

BABBLER

The Newsletter of -

BirdLife Zimbabwe

THE BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL PARTNER IN ZIMBABWE

Member of IUCN, The World Conservation Union

ISSUE #55 – JULY/AUGUST 2003

COMMITTEES

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DISTRIBUTION OF BABBLER

You are all aware that the cost of postage has increased enormously and this edition of *Babbler* will cost BirdLife Zimbabwe over \$60 000 to deliver. You can help us reduce the cost and, probably, receive your *Babbler* much sooner!

- a) Email. If you are prepared to receive the *Babbler* by email, please email the office with the email address to which it should be sent. (This would also reduce printing costs which are increasing monthly.)
- b) Hand delivery — particularly in Harare. Please contact BirdLife offices with a physical address to which *Babbler* could be delivered by hand. This could be home or office.
- c) If you are outside or on the outskirts of Harare and have ideas about delivery in your area, please contact the office. Perhaps you could get a bulk delivery and arrange for local distribution.

ACTIVITIES

NATIONAL

One-day Bird Identification Course – 19th July 2003. Covering raptors, swallows and swifts with a talk on migration and migratory birds. Please contact BirdLife offices.

Spurwing Birding Weekend — 8th, 9th November 2003. Spurwing Island plan to host a weekend on the birds of the Matusadona National Park with slide-shows and lectures by ornithologists as well as drives through the Park. BirdLife Zimbabwe will receive a commission on all bookings made through the BirdLife office. There will be a full moon that weekend. This is a really good chance to ‘get-away from-it-all’. Contact BirdLife office for details.

MASHONALAND BRANCH

Regular outings

Mukuvisi Woodlands: Sundays, 6 July and 3 August 2003. Meet at the Paget Road entrance at 7.00 a.m. (**Note time**). Bring cash for the vehicle guard – remember how much a cool-drink costs these days.

Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary: Sundays, 13 July and 10 August 2003. Meet at 7.30 a.m. (**Note 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 July or August.

Sunday outings

27 July 2003: Christon Bank Nature Reserve: Meet at 7:30 a.m. at 2 Helena Rd, Marlborough (phone 300082 for directions) where cars can be left in secure parking and transport sharing arranged.

Bring chairs and refreshments.

24 August 2003: Masembura Communal Area, Domboshawa. Apart from Miombo woodland and granite kopjes, there is a cave which houses Mottled Swifts and rock paintings. Meet at Wingate Golf Club at 7:00 a.m. (**NOTE TIME**) where cars can be left in secure parking and transport sharing arranged. Bring refreshments and chairs.

Thursday evening meetings

17 July 2003: Alex Masterson, well-known to all of you, will give a presentation on cisticolas.

TUESDAY 19 August 2003: Peter Ginn will show slides of a recent trip to the upper Zambezi and Chobe. **NOTE** that the meeting is on **TUESDAY** — **NOT** Thursday.

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.

If anyone would like to attend any meetings but doesn't have fuel or doesn't want to drive at night, please contact a committee member and we will try to arrange transport. Similarly, if anyone can offer transport to the meetings, please contact us.

Thursday outings to Marlborough Vlei

2nd and 4th Thursdays (10 & 24 July and 14 & 28 August). Meet at 3:30 p.m. in July and 4:00 p.m. in August 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.

Visit to New Year's Gift, near Chipinge, 19—23 September 2003

Instead of Rifa, this year we are travelling to New Year's Gift Estate, situated about 500 km from Harare, 30 km this side of Chipinge. This should be an excellent long weekend (4 nights) with very varied habitat in the area and trips to Chirinda Forest and Haroni-Rusitu planned, fuel permitting. There is accommodation for 15 people at the Guest House and 3 meals a day are included. They are also allowing about 30 people to camp at the Club. Campers must be self-sufficient though water, ablution facilities, a braai area and firewood are provided. Everyone must provide their own drinks. The cost for

staying in the Guest House, based on current rates (this is a commercial facility used by businessmen visiting the area), has been estimated at \$50 000 for the 4 nights. A \$25 000 deposit is required with your booking. The fee for camping has not been decided but we require a \$4 000 deposit with the booking. We will advise actual costs as soon as we have them and expect the balance to be paid by the 19th September. The deposit, or part of it, may be forfeit if you cancel. We are not trying to make a profit from this trip and will pass on actual costs. This is open to all BirdLife members nation-wide.

