

# BABBLER

## BirdLife Zimbabwe

*THE BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL PARTNER IN ZIMBABWE*

*Member of IUCN, The World Conservation Union*

ISSUE #51 – NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2002

### COMMITTEES

<u>Mashonaland Branch</u>	☎	<u>Matabeleland Branch</u>	☎
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### ACTIVITIES

#### MASHONALAND BRANCH

##### Regular outings

Mukuvisi Woodlands: Sundays, 3 November and 1 December 2002. Meet at the Paget Road entrance at 6.30 a.m. There will be a vehicle guard available.

Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary: Sundays, 10 November and 8 December 2002. 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

16 November 2002: 12 Welston Road, Glen Forest. Meet at 2.00 p.m. at Wingate Golf Club where cars can be left and transport shared. Bring chairs and refreshments.

##### Sunday outing

24 November 2002: Ewanrigg Botanic Garden. Meet at 6.30 a.m. at the BLZ offices. This is a good venue for a day outing and there are braai facilities available. Bring chairs and refreshments.

**Thursday evening meeting**

21 November 2002: A bird related, fun quiz. Those who attended last year's will remember how enjoyable it was. Please come along and support the branch. Final meeting for the year.

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 will be held on the 14 and 28 November, and 12 and 26 December 2002 at 4.00 p.m. provided Ian is available. 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.

NO OUTINGS IN DECEMBER APART FROM Mukuvisi AND Lake Chivero.

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**MATABELELAND BRANCH****Socials**Sunday 3 November 2002

A verandah lunch for "special guests" — Michael and Nancy Irwin. Bring and share – anyone from Harare or any other corners north-east-west who wish to attend are of course very welcome provided they bring a plate and their own drinks. 12 noon at 49 Heyman Road, Suburbs. Tel: Julia 232401.

Friday 20 December 2002

Christmas Warm-up. Tea, stroll and sundowner. 4.00 p.m. at 3 Bouchier Wray Avenue, Hillside. Tel: Barbara Cromar 281983,

**Monthly Outings**

Sunday 17 November 2002 — Malalangwe Conservancy, Marula – All day, take morning tea, lunch and tea. To be confirmed nearer the time. Essential to telephone Julia on 232401.

Tuesday, 3 and Wednesday, 4 December 2002 — Eclipse Experience — Joint-venture with Matopo Sailing Club. Camp overnight at MSC. Viewing area to be confirmed. Tel: Margie 247009 (home) or cell 011 218314.

**Aisleby**

Sunday 24 November 2002 — monthly monitoring session

Christmas period ramble during the festive holiday

Both will be early morning outings to the property. For further details, ring Martin on 282474.

**Hillside Dams**

29 November 2002 — monthly ramble

No ramble in December but they will start again on 31 January 2003.

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 ☎ 020-658 19 Jane Clegg ☎ 020-65610

Sunday 24 November 2002

Juliasdale-Nyanga 6.00 a.m.

K Dixon 65819

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](mailto:mitch@africaonline.co.zw)

Secretary: Merle Mitchell P O Box 398, Karoi ☎ 064-6436

**ACTIVITIES**

Rydings School Interpretative Centre. Walks 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.

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**REPORTS****NATIONAL**

Unfortunately our Director – Anthony Cizek – decided to leave us in early October. In the short time that Anthony was in his position he had begun, with great enthusiasm and energy, to get us on track with a conservation strategy and he was developing, with Council, a structure to enable the Association to achieve the plan agreed at the Strategic Planning Workshop in September 2000. We wish you well in your future endeavours, Anthony.

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**MASHONALAND BRANCH**Ms Kate Wood — Thursday 15 August 2002

We have a habit of inviting Kate to talk to us in winter. The last time was about her trip to the Antarctic and I, for one, felt the winter chill as we saw her wonderful pictures, although she had visited in summer. This evening she spoke to 23 of us about a trip she made, on her own, to the Himalayas. There she suffered both extreme cold and extreme heat and humidity. I apologise for the lack of detail in names and places but I was so fascinated, I forgot to take notes.

Kate arrived in Katmandu and she set off by bus to the town from where she was going to walk, for 29 days, in the company of 3 Sherpas, to a base camp near Mount Everest and back. The journey took her up and down huge mountains, over turbulent rivers on fragile, narrow rope bridges, through small settlements and vast, almost uninhabited regions. The climate went from hot and humid to freezing cold. The Sherpas carried all the equipment and most of the food the 4 of them would need for the duration, though the occasional chicken and fresh fruit and vegetables were sometimes available. Kate slept in a small tent each night, sometimes on such a small ledge that the others were inches away outside the tent. In the wet and humid areas, leeches were a horrible problem. High up on the mountains, the terrain was rocky and treacherous. It was an amazing journey. Along the way, Kate took wonderful slides of fantastically beautiful scenery and of the people that she met – all friendly and interested. They proved a fascinating record of a breath-taking trip. Thank you, Kate, for taking time out to share them with us. **Jennifer Carter**

