

BABBLER

The Newsletter of -

BirdLife Zimbabwe

THE BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL PARTNER IN ZIMBABWE

Member of IUCN, The World Conservation Union

ISSUE #57 – NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2003

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BABBLER DISTRIBUTION

Please help us minimise the cost of printing and distributing the *Babbler*. Contact the office if you are willing to receive *Babbler* by email or can change to an address where it can be delivered 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.

MASHONALAND BRANCH

Regular outings

Mukuvisi Woodlands: Sundays, 2 November & 7 December. 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, 9 November & 14 December. 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.

Sunday outings

23 November 2003: Irvine's Game Park, Harare South. 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.

There is no December outing BUT

30 November 2003: SPECIAL OUTING TO Cleveland Dam / Haka Park with RIO TINTO for their annual international "Birds in the Environment" bird count. Rio Tinto International has a 5-year joint venture with BirdLife International and branches world-wide are involved. RTZ has this year donated a million dollars for improvements at Cleveland Dam so we will meet there with RTZ staff members. RTZ will pay for entry to Haka Park where we will picnic after the walk. Meet at Cleveland Dam at 6:30 a.m. Bring chairs and refreshments.

Thursday evening meetings

20 November 2003: BirdLife Education Committee Report Back on their activities in 2003.

There is no December meeting.

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 (13 and 27 November, 11 December). 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

Monthly Outings

Sunday, 23 November: Talk and video/slide presentation by Guave Johnson on his recent Cameroon trip at Gail Amyot's home, 9 Whitestone Way, Burnside: 243282. 4.00 p.m., followed by bring-and-share supper.

Saturday, 6 December: Christmas social at 92 Arnold Way, Burnside. 6.00 p.m. Drinks followed by bring-and-share supper.

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.

Sunday 30 November: morning

EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB

Contacts: Jane Clegg ☎ 020-65610

Bridget Holland ☎ 020-61369

Sunday 30 November 2003 – Mountain Home, Penhalonga 6.00 a.m. A. Christie 64197

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

REPORTS**NATIONAL****OFFICIAL OPENING OF BIRDLIFE ZIMBABWE OFFICES**

On Friday 10th October, Dr Hans Heinsbroek, the Netherlands Ambassador to Zimbabwe and a keen birder, unveiled a plaque officially opening the new BirdLife offices in Eastlea, watched by invited BirdLife benefactors, members and staff. He was then presented with the book "Important Bird Areas of Africa" by Susan Childes who co-authored the Zimbabwean section of this important work. BirdLife President, Dave Sheehan gave the background to the project, started by John Paxton and Sue Childes in the Philippines in 1998 in discussions with Dr Johanna Winkelman, Head of the International Division of Vogelbescherming Nederland. VBN, our Partner in the Netherlands, supplied most of the funds for the purchase of the premises. BLZ members augmented the funds with contributions to the "Buy a Brick" campaign. A message of congratulations and support from Dr Winkelman was read. Drinks and snacks were provided for the hundred or so guests attending, the Ambassador having donated many bottles of imported wine for the occasion. A convivial evening resulted.

DONATION FROM NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY (NAS)

NAS, which is the BirdLife Partner in the United States, has very kindly donated a portfolio of shares that they held in Zimbabwe. The portfolio is valued at around Z\$25 million and this will provide us with a small but steady income that we will be using to fund various conservation and educational activities. There was also Z\$800 000 cash in its account which has been given to us. The portfolio will be retained to enhance our long-term financial stability.

BIRDWATCH 2003

Due to the current fuel situation this event will not be held this year. In October next year there is to be an international Birdwatch and it is intended that BLZ will fully participate in this.

BIRDLIFE ZIMBABWE IN OZ

Zimbabwe's link-up with BirdLife International is actually all about making the move from being a hobby club to a conservation business. It is bringing with it enough funds from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) in Britain to be able to pay people to do our in-house admin on a more efficient basis than before and the opportunity to do more ourselves about promoting bird awareness amongst all our people and with that, hopefully, better bird conservation. But it is also bringing responsibilities: responsibility to get on with those other jobs and to make optimum use of the monies we have been getting, responsibility to improve the effectiveness of our admin to expand our membership and to raise monies ourselves. Even here the RSPB is helping. It has set up courses to which it sends people from BLI's partners from all around the world. This year there are four courses to be attended by two BLZ representatives. Dr. Chip Chirara went to Slovenia and Philippines. I went to Melbourne, Australia in February and Ottawa, Canada, in May.

