

BABBLER

The Newsletter of -

BirdLife Zimbabwe

THE BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL PARTNER IN ZIMBABWE

Member of IUCN, The World Conservation Union

ISSUE #54 – MAY/JUNE 2003

COMMITTEES

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

NATIONAL

One-day Bird Identification Course

Saturday 24th May 2003 at Mukuvisi Education Centre 08:30 - 16:00

The course is aimed at new members and beginners. There will be lectures and bird-watching at this ideal venue. Teas and lunch will be provided. A nominal fee of \$1000 will be charged.

For further details and to register, please contact Birdlife Offices on 490208 or 481496. Registration will close on 20th May.

Comment from the Editor

It has been suggested that some members do not join outings for fear of showing their ignorance among the fundis. I must say that I have never been made to feel stupid by those who are better birders than I am (and there are plenty!) but I have learnt a lot from being out with people who know so much more than I do. Everyone had to start somewhere and everyone remembers that and all of us are still learning!

MASHONALAND BRANCH

Regular outings

Mukuvisi Woodlands: Sundays, 4 May and 1 June 2003. Meet at the Paget Road entrance at 7.00 a.m. (**Note change of time**). Bring cash for the vehicle guard – remember how much a cool-drink costs these days.

Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary: Sundays, 11 May and 8 June 2003. Meet at 7.30 a.m. (**Note change of time**) 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 May or June. The committee will keep the situation under review.

Sunday outings

25 May 2003: 12, Rayden Drive, Borrowdale: Meet at 7:30 a.m. at Helensvale Service Station. Bring chairs and refreshments.

22 June 2003: Bromley: Meet at 7:30 a.m. at BLZ Offices, 35 Clyde Road, Eastlea, where cars can be left in secure parking. Bring refreshments and chairs.

Thursday evening meetings

15 May 2003: Ian Riddell, who has been a Professional Guide all around Zimbabwe for many years, will present a selection from the slides that he has taken over the years.

19 June 2003: Len Bruce will show slides of a recent trip to northern Namibia, Kaokoveld and Etosha. The trip was extensive and encompassed the places we all want to visit. Should be good!

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 (8th and 22nd May and 12th and 26th June). Meet at 4.00 p.m. provided Ian Riddell is available. For confirmation contact Ian on 339716 or 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.

MATABELELAND BRANCH

You will have read that Martin Smith has left Bulawayo for chillier climes and now Clive Townsley, who took over from Martin as Chairman, has been head-hunted to hotter climes i.e. Botswana. I hope those members in and around Bulawayo will rally around Julia, now Acting Chair, and her committee and help keep Matabeleland projects going.

Monthly Outings

Sunday 11th May — afternoon 49 Heyman Road, Suburbs

A speaker followed by tea. Phone Julia on 232402.

Saturday 14th June 9:00, visit to Maureen Norton's garden and morning tea. Phone for details – Penny on 244034 or Maureen on 471238.

Aisleby

Winter has come so we will revert to the winter timetable of Saturday afternoons. Please phone the co-ordinators below for details. As we are now rather thin on the ground, please make an extra effort to help us to continue monitoring this fantastic bird area. For details, phone Co-ordinators Julia on 232401 or Penny 244034.

Saturday May 31

Saturday June 28

EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB

Contacts: Jane Clegg ☎ 020-65610 Bridget Holland ☎ 020-61369
Sunday 25th May— Africa University 6.30 a.m. K. Dixon 65819
Sunday 29th June— Toronto (Penhalonga) 6.30 a.m. J. Clegg 65610
 The Museum is the departure point and, PROVIDED PRIOR ARRANGEMENTS ARE MADE, 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 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**The relationship between BirdLife Zimbabwe and BirdLife International

BirdLife International (BLI) is a global conservation network present in 105 countries, with 65 autonomous Partner organisations. These organisations are the leading authorities on the status of birds, their habitats and the issues and problems affecting bird life in their respective countries. Organisations have to satisfy certain criteria for them to become either affiliates, partners designate or full partners.

BirdLife Zimbabwe (BLZ) became a full partner of BLI in April 2002.

In Africa, the BirdLife International Partnership consists of 18 national conservation NGOs. Contrary to common belief, BLI Secretariat does not run individual country organisations nor pay their salaries. Within the framework of the BLI Africa programme, each national partner carries out its own activities according to local culture, politics, resources and priorities. An Africa Division office within the BirdLife International Secretariat, formerly based in Cambridge but now situated in Nairobi Kenya, coordinates regional projects and programmes, provides technical support to network organisations and circulates news and information throughout the Partnership.