Harava Dam, Bassmasters Site — Saturday 17 August 2002

A disappointing turnout of only 5 members set out from Harare for this outing and we also had a low turnout of only 4 people at Lake Chivero the previous weekend. However, the combined Chitungwiza and Chiota Bird Clubs were well represented with 9 of their members meeting us at the Harava Dam entrance and their enthusiasm is encouraging. The dam was still full and the weather was fine, warm and windy. Although the wind may have reduced the bird count slightly the woodland birding was unusually difficult compared with the previous 4 years. A total count of 50 species was recorded and the highlights included 1 Saddle-billed Stork, 5 Glossy Ibis, 2 African Black Duck, 2 African Fish-eagle and 1 Black-winged Stilt seen on the opposite bank and 2 Long-crested Eagles and 3 Black-chested Snake-eagles, 1 Bennett's Woodpecker, 1 Eastern Saw-wing and 1 Lazy Cisticola recorded on our side of the dam. Unfortunately we did not come across any significant bird parties, but birds did seem to be more evident on the drive out, although we did not stop as it was getting late. **Richard Dennison**

KUTSAGA, TRB — Sunday 25 August 2002

This was our second visit to this venue and 9 of us attended on a warm and windy spring day. TRB is well conserved with a fairly secure outer perimeter fence to protect the enclosed flora and fauna and to protect the crops from large antelope such as kudu. The top dam was full and well lined with vegetation, the middle dam being about 2 metres down and the bottom, Butler's Dam being about half full. None of the dams were polluted by exotic weed cover and there was a good wader environment with extensive, exposed shoreline on the two lower dams. The waterberries *Syzygium cordatum* were still in flower and attracted many sunbirds. A good total of 88 species was recorded. The woodland and open fields highlights included 3 Black-chested Snake-eagles, 3 Wahlberg's Eagles, and 1 Long-crested Eagle, 2 Buffy Pipit,

12 Variable Sunbirds, 10 Amethyst Sunbirds, 8 White-bellied Sunbirds and 4 Miombo Double-collared Sunbirds, 4 Yellow-fronted Canary, 2 Black-throated Canary, 3 Brimstone Canary and 10 Streaky-headed Seedeaters. Highlights from the dams were 6 Three-banded Plover, 5 Wood Sandpiper, 1 Common Greenshank, 3 African Snipe, 4 African Pied Wagtail and 8 Pied Kingfisher. **Richard Dennison**

Dr Philippa Marett — Thursday 19 September 2002

Philippa's reputation as a photographer and raconteur ensured a full house when she came for a "show and tell" on a trip she had made to Alaska last year. Once again, my enthusiasm got the better of me and I didn't take notes. I'll learn!

Philippa started off with a friend who lived just outside Anchorage, on the edge of a hill with wonderful views over the bay far below. We Africans couldn't help wondering what it was like in winter. As you know, Alaska is a vast land but the map we saw had very few roads into the hinterland. If you go almost anywhere in Alaska, you fly and travel locally by boat! She then flew on to an island on the Alaskan Peninsula. There she saw wild bears coming for salmon which were just starting their journey to their spawning grounds. The American Bald Eagle proved very inferior to the African Fish-eagle but she was too polite to say so! She saw Puffins and a few other unidentified birds but mostly they kept their distance and could not be photographed. I didn't realise that Alaska is very mountainous with forested areas and open tundra. Philippa sought out remote places and was lucky enough to see a moose (and another moose), a wolf and Arctic foxes as well as several grizzly bears which were golden in the summer light. They actually fatten up for winter on blue-berries from the tundra as well as salmon. On a train journey from the coast towards Fairbanks, from a very long train, she saw a number of isolated huts where trappers live. The only way in is by train and the trappers stop it when they need it. Although it was summer, it didn't seem to get very warm, especially when Philippa travelled right into the Arctic Circle to a national park. Cars are not allowed into the park and visitors must use buses. The main camp was like a small town but she had a few days at each of two exclusive resorts and walked or drove with their guides, highly trained and very enthusiastic. In the area was the highest point in North America, Mount McKinley Philippa's photos of the peak towering thousands of feet above the surrounding area were most dramatic. It was so far above that she had to point it to us or we wouldn't have noticed it. The highlight of her trip was a flight over the mountain and we saw superb photos taken from the aircraft. It is a fantastic mountain.

Philippa's photos and her talk gave us a wonderful idea of Alaska, and its mixture of wild and very sophisticated. Thanks again, Philippa, we look forward to the results of your next trip! **Jennifer Carter**

RIFA Education Camp — 21 to 25 September 2002

This must be my favourite BLZ outing venue as it combines good birding, good game viewing on foot, good accommodation, good food and good company. We had all these things in abundance this time and the catering provided by Meryl Rautenbach was outstanding! The weather was hot, occasionally cloudy and often windy and the countryside was somewhat drier than in recent years, with most pans dry. Elephant, hyaena and baboon came into the main complex and impala, kudu, eland, waterbuck, warthog, genet, Side-striped and Black-backed Jackal, monkey, bush squirrel, crocodile and hippo were seen in the surrounding, non-hunting area. In addition, bushbuck was seen around Willy Reed's chalets and lion and hyaena were heard at night. 20 members were joined by Ignatius from National Parks, Ian Riddell and Bill Heinecke who provided armed security on our walks. These, which set out from the main complex, visited the bream pool, the Zambezi River and its adjacent pools and sand banks, the bee-eater nesting cliffs, the long pan and the surrounding woodlands. The group that came with Ignatius and me to Tiger point provided the other group with entertainment when we tried to take a shortcut back across a muddy side channel. Some of us managed to get across on the logs we laid down; others were forced to go back quite a long way to our outward crossing point. My wife, Carolyn, got stuck in the mud, fell over partially and got well muddied and Bill tried to cross at a rocky place and suddenly fell into a pool which went up to his chest. He managed to keep his rifle dry but unfortunately cut and bruised one of his feet.

