

BABBLER

BirdLife Zimbabwe

A PARTNER DESIGNATE OF BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL

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CHANGE OF ADDRESS

Please note that our box number has changed to: PO Box RV 100, Runiville, Harare

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Subscriptions for 2002 were due on 1 January. If you have overlooked payment please send cheques to BirdLife Zimbabwe, PO Box RV 100, Runiville. This will be your last *Babbler* if you do not pay!

ACTIVITIES

NATIONAL

Annual General Meeting 20 April 2002

The agenda for the National AGM is included. Please keep it and take it with you to the meeting.

MASHONALAND BRANCH

OUTINGS HAVE BEEN ARRANGED ON THE ASSUMPTION THAT THERE WILL BE NO SECURITY PROBLEMS. PLEASE CONTACT A COMMITTEE MEMBER IF IN DOUBT.

Regular outings

Mukuvisi Woodlands: Sundays, 3 March and 7 April 2002. Meet at the Paget Road entrance at 6.30 a.m. There will be a vehicle guard available.

Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary: No outing on Sunday 10 March but there will be one as usual on Sunday, 14 April 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.

No Saturday afternoon outings have been arranged

Sunday outings

24 March 2002: Christon Bank Nature Reserve. Meet at 6.30 a.m. at 2 Helena Road, Marlborough where cars can be left and arrangements made to share transport. Bring chairs and refreshments.

28 April 2002: Outing to an area south of Harare where there have been reports of sightings of Wattled Cranes. The outing will be hosted by Chitungwiza Environmental Group. Bring chairs and refreshments. Meet at 6.30 a.m. at the offices of BirdLife Zimbabwe, 35 Clyde Road, Eastlea where cars can be left in secure parking. Please support the outing and meet members of the Group.

Thursday evening meetings

21 March 2002: A talk on harvester termites will be given by John Bissett who undertook a study of these insects in the Matabeleland area over a period of about 10 years. The study was one of the most detailed pieces of research ever done on one insect in this part of the world. These insects form a vital part of the diet of many bird species.

No meeting in April due to the National AGM.

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 held on the 2nd and 4th Thursdays of the month at 4.00 p.m. provided Ian is available. Dates are: 14 and 28 March, 11 and 25 April 2002. Bring cash to pay for security. For confirmation contact Ian Riddell on 339716, or gemsaf@mango.zw Directions: drive to the end of Princess Margaret Rd, turn left, continue to the new houses – parking is in a cul-de-sac where a caretaker lives in a fenced off area

100 Club

Mashonaland Branch is trying to raise funds as most of its money has been taken up with the building of the hide at Lake Chivero. The Committee believes that a 100 Club could be a good way of fund raising as well as give members a chance to win cash prizes. If anyone is interested in participating please contact Jennifer Carter, telephone 300082 or Email gcarter@mweb.co.zw or any committee member.

MATABELELAND BRANCH

Evening Meetings

Friday 1 March 2002 – Verreaux's Eagle Briefing. All are most welcome to attend this year's briefing which will pick up problems encountered in the past and allocate nests/territories for this years survey work. The Meeting will commence at 6.00 p.m. and be followed by a "bring and share" supper. Venue: 49 Heyman Road, Suburbs or contact Julia.

Monthly Outings

23/24 March 2002

Proposed visit to Willow Park – contact Penny Feather for further details.

18-21 April 2002 – National AGM at Kyle

Aisleby

Month end dates and co-ordinator for Aisleby are 31 March and 28 April – for both contact Martin.

Hillside Dams. Dates for our monthly rambles are as follows: Friday 29 March & Friday 26 April. Meet at the Lower Hillside Dam Car Park at 4.00 p.m. or contact Martin.

EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB

Contacts: Ken Dixon ☎ 020-65819	Jane Clegg ☎ 020-65610
Sunday 24 March 2002	Africa University 6.30 a.m. K Dixon 65819
Sunday 28 April 2002	Odzi 6.30 a.m. J Clegg 65610

The Museum is the departure point and, PROVIDED PRIOR ARRANGEMENTS ARE MADE, transport and binoculars may be arranged.