The African Partnership meets once every year in a Council of African Partnership meeting (CAP). CAP comprises representatives from all African Partnership organisations who elect an annual chairman. An African Regional Committee (ARC) acts as a decision making body between CAP meetings. This Committee is composed of the current Chair of CAP, the immediate past Chair and two partner NGOs. One of the major achievements of the African Partnership was the publication of the Important Bird Areas (IBA) book in 2001. An article on IBAs will appear in the *Honeyguide* soon.

Dr. C. Chirara, Conservation and Development Officer

EDUCATION COMMITTEENews on Honde Project and other schools.

Most schools have moved into the phase of improving the school grounds habitats. From our Honde Project experience we have found that schools have extensive land and often have large exotic trees like Jacaranda and Saligna. They have neat flower beds and pathways near the buildings.

What is needed is to increase habitats for birds and people. Indigenous and fruit trees will provide food, shade and shelter for birds and people; more shrubs and herbs can be planted near the buildings to attract sunbirds and butterflies, vegetable plots can be extended to include herbs and medicinal plants.

In effect each school should have a plan and be provided with the plants from which they can take cuttings and tree seedlings. No schools have dreary tarred or cement grounds but all could be improved with plantings, water harvesting and mulching.

Imagine the Arrow-marked Babblers, thrushes and hoopoes taking to these habitat-improved gardens!!

Leslee Maasdorp (Mrs) (Education Director BLZ)

Report from the Education Manager

Slide shows and school visits

Two slide shows were held, one at Dudzai primary school and the other at Zengeza 3 High. The slide shows help the students to identify different wild bird species common in their areas, and also prepare them for bird watching excursions. It will be more interesting for the students to see and be able to identify bird species that they would have seen during the slide show, when they go bird watching in the nearby forests or areas.

Two bird watching outings were conducted for Chitungwiza cluster. The outings were well attended, educational and interesting. Most of the participants were able to identify most bird species seen.

Competitions

A quiz competition was held for Chitungwiza primary schools, and an essay competition for secondary schools was also held on 27 March at Mukuvisi Environment Centre. It was great to see that secondary school students are developing a better understanding of bird life. More challenging activities are being organised.

Chimanimani and Vumba/Burma Valley clusters

A visit to Chimanimani and Vumba/Burma Valley cluster was made between 10 and 14 March. During the visit the education manager held consultative workshops with teachers, conducted quiz shows, distributed support resource materials and acquainted himself with the school heads.

Birdlife also wants to thank Mrs Verna MacGregor (Burma Valley) a BirdLife Zimbabwe member for the assistance she is giving to the Vumba/Burma Valley cluster. Her help is greatly appreciated.

Future activities

The education committee plans to run exciting events next school term e.g. the "Our Birds, our Natural Heritage" drama festival for Harare and Chitungwiza schools, as well as attending the Environment Expo 2003 which will incorporate the World bird Watch activities. For all these to succeed resources are needed hence we are appealing to members to help with tokens for prizes, ideas and other support materials. A member may choose to be a sponsor of a particular event, say a competition/festival and a floating trophy or shield can be used as the main prize. Such an arrangement can help sustain schools' interest in BAP, and also gives the individual sponsor an opportunity to demonstrate social responsibility and commitment to the conservation of wild birds in Zimbabwe. This way I think our education programme will reach more people and thus we will conserve more birds. Let us hear what you think! **Clayton Zazu (Education Manager)**

Report from the Conservation and Development Officer

Blue Swallow Survey

The Conservation and Development Officer, together with Jack Amonie of the Department of National Parks, conducted a Blue Swallow survey in the Chimanimani area in January 2003. This is part of a project undertaken by Sue Childes and the data collected will help her finalise her report on the project.

Building on Experience

The CDO attended the Building on Experience course in Slovenia from 20-30 November 2002. The course covered areas that conservation workers would not normally learn during their formal training. The course was attended by representatives from eighteen different countries around the world. As a follow-up to the course, the CDO presented what he learnt to fellow staff members, Council members and volunteers. Mr Alex Masterson is attending the other two modules of this four-module course.

Crane Conservation Officer

The post of Crane Conservation Officer was advertised and about 32 applications were received. Ken Wilson, John Paxton and the Conservation Development Officer went through the applications and short listed four candidates for interviews. Mr Osiman Mabhachi has been recruited as Crane Conservation Officer and will start work on the 14th of April 2003. Mr Mabhachi has been working as a graduate research-assistant at the University of Zimbabwe's Institute of Environmental Studies and has experience in working with rural communities.

