

# BABBLER

## BirdLife Zimbabwe

*THE BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL PARTNER IN ZIMBABWE*

*Member of IUCN, The World Conservation Union*

ISSUE #53 – MARCH/APRIL 2003

### COMMITTEES

<u>Mashonaland Branch</u>	☎	<u>Matabeleland Branch</u>	☎
Chair:	Jennifer Carter 300082	Clive Townsley	244617
Members:	Richard Dennison 747567	Julia Dupree	232401
	Ian Riddell 339716	Penny Feather	244034
	Ken Wilson 745231	Eddie Cross	240093
	Humphrey Rees	Margie Pearce	247009
	Chris Rees	Jean Tucker	241079

### STAFF

Director:	John Paxton	CDO:	Chip Chirara
Education Manager:	Clayton Zazu		

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### ACTIVITIES

#### NATIONAL

**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING – PLEASE NOTE A CHANGE OF VENUE FOR THE MEETING. THE FUEL SITUATION IS OBVIOUSLY AFFECTING BOOKINGS AS ONLY 4 HAD BEEN RECEIVED BY MIDDLE OF FEBRUARY. WITH NO IMPROVEMENT IN FUEL AVAILABILITY IN SIGHT, IT HAS BEEN DECIDED TO MOVE THE AGM TO BIRDLIFE OFFICES IN HARARE. THE DATE HAS ALSO BEEN CHANGED AND WILL NOW BE SATURDAY 26 APRIL 2003.**

The agenda for the National AGM is included. Please keep it and take it with you to the meeting. Please also note that you are required to bring a chair, cup, saucer and plate. Those who had made bookings for Maleme, please contact the office.

**HONORARY TREASURER.** Birdlife Zimbabwe requires a volunteer to stand as Honorary Treasurer. The job entails no paper work but we need someone with good accounting and investment knowledge who would be prepared to attend and actively participate in monthly Executive meetings and quarterly Council meetings. Contact John Paxton at Birdlife offices.

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## MASHONALAND BRANCH

### Regular outings

Mukuvisi Woodlands: Sundays, 2 March and 6 April 2003. Meet at the Paget Road entrance at 6.30 a.m. Bring cash for the vehicle guard – remember how much a cool-drink costs these days.

Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary: Sundays, 9 March and 13 April 2003. 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 outing

Because of the current fuel situation, there will be no Saturday afternoon outings in March or April. The committee will keep the situation under review.

### Sunday outings

23 March 2003: Arcturus: Meet at 6:30 a.m. at BLZ Offices, 2 Clyde Road, Eastlea, where cars can be left in secure parking. Bring chairs and refreshments.

27 April 2003: Fig & Olive Estate, Ruwa: Meet at 6:30 a.m. at BLZ Offices, 2 Clyde Road, Eastlea, where cars can be left in secure parking. Bring refreshments, chairs will be provided.

### Thursday evening meetings

NOTE: March Thursday EVENING MEETING will be on TUESDAY 18 MARCH when we will be privileged to have Peter Ginn give a slide show on his recent visit to the Upper Zambezi and Chobe.

17 April 2003: Dr. Chip Chirara, Birdlife Conservation and Development Officer will talk on Veld Management in relation to bird habitat. Chip's thesis for his doctorate was on Veld Management, an important subject in Zimbabwe.

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

2nd and 4th Thursdays (13th and 27th March and 10th and 24th April). Meet at 4.00 p.m. provided Ian Riddell is available. For confirmation contact Ian on 339716, or [gemsaf@mango.zw](mailto:gemsaf@mango.zw) Bring cash to pay for security. Directions: drive to the end of Princess Margaret Rd. turn left, continue to the new houses – parking is in a cul-de-sac with a small fenced off area at the end.

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## MATABELELAND BRANCH

### Evening Meetings

Friday 7th March – Verreaux's Eagle Briefing – This year's survey briefing will be held at 49 Heyman Rd. Suburbs and will be preceded by a bring and share supper. Contact Julia for details and to confirm your participation, briefing at 8.00, social from 6.00 onwards.

### Monthly Outings

#### Sunday 23rd March – Lower Umgusa Dam

We haven't visited the Council Nature Reserve for some years and in the past we have always found plenty of interest along the watercourse. This will be a morning outing and all interested should contact Martin, in order to co-ordinate transport.

Sunday 30 March – Farewell Lunch for Martin Smith, after Aisleby visit: 1.00 p.m. at 49 Heyman Road, Suburbs. Bring-and-share; please bring a chair, your drinks, cutlery and crockery. Tel: 232401. 18, 19, 20 April Please note that the National AGM will no longer be at Maleme.

