

THE BABBLER

ORNITHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION OF ZIMBABWE NEWSLETTER

ISSUE #6: MAY/JUNE 1995

Mashonaland Branch

Chairman: Mr B Elliot 302465
Secretary/
Treasurer: Mrs I Gray 885406
Members: Mr G Lowe 735507
Mr C Rawson -
PRO Mr K Barrow 732457
Editor: Mr D Gray 885406

Matabeleland Branch

Martin Smith 42474
Mrs P Feather 44034
Mr W Goodwin 64121
Mr M Smith 42474

Postal Addresses:

Committee: P O Box CY 161, Causeway
Sunbird: 14 Fisher Ave, Borrowdale

P O Box 44, Bulawayo
Barbet: P O Box 44, Bulawayo

MASHONALAND BRANCH ACTIVITIES

Regular Monthly Outings

1. Mukuvisi Woodlands: Sunday 7th May and 4th June 1995. Meet at Paget Road entrance at 7.00 a.m. There will be a vehicle guard in attendance.
2. Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary: Sunday 14th May and 11th June 1995. Meet at Marimba Shopping Centre at 7.00 a.m. Beginners are especially catered for. Vehicles parked in a safe area. Bring your chairs and tea.

Saturday Afternoon Outings

1. 20th May 1995. Rainham Dams. Meet at Belvedere Shopping Centre at 3 p.m. Bring your folding chairs, tea and sundowners. Come and see water and grassland birds. Yellow-throated Longclaws and Cape Longclaws and if you are lucky Rosy-throated Longclaw.
2. 17th June 1995. Calgary Farm. Meet at Ashbrittle Shopping Centre at 2.00 p.m. Bring your tea and chairs.

Sunday Outings

1. There will be no Sunday outing in May because of the Hippo Pools weekend.
2. 25th June 1995. Ewanrigg Botanic Gardens. Met at Chisipite Shopping Centre at 7.00 a.m. The Aloes should be in flower and the Sunbirds present in their hundreds. Bring your tea, braai/lunch and folding chairs and make a day of it. Don't forget the entrance fee.

Weekend Outing

Hippo Pools in the Umfurudzi Wildlife area outing from Friday 19th returning Sunday 21st May 1995. There are two beds available at \$90.00 per person per day. Also three camp sites at \$45.00 per person per day are available. All self-catering. Please fill in tear off and return to Dave Gray.

Evening Meetings

1. Thursday 18th May 1995. Meg Coates-Palgrave will speak on "Trees in relation to Birds". Venue Alexandra Sports Club at 6.30 p.m. Entrance on both Blakiston and Prince Edward Streets.
2. Thursday 15th June 1995. Video Evening. Ken Newman's new video "Introduction to Birds". A very informative video. Venue 14 Fisher Avenue, Borrowdale at 6.30 p.m. For directions phone Dave Gray 885406.

Ed. Would Mashonaland members please wear name tags on outings to assist with identifying visitors and newcomers. Thank you.

EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB

Chairman: Mr. K. Dixon 62882 Mutare
 Secretary: Miss G. Henning 4 Mimosa Court 2nd Street Mutare
 Recorder: Mr. A.B. (Tony) Curtis 60281 Mutare

Outings

Saturday	13th	May 1995	Good Hope, Odzi	2.00 p.m.
Sunday	28th	May 1995	Hot Springs	6.30 a.m.
Saturday	10th	June 1995	Mutare	2.00 p.m.
Sunday	25th	June 1995	Burma Valley	6.30 a.m.

The group assembles at the Museum in Aerodrome Road at the time stated. It is always advisable to check on arrangements by ringing Tony Curtis on 60281. Binoculars may be borrowed providing prior notice is given.

MATABELELAND BRANCHFUTURE PROGRAMMEEvening Meetings

Friday 5th May 1995. Video evening. "Birds of Temperate and Tropical Zones". Plus extracts from the excellent video "Birds of the Kruger National Park" Venue: 3 Bouchier Wray Avenue Hillside. 8.00 p.m.

Phone Barbara Cromar for directions — 41983.

