

# THE BABBLER

## ORNITHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION OF ZIMBABWE NEWSLETTER

ISSUE #5: MARCH/APRIL 1995

### Mashonaland Branch

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Members: Mr G Lowe 735507  
Mr C Rawson -  
PRO Mr K Barrow 732457  
Editor: Mr D Gray 885406

### Matabeleland Branch

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## **MASHONALAND BRANCH ACTIVITIES**

### Regular Monthly Outings

1. Mukuvisi Woodlands: Sunday 5th March and 2nd April 1995. Meet at Paget Road entrance at 6.30 a.m. There will be a vehicle guard in attendance.
2. Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary: Sunday 9th April 1995. Meet at Marimba Shopping Centre at 6.30 a.m. Beginners are especially catered for. Vehicles parked in a safe area. Bring your chairs and tea. **NB** there will be no outing in March as all leaders will be at the National AGM.

### Saturday Afternoon Outings

1. 18th March 1995. Teviotdale Riding School. A good woodland area. Meet at the B P Garage opposite Old Georgians Sports Club on the Chase at 2.00 p.m.
2. 22nd April 1995. Crest Breeders (Mrs Pat Bellingan) Meet at GPO Inez Terrace at 2.00 p.m.

### Sunday Outings

1. Mrs Robin Gilmour's Farm on the Dyke. Meet at the Mobil Garage, Greencroft, left side of Lomagundi Road at 6.30 a.m. Come and look for grassland, woodland and water birds. Bring your chairs and tea.
2. 30th April 1995. Ngomakurira Area Domboshawa. Meet at T A Motors (Shell garage) Borrowdale at 6.30 a.m. Bring your chairs and tea and look for Augur Buzzards and other raptors plus grassland and woodland birds.

Weekend Outing

There will be a weekend outing over the weekend Friday 19th, Saturday 20th return Sunday 21st May 1995 to Hippo Pools in the Umfurudzi Wildlife Area. We could find Pel's Fishing-owl, Narina Trogon, Bearded Scrub-robin and Black-throated Wattled-eye to mention but a few.

Accommodation consists of:

1 x 2 bed Cabin

1 x 4 bed Cabin

1 x 6 bed Chalet

1 x 8 bed Chalet

All are fully equipped with a 2 plate stove and ovens fridge and a communal deep freeze.

There are two communal ablution buildings. Cost \$90 per person per day. Self catering.

Booking on first come first served basis.

Besides the birds there is a lot of other wildlife. A very worthwhile area. Please complete the tear off and return to Dave Gray as soon as possible, with your cheque.

Evening Meetings

1. Thursday 16th March 1995. Dr John Condy will speak on nesting boxes. Venue: Alexandra Sport Club. Time 6.30 p.m.
2. Friday 21st April 1995. Social Braai at 14 Fisher Avenue Borrowdale at 6.00 p.m. Bring your own drinks and meat. The committee will supply the salads.

Ed. Would Mashonaland members please wear name tags on outings to assist with identifying visitors and new comers. Thank you.

**EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB**

|            |                      |                                  |
|------------|----------------------|----------------------------------|
| Chairman:  | Mr. K. Dixon         | No phone at present              |
| Secretary: | Hiss G. Henning      | 4 Mimosa Court 2nd Street Mutare |
| Recorder:  | Mr A B (Tony) Curtis | 60281 Mutare                     |

Outings

|                          |                 |           |
|--------------------------|-----------------|-----------|
| Saturday 11th March 1995 | Premier Estates | 2.00 p.m. |
| Sunday 26th March 1995   | Mountain Home   | 6.00 a.m. |
| Saturday 8th April 1995  | Cynara          | 2.00 p.m. |
| Sunday 30th April 1995   | Dorowa          | 6.00 a.m. |

The group assembles at the Museum in Aerodrome Road at the time stated. It is always advisable to check on arrangements by ringing Tony Curtis on 60281. Binoculars may be borrowed providing prior notice is given.

**MATABELELAND BRANCH**FUTURE PROGRAMMEEvening Meetings

Friday 3rd March 1995. Video Evening. 'Life in the Freezer'. Part II of this fascinating video on Antarctic life, which includes Emperor Penguins and how the video was made. Please do come. Venue: 3a Holdengarde Avenues Hillside at 8.00 p.m. Phone 42474.

