

BABBLER

The Newsletter of -

BirdLife Zimbabwe

THE BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL PARTNER IN ZIMBABWE

Member of IUCN, The World Conservation Union

ISSUE #59 – MARCH/APRIL 2004

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ACTIVITIES

NATIONAL

The annual general meeting of BirdLife Zimbabwe will be held at the offices of BirdLife Zimbabwe, 35 Clyde Road, Eastlea, Harare at 10.00 a.m. on Saturday 8 May 2004 followed by a braai. See the enclosed AGM for details.

MASHONALAND BRANCH

Regular outings

Mukuvisi Woodlands: Sundays, 7 March & 4 April. TIME: 06:30. Directions: Turn left off Chiremba Road (coming from town) into Ford Rd. opposite Queensdale Shops and continue down to Blatherwick Rd. then right into 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 March & 11 April. 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.

Sunday 28 March: Double Ro Ranch, 40 km peg Lomagundi Road. Meet at 6:30 a.m., at 2 Helena Rd, Marlborough where vehicles can be left in a secure area and transport shared. Bring chairs & refreshments.

Sunday 25 April: Ngomakurira, Domboshawa: Meet at 06.30 a.m. at Helensvale shops, Domboshawa Rd. A fee is due to Nat. Parks & there is a police presence for security. Bring chairs and refreshments.

Thursday evening meetings

18 March: Talk on Long-crested Eagles by Vernon Dickinson. Vernon rescued an injured eagle and will tell us about his observations during its recovery and after its release back into the wild.

15 April: Video Evening. An interesting video on birds will be shown.

Venue: Bowls Pavilion, Old Hararians Association, Drummond Chaplin Street, Milton Park. Time: 6.00 for 6.30 p.m. A cash bar and pies will be available. Security is provided.

Thursday outings to Marlborough Vlei

2nd and 4th Thursdays (11 & 25 March, 8 & 22 April). 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

Friday 5 March: Verreaux's Eagle Team Meeting: debriefing for 2003 and briefing for 2004. At Cecilia & Dudley Hubbard's house, 7 Hillside Road, Hillside. 6.00 p.m. for 6.30 p.m. Please bring snacks, drinks, chairs, cutlery and plates. Tel: Hubbards on 240127 (h) or Julia on 246269.

Sunday 14 March: Walk on the golf course, followed by tea, with Chris and Auriel Hansen. Meet at Qalisa gazebo, Suburbs, at 7.00 a.m. Bring chairs. Telephone Jean on 241079 or Margie on 247009 (h).

Saturday 3 April: Walk in Maureen Norton's garden and environs, 22 Mahogany Avenue, Newton West, followed by tea. 9.00 a.m. Telephone Jean on 241079 or Maureen on 471238.

24/25 April: Weekend at Antelope Park, Gweru. Camping/chalets. Walks, vulture restaurant, — this is where the immature Egyptian Vulture was seen! Please let us know soonest if you would like to come so that we can organise bookings. Tel: Margie on 247009 (h) for details of rates.

Aisleby. Telephone Julia on 246269 or Penny to organise transport.

28 March: 7.00 a.m. at Aisleby 18 April: 7.00 a.m. at Aisleby

EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB

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

Sunday 28th March: Hillside Golf Course, Mutare 6.30 a.m.

The Annual outings list will be finalised at the AGM and distributed before the April outing. 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

MASHONALAND SOUTH

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**GARDEN BIRD SURVEY – Report on the Survey in 2003

Numbers of contributors has again dropped but thank you to all of those who have continued to keep records and send them in. In particular, thanks to the people who write interesting comments about their observations on their forms.