### Aisleby

Dates and Co-ordinators are as follows:-

Sunday 30th March – Martin Smith

Sunday 27th April – Clive Townsley

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

### Hillside Dams

Dates for our monthly rambles are as follows:-

Friday 28th March

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

**EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB**

Contacts: Jane Clegg ☎ 020-65610      Bridget Holland ☎ 020-61369

Sunday 30 March – Dorowa Mine 6.00 a.m.      B. Holland 61369

Sunday 27 April – Chinziwa Scout Camps Bvumba 6.30 a.m.      J. Clegg 65610

The Museum is the departure point and, PROVIDED PRIOR ARRANGEMENTS ARE MADE, 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 Walks are conducted the first Saturday each month at 6.30 a.m.

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**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**

Response of Carl Hawke of RSPB to the BLZ IS Report – September 2002

“The report is very comprehensive and relates directly to the agreed outputs in the contract. I wish that all progress reports could be like this!” Congratulations to all concerned.

National Sponsored Birdwatch

Well done to the teams that took part in the 2002 event. Although the number of entries were down, the number of birds recorded was very good. The six teams recorded over 160 species. A very good effort in trying times. My sincere thanks to all who participated.

Winners were 14th Timers of Bulawayo with a total of 202 species recorded. Congratulations! Team members were Harry Erwee, Dudley Hubbard and S McAdam. They win a very generous prize donated by Gary Douglas of Malilangwe Trust in the Lowveld.

2nd: total 191 species Wet Warblers (Peter Caldwell-Barr, Gene Engelbrecht and P Gorgon).

Joint 3rd: both total 185; Committee Creepers (Di Rushforth, Richard Dennison, Ian Riddell, Jenny & Graham Carter) AND Team Twizzard, (Dave Dalziel, Tony Alegria, Grant and John Nealon)

4th: total 181 Thetford Therianthropes (Mark Brightman, Thelma Pearson, June Adams and Thebe Moyo).

5th: total 172 Team Spurwing (D Macdonald, A Webb, A Smith, C Collyer, G Nyamhondere and C McMaster).

6th: total 163 Shamwari Safaris (R P Accorsi, W Accorsi, B Banda and PA McNabb).

At the time of going to print, \$55 900.00 has been raised for the education project. I still have to follow up a couple of pledges. Well done. I think this was a very fine effort on the part of those who joined in. **Terry Fallen** (Thanks for organising it, Terry. We had a great weekend! Ed.)

**GARDEN BIRD SURVEY**

In October last year GBS forms were sent to 59 people all over the country. By the end of January forms had been returned by only 20 of those people. Thank you to those who have sent in forms but it is not too late for the others to participate and if any new people would like to join in this survey please contact me. Not only will you be contributing data but you will be surprised at the changes that are inevitably going to happen. As natural habitats are being destroyed more and more species of birds will be looking for refuge in other areas. Harare and Bulawayo particularly represent that possibility. The coverage so far has been: Harare —11(1 person covers two suburbs), Bulawayo —3,

Mutare – 2, Bromley, Kariba, Karoi, Marondera and Masvingo – all 1.

It is very interesting to see how many different species of birds occur in gardens. Although the number of birds identified obviously depends on many factors, one of which is the individual's ability, it is gratifying to note that some high numbers have been recorded. For example, Grant Nealon from his HARARE Greendale garden has reported identifying 105 species in a four week period with Bulawayo and Bromley coming out with nearly 70 species.

Grant, who is obviously a very competent birdwatcher, comments — “If you think the last ones (forms) were good you must see the latest one. I watched a Bat Hawk take a bat over our pool at about 6.30 p.m. whilst I was feeding my owls last week. I have started growing sunflowers and had a male Thick-billed Weaver munching one of the heads for a couple of days, it is quite amazing what is around if you take the time to look and listen. We are on a flight path to a small dam hence the herons, egrets and ducks. We had a Purple Heron about a week ago as well.”

### Breeding records

Definitely some people are better at finding nests than others! Here are some records:

Species	Week numbers.	Details of nest and area seen
Grey Heron	41 to 44	) In heronry in stand of pines— Borradaile Trust, MARONDERA
Black-headed Heron	41 to 44	)
Cattle Egret	41to44	)
African Sacred Ibis	45 to 50	)
Gabar Goshawk	40 to 41 —3 chicks fledged 13 Oct.	At top of Mahogany — Greendale, HARARE
Lilac-breasted Roller	42 to 49	In hole in Acacia — Hatfield, HARARE
Green Wood-hoopoe	44 to 47	Natural hole in Syringa — Hatfield, Harare
Black-collared Barbet	1 to 4 (2003)	Hole in Ficus — Sentosa, Harare
Crested Barbet	42 to 48	Hole in dead Jacaranda — Borrowdale, Harare
Crested Barbet	40 to 43	Hole in Syringa, stolen from Cardinal Woodpecker — Greendale, Harare
Groundscraper Thrush	33 to 35	KAROI
Greater Blue-eared Starling	44 to 50	) Natural hole in Syringa – Hatfield, Harare
Miombo Blue-eared Starling	44 to 49	)
Amethyst Sunbird	45 to 49	Nest in Syringa —Hatfield, Harare

Highlights that are worth mentioning are:

Raptors — Brown Snake-eagle (BROMLEY and Milton Park, Harare), Cape Vulture (BULAWAYO), African Goshawk (MUTARE), African Cuckoo Hawk (Greendale and Hatfield, Harare), Pearl-spotted Owllet (KAROI).