Karoi Bird Club

Co-ordinator: Kevin Mitchell P O Box 398, Karoi ☎ 064-7010 (office) 7725 (home)

E-mail: mitch@africaonline.co.zw

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

ACTIVITIESRydings 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**World Wetlands Day — 2 February 2002

There was an event to celebrate this day at the Mukuvisi Woodlands. Our Conservation and Development Officer, Dr Chirara, gave a talk on the Marlborough and Monavale Vleis. The importance of them and the birdlife, other fauna and vegetation that they contain and the threats to the vleis were highlighted. Mrs Chasi of the Natural Resources Board gave an overview of what is meant by 'Wetlands' in terms of legislation and the Ramsar Convention. We also watched a video of the October Rio Tinto Bird Watch event at Greystone Park Nature Preserve where we saw Jacko Williams and Deborah Varden leading groups for the bird count. An entertaining talk was given by Dr Sibanda of ZINATHA on how culturally so much of nature is put to use in a sustainable way. We went for a walk on the vlei in front of the game viewing platform at the woodlands and after tea attended the re-opening of the walk-through aviary by Mrs Sheila Brookes-Ball of WEZ. **John Paxton — Executive Officer**

Bird Awareness Programme

The Education Committee was overwhelmed by the response to the schools' competition "The Inspiration of Birds". Many of the written entries had interesting and exciting stories and legends showing that birds are interwoven in the cultural life of Zimbabweans. The winning secondary school was Sagambe Secondary School (prize of \$2 000) with Warren Park 2 being awarded first prize (also \$2 000) in the primary schools' category.

The Bird Awareness Programme continues and is very popular and more schools are becoming involved. Workshops on birds as well as bird ringing have been held in various areas. Areas covered by the programme are: Chipinge, Honde Valley, Matabeland, Manicaland, Mashonaland and Midlands.

MASHONALAND BRANCHMasembura Communal Land — Sunday, 25 November 2001 QDS 1731A4

Families Rockingham-Gill, Carter and Dennison together with Geoff Lowe and Kitty Glennie visited the Chikupo Caves, Masembura Communal Land, Bindura District. As had been hoped, 20 to 30 Mottled Swift were circling in front of the caves and we saw a 1945 photo of a gum tree ladder up to the nest sites. Little Swift were breeding in the caves, a Black Stork was high overhead at one time and so were 2 Verreaux's Eagles. Also seen were Speckled Pigeon, Lazy Cisticola, African Rock Martin, Mocking Cliff-chat and Familiar Chats and 40 to 50 Red-winged Starlings. We did not see Freckled Nightjar. The chief activity in the area was the collection of Muzhanje fruit which were prolific and about 5 Whyte's Barbet were seen in the trees with Black-backed Puffback particularly common. A Red-backed Mannikin was seen and an African Emerald Cuckoo was heard. Chacma Baboons were on the rocks above the caves and there was another troop further east. The caves revealed an "old check list" in the form of Bushman Paintings of what was there in days gone by — elephant, rhino, kudu, tsessebe, sable, reedbuck, zebra and warthog. Nearby we visited Nekati Sponge where we saw 2 adult Wattled Crane and an immature which was testing its wings while we were there. The cranes seemed to have little fear of local inhabitants and behaved like turkeys in their presence when they had no objection to being herded.

I looked for field cards from this area and found none, so if anyone has a bird list from the Chikupo Caves area please fill in a field card and send it to the Field Card Organiser. **David Rockingham-Gill**

Thursday, 17 December 2001 — Birds of the British Virgin Islands

Brian Gratwicke had kindly offered to talk to us about his experience in the British Virgin Islands where he had been researching fishes of the coral reefs in the area. We were shown slides of features of the islands as well as some of the birds Brian had seen. We learned that the islands are small and little known and range from the flat, coral atoll Anegada to other islands which are mountainous. The area abounds with migrating sea birds although the total number of species recorded on the islands is only about 160. Common there at certain times of year are flamingos as well as frigatebirds and Brown Pelicans are abundant, nesting in the mangroves. On Cockroach Island there is a large breeding colony of Roseate Terns. Other specials of the islands are Little Blue Heron, American Kestrel, Mangrove Cuckoo, Northern Mocking Bird and several species of Hummingbird, including the Green Hummingbird. There are also many different species doves and pigeons. Brian's work has included the distribution of fish in three different bays, their habitats and the effects of pollution on the fish species. Interesting other wild life found on the islands are the Marine Iguana and the endemic Anegada Rock Iguana. Of interest to Brian is the introduced Cuban Tree Frog which unfortunately is decimating many indigenous species of frogs.