Some interesting sightings have been reported countrywide and are worth mentioning —from Baobab Ridge, KARIBA a pair of Verreaux's Eagles flying overhead and an Orange-winged Pytilia; in a KAROI garden in March a Western Violet-backed Sunbird was seen feeding on aloe flowers; at Borradaile Trust, MARONDERA a pair of Yellow-billed Kite nested in a Pine Tree in August 2003; from a Hillside, BULAWAYO garden at the end of May a Cinnamon-breasted Bunting and from a Burnside, Bulawayo garden this bird was seen in Weeks 13 to 18, 21, 28 and 32; from Bradfield, Bulawayo a single Southern Carmine Bee-eater was seen in September in a flock of European Bee-eaters; from Greendale, HARARE in Weeks 8 to 11 a Striped Kingfisher was the first record for the garden and Meyer's Parrot and Thick-billed Weaver were eating sunflowers on a daily basis. Over the same garden during the build-up to a large storm were seen Common Swift, African Palm-swift, White-rumped Swift and Little Swifts, Banded Martin and Common House-martins, Lesser Striped Swallow, Red-breasted Swallow, Barn Swallow and Wire-tailed Swallows, a dark form Booted Eagle, Yellow-billed Kite and Black Kites, Steppe Buzzard and Wahlberg's Eagle as well as Amur Falcons. Finally, a Tambourine Dove was recorded in Week 6 in Milton Park and an Icterine Warbler has been resident in the garden for over a month in 2004.

House Sparrows. In March 2002 Michael Irwin wrote an article in the journal *Honeyguide* about the status of the House Sparrow in HARARE. His observations are that the House Sparrow is rare in Harare and whilst he speculates the reasons he admits that he doesn't know the answer.

Looking through the Garden Bird Survey records for 2003 and 2004 (January) the following is revealed. Out of 12 Harare gardens only 7 (58%) recorded House Sparrows. Of the 7 gardens only 1 recorded the House Sparrows for the whole year with the remainder reporting them for one or two months only (all in the breeding season). In comparison, all 3 BULAWAYO gardens recorded this bird with the occurrence all year at the Bradfield and Hillside addresses. Other observations came from KAROI (town) and a farm in BROMLEY where it was breeding, presumably around the buildings.

Turning to earlier surveys, the percentage frequency the House Sparrow was recorded in the 1968 to 1970 survey was 58 whilst in 1999 it was 55. Interesting that the percentages are much the same through the years albeit the latest one has a far smaller number of recorders (about half).

Senegal and Burchell's Coucals in the garden

Although the Senegal Coucal is not what one would call a "garden bird", Burchell's Coucal does seem to have adapted to human habitation.

Our survey has shown that Burchell's [! White-browed Coucal] has commonly occurred in Kariba and VUMBA/MUTARE

In HARARE gardens, the Senegal has been reported only once in Chisipite and Borrowdale (2 gardens) 25% but in the three BULAWAYO properties it is seen or heard almost all year round. It has also been recorded from KAROI and BROMLEY gardens. Comparing earlier surveys (Harare only) the Senegal Coucal was recorded in 24% of gardens in 1999 and in 13% of gardens in 1968 — 1970.

References

HARRISON, J.A., ALLAN, D.G., UNDERHILL, L.G., HERREMANS, M., TREE, A J, PARKER, V & BROWN, C.J. 1997. The atlas of southern African birds. Vol. 2. Johannesburg: BirdLife South Africa. IRWIN, M.P.S. 2002. What determines the status of the House Sparrow in Harare? *Honeyguide*, 48(1): 90-91.

Continuation of the survey

The survey will continue in 2004 and those willing to participate can get forms (with new names) from the BLZ offices. They can also be e-mailed to you if you wish

Guide to the week numbers in 2004

1 29 Dec (03) to 4 January	27 28 June to 4 July
2 5 to 11 January	28 5 to 11 July
3 12 to 18 January	29 12 to 18 July
4 19 to 25 January	30 19 to 25 July
5 26 Jan to 1 February	31 26 July to 1 August
6 2 to 8 February	32 2 to 8 August
7 9 to 15 February	33 9 to 15 August
8 16 to 22 February	34 16 to 22 August
9 23 to 29 February	35 23 to 29 August
10 1 to 7 March	36 30 August to 5 September
11 8 to 14 March	37 6 to 12 September
12 15 to 21 March	38 13 to 19 September
13 22 to 28 March	39 20 to 26 September
14 29 March to 4 April	40 27 September to 3 October
15 5 to 11 April	41 4 to 10 October
16 12 to 18 April	42 11 to 17 October
17 19 to 25 April	43 18 to 24 October
18 26 April to 2 May	44 25 to 31 October
19 3 to 9 May	45 1 to 7 November
20 10 to 16 May	46 8 to 14 November
21 17 to 23 May	47 15 to 21 November
22 24 to 30 May	48 22 to 28 November
23 31 May to 6 June	49 29 November to 5 December
24 7 to 13 June	50 6 to 12 December
25 14 to 20 June	51 13 to 19 December
26 21 to 27 June	52 20 to 26 December

Please keep up the very good work and don't forget to pay special attention to those species you may consider common such as Common Fiscal. I have noticed that my pair [HARARE] that had been resident for many years have disappeared — have any of you found a similar situation with this bird or any other species?

