

BABBLER

BirdLife Zimbabwe

THE BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL PARTNER IN ZIMBABWE

Member of IUCN, The World Conservation Union

ISSUE #50 – SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2002

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ACTIVITIES

MASHONALAND BRANCH

Regular outings

Mukuvisi Woodlands: Sundays, 1 September and 6 October 2002. Meet at the Paget Road entrance at 6.30 a.m. There will be a vehicle guard available.

Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary: Sundays, 8 September and 13 October 2002 (Annual Breakfast – see booking slip included). Meet at 6.30 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

21 September 2002: Crowborough Sewage Works. Meet at 2.30 p.m. at 5 Colenbrander Road, Milton Park where cars can be left and transport shared.

19 October 2002: Greystone Park Nature Preserve. Meet at 3.00 p.m. in the car park, Halford Road, Greystone Park. Bring chairs and refreshments.

Sunday outings

29 September 2002: Mazowe Sailing Club, Lake Chivero. Meet at 6.30 a.m. at Marimba Shopping Centre. Bring refreshments and chairs and make a day of it or, alternatively, the club does provide lunches but these must be booked at least one week in advance. Telephone Mike Robinson on 744410.

27 October 2002: Gosho Park, Marondera. This is an excellent birding area. Meet at 6.00 a.m. at the BLZ offices, 35 Clyde Road, Eastlea. There will be an entry fee payable. Bring chairs and refreshments and perhaps stay for the day. Earlier this year Collared Flycatchers were seen in the afternoon.

Thursday evening meetings

19 September 2002: An illustrated talk on Alaska in summer will be given by Dr Philippa Marett. Philippa's slides are outstanding and not to be missed!

17 October 2002: Leslee Maasdorp, Abasi Jana and Gisela Locherer will give an illustrated presentation entitled Birds and People of Honde Valley. The speakers will focus on the BLZ Education Programme, ringing and special birds of Honde and Aberfoyle.

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: 12 and 26 September, 10 and 24 October 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.

MATABELELAND BRANCH**Monthly Outings**

Sunday, 22 September – Proposed outing to Anglesea Farm. This has yet to be finalised. Please contact Penny.

Sunday, 20 October – Proposed outing to Reigate Farm, Airport Rd. All interested to contact Julia.

Aisleby

Dates and Co-ordinators are as follows:

Sunday, 29 September – Clive Townsley Sunday, 27 October – Martin Smith

Both will be early morning outings to the property and all interested should contact the co-ordinator.

Hillside Dams

Dates for our monthly rambles are as follows:

Friday, 27 September Friday, 25 October

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 29 September 2002 Mountain Home 6.30 a.m. A Christie 64197

Sunday 27 October 2002 Dorowa Mine 6.00 a.m. A Christie 64197

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 ☎ 064-6358 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.

MIDLANDS BRANCH

Gweru: Contact Kevin Barry ☎ 054-27316

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

From the Director

This is my first report to *Babbler* and I would like to thank BirdLife Zimbabwe for giving me the opportunity to direct the organisation's conservation programme. I see it as an interesting challenge in what can only be described as very difficult circumstances. There can be no doubt that the situation during the last few years has significantly increased the threats to Zimbabwe's natural heritage. It is a tragic irony that, although Zimbabwe's Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE) has been a, if not the, case study for the management of communally-owned resources (a central tenet of which is sustainable utilisation) just as the UN World Summit on Sustainable Development comes to southern Africa, Zimbabwe would appear to be turning its back on these principles. Interestingly, this has not been lost on the local press, as evident in the title of the *Comment* column in *The Daily News* on August 15: "Zimbabwe no longer the leading light in sustainable development". Many saw or heard about the Carte Blanche (M-Net) report on the levels of snaring in the conservancies in the southeast lowveld. More than being simply harrowing, for me, the visuals of the slaughter were ominous. Most of the animals caught in the long snare lines were left to rot and not used as meat to feed people. The wholesale slaughter of game and destruction of woodland is a national disaster and cause for great concern.

In common with other NGOs in the conservation field, BirdLife Zimbabwe's conservation programme finds itself facing a steep uphill battle. Whilst we have many African friends, it is unlikely that they will fund conservation programmes in Zimbabwe! Recently, funding for the implementation of the master plan to curb unplanned development at Victoria Falls was "canned" by the donor. Thus, in addition to having to deal with a socio-political system in which sustainable utilisation is an anathema, conservation NGOs are facing a drying up of donor funds. It is a bitter pill to swallow, because it means that we will have to rely more on local donors to meet the needs of the programme, exactly at a time when the Zimbabwean economy is in trouble! It is time to reassess the objectives and potential outputs BLZ's conservation programme can achieve in light of the current crisis. Details will be found in these pages once the assessment has been completed.

