

BABBLER

The Newsletter of -

BirdLife Zimbabwe

THE BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL PARTNER IN ZIMBABWE

Member of IUCN, The World Conservation Union

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DISTRIBUTION OF BABBLER

We are still keen to minimise the cost of distributing the *Babbler* so please contact the office if you are willing to receive it by email or can change to an address which makes it easier to receive by hand.

ACTIVITIES

NATIONAL

Library: An important benefit of having our own premises is that the library collection has now been housed in a suitable building at the office. Certain volumes can now be borrowed by members by prior arrangement with the Librarian but there is still a large amount of work to be done before the library is fully operational.

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, 7 September & 5 October. TIME: 06:30. NEW PARKING AREA: A new picnic area has been provided where cars are secure. Turn left off Chiremba Road (coming from town) into Ford Rd. opposite Queensdale Shops and continue down to Blatherwick Rd. The gate is on Blatherwick opposite Ford. Bring cash for the guard who will be on hand to unlock the gate to let cars in and out. Also bring chairs and refreshments as there is a pleasant picnic area.

Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary: Sundays, 14 September & 12 October. Meet at 06.30 a.m. at Marimba Shopping Centre, Samora Machel Avenue West. Bring chairs and refreshments. Beginners are most welcome and spare binoculars will be available. We encourage members with children to attend. *October 12 is Mashonaland Branch Annual Breakfast — booking slip enclosed.*

Sunday outings

28 September 2003: Afdis Settling Ponds, Stapleford: Meet at 6:30 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.

26 October 2003: Chiota Communal Area. South of Harare with varied habitat including acacia scrub. Wattled Cranes are reported. We will be hosted by Chiota Bird Club and the local Chief. Meet at 6:30 a.m. at Agrifoods, 33 Remembrance Drive, where cars can be left in secure parking and transport sharing arranged. Bring refreshments and chairs.

Thursday evening meetings

18 September 2003: A video evening, where 2 or 3 interesting films on birds will be shown.

16 October 2003: A quiz evening using the Roberts CD Identification Games on computer. Last year there was great competition and everyone, from beginners to experts, had a lot of fun.

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 (11 and 25 September & 9 & 23 October). 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.

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

There are still some places on the trip to New Year's Gift Estate. Bookings will close 5th September. A booking slip is attached. Booking will be on first come, first served basis.

MATABELELAND BRANCH

Monthly Outings

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

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

Visit to as many as possible of the Verreux'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.

Sunday 28 September: Talk and demonstration by John Minshull entitled "Special adaptations by birds for fish-eating". 49 Heyman Road, Suburbs. 4.00 p.m. for 4.30, followed by bring-and-share supper.

Saturday 18 October: Visit to Tinus and Sue Steynberg's garden at 3.30 pm. followed by tea. Contact Jean Tucker on 241079 or Margie Pearce on 247009 (h).

Aisleby

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

Saturday 27 September: afternoon

Sunday 26 October: morning

EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB

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

Sunday 28 September 2003 – Leopard Rock Hotel 6.30 a.m. J. Clegg 65610

Sunday 26 October 2003 – Campbell-Morrison (Vumba) 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: 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**

Tribute must be made for the enormous amount of work that has gone into the translation into Shona of the Education Committee's book, "Enjoying the Birds of Zimbabwe". In particular, Leslee Maasdorp, Education Director, has put in many hours co-ordinating the translation and Julia Dupree, in Matabeleland, has done the layout and co-ordinated with originators and printers. 5000 copies of the Shona version are to be printed. Together with the original English version, this is a project of which Leslee and Julia and all members of BirdLife Zimbabwe can be justly proud.

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

The Manager for Education and I visited Chiota early in July and met with some of the teachers, heads and Chiota Bird Club members. Due to a breakdown of communications little had been done for our visit but the St Peters Head and Elisha Chipendo rounded up enough participants together to make the long day worthwhile. The Bird Club would welcome BLZ members and would benefit from their input on a bird walk.

The training course for new members and teachers was held on the 19th July 2003. Speakers giving presentations were Geoff Lowe, Leslee Maasdorp (on migratory species), Ian Riddell (on owls) and Oscar Mitumbili (on raptors). The latter stole the show with his African Hawk-eagle and Black Sparrowhawk. This is how a Form 1 St Vincent Pupil describes the talk. "At first the game warden told us about the life of an African Hawk-eagle and he showed it to us. It has about the size of a hen in size. It is 11 years old and female. It has very long nails. It hatches eggs after 60 or 70 days. Hawk-eagles are very fast hunters, they usually hunt in an open woodland. They have aero-dynamic, they fly up to 70/80 km/hour, they feed on rabbits. We also learnt that female Hawk-eagles are bigger than the male ones." by Sandra John. Twenty participants as well as twenty Form 1 St Vincent School Ruwa students attended. The falconry birds and falconer stole the show.