Other species — Shelley's Francolin, Boulder Chat and Pearl-breasted Swallow (BROMLEY), Black Cuckooshrike (Burnside, Bulawayo and Hillside, Bulawayo — first time recorded), Hadeda Ibis, Jacobin Cuckoo and Mottled Swift (Bulawayo), Grey-headed Kingfisher (Greendale, Harare), African Emerald Cuckoo (KARIBA and MUTARE), Red-backed Mannikin, Retz's Helmet-shrike and Grey-headed Parrot (Karoi), Great Spotted Cuckoo (Marondera), Grey Go-away-bird (Sentosa, Harare – first time for over 10 years).

Grant Nealon reports in week 48 of 2002 that White-crested Helmet-shrike and White-bellied Sunbird had disappeared from both Greendale and Hatfield. Merle Mitchell from Karoi noted a Black-collared Barbet in her garden that was eating a live chongololo!

**Di Rushforth**, Co-ordinator-dirushfi@zambezi.net Telephone 741765

## **EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

At Honde Valley shrubs and trees for shade for children and birds were delivered to over half the schools. Teachers were assisted in grouping the plants by Abasi Jana (Education Officer – BLZ) and Noah Dun (National Botanical Gardens) and Meg Coates Palgrave (Guest Botanist). We stressed the need to manage natural woodlands donated by the Heads for environmental work.

A poster aimed at conserving special birds of Honde and other parts of the Eastern Highlands is nearing completion. It features paintings of Silvery-checked Hornbill and Palm-nut Vulture donated by Steve Alpe. The Honde project has been supported by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) not DED as mentioned in the previous issue of *Babbler*. This project is winding up now as the two years of finding is at the end.

We are planning to expand our schools programme into the Chiota communal area. The local environmental volunteer is Elisha Chipendo and he needs a sturdy second-hand bicycle to contact schools. If any member can donate or sell us a bicycle we would be grateful. Marlborough and Alfred Beit children joined us to celebrate World Wetland Day at Wedza where the village of Maruta showed us their sustainable use of a wetland.

### Monavale and Marlborough Vlei projects

The committees of both vleis continue working towards the conservation of these valuable wetlands. Monavale Environmental Interest Group has kindly undertaken to produce notice boards for conservation and restriction of cultivation to be used at the vleis. The Interest Group is pressing for a report on the importance of Monavale as a bird habitat to be compiled by BLZ

**Leslee Maasdorp (Mrs) (Education Director BLZ)**

### Bird Awareness Programme for BirdLife Zimbabwe – Progress Report January 2003

BLZ helped to produce and distribute the latest BAP newsletter. All the schools and other stakeholders were each sent a copy.

Networking continues through participation in ELF meetings. A Head Teachers' workshop is planned for early February in which a number of NGOs will meet and introduce their Environmental Education projects to the Heads. I am on the Task force that is organising the ELF strategic planning workshop.

Harare Quiz Competition. Five schools attended this competition, which was held at Warren Park 2 Primary School. Only Marlborough primary school failed to come.

Bird Watching outing for Chitungwiza Teachers. On the early morning of 25 January, twelve teachers drawn from different schools went on a bird watching walk to Manyame dam and its surrounding woodlands. A good number of bird species were seen, and most of the teachers said that they enjoyed the walk and are going to attempt organising their own walks with students.

Membership Drive. I am using my contacts with schools and teachers to try and encourage them to join BLZ. As a result two secondary schools from Chitungwiza and one teacher have paid the subscriptions for membership.

Establishment of a Cluster nursery for Chitungwiza. Environment Africa has expressed interest in helping me establish the above. A planning meeting with Charlie, from Eafrika is on the cards and it is hoped that out of the meeting a workable action plan will be drafted to guide the two organisations and define the responsibility of each organisation.

**Clayton Zazu (Education Manager)**

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### BirdLife Council of Africa Partnership Meeting, Ibadan Nigeria.

The ninth meeting of the BirdLife African Partnership was held from 19-23 October 2002 at Ibadan, Nigeria. There were forty nine participants comprising representatives from all BirdLife network countries in Africa, observers from Supporting Partners and BirdLife Secretariat staff. The meeting was hosted by the Nigerian Conservation Foundation and chaired by the Executive Head of the Conservation Society of Sierra Leone, Mr. D.D. Siaffa. BirdLife was represented by Mr J. Paxton and Dr. C. Chirara.