A booking slip is attached. Booking will be on first come, first served basis.

MATABELELAND BRANCH

Monthly Outings

July: Saturday 12th 4:00 p.m. at 49 Heyman Road, Suburbs: Talk by Michael Stuart Irwin entitled "Irwin on his usual subject", preceded by tea and followed by a finger-supper (bring and share). Tel: Julia 232401.

AUGUST: Saturday 16th 4:00 p.m.: Walk at Whitestone School Hillside Dams area preceded by tea – followed by light supper (bring-and-share). Telephone for where to meet – Penny on 244034 / Julia on 232401.

Aisleby

Please telephone Co-ordinators Julia on 232401 or Penny 244034 for details of times, where to meet and transport arrangements.

Saturday July 26

Saturday August 30

Special Weekend: Verreaux's Eagle Survey, Matopos National Park

SEPTEMBER: 12th-14th, Friday-Sunday. Camp/chalets at Maleme.

Visit to as many as possible of the Verreaux's Eagle nests to check on chicks/juveniles/fledged. Members from all branches are warmly invited. Please make your own bookings for accommodation. We are hoping to acquire fuel, both diesel and petrol, for our visitors to purchase for their return journeys. BirdLife Botswana may also be joining us.

EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB

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

Sunday 27 July — La Rochelle — ringing demonstration 6.30 a.m. A. Christie 64197

Sunday 31 August — Murahwa's Hill 6.30 a.m. B. Holland 61369

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: 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 am. on the 3rd Saturday of each month. Contact Margaret Parrock ☎ 068-22005 for details.

REPORTS

NATIONAL

National AGM 26th April 2003. BirdLife Offices, Harare

This was well-attended. Reports were presented by the President, Education and Conservation Directors. The following were elected to National positions.

President: Dave Sheehan
 Vice-President: Alex Masterson
 Treasurer: Oscar Mitumbili
 Secretary: Di Rushforth
 Two Councillors: Rolf Chenaux-Repond
 Ken Wilson

Dr Mike Rands, Director General of BirdLife International, gave a presentation at Module 1 of the programme *Building on Experience* that was held in Slovenia and attended by Dr Chip Chirara. Here is a summary of the presentation.

Mike opened his presentation by suggesting that one of the greatest weaknesses of BirdLife is that it is still seen as the secretariat and yet in reality it is a Partnership of organisations working together to ensure the use of the environment is sustainable.

BirdLife world-wide statistics: 4000 staff
 2.5 million members
 supporter base of 4 or 5 million
 million hectares
 annual turnover of over 250 million USD each year
 secretariat offices all over the world

The group was told that not enough time is spent telling people these statistics; not enough time is spent championing BirdLife. The council (governing body of Partnership) meets every six months at Global Partnership meetings. Regional Partnership meetings are encouraged on a yearly basis to share information, knowledge, ideas, etc. and to develop the BirdLife model at the regional level. A global meeting is held every 4 or 5 years to bring all the regions together and ratify the Partnership's strategic plans for the coming 4/5 years. At the last global conference, each Partner was asked to carry out a workshop on what that Partner wanted to do, based on the four following components:

1. Species Conservation
2. Sites (IBA) Project
3. Habitat
4. People

Mike shared with the group a few things that had not worked as well as would have been liked. Those weaknesses include the low profile of BLI in the eyes of the public, which means the incredible achievements are not fully recognised and to some the organisation is seen simply as 'birdy people', and the tendency in the last few years to be too inward looking.

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

In our busy department the translation into Shona of "Enjoy the Birds of Zimbabwe" has reached the proofreading stage.

Expansion of our Bird Awareness Programme into the Chiota communal area will take place on the 8th July. Mr Elisha Chipendo has covered much ground, getting support from Chief Chiota, Headmen, community leaders and schools. More second-hand field guides, binoculars and posters are needed.

Mr John Shepherd's generous donation of a series of *Roberts'* field guides as well as other books will be distributed to the Bvumba/Burma Valley and Tanganda clusters.

