-throated Longclaw, Pin-tailed Whydah, and Magpie Shrike. Village Weaver, Red-billed Quelea and Southern Red Bishop were very industrious and vocal amongst the reeds and rushes bordering the ponds. The rain showers confined themselves to the distant suburbs of Harare and the outing proved most rewarding. **Helen Fraser**

MATABELELAND

From the chairman

Despite problems of fuel and agricultural disturbance, we have managed to continue with our monthly outings, which have yielded plenty of birds and provided a pleasing diversion from economic and political gloom. The rainy season has commenced and falls have been sufficient to trigger a real profusion of growth. Termites have emerged and migrants are much in evidence making it an interesting time of year for bird watching.

As a Branch, we have just completed our first year at the helm of the MATOPOS Verreaux's Eagle Survey, with most of this year's breeding activity now documented. Breeding was poor with a total of only 11 successful fledglings for the entire survey area. This level of success means that it would take over 8 years for a pair to replace themselves and that does not take into account post-fledging mortality, which must be high. A number of problems still exist with the survey and there is plenty of opportunity for active participation – new members are extremely welcome. Do come and attend our briefing next year or contact me. **Martin Smith**

Sunday, 21 October 2001 – Kloof Farm, Pasipas Rd

This proved to be a delightful outing to an unspoilt property close to the outskirts of Bulawayo. An appreciable shower of rain on the day before had dampened the dust and the bush had that wonderful, freshly washed smell. Trees were emerging into leaf and a number of species were in bloom acting as focal points for sunbird activity. Conditions were overcast and the threat of rain meant avian life remained active well into the day. We were able to explore the kopjie vegetation, pause for tea and then move onto the watercourse. Migrants had returned and we were able to add a good number of cuckoos to the list. Overhead a mixed flock of feeding swallows, martins and swifts posed considerable identification problems – seen as a range of dark, fast moving silhouettes against a grey sky we eventually settled for African Palm-swifts and possibly Horus Swifts, Barn Swallow and Banded Martin. Our return to the homestead followed a path which led through a small kraal, holding some magnificently horned 'mombies' – fortunately they all proved friendly.

After joining the Southern Masked-weavers and African Palm-swifts on the veranda for tea, we moved on to some mixed mopane and the hay field. In the latter, Crowned Lapwing and African Pipit were added to the list as well as the only raptor of the morning – a Wahlberg's Eagle. With conditions overcast and still, few raptors were airborne and the eagle merely flew a short distance to perch in another tree. Our return to the homestead led us through some flowering Terminalia, which was definitely at its worst, with its pungent odour afflicting our nostrils. Mixed vegetation at the base of the kopjie held plenty of interest with a good number of Southern Grey-headed Sparrows, a honeyguide and a pair of Meyer's Parrot. We finished the morning with a tally of just over 80 species and thank Anne Visser for allowing us to explore her wonderful property.

Friday, 26 October 2001 – HILLSIDE Dams

In contrast to the previous month, the weather was less hostile to birding and an appreciable number of ‘birders’ joined the ramble, including a number of new faces. Migrants were much in evidence and three species of cuckoo were added to the checklist. We followed our usual route along the watercourse and found plenty of interest – an attractive call proved to be hard to identify, until the bird was seen and was a White-browed Scrub-robin, perched high in a *Kirkia*. A little further along we were able to puzzle over the identity of a small honeyguide, whose white tail feathers were clearly visible. Poor light and its position against a grey sky made colours hard to distinguish; however, we were able to see a thin curved bill identifying it as a Brown-backed Honeybird – a new species for the dams. Beneath the Upper Dam wall, a female African Paradise-flycatcher flitted noisily from branch to branch and, jokingly, I suggested looking for a ring as I had trapped and ringed a number in the garden. Surprisingly it did have a ring which of course left us with the puzzle as to whether it was mine or not. Our return along the north of the watercourse yielded plenty of activity and as the light was beginning to fade, we were able to add a second addition to the area’s list. A medium-sized heron lazily flew past and then turned to perch in a tree at the head of the Lower Dam. Rufous colours, a large eye and medium size identified it as a juvenile Black-crowned Night-heron – a pleasing way to finish the outing.

Sunday, 18th November 2001 – TSHABALALA Game Sanctuary

The sun was shining and conditions were ideal for birdwatching. A heavy fall of rain the day before meant that the Sanctuary was looking at its best with the Acacia in full leaf and bursting with life. Birds were vocal and active and it was a morning of nests, cuckoos, warblers and raptors.