Thank you very much Brian for a most interesting and enjoyable evening. **Di Rushforth**

Report on the MUKUVISI WOODLANDS

John Shaw presented his annual report to the Mashonaland Branch AGM in January. The Branch had visited the Woodlands eleven times in 2001, the December meeting having been cancelled because of a thunderstorm. John had, however, visited the area during December to maintain the records. 167 people had taken part in the outings and the total number of different bird species recorded during the year had been 129 compared with 128 in 2000. Interesting aspects of the visits had been:

In January much larger numbers than usual of Red-billed Firefinch had been recorded as well as higher numbers of Yellow-fronted Canary, Black-throated Canary and Streaky-headed Seedeaters which had all been singing loudly. In February there had been one of only two sightings during the year of a Brown-backed Honeybird and the only sighting of a Steppe Buzzard. The March outing had recorded Scarlet-chested Sunbird, a first sighting since 1996 and a Common Sandpiper had also been seen. Also in March John Sievi had reported seeing Southern Carmine Bee-eaters flying overhead and he had heard a Coqui Francolin calling close to Paget Road, the last record having been in 1994. In April excellent views had been had of a male Miombo Rock-thrush and a pair of Miombo Tits, Spotted Creeper and Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird had also been sighted. Another record had been of a Red-backed Shrike which is only ever seen in April when passing through on their way to their breeding grounds in Europe. Groundscraper Thrush had been seen in May and again in September at a nest.

In May, John and Ann Sievi had been viciously attacked in the Woodlands which had resulted in both of them being hospitalised and John having lost the sight of one eye.

In June a new bird for the Woodlands had been recorded — an Eastern Saw-wing — and a pair were seen again near the footbridge in November. In August a Three-banded Plover had been seen (the first seen since 1987) and a Pied Kingfisher had been recorded in August and again in September (last recorded in 1986). During the same month a pair of White-bellied Sunbird had been seen in the little patch of acacia near the footbridge — not a common bird in the Mukuvisi and they were seen again in the same patch in October. In September the waterberry trees along the river were in flower and attracted a number of sunbird species including Copper Sunbird. In October, one member had almost stepped on a Fiery-necked Nightjar before it took off from a nest which contained two eggs. Miombo Tit, Spotted Creeper (carrying nest material) and Orange-breasted Bush-shrike had been some of the more noteworthy sightings during that month. In November large numbers of juvenile Miombo Blue-eared Starling had been seen and a Stierling's Wren-warbler was seen collecting nesting material. Wonderful views had been had of a male and two female Western Violet-backed Starlings feeding in a fig tree near the upstream, broken footbridge. In December, highlights had been a Eurasian Hobby, Great Reed-warbler and Cinnamon-breasted Bunting, all of which can usually be seen at that time of year.

Those of the miombo specials which appeared to be surviving are Miombo Rock-thrush which was recorded in 3 months in both 2000 and 2001, Miombo Tit recorded in 4 months in 2001 (3 months in 2000), Spotted Creeper recorded 7 months in 2001 compared with sightings in 4 months in 2000, Stierling's Wren-warbler was seen 6 months in 2001 and 7 in 2000, Green-capped Eremomela were seen in 11

months in 2001 and 12 months in 2000 and Grey Penduline-tit recorded in 3 months in 2001 and only 2 months in 2000.

During the year chopping down of trees had escalated and it was fortunate that, largely due to the efforts of Geoff Lowe, a donation of funds had been made for the erection of a fence around the entire area of the Woodlands. The fence is now in place.

It was with sadness that we bade farewell to John Shaw as leader of the outings for 20 years what a wonderful contribution to birds, birding and the Mukuvisi Woodlands! A presentation was made to John of an original painting of a miombo special – a White-breasted Cuckooshrike – by Steve Alpe. Thank you, John – we hope we will see you at future outings, but relaxing for a change. **Di Rushforth**

Report on LAKE CHIVERO BIRD SANCTUARY

Richard Dennison presented his report covering the period August 2000 to July 2001. He explained that the period had seen high rainfall during the season that had resulted in the vegetation cover remaining good.

The total number of species recorded had been 181 which was the lowest in the last four years. The low count could have been attributed to the almost total disappearance of exposed shoreline which had resulted in a significant reduction in the number of waders and duck species being recorded. In terms of total number of species recorded since 1992, however, this had risen by three to 288. Highlights during the period had been the three new species recorded — 3 Horus Swift, 2 Lazy Cisticola and a female Common Redstart (all recorded in January 2001). In addition, Black Heron, African Purple Swamphen, Black-crowned Night-heron, Little Bittern and White-winged Tern had been unusual waterbirds seen during the period whilst raptor highlights had been a Tawny Eagle in September 2000, White-backed Vulture, Western Marsh-harrier, Lanner Falcon, 40 Yellow-billed Kite, an Osprey and a Marsh Owl in February and April 2001. Other species of interest had been Eastern Saw-wing, White-rumped Swift, Purple-banded Sunbird, 600 Barn Swallow, Yellow-mantled Widowbird, Thick-billed Weaver, White Stork, Retz's Helmet-shrike, Cuckoo Finch, Red-chested Flufftail, Grey Penduline-tit and Southern Hyliota. Richard was pleased to note that the hide had been erected and hoped that this would afford good birding in the future.