A bird training day was held at the Mukuvisi Woodlands for 17 participants on 24th May 2003 and all gained from this experience. The seventeen were made up of six new BLZ members, two guides, three BLZ staff, five teachers from the Bird Awareness Programme and one Churchill School student. BLZ members, Di Rushforth, John Shaw and Geoff Lowe gave of their expertise and time as trainers and

several of those attending attested to it being a most interesting session. Juliet Masana and Clayton Zazu led the walks.

The Director did some bird studies with Westridge schoolchildren at Rifa. A memorable sighting was a very close-up view of a Goliath Heron whose height of 1.4 metres was taller than most of the children. **Leslee Maasdorp, Education Director**

Drama Festival “Our Birds, Our Natural Heritage”

This festival was held on the 10th and 11th of June at Mukuvisi Environment Centre. Three primary schools and six secondary schools participated. Both primary and secondary schools presented some very interesting and educative plays, which brought out various issues pertaining to wild birds and related environmental topics. The event was an eye opener and more ways of improving the use of drama to raise bird awareness will be explored. Thanks to CABS, Meikles Africa, and Caltex (SA) for supporting this event. The results of the festival were as follows:

PRIMARY CATEGORY

Name of school and position	Prize
Dudzai Primary School – Position 1	\$5 000
Tamuka Primary School – Position 2	\$3 000
Seke 7 Primary School – Position 3	\$2 000

SECONDARY CATEGORY

Name of school and Position	Prize	Name of school and Position	Prize
Zengeza 3 High – Position 1	\$8 000	St Mary’s High – Position 2	\$3 000
Zengeza 4 High – Position 3	\$2 000	Zengeza 2 High – Position 4	\$1 000
Seke 6 High – Position 5	\$ 500	Seke 1 High – Position 6	\$ 500

As the way forward, the Education Manager intends to contract, if funding permits, the services of a professional drama group (Sunrise Theatre Company) to produce a play on wild birds and related environmental issues, which can be shown to all pupils or people in all BAP schools and communities. That way we hope to reach more people, get publicity for Zimbabwe, and most importantly have our impact felt and thus promoting the conservation of wild birds in Zimbabwe improved.

Clayton Zazu, Education Manager

GARDEN BIRD SURVEY

In order to reduce postage costs, those participating in the Garden Bird Survey do not need to send returns every month but can accumulate and send them periodically.

MASHONALAND BRANCH

Marlborough Vlei Report 2000 — January 2003. Ian Riddell has been monitoring the Marlborough vlei since 2000 and produced an extended report covering the above period for the Mashonaland AGM in January. The report, covering the period it does, is a bit too long for the *Babbler* and interesting data will be lost if I try to reduce it.

Ian Riddell — Slides, Thursday, 15 May 2003. Ian Riddell entertained 22 members of BLZ with a well-illustrated travelogue of the Chizarira Game Reserve and some of the National Parks of Kenya which he visited some time ago. An excellent satellite colour photograph set the scene for the overland exploration and clearly revealed the abundance of geological fault lines in the area. This gave rise to a complicated hydrological matrix that resulted in the area being well watered with numerous springs. The Chizarira plateau, before the building of Kariba, was a *Brachystegia boehmii* (Mufuti) climax forest that has been destroyed over a relatively short period by elephants moving onto the plateau to escape the rising waters of the lake and fierce annual fires. These two factors have reduced the forest to open grassland with the annual fires preventing regeneration of the forest. Ian showed us some beautiful photographs of the whole range of life forms in the Chizarira area; insects, amphibia, reptiles, mammals and, of course, birds. Birds in the area included the Eurasian Golden Oriole, Livingstone’s Flycatcher, Narina Trogons, African Pitta and African Broadbills. The area also supports a very wide range of raptors, falcons, including Taita Falcon, eagles including Martial Eagle, Verreaux’s Eagle and several snake-eagles and many of the sparrowhawks and goshawks.

Wildlife photographs were interspersed with memorable slides of the African bush taken by a professional sensitive to the diverse habitats in the area. Of particular interest were the deep narrow gorges which have their own microclimate and range of organisms. The whole area seems to have been little affected by the aerial spraying of insecticides for tsetse control and a rich variety of animal life is still to be found on the plateau. The impression was left of a Conan Doyle type of "lost world" on the plateau and among the deep gorges where only the intrepid explorer and keenest of naturalists would venture into.