Our Bird Awareness Programme will be put into schools in and around Eiffel Flats and Renco next term. **Leslee Maasdorp, Education Director**

HONDE VALLEY Forest Specials

The many Eastern District forest specials are the major attraction in this area. The Western Banded Snake-eagle, African Cuckoo Hawk, African Crowned Eagle, African Goshawk and Augur Buzzard are the most commonly seen raptors. The rare Chirinda Apalis and Roberts's Warbler are the only two near-endemic species in Zimbabwe I also found there.

Four forest doves can be found in this area; The Eastern Bronze-naped Pigeons feed in the canopy with Blue-spotted Wood-dove, Tambourine and Lemon Doves feeding on the forest floor. Species found mainly in the canopy are Livingstone's Turaco, Silvery-cheeked Hornbill, White-eared Barbet, Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird and Dark-backed Weaver. Rufous-bellied Tit and Red-necked Spurfowl call from the dense thickets on the edges of the forest and tea fields.

Other species include Narina Trogon, Green-backed Woodpecker, African Broadbill, Square-tailed Drongo, Grey Cuckooshrike, Stripe-cheeked Greenbul, Orange Ground-thrush, Black-fronted Bush-shrike and Magpie Mannikin. Short-winged Cisticola can be seen near the edges of the forest, or calling from the top of dead trees in clearings in the woodlands and tea fields. Red-throated Twinspots and Green Twinspots feed on the ground amongst the dense thickets and Lesser Seedcrackers and Anchieta's Tchagra are common residents at Wamba Vlei.

The Red-capped Robin-chat and White-rumped Swift have stayed over winter with a good number of birds recorded during June and July/August.

Abasi Jana – Education Officer

Accommodation is available at Aberfoyle Club (dinner, bed and breakfast); Eastern Highlands Club (self-catering) and rustic cabins using the Club facilities, should people be interested in coming to the valley to see these, and more, species. Tariffs available on enquiry. Val Marshall (028-2252-7 ext 235), Sue Arkell (028-2252-7 ext 243) and Aberfoyle Club 028-2385 Fax/Phone.

WELL, BLEATING WARBLERS! IT'S A CAMAROPTERA!

"There are several reasons for the changes to certain bird names, but basically the key is international standardisation," Phil Hockey, professor at the Percy FitzPatrick Institute of Ornithology, told us. The common names of birds have always been a problem the world over because, until recently, there was no standardised reference list of common names. This meant that birders were confronted with a potential plethora of names for the same bird, in different regions or between different guides. To find a solution, the International Ornithological Committee (IOC) appointed regional subcommittees which have, during the past two years, been compiling a standardised list of common names for all the world's birds.

Inevitably, some of these names differ from those that have been in use in southern Africa for decades. This means that Southern Africans will just have to get used to their louries being turacos, some of their francolins being spurfowl and the distinctive gymnogene being a harrier-hawk, among others. "The document of bird names runs to 700 pages so there is much to debate" said Hockey. "In the latest Sasol guide, we've made some changes we didn't particularly like but for the sake of conformity, we ran with it."

The new names aren't just for standardisation though. New species keep popping up too. With the strides made in molecular DNA techniques, we are discovering that birds previously regarded as subspecies are, in fact, new species entirely. Take the case of the long-billed lark — it has gone from being one bird to 5: Agulhas, Benguela, Cape, Eastern, and Karoo.

Then there were the errors, such as birds of different genera being given the same common name, as was the case for robins. They have been renamed scrub-robins, robin-chats and akalats. Also there is the example of the green coucal which isn't a coucal at all, it has been renamed the Green Malkoha. We are about 99% there now"

Just when you've mastered the new names, you're in for another shock: classification. Evidence garnered from molecular research suggests that the evolutionary classification currently used by most field guides is incorrect but so far no-one has been brave enough to use the new ordering in the field guides. When it does come, you won't be finding those penguins, grebes and albatrosses where you last left them! (Extracted from *Getaway* magazine April 2003).

MASHONALAND BRANCH

Len Bruce — Slides of Namibia. Thursday 19 June 2003. Nearly 30 people wisely showed up for Len's slides of northern Namibia, Kaokaveld and Etosha. There weren't too many birds to be seen but the slides of scenery, people and Etosha game were excellent and enhanced by Len's commentary. Len had taken the trouble to educate himself on the history of the various areas he visited and passed it on in an entertaining fashion. Len's slides and talk left us all aching to visit Namibia. He should be employed by their Department of Tourism. **Jennifer Carter.**

Alex Masterson on Cisticolas. Thursday 17 July 2003. Those of you in Harare who missed Alex Masterson's highly entertaining and educational talk on cisticolas should be kicking yourselves! I wish those who had seen it before had warned me to bring a video camera as I would love to have been able to record it so I could watch it again and again. We will ask Alex back next year and I will take a video camera! Don't miss it next time!