Alex Masterson's Vlei Walks— Saturday, 26 and Sunday 27 January 2002

The recent dry spell had probably affected the enthusiastic support that we have usually had for these walks in past years and the numbers of people attending were about half of what we have come to expect. The venue was once again the MARLBOROUGH VLEI, which is probably the last of Harare's deep clay vleis which is reasonably pristine. However, I was disturbed by the deep trench that had recently been dug through the middle of the vlei and the approximately one hectare that had been ploughed near the top of the southern extremity. Fortunately, further ploughing has been stopped and we have been assured that the trench will not significantly dry out the western end, although it is now effectively cut off from the seepage of effluent run off from the sewerage ponds.

If there had been more rain in January more of the summer special migrants would probably have been encountered but, alas, few of these were around. I can fully report only on the outing I attended on Saturday, 26 January when Alex gave us his usual very informative explanation of how to identify the various bird species from the habitat, the behaviour, the general description and the calls associated with them. It was interesting to note that Pale-crowned Cisticola flies so high while giving its call that it is almost impossible to see. We were shown various nests which included an old Tawny-flanked Prinia nest, remains of duck shells (probably from a White-faced Duck), a Thick-billed Weaver's nest, which was new and apparently a first for the vlei records and, most striking of all, a Black Coucal nest with 4 eggs in it. The Coucal's eggs were white with attractive black flecks.

The total species count on Saturday was 54 species – not bad when one considers that *Striped Flufftails* [Streaky-breasted Flufftail], Kurrichane Buttonquails and the migratory crakes were conspicuously absent. Saturday's highlights included 1 Hottentot Teal, 3 Red-chested Flufftails (heard calling), 8 Black Coucal, 2 Marsh Owl, 12 Common Swift, 2 Broad-tailed Warbler, 6 Pale-crowned Cisticola, 2 Yellow-throated Longclaws and 8 Rosy-throated Longclaw, 1 Copper Sunbird and 1 Cuckoo Finch. A male Montagu's Harrier was seen on Sunday. Our thanks go to Alex for all the hard work he put into the walks and for the excellence of his guiding. **Richard Dennison**

MATABELELAND

From the Chairman

At the time of writing a long, hot dry spell has hit our region and my lab technician has been cheerfully reminding me of past years ending in two, 1982 and 1992, both drought years, the latter being one of the worst droughts recorded with a rainfall total of only 270mm. Fortunately the total to date for the current season has exceeded this figure, but conditions are still very dry with crops wilting and trees losing leaves. Bird life must be affected, with a cessation of breeding activity and appreciable local movement – data from AISLEBY showing the latter. In early January, Clive Townsley recorded impressive totals of both White Storks and Abdim's Storks but, by mid-month, numbers had dwindled to the low twenties, with most birds presumably following the rain front activity elsewhere. Aisleby continues to offer some excellent bird watching with the Count producing Maccoa Duck, African Crake, Lesser Jacana and an immature African Marsh-harrier. Our HILLSIDE Dams rambles have continued, the highlight of the January walk being a pair of African Openbills – a further addition to the species checklist. Support of most of our activities has been a little thin, so please do make every effort to participate in our programme. From the troubles of the World turn to birds! **Martin Smith**

AISLEBY Waterfowl Count — Sunday, 20 January 2002

Each count always manages to produce plenty of interest and the first count of 2002 was no exception. A sufficient number of bodies allowed three teams to target particular areas of the property and made the count a little quicker than it has been in the past. Despite an appreciable sea with foot high waves, the canoe was launched and after a choppy paddle across the dam proved its worth by getting close to a number of specials. First, a flotilla of 25 Maccoa Ducks were seen – males looking particularly attractive with sky blue bills and chestnut plumage. This was followed by a single Lesser Flamingo that paused for a brief stopover on the dam before departing eastwards. Towards the head of the dam, in the more sheltered water, over 400 Southern Pochard provided plenty of work along with good numbers of Red-knobbed Coot. Species of interest were found beside the water with three Black Herons being flushed from the weedy fringe and Squacco Heron were common and extremely confiding when viewed from the canoe. Most were looking particularly smart with warm brown plumage, tinged with purple. The special of the morning was a diminutive Lesser Jacana – the first I had seen on the dam. Slowly moving along the vegetation at the water's edge allowed us to get to within three metres and it really did look most attractive, showing dark and white feathers in flight. I had failed to appreciate how 'lesser' it really is and can now see why it is easily overlooked – with just its head projecting amongst the weed it was hard enough from three metres. At the head of the inlet, opposite the Club, we found a small group of Pink-backed Pelicans lazily dipping their bills into the water and feeding co-operatively, with the occasional grab at a fish.