It must be stressed that the information given in this report is purely from an amateur's viewpoint and will hopefully provide a bit of interest to observers.

Di Rushforth

Co-ordinator

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

With schools opening, our offices have become a hive of activity. Teachers have been trained at Eiffel Flats and surroundings there were comfortable using the Shona index of *Roberts* but how expensive these books have become.

A launch of the Shona translation “Nakidzwai neshiri dzemuZimbabwe” of *Enjoy the Birds of Zimbabwe* at Belvedere Technical Teachers College. The day was the 6th February 2004 and nearly 500 teachers in training attended the event and helped to make it a very successful gathering. Mr Alex Masterson gave a good and at times very amusing address in Shona and English to the big audience. Mr Kanyowa, Deputy Director of Higher Education officially launched the book and praised BirdLife Zimbabwe for producing it. This publication will be most useful in school, communities, the safari industry and in Parks and Wildlife Authority. The Principal and Vice Principal of BTTC are thanked for the fine great hall provided for the event and for their help in conjunction with Higher Education Official Mr Chikukwa in organising it.

Leslee Maasdorp, Education Director

The Education Manager attended the National World Wetlands Day commemoration function, held on the 2nd of February 2004 at Mashumba project in Mudzi district. The theme for 2004 was “From the Mountains to the Sea. Wetland at work for us.” Zimbabwe has never before organised a national commemoration event to mark the World Wetlands Day, but this year it was possible, courtesy of funding from the SADC/IUCN Wetland Programme. It was encouraging to note that Zimbabwe is beginning to recognise the importance of wetlands, and may probably consider ratifying the Ramsar Convention in near future.

Wetlands are a very important natural resource for both people and wildlife, more so now when the whole SADC region is becoming drier due to persistent droughts.

Lessons learnt at Mashumba project are that communities can draw a lot of benefits from utilising wetlands in a sustainable way. The Mashumba project is success case of how both wildlife and people can use the same piece of land without degrading it. In the project garden, there is a diverse range of vegetables, crops, fruit trees, bananas and sugar cane, but most importantly these are grown in a manner that does not harm the wetland. Birds and other small forms of wildlife are still very evident in this wetland. The Minister of Environment and Tourism, Dr Francis Nhema graced the occasion.

A refresher workshop was held for teachers from Chitungwiza primary and secondary schools. The workshop was held at Mukuvisi Environment Centre on the 5th of February. A total of 17 teachers attended. The workshop came as a result of the request by the teachers that they needed to be updated on some of the aspects of the Bird Awareness programme. The workshop was concentrated on reorienting the teachers to the education programme activities, setting out targets and improving bird identification skills. **Clayton Zazu, Education Manager**

Crane Project Activities (November — December 2003) (QDS: 1931B3/1931B4)

I stayed in the DRIEFONTEIN grasslands IBA during the last week of November and the whole of December 2003. During my stay, I held discussions with local stakeholders, mostly key informants from the area. This enabled me to introduce myself to the locals and present the project’s main agenda to the community. I also used this opportunity to introduce the concept of Site Support Groups to the community leaders and they welcomed it. As a way of promoting the project, publicity and education materials, in the form of project information leaflets, were distributed. The target readership of these materials includes schoolchildren and adults from the project area as well as other external institutions and collaborators. I also undertook a field evaluation of the crop depredation problem by Grey Crowned Cranes during the initial phase of the rainy season. The analysis involved mapping critical areas where cases of depredation are high, identifying main crops targeted by the cranes, periods when cranes are a problem and current mitigating strategies. This provided preliminary answers as to how, why, when and where crop damage occurs. During the same period, an acoustic scarecrow for Grey Crowned Cranes was designed and fabricated. This was done in collaboration with the Metallurgical Engineering Department at the University of Zimbabwe. The prototype is ready for testing under field conditions. My stay in the prime Wattled Crane habitat was very fruitful because I got a lot of invaluable information that is going to become helpful in our future activities and also when the CIDA-funded project finally gets underway.