Friday 7th April 1995. "Smith Family Holiday". The Chairman went to Kenya at Christmas and had the chance of visiting a number of birding venues including flamingos at Nakuru. A presentation including some video footage of vultures and flamingos. Venue: 3a Holdengarde Avenue Hillside at 8.00 p.m.

Outings

10th-12th March 1995. National AGM at Maleme Rest Camp. The AGM will be held at 2.00 p.m. on Saturday 11th March 1995. There is still accommodation available. Tear off form attached at the end. Please support the Council.

AGM Weekend ProgrammeFriday 10th March 1995

2.00 p.m. Members arrive at Maleme Rest Camp.  
8.00 p.m. Verreaux's Eagle Slide Show

Saturday 11th March 1995

6.00 a.m. Early morning birding. Meet at camp entrance  
8.30 a.m. Verreaux's Eagle nest/territory tour conducted by G Banfield  
2.00 p.m. National AGM  
Presentation: Conservation Education Ngoni Chiweshe — Department of National Parks.  
4.00 p.m. Tea: Matabeleland Branch will provide 'eats'  
6.30 p.m. Communal Braai  
8.00 p.m. Matopos Slide Presentation

Sunday 12th March 1995

6.00 a.m. Early morning birding  
10.00 a.m. Members check out.

Friday 30th April 1995. Rosenfels Farm. Mary Rosenfels has kindly invited us to her property off the Plumtree Road. This is an unspoilt natural part of Matabeleland. This should be a rewarding visit. Contact the Chairman 42474.

Aisleby. Recent outings have proved rewarding with a number of interesting sightings (see below). Monthly outings continue, dates being:

| Date                   | Co-ordinator   | Telephone No. |
|------------------------|----------------|---------------|
| Sunday 26th March 1995 | Tim English    | 45688         |
| Sunday 24th April 1995 | Margaret Stone | 44097         |

Either contact the Co-ordinator or meet at the Aisleby boom at 7.30 a.m.

From the Chairman: A little rain has at last arrived and the second week in January saw the Upper UMGUSA rise significantly. Our waterfowl count was conducted immediately after this inflow and it is surprising how quickly numbers and the variety of species have risen. A number of unusual birds were recorded including 58 Black-winged Pratincole, 1 Purple Heron, 2 Greater Flamingos and 1 Lesser Flamingo. Overall numbers were up on last year perhaps a consequence of the high rainfall in the proceeding week. Some comparisons with January 1994 are:

| <u>Species</u>           | <u>January 1994</u> | <u>January 1995</u> |
|--------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Little Grebe             | 64                  | 4                   |
| Pink-backed Pelican      | 11                  | 3                   |
| White-breasted Cormorant | 35                  | 11                  |
| Reed Cormorant           | 35                  | 13                  |
| African Darter           | 7                   | 0                   |
| Cattle Egret             | 447                 | 762                 |
| African Sacred Ibis      | 176                 | 367                 |
| Glossy Ibis              | 20                  | 25                  |
| White-faced Duck         | 126                 | 232                 |
| Red-billed Teal          | 134                 | 427                 |
| Southern Pochard         | 242                 | 153                 |

Duck totals are worth comparing, numbers being higher this year, perhaps due to the recent rise in water level, offering grassy fringes in which to dabble? Cormorant numbers were lower presumably due to the excessive dilution of the few remaining fish. These figures pose some interesting questions about bird movement and location of suitable habitats. Does anyone have any answers?

Martin Smith

#### MASHONALAND BRANCH AGM

This year the AGM venue was Alexandra Sports Club and there was a good turnout of 37 members and visitors. The previous Committee was re-elected. Derek Solomon spoke on 'Birding in South Africa' giving us some highlights of his two birding safaris last year. Thank you Derek for a most interesting and entertaining presentation. A good social evening was had by all. Dave Gray

#### CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

As in recent years we have held four outings a month, namely two regular outings, one Saturday afternoon and one Sunday morning monthly outing. We have also held evening meetings most months.