The Melbourne course was essentially about fund raising: not just cake sales, caps and T-shirts but looking for and securing a share in the big monies that are available out there in the developed world for looking after birds all around the world. It was about identifying and selecting projects that the organisation can handle, preparing the groundwork by ensuring that the people who are going to be involved know what is happening and will support the effort and then costing the project. In this regard,

the value of the volunteer contributions of you, the members, is an important and often overlooked factor. One also has to take into account such normal business considerations as capital depreciation, insurance and repairs and maintenance of assets. A good deal of time was spent on the preparation and presentation of appeals for funds from those big organisations which have come to expect certain conventional forms of analysis of proposed projects and measurable and visible indicators of progress and success in achieving the project objectives. The buzz words are “problem trees” and in this context “log-frames”, short for logical frameworks, which the big monies expect to be presented in conventional form. It may well be regarded as a necessary evil towards enjoying the pleasures of birding but it can also be an interesting and rewarding challenge in itself, producing almost as much satisfaction as clocking up another 20 species to your African Bird List or finding your first Striped Crake’s nest! Sit down and think about it and there is so much more that could be done for birding particularly in the midst of the enormous social and agrarian upheavals that we are going through to in Zimbabwe right now that it actually provides quite a bright light at the end of that tunnel and prospects for new forms of excitement and pleasure to be derived from and for birding.

The course involved the participation of 5 course presenters including their admin back-up and 13 “students”, each from a different country. Some of the bird clubs had a turnover of several million US dollars per annum. Uruguay, the Cook Islands and Zimbabwe were at the other end of the scale. Average age of the participants was early thirties with more venerable representation for Lithuania and Zimbabwe. Greece provided extrovert ebullience and the Ukraine a little mouse of a girl who found her feet during the course and had clearly done much good work in her country. The class and polish came from Slovenia and the Philippines and entertainment from Ian Wilmot, representing the 18000 or so people of the Cook Islands. Africa was represented by BLZ, by Pauline from Uganda, who in her unhurried African way had already been through much of what the course was all about and had helped Nature Uganda to achieve a good deal as an African rather than ex-pat organisation, and by Russel from Cameroon, who spoke better French than English, who really was interested in birds and who often arrived on time. The man from Ouagadougou didn’t make it because of visa problems.

And what about the birds? The course was held at a college of La Trobe University. Wake up and look out of your residence room window and the ‘guineafowl’ running about all over the lawns along the stream meandering through the grounds turn out to be Purple Swamphens. The screeching during the night resumes early in the morning and is repeated frequently during the day – Sulphur-crested Cockatoos. Otherwise the parrots are less raucous than expected and very beautiful. In a mnondo-sized gum tree, there sleeps a Tawny Frogmouth, a king-size nightjar with the head of a big owl. Superb Wrens, Melbourne’s representative of a gorgeous family of prinia-like birds, sound like Red Bishops but, instead of red they have big patches of iridescent blues and hop about at your feet in and out of the flower-beds all over the place. Magpie Larks walk about the lawns, the dining hall and the residence corridors the overgrown (x 4) Pied Wagtails [introduced?], yodel away outside and rule the campus. My overall impression was that Australian birds are often a lot bigger than their ecological counterparts in Africa. **Alex Masterson**, Vice-President BLZ.

EDUCATION REPORT

Azoren Conference for Zoo and Reserve Educators at a venue near Lusaka was attended by Abasi Jana from 8-11 September 2003. CIDA workshop on new approaches to project design, management and appraisal was attended by Leslee Maasdorp from 6-10 October. Rhodes-SADC Enviro Education certificate course is being attended by Clayton Zazu from 1st September — 28 October.

In the absence of the Education Manager, Mrs. Leslee Maasdorp was assisted by Mr Ngoni Chiweshe (or our conservation sector) at the Chiota Workshop. 16 teachers from 10 schools attended and were enthusiastic about the project. Furamera Secondary school was the venue; the grounds were dry and degraded. One shrub survived right next to the entrance door to everyone’s delight in its branches was a Tawny-flanked Prinia nest with a chick and two blue eggs. Our agent Elisha Chipendo was delighted to receive a bicycle from BLZ for the project.

The Harare cluster held a meeting at Tynwald Primary School, to decide on a committee and future plans for the cluster. A complaint from them was that prizes we procured were rather dull. If anyone has a source of for instance cheap T-shirts we would like to buy them.

A kid’s corner in the Weekend Tribune runs feature articles on birds written by BLZ staff. Competitions run by the paper also need prizes for winners. This is good promotion for our programme.

In the Honde Valley, Abasi Jana has been involved in trying to save the Gleneagles Forest and in managing the vlei for the Wamba bird.

