

# BABBLER

## BirdLife Zimbabwe

*THE BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL PARTNER IN ZIMBABWE*

*Member of IUCN, The World Conservation Union*

ISSUE #49 – JULY/AUGUST 2002

### 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

### STAFF

Director:	Anthony Cizek	CDO:	Chip Chirara
Education Manager:	Clayton Zazu	Finance Manager:	John Paxton

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### ACTIVITIES

#### MASHONALAND BRANCH

##### Regular outings

Mukuvisi Woodlands: Sundays, 7 July and 4 August 2002. Meet at the Paget Road entrance at 7.00 a.m. There will be a vehicle guard available.

Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary: Sundays, 14 July and 11 August 2002. Meet at 7.30 a.m. at Marimba Shopping Centre, Samora Machel Avenue West. Bring chairs and tea. Beginners are most welcome and spare binoculars will be available. We encourage members with children to attend.

##### Saturday afternoon outings

20 July 2002: Harare Botanic Gardens, Sandringham Drive. Meet at 2.30 p.m. in the car park.

17 August 2002: Harava Dam, Seke. Meet at 2.00 p.m. at the offices of BirdLife Zimbabwe, 35 Clyde Road, Eastlea where cars can be left in secure parking. Bring chairs and refreshments.

##### Sunday outings

28 July 2002: Haka Park — good for Miombo specials. Meet at 7.30 a.m. at the Park gates. An entrance fee will be payable. Bring chairs and refreshments.

25 August 2002: Kutsaga Tobacco Research Station. Meet at 7.00 am. at the offices of BirdLife Zimbabwe. Bring chairs and refreshments.

#### **Thursday evening meetings**

18 July 2002: Dr Kit Cottrell will talk on the phenomenon of gens that is exhibited by some cuckoos. Cuckoos that are fostered by a number of host species tend to lay eggs that resemble the host – presumably so that the host female does not eject the parasitic egg before it begins to brood. Different hosts lay different coloured eggs so that the cuckoo females must also have this ability. How are they programmed to lay the appropriately coloured egg in the selected host's nest?

Dr Cottrell is a senior entomologist working at the Tobacco Research Station at Kutsaga. He was previously with the Cotton Research Institute at Kadoma where he investigated the diapause of red bollworm, and later had a spell with the Transvaal Museum as a micro-lepidopterist. He has a keen interest in wildlife and ecology in general and is very knowledgeable on certain aspects of bird life.

15 August 2002: Ms Kate Wood will give an illustrated talk on one of her recent trips.

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. As the days are shorter now Ian recommends that if possible people should arrive at 3.30 p.m. Dates are: 11 and 25 July, 8 and 22 August 2002. Bring cash to pay for security. For confirmation contact Ian Riddell on 339716, or [gemsaf@mango.zw](mailto: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.

#### **Rifa Educational Camp — 21 to 25 September 2002**

There are still places available for the four nights booked at Rifa. This is NOT restricted to Mashonaland Branch members. If you would like to go please complete the booking slip. The cost for accommodation and food is \$9 000 per person (it may seem high but is realistic – WEZ are charging \$10 000 per person for their camps at Rifa).

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### **MATABELELAND BRANCH**

#### **Evening Meeting**

Friday 9th August 2002— Mid-year Social and Video Evening. This will be a soup and rolls evening followed by a couple of videos – Puffins and Ospreys. Please bring your own utensils and drink, we will supply the soup and rolls. Venue: 3A Holdengarde Ave from 6.30 p.m. onwards.

#### **Monthly Outings**

Sunday 14 July 2002 – Aisleby Waterfowl Count. We continue to collect data for our best local birding hotspot. Numbers of Egyptian Goose have risen significantly and it will be interesting to compare totals with previous years. Please do come and assist – many hands make light work! Meet at the boom at 7.30 a.m. or contact Martin.

Sunday 21 July 2002 – Rixon Dam Waterfowl Count. This will be the tenth year of recording at the Dam and might be a suitable time to bring the project to completion. Please do support what might be the last count at the Dam! Contact Penny for details.

Saturday/Sunday, 17/18 August 2002 – I intend to spend a week in the Matopos following up on one or two Verreaux's Eagle Survey question marks. To start the week I felt all interested could join me for a camping weekend at Maleme. Please contact me for further details – Martin.

#### **Aisleby**

Our monthly outing in July will be the mid-month waterfowl count and in August we revert to early morning outings with the Co-ordinator being Martin Smith Tel. 282474

#### **Hillside Dams**

Dates for our monthly rambles are as follows:

Friday 26th July                      Friday 30th August

Meet at the Lower Hillside Dam Car Park at 4.00 p.m. or contact Martin.

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### **EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB**

Contacts: Ken Dixon ☎ 020-65819

Jane Clegg ☎ 020-65610

<u>Sunday 28 July 2002</u>	Burma Valley	6.30 a.m.	B Holland	61369
<u>Sunday 25 August 2002</u>	Vumba	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.