The two regular outings to Mukuvisi Woodlands and Lake Chivero continue to be well supported. The Mukuvisi Woodlands outings held on the first Sunday of each month continues to be ably led by John Shaw and we must express our tremendous thanks to John for continuing to do this.

The Lake Chivero outing was ably led by Dave Collis for most of the year as it has been for many years. However, in November we bade farewell to him as he has gone to Australia. On behalf of the Branch, I would like to record our great thanks to Dave for all the enthusiasm and effort he has put into the OAZ over the years. John Paxton has agreed to take over leading this outing and we are very appreciative to him for this.

We continue to hold regular Saturday afternoon outings at various venues. In June, Gary Stafford gave us an interesting falconry demonstration at Rainham Dam. Thank you, Gary. I would like to thank very much the owners of the places we have visited for their hospitality. Evening meetings were mainly held at the Museum but we also used Prince Edward School Library during the year. These meetings have generally attracted small audiences. They were previously held at 8.00 p.m. but this was later changed to 6.30 p.m. We would like members' comments on the time and venues of these meetings. We would also like suggestions as to possible speakers as these can be difficult to arrange.

During the year, talks were given by Tracey Couto, Geoff Wood, John Hough, Colin Rawson, Jeremy Talbot and Alex Masterson. Our sincere thanks go to these people for giving of their time.

Monthly outings continue to be held on the last Sunday of each month. During the year we had outings to such places as Monavale vlei with Alex Masterson and Chivaza Rock with John Hough. Our sincere thanks go to all those who hosted these outings. A special note of thanks should go to John Hough for all the enjoyment which he gave us during the year for his evening meeting videos and his outing to Mvurwi.

The National AGM was held at Lake Kyle over the weekend 15 — 18 April 1994. A fair number of the Mashonaland Branch attended and we had a very enjoyable weekend.

Rifa Conservation Camp outing took place over the long weekend 29 September - 3rd October 1994 and was a great success. Our thanks go to our hosts Leslie and Hugh Maasdorp, Anton Howland and his hunters for looking after us and to Harriot Bolton for feeding us so well. We are arranging another outing to Rifa this year.

### Chairman's Report (Continued)

Joint meetings with other branches were organised following the AGM at Lake Kyle. Dave Gray and other members of the Mashonaland Branch had a weekend outing to Masvingo where they joined up with some of the Masvingo members of the Association. Dave Gray also had an outing with members of the Mashonaland Branch to Dorowa Mine where he and others linked up with members of the Eastern Districts Bird Club. This again was a great success. It is important that Mashonaland Branch members make contact with district members and we are very appreciative to Dave Gray for taking the lead in this.

This year the *Sunbird*, which was previously Mashonaland Branch Newsletter was amalgamated with the Matabeleland Branch Newsletter, namely *The Barbet*, into the National Newsletter called *The Babbler*. Our thanks go to the Editors Martin Smith in Bulawayo and Dave Gray. It is intended to continue with this combined Newsletter.

Finally, I wish to express my sincere thanks to the members of the Committee for their hard work during the year. I would especially like to thank Keith Barrow for agreeing to come on to the Committee and for looking after publicity so well for us. I would also like to particularly thank Ida Gray for agreeing to replace Val Cameron as secretary and also Dave Collis as treasurer on the Committee. Bryant Elliot

### MUKUVISI WOODLANDS REPORT 1994

During the year the Branch carried out twelve monthly visits to the Mukuvisi Woodlands. We recorded 135 different species of birds, 131 different species in 1993 and 144 in 1992. The highest number was 70 different species in February and lowest was 44 different species in both April and August. We saw an average of 54.9 different species each month whilst 161 people attended the outings, an average of 13 per outing, compared with 189, an average of 17 in 1993.

New birds seen were a Thrush Nightingale in February, identified initially by song but good sightings were made by John Sievi later in the month and a Swainson's Spurfowl in October. I am told that David Rockingham-Gill saw a Speckled Mousebird in February and although these birds are now fairly common in parts of Harare, we have yet to record one in the Mukuvisi Woodlands on our outings.