Although we find ourselves in very difficult times, I believe we can make an impact, in certain areas at least. This period of Zimbabwe's history is characterised by rapid change and how we as an organisation adapt to that change is going to determine how well we weather the storm as well as how much of the wealth of the variety of natural life that this country has been endowed with remains. I believe that this is something worth fighting for but that it is going to need a co-ordinated effort in order to have any impact. BLZ's conservation programme looks to the membership for help on all fronts. **Anthony Cizek**

From the Office

We are in the process of getting the garden developed and are appealing to the membership for help. The beds for the smallish garden have been worked over (compost, manure etc) and are ready to be planted. We would be grateful for any plants you might have, especially those that will attract the birds. Most of the beds are in semi-shade, but there are areas of full shade and some which receive quite a lot of sun. Also, we are on the hunt for some garden equipment – specifically, a hosepipe (more than 40m) and spray, wheelbarrow, lawn mower, large garden fork, pick, old secateurs (or old scissors for dead-heading), small watering can, as well as bird baths and bird feeders. So if you have any of these items looking for a home will be put to good use in our garden. Also if anyone has an old tea set or dustbins we would be very grateful for them. **Anthony Cizek**

EDUCATION NEWS

From the Coordinator

A sensitisation workshop for heads was held at Nyanga to put them in the picture with regards to the Bird Awareness and Permaculture Programmes. Although these officials found topics like ecosystems, special birds and water harvesting unusual, they fell into the mood of the workshop and thoroughly enjoyed an entertaining day. Our programme now can rely on support from the top management in schools. Further south in the Eastern Highlands we spent a worthwhile day at Chimanimani with teachers who were up-dated on the project and with teams of children who performed well in the quiz competition. Then, in the Chipinge district, our team was well supported by both Tanganda and Southdown Estates who hosted the trainers and provided fuel. This represented a big saving for our project. Some schools will be planting trees, not only in their grounds, but also on surrounding degraded riverbanks.

This is good news for people and birds! **Leslee Maasdorp**

From the Education Programme Manager

The programme continues to flourish, as much work was done between June and August 2002.

- The education programme exhibited at the 2002 Environmental Expo (7-8 June). About 450 people visited the BLZ stand and 6 of them joined BLZ as members. Many thanks go to Dorothy Wakeling, Richard Dennison and Jennifer Carter for their help during the Expo.
- July saw the programme team visiting Honde Valley. A quiz competition was conducted at Eastern Highlands No 1 School and 13 schools took part. A sensitisation workshop for the heads was also held at Village Inn Nyanga.
- As part of its expansion initiative the education team held a teachers' workshop in Vumba/Burma Valley district on 5 July 2002 at Chitakatira High. 24 teachers from 17 schools attended. This district becomes the programme's latest expansion cluster. However funding for this cluster is not yet available.
- The Co-ordinator and I visited Alfred Beit, Yamurayi and Warren Park 2 primary schools in Harare on 22 July. The purpose of the visits was to evaluate progress being made by the schools and getting to know their problems and future plans.
- Networking was done with WEZ's Hurungwe Environmental Awareness for Life (HEAL) programme. I visited the Education Officer for HEAL and together we drew up a calendar of possible activities for collaboration.
- Through my active participation in the Environmental Liaison Forum (ELF) I was selected to attend the Environmental Education Association of Southern Africa (EEASA) conference in Botswana from 18 to 22 August 2002. This will give me much needed international exposure as well as an opportunity to market BLZ's education and conservation initiatives to the international community.

Clayton Zazu

Zimbabwe bird database

We have received the database from Namibia and may I take this opportunity to especially thank Alice Jarvis and Tony Robertson of Namibia's Directorate of Environmental Affairs for agreeing to supply the design and to Tony for undertaking to adapt it for our purposes. We will still need to make a few more design modifications to hold Special Species Survey and Field Cards data. Otherwise, the database can hold Atlas cards, Wetland, Museum specimen and Nest Record data. Once we have set up the mapping program, we will be able to print out distribution maps. Species lists for Parks, by QDS and for the country, can be printed, as well as reports relevant to the datasets.