The second series of slides was devoted to a lightning tour around some of the Game Reserves in Kenya, in hired pickup vehicle which had gypsy habits of camping at any convenient out of the way spot in an attempt to avoid the plague of mini-vans that spoil the experience of being alone in Africa among the animals and with Nature. Ian showed us good shots of vultures around a kill and in particular shots of Ruppell's Griffon whose features could be compared with the more common White-backed Vulture. Elephants appeared to have recovered some of their former numbers and were co-operative photographic subjects once the gaggle of mini-vans had headed back home for midday refreshments. Ian introduced some of us to a few of the Kenya bird specials, the Superb Starling, Vulturine Guinea-fowl and one of the varied forms of the White-headed Barbet to name but three.

This interesting slide show covered the whole range of African wildlife as seen through the lens of a professional naturalist, from the small insects to the dominant mammals with the birds and other vertebrates taking their place in the wide diversity of African wildlife.

Fig and Olive Estate, Ruwa – Sunday 28 April 2003 (ODS 1731C3)

There was a reasonable turnout of 9 of us at 6.30 a.m. for this outing which, at about 2km before Ruwa, was quite close to Harare. We were met on our arrival by our host Rehman Hassim who very hospitably provided us with the use of their cottage and tea and muffins after our walk. For most of us this was a first visit but a couple of us had been there previously. The last time I visited the property was about 3 years ago when it belonged to Kevin Fick.

For those of us who had neglected to bring something warm to wear we had a chilly start as the wind was blowing and the day had yet to warm up. However, after the first hour of walking, although the wind continued, it became pleasantly warm. Initially we walked through the miombo woodland on the far side of the river and did not see many birds, but as the day warmed up the birding improved. We crossed over the wall of the main dam, passed the pine and gum tree plantation and entered a patch of mature miombo woodland between the stream and the garden. Here we encountered a bird party and had good birding right through this patch of woodland until we returned to the garden.

Both the main dam and the small dam were spilling and the vegetation cover was good. Unfortunately there was evidence of significant lantana, jacaranda and Syringa infestation, but we could also see that an effort was being made to remove the lantana. The highlight on the dams was a pair of African Black Duck and the highlights for the woodland included 1 Long-crested Eagle, 8 Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters, 2 Whyte's Barbets, 1 Greater Honeyguide, 5 Eastern Saw-wings, 1 White-breasted Cuckooshrike, 1 Southern Black Tit, 1 Grey-headed Bush-shrike, 1 Red-backed Mannikin and 4 Purple Widowfinches (Indigobirds).

The total count was 66 which was quite good for such a limited area. Thank you to Rehman for making us feel so welcome and we look forward to our next visit.

Richard Dennison

12 Rayden Drive, Borrowdale — 25 May 2003 (ODS 1731C1)

Eleven members enjoyed a pleasant morning's birding in this river valley, so near to HARARE and yet so far from the hustle and bustle of the city, some from Borrowdale Brook which we could see from the top of the hill. The farm has a resident Long-Crested Eagle that was in sight most of the time and a Gabar Goshawk flew across the ether side of the valley. We saw about 12 Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters, including several juveniles, Red-faced Mousebirds and Speckled Mousebirds and a Purple-crested Turaco. Common birds seen included Dark-capped Bulbul, Arrow-marked Babbler, Red-eyed Dove, Cape Turtle-dove and Laughing Doves, Black-collared Barbet and Crested Barbets, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird, Yellow-fronted Canary and Streaky-headed Seedeater. Waterbirds were Black Crake, Common Moorhen and African Jacana. Altogether 47 species were identified.

MATABELELAND**AISLEBY 31 May 2003 (ODS 2028B1)**

Our winter time of Saturday afternoon attracted some of those members who are unable to attend our usual Sunday mornings, and it was also good to have with us our (sadly) no-longer-resident Chairman, Clive Townsley, up on a visit from Gabarone. So a small group of us set off on a relaxed overview to see what was what.