John Sievi as usual added considerably to the interest of the October outing by pointing out nests or nesting holes of about twenty different species of birds, some of the more interesting were a Spotted Creeper, Black-headed Oriole, Variable Sunbird, Miombo Double-collared Sunbird and Amethyst Sunbird, White-breasted Cuckooshrike, Miombo Rock-thrush and Fiery-necked Nightjar. We had experienced a long cold winter which may have affected the start of the breeding season for some species. At this outing last year we were shown about twelve Dark-capped Bulbul nests, on this occasion not one.

The impression I gained on walks through the Woodland in November and December from the numbers of young birds around was that the breeding season was probably a successful one. In October we had seen an African Cuckoo and in December we saw a fully fledged youngster soliciting for food which suggests that this bird may have hatched in the woodlands.

We have continued to attempt to record the status of Miombo Specials and it is disappointing to report that neither the Southern Black Tit nor the Miombo Tit was recorded during the year. However, on the credit side a Southern Hyliota was seen in December our first since 1992.

A word of thanks to John Sievi for showing us nests in October, for taking the November outing whilst I was at Mana and for continuing to allow his gardener to look after our cars. Thanks are also due to those who supported these outings and made them such an enjoyable part of the Branch's Birding year. John Shaw

## TAIL FEATHERS

### Pitta in HARARE

I thought you might be interested to know that I had an exciting find in my garden on Christmas Eve — an African Pitta. I was about to step into a bed of plants which I have in the corner of the garden under a large tree and was thinking about snakes — it looked so overgrown — when a bird flew up from under my feet. I was aware of a glorious flash of blue. It very obligingly sat on a wall about 2 metres in front of me and imagine my surprise when I saw that it was a pitta. It then flew off into the next door garden and has not been seen since. Perhaps it had stooped off in my garden to rest up before travelling on further, on its migration route. Di Rushforth

### Avian Opportunism

On our last trip to South Africa whilst refuelling at BEITBRIDGE we had time to observe the resident House Sparrows. As vehicles stopped on the forecourt these little birds were alighting on radiators and collecting any dead and trapped insects. What could be an easier way to collect lunch?

Colin Rawson

### Resilience of Birds

Our HARARE garden has a number of tall fir trees which attract some of the local Pied Crow population. One pair decided to nest on the top of one of the largest, approximately 30 metres high. During a particularly heavy storm the two small chicks were blown from the nest on to the ground. They appeared unhurt so hoping the parents would return to their young we placed them on the garage roof which was conveniently under the tree. Not only did the parents return but they continued to feed their family for the next three weeks until they were able to hop from branch to branch and back up the tree to their nest, later to learn to fly and take their place in the local community.

During the feeding period the gardener had the responsibility of continually replacing these two small chicks each time they moved too actively and tumbled off the garage roof.

Colin Rawson

### Mabelreign and MONAVALÉ Vleis: Sunday 29th January 1995

Thirty-six birders joined Alex Masterson for his popular vlei walk on a beautiful bright and sunny morning with a cool breeze and the grass still damp underfoot. The first vlei was behind the old Mabelreign Drive-In. The terrain varied from medium height grass dotted with Acacia trees, to thick tangles of tall reeds and golden-flowered sedges and Timothy grass concealing mud, pools and flowing streams.

Some members wearing wellies were invited to join Alex in an attempt to flush out Levillant's Cisticolas from the wetter areas, which was successful.

Numerous Southern Red Bishops in their bright breeding plumage proudly surveyed their territory. The widowbirds were also in breeding plumage and three species were recorded: Yellow-mantled Widowbird, Red-collared Widowbird and White-winged Widowbird. We saw two Diderick Cuckoos displaying in a bush and a Greater Kestrel posed on an Acacia branch. The Acacias also provided perches for Rattling Cisticolas and a pair of Gabar Goshawks. Other species included a Flappet Lark, a Hamerkop, European Bee-eaters, Black-shouldered Kite, Yellow-throated Longclaw, African Palm-swifts and a flock of Helmeted Guineafowl.

From there we drove to Monavale vlei, the temperature was rising and the area was much drier and consisted of medium-high grass with patches of cultivated maize and clumps of tall Mexican sunflowers. A Cuckoo Finch flew up and a couple of Rufous-naped Larks were perched conspicuously. Zitting Cisticola and Cloud Cisticolas [Pale-crowned Cisticola/Wing-snapping Cisticola?] were heard overhead. High above were African Palm-swifts, Common House-martins and possibly a Red-footed Falcon.