Osiman Mabhachi, Crane Conservation Officer

IF YOU ARE SERIOUS ABOUT BIRDING... then perhaps you should consider Honde Valley for your next outing (QDS: 1832B4)

March and April are great birding months in the Honde Valley area although birders still wanting to see the Blue Swallow should visit the area earlier rather than later during this period. All the other local "specials" are still present in abundance however.

April is the month when everything starts quietening down again in preparation for the winter. Local altitudinal migrants have mostly left the Aberfoyle and EHPL area for their winter holidays nearer the coast or up Mount Nyangani range. Like any time the year there is something for the keen birder in Honde Valley, however. This is the time to watch for spectacles such as large numbers of birds gathering in early April for the long migration back to their breeding grounds in Europe and Asia. The area is a jewel in terms of its landscape, scenic beauty and its extraordinary bird life. The IBA boasts over 370 species of birds of which no less than 15 are rare species.

Honde Valley is one of only a few places in Zimbabwe where the much sought after near-endemics, Chirinda Apalis and Roberts's Warbler can be found. Other species include, Pallid Honeyguide, the five Palm-nut Vultures, Silvery-cheeked Hornbills which can be seen in good numbers at Katiyo Primary School, Narina Trogon, Scarce Swift, Pale Batis, Grey Waxbill, Rufous-breasted Tit, Bat Hawk and many more.

A variety of forest species also occur in the area, including Eastern Bronze-napped Pigeon, Yellow-throated Woodland-warbler, Black-fronted Bush-shrike African Broadbill, Red-capped Robin-chat and White-starred Robin, Green Twinspot and Red-faced Crimsonwing. **Abasi Jana, Education Officer**

(Graham and I had a wonderful trip to Aberfoyle at Christmas. The Palm-nut Vultures flew in on our first evening and Black-throated Wattle-eyes, Red-backed Mannikin and Green Twinspot were outside our window. On Christmas Day, we had excellent views of FOUR Narina Trogon at the Lodge before finding the Wamba Bird, Anchieta's Tchagra, at the vlei. Even Abasi got excited when a Barred Long-tailed Cuckoo presented himself for us to admire, close by for 5 minutes or more. There were numerous other species. The Green-backed Woodpecker still lives near the tennis courts, a Red-capped Robin-chat called like an African Crowned Eagle — and so did the eagle as a pair soared above the Lodge until they were specks in the blue! Do visit. Ed.)

MASHONALAND BRANCH

Saturday 24th January, MARLBOROUGH Vlei, Harare, with Alex Masterson (QDS: 1730D2).

Around 15 people turned up on a cool, cloudy morning to enjoy Alex and the vlei. There has not been much rain this year so the vlei was dry in comparison to other years with only a small wet area towards the sewerage works.

Before we left the parking area, we had seen Yellow-mantled Widowbird and Red-collared Widowbird, Rattling Cisticola, Pale-crowned Cisticola and Zitting Cisticola, Common Fiscals and Rosy-throated Longclaws. For the duration of the walk, a male Western Marsh-harrier patrolled far and near, giving us superb views. A Yellow-billed Kite and a Black-shouldered Kite flew over nearby houses but other raptors were scarce. As we made our way towards the marshy areas, we had good sightings of the longclaws and a number of Black Coucals. Southern Masked-weavers, Southern Red Bishops, Common Waxbills and Orange-breasted Waxbills were all around. At the reeds, we heard but did not see Streaky-breasted Flufftails and African Rails. Among the warblers was a Broad-tailed Warbler, Little Rush-warbler and Sedge Warblers and Lesser Swamp-warblers. An African Crake shot out of the grass and two small birds we were told were Cuckoo Finch flew over. Later we had a good view of a Cuckoo Finch and Red-faced Cisticolas were seen.

A Marsh Owl burst from the short grass and Alex explained that Marsh Owls don't have a 'house', i.e. they will roost anywhere, but African Grass-owls do have a 'house' where they will always be found. And he did find us one — what a beautiful bird.

The usual doves were around and Cattle Egret, African Sacred Ibis and Grey Herons flew over.