Dr. Chirara presented the BirdLife annual report and also chaired one of the sessions of the meeting. It was agreed that a new five-year Africa Programme (2004-2008) would be developed by BirdLife Secretariat in liaison with partner organisations. Volunteer task forces were formed to assist the Secretariat to implement BirdLife strategies and plans. BirdLife Zimbabwe is on the Regional IBA Conservation Strategy Development Task Force. Mr John Paxton had very fruitful discussion with

senior staff of the RSPB (BirdLife Partner in the UK who are our supporting partner) to update them on our progress and problems.

The BirdLife International Global Council meeting was also held in Ibadan and Global Council members joined Council for African Partnership (CAP) delegates for one day. One session was held where delegates discussed with leaders of RSPB and other Global Council Members. The next CAP meeting will be hosted by the Wildlife Conservation Society of Tanzania in September 2003. **Dr. C. Chirara (Conservation and Development Officer)**

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## **MASHONALAND BRANCH**

### LAKE CHIVERO BIRD SANCTUARY Report — August, 2001 to July 2002

This was a fairly dry year after 6 years of above-average rainfall. In Hillside, Harare, the rainfall was 74 % of normal so Chivero was probably in the region of 70%. However, the Lake remained fairly full and only dropped significantly in late winter of 2002, which was after the period under consideration. The mammal population remained stable although there appeared to be an increase in the signs of Bushpig. It was good to see the pair of Clawless Otters again. The water hyacinth and other exotic surface water plants continued to expand and the inland vegetation remained in good condition. However, it would be nice if National Parks would remove the invasive jacaranda and other noxious exotics.

The total number of species recorded was 198 which was about average for the last 5 years. Unfortunately, because of political unrest and my absence on leave, counts were not recorded between March and May. The total number of species recorded since 1992 rose by 4 to 292 so we may reach 300 in due course.

The 4 new species recorded were 9 Lappet-faced Vultures in August 2001, 1 Whyte's Barbet in the same month, 2 Yellow-bellied Greenbuls in December that year and an Ashy Flycatcher in June 2002. Other highlights were

*Shore and Water Birds:* 120 Reed Cormorants, 50 African Sacred Ibis and African Openbills, 60 Grey-headed Gulls and 3 African Spoonbills in July 2002; about 30 each of African Openbills and Glossy Ibis in December 2001; in 2001, 7 Hottentot Teal in September, and a Little Bittern in November; in 2002, 2 Black Herons in January and African Purple Swamphen in January and February.

*Raptors:* a Barn Owl in August and 2 Spotted Eagle-owls in October 2001; 3 Western Marsh-harriers in December, January and February; 1 Osprey in February; Marabou Stork in October and February; White-backed Vulture, 16 in August and 11 in September.

*Others:* 1 White Stork in February; African Green-pigeons, 1 in October, 20 in June and 2 in July; 5 Meyer's Parrots in June (the figs were ripe), an African Pygmy-kingfisher in December and about 300 Barn Swallows in January; a White-breasted Cuckooshrike in August and June; 1 Grey Penduline-tit in September and July and 7 in June; Southern Hyliota were seen in October, November, June and July; a Grey-headed Bush-shrike in January, 4 Retz's Helmet-shrikes in August and 6 in December, 2 Purple-banded Sunbirds in September and October and a Thick-billed Weaver in February.

In my opinion, the number of vultures and Marabou Storks seen around Harare has been steadily increasing in recent years and this is probably because of the creation of vulture restaurants. With the decline in the commercial beef herd, I expect the trend to reverse from now on.

It is interesting that 4 waterbird species gave a combined total of 280 birds in July 2002 and 20 African Green-pigeons were seen feeding on wild figs in June 2002. Southern Hyliota and Grey Penduline-tits are now being seen fairly regularly.

### **Richard Dennison**

Annual reports for Mukuvisi and Marlborough vleis will be in the next *Babbler*.

### Thanks

BirdLife Mashonaland received a generous donation from Bette Riddle, whom many of you know, accompanied by this tribute: "I shall be moving to South Africa permanently on 27 February so this is in fact, my resignation from BirdLife. I have had many hours of pleasure from this society, met some lovely folk, learned a lot about birds and had some great outings. Thanks to you all committees, past and present. I wish you well. Hang in there!" Thanks very much, Bette. We wish you well and hope you join Birdlife SA very soon. **Jennifer Carter**

## **MATABELELAND**

### From the Chairman

This is my last contribution to the *Babbler*, as a change in family circumstance has meant we are moving to a drafty and windswept corner of Essex. I will miss Africa's wonderful diversity and the ability to look through binoculars which are not spattered by rain. Sadly, predictions of a drought seem to be in danger of coming true with BULAWAYO receiving less than 100 mm's of rain by the year end and the Province looking very dry. Bird-wise this has made things interesting with waterfowl concentrating at AISLEBY. In December and January large numbers of Southern Pochard and White-faced Duck were present. In the lands, at least two species of harrier were present, whilst at the Bird Dam crakes were the focal point of interest with three species present in a small patch of bulrushes.