First we sterilised our feet (and socks in some cases) in the anti-foot-and-mouth dip at the entrance to Aisleby, then it was back across unpurified ground to our vehicles and off to the dam inlet. This took us through fields with recently mended fences, and necessitated enormous initiative to successfully undo the tortuously wired-up gates designed to keep cattle in (but, we assume, not us out).

There wasn't much on the little holding dam other than a smell. But the inevitable Three-banded Plovers were standing possessively over their dry patch, in the company of a couple of bobbing Blacksmith Lapwings and three squeaking African Pied Wagtails, whilst the bordering acacia produced a Grey-backed Camaroptera and Rattling Cisticolas.

Down towards the water we headed, noting that the long-term occupant of the shoreline had moved off which can only bode well for the demise of the cornfield and regeneration of the slain acacia, which hitherto has been so full of bird activity. At the water's edge were a couple of African Pipits and on the water itself there wasn't much — until, that is, a Peregrine Falcon flew over, which caused alarm and dispersion upwards of many Red-knobbed Coots and African Sacred Ibis, clumps of Red-billed Teals and little Hottentot Teal, the odd Black-winged Stilt with the inevitable leg hanging down and a few White-faced Ducks, Cattle Egrets and croaking herons, and dispersion down under-wards of Little Grebes. We then, when peace once again descended, started to see more of the same bobbing around on the water and in the weed.

Back again on shore, a Brown-hooded Kingfisher perched in the Phragmites remained invisible to a few, and one amongst us who didn't even have binoculars spied a far-distant Pied Kingfisher sitting on the wires with Little Bee-eaters. We didn't see the Terrestrial Brownbuls but did catch glimpses of gorgeous little Common Waxbills and a singing Lesser Swamp-warbler. Having walked back through the acacia, which was uncharacteristically quiet, we headed off inland. En route, by the way, the lead vehicles watched the antics of a Senegal Coucal whilst the rest of us had a competition to see who could guess what was being pointed out to us so animatedly.

At the Muddy Puddle, which was as rewarding as usual and lacking only sight and sound of Spotted Crake and Baillon's Crakes, we straight away saw three African Purple Swamphens, stunning in full sunlight, along with lots of Common Moorhens, three or four African Jacanas, lots of African Sacred Ibis several flashing their breeding "bleeding" armpits, Cattle Egrets, a couple of Black-winged Stilts, a few Glossy Ibis, Wood Sandpipers and Wattled Lapwings, as well as three headless African Spoonbills evidently ready for bed. In the pastures on the other side were Spur-winged Goose, more Egyptian Goose and Wood Sandpipers enjoying the fast-running, stinking black water. And overhead a large congregation of Blacksmith Lapwings came off the dam to disturb the peace by wheeling around shrieking, though we could see no predator to justify this performance.

It then became teatime so we headed off to The Lands to look for raptors and coursers. And at the river crossing a surprise was in store, and this time we all had a wonderful view — a Lizard Buzzard perched on a pole right next to the road! This is not your everyday bird at Aisleby — or many other locations, come to think of it. Anyway, on up to the lands where we saw another flying Peregrine Falcon and something larger which we identified (but which! can't remember but will find out and let you know), and otherwise all seemed rather quiet. Then Clive spotted a couple of Temminck's Coursers which caused everyone to put down their cups and cakes (and Castle) and put up their bins. In the end I think we saw three, past masters of disguise. And, as usual, there were several African Pipits poking around. Just about everywhere, we saw Egyptian Goose, Magpie Shrikes, Laughing Doves, Black-headed Herons and Grey Herons, the odd Pied Crow, Common Fiscals including a brownish immature model, Laughing Doves and Red-eyed Doves, the ever-cheerful Dark-capped Bulbuls and several sunbird spp. We also heard, at various places, Rattling Cisticolas.

As usual the time ran out far too quickly and our short visit was cut rather shorter by the threat of fast-descending dusk and the fact that most of us needed to be back before dark.

Julia Dupree

Newton West BULAWAYO — 14 June 2003

This month we did something a little different – we spent the morning bird-watching with Maureen Norton in her charming, natural garden in Newton West. To start with all was quiet, presumably because (like us) the birds were suffering from the cold wind, which initially managed to outdo glorious sunshine.