Friday 2nd June 1995. Slide Show. Mr. Peter Tucker will show some of his 5000 bird slides taken over forty years. Please support us as this promises to be a most worthwhile evening. Venue: 3a Holdengarde Avenue, Hillside. 8.00 p.m. Contact Martin Smith for details. Phone 42474.

Monthly Outings

ERRATA: For Friday 30th April 1995 read Sunday 30th April 1995.

Sunday 21st May 1995: Chipangali visit. We have arranged a tour of Chipangali for the May outing, arriving in the morning followed by a study of their aviary birds in the afternoon. Bring lunch and meet at Chipangali at 10.30 a.m. There will be an entrance fee of \$12.00. Further details Tel.: 42474

Sunday 18th June 1995: Mtshabezi Falls and Lumani Falls. This will be a whole day outing to an attractive area of the Matopos. In March, Warren Goodwin sighted a pair of Verreaux's Eagles plus a juvenile. It will be interesting to see if they are breeding. Meet at 7.30 a.m. at the Ascot car park. Further details Tel.: 42474.

Aisleby

Monthly outings to Aisleby continue. We will revert to winter times. Meet at the Aisleby boom on the LAST Saturday of the month at 2.30 p.m.

DATE	CO-ORDINATOR	TELEPHONE
Saturday 27 May	W. Goodwin	64121 (work)
Saturday 24 June	M. Smith	42474

FROM THE CHAIRMAN

The New Year has begun positively for the Branch with excellent support and attendance at Evening meetings and outings. In February, our Branch AGM was well attended, reports were given and plenty of discussion took place. Elections produced a few minor changes with Eileen Milton retiring and Penny Feather assuming full Secretary-ship. Thanks to Eileen for all her help in the past. We also welcome Warren Goodwin on to the committee.

March was also a busy month with an excellent turnout for the second part of "Life in the Freezer". We also hosted the National AGM at Maleme with a full camp and an attendance of over 60 people at the meeting. A very good time was had by all. Our thanks to all those who travelled such long distances to support the Matabeleland Branch.

At Aisleby, the Upper UMGUSA dam holds a respectable amount of water and a wide variety of species are present. The March outing produced some unusual sightings: a Ruff in partial breeding plumage with a white ruff; over 200 Pied Avocet and a misguided Phalarope with a slight navigational crisis. We were able to study this clearly from the hide at distances of 30 metres. We came to the conclusion that it was a Red Phalarope, according to Irwin, it was last sighted on the Upper Umgusa in 1972. It's surprising what appears on this 3 hectare puddle of water!

Good birding. Martin Smith

NATIONAL ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING—1995 — Maleme Dam Matopos

Fifty-six members attended the 14th Annual General Meeting at Maleme Dams Matopos National Park. The Matabeleland Branch had laid on some very interesting entertainment for the Delegates, which ended with a Social Braai and a fun quiz. The Meeting was held at 2.00 p.m. on Saturday 11th March 1995. The President opened the meeting by welcoming the Delegates and then presented her report which follows:

The year has been uneventful and membership has stabilized with 21 being overseas members indicating the high regard *Honeyguide* is held.

Concern was expressed about stream bank and vleis cultivation, dumping of builder's rubble and other forms of waste and the removal of topsoil from vleis and green areas. Although this has been reported to the Authorities, the bye-laws covering these practices have not as yet been enforced.

Members are encouraged to report unusual sightings and any conclusions they have drawn. Although it is not necessary to fill in a Rarity form it would be ideal for determining a positive acceptance or not. The more reports received the better a pattern emerges. The Southern African Atlas is well underway and it is hoped it will be published next year. The Zimbabwe Atlas will be controlled by a steering Committee headed by Colin Rawson. Names of all Zimbabwe Atlasers are required for a possible special price offer.

Special Species cards are obtainable from Tracey Couto PO Box BE60 Belvedere or your Branch Chairman. A new field card is in the process of being produced on the lines of the old folding one.

Four members visited Sengwa Coal fields in November to assess the impact that the mining operation may have on the bird and tree life.