Environmental Policy Workshop

The CDO attended a workshop facilitated by the Institute of Environmental Studies on the formulation of a National Environmental Policy for Zimbabwe. This workshop was attended by the Minister of Environment and Tourism, Dr Alfred Nhema, who invited discussion questions from the floor. The CDO had the opportunity to discuss issues with colleagues from other environmental organisations.

Dr. C. Chirara

Species Index to Honeyguide

First of all, apologies to all those I told to watch out for the species index on the BLZ website as it has yet to appear! MWEB have been trying to get this up for some time now but always run into one problem after another. Perhaps by the time this notice appears something will be up.

However, if anyone is trying to write a Short Comm. or article and wants references for a particular bird, please contact me direct and I will pass on what I have. As an example (a short entry to save space here) the entry for Coqui Francolin *Peliperdix coqui* (*Francolinus coqui*):

Gau, W. 1990. A conservation technique for nesting Martial Eagles. 36(1):36-37

Anon. 1990. Some game birds. 36(3): 110

Msimanga, A. 1995. Nest Record card report for 1989 -1994. 41(4): 263-267

Anon. 1997. Bulawayo birding: The Tshabalala Sanctuary. 43(2): 74

Recent Reports

38(1): 34-41 38(4): 194-204

40(2): 104-114 40(4): 251-261

Note that the 1990s appears in this format, up to shrikes, which I am working on at present & all African birds mentioned in *Honeyguide* are listed. For earlier or later data I can send you an unformatted table/list, going back to 1975. A bibliography (by author) from 1975 to present is complete & hopefully will up on the website too. E-mail is the fastest method these days so please use this route if possible. **Ian Riddell**

MASHONALAND BRANCH

MUKUVISI WOODLANDS 2002

The Woodlands are visited on the first Sunday of each month. The largest turnout of birders for 2002 was 19, the smallest 5. Each month had something of interest. In January was the first of 4 sightings of African Black Duck — apparently escapees from the aviaries at Mukuvisi. It will be interesting to see if they establish themselves. Also seen were Brown-backed Honeybird and Red-backed Mannikin. February had White-faced Duck flying over and excellent views of a Eurasian Hobby. African Cuckoo were seen and heard and we had the only record of a Cape Crow.

March was the first of 3 times we saw White-breasted Cuckooshrike. A Levaillant's Cuckoo was seen and the African Cuckoo was still present. In April we saw a Swainson's Spurfowl. Everyone there thought it to be uncommon in the area. Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters were now present and were seen every month through September. Miombo Rock-thrush was seen for the first time in 2002 and Black Cuckooshrike for the last time until November. The latter always move away from the highveld in winter. In contrast, White-crested Helmet-shrike were common around Harare over the winter and good flocks were seen in April and 3 other months.

In May, we had the only record of Emerald-spotted Wood-dove. Village Weavers were noticed for the first time but were common over the winter visits. White-bellied Sunbirds and Scarlet-chested Sunbirds were more noticeable and were seen throughout the winter. An African Goshawk and Shikra were present in June and a Lizard Buzzard in July. August gave some lucky birders a sighting of a Black Sparrowhawk and one of only 2 records of Grey Penduline-tits. Yellow-bellied Eremomela were seen and the only Southern Hylia of the year.

In September, an unusual bird for the Woodlands was a Great Egret. Namaqua Dove were seen, the only record for the year. October produced the only record of White-rumped Swift and the only owl, a Spotted Eagle-owl. November and December saw the total for the morning walk reach 100 species with many summer migrants returning. November produced Barn Swallows, Abdim's Storks and

Black Cuckooshrike. Other birds, like bishops and whydahs were coming into breeding plumage making identification easier. December was exceptionally good and there were a number of specials, Red-chested Cuckoo, European Nightjar, African Pygmy-kingfisher and African Cuckoo Hawk being most striking. The new electric fence is keeping most of the tree-cutters away and it is interesting to note how quickly the paths are getting overgrown. The main interest in Mukuvisi has always been the Miombo and woodland specials. Some, such as Rufous-bellied Tit and Southern Black Tit and Green-backed Honeybird, were not seen at all and others, for example Southern Hyliota and Brown-backed Honeybird, disappointingly few times. It was good to see large flocks of White-crested Helmet-shrikes on 4 occasions, Spotted Creeper on 8 and Miombo Rock-thrush on 3. There were regular sightings of Whyte's Barbet (11) and Miombo Tit (9) as well as Green Wood-hoopoe and Common Scimitarbill, the 4 common barbets and woodpeckers.