Maureen handed us all copies of her usual June sightings which gave us a marvellous start. We headed off to the bush behind the house where right away we saw Chin-spot Batis flitting about and a flock of around 12 “now-what-are-thoses?” Well, they turned out to be “things-out-of-plumage”, such as *Euplectes* spp. except that when we really got down to discussing and researching the subject with field guides later over a cup of tea, we discovered they were in fact *Vidua* spp., namely whydahs in drab. A bit further on into the bush we encountered sunshine and a group of extremely possessive and gutsy Blue Waxbills, bravely trying to gain the attention (and departure) of the dog. Ahead of us were little Scaly-feathered Finches and in a combretum a busy Long-billed Crombec and an unbusy Black-throated Canary trying to warm up. A Yellow-throated Petronia without its yellow waited patiently to be identified (which took a while as I was trying to find it in the field guide as a Yellow-throated Canary) and in a nearby acacia a Chestnut-vented Tit-babbler was chirruping away.

Perched in the hedge we spotted a glorious Scarlet-chested Sunbird, all round and fluffy and too chilly to move, and a White-bellied Sunbird flitted and squeaked above. Then we saw another male sunbird which, after much discussion and partly by process of elimination, was reclassified from the originally-listed Southern (Lesser) Double-Collared to Miombo Double-collared Sunbird.

Back past the veg patch more Chin-spot Batises, 2 females and a male, the serene sound of far-off Cape Turtle-doves, and the noisy appearance of a couple of Magpie Shrikes whose territory we were obviously invading. In the tree above, more Scarlet-chested Sunbirds, the male of which was singing and singing and then came down to the flowering aloes, and a Miombo Double-collared Sunbird, whilst over in the hedge we had good views of two nosy and noisy White-throated Robin-chats. Then it was teatime, comprising delicious home-made herb bread and sticky cake, served on the verandah under a wonderful spreading fig tree and surrounded by colourful plants. At this juncture Maureen put on the bird shower a sprinkler feeding a birdbath and the nearby bushes – and within minutes customers arrived. Those in the know quickly got down to washing and splashing followed by perching and shaking, whilst others took a little longer to catch on. Eventually everyone was there, from those whydahs again to Scaly-feathered Finches and a lone Southern Grey-headed Sparrow.

This was a most enjoyable outing, which had the added benefits of fuel-saving and lunch-saving, so much did we eat and drink. Our warm thanks go to Maureen for her original thinking and kind hospitality. Julia Duprée

EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUBAFRICA UNI, Old MUTARE, Sunday 25th May 2003

Transport and binoculars supplied, clear blue sky but only 5 of us for this interesting venue. Sadly, Daniel Nzengya, our Kenyan contact, was unable to accompany us but Kahue his colleague deputised and led us on a great walk. AU has 2 distinct advantages – varied habitats and location on the other side of the Pass which often means species different from those regularly seen in Mutare. On this occasion we concentrated on arable land, acacia woodland, riparian woodland and a sewage pond for good measure. There were House Sparrows on the Uni residence, a species rarely recorded on our lists, and lots of vocal Common Fiscals before we set off across the ploughed fields which had many Red-capped Larks, displaying African Pipits, Yellow-throated Longclaw and Black-headed Heron. Skirting the acacia area, we picked up many common species with good views of Grey-headed Bush-shrike and Red-necked Spurfowl, our *swynnertonii* which was new to Carl, fresh from Zambia who confused us on many occasions with some weird names like Zebra Finch, Large Golden Weaver and Village Weaver. On the other hand he was a great fund of knowledge for Peter and Tatenda, and for me too. Very few birds escaped his eagle eye.

Few raptors but mainly due to the blueness of the sky which made them so difficult to locate. I saw a Dickinson's Kestrel as we set out and we had close views of Black-shouldered Kite and Lizard Buzzard. We were lucky to find 2 flocks of Orange-breasted Waxbills, surely one of the prettiest birds we have. Deeper in the woodland we had a good selection of birds, even a Red-capped Robin-chat imitating other species which we knew would not be in this habitat. A bird that recurred many times was the

Brubru. The riverine bush was lush but quiet and the river completely full of reeds so we made our way back towards the fields, seeing on the woodland fringe 3 Orange-breasted Bush-shrike gleaning on the one tree.