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### **Karoi Bird Club**

Co-ordinator: Kevin Mitchell P O Box 398, Karoi ☎ 064-6358 or Cell: 011 408023  
E-mail: mitch@africaonline.co.zw  
Secretary: Merle Mitchell P O Box 398, Karoi ☎ 064-6436

### **ACTIVITIES**

Rydings School Interpretive Centre Walks are conducted the first Saturday each month at 6.30 a.m.

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### **MIDLANDS BRANCH**

**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 ☎ 068-22005 for details.

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### **REPORTS**

#### **NATIONAL**

##### Members of Council

The following were elected to Council at the AGM held at Kyle National Park in April:

President Kevin Barry Vice-President Dave Sheehan  
Hon. Treasurer Peter Lawrence Hon. Secretary Di Rushforth  
Members Rolf Chenaux-Repond and Ken Wilson

##### Summary of Executive Officer's Report to the AGM

Mr Paxton advised that it had been an eventful year. In June there had been a review visit for BirdLife Zimbabwe's advancement to full partner status in BirdLife International. This had been done by Dr Hazell Thompson, Head of the Africa Division of BLI in Cambridge, and Mrs Alice Bhukoli of Tanzania, the immediate past Chair of the Council for African Partnership (CAP). Their report had recommended that BLZ be advanced subject to the fulfilment of certain objectives.

Funding had been arranged for the employment of a Conservation and Development Officer within the terms of the RSPB support contract. After advertising in the national press Dr Chipangura Chirara had been selected and he had assumed duty on 1 November 2001. Funding had also been arranged for the purchase of a vehicle for Dr Chirara's use.

Mr Paxton had attended the impressive launch of the IBA book for Africa in Johannesburg. After the launch the CAP meeting had been held over the next five days at the BLSA training centre at Wakkerstroom.

RSPB had continued to support the Association with core funding and a contract for the period April 2001 to March 2002 had been signed in April.

Membership continued to be fairly constant at around 650 with 40 black members having joined the Association, many of whom had fallen under the sponsored membership scheme. The scheme had received heartening support during the membership renewal and enough had been raised to cover 80 full members. The target was a membership of at least 1000 by December 2003.

The subdivision of the stand on which the offices were situated had been approved and the transfer of title was awaited.

Mr Paxton advised that he had attended meetings of the Environmental Liaison Forum (ELF) where networking with other NGOs was done. He and Dr Chirara had presented a piece on Envirofocus on the former Radio One in November, Mr Maozeka the Crane Field Worker having done one in March 2001. The web site was now up and running, being hosted by MWEB who updated it with the programme of events every two months.

During the year a crisis had arisen at the Mukuvisi Woodlands due to illegal woodcutting. Mr Paxton had been able to help their Council compile a project proposal for funding for a fence. Funding had been obtained from the Dutch Embassy.

Mr Paxton gratefully acknowledged the help he had received from the President, Dave Gray, the Council Secretary, Di Rushforth, and the Education Co-ordinator, Leslee Maasdorp. He confirmed that he had received tremendous support from the staff, in particular the Administrative Assistant, Alice Chamunorwa. Particular thanks were also due to Graham Carter who had given so much help at very little cost in keeping the computers going. The contribution made by Julia Duprée to BLZ had been very substantial. Peter Mundy and Tracey Couto had continued to be very supportive and Mr Paxton extended his thanks to them. **John Paxton**

#### Report of the Executive Committee of Council — May 2002

##### Staffing

With the appointment of the Conservation and Development Officer last year and the Education Manager this year, it was felt that the time had come to appoint a team leader to head BirdLife Zimbabwe as Director.

It is therefore pleasing to announce that Mr Anthony Cizek will assume duty as Director of BLZ on 15 July 2002. He is a well-qualified and enthusiastic ornithologist who has worked on several projects including the Marlborough and Monavale vleis. He has also published many articles and notes in various journals. He has recently completed his studies for his Master of Science in Conservation Biology at the Percy FitzPatrick Institute at the University of Cape Town. This appointment will further strengthen BLZ's technical capacity.

John Paxton, who was Executive Officer, becomes Finance Manager on a part-time basis as it is his wish to go into semi-retirement.

##### Partner Status

We were very pleased to receive a letter from the CEO of BLI, Dr Michael Rands, informing us that we had been approved by the Global Council to be advanced to full partner status. This is very good news and brings to culmination a process that began just on 6 years ago. The partnership agreement has been signed.

##### Office Extensions

The back veranda has been bricked in resulting in a reasonably spacious extra office. The room has been provided with basic furniture and will house the education department. Further alterations have been made which will provide more office space and a storeroom.