In spite of the cultivation on the vlei, there is still a wonderful variety of bird life to be seen. Contact Ian Riddell about visiting on 2nd and 4th Thursday of each month. **Jennifer Carter**

MATABELELAND BRANCH**AISLEBY: (ODS 2028B1)**

Seven of us sorted ourselves into three (stretched) teams for the January waterfowl count. We knew that it would be a good day even before we got there, as the air was thick with the scent of Aisleby's special product, beloved by most birds, especially waders!

Cecilia, Dudley and Harry based themselves on the far shore from where they covered most of the Upper UMGUSA dam. They also did the lands from Harry's Tap upwards. Adrienne and Helga beetled around the pastures and feedlots to the left of the main road, and Jeanette and I covered the areas and holding ponds to the right of ditto road, as well as the lands up to Harry's Tap. We reckon this all amounted to 90% of the total area, the last 10% consisting of pastures criss-crossed by umpteen canals of oozing sludge, too wide for us to jump – which is why they were always left to Clive and Martin. (That's the other reason why we miss them).

Our total numbers were 4483 birds representing 45 species. Rather than ramble on, we thought it might be of more interest to give you the following figures, for January for the last 5 years.

Species	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Little Grebe	12	302	220	268	32
Pink-backed Pelican			7		
White-breasted Cormorant	35	38	19	6	11
Reed Cormorant	55	164	94	15	9
African Darter	3	17	2		2
Grey Heron	5	7	7	7	2
Black-headed Heron	11	4	17	19	12
Great Egret	3	4	1	7	20
Black Heron			3		3
Yellow-billed Egret	7			5	9
Little Egret	16	1	9	3	2
Cattle Egret	840	1398	778	771	1538
Squacco Heron	10	37	32	11	19
Green-backed Heron	3	1	2		
Abdim's Stork		4	21	106	2
White Stork	43	63	38	37	153
African Sacred Ibis	161	410	747	477	573
Glossy Ibis	18	11	18	5	30
Fulvous Duck	4	1	1		21
White-faced Duck	31	139	61		21
W-faced ducklings					45
Comb Duck	3		37	148	6
Egyptian Goose	23	71	55	130	30
Red-billed Teal	70	266	226	135	134
Hottentot Teal	296	91	147	53	37
Southern Pochard	187	242	563	533	315
Maccoa Duck		12	25	11	
Black Crake	15	10	5	6	3
Spotted Crake				8	
Baillon's Crake				1	
Common Moorhen	18	8	12	9	3
Lesser Moorhen	1				
Allen's Gallinule	2	2		4	
African Purple Swamphen	1	2	2	6	2
Red-knobbed Coot	116	1307	380	277	876
Lesser Jacana			1		
African Jacana	23	49	9	24	13
Greater Painted-snipe	2	1	2	5	
Black-winged Stilt	58	35	20	22	4

Species	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Pied Avocet					39
Blacksmith Lapwing	133	385	145	207	188
Crowned Lapwing	2	5	4		24
African Wattled Lapwing	8	45	35	60	19
Common Ringed Plover			1		
Kittlitz's Plover	1		2	38	
Three-banded Plover	12	14	19	30	4
Marsh Sandpiper	3	17	14	3	13
Common Greenshank	17	6	6	1	1
Wood Sandpiper	84	247	102	135	133
Common Sandpiper	8	8	10	7	18
African Snipe			2		
Little Stint	223	137	62	54	31
Curlew Sandpiper	69	13	6	16	29
Ruff	70	191	202	254	61
African Fish-eagle				2	
African Marsh-harrier			1		
Western Marsh -harrier	1	1			1
Pied Kingfisher	1	1			
Cape Wagtail		1	1	2	
African Pied Wagtail	6	1	1	3	
Yellow Wagtail	5	4	1	12	21

Additional species seen:

Little Bittern – 1; Yellow-billed Stork – 8; African Openbill – 1; Saddle-billed Stork – 2; Marabou Stork – 1; African Spoonbill – 1; Hamerkop – 5; Lesser Flamingo – 1; Cape Shoveler – 6.