The sewage pond was our last 'port' of call and helped us to a total of 72 with both Cape Wagtail and African Pied Wagtail, 20+ Three-banded Plover and Wire-tailed Swallow, Grey-rumped Swallow and Easter Saw-wing. Five Speckled Mousebirds on the exit road was our last sighting.

Many thanks to Daniel for organising the trip, Kahue for guiding us and Carl for driving. **Ken Dixon**

KAROI BIRD CLUB

RYDINGS School — Saturday 5th April 2003 (ODS 1629D3)

There were 3 of us for this walk and we decided to go along the woodland beside the top dams, now full and over-flowing – a good sight! On the water were Little Grebes (on 10 May one of these had a 'flotilla' of 4 chicks), White-backed Duck, Red-billed Teal, White-breasted Cormorant, Green-backed Heron, African Jacana, Pied Kingfisher and Malachite Kingfisher. In the vleis below the dam wall, African Wattled Lapwings and Blacksmith Lapwings, Wood Sandpiper, Cattle Egret, and in the taller grass, African Stonechat, Tawny-flanked Prinia, Pin-tailed Whydah, and atop an acacia, a Grey Heron. The woodland yielded African Paradise-flycatcher, the usual doves, Willow Warbler, Brown-hooded Kingfisher, Groundscraper Thrush, Chin-spot Batis, Common Scimitarbill, Natal Spurfowl, Swainson's Spurfowl and a lone male Scarlet-chested Sunbird. In the undergrowth, White-browed Robin-chat, Terrestrial Brownbul and a scolding White-browed Scrub-robin. In the open grassland, we saw Croaking Cisticola, Rattling Cisticola and Zitting Cisticola, Helmeted Guineafowl and Yellow-throated Longclaw. Flying above were Amur Falcons, Barn Swallows and European Bee-eaters. 52 species in all plus zebra, impala, kudu, wildebeest and oribi. **Merle Mitchell**

RYDINGS School — Saturday 3rd May 2003 (ODS 1629D3)

We had 4 on this walk and we gathered at 6:00 a.m., clear and coldish with the dam covered in mist that lifted after 10 minutes. We had a very quiet walk around the main dam and through the woodland, picking up only 38 species. We did see 2 African Fish-eagles at the dam and always enjoy the White-crested Helmet-shrikes and Retz's Helmet-shrike in the woodland. In the open, a Black-shouldered Kite, not seen for a while. At the top dam were Little Grebe and Red-billed Teal and we added a few more woodland birds to total 44 species. A few days later, on the farm, we saw a Grey Penduline-tit, not seen for some time. **Merle Mitchell**

TAIL FEATHERS

QUESTIONS FROM KAROI – responses

Is it true that the Southern Ground-hornbill only breeds once in 9 years?

Tendai K. Sadoma (Zumbejena) wrote an excellent letter but too long to reproduce in which he suggested that, where the conditions are right, ground-hornbills, like any other species, will try to reproduce annually but perhaps have a high mortality rate and natural population control.

Dr. Peter Mundy supplied the following (and brought to my notice that I hadn't updated the edition number on the last *Babbler* — apologies to all):

"Alan Kemp has studied the Ground-hornbill *Bucorvus leadbeateri* in the Kruger National Park and extensively published on the results:

In particular: 12 groups were followed in the Satara area for a total of 215 pair-years. In that time there were 49 breeding attempts but only 23 young were fledged. This is an average productivity of one juvenile per 9.3 years. Note that one group produced 8 young from 9 attempts in 20 years, but another group had no attempts in 19 years."

Thanks to you both for your responses.

A Pleasing Increase in population of Local Threatened Species of Nyautare Area, Nyanga North

Nyautare is a small area found in NYANGA North that falls under region 4. The area is between two rivers, the Nyabobwe, that originates on the top of Nyangani Mountain on the eastern side, and to the

southern side there is the Nyautare river from which the area got its name. Muchena and Chitura Hills lie in the southwest and the mountains are home to different species of mammals and birds. Two decades ago, the area was inhabited by very few people. It was covered mainly with Terminalia woodlands and also miombo woodlands along the hills giving a nice preference for a variety of birds and game species.