It was interesting to note how many raptors are seen on this walk. We also see a lot at Haka and the Botanic Gardens. Perhaps some energetic person would like to start a raptor/owl survey along the lines of the Garden Bird Survey!

When you are bored at 6 a.m. (7 a.m. from May to August) on the first Sunday of every month, come and join us at Mukuvisi. Don't forget a decent tip for the car guard—the only person who made all 12 visits!

David Dalziel

(David has produced a spreadsheet of species seen at Mukuvisi in 2002 and the months in which they were seen. If you would like a copy, please contact me. Ed.)

AFDIS Settling Ponds — Saturday 15th February

On the afternoon of Saturday 15th February, 7 members of Birdlife met at 2 Helena Road to organise transport to the settling ponds. When we got there, we were met by Innes Louw who was watching a raptor eating an African Paradise-flycatcher. Identifying the snack was easy but who was the diner? We had excellent views; definitely an immature bird... too big to be a Little Sparrowhawk... possibly an African Cuckoo Hawk but the jizz was wrong...; the immature African Goshawk has tear-drop markings and these were not tear-drops. Eventually we agreed that it was an immature African Goshawk! In all we saw 77 species. Other good sightings were a Long-crested Eagle, Eurasian Hobby, a pair of Greater Painted-snipes, Thick-billed Weaver, good numbers of Ruff, Wood Sandpipers and Three-banded Plover and numerous fleeting views of Great Reed-warblers and Sedge Warblers. We had an excellent afternoon and the ponds are well worth visiting.

African Hawk-eagles and Black Sparrowhawks – Thursday 20th February 2003

About 20 members were privileged to meet the 'other women' in Oscar Mitumbili's life on this fascinating evening. These were "Giri", a magnificent 11 year-old African Hawk-eagle and an as yet unnamed 2 month-old Black Sparrowhawk. Oscar was introduced to falconry at, appropriately Falcon College, by Ron Hartley and has remained fascinated and involved ever since. Falconry has sometimes been frowned upon by some people who feel it is exploiting birds. However, anyone who has listened to a falconer talk about his hobby (not a pun!) will understand how passionate and dedicated these people are. Oscar is no exception. He has been studying Black Sparrowhawk nests in and around HARARE for many years. These birds often nest in the larger stands of gum trees but there seems to have been a decline in numbers of the last few years. Oscar is trying to establish why. The young female that he brought to the meeting had been captured only 2 weeks previously but was already amazingly accepting of human beings. She was at full size already but had juvenile plumage, very different from adult plumage that she will develop in about a year.

The African Hawk-eagle, which sat on Oscar's arm as he talked, has been with him for 11 years. She is a truly magnificent creature with enormous talons which she uses for killing. These eagles mate for life and often hunt in pairs, with one flushing out the prey, mainly francolins and Helmeted Guineafowl, and the other catching it. Oscar has taught Giri to hunt at night with a spotlight. She is part of the family though at the times of the natural breeding cycle, when her hormones are raging, she has to be kept apart. Oscar has been given a permit to capture a male and try to start a breeding program. He would love to hear of one that he could get his hands on!

It was a fascinating evening and wonderful to see these beautiful birds close up and appreciate how superbly they are suited for the different ways that they hunt. You should have been there!

Jennifer Carter

Darryl Tiran, Arcturus – Sunday 23 March 2003

On a warm and partly cloudy morning a good turnout of about 14 of us set off from the BLZ office for the cul-de-sac opposite plot number 24 at the end of Jeans Walk in Arcturus. There we were met by our host Darryl Tiran who, unfortunately, could not join us on the walk as he had a flight to catch that morning. However he provided us with a vehicle guard and directions for a walk of up to about 6 km, although we ended up walking about 7 km. This was a new venue for us in the last 7 years and Darryl had seen Orange-winged Pytilia, Red-backed Mannikin and Cabanis's Bunting in this area in mid summer. These factors may explain the good turnout but, unfortunately, we failed to see any of these special birds on this visit.

The walk went downhill along paths to a river and then joined a road which took us back to our starting point up the hill. When we reached the road after crossing the river we decided to divert to a nearby dam to increase our options and this is where we added on the extra km to our walk. The dam was full and well conserved and the river was flowing, but the river valley was heavily invaded with lantana, Syringa and jacaranda. There was also a lot of gold panning taking place along the river.