Julia Duprée

EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB

25 January 2004, Wilderness Area of CECIL KOP Nature Reserve, MUTARE Heights. (QDS 1832D3)

The venue for this walk was changed at short notice from the Mutare Golf Course to the Mutare Heights. The organizers ensured that all participants ended up at the gate of the park at around 06h45. 16 people turned up for this well-attended walk. We wandered along the road into the park and after an initial quiet period a thin 'tsi' noise attracted attention to a bird on top of a tree; Cabanis's Bunting! The bird gave good views to all present and was still perched when we wandered on. As we walked on some pipits were disturbed from the ground and disappeared into the trees. These were several Tree Pipits. Some birds were flitting in some trees high on the hill, beyond the park fence. There were various shouts of Black Cuckooshrike, Miombo Tit, Miombo Rock-thrush, etc. For most of us these remained elusive and especially a long way off. We decided to climb up the hill and investigate the party from nearby. The scramble up the hill was worth it. All participants eventually got good views of Black Cuckooshrikes, Miombo Tits, Rufous-bellied Tits, Spotted Creepers, more Cabanis's Buntings, which were having young, and Miombo Rock-thrush. Downhill we bumped into the reason for changing the venue, a male Collared Flycatcher in full breeding dress. Unfortunately the bird was not too co-operative and never remained more than a few seconds in the same spot. A few lucky ones had good views of the bird in some trees or on powerlines; half of us had flashes of a black and white bird as it dived out of view. Still more Cabanis's Buntings showed themselves, strongly convincing everyone that they do exist and are not a figment of the (my) imagination. (See Tail Feathers Ed.) On the way back to the cars some Cinnamon-breasted Buntings showed well, also with young. Back at the cars a bird party appeared over our heads, allowing everyone good views of Red-faced Crombec, Southern Hyliota and White-breasted Cuckooshrike. With lifers galore for nearly everyone this was a very successful outing. The total bird list got up to 60 for the morning. **Carl Beel**

MIDLANDS BRANCH

Saturday 6th December 2003, Vungu River (QDS 1929D1)

Eight members led by Kevin Barry and Bernard Beekes went to the Vungu River. It was hoped to see/hear Melodious Lark but none were recorded.

Of interest was a Rufous-bellied Heron – way out of habitat, of course, in the large pool at the Vungu River Bridge on the National Highway. Also recorded were Crimson-breasted Shrike – probably the resident pair and an Ashy Tit, shown and explained by Kevin and Bernie. Three Kori Bustard who were very shy were seen along with two Tsessebe for interest. A total of fifty-five species were noted.

Saturday 3rd January 2003, Long Valley, Hunters Road (QDS 1929B1)

The visit was undertaken by ten members led by Bernard Beekes and Kevin Barry from 9 a.m. until 12.30 p.m.

What was of great interest was the number of shrikes around (seven and the White-crested Helmet-shrike — not close to the house, but present.) Only once has the Common Fiscal been observed — in 1978 – but not since. The nesting weavers were being harassed by the Little Sparrowhawk. The four cuckoos were present, with the Piet-my-vrou Red-chested Cuckoo calling far into the night and early morning hours, and were discussed. The African Openbill astonished many members as we were able to identify it in flight. The total of 78 ticked was fair for a two hour outing.

There is a planned trip to the Tuli Circle in April.

KAROI BIRD CLUB

Saturday 1st November 2003, Marshlands Farm (QDS 1629D3)

We set out, 4 adults and 4 juniors, to visit Marshlands Farm, which has a good, wet, marshy area around the dams, which was our main point of interest. We found Wood Sandpiper, Common Sandpiper and Marsh Sandpiper and Common Greenshank. A good-sized flock of White-faced Duck, a few Red-billed Teal, 2 Comb Ducks and two pairs of Egyptian Goose were there. Ruffs were also in the shallows together with a single Black-winged Stilt. A single Collared Pratincole flew off and we could see it had a damaged leg. African Snipe and Black Crake were in the bulrushes and we heard Cape Reed-warbler. Three-banded Plover, Blacksmith Lapwing and Crowned Lapwing together with African Jacana, were in the short thick grass around the edge of the water, Reed Cormorant and White-breasted Cormorant and African Darter draped on various stumps in the water and there were the ever-present Little Egret and Great Egret too. In the skies were African Fish-eagle, Black-chested Snake-eagle, Black-shouldered Kite and European Bee-eater. In the woodland around the dam were the usual doves, White-browed Robin-chat, Levaiant's Cuckoo, Broad-billed Roller, Brubru, Red-billed Firefinch, Common Waxbill and Orange-breasted Bush-shrike — 72 species in all and an enjoyable trip to this 'must be visited again' area. And we did exactly that on 17th January 2004 to do a waterfowl count. This time the White-faced Duck count was 290 and to the water birds we added Squacco Heron, Black Heron and Purple Heron, more Red-billed Teal, 2 African Pygmy-goose, a single Spur-winged Goose and 7 White-winged Tern. And for grassland birds, a Yellow-mantled Widowbird in full breeding plumage. Back to the vehicles for coffee and biscuits and a mulling over of the days sightings and anything else that needed sorting!