The new bird clubs are not too active. Can members suggest ways of getting them involved in bird watching? They are keen but do not have a leader competent in identifying birds.

I am involved in getting a training course for college and university students at Rifa organised for the 29th November – 5 December. Other interested adults who can provide \$75 000 for the full course plus food and transport could apply for a place. **Leslee Maasdorp**, Education director

CONSERVATION & DEVELOPMENT

Building On Experience Module III

I attended Building on Experience Module III in the Philippines in from June 30—July 9 2003. Building on Experience is a BirdLife International strategy to build capacity in partner organisations and is run by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the BirdLife partner in the UK. Module III covered financial management in non-governmental organisations. Alex Masterson attended Modules II and IV in Australia and Canada.

IBA Monitoring Planning Workshop

I also attended the Important Bird Areas (IBA) monitoring planning workshop in Naivasha, Kenya at the beginning of August 2003. The purpose of the workshop was to promote use of the regional IBA monitoring framework in Africa. Specifically, the aim of the workshop was to:

- Share practical experiences in IBA monitoring (both basic and detailed) based on the framework
- Identify the main constraints and barriers encountered, and map out practical ways to overcome them.

The workshops proposed modalities for data analysis and information dissemination. Although BirdLife Zimbabwe was not involved in the regional IBA programme that was funded by GEF a few years ago, the organisation has done well in terms of species work in BAs like the Driefontein Grasslands.

Visit to Chiota Communal Lands

Ngoni Chiweshe, Assistant CDO, Osiman Mabhachi, Crane CO and I travelled to Chiota Communal Lands to look for a possible community project site. The team visited Nyamungai Pan. I understand that the site is traditionally protected. The only notable disturbance to the area was trampling by cattle. A variety of water birds were observed. The CDO will meet the Councillor and Chief of the area in the next month to discuss future co-operation. A detailed report of this trip is available from the CDO.

CAP 2003, Mweka College, Tanzania

I attended CAP in Tanzania from the 18th – 23rd September 2003. A variety of issues were discussed. The Africa BirdLife Partnership is developing a new strategic plan for the next four years. I am one of the people developing the plan for Habitats. I also held several side-meetings with colleagues. BLZ managed to secure funds for a National Blue Swallow Action Plan. This will be held in February 2004 and will be facilitated by Steven Evans of BirdLife South Africa.

Chip Chirara, Conservation and Development Officer

MASHONALAND BRANCH

Unfortunately, we again were unable to see Peter Ginn's slides of his visit to northwest Zimbabwe and Chobe as he had to travel out of the country on 19th August. Worse, his trip resulted in his leaving the country and settling in George, South Africa. Peter did not want to leave Zimbabwe but the collapse of tourism in the country had destroyed his business. Zimbabwe's loss is South Africa's gain. All at BirdLife Zimbabwe wish Peter and his family all the best for the future.

Dr. G. Archibald, International Crane Foundation (ICF) — Tuesday, 26th August 2003

In spite of news of Dr. Archibald's visit to Zimbabwe coming too late for the last *Babbler*, some 30 members were lucky enough to hear him talk about the ICF of which he a co-founder.

Dr. Archibald spoke of ICF projects throughout the world. In China's poorest province, a nature reserve has been created to help protect the Black-necked Crane, which was severely threatened, as with most crane species, by the destruction of wetlands. ICF sourced a US\$200 000 fund to assist local farming groups with loans so that they can improve their lives. The farmers are assisted by Forestry rangers who also educate locals about the cranes. The number of cranes has increased from about 400 to 700. On the Amore River on the Chino/Russian border, ICF has assisted a Russian conservationist to lease for 50 years an important crane area which is home to Red-crowned Cranes plus 5 other crane species. A

camp has been set up where children from as far away as deep inside China and locals are educated about conservation matters.

Another project, started by locals and assisted by ICF and others, is at Kitale in Kenya. In the Siawa area, the wetland home of Grey Crowned Cranes and Sitatunga antelope was being destroyed. The guiding principles are that locals must be involved and that people must benefit from the protection of the wetlands. The wetlands now feed into fish ponds and gardens and donated trees have reduced erosion. In 12 years, 1.25 km of the river has been restored.

In the USA, the Whooping Crane was nearly wiped out but numbers are gradually being restored by hand-rearing and release.