On to the lands and plenty of tall weeds made numbers of White Stork hard to assess, overhead 1000's of Barn Swallows were feeding on insects, whilst about 40 Amur Falcons wheeled and hovered in search of prey. We ended the count at the Ibis Dam which was largely covered with weed, offering excellent conditions for skulking reedbed species. Two families of White-faced Duck emerged with ducklings of 8 and 10, all appearing to be of a similar age. Overhead a single harrier "stirred the pot" occasionally flushing the smaller birds and, after plenty of debate and much consultation of books, we came out in favour of a juvenile African Marsh-harrier, the first record of this species for a number of years. Count totals of note were high numbers of duck but a deficiency of storks. Two weeks prior to the count, Clive had recorded 320 Abdim's Storks and 432 White Storks whilst we were down to only two figures. Aisleby continues to be one of the best areas for birds close to town, so please do come and support our outings. **Martin Smith**

MIDLANDS BRANCH

NYORORO Birding Weekend — 27/28 October 2001

QDS 1930B4

Nyororo was looking lovely and was a perfect venue for a birding weekend with new grass coming away on the burnt vleis after having had 46 mm of rain the week before and the trees looking magnificent with their blossom and new leaves. There was not much vegetation near the rivers which made access to these important birding areas easy. Unfortunately, due to other commitments and costs of travelling, only four of us were able to join Keith, Jeanette and Forbes Harvey, and then only for a very short weekend of Saturday afternoon and Sunday morning. The notorious south east cold weather blew in on

Saturday night making birding conditions not so ideal on Sunday. However, we still managed to have a wonderful weekend and recorded 94 species. This was a lower count than normal as we did not visit the pan on Widgeon due to lack of time and missed a lot of the waterfowl we normally see.

The area around the homestead at Culloden was very rewarding and we added about 50 species to our list, mostly woodland birds. Driving away from the homestead we encountered a herd of 10 Kudu cows and calves, 14 Impala, 5 Reedbuck, a pair of Secretarybird and a pair of Kori Bustard. In the vlel we had wonderful sightings of both Cape Longclaw and Rosy-throated Longclaws and Forbes obliged us by wading into the marshy areas to flush out African Snipe and Marsh Owl. We saw a number of Grey Crowned Crane and a pair of Wattled Cranes with an almost fully-grown chick, as well as another two pairs of Secretarybirds. One pair had a third bird near them and we wondered whether it could have been a chick but it didn't look very much different from the adults except that it was slightly smaller.

There is always a special sighting on a bird outing and this weekend our highlight was the swallows. Martin had collected ant mounds to take home for his cage birds and had put them in the back of the truck. We suddenly realised that we were being followed by a "swarm" of swallows. The ant mounds were full of small winged ants [termite alates] which were taking off and the swallows were catching them. Eventually there were over a hundred (mainly Barn Swallows but also Red-breasted Swallows) in a cloud around us, swooping and diving and never missing a single flying ant. There was a southeast wind blowing and the birds were flying into the wind to collect the ants being blown in that direction and then circling around to swoop in again. It was an amazing experience to observe these graceful birds at such close range.

Thanks to Bern and Nome for joining us and to Keith, Jeanette and Forbes for putting us up and giving us another magical birding weekend on Nyororo. I pray we will be able to continue this tradition for many years to come. **Lynne Wilkins, Masvingo**

TAIL FEATHERS

My local "patch"

My local "patch" is my [HARARE] garden, and it really has been worthwhile keeping monthly records and looking at them at the end of the year – something I never did during "official" garden bird surveys as I sent the forms in monthly. 2001 has been quite illuminating and each month had a highlight one way or another.

January — saw the Hamerkops by the pool and were seen also in May, June, September and October, mostly in the early morning before the dog came around the corner to disturb them. Occasionally a Cattle Egret joined them. I also had Blue Waxbill, not common here, and a Common Waxbill, even more uncommon. Incidentally, I've seen both again this last January 2002!

February highlights include Whyte's Barbet (getting more common) and a Red-chested Cuckoo, Steel-blue Widowfinch and Cardinal Woodpecker. Best of all was a White-browed Scrub-robin which stayed and sang for two months.

March — delights were 20 White Stork flying overhead, 5 species of sunbirds and two Rosy-faced Lovebirds. Alas, the latter have increased to five and devour not only the sunflower seed I put out for them but have cottoned onto the munga meant for my mannikins and finches. The Brimstone Canary, my favourite, really are bullies and chase off the other birds at times and vie with the lovebirds for sunflower seed. Brimstone Canary weren't recorded in April, May and June.