We made our way down a particularly sticky, muddy track towards the staff quarters and found a couple of nests to view. The first was that of a Cape Penduline-tit, positioned at the top of a small *Ziziphus* tree, it was beautifully crafted with the false entrance clearly visible. We caught a fleeting glimpse of the occupant which rapidly disappeared inside. The second nest was that of a pair of Black Cuckooshrike, with both birds actively involved in its construction – the male and the female appeared to bring nest material with the female subsequently sitting in the nest and apparently arranging material. We then moved on to skirt the open area and found some interesting scats containing plenty of hair and small pieces of scales that looked remarkably like plastic. We settled for snake scales, which, judging by their size, would have belonged to a comparatively large reptile – perhaps a civet was responsible for the scats’ production.

Pearl-spotted Owlet impersonations generated a flurry of activity with Marico Flycatcher and sunbirds arriving to flit about in consternation. Subsequent scolding “chitters” attracted both Icterine Warbler and Willow Warblers and it was interesting to be able to compare diagnostic features of both. The Icterine Warblers’ yellow wash, slaty blue legs and orange gape were all clearly visible. A little further on a Spotted Flycatcher foraged at ground level and we were all able to observe its streaked head and note its long-winged appearance. Vocally, we were treated to a range of calls from a Kalahari Scrub-robin perched high on a marula tree. Again we were all able to see it and note its plain underparts and cocked tail. Above this and a little below the cloud base a good number of raptors drifted past, their large bulky silhouettes and s-shaped pattern of the wings led to most being recorded as Steppe Eagles, a real indication that the rainy season was in progress. At a lower level, Yellow-billed Kite, Wahlberg’s Eagle and both Brown Snake-eagle and Black-chested Snake-eagle were added to the list. The Brown were seen in flight together with the Black-chested which repeatedly dived on its Brown counterpart.

Finally, as we made our way back to the entrance, Black-chested Prinia were seen and heard, bringing our total for the morning to just under 70 species, which included 5 species of cuckoo. The Sanctuary continues to be an avian delight and worthy of inclusion within our regular programme.

AISLEBY

The October outing was meant to be an educational trip with the Museum Bird Club, but cool, overcast conditions and Highlanders’ birthday celebrations produced a single participant plus the Museum Staff. We felt we should follow the programme and spent a couple of hours ‘birding’ at Aisleby. Foot and Mouth control measures were in place with vehicles and feet being dosed with disinfectant, although there seemed to be no restriction on movement within the property. We started with a slow perusal of the pastures, which produced plenty of Wood Sandpiper along the irrigation channels and a pair of Greater Painted-snipe. At the Bird Dam, African Purple Swampheens were clearly visible amongst the Typha and a third Greater Painted-snipe was seen briefly before it moved into cover. The Ibis Dam was disappointing in that the water level had been reduced to a mere puddle with water being drawn off for

irrigation. Waterfowl were clustered around the remaining water at the far end of the dam and hard to distinguish, although we could pick out a pleasing number of Ruff and Glossy Ibis.

November always seems to be one of the best months to visit the property with plenty of specials on the move. Ken Seiler reported a Grey Plover, which he saw twice over a period of four days – typically it had moved on by the time I managed to reach the property.

The Sunday outing received little support, which was a pity because we had some excellent “birding”. We began with a check on waders at the night storage dams and, with one holding a muddy pool of shallow water, there was plenty to observe – Little Stint, sandpipers, Ruff and Black-winged Stilts were all present in appreciable numbers. A slow drive through the pastures produced the first Yellow Wagtail of the year, whilst overhead a pale phase Booted Eagle caused panic amongst the waders. It is a vagrant to the property with the last record being about three years ago and it took a little time to identify it, however, the diagnostic “landing lights” at the base of the leading edge of the wings were seen. The pastures also held a small flock of Spur-winged Goose with 17 present – a high total for the farm.