We returned alongside a watercourse lined with willows, poplars and Phragmites reeds and as we approached we were greeted by a flock of Orange-breasted Waxbills, more widowbirds and we added the Yellow Bishop and the Pin-tailed Whydah to the sightings. Although unseen we heard Great Reed-warbler, Red-faced Cisticola and Diderick Cuckoo. We disturbed a couple of Marsh Owls and finally a Little Bittern appeared. Our thanks to Alex for yet another most enjoyable walk.

Shirley Dodds

Fairholme Farm, PENHALONGA (P and K Hurrell) Saturday 10 December 1994

Our last trip for 1994 will not be quickly forgotten by the eight members who attended (or the two who were left behind). We successfully identified a small raptor thus solving a problem for our hosts.

In the morning we had had a couple of showers in Mutare, the first of the season, but hardly a drop had fallen on Fairholme Farm, just over the Pass. The bushy spinney along the field was, despite the drought, fairly busy and we quickly spotted a host of occupants including Senegal Coucal, Cardinal Woodpecker and a Long-billed Crombec. Flying from bush to mealies were flocks of Red-billed Quelea, Red-collared Widowbird and Yellow Bishop all containing a few males in breeding dress at last.

In the riverine bush there was a flock of Speckled Pigeon [Rock Dove?], one of a few Red-backed Shrike we were to see, and African Firefinch. In the mealie field were Black-headed Heron enjoying a shower from the sprinklers, Cape Crow and Steppe Buzzard hunting from the telegraph poles.

Finding ourselves a long way from the cars but wanting to go further yet warned by Tony of the first rains directly above us still imprisoned in their black cloud, I ran off to collect a pickup which might just save us from a soaking and allow us to inspect a raptor's nest on the neighbouring farm. As I and the group approached the meeting-point from opposite directions I spotted a bird on the track in front of me. Could it be the falcon we had come to identify? We got closer and closer without scaring it away. Yes, it was definitely a Lanner Falcon. Instead of flying up the poor thing limped slowly into the gums, trailing its right wing. After a short discussion the bird was easily caught in a towel just as the heavens opened in retribution.

When we delivered the bird to Rob Truscott, our local expert, he put it in a small aviary, confirmed the injury and promised it a tasty bit of hare or monkey from the freezer. Apparently wing injuries rarely heal successfully so the bird may well be used for breeding purposes by a local falconer.

Ken Dixon

OSBORNE Dam: Saturday 14th January 1995

In common with our last two visits to the embryonic Osborne, this trip was interesting but did not reveal any progress on the bird front.

This time we approached one of the dam's arms via Manica Bridge and Mount Jenya. Near the point where we thought the shoreline should be we parked the vehicles and followed a dry river bed through thorny scrub to the water. On the way we came across Red-backed Shrike, Southern Red Bishop, Red-collared Widowbird and a Black-chested Snake-eagle.

The shallow, muddy water we eventually reached had only Pied Wagtails, a White-breasted Cormorant, an African Darter and a Black Crake. However, as we moved through the bushes we found White-browed Scrub-robin, African Pygmy-kingfisher, Little Bee-eater and European Bee-eater.

Crossing a more open area on our way back we were delighted to find two pairs of Violet-eared Waxbill which are uncommon in our area. Then, in quick succession came Marico Flycatcher, Violet-backed Starling, Rattling Cisticola, Chestnut-vented Tit-babbler and a nightjar.

A Diderick Cuckoo was seen feeding its growing son or daughter. Tony said "But I thought young cuckoos were fed by the host". What is the answer? \*

Finally, as we chatted before leaving, a Wahlberg's Eagle appeared, a species little seen so far this summer.

As far as the dam is concerned, major questions remain to be answered. Will it ever fill? Will the area ever become a National Park allowing us all access to the water and the beautiful mountains surrounding it? 40+ species. Ken Dixon

\* Ed. This appears to be display behaviour in the Diderick Cuckoo with the male symbolically feeding the female.