We heard of how, at one stage, from specimens examined, it was thought there were over 170 different species of cisticolas but a retired Rear-Admiral in the British Navy, fortunately a bachelor, found the time to travel, particularly in Africa, and re-categorise the specimens. He brought the count down to 43, among them the Zitting Cisticola which occurs all through Africa and parts of Asia, down even to Australia where Alex saw one when he was there recently for BirdLife.

Alex then told us how to identify these LBJs by their habitat and behaviour. I made notes but still want to see the presentation again (and record it!). I warn you again, don't miss it next time! (PS Alex wouldn't commit himself on how to pronounce 'cisticola'!) **Jennifer Carter**

Brookmead Farm BROMLEY: (ODS: 1831A2) – Sunday 22 June 2003

Jenny Faasen welcomed 16 of us to her lovely Bromley farm. We saw White-bellied Sunbirds, Blue Waxbills and Dark-capped Bulbuls in the garden before Jenny led us away around the farm. There were Brown-hooded Kingfisher, Fork-tailed Drongos and Red-billed Hornbills before we saw 3 Spotted Thick-knees, an unusual sighting. We also saw several Groundscraper Thrushes which we don't always see. Down at the stream were a pair of Yellow-throated Longclaws, African Stonechats and Common Waxbills. We also saw 4 Buffy Pipits which flew into a tree when disturbed by us. As we relaxed with our tea back in the garden, there were a Lesser Honeyguide and Miombo Double-collared Sunbirds and Scarlet-cheated Sunbirds. Altogether 67 species were recorded. Our gratitude to Jenny for her warm welcome and invitation to return any time. **Jennifer Carter**

CHRISTON BANK BOTANIC RESERVE. ODS: 1731C1 – Sunday 27 July. 2003

There was a turnout of 7 of us by the time we arrived at the Botanic Reserve at 8.15 a.m. As usual we managed to give lifts to those that wanted them. This is a reminder to our retired members that we usually manage to give lifts to all of those that need them as we tend to see very few of our retired members on outings these days.

The weather started off fine and cool but steadily warmed up to become ideal for walking in such a hilly area. When we reached the Mazowe River at the bottom of the flatter valley section we found that it was flowing well but much degraded by the ongoing gold panning. Wood poaching has increased over the last 3 years to the point where it is now significant. However, this is still a very pleasant and scenic place to visit and, as with much of the country, the late summer rain had resulted in good vegetation cover. In the riverine habitat our highlights included a Giant Kingfisher, 2 Terrestrial Brownbuls and a Brown-crowned Tchagra, while away from the river, in the valley, we saw 2 African Harrier-hawks and 13 White-fronted Bee-eaters flying overhead. The hilly terrain yielded 3 Lazy Cisticolas, 2 Grey Tit-flycatchers and a Striped Pipit. Unfortunately we did not pick up any Mocking Cliff-chats, Boulder Chats or Familiar Chats or any eagles.

Human disturbance may have reduced the wildlife as no mammals were seen and only dassies were heard. The total bird species count was only 50 but I had not seen Grey Tit-flycatchers or a Striped Pipit for several years and Brown-crowned Tchagra are more typical of lower altitudes.

Richard Dennison

MATABELELANDAISLEBY 28 June 2003 (ODS: 2028B1)

Jeanette, Penny, Bob and I found ourselves debarred from entering Aisleby, because the farm was in quarantine due to foot-and-mouth. This turned out to be to our advantage as, following a tip-off from Harry Erwee, we proceeded over the river to a private farm on the far side of the Upper UMGUSA Dam. Harry had seen exceptionally large numbers of Cape Shovelers and Maccoa Duck a couple of days before and, lo and behold, there they were, floating just off shore, a huge clot of Maccoa – lifeless wooden decoys, all with their heads under their wings (possibly because of the uncivilised weather which was overcast, windy and cold) and their tails sticking up. To be fair, it was only these 82 that were idling – there were several more active, pootling around a bit farther out, and bobbing up and down on the waves. However, none seemed inclined to dive.