We achieved a very pleasing 176 bird species recorded with significant contributions from Ian Riddell. From walks from the main complex the highlights included Rufous-bellied Heron, Marabou Stork, Hadedda Ibis, Spur-winged Goose, White-headed Vulture, African Hawk-eagle and Western Banded Snake-eagles, Greater Painted-snipe, Green Sandpiper, Three-banded Courser, African Skimmer, Grey-headed Parrot, Klaas's Cuckoo, Verreaux's Eagle-owl, Horus Swift, Bohm's Spinetail, European Bee-eaters, Southern Carmine Bee-eaters, Mosque Swallow, White-breasted Cuckooshrike, Bearded Scrub-robin, Ashy Flycatcher and Pale Flycatcher,

Grey-headed Bush-shrike, Retz's Helmet-shrike, Red-billed Oxpecker, Collared Sunbird, Lesser Masked-weaver and White-winged Widowbird. The Mopane woodland and Chirundu village provided Pied Crow and Arnot's Chat, the hot springs to ZAMBEZI River and sand pools added Black Heron, Saddle-billed Stork and Yellow-billed Storks, Marsh Sandpiper and Curlew Sandpiper and Desert Cisticola, Tiger Point added Giant Kingfisher and Willy Reed's chalets added White-fronted Plover, African Mourning Dove and Sombre Greenbul. Robyn Gilmour kindly provided some cattle foetus for the vultures and about 22 vultures and some Marabou Stork came down but did not seem to recognise these as food. We therefore brought them inside and put them out again the next day when they were very smelly. This time they were consumed readily. **Richard Dennison**

CROWBOROUGH Sewage Works — Saturday 21 September 2002

Rifa must have had a fantastic attendance as only Mimi Rowe and I showed up for the visit to Crowborough "Stinks". On our way into the plant area there were the usual Cattle Egrets and Great Egrets and African Sacred Ibis. There were also six Capped Wheatears, one of which was an immature without its cap and bib. In the plant area was Hamerkop, and more African Sacred Ibis. On the radial arms of one of the tanks were dozens of Wattled Starling, some in breeding dress, catching a merry-go-round ride. They would hop off into the tank and then come back out again. We could not decide what they were doing. Altogether there were about 200+ in the area. The settling ponds area has been cleared of all the undergrowth which enables one to see the waders and ducks of which there were Common Sandpipers and Wood Sandpipers and about 100 White-faced Duck. There were also Blacksmith Lapwings and Black-winged Stilt. In all 33 species were seen and this included a Cape Longclaw. **David Gray**

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**MATABELELAND**

From the Chairman

Our programme of activities has taken place as advertised in *Babbler*, although attendance has been notably thin with most outings attracting totals of less than ten. Despite the country's troubles, plenty of good birdwatching is still possible a short distance from BULAWAYO and even within the suburbs. A returning flock of European Bee-eaters made my morning at school, whilst a pair of African Fish-eagles calling in flight over Hillside added a new dimension to garden birding. The focus of the past month has been the MATOPOS and its raptor population – invariably any time spent in the Hills produces some raptor sightings. Verreaux's Eagle Survey work for the year is well under way with a total of just under 200 reports having been submitted, occupancy for most territories has been established and we are now monitoring breeding. We are also recording any other raptor species within the Hills with the data being collated by Ngoni Chiweshe of ORU, National Parks. During my week in the Hills, it was particularly exciting to find an immature African Crowned Eagle flopping about in the trees below Fish Eagle Lodge and hear the call of an adult on a couple of mornings. My week in mid August produced a steady movement of Yellow-billed Kite, presumably on migration south, heralding the start of another season. Migrants are about to return making it a particularly rewarding time of year to be gazing through binoculars, so do come and join us. **Martin Smith**

17/18th August – MATOPOS Verreaux's Eagle Weekend

A total of seven participated in the weekend, with guests Anthony Cizek and Geoff Lowe from Harare. Our aim was to continue with survey work, establishing occupancy and the breeding status for a number of pairs of Verreaux's Eagle. We began within the Bambata area – a real hot spot with respect to eagle occupancy. Four pairs are present, all of which could be seen from the top of Bambata. By the time we arrived, eagles were in flight with two pairs visible from the car park; we then walked along the track and, on emerging onto the open kopjie, encountered five birds in flight together. Plenty of confusion reigned but by following the two pairs and a single we were able to guess as to who belonged to what. The single was the male from Bambata and arriving at the nest showed that the female was still sitting and the male had now perched on a grassy ledge to the west. Carefully scanning the sky revealed yet another pair of eagles, one of whom eventually alighted on nest 44, causing a chick to stretch its wings. This was a real bonus as, despite being able to see mutes, we hadn't seen the chick, even with the aid of a telescope. A closer study of Tomahawk showed a pair of Black Stork, which emerged from the known nest site and flew along the face of the kopjie. After lunch, we moved on to Mesilumi and an absence of visitors meant that as we arrived we flushed a pair of African Pygmy-goose and, a short time later, a splash and the sound of flapping wings heralded the arrival of an African Fish-eagle which had made an abortive attempt to catch its lunch. Using the telescope, we were eventually rewarded with a view of a largely