RYDINGS School, 3rd January 2004 (QDS 1629D3)

Six of us gathered at the top dams for our first walk of the New Year. The dams were still a third full and we found Little Grebe, African Jacana, Red-billed Teal, Wood Sandpiper, Blacksmith Lapwing and African Wattled Lapwing, a single Black-winged Stilt and a Black Heron fishing. Yellow-billed Egrets were on the shore-line and lovely Orange-breasted Waxbill in the grass. We wandered down to the smaller of the two dams where Kevin and family were camped, doing some ringing. There weren't many birds netted but we had the opportunity to watch him ring some. A Little Sparrowhawk was of interest and a Cattle Egret! Some of the others netted were a Klaas's Cuckoo, Spotted Flycatcher, Brown-hooded Kingfisher and Blue Waxbills. At the end of November 2003, we saw 8 Hamerkops in a group walking at the edge of the dam. 12 December 2003 there were 24 White-backed Vulture at the carcass of an impala and we counted 40 African Green-pigeon fly out of a *Ficus thonningii*. 28 January 2004 a single Jacobin Cuckoo was perched on a small tree watching the world go by. Haven't seen one of them here in a while! **Merle Mitchell**

TAIL FEATHERS

The Cabanis's Bunting pursuit 3rd January 2004, Jeans Walk Arcturus (QDS 1731C4)

The quest was for a good sighting of the Cabanis's Bunting (*Emberiza cabanisi*), a late summer resident in the miombo covered hills, not that common being very area specific, but almost a guaranteed sighting during a good rainfall season. Our birding group left the meeting point at 7 a.m., for a morning ramble through predominantly miombo hillside, down to typical thicket riverine vegetation found along the Mutenje River and farm irrigation canal, then onto the dam, before heading back up the hill for a lunch braai, refreshments, rest and another quick afternoon walk. During the day's activities, 13 species were spotted of the current 255 recorded for this area. Unfortunately with the very erratic rains falling this year, the effects are definitely being seen on decreased bird numbers, the birds having quickly moved off to wetter feeding locations. Two typical 'control' species, also very common summer residents in this area, are the Amur Falcon (*Falco amurensis*) and European Bee-eater (*Merops apiaster*), normally both found in large groups, waiting for the termitaria to release their prized 'flying ants' plus a guaranteed feast on many other woodland flying insects. Both species have now moved off en-mass to literal greener-pastures and productive feeding grounds, a very good indicator of the rain season to be expected.

A few notable sightings were 20 White-backed Duck (*Thalassornis leuconotus*), 2 Tambourine Dove (*Turtur tympanistria*) having a territorial dispute, calling often and offering a great call comparison with another nearby vocal Emerald-spotted Wood-dove (*Turtur chalcospilos*), 4 Broad-billed Roller (*Eurystomus glaucurus*), 8 White-breasted Cuckooshrike (*Coracina pectoralis*), 6 Retz's Helmet-shrike (*Prionops retzii*), a pair of Western Violet-backed Sunbird (*Anthreptes longuemarei*), a feeding party of Red-backed Mannikins (*Lonchura nigriceps*) showing off their stunning russet backs and spotted primaries, plus a very unperturbed Cinnamon-breasted Bunting (*Emberiza tahapisi*), sitting on a large rock, totally unfazed by the 7 binocular intruders studying her from 2.5 metres away (actually she was a bit too close for the binos to focus properly!). However, the bird of the day – Cabanis's Bunting – remained totally elusive after a hot, energetic but very enjoyable day. A few fatigued birdwatchers concluded that to see this Cabanis's Bunting one obviously needs to have a joint of Cannabis!! **Darryl Tiran**, Mutenje Hills, Arcturus.