Once we have finalised the design, the input of data can commence, probably starting with all the Special Species Survey cards and the transference of Atlas records. Whilst on the subject of the Special Species Survey, may I thank all those who still send in cards, particularly the ORU. **Ian**

Riddell

MASHONALAND BRANCH

Correction — report on visit to Greystone Park Nature Preserve (*Babbler* issue No. 48, page 4) Reference was made to Mr Tony Conway but should have read Mr Terry Conway. Apologies!

Double Ro Ranch Dyke Property [Pucklehills Farm] — Sunday 26 May 2002

This was the first time that the Association had visited this farm, to the best of my knowledge. To get there we turned left about 60 km from Harare along the Chinhoyi road and travelled about 6 km along a

dirt road. We met our hostess for the day, Robyn Gilmour, at the butchery at 8.00 a.m. but reached our ultimate destination by the farm dam only at about 8.30 a.m., which was a bit of a late start for such a warm and sunny day. However, we were not disappointed as the birding was good and we all agreed that the setting was very pleasant. 11 of us attended the outing.

We parked in the shade of some acacia trees next to the farm dam, which was about half full and well populated with water lilies. The centre of the Dyke is generally quite fertile, well wooded and well watered by streams and it was in this type of country that our walk took place. Although Sable antelope and Kudu are to be found on the farm, we did not go into the area where they are usually seen. However, the vegetation cover was in good condition and we saw plenty of streams that were still holding water.

The total count was 72 and the highlights include: 7 African Black Duck and 1 Giant Kingfisher on the dam, 19 White-backed Vulture, 1 Greater Honeyguide, 2 Southern Hylia, 4 Grey Penduline-tit, 8 Familiar Chat, 1 Red-faced Crombec and 4 Long-billed Crombecs, 2 Yellow-bellied Eremomela, 4 Ashy Flycatcher, 2 Striped Pipits and 2 Wood Pipits, 1 Cape Longclaw and 3 Yellow-throated Longclaws, 4 Retz's Helmet-shrike and 2 White-winged Widowbirds in the miombo woodland and surrounding vleis. Our grateful thanks go to Robyn Gilmour and the farm manager, Boysie Kock for a very enjoyable outing. **Richard Dennison**

Mbizi Game Park — Sunday 23 June 2002

This day started off very cold with 4°C minimum recorded at my house in Hillside but the sun was shining brightly and by mid morning it was quite mild. There was a good turnout of about 15 people and we split up into 3 groups when we set out on our walks. Although Harava Dam was fairly full, the main farm dam was almost empty. However, rain in April and May seems to have resulted in widespread spring growth in Msasa and Mnondo trees and Mbizi was no exception. Although we did not venture into the main game area we were delighted by 3 Clawless Otter on a rock on the opposite side of Harava Dam. With an exceptionally good count for winter of 104 species we had a very good morning. The highlights included 1 juvenile Saddle-billed Stork, 2 African Black Duck, 2 Spotted Thick-knees, 3 African Green-pigeon, 1 Greater Honeyguide, 1 Lesser Honeyguide and 3 Green-backed Honeybirds, 5 species of swallow, 2 Brown-throated Martin, 5 Grey Penduline-tit, 1 Chestnut-vented Tit-babbler, 20 Long-billed Crombec, 8 species of shrike which included Brown-crowned Tchagra and Grey-headed Bush-shrike, 5 species of sunbird, 4 species of weaver and 6 species of finch.

Richard Dennison

Dr Kit Cottrell — Thursday 18 July 2002

The twenty-five people present must have felt as I did that we were very fortunate to have the opportunity to listen to a speaker of the calibre of Dr Kit Cottrell who gave us an outstanding, fascinating and informative talk on cuckoos and the phenomenon of gentes that is exhibited by some cuckoos.

Cuckoos as a species have, through the ages, provided man with many unanswered questions about their behaviour. They are mentioned in the Bible and in the works of Shakespeare and Chaucer to mention but a few. There are 53 species of cuckoo in the world and only half of those are brood parasites. Other bird species are also brood parasites, such as honeyguides, some finches and widowfinches.