In Zimbabwe, there are an estimated 200 Wattled Cranes and 2000 Grey Crowned Cranes. They have never been more threatened. **Jennifer Carter**

Video Evening — Thursday 18th August 2003

About a dozen members watched a very interesting video, “Mother’s Little Helpers” about the Chuff in Australia where a large family is required to help raise a brood each year. This is because food supply is steady all year without the spring flush of food sources as happens elsewhere, to help parents raise their young. There a family of 15 or more birds is needed. If numbers get too low, the flock will die out. The film showed what was said to be the kidnapping of a fledgling by another family whose numbers were presumably getting too low! Other species were also shown and there are certainly some spectacular birds in Australia.

The second film was about the Siawa project in Kenya mentioned above. The project was started by a local man who was getting concerned about the destruction of the environment. They are doing what they can to involve locals by doing research into the renewable utilisation of the wetlands, for example using swamp grasses and reeds to feed cattle. They have a tree nursery as well. The video showed a very good example of this type of project and has been handed to Head Office for education purposes.

Jennifer Carter

Chikupo caves, MASEMBURA – Sunday 24 August, 2003 (ODS 1731A4)

We had an exceptional turnout of 16 people for a destination which is over an hour’s drive away. Fortunately no one was left behind although the Reeses were forced to use up petrol that they could not really spare. The day started off very foggy and the fog did not lift until about 7.45 a.m. However, the day then became fine and warm. At the caves site the vegetation has been left reasonably undisturbed but about a kilometre away the tree chopping is very significant. The main cave is difficult to access and the paintings are well preserved but the smaller cave is at ground level and has had some of its paintings damaged and defaced.

We basically encountered birds from 3 habitats, the rocks, the bushveld and the miombo woodland. Granite kopjies: On the granite inselberg opposite we could see a Verreaux’s Eagle. We suspected a nest close by. At the caves we saw Speckled Pigeons, Rock Martins, about 6 Mottled Swifts and Red-winged Starlings. Above the caves we came across an Augur Buzzard, White-necked Ravens, Cinnamon-breasted Buntings, 2 Freckled Nightjars and 4 Familiar Chats. We did not go into the boulder country and saw no Boulder Chats, Mocking Cliff-chats or the special Cape Eagle-owl, but this is where they live.

Bushveld: Associated with any bushveld were many common birds; Natal Spurfowl, Emerald-spotted Wood-dove, Brown Snake-eagle, Lizard Buzzard, African Grey Hornbill, White-browed Robin-chat, Black-headed Oriole, Tropical Boubou, Black-backed Puffback, Brown-crowned Tchagra and Yellow-bellied Eremomela.

Miombo woodland: between the 2 kopjies the dominant tree is *Uapaca kirkiana* which Coates-Palgrave calls the mahobohobo but which I call the mzanje. There is a forest of these trees and we were there before the ripening season when fruit comes out of there in lorry loads, in here we encountered a bird party which consisted of Green-capped Eremomelas, Rufous-bellied Tits, Cardinal Woodpeckers and Golden-tailed Woodpeckers, African Yellow White-eyes and African Dusky Flycatchers. The Rufous-bellied Tits were a lifer for most of us and seemed to be on the fringe of the Uapaca woodland in the mountain acacias, *Brachystegia glaucescens*. Birds that were not associated with the bird party included Gabar Goshawk, Ashy Flycatcher, Klaas’s Cuckoos, Whyte’s Barbets, Greater Honeyguide, Black Cuckooshrike, Mionbo Tit and Southern Black Tits, Black-crowned Tchagra, Retz’s Helmet-shrike and Striped Pipit. The total count was 57 species. **Dave Rockingham-Gill**

AFDIS, Stapleford, Zvimba District — Sunday 28th September, 2003 (ODS 1730D2)

About 10 of us met at Afdis, in Mashonaland West. The focal point was the settling ponds for industrial waste from the distillery, just north of the warehouses. The place is characterised by enormous old gum trees, reedbeds near the water and mown grass, almost like a golf course.

There was a pair of Black-shouldered Kites, and a Black-chested Snake-eagle flying and hovering overhead. A pair of Hottentot Teal was on the weed filled ponds below the settlement ponds, and the reed entanglements attracted many Black Crakes & Common Moorhen. The Settlement Ponds were fairly clean and only one Common Sandpiper, 15 Wood Sandpipers and a pair of Three-banded Plovers were there. While nearby in the soak zone were 8 African Sacred Ibis, half a dozen African Wattled Lapwing and an African Snipe was heard. Red-eyed Doves were the dominant bird in the gum trees, where they obviously roost in large numbers before flying to their feeding grounds. A Grey Go-away-bird was seen and a single European Bee-eater (I recorded my first one for the season on 23/9/03 in Greendale. Richard Brooke used to say those seen before the 20th September were South African breeding birds and those after, were European migrants). The Greater Honeyguide and Lesser Honeyguides were seen in the woodland and both Red-faced Mousebird and Speckled Mousebirds seemed equally common. Meanwhile in the reedbeds we saw or heard both the African Reed-warbler & Marsh Warblers, the Cape Reed-warbler, the Dark-capped Yellow Warblers and the Little Rush-warbler. Other LBJs were Bar-throated Apalis, Rattling Cisticola & Red-faced Cisticolas and Tawny-flanked Prinias.