brown eaglet on 51 and it was interesting to note that prior to it standing there was little evidence at the nest to suggest it was active and we were all beginning to think that yet another attempt had failed. This was the case at 105, where the previous visit had produced a bird on the nest. After a dusty scramble up the kopjie and careful negotiation of a patch of thorn, we were able to view the nest from a short distance and found it built up with some mutes but no chick – the pair had failed yet again.

On Sunday, Peter Mundy held a ringing demonstration for members of the Matobo Conservation Society and we went along to view a chick in the hand. Despite it being only some six weeks of age, it already weighed over 2 kg and its talons were particularly impressive, the long hind claw being a formidable weapon. With the feet secure, the eaglet was surprisingly passive and thankfully had no idea that its beak might prove to be a useful means of defence. Measurements were taken, the chick ringed and then hoisted back to the nest. A check later in the week showed that the trauma of ringing appeared to have had little effect, with the eaglet having developed more brown plumage. Following this our party split up with Geoff and Anthony departing for Harare and Julia and I moving on to check nest in the Maleme area. 34C was sitting, No. 1 had failed at the chick stage and 54 and 55 appeared to be having a year off. I spent the remainder of the week watching eagles and managed to sort out a number of question marks. A pair was definitely in occupation within the 97 territory, whilst 67/71 was ranging up to the eastern side of the Maleme Road. 33A was active with a small chick, whilst further south most of the territories appeared to be vacant as was expected. Communal land birds continue to struggle and, despite spending most of the day within the Silozwe area, I failed to find the pair, although they had been seen earlier in the year. To date we have a tally of 12 chicks with a few remaining question marks to sort out and this is up by two on last years statistics. **Martin Smith**

#### Anglesea Farm – Sunday 15th September

This is an attractive property bordering the north western boundary of the Matopos and features an interesting mix of kopjies and bush. Vegetation around the edge of the hills is varied and lush and it was here that we found plenty of interest. We began by walking downstream from the Camp, which allowed us to view a derelict Verreaux's Eagle site, matching the kopjie features against a photograph taken two decades earlier. Little was to be seen of the Verreaux's Eagles, which remained elusive with just a single bird seen in flight briefly, which we suspected was the male from 38. Along the watercourse an open area of rock allowed a trickle of water to run downhill, filling a number of pools.

**Martin Smith**

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

##### Sunday 29 September 2002 Wiermouth

Our original destination was Mountain Home in Penhalonga but as John Meikle was not available and it was also the day of the Rural District Council elections it was deemed wiser to postpone the visit. Not wishing to miss an outing, however, a small group of us made our way to Wiermouth which always offers a wide variety of species. It's not a particularly attractive venue, consisting mainly of smallholdings with degraded scrub and the Prison area but there are birds everywhere. We also tried the Feruka road but were turned back by a security guard. Our 60 species were quickly and easily found. Acacias abound and were alive with birds. A Brubru was the pick of these for me but there were also apalises, barbets, canaries and White-browed Scrub-robin. In the thick bush we saw Grey-backed Camaroptera, Tawny-flanked Prinia, tchagra and Speckled Mousebird. Flocks of Red-winged Starlings and Greater Blue-eared Starlings flew over the cultivated land and a Black-headed Heron enjoyed the irrigation. A Lilac-breasted Roller was unexpected but was possibly indicative of the drought conditions. The only raptor was a Little Sparrowhawk and summer visitors were Klaas's Cuckoo and Lesser Striped Swallow. All in all it was an interesting outing for 2 enthusiastic beginners from Chitakira who were helped by one of the regulars, Tatenda and me.

See you at Dorowa!!! **Ken Dixon**

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#### **KAROI BIRD CLUB**

##### September 2002

We are now "townies" — "Karoites" to be precise. A whole new way of life, but the birds are still around and we are delighted to find so many here — e.g. White-crested Helmet-shrike and Retz's Helmet-shrikes, not to mention Red-backed Mannikin (13 of them) feeding on Budgie seed from the feeding tray. Ko Voorn, our neighbour, reported them in his garden months ago but seeing is believing! We have also seen Long-billed Crombec, Brubru, Lizard Buzzard, Green Wood-hoopoe and Common Scimitarbill,