#### Report from the Conservation and Development Officer

##### Visit to South Africa

I was invited by BirdLife South Africa (BLSA) to their workshop on Membership Growth Strategies from 5 to 8 April. Sponsorship was provided by RSPB and I am very grateful to Paul Buckley for facilitating the trip. From this workshop, I think the issues that BLSA raised are comparable to our situation here in Zimbabwe. Although their set-up is slightly different, they are faced with the same problem of blacks apparently shunning bird clubs. A lot of issues related to this problem were discussed, including historical, social and attitudinal concerns. My question to BLSA was, "How sincere are you?" BLSA advised that they were serious, sincere and committed to seeing an increase in black membership. This is why they committed funds to such a workshop, which was also attended by BirdLife International Partners from Uganda, Ghana and Tanzania. In addition BLSA has an impressive corporate membership drive. Maybe it is time BLZ started looking at the possibility of organising a strategy for Zimbabwe's black membership drive, especially among the middle class.

##### Visit to the DRIEFONTEIN Grasslands

From 13 to 23 April 2002 a ground survey was conducted for Wattled Cranes in the Driefontein Grasslands – one of our IBAs. Jack Amonie from National Parks and Abasi Jana from BLZ participated in the survey. There are new settlers in this IBA and thus we are faced with challenges associated with population increase and environmental degradation. Subdivision of the farms into plots and establishment of more homesteads, coupled with a shift in the mode of farming from ranching to arable crop production, will inevitably affect the ecological functioning of this area. At the moment the new settlers are based next to water points such as windmills and the wet areas, which are important for the breeding of cranes, are also attractive places for settlement and agriculture for the new farmers. Since the new settlers are mostly from the adjacent communal areas, they know the cranes and are at

least aware of people doing crane conservation work and thus are receptive to the field workers. We hope to continue to work with the new farmers in the conservation of this Important Bird Area. I am positive that if we involve local communities in our conservation work, this IBA will continue to be home to the Wattled Crane and Zimbabwe's other protected bird species. There is more need for co-operation, hard work and commitment to conservation now than ever before! **Dr Chip Chirara**

#### Report of the Education Manager

Hello and how are you all old and new members of BLZ. Finally I am here and have assumed the position of the Education Manager. Yes, like any new person to a new post, I experienced my own set of problems and anxiety but the people at the office welcomed me warmly and I do not hesitate to mention that all of them were very helpful and friendly. Keep that spirit of team work guys! It took me time of course to feel a part of BLZ but right now as I write this report, I feel like I have been here as long as everyone else in the organisation – a sign of good working relations. Enough of my settling process. What has been happening in the education side includes:

- The distribution of resource books and newsletters to programme schools. All schools were sent the latest newsletter and copies of the teachers' resource book
- Preparations and conduction of a bird awareness quiz and poster competition for Chitungwiza cluster. This was a great success. Schools received certificates of participation and many prizes. The quiz was held on 31 May 2002 and I tell you it was well organised thanks to Mr Zacharia Chipendo whom the Education Manager worked with and Dorothy Wakeling for providing transport to the venue.
- Plans for the Enviro Expo to be held on 7-8 June 2002 are underway. A detailed report will appear in the next issue of *Babbler*.

My vision for BLZ's Bird Awareness Programme (BAP) is great. With your support I wish to make BAP one of the best and most effectively run and managed environmental education programmes. This is very possible with a sound financial back up, regular visits to schools, more sensitisation of schools' heads and teachers and production and provision of adequate learning resources plus regular competitions. Above all this challenge calls for team work and networking with other organisations. Remember you have not failed until you fail to try. We can make it together for the love of nature, birds and the environment at large. **Clayton Zazu**

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#### **MASHONALAND BRANCH**

##### CHRISTON BANK Botanic Reserve – Sunday, 24 March 2002

We had a fair turnout to the Reserve, perhaps resulting in too long a queue, which is not ideal for those bringing up the rear. The morning was rather quiet with very little seen until we reached the Mazowe River – across the valley a Mocking Cliff-chat was difficult to see on the rocks opposite but Yellow-throated Petronia were flitting about and White-browed Robin-chat could be heard in the distance; in all there were about 6 different robins-chats/scrub-robins heard. The river is becoming more disturbed and illegal gold-panners are moving in, digging up the streambed and camping on the sides, so future impact is expected! Being in the fore, I heard and then had a short sighting of a pair of Red-throated Twinspot but unfortunately they slipped away as our caravan arrived. Emerald-spotted Wood-dove, Terrestrial Brownbul, Bar-throated Apalis, Grey-backed Camaroptera, Tropical Boubou and Jameson's Firefinch were amongst the riverine denizens that brought more activity to the morning. As we headed downstream on the path parallel to the river, raptors started appearing – first a Lizard Buzzard, Little Sparrowhawk and two Brown Snake-eagle and later a solitary Verreaux's Eagle. A very exciting moment was had whilst looking over a streambed valley and trying to point out a rather hidden Brown-hooded Kingfisher in the bushes below, when Jennifer brought our attention to a group of 5 Black-collared Barbets. We would have otherwise ignored these commoners but luckily spotted a yellow-headed morph amongst them! That certainly made the quiet day worthwhile. More on that subject was reported in the previous issue of *Babbler*. Other interesting birds were 4 Boulder Chat, a very visible and active little group of 3 Ashy Flycatcher, hawking from the game fence in wonderful light, and plenty of Grey Penduline-tit – there were many along the stream on our way up the hill and at least 20 overall. Back at the car park Lazy Cisticola, a Black-headed Oriole and a few Rock Martins brought our total to 53. It is a

pity that the best is not made of these all-day outings! Everyone had gone by midday, and on a quiet morning, which does happen here; many more birds can be found with another walk. The view over the Mazowe Dam and valley from the hilltop is always worth the effort and African Crowned Eagle, Speckled Pigeon and others are rewards that could come with more persistence. **Ian Riddell**