Much mystery has surrounded the cuckoo, especially the fact that females lay their eggs in other species' nests. It was only in 1940 that Edgar Chance published *The Truth about the Cuckoo* – a summary of his work on cuckoos which he began in 1918. Chance was an egg collector and his collection is now housed in the British Museum. His work revealed that, although he was not an ornithologist, he was very thorough in his research and he witnessed the laying of eggs of all his study cuckoos. In one of his studies he discovered that the Common Grey Cuckoo (Common Cuckoo) selected the nest of the Meadow Pipit where she laid her egg and then ate the pipit eggs. Most laying took only 11 seconds. Interestingly, cuckoo eggs are one of the smallest in size of all birds in relation to the size of the female. We were enlightened by Dr Cottrell about his study of international research on cuckoos. They are birds that parasitize nests of other bird species (often of several species) and the focus of the evening was to explain the theory that certain cuckoo species are of a host specific clan (gens). As an example, Diderick Cuckoo parasitize more than one host species but the question is: does a female Diderick Cuckoo, raised by a particular species, carry the gene that enables her to lay the right sort of egg which looks the same as or similar to that of her particular host species? Through DNA testing in Japan it has been proved that cuckoo gentes are female lines of descent and that it does not matter if they are mated

by males from other gentes. This therefore enables a cuckoo female to produce the right type of egg which will be accepted by the host species that is the same species that raised her.

Over time, host species have evolved to discriminate against "foreign" eggs in their nests and cuckoos have likewise adapted to lay matching or near matching eggs in the host's nest. Not all hosts however discriminate against eggs in the nest. In Iceland, where there are no cuckoos, experiments have been carried out with some of the species that are parasitised in other parts of Europe. When different eggs have been put into their nests they have not discriminated against them.

There is still so much work to be done on the study of the fascinating life of cuckoos. Thank you very much, Kit, for your excellent presentation. **Di Rushforth**

HARARE BOTANIC GARDENS — Saturday 20 July 2002

A reasonably-sized group gathered for the afternoon outing and the weather was very pleasant – we hadn't yet suffered any side-effects from SA's snow! On the pond were the usual Common Moorhen, Black Crake and Red-knobbed Coot with 3 Thick-billed Weaver in the bulrushes. Wandering off towards the acacias we came across a Whyte's Barbet or two and, when we did get to the acacias, only a single Purple-banded Sunbird was glimpsed. Plenty of other species in various plumage stages were zipping through the flowers, and many weavers (including a few Village Weavers) were about. Towards the hill, near Saint George's, we started seeing Yellow-throated Petronias (Sparrows) and these were common throughout in fairly high numbers. Also in this area, were half a dozen Violet-backed Starlings in a fig tree – clearly over-wintering. We were hoping the Lesser Honeyguide would be around here but we didn't find it this time. Continuing around towards the forest we came across Green Wood-hoopoes and Common Scimitarbill, with an African Hoopoe being chased by Yellow-throated Petronias and, in the distance, did we heard a Klaas's Cuckoo? I told Richard that it was probably someone imitating but in fact it no doubt was one – on Sunday morning a male was in the Zambezi section. On the edge of the forest section was a large group of 20 non-breeding Pin-tailed Whydahs and on the herbarium side we counted about 12 Southern Grey-headed Sparrow feeding on the lawn with 2 Green Wood-hoopoes. This, in addition to all the other Grey-headed, counted to 20 plus and Petronias to 40 plus. Unfortunately no Tambourine Dove was heard although I've heard they are back again! Total – 54 species, counting the cuckoo confirmed the following day. **Ian Riddell**

HAKA Game Park – Sunday 28 July 2002

11 of us turned up for this very full birding outing on a fine and hot, for late July, day. Temperatures in the second half of July were more typical of September and birds around HARARE seem to be breeding about a month earlier than usual. Haka Park bore this out and we saw a Wahlberg's Eagle, a sighting which was about 3 weeks earlier than I would expect.

Grant Nealon kindly agreed to lead us and he is gaining a reputation as one of Harare's most capable birders. His birding group has made frequent visits to Haka in the last 2 years and has recorded 262 species as well as breeding records of Dark Chanting-goshawk, Black-chested Snake-eagle and African Cuckoo Hawk. Cleveland Dam also appears to have become an African Pygmy-goose stronghold with up to 21 birds being recorded in an outing.