Away from Aisleby, I was pleased to hear at least three Thrush Nightingale singing within CBC's woodlot and have since managed to trap and ring two of them. Further afield, travelling across the country just before Christmas revealed the extent of this year's drought. The Somabhula Flats seemed particularly dry and it was disturbing to note a complete absence of Lesser Kestrels and Amur Falcons, which in the past have always seemed to compete for perching space on the telephone poles. I hope they have merely changed their winter quarters rather than having succumbed to some Asian catastrophe.

We continue to offer a varied programme of activities and appreciate your participation. I hope you will continue to support the Branch.

**Martin Smith**

### AISLEBY Sunday 29th December

Christmas and a lack of fuel meant that support for this outing was a little thin, with only three of us meeting for an early morning tramp about the property. Arriving only two hours after sunrise meant that crakes might still be active and we began at the Bird Dam in the hope of seeing them. We were not disappointed and managed to find at least six Spotted Crake on the northern side of the dam, foraging on the mud surrounding the reeds. Taped calls produced some response with the odd squawk in reply but no apparent movement towards the sound. Moving farther along we were able to find at least two pairs of Baillon's Crake, also foraging on the muddy fringe. These proved to be confiding and I was able to get close enough to film them, which was certainly worth a pair of extremely muddy shoes. It was interesting to note some interaction between the two species with a Spotted Crake very possessive over his patch of mud, chasing away an intruding Baillon's Crake. The latter also seemed to spend a lot of time preening, which was hardly surprising given the nature of its environment.

On smelly feet, we moved on to the inlet on the northern shore of the UMGUSA Dam and found plenty of interest. Shortly after our arrival an Osprey flew past along the water's edge. We all had a good view and were hoping that it would fish. Unfortunately three Yellow-billed Kites pursued it upwards to cloud level and it disappeared from view. Waterbirds were present in large numbers, most being White-faced Duck, Southern Pochard and Red-billed Teal. In contrast to the October outing, numbers of Cape Teal had dropped to single figures and we only found a few Maccoa Duck. Vegetation had grown on the muddy shoreline and the habitat had changed significantly. As a result of this, the Chestnut-banded Plover had moved on.

We then moved onto the lands in search of harriers and kestrels. As we arrived a swirling flock of Red-billed Quelea attracted our attention and closer inspection showed they were being harried by two juvenile Lanner Falcons. Their attempts to catch quelea were sadly lacking in finesse and on swooping low, the quelea merely hid within the vegetation. On the few occasions that they were put to flight, the wave and smoke like effect of the chattering flock was most impressive. Other raptors included a female Western Marsh-harrier, which flopped lazily over the vegetation and a single ringtail, which had to be recorded as a question mark. Storks were present in low numbers with only 15 White Stork and no Abdim's Storks, a consequence of our poor rainfall and dry conditions.

To end the morning, we left via the night storage dams and added Pied Avocet to the list, lightning flashed and thunder rolled drawing the outing to a close with some excellent sightings on the Checklist.

### AISLEBY Waterfowl Count – Sunday 19th January

Five of us participated in the count, which meant that we were (just) able to split into three teams; I took the canoe on to the water whilst the others covered the pastures, small dams and the lands. Launching the canoe proved to be the first hazard, with a thick algal soup surrounding some lush vegetation. This made paddling just a little unpleasant and the thought of toxic algae came to mind. The thick fringing

vegetation made visibility difficult and I am sure that we missed a substantial number of skulkers. Paddling to the head of the dam, showed it to be clogged with weed and the best way to view it was to moor and climb the old wall. This flushed at least four Allen's Gallinules, distinguished by wonderful bright red legs, trailing below as they flew low over the reeds. Waterfowl had congregated in the inlet, opposite the Club and large numbers were present, which made counting difficult. Some of the totals recorded were: White-faced Duck – 464, Comb Duck – 148, Southern Pochard – 533, Little Grebe – 268

Elsewhere on the property Spotted Crakes and Baillon's Crake were still to be found at the Bird Dam and it was pleasing to add these species to the checklist. In total, 4449 birds of 51 species were recorded emphasising the importance of Aisleby as a refuge for waterbird populations especially in times of drought.

### **Martin Smith**

#### Farewell to MARTIN SMITH — Chairman, Matabeleland Branch, BirdLife: 1989 to 2003

Our abiding memory of Martin will be that of a bearded, long-legged figure striding out across the veldt or racing up the nearest kopjie. Sometimes the rest of us struggled to keep up, but it was always worth doing so in order to learn from his expertise in identifying birds.