Then, to the right, was large raft (72 in all) of animated shovelers swimming off round the point, plus a pair fishing contentedly in the little bay, and another singleton standing on shore displaying his ostentatious orange legs. Shovelers do nothing by halves, do they – their bills are exaggerated in every dimension and their legs outrageously bright. And so to the Cape Teal – modest, attractive, not usually present in large numbers and quite often not present at all. We were thrilled when, from the bridge on the way in, we saw several swimming in the river with lots of Little Grebes and Red-knobbed Coots. But then we saw these two large clumps on the main dam and in the end counted a total of 68. None of these species is your everyday bird in Matabeleland, actually, and in fact it seems that these are record numbers, exceeding by far anything previously noted, particularly for Maccoa and Shoveler, Cape Teal have visited us in quite large groups during previous dry winters, but not that large. And it's fairly likely that we didn't see all, as apart from rather choppy water, the middle and far side of the dam were out of range.

Coming down to earth – but actually still on the water – we also noted countless Little Grebes, (“countless” because they would keep diving); 200+ Egyptian Goose and 386 no less – but probably actually considerably more – Red-knobbed Coot; not a great number of Red-billed Teal; a few Comb Duck; an African Spoonbill all alone; two little jewels in the form of Malachite Kingfisher, perched at the edge of the river and diving to collect insects off the green algae; two Giant Kingfishers and one Pied Kingfisher; and African Wattled Lapwing, Crowned Lapwing and Blacksmith Lapwings, all making different screeches at the same time, to the apparent discomfort of the little Kittlitz's Plovers and Three-banded Plovers who found themselves dashing up and down their own and each others' patches.

On land there were lots to see and hear. The habitat in this area is pretty varied comprising, in addition to mud, lots of acacia, some eucalyptus, an informal settlement, quite extensive Phragmites and sedge, and an active abattoir – which you can't avoid passing next to (ugh), other than by boat.

There were Marico Flycatcher and Marico Sunbird; Meves's Starlings and lots of Wattled Starlings; a cheeky Crimson-breasted Shrike and static Southern White-crowned Shrikes and a Common Fiscal; something zitted past which was apparently a suitably-named Zitting Cisticola, while we were busy admiring three brightly-coloured Brimstone Canary and identifying another brown job in the form of a Tawny-flanked Prinia. Overhead were African Palm-swifts and Little Swifts and Barn Swallows and Grey-rumped Swallows, the latter apparently a fake as part of its scientific name is *Pseudhirundo*. And then there were Pied Crows, an immature African Fish-eagle and a Black-chested Snake-eagle – and a Tawny Eagle which came down amongst the Egyptian Goose and didn't come up again for ages – apparently because it had an enormously bulging crop possibly occupied by something dead just swallowed. We had a most rewarding, though rather short, afternoon's viewing, and we came away with the intention of keeping a close eye on this area, despite likely difficulties with fairly evident security challenges, not to mention the presence of the abattoir.

Subsequent visit on 16 July 2003 with Michael and Nancy Irwin. Large numbers of Maccoa Duck, though more fragmented, were still present (over 55 in one group) but the water level had dramatically decreased and most large groups of birds (we could just pick out but not accurately count Cape Teal and Maccoa) were down towards the other end of dam out of binocular and telescope range. Overhead around eight Marabou Storks, pestered and bombed by every Pied Crow in the vicinity, slowly dropped down over the abattoir. A flock of over 30 Pied Avocet flew in to join a few already on the dam; and several Spur-winged Goose, two African Pied Wagtail, three or four Lark-like Bunting and an increased number of Black-winged Stilt can be added to the original list. **Julia Duprée**

EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB

Chinziwa Scout Camp, VUMBA (ODS: 1932B2) – Sunday 27 April 2003

A healthy-sized group of 12 met at the entrance to the camp at 7 a.m. on an initially rather grey morning. Peter, a fairly recent, very keen recruit had 'footed' the 25km from his rural home the previous day to be in town for the trip. What commitment! We hoped it was going to be worth the effort.

Andrew Cowell, our link with the scouts, led us to the park place and gave us a general introduction to the area which was mostly *Brachystegia* woodland and very quiet and still dripping wet from the previous evening's rain. Nothing was seen for a while as we negotiated the 'dangerous' dog and made our way downhill to a more open area. So far only a Red-throated Twinspot had been heard. However, in the clearing the sun appeared and a few birds were persuaded to show themselves. Fortunately, Bart and Petra were able to fill the silences with fascinating facts about Buffalo beans and various plants. A Hamerkop flew in, Black-headed Oriole, Variable Sunbird and Collared Sunbird and Tawny-flanked Prinia were sighted and a Yellow-breasted Apalis called.