In order to cover the whole park effectively and avoid wasting time walking between bird parties we employed a drive and short walk system. This proved to be very effective as we recorded 106 species in 6 hours, which is about as good as July birding around Harare gets! We started off with 3 stops in the main block of Miombo woodland where the highlights included African Green-pigeon, Klaas's Cuckoo, Whyte's Barbet, Lesser Honeyguide and Brown-backed Honeybird, Bennett's Woodpecker, 8 Grey Penduline-tit, 7 Spotted Creeper, Southern Hyliota, Red-headed Weaver and Golden-breasted Bunting. Not all of the Penduline-tit and Spotted Creeper were seen here but these are good numbers. We then moved into the mixed vlei grassland, granite boulder outcrops and mainly Parinari (Mahachi) woodland environment where the highlights included 50 Helmeted Guineafowl, 5 species of dove, Spotted Eagle-owl, Fiery-necked Nightjar, Wahlberg's Eagle, Dark Chanting-goshawk, White-backed Vulture, 12 Swallow-tailed Bee-eater, 5 species of swallow, including Red-breasted Swallow and Eastern Saw-wing, 3 Pale Flycatcher, 6 species of sunbird, including Copper Sunbird and five species of canary, including the rare Black-eared Seedeater. An adult and a juvenile Dark Chanting-goshawk were recorded and the adult was seen with a Skaapsteeker Snake in its beak. The White-backed Vulture was very close to Harare and both the Wahlberg's Eagle and the Red-breasted Swallow were early arrivals. We ended up by the dam in the middle of the day where the highlights included White-backed Duck, Red-billed Teal, 8 African Pygmy-goose, African Snipe and 6 Yellow-throated Longclaw. **Richard Dennison**

MATABELELAND

From the Chairman

After a cold June, the last week of July seemed unusually hot with temperatures rising to the mid twenties, creating a false feeling of spring. Birds responded with plenty of contributions to the dawn chorus – robins, bulbuls, doves and barbets were all particularly vocal within our BULAWAYO Hillside garden. The late spell of heavy rain in April delayed flowering of the Erythrina in our garden and presumably this was the case elsewhere. As a result, sunbirds appeared to concentrate on the few trees in bloom. A Kenya Coffee Shade tree at CBC was alive with activity for most of July, with a flock of Wattled Starling ‘chattering’ loudly whilst they foraged for nectar and pollen. Red-billed Hornbills were still in residence, with at least eight birds present on a Sunday afternoon at the beginning of the month. They were particularly confiding and we were able to watch them feeding at ground level on what appeared to be termites. An unusual shower of rain bathed a Natal Mahogany in moisture providing African Grey Hornbill with a chance to wash. After much flapping of wings and beating of leaves, they then emerged to perch within a bare Kirkia to spread their wings and dry off. Other species which appear to have moved into town, presumably due to the drought, were parties of White-crested Helmet-shrike and the occasional group of Retz’s Helmet-shrike. A few local migrants have returned and reasonable numbers of both Red-breasted Swallows and Lesser Striped Swallow were present at AISLEBY on 14 July. These formed part of a mixed flock of aerial feeders that was dominated by African Palm-swift, but also included the larger and far more impressive Mottled Swift – probably ranging from the MATOPOS.

Finally, Verreaux’s Eagle Survey work continues within the Hills and a number of chicks have been reported – we await the results with interest. Please do continue to support us. Good birding. **Martin Smith**

Condolences

It was with deep sadness in May that we learned of the death of Peter Tucker, our Branch Treasurer. He was a loyal and faithful supporter of Branch activities and his quiet presence and sense of humour will be greatly missed. Our warmest sympathy to Jean and family.

Saturday 29 June – AISLEBY

It was a beautifully warm winter’s afternoon with a clear blue sky and little wind, making conditions ideal for birdwatching. We made our way slowly through the pastures, pausing at the Bird Dam which produced its normal range of waders and a number of warblers calling loudly, but nothing unusual was seen. Following this, we moved on to the latest “new” birding spot – a shallow dam, fringed by Acacia and accessed from the track in front of the staff houses near the lands. Approaching from the west, we had the sun behind us and had excellent views of a magnificent Crimson-breasted Shrike. This was followed by some attractive orange feet that were attached to a flying Cape Shoveler. Walking through the Acacia produced a number of bird parties with Chestnut-vented Tit-babbler, Long-billed Crombec, Black-backed Puffback and Southern Black Tit all being recorded. A search of the more open bush failed to produce Bronze-winged Courser (Clive and Julia’s “special” from the previous month), so we moved on to the UMGUSA Dam. We had a rather limited view from the head of the inlet, but did manage to see group of Maccoa Duck and a single Cape Teal. Overhead, two terns floated lazily past, both being identified as White-winged Terns, with one showing its attractive breeding plumage – a species not often recorded during the winter months. Our return to the vehicles took us across open pasture and forced a group of nine Marabou Storks to stride out of the way. Part of the attraction of the field seemed to be a vulture-friendly approach to cattle management, with the remains of a carcass still left where the beast had died.

Finally, we paused for tea in the lands next to the emerging wheat crop. This was being watered and an appreciable number of Kittlitz’s Plover were busy foraging amongst the spray. Further away a flock of Helmeted Guineafowl were being stared at in a rather hopeful manner by a lone Black-backed Jackal, whilst overhead a lone hawk put plenty of the ground feeders to flight, bringing the outing to a close.