African Yellow White-eye and four different species of sunbird enjoy the Bottle Brush flowers [nectar], whilst an Orange-breasted Bush-shrike paid a visit, so too did a Senegal Coucal and a Hamerkop flew by. We are pleased to hear African Scops-owl, Pearl-spotted Owlet, Southern White-faced Scops-owl, Spotted Eagle-owl and Barn Owls. Three male Klaas's Cuckoos were in the Natal Mahogany and I saw a Brown-hooded Kingfisher take a dip in the birdbath! I only ever saw him use the swimming pool on the farm. Groundscraper Thrush have been stuffing their bills full of nesting material from the lawn and are now sitting on the completed product. African Green-pigeon enjoy the fruit of the *Zanha africana* in the garden. We have 8 different indigenous trees in this small area — including a Baobab (girth, one metre up, of 1.95 m) — planted years ago by previous owners and two large *Erythrina abyssinica*. One evening we were having a braai on the lawn when we spotted a little Pearl-spotted Owlet only 10m away, perched on the lower branch of a thorn tree, on the edge of the circle of light, quite unperturbed, busily scanning the lawn for his supper, or should I say breakfast! He isn't as vocal as he was at the beginning of August and hopefully is too busy incubating. We have a count of 70 for August for the town area — no doubt some have been missed — and 36 for our immediate garden area, counting the sky above! African Paradise-flycatcher arrived in the garden on schedule — 17 September — they are amazing! **Merle Mitchell**

#### RYDINGS Interpretive Centre

We have continued here with our walks every first Saturday of the month. We discovered a Hamerkop nest in the woodland, with a huge bunch of hanging orchids next to it which fascinated me. We saw a flock of 12 White-crested Helmet-shrike and five Retz's Helmet-shrike, Cardinal Woodpeckers, Golden-tailed Woodpeckers, Bearded Woodpeckers and Bennett's Woodpeckers, 80 Helmeted Guineafowl and an elusive African Barred Owlet. Waterbirds on the dam are so few — Green-backed Heron and Grey Heron, two Three-banded Plover, two Reed Cormorant, one African Jacana and a lone Little Egret! In all 85 species for the month of September. **Merle Mitchell**

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#### **TAIL FEATHERS**

##### Martial Eagle attacking Oribi

On Wednesday, 26 June, at about 10.30 a.m. in the KAROI area I noticed a full grown Oribi standing in my wheat. As this was fairly unusual, especially as people were working on the irrigation pipes a couple of hundred meters away, I stopped to have a look. It was then that I noticed an eagle sitting, apparently exhausted with its wings outstretched a couple of metres away from the Oribi. After a few minutes the eagle took off and pursued the Oribi who took off in a jinking run through the wheat. The eagle again fell into the wheat after an unsuccessful attack and the stand-off resumed. The Oribi did not seem at all alarmed and even when pursued did not panic and charge off blindly but almost seemed to be toying with the eagle in the same way that a fast flying bird plays in front of an attacking raptor, confident in its ability to evade its opponent. This happened a couple of times with the same results until the irrigation gang got too close and the Oribi took off in earnest into the bush. The eagle gave a half-hearted chase before flying to the top of a pole where I got a good chance to look at it. I identified it as a juvenile Martial Eagle — because of its size, appearance and colouration, juvenile because it did not have the distinctive brown bib that adults have and the lack of brown spots on its breast. As I mentioned earlier, the Oribi did not seem handicapped in any way and was fully grown — a handful indeed for any bird. I presume it was under attack by an inexperienced bird. I could not clearly see if the bird actually was able to make contact with its feet but I do not think so as the Oribi was jinking too wildly. **Chris Bishop, P O Box 365, Karoi**

##### Swanning around CHRISTON BANK

Following the notes in the July/August issue of *Babbler* and remembering that Christon Bank really does have some great birds, we went out there one Sunday afternoon in June. By midday it had started to get overcast and by the time we left home about 3 p.m. the clouds were closing in. But still we went. Parked on the "off ramp" at the Herbarium site. Chilly now and nothing about. Down and across the stream: no bishops, no prinias, not even a winter weaver. Down along the path that follows the stream and goes around the shoulder of the first kopjie. Should be okay for Striped Pipit, Miombo Double-collared Sunbird and even Boulder Chat. None of these but the dog did put up a Natal Spurfowl and a Lazy Cisticola said "wheat" two times. Over towards the rocks that overlook the top end of Mazowe Dam. Have often seen Racquet-tailed Rollers here; nice place too for White-breasted Cuckooshrike, Retz's Helmet-shrike and Miombo Rock-thrush. Another Lazy Rock did say "wheat" but only once and we didn't see this or another. We saw nothing else. Up and round to the big rock left: no Speckled Pigeons, no Red-winged Starlings, no Lanner. Sat for ten minutes but no bird party anywhere in the extensive