As we made our way into the woodland again the birds disappeared but Petra filled the void by showing us a leafless flowering orchid. While observing this, we noticed a party of 6 Retz's Helmet-shrikes moving quietly through the trees. Next was a family of Red-faced Crombec, a lifer for our Zambian friends and maybe for Bart. Further on in a forest section was a large party of African Yellow White-eye, a White-tailed Crested Flycatcher, Dark-backed Weaver and Yellow-bellied Greenbul. Soon, to our surprise, we were back at the car park but now it was warm and sunny and the tall Msasas were alive with birds and our poor list suddenly began to grow; more sunbirds, lots of Miombo Tit, Black-backed Puffbacks, more Cardinal Woodpeckers and crombecs and African Dusky Flycatcher and Ashy Flycatcher. Our last but not least was an unmistakable Black-eared Seedeater on a dead sunflower. What had begun as a rather unpromising morning had finally come up trumps. Our final count was 44 species. Many thanks to Ray Beer for sanctioning the visit.

Ken Dixon

LA ROCHELLE PENHALONGA (ODS: 1832D3) Sunday 29th June 2003

Whoever thought that this cold, drizzly day would produce spectacular birding for us "chilly" birdwatchers who had braved the frigid weather? Six members of the Bird Club set off early for La Rochelle – an elegant and hospitable hotel famed for its good and varied bird species – expecting some relief from the bad weather.

In the Aloe Garden (many beautiful varieties in flower) we spotted some Eastern Highland Specials e.g. Olive Sunbird, Tambourine Dove, Red-backed Mannikin, Red-throated Twinspot, Grey Pendulinitit and Ashy Flycatcher. In fact, there were sunbirds everywhere in the Aloe Garden (Collared Sunbird, Amethyst Sunbird, Variable Sunbird, Miombo Double-collared Sunbird, and Olive Sunbird). Some rare species confused all of us and after much debate and many "looks" we were very excited to record the Pallid Honeyguide (this species differs from the more common Lesser Honeyguide as it lacks the dark moustachial stripe and has a faintly scaly mottled throat not as evident as that of the Scaly-throated Honeyguide which we also heard calling) — the Pallid Honeyguide according to *Roberts'* displays a "tail-to-beak chasing" behaviour, which this bird certainly did for about an hour or so and its call is a "zeet-zeet" which was clearly heard. Among other recorded species were Livingstone's Turaco, Black Cuckooshrike, Swallow-tailed Bee-eater, Dark-capped Yellow Warbler, Bar-throated Apalis and Yellow-breasted Apalis and Mountain Wagtail. After a welcoming cup of hot coffee, we wandered around the Hotel Gardens to find a Blue-spotted Wood-dove – this species is easily distinguishable from the similar Emerald-spotted Wood-dove by its very obviously yellow-tipped red bill and blue spots. A bit of hide and seek ensued as we tried to locate a mysterious call in a tree canopy – this bird was spotted by Peter and was confirmed as a Whyte's Barbet. Amidst some discussion about the "Chipoko" which was said to haunt one of La Rochelle's guest houses, I spotted a Grey Heron sitting luxuriously in a tall tree.

The rain began to descend in earnest bringing our birding to a halt shortly after 11.00 a.m. We headed home to Mutare with a checklist of more than 50 species – not bad for a chilly, wet day which we "bona fide" members braved. Special thanks to Mr. Simon Herring who very kindly provided us with coffee and chocolate cake and to the members who dedicatingly attended this outing.

One question – do Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters migrate? **Trust Mauyuni** (A Level Student)

**LA ROCHELLE, PENHALONGA (QDS 1832D3) – BIRD RINGING DEMONSTRATION
SUNDAY 27 JULY 2003**

This eagerly awaited event was attended by 10 members of the Club, and we are deeply indebted to Bill Chadder, as well as Jill and David Todd, who put on a fascinating demonstration of the netting and ringing of our avian friends.

We left the Museum somewhat later than usual, as Bill and his helpers had been putting up the nets at La Rochelle from 6.30 a.m. onwards, and we arrived at 9 a.m. to find everything ready and Bill about to start the ringing. This is an extremely detailed procedure and we are privileged to have been able to witness it.

Bill pointed out that the safety of the netted bird is of paramount importance, as is the location of the nets, the background of each of the nets having been carefully considered according to the type of birds we expected to find. The members then saw the difficulties encountered in the extraction on the birds from the nets, and how carefully they have to be handled.

Firstly, each one is placed in a cloth bag, and then the following procedure is carried out. The bird is weighed in the bag, it is then removed and while it is hand held in the appropriate manner the bag is weighed to determine the weight of the bird. This is followed by various measurements being taken; the length of the culmen, the tarsus, and the wing and tail. The moult is then checked and recorded and the sex and age determined as far as possible. The bird's size, the shape of the breast and the colour are also noted.