April — produced a Red-backed Shrike on its way home, Lesser Honeyguide and Orange-breasted Bush-shrike. Red-faced Cisticola stayed for a time and my one and only Barn Owl screeched one night. Two young Levallant's Cuckoo, clamouring for food from the host Arrow-marked Babbler at my back door, were entertaining in May and early June when a Little Sparrowhawk sat day after day watching the mannikins and, making sorties, mostly unsuccessful, although I did see it kill one once. The Green Wood-hoopoes passed through noisily and the Cardinal Woodpecker appeared again.

In August Copper Sunbirds came and made my total sunbird species up to seven during the year — Variable Sunbird, White-bellied Sunbird, Miombo Double-collared Sunbird, Scarlet-chested Sunbird, Amethyst Sunbird, Copper Sunbird and a Purple-banded Sunbird in November.

A Grey-headed Bush-shrike visited in September (and also graced New Year's Day 2002). African Paradise-flycatchers and European Bee-eaters were in evidence and the only African Hoopoe of the year came — why are they so scarce these days? The Rosy-faced Lovebirds had increased and were becoming a menace. Anyone wanting them is welcome to come and collect — no charge, I assure you! In November, 100 Abdim's Stork sailed over (on the 11th) and a Purple-banded Sunbird spent a few hours in the Bauhinia. On the 16th my all-time highlight came — a Lesser Grey Shrike — which sat on a

dead branch near the verandah for 2 — 3 hours, probably exhausted. It was silhouetted against the western sky and I could get quite close without disturbing it. It was too beautiful and exciting to me. December came and so did the Amur Falcons after a storm one evening. 100 plus circled and sat in a coffee shade tree, then all took off with a whoosh, flew around, landed and did this several times. I really thought I was to become a new roost but it was not to be.

I am quite content with my little family of Red-billed Firefinch which come onto the verandah for seed and show no fear of me or the dog. If we do have an official survey again I will have to make duplicate copies — well worth it. The highest list was 47 species in March, the lowest 29 in June. Those months of course show the goings and comings of migrants. **Jacko Williams**

“Why do you hate me?” written by Cleopatra Madimutsa, Grade 7A, Tamuka Primary School

The following is the fourth and final in a series of four written by children in the Seke area.

- | | | | |
|----|---|----|--|
| 1. | My name is owl.
Many people hate me
For no apparent reason,
But I don't know why. | 4. | My tears never seem to dry.
I always cry day and night.
Because of what people say.
Happiness is all I need,
Please treat me like other birds. |
| 2. | Some say I am an evil creature,
Some even say I have bad evils
I am not considered as
Someone special, someone good
People always consider me as
A bad creature a bad Bird | 5. | Stop calling me names -
Muroyi, witchcraft and all sorts
I am in pain and great sorrow
Please respect me and
Care for me.
Owl, owl, owl — what a good Bird. |
| 3. | I hunt at night,
I am active at night.
That's why people say
I am a bad Bird,
Some even call me a witch, muroyi! | | |

Where have all the raptors gone?

On a drive to South Africa in early November, the lack of raptors was very noticeable. In previous years, particularly during the summer months, the route between Harare and Beitbridge has produced large numbers of raptors of various species, but on several trips “south” in 2001, the numbers have been very disappointing. On this November trip I saw one Yellow-billed Kite the whole journey – not a single Black-shouldered Kite, not a Wahlberg's Eagle, nothing! On the return journey several weeks later, it was just as depressing. Two Yellow-billed Kite, between the Runde River and Masvingo, and a small group of White-backed Vultures outside Chivhu. That was my total for the journey.

Then, on 13 December, I drove to Bulawayo and on to Victoria Falls the following day. My raptor count for the Harare-Bulawayo journey was nil. There were no Amur Falcons on the telephone lines around LAKE CHIVERO (normally there are hundreds in the early morning), and not a single Lesser Kestrel in the open grasslands between Gweru and Shangani. Have these two Palaeartic migrants simply come in very late or where have they (and the other raptors) gone?

The drive between Bulawayo and Victoria Falls improved on the 14th, as suddenly there were fair numbers of Yellow-billed Kite along the way, plus a few Wahlberg's Eagle but nothing else. I then spent two weeks in southern Zambia where raptors were plentiful. On 29 December I returned to Harare via Kariba, and saw several Yellow-billed Kites on the way until I reached Karoi. Then they disappeared, with no more sightings all the way to Harare. Another “common” powerline bird is the Lilac-breasted Roller. This too was very sparse along all of the routes mentioned above. I did see a small flock of Amur Falcons just outside Karoi on the 29th.