woodlands in and across the valley before us. Back and up to the top of the kopjie: lots of long grass, grass seeds, stick-ons and huffing and puffing. You can see the Mazowe Dam from the top but it was cold and grey and the breeze had picked up. No Rock Martins and no Rock Kestrel though the nest box that Duncan had put up there some years ago and which the kestrels promptly used was still in place. On the way back he dropped off to check this box out and Rose and I went over, round, up and down a series of boulders 'till we looked out over to the east. A broad tarred aircraft runway where there used to be mealie lands was the immediate feature to strike one. The homestead is nevertheless attractively tucked away amongst the rocks and trees on top of another kopjie and at its foot there is a little dam with dead trees still standing in it. There were a few fishermen up to their waists in the water. Small hope they had. No wonder three of them had black raincoats and the other had a white plastic bag over him or that's what it looked like across the valley as they moved about among the standing trees. Rose's little pocket binos were not much good but nobody seemed to be catching anything. Too cold and too far away to sit and watch them now. Ah! A winter White-browed Robin-chat called in the valley below as we began the return journey: "toot, tutuWHEE; toot, tutuWHEE; toot, tutuWHEE" times five. Things were looking up. Back across the shoulder between the kopjies. No birds, no bird party to be heard, but look: someone has nicked all those lovely Excelsa aloes. A few dead ones about but the only living specimen was a four-leafed 12cm little fellow, hiding between two rocks. Maybe the rest had migrated to the airport. Maybe they had been flogged off in town. Not waiting around here however. Best get back to the car, the thermos and the coffee. Quick. Duncan had already got there and was making notes at the foot of his field card. Let's tot up I says. Our score is 3: the spurfowl, the cisticola and the robin-chat. One seen and three heard.

"That's about all I got", says Duncan, "plus a Dark-capped Bulbul". "But what were you writing at the end of your card?"

"Those things swimming about on Bredenkamp's dam?"

"What do you mean?" says Rose, "they were just fishermen". "No, no they weren't" replies Duncan.

"That's what I'm adding to my field card, yes, three black and one white".

"Swans, not fishermen!" **Alex Masterson**

#### Visit to HWANGE National Park – 21-28 September 2002

We chose to stay at Sinamatella this time. Situated high above the surrounding countryside, moments spent at the end of a hot day, cool refreshment of choice in hand, comfortably seated out front around the braai area, soaking up the quietness and vast space set before us, with cool breeze rustling the Mopane leaves of the trees sheltering the cottages, will long be remembered. We spent much of our time on our drives watching out for birds and ended up with 115 species for our four days there. Helmeted Guineafowl were everywhere and we had a chance to stop and examine carefully the incredible feather patterns of the Crested Francolin. It was good to see African Red-eyed Bulbul again, and we saw them at Mandavu, Deteema, Robins Camp and Masuma Dam. A Red-crested Korhaan and Arnot's Chat were in Mopane woodland. Two Gabar Goshawk were having a difference at Big Toms and a Secretarybird was in the grassland behind Salt Pan, off the Robins Camp Road, had a number of water birds, and we found a Goliath Heron at Crocodile Pools. The lovely Violet-eared Waxbill was at Mandavu and Black-chested Prinia which was identified by a vestigial black breast band. We stopped for elephant on the road, chewing away at dry twigs which were festooned with white thorns — how do they do it? — and were rewarded by the brief appearance of a Yellow-bellied Eremomela. Not only that, in the end, we had to detour as the elephants would not move and went around them via the salt spring road. At the springs we saw four magnificent cheetah! Double-banded Sandgrouse were on the roadside and it was good to see again Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill, Southern Pied Babbler, Southern White-crowned Shrikes and Crimson-breasted Shrikes and so many Golden-breasted Bunting as well as flocks of Black-throated Canary. White-headed Vultures and White-backed Vultures, the latter with chicks, Bateleur, Tawny Eagle, Wahlberg's Eagle, Long-crested Eagle, African Fish-eagle and Brown Snake-eagles were the "Birds of Majesty" we saw. So many birds were seen in camp — Brubru, Willow Warbler, Klaas's Cuckoo, Steppe Buzzard, Swallow-tailed Bee-eater, Common Scimitarbill, Meyer's Parrot, Bearded Scrub-robin, Grey-backed Camaroptera among others. There was a family of appealing Dwarf Mongoose passing by us as we sat on the restaurant terrace and a scrap developed over the discarded half of a hamburger roll between those fat lizards they have there. Red-billed Hornbill, Meves's Starling and Dark-capped Bulbul — they all managed a morsel. We found hyrax there and at Mandavu they were so amusing in their various poses of relaxed abandonment, in the



most ingenious spots, on trees, walls and rocks. Then on the road home from Bulawayo, near Shangani, we had a roadside tea break and there on the top of the tree was an Ashy Tit, bill pointed skyward, calling to whoever might be interested. A first for us and a nice ending to our trip! **Merle Mitchell**

Twitchers — Beware of Harry

An incredible but true ornithological account by Leon Varley — submitted by David Gray.