While coming down the hill our birding highlights included African Green-pigeon, Miombo Rock-thrush and Lazy Cisticola. In the river valley the highlights included Brown Snake-eagle, Black-chested Snake-eagle, Tambourine Dove, Meyer's Parrot, Giant Kingfisher, 5 Lesser Honeyguides, Eastern Saw-wing, 6 Black-headed Orioles, Grey Penduline-tit, Terrestrial Brownbul, Southern Hyliota, 5 Marsh Warblers, Ashy Flycatcher, Western Violet-backed Sunbird, Red-headed Weaver and Broad-tailed Paradise-whydah. Highlights at the dam included Black Heron, White Stork, White-backed Duck, Southern Pochard, Long-crested Eagle, White-rumped Swift, Mountain Wagtail and Thick-billed Weaver. It is several years since I have seen Mountain Wagtail as it prefers rocky stream beds and we do not often encounter that sort of habitat on our walks.

The total count was a pleasing 99 and we look forward to our next visit to this picturesque spot.

Richard Dennison

The outing to Christon Bank Nature Reserve scheduled for 23 February was cancelled due to persistent rain. The slide show by Peter Gill scheduled for Tuesday, 18 March was postponed because of the stay-away. Peter will now present his slides on Tuesday 19th August.

MATABELELAND

Sunday 23rd March – AISLEBY

The Monthly Outing was supposed to be to Lower Umgusa, but on arriving at 7.30 and finding the gate locked, Julia and I moved on to Aisleby instead and what a feast of birds was to be had!

We began at the night storage ponds and found the surrounding pasture flooded and both dams partially filled with a black oozy liquid that was best not to peruse too closely. Plenty of waders were foraging for food on the flooded sections and we were treated to a brief glimpse of a Cape Longclaw as it flew past before alighting behind a grassy tussock. A little further away, a dark wader caught our attention and when viewed through the scope proved to be an African Snipe. It didn't appear to be up to very much and the only movement we observed was when a Peregrine Falcon flew over and even then it only crouched down. Having done so it disappeared from view, explaining why the species is so poorly recorded.

We moved on to the Acacia at the top of the UMGUSA Dam and as always found plenty to study. Warblers were active and we were able to see both Sedge Warblers and Willow Warblers foraging amongst the lush growth. A pale and very vocal warbler caused consternation with only part of the body visible, eventually a slight movement allowed us to add a label of immature Grey-backed Camaroptera. At the dam, the rise in water level had flooded plenty of vegetation, offering a suitable habitat for large numbers of Red-knobbed Coot, Southern Pochard and Little Grebe. Despite plenty of careful study we failed to find Black-necked Grebe. On the far shore, a lone Saddle-billed Stork was visible through the telescope, whilst overhead a large flock of White Stork circled and wheeled within a thermal. This made counting difficult, but we estimated at least 500 birds, all presumably on passage back to Europe. Leaving the dam, we encountered more storks perched as a flock beside a sewage pond at the back of the sewage works and this time we were able to count them recording 116 Abdim's Stork. All appeared to be loafing and it was interesting to note the range of variation in facial plumage from a scruffy black to attractive blues and red. We moved on to the Bird Dam and managed to catch a brief glimpse of a Spotted Crake moving slowly through the Typha confirming the presence of this species throughout our

summer months. Overhead, the clouds were building up and suggested rain, so we moved on to the lands and found about 20 to 30 Amur Falcons feeding on insects. On some fallow land close to the road we saw a small group of about 10 Temminck's Coursers. As with the storks, they showed a range of plumage with crown colour ranging from russet to a paler cream. Whilst we studied them, the White Stork returned. Having failed to find a favourable wind all proceeded to descend and alighted within the pastures. We moved closer in the hope of being able to find some ringed birds, but as we approached, total panic ensued with all flapping wildly to become airborne. After two further attempts to land, all departed low overhead, the sound of their wing-beats audible and impressive. All that remained was a single stork, with what appeared to be a damaged wing and a large white bird just visible through the grass and weeds. This took to the wing and circled back towards us and proved to be the cause of the stork panic, a juvenile Martial Eagle. It flew low overhead and we were able to gain a real appreciation of the impressive size of Africa's largest bird of prey. Ignoring the damaged stork, it flew off to alight in the pasture a short distance away. On our ramble about the property, we had found the remains of at least two dead cows and seen a third that seemed likely to be joining them shortly. This casual approach to carcass disposal must produce plenty of pickings for scavengers and there can be no shortage of food on the farm. This brought the morning to a close and what a morning it had been with an impressive diversity of birds including warblers, waterbirds, raptors and storks, all less than 20 km from the City Centre. **Martin Smith**

EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB

Hillside Golf Course Outing – Sunday 23rd February 2003

This Sunday, with wings well and truly clipped by the fuel crisis, we made an early start at the Hillside Golf Course in Murambi MUTARE, and took a leisurely walk, birding instead of punishing the little white ball. Walking down the 9th hole, we found Loranthus creeper with Variable Sunbirds and Amethyst Sunbirds, and Willow Warblers. The dense scrubby wooded area further down yielded a Bearded Scrub-robin and Kurrichane Thrush. Grey Waxbills, a pair, co-operated long enough for us to all get a good look as they fed on the *Setaria* grasses (we should all have a stand of this attractive grass in our gardens). Walking on along the riverine strip of forest, we added African Paradise-flycatcher, White-faced Ducks overhead, an African Goshawk youngster mewing plaintively, Black-headed Oriole, and Chin-spot Batis and Cape Batis. At the first small pan, we saw Black Crake and Common Waxbills. In a stand of limited forest we picked up the call of Lemon Doves, which we later saw. The second pan gave us Purple Heron, Black-winged Bishop, Red-collared Widowbirds, Lesser Swamp-warbler and a largish breeding group of Thick-billed Weavers. We also saw Golden Weavers and Spectacled Weavers in the reeds there. Silvery-cheeked Hornbills flew over and Abdim's Stork made use of the well-cropped fairways. Hopefully the green keepers don't use poisons! We finished the day early and with a hearty breakfast at the Clubhouse to round things off. The Hillside Golf Course is one of the most attractive courses around, and well worth nine holes if you are in the area. The management have been environmentally proactive and have not only been re-sculpting several holes using indigenous trees, but also labelling the trees with species names, so a visit to the course for visitors can be educational. There are many unusual trees, as well as stunning examples of commoner trees that were never removed during the initial laying out of the fairways, so do visit if you are in the Eastern Districts.

With a final tally of 58, many of the birds unusual, we very much enjoyed the morning. **Bridget Holland**

The fuel shortage unfortunately put paid to the EDBC outing to Dorowa Mine on 30th March.

KAROI BIRD CLUB

RYDINGS School — Saturday 15th February 2003 (QDS 1629D3)

6:00 a.m. and 3 of us turned up for the walk around the dam and through the woodland. Around the dam we found Pied Kingfisher and Striped Kingfisher, the latter hunting from its perch of a dead tree along the shoreline. Wood Sandpiper, Common Greenshank, Egyptian Goose and Green-backed Heron were there, so too Reed Cormorant, White-breasted Cormorant and African Darter. Overhead flew 7 Comb Duck and we heard White-faced Duck while in the woodland. Crowds of Amur Falcons were in the skies.

The woodlands were not too productive though we did see a pair of Neddicky which we had not seen for some time. An African Harrier-hawk was perched on a large tree and a couple of bright yellow African Golden Orioles

flashed through the trees. In spite of it appearing to be fairly quiet, we did pick up 54 species, including a Black Heron at the dam when we returned and a welcoming Rufous-naped Lark atop the building.

A later walk on the farm yielded Spotted Flycatcher, Levillant's Cuckoo, Black Coucal, 4 Magpie Shrikes, Chin-spot Batis, Meyer's Parrot, Willow Warbler and a Common Fiscal! In the gum trees, we heard what sounded like a small raptor, and minutes were spent trying to find it until we found the call was coming from a Grey-headed Bush-shrike, the first time we had heard its 'screaming' call.

RYDINGS School — Saturday 15th March 2003 (QDS 1629D3)

6:00 a.m. and 3 of us once more! It was quite overcast with scudding, low cloud so we waited 15 minutes for it to clear a little. But we picked up the early callers while we waited. All the doves made themselves known and Natal Spurfowl and Swainson's Spurfowl, Senegal Coucal, White-browed Robin-chat, Tropical Boubou. A male Pin-tailed Whydah was dancing over the grass at the water's edge and the Rufous-naped Lark took up his position on his calling post atop the building. The dam had a lot more water in it but no more water birds! A lone White-breasted Cormorant on a dead tree in the water with one Reed Cormorant and one African Darter on the same tree and one Pied Wagtail below. One Green-backed Heron flew across the water, so too 2 White-faced Duck.