By the end of 1989, the population increased in the area, with more vegetation being cleared off to give room for agriculture. Gardens were established along river banks resulting in many species of birds feeding on vegetables, especially Speckled Mousebird and Black-crowned Tchagra and also the Senegal Coucal on which I am carrying out research to see if it is true that this bird is a pest. Young children were given the role of guarding the gardens resulting in them chasing birds and catching them when they were tired due to their poor flying endurance. Species which were vulnerable included Speckled Mousebirds, Senegal Coucal, Black-crowned Tchagra, Helmeted Guineafowl, Swainson's Spurfowl and Crested Barbet, and, to a lesser extent, Red-faced Mousebirds. It became rare to encounter the species in the Nyautare area between 1990 and 1998. I left the area for Bulawayo in 1996.

Every year, I went back to my rural area but was not interested in birds. In 2000, I became a Professional Hunter and in 2002 a member of BirdLife Zimbabwe and became interested in studying the birds of my area. I paid a visit to the area from 30 March to 24 April. My major objective was to study the species which I last knew to be on the verge of extinction in the area.

I was amazed with the increase in Black-crowned Tchagra of which I recorded 30, 8 Crested Barbets, 10 Senegal Coucal, 3 flocks of Speckled Mousebirds, 7-10 in each flock. Helmeted Guineafowl I recorded 2 flocks of about 17 and 22 and 9 Swainson's Spurfowl. On April 2, I came across an African Golden Oriole and 2 Spotted Eagle-owls for the first time in the area. Although it was the rainy season, I didn't see any Cattle Egrets which are usually very common. I saw 3 flocks of White-crested Helmet-shrike with 8, 10 and 13 members. In all, I would say I recorded about 300 species of birds in about 3 weeks.

I thank the inhabitants and urge them to continue the spirit of conservation. I will be back next year with more observations. **Tendai K Sadoma** (Zumbejena), House No 3056, Old Highfield, Harare

A Single Wattled Starling *Creatophora cinerea* in a flock of Glossies

A flock of 12-20 glossy starlings visit our garden in Ballantyne Park HARARE every evening for a bath and to feed on the insects in the lawn. Their characteristic call announces their arrival as they perch in a dead tree. To my surprise on 29 May 2003 there was a very different bird, smaller than the noisy glossies, very pale and with a dark wing and a white rump. On examining the bird through binoculars, the yellow behind the eye became evident. It was without doubt a single Wattled Starling, but what was it doing with a flock of glossies? (I think they are the Greater Blue-eared Starling *Lamprotornis chalybaeus*, because I have tried to look for chestnut feathers on the bellies and found no sign of Miombo Blue-eared Starlings *L. chloropterus*)

Jean Metlerkamp, 5 St. Brelades Park, 19 St. Brelades Road, P.O. Borrowdale. wellmet@mweb.co.zw

Jean Metlerkamp parked in front of me at the fuel queue in Ballantyne Park, and told of this sighting. I said that with certain congregatory birds species particularly the Barn Swallow, *Hirundo rustica*, it is quite common to find another species of swallow amongst the flock but I have not seen this with starlings before.

I have lived in Borrowdale for more than 50 years, and we never saw Wattled Starlings before 1985. My first sightings of them were in Kenya Coffee Shade Trees, in MHANGURA, in the mid 1980's and thereafter I saw them at MANA POOLS, and in the CHINHOYI area where they are now frequent visitors.

Would anyone with records like to tell us when they arrived in their area, and if they ever see singletons?

I will write up the results, and try to get to the real position, as the Southern African Bird Atlas is more or less silent on the expansion of the Wattled Starling in this country.

D.V. Rockingham-Gill, 4 Fernleigh Road, P.O. Borrowdale. pforbes@mango.zw

The African Crowned Eagle and the African Grey Parrot

Friends residing in Emerald Hill, HARARE, told us of a visit their African Grey Parrot had from an African Crowned Eagle. The parrot spends his days alone in a large aviary in the garden and, investigating his raucous protests one day, they found the eagle perched on top of the aviary, eyeing the parrot with much interest. **Merle Mitchell**

NOTICEBOARD

Would those submitting records 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.

BirdLife thank the following for their donations to various funds.

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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. Please help.

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