Although there were relatively few birds netted and ringed, observing this demonstration kept us attentive and keenly interested throughout the morning. The following birds were ringed, the old names being shown in parenthesis:

Striped-cheeked Greenbul (Striped-cheeked Bulbul)

Dark-capped Bulbul (Black-eyed Bulbul)

Variable Sunbird (Yellow-bellied Sunbird)

Olive Sunbird

Miombo Double-collared Sunbird

Green Twinspot

Red-throated Twinspot

Black-backed Pullback (Puffback)

We are most grateful to Bill, Jill and Dave for a most interesting and informative morning which was followed by our enjoyable lunch at the Hotel by the majority of our Group. **Alistair Christie**

KAROI BIRD CLUB

KAROI BIRD CLUB
RYDINGS School — Saturday 6 June 2003 (QDS 1629D3)

We had a much more successful walk this time — species-wise and birdwatcher-wise! Eight of us in all, 6 adults and 2 juniors started out at 06:30 around the main dam and adjacent woodland on a beautiful balmy morning; winter is slow here this year. African Fish-eagle was on a dead tree in the dam, Little Grebe on the water, Great Egret on the bank and 11 Reed Cormorant flying overhead. Swainson's Spurfowl called, together with Cape Turtle-doves and Emerald-spotted Wood-doves. African Green-pigeon were sunning themselves. Gorgeous Orange-breasted Waxbills were in the grass along the dam wall. In the woodland, we heard Black-crowned Tchagra, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird and our usual scolding White-browed Scrub-robin and saw Green Wood-hoopoe, Chin-spot Batis, Meyer's Parrot, Grey Go-away-bird, and White-crested Helmet-shrike, amongst others. 38 species in all here but we proceeded to the top dams and added a further 25; African Jacana, Malachite Kingfisher & Pied Kingfisher, Common Greenshank, Blacksmith Lapwing & African Wattled Lapwing, Wire-tailed Swallow and Grey-rumped Swallow. There were also Groundscraper Thrush, Three-banded Plover, Grey Heron and African Sacred Ibis. As we entered the woodland, Helmeted Guineafowl exploded from the undergrowth, causing us to miss a heartbeat. In the canopy were African Yellow White-eye, Long-billed Crombec, Grey-backed Camaroptera, Brubru, White-bellied Sunbird and Pin-tailed Whydah on top. A Lizard Buzzard was heard in the distance.

On a later walk, 18 June, we saw a single Black-winged Stilt, a male Saddle-billed Stork, 8 Green-winged Pytilia, Terrestrial Brownbul, a pair of Pale Flycatchers, Jameson's Firefinch and

African Hoopoe. Grey-rumped Swallows were flying low and both Purple Widowfinch and Steel-blue Widowfinch were seen with Magpie Shrike and a Long-tailed Paradise-whydah, still in breeding colours. A lone Black Stork was with a Grey Heron. **Merle Mitchell**

Rydings School — Saturday 5 July 2003 (ODS 1629D3)

Five of us did the walk on a crisp morning, around the dam and adjacent woodland. It was very quiet with only 38 species and nothing unusual. **Merle Mitchell**

RYDINGS School — Saturday 2 August 2003 (ODS 1629D3)

Four plus one junior decided to look at the top dams this time. Small as they are, they are still holding quite a bit of water with lilies and weed covering a fair amount of the surface with grassy islands and, at 06:30, the mist was thickish to start. We were delighted to discover how busy they were with more water birds than usual. 16 Red-billed Teal, 8 Black-winged Stilt, 12 Three-banded Plover, several Little Grebe, African Jacana, Wood Sandpiper, a pair of Egyptian Goose, Reed Cormorant, Grey Heron, Great Egret, a pair each of Malachite Kingfishers and Pied Kingfishers, African Wattled Lapwing, Crowned Lapwing and Blacksmith Lapwing on the banks with African Pied Wagtail. Grey-rumped Swallows and Wire-tailed Swallows flew over the water. As we moved into the woodland, the far-carrying drumming of the Bearded Woodpecker seemed particularly loud in the early morning. Other woodland birds were the doves, including Namaqua Dove, all busy with their calls. White-browed Robin-chat was very vocal, together with Arrow-marked Babbler, which were plentiful and we heard the gentle whistle of Red-faced Mousebirds as 10 of them flew over. Just 40 species in all. To add here, fireguards have been burnt on Rydings and the Crowned Lapwing plentiful in the area — 44 counted! Also saw Temminck's Courser and Red-capped Lark here and, with much patience, found the nest of a pair of Grey-rumped Swallows — the usual ant hole and right next to a well-used footpath! **Merle Mitchell**