I personally feel that the merging of the *Sunbird* and *Barbet* has been successful and I congratulate the Editors.

I would like to see members getting together for birdwatching in a social fashion as some Harare and Masvingo members have done and maybe the 32 scattered Midlands members could get together. I know of at least two Safari Ranches who are prepared to have OAZ members out of season.

The OAZ has been criticised for not doing enough educationally. I don't think we should feel or be made to feel guilty about this. Those that are qualified to do so are thin on the ground and may not have the time or the funds to do so. From time to time we have responded to calls from schools and clubs to give talks.

The 1994 Birdwatch top two scorers were very close but one team consisted of one member and a friend and the other had no names or venue. When we finally gathered who the Leader and his "birds" were, it was decided that they should hold the Trophy. I would like to present the Trophy to Dave Dalziel and his team but we have not had it returned by the previous winners.

Val Cameron left Harare to work at Brondesbury Park which left a void in the invoicing scene. This has been filled by a very new member Cornelis Malan who took over the computer work. Dave Dalziel has to stand down as Treasurer and Cornelis has volunteered to take over this position if his residency permit is granted. Our thanks go to these three members. Colin Rawson has been appointed Chairman of the atlas Publication Committee. I am standing down as President. John Paxton, the Vice President will take over and Dave Gray will stand as Vice President.

It remains for me to thank the Matabeleland Branch for organising this weekend so well. Also my thanks go to those who have assisted during this year. I wish the incoming Council a successful and trouble free term of office. Thank you.

Jacko Williams

The Treasurer's, Editor's and Library Reports were read and the Branch Chairmen gave their reports. Tracy Couto spoke on the Special Species project and the Membership Secretary gave her report. Then followed the election of Officers with John Paxton and Dave Gray being elected President and Vice-President respectively.

A very interesting talk by Ngoni Chiweshe of National Parks on Conservation Education was given after tea.

TAIL FEATHERS

Hole Nesting Birds — Dr John Condry - 16th March 1995

Dr Condry brought along a nest-hole which he had made that afternoon from a dead tree. He explained that according to Roberts about 50 birds are hole-nesting birds. Natural holes are in great demand and by providing man-made ones and placing them in an isolated place one helps to increase the bird population and provides a very useful way of attracting them. Many thanks to Dr John Condry for coming along and discussing this very interesting topic with us. Bryant Elliot

Bird Census on the Mazowe River

A census of the birds of the Mazowe River on the Mazowe Citrus Estate is being undertaken. The area to be covered extends immediately downstream of the Mazowe Dam and includes some attractive riverine forest and some other habitats. If you wish to visit please first notify the General Manager of the Estate Mr. N. Fawcett, Telephone Mazowe 175—2434 (Home) and 175—2431 (Work) of your intention. Please send Bird Lists to G. Lowe, 9 Dundee Road Eastlea Harare.

Geoff Lowe

CYNARA FARM — 29th January 1995

Although this was my third visit in ten days there was nothing tedious or repetitive about it. We were pleased to welcome two juniors and a visiting Finnish couple plus Abasi “our man from Aberfoyle”. In a 4 hour leisurely stroll we notched up about 75 species and a large Nile crocodile. The water level is frighteningly low on all dams and on this perfect morning there seemed little hope of more rain. The newly planted field at the entrance was alive with birds: a large flock of Speckled Pigeon, Red-necked Spurfowl, Helmeted Guineafowl, pipits, waxbills and larks. Overhead were Long-tailed Paradise-whydah and Pin-tailed Whydah, Little Bee-eater and European Bee-eater and Namaqua Dove. The new dam had nesting Cattle Egret and a few Reed Cormorants, 11 Egyptian Goose but almost no waders. Everywhere water birds were scarce and our attention was more often than not drawn towards the trees and bushes chasing flycatchers, weavers and finches. On the small, almost dry higher dams we failed to relocate the Allen’s Gallinule seen the previous week but found Black Crake and Common Moorhen, Common Sandpiper and Wood Sandpiper. A welcome sighting was a Broad-billed Roller.