Some saw a African Paradise-flycatcher (my first record of the bird was on 26/9/03 in a Greendale Garden). When we adjourned for tea near the Kenya Coffee Shade Trees we finally worked out that there were two flocks of Wattled Starlings, one of 40-odd & another of 50-odd. It was good place for sunbirds. We saw Amethyst Sunbird, Scarlet-chested Sunbird, Purple-banded Sunbird and Copper Sunbird among the black sunbird group, and the White-bellied Sunbird, Variable Sunbird and Miombo Double-collared Sunbird in the collared group. We also noted 3 different canaries, Black-throated Canary (about 10), the Yellow-fronted Canary (1), and the Streaky-headed Seedeater (2).

In the recent *Africa Birds and Birding* (Vol. 8 No. 3, June/July, 2003) it invites people to help write up a new 7th edition of *Roberts*. Many of the birds mentioned in this article, according to my information, are little known. For example nests in Zimbabwe

	<u>Eggs measured</u>		<u>Incubation</u>	<u>Fledging</u>
	<u>1981</u>	<u>1984</u>		
419 Mottled Swift	36	3	U/R	U/R
556 Rufous-bellied Tit	4	12	U/R	U/R
655 Green-capped Eremomela	38	4	U/R	U/R
691 Ashy Flycatcher	11	24	14 days	U/R
720 Striped Pipit	27	29	U/R	U/R

So if you know something that *Roberts* does not, tell them for the next edition. Write to “The Percy Fitzpatrick Institute of African Ornithology, UCT, Rondebosch 7701, Cape Town, South Africa” or email. **Dave Rockingham-Gill**

CHIOTA Bird Club: Nyamungai Pan — Saturday 23 August 2003 (ODS: 1831A1)

Nyamungai Pan, about 45 minutes walk from our home, is one of the most interesting bird-watching places in Chiota (indeed in Zimbabwe — Ed!), where a variety of bird species can be seen giving hovering, bathing and swimming displays around the pan. Also making the pan interesting are indigenous fruit trees such as (mutamba) monkey orange, waterberry and chocolate nut (muhubu). (No Latin names for these from me! Ed.)

In the first hour we saw 45 bird species including a pair of Wattled Cranes, flamingo, Saddle-billed Stork, Half-collared Kingfisher [?], African Paradise-flycatcher, Quail, Long-crested Eagle, African Goshawk, African Spoonbill, Kori Bustard, Cape Shoveler, Meves’s Starling, Black Cuckoo and Namaqua Dove & Red-eyed Doves, Greater Painted-snipe, Pin-tailed Whydah, Comb Duck, Black-shouldered Kite, Egyptian Goose, Grey Heron and Black-headed Heron and African Black Duck as well as many more common species. Most of these birds appear daily at the pan. Later we watched African Sacred Ibis catching frogs, a Yellow-billed Duck and, still later, saw a pair of Secretarybirds.

Elisha Chipenda, Co-ordinator, Chiota Bird Club.

MATABELELAND BRANCH

Talk by John Minshull

On Saturday 28th September, BirdLife members met at Julia's home for an enlightening talk by John Minshull, an entomologist, ichthyologist and freshwater ecologist, erstwhile of the Museum. Although a fish man, he knew a lot about birds too! His talk was titled "Special adaptations by birds for fish-eating".

His illustrations, drawings and actual specimens from the Museum collection made this talk not only informative but hands-on for everyone who had to discover for themselves which birds had the adaptations he had explained. We were privy to some scientific discoveries which have not been published yet, but we are assured these will be in *Honeyguide* in the near future. We look forward to seeing them in print.

Thank you John for taking the time out of a busy life to give this talk; the excellent turnout was indicative of the reputation of the speaker.

We ended with a bring 'n share supper, welcomed new members and got to know other members better. **Jeanette Cross**

EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB

VUMBA and White Horse Inn – Sunday 29th September, 2003 (ODS: 1932B1)

7 members of the bird club met in the car park of the White Horse in this Sunday, and were immediately hailed by awesome views of a calling Narina Trogon. Even members of the hotel staff came out to spot the bird with borrowed binoculars and their excitement was contagious. What a first lifer for them. Nearby in a tall *Albizia gummifera*, 2 Livingstone's Turacos were huddled together, and these were joined by some White-eared Barbets and we could hear White-starred Robin.