#### KYLE RECREATIONAL PARK — 18 to 21 April 2002

It must be about 12 years since my wife and I last visited Kyle Recreational Park and my first impression of the environment was that the vegetation was quite lush and that the amount of thick bush had increased significantly since my last stay. Recent good rains had fallen and rainfall has been above average for the season. The weather on the weekend was perfect for the first two days but got cloudy and a little windy for the last two days. The lake was almost full and the shoreline varied from bare rock in deep water to gently sloping, well vegetated soil. This variety of habitats makes for potentially high numbers of bird species counts. Game viewing drives yielded a good variety of game animals and Geoff Lowe and I saw several White Rhinoceros, and a herd of 34 foot-and-mouth-free Buffalo. Bird walks around the accommodation area took place in the early mornings and late afternoons. Although most of the bird species recorded were initially observed on these walks, significant additions came from game drives outside the fence, especially from the shoreline and the Acacia woodland. A good total species count of 141 was achieved and the highlights included an unidentified pelican (not recorded), 3 Black Herons and 1 Slaty Egret, 3 Glossy Ibis, 1 African Spoonbill, 1 Secretarybird, 2 Verreaux's Eagles, 1 African Crowned Eagle, 2 Black-chested Snake-eagles and 4 African Fish-eagles, Crested Francolin, Natal Spurfowl, Red-necked Spurfowl and Swainson's Spurfowl, 1 juvenile Great Spotted Cuckoo, Spotted Eagle-owl and Verreaux's Eagle-owls, 3 Freckled Nightjars, 5 species of kingfisher, 2 Purple Roller, Black Cuckooshrikes and White-breasted Cuckooshrikes, Familiar Chat, Mocking Cliff-chat and Arnot's Chats, White-browed Robin-chat, White-throated Robin-chat, White-browed Scrub-robin and Bearded Scrub-robins, 4 Yellow-breasted Apalis, 4 flycatcher species and 10 shrike species. One can only speculate what the species count might have been a month or two earlier with the summer migrants present. **Richard Dennison**

#### CHIOTA Bird Club — Sunday, 28 April 2002

After a delayed start about 13 of us left Harare for the Chiota Communal Land. The Chairman of the Chitungwiza Bird Club had arranged the visit together with Elisha Chipendo of Chiota Bird Club. We were guided to Chipendo Village in the Communal Land and after about a 40 kilometer drive we arrived at the village where we were introduced to about 20 of the villagers including members of the Chiota Bird Club. Elisha welcomed us and outlined a list of about four places that he had planned for us to visit. Our main objective was to visit the vlei where Wattled Cranes and Grey Crowned Cranes were regularly being seen.

To start off we walked around the village irrigated gardens, a couple of ponds and then down towards a stream in a vlei. Unfortunately, however, our birding did not last much longer than an hour before it was brought to an end by the local councillor. The councillor complained that the proper procedures had not been carried out for BirdLife Zimbabwe to visit the area, even though Elisha had received permission from the local Chief. In spite of the shortened visit we managed a good count of 43 species and it was interesting to find two birds not found near Harare — 3 Chestnut-backed Sparrowlark and 2 Scaly-feathered Finch. Other highlights were 1 Red-billed Teal, 1 Black-chested Snake-eagle, 1 unidentified kestrel, 5 Cape Crows, 4 Chestnut-vented Tit-babblers, 6 Pied Wagtails and 4 Magpie Shrikes. It was encouraging to see that bird conservation efforts of the local Club are bearing fruit.

**Richard Dennison**

#### International Dawn Chorus Day — Sunday 5 May 2002

Birdlife Zimbabwe Mashonaland Branch took part in the International Dawn Chorus day 2002 at the MUKUVISI WOODLAND. A total of 69 birds were identified by 32 people. Highlights were:

Long-crested Eagle and Black-chested Snake-eagles, Gabar Goshawk, Speckled Mousebird and Red-faced Mousebirds, Striped Kingfisher, Little Bee-eater and Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters, Common Scimitarbill, Whyte's Barbet Bennett's Woodpecker, White-breasted Cuckooshrike, African Golden Oriole and Black-headed Orioles, Miombo Tit, Spotted Creeper, Brubru, Black-crowned Tchagra, Grey-headed Bush-shrike, White-crested Helmet-shrike, six species of sunbird, including Copper Sunbird and Scarlet-chested Sunbird, Spectacled Weaver, Golden Weaver and Village Weavers, Black-throated Canary and Golden-breasted Bunting. Thank you to those who took part. **David Dalziel**