There are birders and then there are birders. The dedicated twitcher, who will name 99 out of any 100 birds seen, heard or suspected. The enthusiast who will name most of the most obvious birds but when confronted by warblers, cisticolas and the like there will be much leafing of field guides, humming and hawing and usually ending with “This one, this one or that one.” Then there’s the casual observer who will exclaim at a roller or a bee-eater but that’s about it. Then there’s Harry from Yorkshire!! Harry loves Africa and he and his family, Edna from London and their teenage sons, come to Africa at least once every three years. The difference this time was they had booked on a walking safari. This was quite strange in Harry’s case as, in four days of his walking safari he never walked a single step that wasn’t necessary for basic survival. The pattern set itself on the first afternoon in Kazuma Depression National Park after a morning drive from Victoria Falls. Edna and the boys leapt from the vehicle with enthusiasm for the first walk. Harry settled himself more comfortably into the front seat, opted out of any exertion and requested the cool box be placed closer to hand. We were away for two or three hours and I started to fret about Harry. Edna assured me that he would be fine and so it proved to be when we returned to the vehicle at sunset. The next part of the pattern then emerged. Edna and the boys would position themselves around Harry and, in the minutest detail, describe the walk. Harry would sit, completely absorbed in the tale, thoughtfully swigging his beer, asking the odd question and sometimes turning to me to confirm points of interest. I found it a little strange but thought it was a one-off thing. Perhaps Harry was a little tired from the drive. But that was not the case. Next morning, off we set in the vehicle with Harry firmly ensconced in the passenger seat. When I parked everyone, except Harry, alighted. I looked at him enquiringly but he just smiled lazily informing me that he would sit this one out and again requested the cool box to hand. By the time we returned to the vehicle we had covered 12-odd kilometres and there was Harry – almost a caricature of the Englishman on holiday. Again the family settled themselves around him and narrated the smallest incident. I found it a little exasperating at first and on the way back to camp asked Harry why he didn’t just walk with us as he was obviously so interested in it all.

“Well lad” he said “I’m on ‘oliday, I need to get me away from work and the walking is too much like work”. “But I have to tell me lads in the pub what I did in Africa don’t I? I can’t tell’m I just spent that money sitting in the motor”.

Kazuma during the rains can get a little sparse in game but the bird life is fantastic. It was here that Harry the birder came to the fore. We had been pointing out the birds on the drives to and from the camp, naming them and discussing habits and peculiarities. Harry leaned toward me and caught me with his gaze. “Lad” he said — his Yorkshire accent very broad. “All them birds is confusing me. There is only three kinds of birds. There’s boodgies, there’s pidjuns and there’s dooks.” Budgies, pigeons and ducks. I could see the great ornithologists of the past: Peter Scott, Richard Meinerzhagen, Fitzpatrick, Austin Roberts shot down in the blue skies of Kazuma. “Right” I thought, “you’re on”. Great debate raged. “It’s a budgie”, I said. “Nay lad, it’s a pidjun there’s no colour”. “A pigeon” I would declare. “Nay lad, it’s walking in the water. It must be a dook cos pidjuns don’t like water”.

It gradually sorted itself out. If it was at all colourful it was a budgie. If it was drab coloured or a certain size it was a pigeon. If it was larger or near water it was a duck. But Harry’s mind was too free ranging to be captivated by even these broad standards.

“Grey Lourie, go-away bird” I said as the bird gave its characteristic call, before realising I was in the presence of Harry. “Pigeon”, I corrected. “Boodgie”, Harry was adamant. “Why Budgie?” I asked. “Well I knows me pidjuns and I knows me boodgies and I never ‘eard no bloody pidjun talk”. Irrefutable logic. Peter Steyn, Ken Newman, Prof Mundy crashed and burning on the plains of Kazuma. But Harry was a true free spirit and his logic would take off in bizarre directions. Oom.oom.oom I heard early one morning. I dragged Harry from his tent and we walked off through the mopani towards the sound. There he was – a Southern Ground-hornbill in all his majesty, bright red throat swelling and drumming as he heralded the dawn. “Duck” I said without hesitation.

Harry stroked his chin meditatively as he looked at the hornbill in obvious admiration. “No, it’s a boodgie”. “A duck” I said emphatically. “Boodgie”. Harry dug his heels in.

“Harry” I said, “when the hell did you ever see a budgie that size?” “I know, lad, I know” — he patted my shoulder reassuringly. “But I’ve always liked my boodgies and I never really liked dooks. But I like that ‘tin so he must be a boodgie. I could see the great Linnaeus, father of classification, tearing his hair out with both hands as he spun in his grave. Harry had a wonderful power of observation and would often see something before the tracker and I. He also had a phenomenal memory. “That second walk we did, lad” already slipping into the first person in preparation for the lads in the pub, “we walked down the river for a while. Then we saw the elephant so we crossed the river, right? Then we climbed the bank and we saw a waterbuck”. I had trouble remembering the small details and I had the advantage of having actually been there. On the last day as we drove I was dawdling a bit as they were great company and I was sorry to see them go. Just before Pandamatenga Border post I caught sight of movement off to the right. A magnificent cock ostrich stalked out of the long grass, across the graded no-man’s land and onto the road. He nearly paused to give us a disdainful glance as he crossed the road in front of us then strode off into the bush on our side. I was pretty sure what to label it. Even Harry wouldn’t dare label an ostrich as a budgie but after the hornbill incident I was cautious. “Well, Harry?” I asked. Harry stroked his chin thoughtfully, screwing up his eyes to follow the retreating bird. “Well” he said, “Well” he said again. “Well” he said for the third time before making up his mind. “It’s a dook” he observed with all the gravity and weight a great scientific observation deserves. We watched the ostrich disappear into the bush. Harry leant forward, looking at me steadily until he was sure he had my undivided attention. “Grant ya, lad, it’s a great, big bloody dook, but it’s still a dook”. Harry from Yorkshire — the greatest birder I ever knew!