The Ibis Dam was looking a little more positive with water now covering most of the surface, but thick grass and vegetation has grown up restricting visibility. This should be good as cover for “skulkers” a little later in the year and we might expect Allen’s Gallinule and Common Moorhen to breed. Over the far end of the dam three Yellow-billed Kite circled and drew our attention – closer inspection revealed that one was a juvenile/female Western Marsh-harrier, the first of the year and a fitting sighting to end the outing. **Martin Smith**

Summary of Notable Sightings

Grey Plover – Sewage Works Dam, 17/11/2001, Night Storage Ponds, 20/11/2001. Two pratincoles – species unknown – pastures, 22/11/2001. 40 White Stork – in flight over lands, 22/11/2001. 1 Yellow Wagtail – Sewage Works, 25/11/2001. 1 Booted Eagle (pale phase) – in flight over pastures, 25/11/2001. 1 Western Marsh-harrier (immature/female) – in flight over Ibis Dam, 25/11/2001.

EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB

Outing to Kondozi Farm, Odzi - Sunday 26 August 2001

A large group of members and visitors participated in the August outing that Koos de Klerk had organised at his farm. This area near Odzi town differs from the rest of Mutare and consequently is always interesting. It is a much drier, harsher environment with a lot of scrub acacia and it seems that here we can expect Matabeleland-associated birds.

On arrival, we drove past impressive packing sheds to a small but well-vegetated dam and the first group immediately spotted Violet-eared Waxbill. From the dam we saw our first Little Rush-warbler, behaving exactly as *Roberts’* said it should, and Black Crake adults with two well grown chicks. With marshy land on our left and dry scrub on the right, we saw a good mixture of birds — these were Grey-rumped Swallows, Lesser Striped Swallows, Wire-tailed Swallows, Pearl-breasted Swallows and Red-breasted Swallows. We listed Giant Kingfisher, Pied Kingfisher, Malachite Kingfisher, Brown-hooded Kingfisher and Striped Kingfishers, whilst Little Grebes, Three-banded Plover, Wood Sandpiper and Water Thick-knees were seen on or near the lower dam. A more energetic group walked the entire route cut for us by Koos and they added exciting birds like African Quailfinch, Orange-breasted Waxbill and Purple Heron.

At the end of a fine morning’s birding, we all had a refreshing tea at Barbara and Koos’ beautiful home which has a commanding view. Sadly, this came as a stark reminder of the times in which we find ourselves and most of the land was under set fires as far as the eye could see. Our thanks to the de Klerks – Barbara, Matthew and Koos – for the opportunity to visit the area, which came up trumps and yielded 96 species for a short morning outing. **Jane Clegg**

JULIASDALE — Sunday, 25 November 2001

Remember the promises made to us by our (once) well-respected Chairman, about such exciting things as Blue Swallows and Wattled Cranes, which he claimed to have had lined up for us last Sunday? Well, this is what he has to say for himself

“Come and see the Blue Swallows, even a few Wattled Cranes”, I said hoping thereby to drag our members away from home. And I was to some extent successful as we were 8 at the museum at 6.00 a.m. Unfortunately, later I seemed to lose the plot. It was a fabulous, clear day – Mutasa looked wonderful with everyone at work in the fields under a blue sky. En route for Bonda we saw Long-crested Eagle and Black-shouldered Kite. Val Cameron was there to meet us as we arrived at Ruadzi Primary School, near London Store and we set off full of expectation down the bumpy track.

Surprisingly few hirundines about, I thought, still sure they would be present lower down. But no; not one Blue Swallow – even Lesser Striped Swallow were difficult to find. There were birds in the riverine scrub and fields – Wailing Cisticolas and Rattling Cisticolas, Groundscraper Thrush, African Pipit, Cape Bunting, Rufous-naped Lark and lots of weavers, but no Blue Swallows! I prevaricated, giving them time to appear, but to no avail. “Perhaps they’ve moved down the valley”, said Val who, only the previous day, had visited the school and been told they were there.

Our next stop was another good spot for Blue Swallows, but was also barren, though we did see a Rock Kestrel and there were large numbers of African Stonechat. The Archer’s protea propagation farm was next but not until we had gorged ourselves on various flavours of tea and biscuits at Val’s delightful cottage. Birding here was also not as rewarding as usual despite the favourable conditions. Violet-eared Waxbill was a bonus as was the Yellow-bellied Eremomela but we had to work hard for them. On the way back we added almost nothing and had to be content with about 50 species but memories of a lovely day out. Thanks to Val for hosting us and Terry and Tim for providing transport. **Ken Dixon**

TAIL FEATHERS

Visit to DAVID WHITEHEAD PONDS, CHEGUTU — Saturday, 27 October 2001

A 7 o’clock start at Chegutu was a must as the morning got hot quickly – 36°. The four of us walked 5 km along the roadways between the various ponds and shallows. A total of 32 species were recorded with highlights being: 30 pairs of Black-winged Stilt, 40 Black-headed Heron — some nesting in an Acacia, 100 Red-billed Teal, 60 Pied Avocet, 50 Little Grebe, 30 sandpipers — Common Sandpiper and Wood Sandpiper.