Martin Smith

Sunday 14 July – AISLEBY Waterfowl Count

This was our tenth year and twentieth count at the property using the Wetlands format of data collection. Seven stalwarts attended and we were able to launch the canoe from the bridge at the top of the UMGUSA dam and then drift downwind, counting on the way. As in the past, the reedbed at the head of the dam and its surrounding shallow water proved to be one of the most productive areas. Forty Pied Avocets were busy feeding in the shallows, a lone African Black Duck was an unusual record and single Yellow-billed Stork proved to be an easy tick. Counting from a convenient grassy knoll was the best way to estimate the large numbers of Little Grebes present although, with plenty of up and down movement, our total could

only be approximate. Further down the dam, a group of eight Cape Teal were a pleasing addition to the list and a single Greater Flamingo flew off at our approach. The breeze freshened and produced bobbing ducks, which were harder to record; a small nondescript group of Maccoa Ducks had us puzzled before an obliging dowdy male finally put his tail up. Lastly, as we made our way across the open water, a pair of African Fish-eagles circled overhead, calling noisily. Accompanying this were plenty of surface splashes either from Little Grebe or fish, diving for safety? By this stage, the water was choppy and it was hard to distinguish the source of the spray – from the number and lack of visible body I felt fish were the most likely cause.

Back on land, we all met up at the Ibis Dam to total records and compare notes. Hadedda Ibis had been listed and, with four birds having been seen, confusion reigned as to whether we had a single pair that had moved, or two pairs. As always what was present and what was absent was of interest – on the plus side we had the highest total of Cape Teal to date with 17 being recorded, Marabou Stork numbers were up to 14 and Blacksmith Lapwings totalled a healthy 518. Against this, a number of species were conspicuous by their absence, with not a single Fulvous Duck or White-faced Duck being seen and only 145 Cattle Egret present. Overall the count yielded 2 833 birds of 49 species, comparable to the previous year's dry season count. As well as waterbirds, we also compiled a checklist of all the species seen or heard during the morning producing a total of over 125 – excellent for a mid winter count with no migrants and this all just over 20 km from the City centre! **Martin Smith**

EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB

Umvumvumvu River — Chimanimani Road — Sunday 30 June 2002

This Sunday had a fairly small turnout of 6, which included a newcomer, Matthew McNally from Bonda Mission Hospital. We were scheduled to go to Hot Springs, but opted instead to do a whistle stop tour heading for the Umvumvumvu River on the Chimanimani road instead. We stopped at regular intervals en route to see if the changes in the vegetation types influenced the birdlife much. Nothing too dramatic was noted, but it certainly was interesting to see how different vegetation species dominated over short distances. I suppose we hedged our bets a bit by selecting obviously different stops.

Our first foray was to a small, well-vegetated dam, surrounded by open woodland with loads of veld aloes. Tree species we recorded mostly were: *Terminalia sericea*, *Euphorbia ingens* and *Combretum molle*. This was near MUTARE (FERN VALLEY), about 50m from the main road. On the dam were White-faced Duck, Black Crake, African Jacana and, away from the dam, we recorded Black-headed Oriole, Speckled Mousebird, White-browed Scrub-robin, Common Waxbill and Hamerkop.

We pushed on to the holding dams at Zimunya next, where we usually have fair success, but the big dam was covered in a deep green algal growth and a dead duck floating did not auger well for bird life. We did pick up a pair of Ovambo Sparrowhawk here, initially perched in a line of Eucalypts. The second dam added 2 African Wattled Lapwings. We soon moved on, this time stopping at the Mpudzi River, which is a broad open stream, well inhabited, but it added only 2 African Pied Wagtail to the list. We headed for our next stop – a beautiful kopjie – which had completely different vegetation: *Xeroderris stuhlmannii*, *Grewia bicolor* and *G. monticola*, *Commiphora marlothii*, *Ziziphus mucronata* and *Acacia nigrescens*.

There was a dearth of bird life, but we probably needed more time and we listed only White-crested Helmet-shrike.

Our next stop was the Umvumvumvu River. Here we had a *Ficus sycomorus* in fruit and we saw Greater Blue-eared Starling, Wattled Starling and Meves's Starlings, Acacia Pied Barbet, Red-faced Mousebird, and Matthew and Peter saw Broad-billed Roller.