Part of the aim of the day was the Bvumba miombo and the hope of a few specials therein, so we drove down towards the Mozambique border and made several stops. We listed Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird and Yellow-fronted Tinkerbirds, Black-backed Puffbacks, Red-faced Crombec, Chin-spot Batis & Cape Batis, Black-crowned Tchagra & Brown-crowned Tchagra, Striped Pipit, Violet-backed Starling and Grey-headed Bush-shrike. We heard Lesser Honeyguide and we pondered long and hard about the call of a possible Brown-backed Honeybird, but decided against listing it as we were not 100% sure. We all commented on the number of tree orchids in this area, many of which were flowering, so we were briefly diverted by Bart to learn a bit about them.

A bit lower again and we saw Silvery-checked Hornbills and Green Wood-hoopoes. A short drive further, at a small river crossing, with some lush riverine forest, we added Red-capped Robin-chat, Tambourine Dove and Brown-hooded Kingfisher. Heading back up to the hotel, we stopped at a field of proteas and we could add Olive Sunbird, Amethyst Sunbird, Variable Sunbird and Collared Sunbirds, and African Dusky Flycatcher, Eastern Saw-wings, Red-chested Cuckoo and African Emerald Cuckoo.

In the hotel grounds we met up with Peter, who is guiding guests and has made huge effort to learn the trees as well as the birds, and he took us for a walk into the forest below the hotel. Here we added Red-throated Twinspots, White-browed Robin-chat, White-tailed Crested Flycatcher, Stripe-cheeked Greenbul and African Yellow White-eye. We saw all three of the day's raptors from the hotel's patio: African Harrier-hawk, African Crowned Eagle and Augur Buzzard. The lush hotel gardens are a haven for birds, and are looking particularly beautiful. The old-world charm of the hotel, run by its owner of 20 odd years, David Graham, really deserves some support by keen birders. The indigenous trees in the garden exude history, and can be an armchair introduction to the Bvumba.

KAROI BIRD CLUB

RYDINGS School — Saturday 4 October 2003 (ODS 1629D3)

Our walk for this month was well attended, 5 adults and 2 juniors. We started out at 6:30 a.m. on a clear, fresh morning at the small top dams. They were busy though the numbers were few. White-faced Duck and Comb Duck, Red-billed Teal, Egyptian Goose and Little Grebe were on the water, waders were Common Sandpiper and Wood Sandpiper, Black-winged Stilt and African Jacana, Great Egret, Blacksmith Lapwing and African Wattled Lapwing, Three-banded Plover and Hamerkop on the shore-line. Swallows over the water were Mosque Swallow, Grey-rumped Swallow and Wire-tailed Swallow. The Pied Kingfisher

was trying his luck and Malachite Kingfisher crossed our vision in a flash of blue while Reed Cormorant passed the time on protruding stumps. Along the way to the smaller dam, we were puzzled for a moment by birds in a bush, hard to distinguish against the light, but some on the ground showed up as Wattled Starlings. Others in the woodland were Brubru, Black-backed Puffback, African Green-pigeon, Orange-breasted Bush-shrike, Magpie Shrike, White-browed Scrub-robin and White-bellied Sunbird, amongst others, but no African Paradise-flycatcher — they arrived in our garden on 13th September. At the smaller dam a raptor flew down low, harassing the lapwings and doves on the shore line. It looked like a falcon, but only after several swoops, with no success, and after it settled on the top of an acacia, were we able to get a view of the underparts — very white. The upper parts gave the impression of pale brown speckled, legs and bill yellow?? Anyway, it was an interesting finish to our walk. Other viewings over September gave us Black-chested Snake-eagle lifting a snake, Hamerkops building a new nest, 2 White Stork flying overhead and an African Scops-owl calling mid morning!