Verreaux's Eagle Survey MATOPOS. George has completed his report for the 1994 breeding season, key figures being:

|                                  |              |
|----------------------------------|--------------|
| No. of sites observed            | 42           |
| No. of territories occupied      | 37           |
| No. of breeding attempts         | 23           |
| No. of young successfully reared | 21/37 —0.57% |

This figure is the best breeding success rate since 1973 and hopefully some of the fledglings will mature into adulthood.

#### Spotted Eagle-owl – 3 Bouchier Wray Ave Hillside, BULAWAYO

For a number of years we have had the pleasure of observing a pair of Spotted Eagle-owls roosting by day in a Kirkia (thickened up with Bougainvillea) in our garden and at dusk — after stretching their wings — taking flight for their nightly hunting. We would also hear them calling to each other during the night whilst perched either in trees above our house or on the road light poles.

This year we have taken particular note of their movements and on 25/8/94 we noted the owls perched in different trees and then at dusk the male flew over to the female and saw them mating — this occurred on two consecutive days.

On the 30/8/94 the owls had disappeared from the Kirkia and wondered if they could be nesting in the nearby rocky cliffs. In fact they nested in the grounds of the Nesbitt Castle which is the property adjacent to ours and we were very pleased to be told during mid November by the proprietors of the Castle that they had seen a fledgling with the parent owls. On 3/11/94 we heard the owls calling to each other so we knew they were still around and on 24/11/94 we were invited to go and view the family of owls. We found them in the canopy of a huge Jacaranda tree with the parent birds higher up and the juvenile staring down at us — no ear tufts were visible at that time and the bird was covered in soft brown/white striped feathers.

On 29/12/94 we noticed one owl back in our Kirkia and on 30/12/94 we noticed two owls and then on 31/12/94 we saw the three owls in the Kirkia, always perched one above the other at an angle. The juvenile at present is two thirds the size of the parent birds and ear tufts are now beginning to develop and markings now becoming distinctive. We also observed that when the juvenile takes flight the female bird stays close to it.

We were so pleased to see this family having monitored the successful breeding cycle. All these dates fit in perfectly with the breeding information as described in Roberts.

Barbara and Jimmie Cromar



BIRDWATCH: FEBRUARY 25th/26th 1995

## GET YOUR TEAM GALVANISED INTO ACTION FOR THIS EVENT

As well as smaller prizes (and the Trophy) there is a BIG Prize of two nights B & B at Hwange Safari Lodge for two.

Come on Schools, why not enter teams? Completed cards to be sent in to Jacko Williams, 14 Harare Drive, Borrowdale by 20th March 1995.

N.B. The return address for your subscriptions is P O Box CY 161 Causeway.

Tear Off Here

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HIPPO POOLS WEEKEND

19th-21st May 1995

I, \_\_\_\_\_ require accommodation for  
\_\_\_\_\_ persons

I enclose my cheque for \$  
Address

Telephone No.

To: Dave Gray  
14, Fisher Avenue, Borrowdale

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NATIONAL AGM 1995

Maleme Dam accommodation consists of double-bedroom and single bedroom chalets with conveniently situated communal ablution blocks and outside cooking facilities. Double-bedroom and one single bedroom Lodges with dining room, kitchen, bathroom, shower and toilet. All units are equipped with beds, mattresses, bedding, towels, refrigerator, essential furniture and basic cooking utensils. No crockery or cutlery is provided in the chalets. Chalets have two plate electric cookers. Table linen, crockery and cutlery are provided in the Lodges which are also equipped with electric stoves.

|                  |             |                    |             |
|------------------|-------------|--------------------|-------------|
| 1 Bedroom Chalet | (2 persons) | \$40.00 per night  | 7 available |
| 2 Bedroom Chalet | (4 persons) | \$80.00 per night  | 5 available |
| 1 Bedroom Lodge  | (2 persons) | \$60.00 per night  | 1 available |
| 3 Bedroom Lodge  | (6 persons) | \$180.00 per night | 2 available |

CAMPING per person per night \$10.00

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Tear off

I \_\_\_\_\_ require the following accommodation  
For \_\_\_\_\_ persons. I enclose my cheque for \$  
Address \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

To: Mr Martin Smith  
P O Box 44  
BULAWAYO.