#### Video Evening — Thursday 16 May 2002

There was a good turn-out of 27 for a video evening on 16 May. Two TVs were set up so there wouldn't be too many crowded around one screen. Then at 6:25 the lights went out! I was considering trying to describe the film to the good people in the dark (the pies wouldn't be heating either!) when

after 5 minutes we had power! Relief! We watched a film on kingfishers in the Okavango which showed both Malachite Kingfishers and Giant Kingfishers inside the nest at the end of the tunnel, the Malachite from sitting on eggs to leaving the nest and the Giant from naked hatchlings. The photography was excellent, the commentary less so (he kept talking about “Malakit” Kingfishers). Other species were shown including Pied Kingfisher and Southern Carmine Bee-eater and many other birds of the region. After our pies, we saw another video, this one of Pel’s Fishing-owl, also in the Okavango. We saw a lot of wonderful footage of African Darters and other creatures feeding under water as well as the owl, African Fish-eagle and other birds. The films were both excellent and everyone enjoyed them. In my next life I want to be a wildlife photographer – if there is any wildlife left by then! **Jennifer Carter**

#### AFDIS, Stapleford — Saturday 18 May 2002

Afdis is a new venue for us just on the outskirts of Harare and 18 people turned up to check it out. Ken Jarvis, a keen birder, has turned the distillery’s settling ponds into a wonderful wetland environment as well as landscaping the adjoining area and planting indigenous trees to attract birds. Fifty-one species were ticked, including a South American Ringed Teal on the ponds. Cheating! – okay 50 plus 1 exotic and a pair of Slender Mongoose. Great excitement was caused by the sound of an African Mourning Dove! It was heard by several people and though some doubted their ears and tried to think what it could be as it couldn’t be a Mourning Dove, it definitely was! Unfortunately, it was behind the reeds on the other side of the ponds and we didn’t see it. But we did see a flock of over 20 Speckled Mousebird, Black-headed Herons and Grey Herons, 2 Hamerkop, lots of Cattle Egret and 2 African Sacred Ibis. A Hottentot Teal was astonished by his exotic neighbour and there were Black Crake, Common Moorhen, Three-banded Plovers, Blacksmith Lapwings and African Wattled Lapwings. The other doves, Red-eyed Dove, Cape Turtle-dove and Laughing Dove were out in full force. A Senegal Coucal and a Brown-hooded Kingfisher, Black-collared Barbet and Crested Barbets and Little Bee-eaters were also seen. Shrikes were represented by Common Fiscal, Tropical Boubou, Orange-breasted Bush-shrike and 9 White-crested Helmet-shrikes. A pair of Copper Sunbird was joined by Scarlet-chested Sunbird, Miombo Double-collared Sunbird and Variable Sunbird. The venue is well worth a visit and we look forward to returning in the summer when waders should be there in numbers.

**Jennifer Carter**

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#### **MATABELELAND**

##### From the Chairman

A spell of cold weather in May indicated that winter was definitely here. Locally, frost has been quite severe with a number of valley bottom trees in the Matopos looking badly scorched, dead leaves prevailing to a height of about metre above the ground. Birds seem to remain unaffected and it was interesting to note tiny Tawny-flanked Prinia still active at MATOPOS Dam despite a heavy frost. Migrants have departed and Aisleby skies seemed to be comparatively empty during our May Outing which was in complete contrast to March, when the lands were cloaked in feeding swallows. Having spent most of April in the UK, it was interesting to be able to monitor the arrival of migrants at the “other end”. By the middle of the month only 3 Barn Swallows had returned to my parents’ farm, on the east coast of Essex. Two weeks later and only two more birds had arrived, down considerably from the 40 plus birds that had departed for Africa the previous autumn. This seemed to be a common pattern for most of the swallows in the east of England and thousands must have perished on route – perhaps the result of a severe sandstorm as opposed to the activities of Mediterranean gunmen. Other migrants to return to the farm were Willow Warbler, Common Whitethroat and Yellow Wagtail, the males of the latter being a vivid yellow, whilst the females were a little paler. It was interesting to compare their plumage with those of our Aisleby wagtails seen the month before, 9 000 km away.