Martin joined the then OAZ in 1989 and has played a leading role in Branch affairs for many years. In addition to his duties as Chairman, he has largely been responsible for our contributions to *Babbler*, and latterly became the very able Co-ordinator of the Verreux's Eagle Survey.

He has been an 'ideas' man, organising the popular "Paint a Bird" competitions and other birding events for students. He has also been responsible for running a number of light-hearted quiz evenings for our members. So quietly efficient has he been that although he has attempted to hand over the reins of power on a number of occasions, he has never been allowed to do so — and now he has had to resort to the drastic step of immigrating to England...!

We shall miss Martin very much and wish him and his family all the very best for their new life as Essex farmers. Fortunately the salt marshes close to the farm are very 'birdy' so there will be a variety of waders and waterfowl to keep them company.

### **Matabeleland Branch**

Birdlife Council would like to add their best wishes to Martin and his family in their new venture. Martin has been a highly valued and committed member of Birdlife and will be sorely missed.

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### **EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB**

#### Mavusa Farm, Campbell-Morrison, VUMBA – Sunday 26 January 2003

On Sunday 26 January an enthusiastic group of 16 Bird Club members visited the beautiful Vumba property belonging to the Campbell-Morrison family. While we waited for all members to assemble at the stables we had an excellent sighting of a Miombo Rock-thrush and Tree Pipit. As usual, our hosts Lynda and Ian Guy welcomed us with a strong cup of Vumba coffee before we set off down the hill to explore a fairly low altitude forest.

This patch of forest is dominated by huge Forest Newtonia (*Newtonia buchananii*) and is truly a magical place to wander through. On entering the forest a Green Twinspot was sighted; the robins were well represented with White-browed Robin-chat, very chatty Red-capped Robin-chat and White-starred Robins. The most exciting bird for us, being a "lifer" for two members, was a pair of Blue-mantled Crested Flycatchers which flitted through the canopy with their distinctive white wing stripe and fluty call.

We were on the lookout for a Scaly-throated Honeyguide which Charles Bandura (the excellent Mavusa bird guide who knows the farm like the back of his hand) had seen there only the day before. This honeyguide is seen on the same call-site regularly – but no luck for us!

Other forest birds, to name a few, included Buff-spotted Flufftail (heard), Tambourine Dove, Dark-backed Weaver,



Black-fronted Bush-shrike, Black Cuckooshrike, Yellow-breasted Apalis, Olive Bush-shrike, Barratt's Warbler, Grey Tit-flycatcher, Grey Waxbill (heard), Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird, White-eared Barbet and Red-throated Twinspot. The call of an African Crowned Eagle was heard overhead. We tried valiantly to call up a Narina Trogon by tape (we have seen many there before); to no avail— they weren't answering today.

The forest verge and surrounding open grassland produced Red-backed Mannikin, Yellow Bishop, Yellow-bellied Waxbill, Yellow-throated Longclaw, Red-faced Cisticola and Singing Cisticola plus many others.

The group then traipsed uphill, through yet another untouched virgin forest; around the dam, back to the homestead to compile our list —74 in all.

This farm has got to be on every birder's destination list — with a wide variety of species as a result of having low to high altitude areas. One can book in to stay at Badger's Bend Cottage, sleeping 6 persons and organize for Charles to be available to expertly guide you. Mavusa Farm is situated a few kilometres from Leopard Rock Hotel.

Many thanks to the Campbell-Morrison's for their always warm hospitality and for allowing the Bird Club to wander around and enjoy their stunning property. As always a treat for the Bird Club.

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### **KAROI BIRD CLUB**

#### RYDINGS School —7 December 2002 (QDS 1629D3)

Three of us did the walk around the dam and through the woodland. A lovely early morning, green grass from the early rain, but the dam very low with some sandy islands showing. A few more water birds now; Common Greenshank, Common Sandpiper, Three-banded Plover and Blacksmith Lapwing, Egyptian Goose, Green-backed Heron and Grey Heron, Little Egret, African Jacana and Pied Kingfisher and Giant Kingfishers. In the woodland, we spent time identifying an African Cuckoo and also saw Levillant's Cuckoo and Red-chested Cuckoos. There were Willow Warbler, Chin-spot Batis, Black Cuckooshrike, Long-billed Crombec, Brubru and Black-backed Puffback. Black-crowned Tchagra was calling and Broad-billed Roller and Lilac-breasted Roller, Black-collared Barbet and Meyer's Parrot perched conspicuously in the open. Little Bee-eater, Red-backed Shrike, Croaking Cisticola and Rattling Cisticola, Magpie Shrike (not seen here before) and 14 Crowned Lapwings, confabbing in the short grass. Low in the thickets, Tropical Boubou, White-browed Robin-chat and a gorgeous Green-winged Pytilia in bright new breeding plumage. Above, Black-chested Snake-eagle, Barn Swallow, Wire-tailed Swallow, Lesser Striped Swallow and Red-breasted Swallows – 5 of the latter sitting on a fence in between cruising above. Two Hamerkops were 'wheeling' fairly high up, too. A Pearl-spotted Owlet obliged for a minute or two when disturbed by a Grey Go-away-bird. A sleek Large Grey Mongoose crossed our path and we saw 4 Tsessebe in the distance, with a small youngster. When one of us rested on a fallen log, waiting for the dawdlers, a squirrel came within a metre, but at his friendly 'tick tick, it scooted off in a flash. On a later walk, we found a Saddle-billed Stork in the vlei. A Black-chested Snake-eagle was aloft, trying to swallow a snake whilst being pestered by a few kestrels. It did succeed in the end. There were crowds of Amur Falcons, an estimated 500. In the woodland, we had a good view of a juvenile White-browed Scrub-robin, so appealing in shape and brown spots, lifting its minuscule little tail, whilst its parent did a better job in the next bush. 250 Cattle Egret, spread like a white sheet on the dam shoreline, whiling away the hours with a Great Egret and a lone Wood Sandpiper.