At present with land preparation there is a lot of human movement around the ponds but this does not worry the residents or summer migrants. **Margaret Parrock**

Rio Tinto — Birds and the Environment

Last year employees from 21 Rio Tinto mining sites in 10 countries volunteered to participate in a bird count and an incredible 590 species were recorded.

This year during 6 and 14 October our site was again the Patchway Mine — 15 km west of Kadoma. Our weather was perfect – clear, sunny days and a total of 99 species were recorded by our team. Mr R T Chittenden, the Mine Manager, together with Mr C Shumba and Mr T Chindove of the Mine organised talks, slide shows and outings. 10 children from Patchway Primary School and 15 children from Kwayedza Secondary School at the Mine joined in. These children have a conservation club at school and now they are more aware of the birds around them. Competitions were organised and the best pupil would receive a copy of *Newman’s Birds of Southern Africa*. Six outings were held at different times and areas of the Mine complex. The resident breeding colony of 80 plus Little Bee-eaters is happy and nesting in the sand dunes. A party of Blacksmith Lapwings feed in the slime waters, Crested Barbet, Fork-tailed Drongo, Southern Masked-weaver and Cape Turtle-dove all nest in the quiet tree areas surrounding the various mine dumps. Violet-backed Starlings were plentiful (30), and White-bellied Sunbird were plentiful (15) flitting everywhere. Mr B Freeman and Mrs C Chittenden shared in all the outings and were invaluable for identification and calls. Thank you to Patchway Mine management for all their hospitality and transport. We look forward to 2002. **Margaret Parrock**

“Birds” written by Lucia M Grant, Grade 7A, Tamuka Primary School, Seke, Chitungwiza

The following is the third in a series of four written by children of Tamuka Primary School.

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Everywhere they are found flying
Even on earth they are found
Looking for locusts to eat
They add colours to our environment
Birds, Birds, Birds, everywhere Birds | 2. Imagine an environment without Birds
What a silent and dead atmosphere
Birds are part of us,
They play a crucial role
Birds, Birds, Birds, everywhere Birds. |
| 3. They deserve protection
They need our care
Even our love is needed
Stop killing Birds
Stop abusing Birds
Birds, Birds, Birds
Birds are important | 4. Every morning they produce music
What a melodious sound
What a sweet hearing sound
So let’s protect our Birds
Birds beautify our world.
They add colour to our world
Let’s conserve Birds. |

NOTICEBOARDBuy-a-Brick Campaign

Thank you very much to those of you who have recently contributed. Names will be published in the next issue. Any contributions, no matter how small, will be much appreciated – a form is included.

2002 Peter Ginn Calendars

We have been fortunate to have been offered a number of Peter Ginn's calendars. The quality of the photographs is as usual excellent. These will not, however, be available until January and are therefore offered at a discounted price. If you wish to place an order please complete the form included.

2001 NTT-ME World Bird Count

This year the number of Zimbabwe birds recorded during October was 447 which means that an amount of US\$4 470 was raised by us for bird conservation work in Asia.

Blue Swallow Survey

This is the season for Blue Swallows and sightings and records are required. Details of date, location, number of birds seen (adult/juvenile), other swallow/swift species, observer's name and address. This work is part the African Species Action Plan and provides valuable information. Please submit records to: Susan Childes, P.O. Box BW 53 Borrowdale, Harare or email cfaz@africaonline.co.zw

ZIMBIRDNET

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 e-mail 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	\$395	Two-tone caps	\$553
T-shirts	\$500	Sleeveless, hunting jackets	\$663
Golf shirts	\$740		

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.

National Garden Bird Survey

Thank you to all of those who completed the questionnaire – a fair number of people have responded almost all of whom have indicated that they wish to participate. Unfortunately none of those who had previously participated and had dropped out have replied – it would be useful to know their reasons. For those of you who have forgotten to do so it's not too late! The Research & Conservation Committee are working on the details of a survey that will have clear objectives and be of interest to participants. Early in the New Year forms will be sent out.

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.

WISHING YOU AN ENJOYABLE FESTIVE SEASON AND A SAFE AND HAPPY NEW YEAR.