Eventually the following conversation with one of the Juniors reminded us that it was time to go. “How many species have we seen now, Ken?” “About 65 I think” “How many do we have to see before we can go home?”

Ken Dixon

“Far Forest” forest Saturday 11 February 1995.

As a variation on our usual visit to Barbara and Georges Daniel’s delightful property high up in the Vumba, we asked them to lead us on a walk down through the indigenous forest which links their land with the Leopard Rock area below. It was the most pleasant afternoon for weeks in our area and nine members were present to join the ramble.

With George’s keen eye and unerring sense of direction and Barbara’s well-trained ear we were in for an exciting time. As usual in thick forest in summer relatively few birds were clearly seen but there was ample evidence of their presence. Tambourine Doves call continuously, Silvery-cheeked Hornbills honked through the treetops, Stripe-cheeked Greenbuls and Yellow-streaked Greenbuls and apalises could be found now and again, while Square-tailed Drongo, Dark-backed Weavers and White-eared Barbet were abundant. The Black-fronted Bush-shrike, a Vumba special was also located thanks to Barbara’s keen ear. At a lower level, Red-capped Robin-chat, White-starred Robin and Swynnerton’s Robin and Olive Thrush were heard on a few occasions.

At a spot previously earmarked by Georges, we were quickly able to call up the local Narina Trogon — what a stunner! — which stayed long enough for all of us to feast our eyes. The African Broadbill was, unfortunately, not so obliging.

Time rushed by as we dawdled along on a perfect evening and the sun was setting as we took our cup of tea and said goodbye to our generous hosts.

Ken Dixon

Mapari Ranch, near Birchenough Bridge, 24—26 February 1995

Birdwatch weekend found seven members of the Eastern Districts Bird Club displaced from their upland haunts, some 800 metres lower than usual and actually outside Manicaland — only just! We had been invited to spend a weekend at the Save camp of Mapari Ranch whose entrance is at the crossing of the Devuli River. And in the new spirit of democratisation of the EDBC, Chairman Ken strongly urged (commanded?) this novice reporter, also labelled Ken, to set down the record.

Birds were in relative abundance but with some species very common within their habitat the variety was not as great as we had perhaps hoped. Some examples were: Terrestrial Brownbul, Spotted Flycatcher and Grey-backed Camaroptera within the riverine forest (beautiful Nyala trees); Red-backed Shrike (in numbers sufficient to send English twitchers bananas) and Rattling Cisticola within the scrub of the adjacent plain; Southern Grey-headed Sparrow (ubiquitous) Red-faced Mousebird and Meves's Starling popping up almost everywhere and Natal Spurfowl sounding as if they were everywhere. As seems to be common, we quickly found our best birding within easy reach of the camp. As well as the aforementioned habitats, we also had the river itself with reeds and flats — usual plovers and sandpipers plus White-fronted Plover, Pied Kingfisher, Egyptian Goose and Hadedda Ibis. The Commiphora-covered hillsides held a Grey-headed Kingfisher, White-crested Helmet-shrike and Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill. (Why were so many of the zebra-bark commiphoras breaking off part way up and dying?) The plain contained several small pools surrounded by vegetation and from two of these a Dwarf Bittern flew up as we approached, on one occasion perching in a bittern pose to give good views. A stay at one of these pools produced a Cut-throat Finch coming to drink while a Southern Masked-weaver built overhead.

During the course of our stay we had good sightings (Great Spotted Cuckoo) and soundings (Black Cuckoo, African Emerald Cuckoo, Diderick Cuckoo) of cuckoos, but perhaps the best soundings of all were Thrush Nightingales in three places near the camp. One sang and then replied vigorously to a tape, but stayed tight within its bush. For raptors we had Bateleur, Brown Snake-eagle and Little Sparrowhawk as well as tantalising glimpses of falcons each evening with Mount Rudd in the background.