Turning into the Chimanimani road, we saw African Grey Hornbill. Our turning and coffee point was again the Umvumvumvu River, and we stopped at a tranquil bend where the old road peels off and we picnicked near a big old *Diospyros mespiliformis*, which gave us great views of a Orange-breasted Bush-shrike, Southern Black Tit, Crowned Hornbill and some saw Giant Kingfishers. One bank of the river is a steep rock face, which looks interesting and is well forested and we possibly needed more time to bird watch there. The party broke up at this point, but we were so close to Chimanimani town that we headed for the delightful Mwenje Lodge, email: Mawenje@mutare.mweb.co.zw which sits on a bend in the translucent jade green Haroni River, fresh from its mountain source. The hotel has an impressive bird list of Chimanimani specials which saw us making a booking to stay there as soon as possible.

Total for the day: 59 species and my thanks go to Peter who kept the record straight! **Jane Clegg**

MIDLANDS BIRD CLUBSaturday 20 July 2002— Cherrybank Farm, KADOMA

Cherrybank Farm is situated 6 kilometres along the Bulawayo Road and 4 kilometres off the main tarmac. The faithful four adults enjoyed the morning, and, as the weather warmed, so the birds appeared. Some burnt grass saw a Black-headed Heron and Fork-tailed Drongo – both species liking newly burnt grass areas. The walk to the small dam saw numerous Blue Waxbill, Red-billed Firefinches and Jameson's Firefinches, Green-winged Pytilia – all loving the thorn bush areas. Around the dam were Golden-breasted Bunting, 1 pair of Hamerkop, 1 pair of Three-banded Plover, 1 Black-winged Stilt, 1 pair of Red-throated Twinspot, 1 adult and 1 juvenile Brown-hooded Kingfisher and pairs of Marico Sunbirds and White-bellied Sunbirds were actively searching for nectar. There were numerous colonies of White-browed Sparrow-weaver with the thorn trees full of nests and we saw three varieties each of barbet and dove. Capped Wheatear and Striped Kingfisher were resident around the farmyard. A total of 44 species was recorded. **Margaret Parrock**

TAIL FEATHERSVisit to EWANRIGG BOTANIC GARDENS — 14 July 2002 QDS 1731C2

Penny and I went to Ewanrigg for the morning. Most of the time we walked around the developed area. It was a little "nippy" up until 8.00 a.m. and it was noticeable that few sunbirds were in the aloes at that time. They were mostly in the Kenya Coffee Shade tree near the warden's house. Later, between 10 and 11 a.m. the sunbirds came to the aloes – I counted 11 Scarlet-chested Sunbirds, 6 Miombo Double-collared Sunbirds, 5 White-bellied Sunbirds, 3 Variable Sunbirds and 2 Amethyst Sunbird males. I looked in every Mukwa tree but saw no Western Violet-backed Sunbird!

Other birds around were a sub-adult African Harrier-hawk, 10 Speckled Mousebird, 4 Swallow-tailed Bee-eater, 3 Whyte's Barbet (which never come to our garden in Borrowdale — but seem to be in everyone else's!), 5 Pied Crow (a nasty addition to the Ewanrigg list). A Brimstone Canary was carrying nesting material into a palm tree. There were about 10 bush squirrels in the very large Miombo trees at the top of the kopje. **D V Rockingham-Gill, 4 Fernleigh Road, Borrowdale**

White-crested Helmet-shrikes

Having recently read in the *Wildlife & Environment Zimbabwe* journal (No. 104, Vol. 200 1/2) an article by John Shaw on the changing bird life in the MUKUVISI WOODLANDS and in particular the lack of sightings of the White-crested Helmet-shrike for some years, I thought the following maybe of interest to readers.

In early April 2002 five birds were seen in White Close, Belvedere HARARE just a few hundred metres from the head office of the Meteorological Services. On 22 April 2002 five birds were seen foraging for about 20 minutes in a garden in Msasa Lane, Kambanje. On 23 May 2002 a single bird was seen in a garden in Isobel Close, some 500 metres from the Avondale Post office. Only a few hours after this sighting a further 9 or 10 birds were seen flying across the bowling greens of the City Bowling Club in the Harare Gardens. Again, on 2 June 2002, four birds were seen in White Close, Belvedere. The owners of this property state that the sighting of helmet-shrikes in their garden was the first in the 17 years that they have lived there. As these birds are normally gregarious, I can think of nothing to explain the presence of a single bird in the Avondale garden.

At Kamba Park (formerly Rocara Park) we have a "resident" flock of 14 birds which departs at the onset of the rains only to appear again in the New Year. **Mike Marriott**

Editor's note: See details of a survey on White-crested Helmet-shrikes in NOTICEBOARD.