As the woodland still looked a bit dark, we opted to walk along the fence-line and saw African Paradise-flycatcher, Crested Barbet and heard Black-crowned Tchagra. A White-browed Scrub-robin was at his usual scolding as we walked by. Not such a good idea! The fence-line was overgrown with tall wet grass and the birds were heard rather than seen – Striped Kingfisher, Bearded Woodpecker, Black-backed Puffback, Helmeted Guineafowl, Orange-breasted Bush-shrike, Chin-spot Batis and Grey-headed Bush-shrike. Back in the woodland, we spent time identifying a female Klaas's Cuckoo, a Streaky-headed Seedeater showed itself briefly and then it was quiet until we reached the dam once more. There, a Pied Kingfisher had turned up and 17 Blacksmith Lapwings — the latter had appeared on the sports field the week before! 46 species in all.

To add to our number, we decided to drive up to the top dam. On the way, we had an interesting view of a Lilac-breasted Roller diving onto the road in front of us for something. It flew off further along the road with a 9 inch Blind Snake! We watched the roller battle to subdue the worm and in the end, the snake was still half alive when the bird swallowed it inch by inch and flew off with 3 inches still to go! At the top dam, we found 5 Red-billed Teal, African Jacana, Malachite Kingfisher, Wood Sandpiper and Black-headed Heron. A Red-backed Shrike was on a post in the vlei and, calling across the dam, Magpie Shrike and a Levillant's Cuckoo. The kestrels [falcons?] were overhead. Driving back along the airstrip, the cattle were there with zebra which we stopped to look at. Just then, 4 Red-billed Oxpeckers 'came in to land' on a cow, with their 'hissing', and proceeded to check out the food supply. More cattle came milling about but the birds only fancied this one cow and her half-grown calf. They found something in the ears and one front hoof but not much luck really so they took a sand-bath instead — not worried about the hooves trampling about! It was great to watch! So, our total for the day reached a better 60!

Another time.., driving up along the side of the airstrip on Rydings, I spotted a bird sitting beside the road by an ant hole. It was a female Greater Honeyguide. She was ducking into the hole, feeding on the ants and, the hole being large enough, half her body would disappear at times. She was there for 10 minutes until I moved past her.

Merle Mitchell

TAIL FEATHERS

CHITUNGWIZA BIRD CLUB

MANYAME Dam — 25 January 2003

Birdlife Education Manager, Clayton Zazu, arranged an outing to Manyame Dam for teachers involved in the Chitungwiza Bird Awareness Program. Despite short notice, all 10 teachers attended. Binoculars were provided for everyone but we had to share only 2 field guides. We approached Manyame Dam through Miombo woodland and saw Blue Waxbills, weavers and Red-eyed Doves. We then came across a bird party which allowed all to get a look at, among others, Dark-capped Bulbuls, a Long-tailed Paradise-whydah, African Golden Oriole, cisticola, Southern Red Bishops & White-winged Widowbirds.

In a nearby vlei, we saw Cattle Egrets, Crowned Lapwings and Abdim's Storks and at the dam there were Pied Kingfishers. The members were very impressed by the kingfishers feeding methods! There were also a Giant Kingfisher, Grey Heron, African Spoonbills and Egyptian Goose.

Some members thought the Cattle Egrets were storks. After some discussion, it was realised that the name and label of Stork Margarine has caused confusion. The teachers decided they must try to educate their pupils about the difference between 'storks' and 'cattle egrets' — a common problem for new birders.

Also seen on the day were a Brown Snake-eagle, Cape Crow and African Fish-eagle. The members associated the presence of these birds with the availability of food such as rats, mice and snakes around the nearby village. It was a good day and it seems the members are developing a positive attitude towards bird watching as a hobby.

Seke Unit, C and F 5th February 2003

Only 5 members attended this afternoon outing. The members had agreed that it was a good idea to do their bird watching locally and identify birds which are at home in the local suburbs. The entire community was surprised to see black people bird watching, using binoculars! Some people even shouted "Don't you have anything better to do?" (A common sentiment among non-birders! Ed) Children followed us to see how binoculars are used and some even requested to try using them for fun! The presence of fruit trees, such as mangoes and peaches, and gum trees and Mexican apples attracted birds. Grey Go-away-birds, Rock Doves, Laughing Dove, Pied Crows and Cape Crows, Fork-tailed Drongo and other species were recorded. **Zachariah Chipendo** (Chair, Chitungwiza Bird Club) (Contact Chipendo at Tamuka Primary School, Seke (070) 24916).