At Aisleby, birding has continued to be excellent with Clive and Julia finding plenty of specials on the property in April. In May, we shifted to Saturday afternoon outings, which meant we could watch the sunset at the Ibis Dam, accompanied by the squabbles of many roosting Cattle Egret. Conditions for bird watching were ideal with little wind and good light but unfortunately most of the activity was at the far end of the dam although we were able to pick out an appreciable range of waders. Aisleby continues to offer outstanding bird watching, so please do come and join us. **Martin Smith**

#### AISLEBY Sunday, 28 April 2002

The outing on the last Sunday of April 2002 was attended by four people and for those that missed out on this one what can I say except “sorry for that!” The unusual sighting of a Squacco Heron perched in a tree by the boom should have warned us as to what lay ahead. At the overnight holding ponds 3 Cape Teal

were seen dabbling alongside Hottentot Teal and Red-billed Teal and in the shallows a small flock of 8 Pied Avocet. On the way to the “muddy puddle” or “Bird Dam” we stopped to look at a Cattle Egret that the day before had provided a partial meal for a juvenile Martial Eagle, but today we saw only what was left of the egret. At the “muddy puddle” a pair of African Openbills flew overhead towards the main UMGUSA Dam and, after this sighting, I was ready to pack up my sandwiches and beer and head for home at 0830. Just as well I didn't, as not five minutes later an excellent sighting of a pair of Hadeda Ibis feeding in a field, the early morning sun showing the birds' colouring at their best – brilliant. We travelled to the staff houses at the start of the agricultural lands and parked the cars before walking through acacia woodland. A bird party yielded Chin-spot Batis, Burnt-necked Eremomela and Yellow-bellied Eremomela and Long-billed Crombec. A Crimson-breasted Shrike flew in front as we walked on. Movement on the ground offered up 7 Bronze-winged Coursers and much fun was had trying to herd the birds into open ground for good sightings. At last we were successful and positive identification possible. Whilst the courser episode was going on we spotted Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters darting between the trees. Much to the amusement of Julia and myself and at the expense of our Chairman, we saw three Red-billed Hornbills. These birds have our flag firmly planted in them claiming them as ours. Marabou Stork were still present and a tricky mixture of both Brown-throated Martins and Sand Martins dashed over the grass tops and some obligingly perched on the fence wire for identification. 48 White Stork were feeding behind a tractor that was feverishly working the ground for crop planting. At Ibis Dam a fire had swept through the reeds allowing improved visibility compared with previous outings. From the Dr Hugh Ashton platform we watched 23 Spur-winged Goose soaking up the sun, a single juvenile Greater Flamingo feeding, Cape Shoveler and in the distance 2 more Cape Teal. A pleasant surprise was 3 Grey Crowned Crane after a long absence. A single Saddle-billed Stork was present although, earlier in the week, a pair had been seen. The last time Saddle-billed Stork had been sighted at Ibis Dam we thought that breeding had taken place but with no conclusive evidence – maybe this time! For the records we achieved a total of 100 species but the day was definitely about quality not quantity – 4 stork species, 3 species of teal and 3 species of ibis. To Bulawayo residents, not many places in Zimbabwe can offer such a variety of birds right on your doorstep. **Clive Townsley**

#### Verreaux's Eagle Kopjie Watch — 11/12 May 2002

We began the outing with a briefing at the Yacht Club on Saturday afternoon, the aim being to discuss strategy and co-ordinating the [MATOPOS] kopjie watch. This was useful with the Verreaux's Eagle Family Albums and maps of known nest sites receiving much attention and plenty of helpful discussion taking place. Night seemed to fall all too quickly with the sun setting behind the hills surrounding the dam and with it went the heat of the day drawing us all around the fire. Much talk ensued with plenty of stories being exchanged – it had been quite sometime since we had held an away weekend and all felt it should be repeated more often. Sunday dawned cold, with the dam cloaked in mist and an appreciable layer of frost, even producing a good coating of ice crystals on the boat covers. Birds were slow to emerge, but we did hear Shelley's Francolin call shortly after dawn and a heron flapped slowly through the mist. After breakfast we split into teams with some being assigned to particular kopjies, whilst others were more mobile checking on activity within known territories. We all met back at the Yacht Club for tea and a debriefing which was useful and allowed an immediate assessment of breeding activity. A total of 6 teams had been involved and summarising results showed that we had seen at least 32 different Verreaux's Eagles or roughly half the estimated population within the National Park. Breeding activity was only recorded for a limited number of pairs, with some involved in nest restoration and a couple of pairs possibly sitting. It was still quite early within the breeding cycle and the heavy spell of rain in April may well have delayed breeding – we await further events. As well as Verreaux's Eagle, a number of other raptors were recorded including African Hawk-eagle, Augur Buzzard, Black-shouldered Kite, Brown Snake-eagle, African Fish-eagle and a Lanner Falcon. The Matopos continues to be a raptorphiles delight and an excellent birding venue. **Martin Smith**

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

##### Die Guns Farm, ODZI — Sunday 28 April 2002

A group of nine birders went out to Die Guns farm belonging to Jan and Cristo Kok. This area is fairly dry, but has good Brachystegia woodland, is very well represented in Acacia species, and has some lovely riverine vegetation all close to the homestead. The well-covered paddock was also productive.