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## **NOTICEBOARD**

### 2003 Subscriptions

You’ve guessed it – they have to go up! Members’ subscriptions annually should cover the cost of the publication of 2 issues of *Honeyguide* and 6 of *Babbler*. Also to be funded is the work being done by Ian Riddell on the database of bird records (he is starting with the Special Species cards), supporting the funding of the Education Project, contributing to the Verreaux’s Eagle survey, etc. The costs of running the office, including staff salaries, are paid by the RSPB. Therefore the rates for 2003 will be:

Individuals and Schools - \$1 500	Pensioners - \$500	Juniors - \$300
Institutions - \$2 500	External - unchanged	

The pensioners’ concessionary rate is for those members aged 65 years and over, but we would appeal to those of you who qualify to please consider paying the full rate if you can afford it. We do have a Sponsored Membership Fund and anyone who is not in a position to pay the full subscription can apply in writing to the office. Invoices will be posted in December.

### Membership of African Bird Club

Membership of this UK based organisation enables you to help conserve birds on the African continent. Two issues of an excellent pictorial publication, *ABC Bulletin*, are sent by airmail direct from the UK.

The subscription rate for 2003 is ZW\$3 750 (students ZW\$1 125) and the funds are paid to BLZ who can nominate a project annually to benefit from the proceeds. Advance payments for three years can be made at a fixed rate or you can pay in Sterling. For further information contact Alice at the office.

### The Year of the Helmet -shrike

Alex Masterson is very grateful for the many responses to the helmet-shrike survey. He has been promised more information and a full report will appear in the next issue.

### Garden Bird Survey

Forms have been sent out to those members wishing to participate. Reports will be published from time to time in future issues.

### Donations

We have received a donation of \$1 000 from Miss D V Rowell for conservation work at Marlborough Vlei. Thank you very much.

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 to Clayton Zazu for his donation of \$200 towards the building fund.

We are very grateful to David Gray for his donation of two window frames and a door used in building extensions. Also to be thanked is Glass Fast (Basil Rushforth) for the donation of glazing to two window frames.

Sponsored Membership Fund

Very grateful thanks to the following for donations for the fund:

Anonymous - \$340 Mr W Bailey - \$10000

Merchandise for Sale

Embroidered badges	\$ 60	Plain caps	\$ 395
Two-tone caps	\$ 910	T-shirts	\$1 200
Cricket Hats	\$1 450		

Books for sale

*Atlas of Southern African Birds* (Volumes 1 and 2); *A Guide to Birds of Southern Rhodesia* (C D Priest); *A Field Guide to the Birds of East and Central Africa* (J G Williams); *Attracting Birds to your Garden in Southern Africa* (Roy Trendier & Lex Hes); *Newman's Birds of Southern Africa* (Updated); *Newman's Birds by Colour* (Southern Africa's common birds); *Watching Birds in Southern Africa – LB J's* (Newman, Solomon, Johnson and Masterson); *Watching Birds in Southern Africa – Confusing Birds* (Newman and Solomon); *Roberts' Birds of Southern Africa* (Fifth Edition); *Roberts' Birds of Southern Africa* (Sixth Edition); *Gardening with Birds in Zimbabwe* (Derek Solomon); *Guide to the Waterfowl of Rhodesia* (Smithers and MacKenzie); *Birdwatch Zimbabwe* (Solomon and Williams); *Kariba Birds* (Solomon and Solomon); *Southern African Birds—a Photographic Guide* (Sinclair); *Peterson First Guides Birds — common birds of North America*; *Birds of Mauritius — New Edition* (Claude Michel); *The Birds of Zimbabwe* (Michael P Stuart Irwin); *Newman's Field List for Bird-watchers*; *Bundukit Series 1* (Birds of a Feather). All in good condition.

Offers to be made to Mr Steel, Telephone 304996 (Harare)

Books for Sale (continued)

*Birds of the Southern Third of Africa* – Mackworth-Praed and Grant (2 Volumes) Good condition - \$5000 each, *The Birds of Zimbabwe* – by Michael P Stuart Irwin. Hard-backed in very good condition - \$10 000

These books are being sold in aid of the Education Fund. Those interested can contact the office.

New members

We welcome the following new members:

David Beekes, Mrs. V Black, Mr & Mrs A Brooks, W J Dewis, Daphne Dyer, A Field, Mr & Mrs R Greenwood, Roy and Sue Osborne, B Seller, Peter & Denise Taylor, Alan & Moira Wishart

National Sponsored Birdwatch

This year's National Birdwatch will be over the 48 hour period of 30 November to 1 December 2002. Let's have fun!!! There is a beautiful trophy to be awarded to the winning team!

1. Pick any 24 hour period over this weekend.
2. Get together with your friends, 3 or more to make a team. Two must be members of BLZ.
3. Try and raise sponsorship on the number of birds recorded by your team.
4. Let's try and cover the country, from Chirundu to Beitbridge, Victoria Falls to Chipinge and Tuli Block to Nyamapanda.

Editor

This will be my last issue as editor. After five years I think you need a change and I am pleased to tell you that Jennifer Carter will be taking over from January. Thank you to all of you for your support and for submitting so many interesting pieces for publication. Keep it up! **Di Rushforth**