Merle Mitchell

MIDLANDS BRANCH

Ard Behg Farm, Chakari — Saturday 19th August, 2003 (ODS: 1829B2)

Spring is decidedly with us and the birds and the bush tell us so. An afternoon trip to this new area was well worth it. 38 species were seen or heard. The sunbirds, White-bellied Sunbird and Scarlet-chested Sunbird, were abundant in the baobab trees, while Amethyst Sunbirds were enjoying nectar in the Kenya Coffee trees. The Southern Masked-weavers were noisy and active, as were the White-browed Sparrow-weavers. The dry open fields showed African Pipit and a close-up view of Mr. & Mrs. Yellow-throated Longclaw was a thrill. The Southern White-crowned Shrike and Crowned Lapwing both thrive in open thorn bush. Black-headed Oriole is a hot, dry talker. Common birds seen were Dark-capped Bulbul and Yellow-bellied Greenbul, Red-eyed Dove, Cape Turtle-dove and Laughing Doves, Black-collared Barbet and Crested Barbets, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird, Yellow-fronted Canary, Bronze Mannikins, Grey Go-away-bird and African Grey Hornbills. **Margaret Parrock**

The outing scheduled for Saturday 11th October will still take place despite two members having attended the evening function at BLZ offices in Harare the previous evening.

Despite a turnout of less than fifteen members these outings are interesting and well conducted by Kevin Barry and Bernard Beekes. Veld fires are being continuously set in the SOMABHULA farming area and the huge areas of grass cover where the Melodious Lark (#492) survives are now without any form of cover and on the opposite of the National highway there are numerous new settler houses. There are patches of bare desolate soil, a few donkeys and no cover for the Melodious Lark.

At the next organised meeting an attempt will be made to encourage a few interested folk from Kwekwe to attend. More easily said than done.

Reports are submitted after outings, by email, but obviously were too late for inclusion in the latest *Babbler*. **John Barry**

TAIL FEATHERS

BLZ Mashonaland Trip to TRIANGLE 5th July 2003 (ODS: 2031D4/2131A2)

Triangle Limited wanted to carry out a bird survey within the Triangle Area to determine what was present as a start to further bird surveys to gauge changes, movements etc. BLZ Mash was invited to send down birders to assist in the initial survey to get the study started. At the 38 km peg on the Chivhu to Zaka Road [1930B4 FELIXBURG Widgeon Pan?], we stopped at a pan which yielded two Wattled Cranes, a Saddle-billed Stork, Spur-winged Goose, a Capped Wheatear. An African Quailfinch was heard. (On the way back, there was also a pair of Grey Crowned Cranes at this site. Ed).

On arriving at our destination, Muwonde Lodge [High Syringa], where we were well looked after, we went for a bird walk in the bush/game park in the afternoon. We also had a Sunday morning walk at this location. Next morning, after a very early breakfast we were picked up by our team members for a full day of birding in designated habitats for the inaugural bird count. Two of us accompanied each of the five Triangle bird groups who not only transported us to the locations but also fed us. Saturday 5th July was a bitterly cold day and all groups experienced wind, drizzle or rain with minimal sunshine. Birding conditions were certainly not good with little bird movement and nothing to sing about.

Five different areas were visited:

1. Small supply dam, riverine bush, cane fields, woodland with dry river-bed, small sewerage ponds. (Total: 77 species seen).
2. Jiri Dam and boat club area (Total: 78).
3. Sugar cane fields, miombo woodland and riverine (Total: 86).
4. Rocky hills, virgin bush and a dry river bed (Total: 61).
5. Centre pivot area of section 8 together with the feedlot, woodland and riverine (Total: 70).

Overall Total (including Muwonde Lodge environs): 157 species

It was interesting to note that the fewest bird species were seen in the most untouched area. No unexpected birds were seen but of interest were several Black Cuckooshrikes. These birds apparently move from the highveld to the lowveld in the winter months. On the Jiri Dam, more than 100 Pied Kingfishers were counted as well as 40+ Little Egrets, 40+ White-breasted Cormorants, 60+ White-faced Ducks & 200+ Reed Cormorants indicating an abundance of small fish. The birds among the cane were mainly Dark-capped Bulbuls with some weavers and African Yellow White-eyes. On the cut fields, there were only African Pipit and Buffy Pipits.

I feel we contributed to the bird survey and hope we instilled a better appreciation of birdwatching. We thank Triangle for their fabulous hospitality and urge them to invite us again when the migrants are back and the temperatures are a bit more reasonable. **Tony Alegria**

Egyptian Goose at NYANGA (ODS: 1832B4)

I was at Nyanga over the holiday weekend, and on Saturday 9 August walked around Rhodes Dam. As we arrived at the dam, there was an unmistakable call, and then a little later a pair of Egyptian Geese was seen together on the water. I can't find any record of them being recorded in the eastern highlands previously. They are not shown in the Atlas for the Juliasdale QDS, and are also not recorded in Peter Turnbull-Kemp's Nyanga NP booklet.