NOTICEBOARDMembership drive

WE NEED MORE MEMBERS, especially young ones, and are appealing to each of you to try to get at least one person to join BirdLife Zimbabwe this year. The more members we have the less the individual subscription will be and the more work can be done to conserve birds and their habitats. Included with this issue is an application form. Subscription payable is only half for the rest of the year.

PLEASE TRY!

Field observations – Honeyguide

Please note that Mr Colin Baker is NOT the Field Card Organiser, as erroneously stated in the previous issue. He is however compiling the report on Field Observations for *Honeyguide*. If you have any observations you would like to submit, please send them to: Mr C Baker, P O Box BW 168, Borrowdale. The next issue of *Honeyguide* will be published in mid-2003 and Colin would like to aim at including in that edition observations for the nine-month period March to November 2002. He would therefore like to receive reports on a quarterly basis through to the end of the year. Firstly, March to May 2002 as soon as possible, and thereafter June to August and September to November as soon after those periods as possible. Field Cards should be sent to the BLZ offices.

Honeyguide 48(1): March 2002

Unfortunately it seems that some copies of the above issue of *Honeyguide* are faulty in that (a) some of the pages come out, (b) the pages remain intact but the covers fall off, (c) the journals disintegrate totally. In order to assess the damage, and to satisfactorily conclude our discussions with the printer, it would be much appreciated if all members – even those who don't normally open their *Honeyguide* – could please be kind enough to examine theirs. Then, anyone who has a faulty copy should please send it or report the details to Alice in the BLZ office in Harare, or myself in Bulawayo, thereafter your comments will be noted and a replacement *Honeyguide* will be provided.

Hopefully not too many copies are affected, but until we receive this information we have no means of telling, so your assistance would be invaluable. **Julia Dupree**

The Year of the Helmet-shrike

Everybody seems to be running into flocks of White-crested Helmet-shrikes this year. On the golf course, in my garden in Avondale, in the trees near the dam on the farms at Raffingora, at Mana Pools, at Kariba. And much bigger flocks; they can no longer be called "Seven Sisters" when you get a couple of dozen together. They certainly are much more obvious than usual in Mashonaland. I am talking of the winter months of May/June. What will it be like in August/September?

So let's try and put some records together NOW. BLZ will get them all analysed and report back to you SOON through *Babbler* — and perhaps later through *Honeyguide*. A questionnaire is included with this issue.

Garden Bird Survey

Apologies to all of you who have been expecting your forms. Work on them has taken the committee longer than anticipated but please be patient and keep your records for July and August. The survey is definitely going to happen! **Di Rushforth — co-ordinator**

Donations

A reminder that under the new tax regulations donations to registered welfare organisations (PVO's) 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:

Anonymous	-	\$25 000	Thomas Dhliwayo	\$ 300
M G Marriot	-	\$140	Sonja Messick	- \$1 500
Angus Middleton-		\$700		

Merchandise for Sale

Embroidered badges	\$ 60	Hats	\$ 258
Caps	\$ 395	Two-tone caps	\$ 910
T-shirts	\$1 200	Cricket Hats	\$1 450
2002 Peter Ginn Calendars	\$ 30		

Books for sale

Two copies of *The Birds of Zimbabwe* by Michael P Stuart Irwin are offered for sale. They are soft cover volumes, in good condition and they are priced at \$5 000 each.

Also on offer is *Where to Watch Birds in Southern Africa* by A Berruti and J C Sinclair. This is a hard cover book and is priced at \$4 000. Contact Di Rushforth.

Books for sale (continued)

Thorburn's Birds — a classic masterpiece and a collector's item.

Birds of the Ocean — a handbook for voyagers by W B Alexander. This book covers all the sea birds of the world in a small hand book. Suitable for the specialist.

Robert's Birds of Southern Africa — 1963 edition.

Birds of Zimbabwe by Michael P Stuart Irwin (soft cover)

Please contact: Jacko Williams on 882206

New members

We welcome the following new members:

Stephen Alpe, P Barn, M Benson, R & M Blackie, W Brunette, R Chikudo, L Chinanzvavana, C Chishiri, E K Cragg, B Danha, Clemence Erefasi, P J Evershed, Hazel Hatton, R Katerere, N Mapara, Marongwe Family, Angus Middleton, Edith Paya, Eva Roehl, Brian Ruzvidzo, R Ryberg & J Stagerfelt, Julia Salnicki, R Samupindi, V Tarumbiswa, Tsiga Family, Dudzai Primary School,

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