#### RYDINGS School — 4 January 2003 (QDS 1629D3)

Four of us met at 6:15 a.m. for a very 'tame' walk and worked very hard to find 42 species. It was a dull, overcast morning so this partly accounted for the lack of birds. The dam produced 2 Common Greenshank, a single African Jacana, one each of Green-backed Heron, African Pied Wagtail, Three-banded Plover, Blacksmith Lapwing, Little Egret and Pied Kingfisher, 3 Egyptian Goose and 35 Cattle Egrets. The water level is still very low. The woodland was so quiet but we did see the African Cuckoo and Retz's Helmet-shrike and heard Orange-breasted Bush-shrike and Grey-headed Bush-shrike, Senegal Coucal, Black-crowned Tchagra, Willow Warbler, Arrow-marked Babbler, Terrestrial Bulbul and the usual doves, and there were 4 African Green-pigeons atop an Acacia catching the weak sunshine. A White-breasted Cuckooshrike showed himself briefly, flying over the bush and taking a short rest before continuing. We were highly entertained by a wildebeest on the wrong side of the electric fence. He was determined to come through and 3 times made the charge before being successful. It was so amusing to see him turn around after each failure, run a short distance back and then make the mighty charge!

**Merle Mitchell**

## **TAIL FEATHERS**

### A birding "Eden" at HAKA Park

This small game park is extremely well covered by Miombo woodland and some vlei grasses are located next to upper reaches of CLEVELAND dam. Entrance fee for a car is Z\$500 plus Z\$200 per person. You can park your vehicle inside the Park at the main entrance (no charge) and 'bird' at your leisure. I am no means anywhere near as skilled as Grant Nealon who has on a mornings' outing sited some 158 species but I have comfortably recorded between 45-65 species in a 2 hour stroll, cumulating to a total species count of 135 over some 5 months. Miombo specials include Miombo Tit, Black-eared Seedeater, Spotted Creeper, Miombo Rock-thrush, plus the strong likelihood of African Cuckoo, Lizard Buzzards, Spotted Thick-knee and Bronze-winged Courser. At the top end of Cleveland dam you may be fortunate to see African Pygmy-goose, White-backed Ducks, Purple-banded Sunbird, African Marsh-harrier, African Snipe, African Openbill, Purple Herons, Yellow-mantled Widowbirds, Cape Longclaw... plus European Roller, Lilac-breasted Roller, Racquet-tailed Roller and Broad-billed Roller, 5 sunbirds, owls, various raptors and plains game! Not to forget the Golden-breasted Bunting, African Golden Oriole and Black-headed Oriole, Whyte's Barbet, Pin-tailed Whydah, Red-headed Weaver, Violet-backed Starling and many more.

As the Park is bordered on 2 sides by tarred roads (Harare drive and Mutate road) and mealie fields on the other two perimeters, it fulfils the role of an "Eden of refuge" for our feathered friends. Remember this birding site is on all our doorsteps, virtually 'free' and a great de-stresser – any interested birder who may wish to join me on my regular strolls on Sunday afternoons (3-5.30 p.m.) is invited. Contact numbers are: 486600 (W), 490466 (H) or an expensive cell call if you are with Econet on 091-219140. Or just treat yourself. Mutate road, past Danhiko, first left, and then left to Haka before Cleveland dam picnic site.