I have recorded Scaly-throated Honeyguides on Church Road, Troutbeck, and in the Rhodes Hotel/dam area for a couple of years now. They were in full voice at both localities on the 9th. **Colin Baker**

September Sunbird Paradise (ODS: 1731C2)

In mid September 2003 my family and I set out to explore, for the first time, HIPPO POOLS (approximately 160 km north east of Harare) in the UMFURUDZI Wildlife Area and what an absolute delight this was. The setting is exquisite with the trees giving one a very distinct feel of being in the Zambezi valley. The Fire Combretums and Pink Jacarandas and many other trees were in full flower providing ideal pickings for sunbirds. Within minutes of arrival in camp both Scarlet-chested Sunbird and Amethyst Sunbirds had made their presence known. On our first bird walk later that same afternoon, within the environs of the campsite, the third sunbird to put in an appearance was Western Violet-backed Sunbird and quite quickly a Variable Sunbird was twittering away overhead.

The following morning, 17th September 2003, we went on an early walk, of several hours duration, and this showed all the same species again and a mid-way fleeting brush with a Narina Trogon brought the party to a halt to try and get better sightings. During this process a Purple-banded Sunbird was located. Whilst scanning some tall riparian trees containing the Fire Combretum I had a quick glimpse of a very small yellow bird and on relocating it was instantly a little confused as I appeared to be studying an African Yellow White-eye without a white eye! As I then noticed the longer, but still quite short, de-curved bill, her husband popped into view and I was staring, somewhat open mouthed, at a pair of Plain-backed Sunbirds! The short bill, blue throat and forehead were noted and the complete lack of any metallic sheen on their backs clinched the identification for me. What a morning!

A drive and a short walk in Miombo and Brachystegia woodlands that same afternoon gave us White-bellied Sunbird and a Miombo Double-collared Sunbird giving us a total of eight sunbird species in a matter of five or six hours birding. This was truly an experience to be remembered. It would have been wonderful to have more time and been able to find Collared Sunbird and Copper Sunbird in the area and achieve a clean sweep, as both of these are distinct possibilities.

In some of the older field guides Plain-backed Sunbirds are marked as existing sporadically in the area, but this is not so in the newer books probably because they were not recorded

during the atlas period. Having previous experience with this bird in Mozambique in similar densities of forest I do not feel that this sighting should be unexpected. **Tony Wood**

HIPPO POOLS Game Count – 7th, 8th & 9th November 2003

Hippo Pools is a peaceful bush camp situated on a secluded spot on the banks of the Mazowe River. There are fully equipped lodges of different sizes to accommodate families or larger groups. There are also smaller more basic cabins and an excellent area for campers all at very reasonable rates. The UMFURUDZI Safari area is within a two hour drive north of Harare on mainly tarred road.

There are numerous footpaths that can be followed or those who are not so energetic can use 4X4 vehicles or pick-ups to travel around the area, which is some 74000 hectares in extent. The beautiful and scenic Mazowe River forms the southern and eastern borders for some 60 km.

Numbers of Sable, Kudu, Grysbok, Klipspringers, Wildebeest, Warthog and Impala have all been sighted on previous game counts, and of course there were the resident pods of Hippos in the river. Amongst the many birds seen there were the Dark Chanting-goshawk, Water Thick-knee, Red-chested Cuckoo, Senegal Coucal, Grey-headed Kingfisher, White-fronted Bee-eater, European Bee-eater and Little Bee-eaters, Trumpeter Hornbill, Bearded Scrub-robin and the Scarlet-chested Sunbird. African Pitta and Narina Trogon have also been seen in this area. This is an event for either the whole family or single people to take part in. Bookings can be made through the Hippo Pools booking office which is situated in the Bronte Hotel, Harare 730123 wildernesstrust@msasa.co.zw
7th November arrival: 18.00hrs 7th November. Meeting at the Hippo Pools boma.

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.

CAMPING EQUIPMENT

BLZ requires camping equipment for use by conservation officers in the field, if anyone has or knows of any for sale, please contact the office.

2004 Subscriptions

Ordinary / Schools/ family Pensioners	\$5000 \$1500	Junior Institutional	\$1000 \$10000
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New Members

Mr and Mrs. Nyandoro	Clare Wright	Darren Lanca
Sister Janice McLaughlin	Materera Primary School	Materera Secondary School
Furamera Primary School	Furamera Secondary School	Chitandara School
St Phillips Secondary School	S Chimbwanda	B Marombedza
Mr and Mrs. Newmarch	Anthony Kaschula	Prince Jakata
GEF Dilley	J Mutukwa	

Merchandise for Sale — please contact the office for prices and availability.

T-shirts — adults & children	Two Tone caps
Cricket Hats	Embroidered badges

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.

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