Around 100 species were seen over the weekend – not bad when altitudinal adjustment is accounted for. We are very grateful to Hermanus Vorster for letting us use the excellent facilities and can recommend Mapari Ranch for birding and relaxation. Ken Longden

The Truscott's Farm — Old Mutare, 11th March 1995

As Chairman Ken and Treasurer Tony had gone off to the OAZ AGM, we were thin on the ground for a visit to the Truscotts PREMIER ESTATES.

A pack of six of us took to the trail kindly provided in the form of a map from Rob (we did not walk on the map). There were many old birds turning to dust under the gravestones of the Pioneer Cemetery which we keenly perused before turning to the younger birds.

We tramped about 6 kilometres as the crow flies, more as the road curved. We saw some interesting species e.g. Swallow-tailed Bee-eater, Eremomela and two varieties of flycatcher. We saw a *Brachystegia* woodland in which Spotted Creepers were not creeping at that time. We also saw *Commiphora mollis*(?), Green Wood-hoopoes and *Combretum imberbe*, Little Bee-eaters in *Acacia polyacantha* and Speckled Mousebirds in the *Securinea virosa*. We passed the Martial Eagle lair which was pointed out to us but they had taken a break.

Alas time was short we missed the African Finfoot country too. We totted up 102 species that afternoon — 32 bird species and 70 tree species (just along the road). This farm with all its diversity of habitat deserves special attention especially early in the morning when more bird species are visible. Our Host and Hostess were very helpful and showed a keen interest in what we had seen and in giving us refreshments afterwards. Our thanks once again to them for their kind hospitality.

Gail Henning

Paradise "Squatter"

Two old Mahogany trees in our KADOMA garden provide a popular nesting area for African Paradise-flycatchers. This breeding season their nesting habits have been disrupted by a resident pair of Tropical Boubous which has destroyed three separate nests during their construction.

One of the affected pairs persevered in their nest building and eventually raised two young. Five days after their young had flown we noticed the original nest had been extended around the upper edge by one of the pairs whose nest had been destroyed and who then took up residence. Two young from this second pairing have now been reared. Is this "squatter" habit an unusual occurrence?

Jackie Jones

Speckled Mousebird and Dark-capped Bulbuls

A single Speckled Mousebird has been in our area [MUKUVISI] for some time. On the morning of 22nd February 1995, I was pleased to see perched on some sticks near the green bridge an adult Speckled Mousebird grooming its chick. The following morning the youngster was sitting on a dry branch of a Fig tree of unknown parentage, two hundred meters upstream.

I finally solved the riddle of the faulty breeding timing of our Dark-capped Bulbuls. Due to the extended wintry cold and non availability of food, last year's breeding cycle started several weeks later, therefore avoiding exposure of their nests, as by this time all the small trees were in full leaf.

It appears that a normal warm spring with abundant food supply induces the bulbuls to breed. Most build their nests in small deciduous trees and then the old leaves drop off and expose the chicks to predation at the crucial moment.

John Sievi

Trouble in Store

When there is trouble about life becomes more interesting. Far from running away from whatever it is, our curiosity is aroused and crowds soon gather. You would think everyone might run a mile when two weeks ago I found a 5 foot cobra moving slowly around my rabbit run. He was a formidable fellow raising his head and neck and frequently hissing. Everyone on my property rushed over to look and I had to urge them back to work. None could understand why I did not kill it. Owing to the baby rabbit bulging inside it the cobra could not fit through the wire mesh which I enlarged and eventually it glided out back into the bush. I had far too many rabbits so a bit of natural culling is all part and parcel of life.