What is causing this lack of roadside raptors? – agriculture, politics! – or was I driving too fast. Any comments from other members? **Derek Solomon, Harare**

God's wings

After a forest fire in Yellowstone National Park, forest rangers began their trek up a mountain to assess the inferno's damage. One ranger found a bird literally petrified in ashes, perched statuesquely on the ground at the base of a tree. Somewhat sickened by the eerie sight, he knocked over the bird with a stick. When he struck it, three tiny chicks scurried from under their dead mother's wings. The loving mother, keenly aware of impending disaster, had carried her offspring to the base of the tree and had gathered them under her wings, knowing that the toxic smoke would rise. She could have flown to safety but had refused to abandon her babies. Then the blaze had arrived, and the heat had scorched her small body but the mother had remained steadfast. Because she had been willing to die, those under the cover of her wings would live. Taken from *National Geographic* magazine, submitted by **Liz Elliot**

Oh, let me rescue all creatures

The baby bird is in the corner, on the floor, its wings splayed and ruffled. It's making an awful squawking sound and feathers are fluffing up all over the tiny body. I stand watching in desperation as it attempts to hop up onto something to feel a little more secure. I step quietly towards it, talking gently, gently, reassuring it. I don't know what I'm going to do. I've seen friends throw shawls over birds in a bid to calm them down, then capture them and set them free outside. The baby looks too fragile to survive the shock. It has been flying around my lounge for over an hour, banging into windows, catching itself on things, and I'm alone in here with no one to tell me what to do. Outside the parents shriek loudly, dive-bombing furiously, they can hear their baby inside but understand the perils of entering a house—where things are not what they seem. While the baby is recovering, I go and stand outside to show the parents that I'm on the case. Swallows are interesting birds – they nest in the same place every year. They seem to bond with humans, watching us as curiously as we have been watching them. This spring has been a very special time for my family. It's why we moved to the country. We've had a box seat to the laying of the eggs outside the kitchen window, the hatching of the eggs, and last week's very emotional experience; the teaching of the babies to fly. Three babies in all. We sat as mesmerised as any circus audience as the fluffy balls left the nest, one by one, and dropped, then rose up in glory.

There have been birds in my lounge before. Mice in my kitchen. Snakes on my porch. When you don't know the animals individually they are just "silly birds", a "dirty mouse", a "vicious snake". But when you watch them being born, get to see and share the parents' joy, the effort those tiny creatures put in, and the love, it's a different story. You don't feel so arrogant. They are not in your space. You, perhaps, are sharing theirs.

I get closer to the baby, praying softly. My body aches with the desire to protect, to rescue. I watch the television every night in this very room. Afghan refugees, orphans, frightened families devastated by war and hardship, staring into my eyes. People I cannot save. And yet here it is. A chance to rescue. My big hand comes down. "Oh God, let me not make things worse!" I whisper, suddenly aware of the awesome responsibility I carry. I have never held a baby bird before. Its heart is thumping. It keeps trying to bite and scratch me. I remain confident, knowing that if I let go, it will die. I carry it outside in both hands. The legs are completely entangled in a thick wool-like ball of dust. I pull, but fear I will break the tiny bones. I can see the kitchen scissors but can't get them without letting go the bird. I can't let go the bird without it flying away, badly maimed and tangled up. I feel helpless. The parents are circling overhead. They no longer trust me, and I don't know if I'm making things better or causing harm. I hold the baby close to my heart, and wait. "What's wrong?" says my husband, finally home, looking at my tear-stained face. "The baby," I say. "Its feet are caught." He pulls at the cobwebs softly, meticulously. And slowly a leg is free, and the next. "Do we give it water to calm it down?" I ask. "No. Just let it go," he says. And I open my hands and the baby flies out, up, up. Then suddenly it is down and into some dense scrub in the distance. "Oh God! It's down! Let's go look!" I panic. But my husband holds me back. "It's for nature and the parents to handle now," he says. "There's no more you can do." I bite my lip, fearing I'll only make things worse by interfering further and go inside. But at night I lay awake thinking of that bird. There are only two babies in the nest now. Has the oldest one flown away, or did my baby die, alone, abandoned in the scrub? Deep down I know the answer. Just as I know that I should have done more. And I fret, feeling sick with grief and guilt. Not just for that baby bird but for all God's creatures, trapped and alone, beamed into our lounge rooms each night, who we fail to protect or save.