(Darryl should visit Cecil Kop next year, I think! Ed.)

Visit to CECIL KOP Game Reserve, MUTARE Heights – top part 18th January 2004 (QDS 1832D3)

We recently enjoyed an amazing visit to the top section of Cecil Kop Game Reserve in Mutare (by this I mean the area below the mast; accessible by a road to the left when entering Mutare.) The area is rich in mature Brachystegia woodland, interspersed with large, granite boulders. Consequently, it attracts a host of miombo bird specials. In one morning, we managed to find Spotted Creeper, Rufous-bellied Tit, Miombo Tit, Miombo Rock-thrush and Southern Hyliota. Other species less restricted to the miombo but just as exciting included Green Twinspot, Lazy Cisticola, Black Cuckooshrike and Yellow-bellied Waxbill. Best of all, undoubtedly, was a male Collared Flycatcher which presented us with brilliant views. This is the second occasion on which we have sighted Collared Flycatcher in the Park – as a summer visitor to the area it clearly favours the well established woodland here. We did notice how unusually common each of these regular species was. For newcomers, it is advisable to walk off the road a little – firstly, the road itself is terribly rough for vehicles and secondly, the birds seem to prefer spots which are more densely wooded. Take a picnic if you wish; it is so pretty!

Bridget, Benjy and Emma Holland (No wonder EDBC changed their venue for January! Ed.)

SELDOMSEEN, VUMBA (QDS 1932B2)

We spent Christmas at Seldomseen this year, so good for the soul, soaking up the forests and special species seen at the Bvumba. And the weather was good, no rain for days on end. Two sightings of interest to mention. We saw an albino juvenile Stripe-cheeked Greenbul at the VUMBA BOTANIC GARDENS, its mother feeding it Mountain Peach (*Aphloia theiformis*) berries. It was pure cream all over but for the faintest suggestion of grey on the head, and the eye appeared to be black. Is it only a true albino if the eye is red?

The other sighting, of course, was the Buff-spotted Flufftail, so elusive. On one morning at around 10:00 a.m., the female was perched two metres up in a small shrub sunning herself and not too

concerned about being observed, though she did fly off into the undergrowth after about 30 seconds. We saw her again in the same area early one morning, not too concerned again at the intrusion but quietly moving through the sparse undergrowth to better cover. The male shot across our path on another morning's walk and we only had a brief look at his colour and spots before he disappeared into thick cover. They are very appealing. **Merle Mitchell**

NOTICEBOARD

FIELD OBSERVATIONS FOR *HONEYGUIDE*

Colin Baker is getting quite a lot of useful info from Field Cards, but would like contributors to please RECORD ACTUAL NUMBERS SEEN. Please also remember to include notes on any exceptional sightings.

Also, please send contributions for Field Obs to Colin at [redacted] and not to the email address that currently appears in *Honeyguide*.

BABBLER REPORTS AND OBSERVATIONS

The following are the dates by which I intend to get *Babbler* to the publisher this year. If you have a contribution for *Babbler*, please note these dates.

<u>Issue</u>	<u>Editing Date</u>	<u>Date to Printer</u>
May/June 2004	15 April	21 April
July/August 2004	19 June	21 June
September/October 2004	21 August	23 August
November/December 2004	16 October	20 October
January/February 2005	3 December	6 December

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.

Sponsored Membership Fund

Thank you to all those members who have contributed to the fund already this year.

A list of contributions is on the back of your AGM Agenda.

The total is a magnificent \$705 000!

New Members

Mrs. B Cooke	Emma Holland	Bezel Dzawo	Mr and Mrs D Roeloffze
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Stan Higgins	Carol Smith	The Very Reverend James and Mrs. Elizabeth Martin	
Tracy, Dave and Heather Buchan		Mr and Mrs. J O'Brien	J P Dawson

We are delighted to see so many new members and look forward to seeing you all at our outings!

Repairs to binoculars, telescopes and cameras by Mike Begbie. Ph: 331478 or email songbird@mweb.co.zw

Merchandise for Sale — please contact the office for prices.

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