MIDLANDS BRANCH

Rio Tinto, Patchway Mine, Kadoma (ODS 1829B4) — Saturday 5 July 2003

This mining area is situated 15 km west of Kadoma. Russell Chittenden, the Mine Manager, had kindly organised transport. We set out walking at 10:00 a.m. on a cold, overcast and windy day. The large resident colony of Little Bee-eaters was actively feeding from any vantage perch, especially the gum trees all around the dumps. A permanent, residual mine water area on top of a slime dump is a haven all year for hundreds of birds. A flock (100+) of Greater Blue-eared Starlings plus 4 Wattled Starlings (NB!) were happy drinking in a sheltered thorn tree area. Red-eyed Dove, Cape Turtle-dove, Laughing Dove and Namaqua Doves all use the watering area. A total of 39 species were seen or heard. Lilac-breasted Roller, African Yellow White-eye and Chin-spot Batis were the unusual sights. Russell and Cheryl have encouraged the birds to their large garden with many feeding areas and water sprays. They love to watch the birds at close range all year. The Brown-hooded Kingfisher just loves diving across the pool to freshen up! The many species at different times of the year are an indication of a happy environment around the mine area. **Margaret Parrock** (Thanks, Margaret! It's good to hear from the Midlands!)

TAIL FEATHERS

White storks (ODS: 1731C3)

On Wednesday 30th July 2003, Grant Nealon saw 17 White storks foraging around in a newly burnt area in the vleis and grassland area between Borrowdale and Alpes roads HARARE ± 100 m from the road. Graham Carter also saw about 20 in the same area around the same time.

Fork-tailed Drongo eating fruit/ Bronze Mannikins near Main Camp — HWANGE (ODS: 1826D2)

Working through the grounds at Main Camp Hwange recently with one of the parks guides, we saw a Fork-tailed Drongo pick something up off the ground and land in a tree about 5 meters away. It was a ripe Buffalo Thorn fruit which the bird held in its right foot. It proceeded to bite off and swallow the outer skin and flesh. When it had eaten away all the fruit, it swallowed (after 3 attempts) the seed.

On the road at Livingi Pan, a flock of about 8-10 Bronze Mannikins flew across the road in front of us. It was a mixed flock of adult and immature birds. I believe they are found on the Gwaai but cannot find any records for this area. Has anyone else seen them here? **Grant Nealon**

Western Violet-backed Sunbird, KAROI (QDS 1629D3)

I was delighted to spot a male Western Violet-backed Sunbird in our garden here in Karoi on 1 May. I saw a bird hovering by the spider-webs in the Lady Chancellor and noticed its very white breast, short, sturdy bill and the colour extending just below the chin not onto the breast. It perched a moment, back to me, and there was the beautiful violet on the back, top of the head and a touch in the dark colour under the chin. The last time I saw one was on the farm (QDS 1629D2) in August 1995 where it was breeding. Later in the morning, the female was in the Kenya Croton. As she flew off, away from me, the violet on the top of her tail was very evident. To me she is the most 'handsome' of the female sunbirds. The pair was again in the garden on 15th May. **Merle Mitchell**

At the end of March I was in CHIRUNDU and one evening we visited a flooded pan (about 15km from Chirundu on the Makuti Road QDS: 1629A1). There was abundant bird life there and it was wonderful to see the transformation of the pan from a sterile puddle in August last year to a hive of breeding activity. A highlight for me was to see a nesting pair of Lesser Moorhen and there were several Little Grebes on nests as well. Black-winged Stilt foraged in the shallows and a flock of about 30 Comb Ducks flew around and finally landed within a group of White-faced Duck. A couple of White-backed Duck and several pairs of African Pygmy-goose were found in amongst the water lily pads. Unfortunately, apart from a lone impala, no game was seen. There had been quite a bit of rain during the weekend and the humidity was extremely high – the sugar in the sugar bowl almost dissolved and the salt became a compacted lump in the salt cellar. **Di Rushforth**

Albino Dark-capped Bulbul – MANA POOLS (QDS: 1529C2)

Mana Pools must be as close to heaven as you can get – in my book anyway. Thus we get there as often as we possibly can. The birding is, of course, great – and best, I find, within a 1 km radius of the lodges. Just sitting under a mature *Faidherbia albida* for half an hour can reward one with up to 25 species when the feeding parties pass through. Best is in the early morning when the first rays are hitting the tops of the trees and those Albidas that are festooned with flowering *Capparis tomentosa* are especially favoured by the early birds.

During our (late) June 2002 visit I was amazed to see this white Dark-capped Bulbul amongst the noisy early morning revellers. Pure white except for the crest being greyish. The next morning, at the same tree – two, looking just white cockatiels – so out of place. One wondered about their life expectancy. Alex Masterson and I saw them later and he commented that they were quite likely from the same brood. We were at Mana the same time this year and, to our amazement, we saw one again, in the same area.