QUESTIONS FROM KAROI

Is it true that the Southern Ground-hornbill only breeds once in 9 years? This was stated in a documentary. No reference to this in *Roberts'* or Southern African Birds — Ginn, McIlleron or P Le S. Milstain. (Response: The documentary I saw, Merle, suggested that Ground-hornbill breeding females can be very fussy about where they nest and often don't find a suitable bole or tree. They then fail to breed, sometimes for several years. I expect, if conditions are right, they breed every year or maybe every second year as the juveniles are dependent for up to 12 months. Ed.)

Would the deaths of swallows, reported from KARIBA, during the persistent rainy period, second and third weeks of March, be due to the inability to feed because of the conditions? Merle Mitchell

Answers please, to both questions, to the Editor.

Storks, storks and more White Storks

Whilst crossing Lake KARIBA from Marineland to the Sanyati Gorge, in early March, we saw literally hundreds (estimated at over a thousand) of White Storks. They were flying low in a south-easterly direction. The flock consisted of a never-ending stream of birds which, rather than fly over the houseboat, decided to move over further and further to give us the right of way — till they started flying behind us. We had some real close ups!

Looking at the map, the storks could very well have been flying towards the Karoi farms — who knows?

On subsequent days, White Storks were seen almost daily (counted three flocks flying fairly close to each other, each of some hundred birds) some fairly high, but still flying in the same direction. The area we parked the houseboat for the full duration of the trip was rather devoid of bird life, however I did see Broad-billed Rollers, White-crested Helmet-shrikes, a Grey-headed Kingfisher, an African Golden Oriole and heard a Barn Owl, Black-crowned Tchagra, African Paradise-flycatchers and Natal Spurfowls & Swainson Spurfowls. **Tony Alegria**

Gene Engelbrecht has photographed a Corn Crake in his garden at Gaths Mine, Mashava. The bird has been seen several times and is not too timid allowing people to approach quite near.

Kevin Barry saw 24 Little Grebes at the sewerage farm in SHURUGWI. Prior to the bird watch he saw Montagu's Harrier, the Pallid Harrier and the African Marsh-harrier, also a Kori Bustard and a Black-bellied Bustard.

Bird walk and drive in Port Alfred. The thick coastal bush was no problem for Tim Cockcroft who took “yours truly” for a drive/walk from Port Alfred to Bathurst via the back roads. The scenery was fantastic through heavily wooded mountainous country winding down to riverine vegetation and climbing right up to the top of some red stone cliffs. Difficult birding terrain but Tim was armed with two tape recorders – one for calling and one for recording. Consequently many more sightings were recorded than normal – the best being the calling out of three Booted Eagles from their nest in the Rooi Krans. A great day for birding and scenery, thanks to Tim”.

Terry Fallon

NOTICEBOARD

Would those submitting reports and observations on bird sightings to *Babbler*, please try to include the QDS (see the Karoi reports) or enough information (road, mile peg etc.) so that we can work it out. Thanks, Ed.

The first section of the list of new bird names is printed with this *Babbler*. There will be another with the next *Babbler*. From next month, I will use the new names, with the old ones where I think it necessary. Would contributors please assist by using new names where they can? Thanks, Ed.

Donations

Again we have had many donations this month, particularly to the Sponsored Membership Fund. There were about 80 donations last month and another 40 or so this month. There is just not room to list you all individually but we are very grateful. However, I will mention nearly \$24000 from A J Beasley.

New members. We welcome the following new members

C T Muchenje & Family	A Lues	P R Gargan	F Siyajeya	S Mukarati
O Mitumbili and Family	J S Cupido	P Gwidibira	Carl Beel	

Merchandise for Sale – please contact the office. (Please note the new prices.)

T-shirts - \$4300	T-shirts (Children) - \$2600 (limited stocks)	
Two Tone caps - \$4000	Cricket Hats - \$4000	Embroidered badges - \$ 120

Lawn mower

BirdLife Zimbabwe is looking for a donation of second-hand lawn mower. If anyone has got one, please get in touch with the office. We will consider buying one in good condition.

Legacies and Wreath Funds

A reminder that if any of our members would like to remember Birdlife Zimbabwe in their wills and so make a contribution to our work in conservation and education, this would be greatly appreciated. Another way is to make a contribution in memory of a loved one by Wreath Funds whereby money is donated to the charity in lieu of flowers. Please contact the office for further information.

PUBLISHED BY JAY KAY PUBLISHING

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