Normally, if I write a report on an outing I list the birds methodically, as they were seen, but forgive me if I launch straight into midmorning when we spent a good few minutes with a Brown-backed Honeybird. I had always imagined I would have difficulty identifying one, but it is well painted in *Roberts'* and is so obviously a honeybird, duller and smaller than the other common ones, with obvious white outer rectrices. Our first sighting of it had us thinking along the lines of flycatchers, but that was due to the fine bill. It was a lifer for most of us, although Bart and Petra have had one before at Ndundu Lodge in the VUMBA. We had arrived at about 7.15 a.m. and walked slowly, edging the field, but with a good view into the clumps of trees. Immediately, right in the garden, an African Harrier-hawk was busy loping up trees and gave the (fairly) newcomers a great display of how raptors do not usually behave. We saw, amongst other birds, Yellow-throated Longclaw (4), Blue Waxbill and a very co-operative Golden-breasted Bunting in the field. In the riverbed, we listened to a White-browed Scrub-robin in full song, saw Little Bee-eater, some barbets and, in the wonderful shade of a large Jackal berry *Diospyros mespiliformis*, we watched the antics of some African Green-pigeons. We then wandered slowly back to the house for a cup of tea. The garden was, also most productive, with every Acacia branch bedecked in weaver nests. Under the eaves, a Wire-tailed Swallow was nesting on a mud platform nest and they seemed quite at peace with the attentions of the 3 Border Collies who sat below, willing an unfortunate accident upon the nestlings. We also saw Jacobin Cuckoo, Meyer's Parrot and Meves's Starling. Leaving the homestead, we stopped at the small dam, where we picked up Blacksmith Lapwing, Hamerkop, and African Pied Wagtail. We then headed for Mount Mwenje Lodge, which has now, sadly, closed down. Here we collected Klaas's Cuckoo and Mocking Cliff-chat and finally headed for home. Brian, Bart and Petra were all newcomers (at least to me) and were very welcome. It was nice to have someone with Bart's experience on board and hope we see them all again. **Jane Clegg**

## **KAROI BIRD CLUB**

### Outings report

Over the past months, due to the circumstances surrounding us for so long, there has been no extra activity in the club apart from the monthly walks at RYDINGS School. These have been enjoyed by those who have attended and, on the May walk, 75 species were seen. The highlights were: Golden-breasted Bunting – seen there for the first time and allowing a good sighting while quietly feeding on the pathway – two Saddle-billed Stork were at the dam as well as Pied Kingfishers and Malachite Kingfishers, a pair of Giant Kingfisher and a Crowned Lapwing on eggs. Up above were Black-chested Snake-eagle, Black-shouldered Kite and two African Fish-eagles. A flock of Miombo Blue-eared Starling was identified and we had a good viewing of Orange-breasted Waxbill, with time to enjoy their beautiful colours. Just to mention here, that in January there was a flock of 30 Violet-backed Starling seen at Rydings — normally we see only a handful! We also saw a lone Black Heron keeping company with Cattle Egret at the water's edge. Here on Kevlyn Farm (QDS 1629D2), we had two very vocal Pearl-spotted Owlets calling for ten days. We have never had them here before and we also saw Coqui Francolin crossing the road.

Danny van den Bergh, on Caversham (QDS 1629D3), was pleased to find what he thought was an African Grass-owl which was put up by his dog while walking across a heavily grassed fallow land. His firefinches in the aviary, which he saved from the pet shop, have quite happily bred for the first time.

The weekend of 1 June, we were invited to stay at Rumwa Safari Lodge (QDS 1629A 1), situated at Chimutsi Dam which you see on the right as you go down the escarpment to the Mana Pools turnoff on the road to Chirundu. The lodge is sited high up on the river bank — now dry and sandy — and from there you can walk about 150 metres across the sand to the dam. No sooner had we arrived than we decided to do just that. We found to our delight — and a first for us — Mottled Spinetail circling and dipping over the water. Wire-tailed Swallows and Lesser Striped Swallows were there as well. There were also Kittlitz's Plover in small numbers and Three-banded Plovers, Blacksmith Lapwing and Crowned Lapwings settling on the sand. We also saw Red-capped Lark in the sparse grass on the sand. A lone Yellow-billed Stork on the far bank was keeping company with Egyptian Goose. Of the herons seen there were Black-headed Herons, Grey Herons and Green-backed Herons whilst there was the ever present Little Egret, a few Common Sandpipers and two Common Greenshanks. Kingfishers seen were Pied Kingfishers, Giant Kingfishers and Brown-hooded Kingfishers. African Fish-eagle were active on a nest in a baobab tree on the far side of the dam and the next morning we were greeted by the sight of two Saddle-billed Stork flying in and striding along the waters edge — they stayed for the rest of our time there. A lone African Spoonbill also appeared on the second day. Hornbills seen were Red-billed Hornbill and Crowned Hornbill and we heard Trumpeter Hornbill and Southern Ground-hornbill. Golden-tailed Woodpecker and Cardinal Woodpeckers were in the trees around the lodge where we saw all the rest of the woodland birds — Eastern Nicator spent some time with us as did

Yellow-bellied Greenbul. The little birds were Long-billed Crombec, Blue Waxbill, Grey-backed Camaroptera, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird and sunbirds were Amethyst Sunbird, Scarlet-chested Sunbird and White-bellied Sunbird. We saw a good flock of White-crested Helmet-shrike settle in the green trees along the river bank and only Bateleur, African Harrier-hawk and Yellow-billed Kite were in the sky. A most enjoyable weekend and, can you tell me, is there anything better than just wandering about with a pair of binoculars, hour after hour, ever alert to any sign of movement — speaking as a twitcher of course?!