Taken from Ruth Ost[*name missing*]'s column in *The Weekend Australian* and submitted by **Liz Elliot**

NOTICEBOARDBuy-a-Brick Campaign

Thank you very much to the following for your donations towards the building fund:

African Distillers - \$2 500.00, Mr & Mrs J C Barratt - \$1 000.00, E Bemont - \$250.00, Mr & Mrs AGM Born - \$500.00, Mr & Mrs Brunwin - \$2 000.00, J M Cahill - \$500.00, Mr & Mrs P Clarke - \$1 000.00, J M Dawson - \$500.00, B Elliot - \$325.00, R Fisher - \$2 000.00, Mr & Mrs Futter - \$325.00, Peter Ginn - \$930.00, B Golombick - \$1 000.00, Mr & Mrs P N Ineson - \$325.00, Mr & Mrs Kennaird - \$325.00, Adrienne Macdonald - \$5 000.00, Garikai Mazanhi - \$200.00, Sonja Messick - \$100.00, K R Pearman - \$75.00, Mr & Mrs Rosenfels - \$1 000.00, D J Scott - \$1 15.00, Lloyd Skinner - \$1 825.00, P Spear - \$5 000.00, Graham Speedy - \$500.00, B. Staplekamp - \$100.00, Mr & Mrs Wilkins - \$225.00.

Merchandise for Sale

Embroidered badges	\$ 60	Hats	\$258	Caps	\$395
Two-tone caps	\$553	T-shirts	\$600	Golf shirts	\$740
Sleeveless, hunting jackets	\$663				

2002 Peter Ginn Calendars

There are still stocks of Peter Ginn's calendars. These are now available at the discounted price of \$50 each. If you wish to place an order please complete the form included.

Field observations – Honeyguide

Please note that field cards are to be sent to either the Field Card Organiser, Mr C Baker, P O Box BW 168, Borrowdale, or to the BLZ offices.

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.

National Garden Bird Survey

The Research & Conservation Committee are still working on the details of a survey that will have clear objectives and be of interest to participants. Forms will soon be sent out. In the meantime please keep your records.

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.

Sightings of Flamingos

If anyone has recorded sightings of Greater Flamingos and Lesser Flamingos anywhere in Zimbabwe during January 2002 please advise the BLZ offices. Experts are trying to establish a picture of the entire African population of these birds.

Book for sale

Mrs Pat Bellingan has generously donated books to the Education Project. One of those — a hard cover version of *The Birds of Zimbabwe* by Michael P Stuart Irwin is offered for sale at \$7 500 or nearest offer. This is a must for the serious birder. Contact the BLZ offices.

New members

We welcome the following new members:

Robert Beaton	J Black	Mr & Mrs C Brans	Charles Brightman	Julius Chiramba
W R Evans	Jenny Holman	Pastor E Lobb	G F MacRobert	Sonja Messick
Webster Mudzingwa	Joseph Mukono	Stephen Murota	K R Pearman	K D Percival
Mr & Mrs Roberts	B Rutherford	Roy Wakefield	W M Yon	

Sponsored Members Fund – Response to the Sponsored Members Fund has been excellent. The fund now stands at \$58 505 which is sufficient to support 86 full members. Grateful thanks to you all:

Name	Amount (\$)	Name	Amount (\$)
F D Adams	325.00	T Alegria	150.00
C J Anderson	325.00	J D Andrews	500.00
D Arangies	1000.00	Mr & Mrs R Ham	675.00
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Mr & Mrs P N Ineson	325.00	Mr & Mrs P A Johnson	325.00
Mr D A Keith	125.00	N G Kennaird	325.00
Mrs F H Kerstein	325.00	Dietrich Klein	325.00
Mrs DM Lee	675.00	S G Lees	25.00
Dr C J Lewis	1 000.00	B Lombardo & M Litchfield	675.00
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Mr O A Macdonald	75.00	Mr & Mrs S Marques	325.00
Mrs P Mason	325.00	Mr I A Meikle	500.00
E Meikle	125.00	Mr J Moore	1 000.00
Damian Newmarch	50.00	KR Pearman	75.00
LT Pugh	325.00	H Rees	255.00
Mrs B Riddle	325.00	Rio Tinto Foundation	3 875.00
Linda Rothen	325.00	Basil & Di R.ushforth	325.00
Dr M C Saunders	675.00	J T R Scorgie	825.00
KG Seiler	325.00	Mrs C Sharp	25.00
J R Sievi	1 000.00	Lloyd Skinner	1 825.00
Mr & Mrs W Slooten	325.00	Patrick Smet	1175.00
Mrs A C Southey	25.00	Graham Speedy	325.00
M Stanley	325.00	J E Stanton	325.00
P N Stidolph	675.00	R Stodart	325.00
D Swales	325.00	S Travis	255.00
Mr & Mrs J van Altena	200.00	D J H van Den Berg	200.00
Dr Aad van Geldermalsen	75.00	H van Vuuren	1 000.00
Mr & Mrs van Zyl	1 000.00	T Walford	325.00
D C White	5 000.00	Mrs C Wiles	325.00
MJ Wilkins	225.00	Mr & Mrs F Winch	525.00
Mrs H Young	325.00		