This morning I have been enchanted by a little episode involving birds. I wandered down the drive looking at the marvellous way everything has come to life since the rain two weeks ago (from Friday 13th January 1995 and during the following week a total of 10 inches). Near the gate there is a small kopje of lovely indigenous bush and trees. About 10 metres away I heard an unfamiliar urgent bird call which was a young White-crested Helmet-shrike demanding to be fed. On returning to the house I heard more calls from the same area — Arrow-marked Babblers as usual in a flock — noisy — also a Fork-tailed Drongo and other birds not immediately identified. The noise increased and became urgent which is unusual. I fetched my binoculars and focussed on the area. What a feast for the bird watcher! In this small area were Common Scimitarbill, Green Wood-hoopoes, various sunbirds, weavers, doves, woodpeckers, a Crested Barbet, canaries, Dark-capped Bulbuls, African Golden Orioles, a pair of Groundscraper Thrushes, the Fork-tailed Drongo and of course all the White-crested Helmet-shrikes and Arrow-marked Babblers. Some when perched were cocking their heads and looking down. The reason for this commotion must surely be a snake because, like all of us, birds cannot resist the excitement of danger. The Green Wood-hoopoes moved away and others began to lose interest and I moved slowly forward and raised my binoculars to have a closer look. There standing proudly on the ground among the dead leaves observing me with intense orange-yellow eyes was a fine

looking Spotted Eagle-owl.

Peter Creswell

Ethokozweni Safari Camp Turk Mine. 18 — 19th February 1995

Our planned Gwaai River trip failed to happen due to a lack of water and so instead we visited Dennis Streak's property off the Turk Mine road. We arrived at the farm shortly after 7.30 a.m. — a delightful camp and most welcome cup of tea awaited us. The camp is sited on the edge of a dam, surrounded on one side by mixed Miombo woodland with rocky outcrops, and on the other side by fallow lands. This presented an interesting mixture of habitats. Within the woodland, birding was hard work with only a few species being seen — a Striped Pipit and Familiar Chat were recorded on the side of a kopjie. A bird party was discovered which included a pair of Greater Honeyguides and an assortment of other species. Overhead the vultures soared with good sightings of White-backed Vultures and Lappet-faced Vultures, with a possible White-headed Vulture seen at a low angle and moving quickly. Back to the dam and a variety of waders to study over lunch. Our day ended with an African Openbill, which brought our total to 100. Hopefully we can go back and increase our total.

Martin Smith

HWANGE Birds — 24 February 1995

Our half-term break was spent at Hwange Main Camp and I had the opportunity to do a little birding. A car-borne tour of the pans south of Main Camp produced a number of interesting species. Storks were well represented with about 100 Abdim's Storks at Nyamandhlovu and Woolly-necked Storks scattered elsewhere: 5 at Ngweshla and 1 at Makwa. Back at Main Camp, I signed up for a guided walk and after tracking lion spoor to the previous night's kill, was able to get on with some more serious birding. Termites were active on the airstrip and a host of raptors were busy feeding on them. Overhead a pair of Lanner Falcons and a number of Eurasian Hobby caught flying alates. At ground level all sorts of big brown raptors hopped and shuffled after termites. Tawny Eagle, Steppe Eagle and Lesser Spotted Eagles, Yellow-billed Kites, Bateleur and White-headed Vulture were all seen feeding actively on termites. We were able to approach to within 50 metres and at this distance the large brown raptors appeared less awesome, size became apparent and leggings visible. Our walk ended with the sun dipping below the horizon and a rewarding view of both species of Jackal and Bat-eared fox all visible in one field of vision.

Martin Smith

BIRDWATCH 1995 RESULTS

	<u>Total</u>	<u>Team Name</u>	<u>Leader</u>
1	205	Red-faced Gobby Guides	Gary Douglas
2	202	8 th Timers	Harry Erwee
3	169	Scoops	David Dalziel
4	167	Somabhula	Peter Tourle
5	154	Hwange	R P Accorsi
6	151	No Name	S Long
7	146	- ditto -	R B MacCallum
8	117	Chirundu	K R Mitchell
9	109	Umwindzi Wotzits	Barbara Jonsson
10)	99	Other Nittwits	Ken Harvey
11)	99	MCC WLC	Ian Cannell
12	98	The Roaring over 40s	Jacko Williams
13	96	Grayson Bashers	Dave Gray
14	94	Silvery-haired Hornbills	Tony Curtis
	173	Wrong date	Terry Fenn (not eligible)

The winners of the Zimbabwe Sun prizes for a weekend at Hwange Safari Lodge are:

- 1 Mr & Mrs S Long (No. 6)
- 2 Barbara Jonsson and Peggy Henderson (No. 9)