Animals seen were lion (6) which we surprised. They were in superb condition and huge. There were impala, three elephant which came to drink, several hippo in the dam, a croc on the bank, baboon, monkey and hyaena which were heard. Squirrels were at the lodge, a beautiful blue-tailed lizard, sitting under the trees and just at dark we saw two tiny night-apes alone the branches come out to feed and there were small black bats flying around. **Merle Mitchell**

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### **TAIL FEATHERS**

#### Observations from Rocara Park, LAKE CHIVERO

On 29 October 2001, Red-headed Weavers were constructing a nest under a metal roof. The nest was eventually abandoned.

Spotted Creepers were constructing a nest but this was destroyed by monkeys. I am not certain whether or not eggs were laid.

On 1 November 2001 African Green-pigeon were building a nest. Chicks hatched on approximately 15 November. Adults and chicks vanished on 20 November and it is possible the nest had been predated by monkeys.

Two species not recorded at Rocara before were White-browed Scrub-robin which was seen at a bird bath on 11 November 2001 and a Yellow-bellied Greenbul drinking on 12 November.

Finally, a young Black Cuckoo was seen on 16 December being fed by a Tropical Boubou. This same bird was seen again on 17 December when it was alone drinking from a bird bath. **Mike Marriott**

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### **NOTICEBOARD**

#### Donations

Under the new tax regulations donations to registered welfare organisations (PVO) are deductible from taxable income. The office is now providing a receipt stamped with our PVO number to all persons and companies making donations this year, whether they are paid by crossed cheque or cash.

#### Buy-a-Brick Campaign

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

Mr and Mrs S D Varden	-	\$10 000	Mike Futter	-	\$1000
S Chizipi	-	\$ 100	Stephen Murota	-	\$ 100
Roy Wakefield	-	\$ 100	B A Honeybun	-	\$ 70
Mr & Mrs O White	-	\$ 44			

#### Sponsored Members Fund

Responses are still coming in and we are grateful to the following for their contributions:

SD Bean	-	\$325	JM Borland	-	\$325
A Lock	-	\$325	JD Roberts	-	\$325
B J Robertson-Dyer	-	\$325	Mrs L Van Zanten	-	\$325

#### 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 office for further information.

#### Merchandise for Sale

Embroidered badges	\$ 60	Hats	\$ 258
Caps	\$ 395	T-shirts	\$1 200
Cricket Hats	\$1 450	Peter Ginn Calendars	\$ 30

Books for sale

Two copies of *The Birds of Zimbabwe* by Michael P Stuart Irwin are offered for sale. Prices are: \$5 000 for a semi-soft cover volume in good condition and \$6 000 for a hard-back cover in fair condition. Contact Alice at the office – 490208 or 491496.

New members

We welcome the following new members:

C J Gillies, A Mususa, I K Sadomba, K Schmahl

Field observations – Honeyguide

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

Mukuvisi Woodlands

Access to the Public Walking Area

For the present the gates are being kept locked. This is to prevent illegal woodcutting which is a problem particularly during the winter months, and not to deny access to responsible persons! Please contact the office at the Mukuvisi Woodlands if you wish to walk in the area. Access is still free and it is planned to make the area more accessible in future.

Guided Bird Walks

A bird guide is available for hire who can show you most of the birds present in the woodlands. Contact the Mukuvisi Woodlands Office on telephone 747111 to make the necessary arrangements.

Aviary

The large walk-through aviary has been repaired and houses a fair number of species. Indigenous birds are needed for restocking and these should have been hand reared or habituated to aviary life. Such birds are easy to observe and less likely to be stressed in captivity. If you are able to assist please contact the manager at the Mukuvisi Woodlands or Geoff Lowe on Harare telephone 332087.

Birding Code of Ethics

The following has been adopted by the Council of BirdLife Zimbabwe for its members. Most of it is common sense but members of BLZ are expected to behave in a responsible manner.

Birders must —

- Respect the rights and not interfere with the activities of other birders and the general public.
- Obtain permission to enter private and designated land.
- Observe all laws, rules and regulations pertaining to the use of public birding areas.
- Practice common courtesy when interacting with others.
- Always behave in a manner that will enhance the image of birders and of BirdLife Zimbabwe.

Birders must not —

- Disturb birds unduly when observing or photographing them, especially near nesting sites.
- Chase or repeatedly flush birds.
- Use tape recordings in such a manner that birds are excessively disturbed or distressed.
- Handle birds or their eggs unless involved in a recognised research project.
- Cause damage or disturbance to the natural environment or its inhabitants.

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