**Innes Louw**

### Goings On at the Birdbath, KAROI Town

New Year's Day, morning tea-time on the veranda gave us a chance to watch the goings on at the birdbath! The Blue Waxbills arrived first of all, daintily hopping along the rim, dipping their bills into the water, spending time making the big decision. But then several Bronze Mannikins interrupted and it was the same story. Looking at each other – 'You go first!' – 'No, you go' – 'Oh, alright' and the 2 hopped into the water. But before they could start, a Red-backed Mannikin landed right in the water, showing them how it was done. His bathe, however, was cut short by a Spectacled Weaver who wasted no time hopping into the middle of the bath and, with much fluttering, soaked himself and sprayed the undecided waxbills and mannikins, who promptly took off, relieved the decision had been taken from them and happy enough with their shower. A pair of Dark-capped Bulbuls was the next visitors but they were beaten to the water by a juvenile Fork-tailed Drongo. He was not sure about this bathing thing so he ducked his whole head into the water and leaves. The bulbuls then took a uninterrupted bath followed by a single male Red-headed Weaver, who did a good job. Then the mannikins fluttered back but once again the decision was taken from them as the drongo landed once more with a better idea which was to bumble straight through the water and fly off the other side, leaving the surprised mannikins who once again gave up. All was quiet after this and it seemed bath time was over. But no, an Arrow-marked Babbler arrived. His bathing style was to make a quick dash into the water and hop out further along, repeated 3 times before he went to shake off in a convenient tree. He was followed by a nervous Kurrichane Thrush youngster who did a couple of 360 degree hops before his half-hearted bathe was interrupted by another pair of bulbuls. Then more babblers arrived, this time doing a thorough job and displacing much of the water. Their goings on and chattering was observed by the bulbuls but it was too much for them and they left! Once again all was quiet and the mannikins dropped back. This time they were undisturbed and several were having a good bath when we left, deciding there were chores that needed doing!

### Black-collared Barbet

A Black-collared Barbet landed on the driveway next to a moving Chongololo. I thought, 'Surely not!' But, yes, the Barbet attacked the Chongololo breaking it in half, shook its head and then ate a piece. Then it took another small piece and flew off with it—to feed chicks? It repeated the same procedure once more – without the shaking of the head! The taste buds had been conditioned.

**Merle Mitchell**

Interesting Sighting at Lake MANYAME

While fishing at Lake Manyame on 18 January 2003, my fishing buddy, Terry Burt, and I saw a Caspian Tern. We spotted the bird flying slowly over the lake, about halfway down the length of the dam in the vicinity of the Gwebi River. During the course of the day, we saw the bird on 2 occasions. The size of the tern immediately distinguished it from other more common "inland" terns, such as the White-winged Tern. The black cap, red beak and black patches at the ends of the underside of the wings were distinctive features.

**Jason Moore**

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**NOTICEBOARD**

**HONEYGUIDE** The editor of *Honeyguide* would welcome contributions from members. All material will be considered. Items on bird behaviour are of particular interest.

**Special Bird Watching and Falconry Week-End at Main Camp, Hwange**

Various walks, talks and slide shows will be given by well-known Ornithologist, Dr. Peter Mundy, Ngoni Chiweshe and Main Camp's resident guide/birder, Elias Banda. Walks will be organised to take best advantage of time, season, habitat and bird species. Morning walks will be in Main Camp area acacia bush to look for Burnt-necked Eremomela, Chestnut-vented Tit-babblers, Violet-eared Waxbills, and cisticolas etc. Drives with the experts to look for raptors and grassland birds will take place later each day and there will be a night drive into the Park to look for nightjars, plovers and other nocturnal species. World-renowned falconer, Ron Hartley, will talk specifically on the raptors of the area and will bring a number of falcons and small raptors to show and fly. The weekend is aimed at birders of all abilities.

Date: From 08:00 Saturday 17th and Sunday 18th May (best to get there Friday!)

Venue: Main Camp, Hwange National Park

Bookings: Tel: (018) 686, (04) 706007-8, (04) 707624 Fax: (018)378 or 687, (04) 726089 E-mail: [natparks@africaonline.co.zw](mailto:natparks@africaonline.co.zw)

Costs: Walks \$500 per hours per group of 6. Night-drive \$500 per person + \$500 per car. Normal Parks accommodation and entry fees are applicable.

Fuel: Blend and diesel will be available at Main Camp

Meals: Waterbuck's Head Restaurant and Bar open all weekend.

Donations

We have had so many donations including those to the Building Fund and the Sponsored Membership Fund that there just isn't room to name all donors. I hope to do so next time. Grateful thanks to you all.

Merchandise for Sale – please contact the office.

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

There are also a number of books and a Hanimex Slide Projector.

New members – we welcome the following new members:

Anna Smet	St Mary's Secondary School	Cher McAdam	Elijah Matepo
David Kaye	H J Schoultz	A Shears	S C Phear
J O'Neill	Naison Goremusandu	Zengeza 3 High	Shadreck Maloi
Chiota Bird Club	Simba Mupodyi	Allan Machakaire	L Picherit
Wilfred Mbowa	Wonder Munyanduki	David Nyakawango	K J Went
Peter Madziwana	Takesure Siampane	Buluwesi Murambiwa	R Fisher

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