The question arises – was it one of the same birds, or another brood. **Robin Kemp**

Fish-eagle over Mabelreign HARARE (QDS: 1731C3). On June 20, I heard the call of an African Fish-eagle whilst gardening at 35, Ridgeview Drive, Sentosa. I first thought that someone must be playing a bird-call tape in the neighbourhood but heard the crowing of Pied Crows and observed about a dozen of these escorting an adult Fish-eagle in loose formation, flying at a height of about 100m directly above me over Sentosa Hill, from SE to NW. The eagle flew with steady, slow wing beats and did not seem too worried about its noisy escort!

Purple-crested Turacos at Mount Pleasant (QDS: 1731C3). Dr. L. Jaklitsch, who lives in Sims Road, Mount Pleasant observed a group of 20 or so Purple-crested Turacos in his garden on 27 June. Twelve were clambering about in the same tree, with others moving about in other parts of the garden. **Rolf Chenaux-Repond**

A winter outing at Leopard Rock VUMBA (QDS: 1932B2)

Many people were invited to Janet Marchussens 60th birthday party at Leopard Rock over the weekend of the 26/27th July 2003. It was a privilege to be there, after festivities about 10 of us gathered to go birding with Crispen early on Sunday morning.

The birds of the Bvumba Highlands by Harwin, Manson, Manson & Mwadziwana (1994) (H/Guide Vol. 40, Supp I) was taken as the authority, but there is another tourist list called *Birds of the Vumba* (Anon)

HMMM has 243 species and 66 not in Anon, while Anon has 213 species 47 of which are not in HMMM. So there is clearly a need for extra exploring in the Bvumba.

Neither list had the White-breasted Cormorant, *Phalacrocorax carbo*, sitting on a rock at the hazard in front of the Golf Club for 100 of us to see, and the Common Sandpiper, *Tringa hypoleucos*, and the Green Wood-hoopoe, *Phoeniculus pupureus*, were not in the HMMM list.

There must have been 20-30 nests of the Little Swift, *Apus affinis*, glued to the overhang high rise buildings, while I never saw the birds they had clearly bred as we heard young calling in the nests. A pair of Giant Kingfisher, *Megaceryle maxima*, was at the LR reservoir near the gate. Only 3 Silvery-checked Hornbill, *Bycanistes brevis*, were seen on the Golf Course by Alex Morris-Eyton. Three White-eared Barbets, *Stactolaema leucotis*, were seen feeding in *Ficus sur* as a family party, the population of this bird in this country cannot be very large. The Grey Cuckooshrike, *Coracina caesia*, was seen by some. We had good views of the Ashy Tit, *Parus cinarescens*, there must have been two pairs in close proximity to each other and we were lucky to see the Grey Penduline-tit, *Anthoscopus caroli*. The Yellow-streaked Greenbul *Phyllastrephus flaviostratus* was a lifer for the writer but they are clearly commonly seen in the area. The Chirinda Apalis, *Apalis chirindensis*, and the Roberts's Warbler, *Oreophilais robertsi*, were gleaning together often low down in the canopy of trees at 07h30 in the morning, and enjoying the new sunny day. We await the hunter who describes the eggs, incubation period and nestling period of *A. chirindensis* and the incubation period & nestling period of *O. robertsi*. A pair of Ashy Flycatchers, *Muscicapa carulescens*, was there, so too was the Black-fronted Bush-shrike, *Malaconotus nigrifrons*. The Collared Sunbird, *Anthreptes collaris*, was seen at this altitude and it is also seen in our hot river valleys like the Angwa River, but they don't seem to be in between, maybe it is the forest or the forest edge element that they like. We saw 2 Dark-backed Weavers, *Ploceus bicolor*, Seven Yellow-bellied Waxbills *Estrilda quartina*, were noted and they must be our smallest waxbill, yet my copy of *Roberts'* gives no weights for this bird and we saw 11 Red-backed Mannikins, *Spermestes bicolor*, feeding on the fairway before we made our way back to breakfast. According to HMMM this is the commonest of the three species in this area.

David Rockingham-Gill pforbes@mango.zw or 4 Fernleigh Road, P.O. Borrowdale

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.

SALE OF BIRD BOOKS

In terms of the will of the late Dick Harwin his extensive collection of books, including many of his bird books, are to be disposed of by auction. The proceeds from this sale will be donated to Birdlife Zimbabwe for use in educational projects. For further details please contact Mr. Hawkins of AA Auctions as follows:

Email: quoting SALE OF BIRD BOOKS in the heading
phone/fax: 667437/8 or 662375 quoting return fax number.

For Sale: Virtually new Miranda 16x50, coated optics with rubber eye cups. Price Z\$130000 negotiable

Contact D. Dalzell on 6762 Triangle

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

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