

BABBLER

The Newsletter of -

BirdLife Zimbabwe

THE BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL PARTNER IN ZIMBABWE

Member of IUCN, The World Conservation Union

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COMMITTEES

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BABBLER DISTRIBUTION

PLEASE help us to minimise the cost of printing and distributing the *Babbler*. Email birds@zol.co.zw if you are willing to receive *Babbler* by email or can change to an address to where it can be delivered by hand. If receiving it by email, you will need Microsoft Word.

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. The meeting will be followed by a braai. Fires will be provided but please bring your own food, drink, plates, cutlery and chairs.

MASHONALAND BRANCH**Regular outings**

Sundays 2 May & 6 June: Mukuvisi Woodlands. TIME: 07:00 NOTE CHANGE OF TIME.

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.

Sundays 9 May & 13 June: Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary. Meet at 07.30 a.m. (NOTE CHANGE OF time) at Marimba Shopping Centre, Samora Machel Avenue West. Bring chairs and refreshments. Beginners are most welcome and spare binoculars will be available.

Sunday 23 May: Thetford Estate, Christon Bank. 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 27 June: Ewanrigg Botanic Gardens. Meet at 06.30 a.m. at BLZ Offices, Clyde Rd. A fee is due to Nat. Parks.

We suggest you bring food and drink for a braai and stay for lunch. Remember your chairs.

Thursday evening meetings

20 May: Talk by Michael P Stuart Irwin. No further introduction required. See you there!

17 June: Talk by Alex Masterson. Aren't we privileged to have speakers like these? See you there as well!

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 (6 & 20 May, 10 & 24 June). 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.

Rifa Camp 3 nights 10TH – 13TH SEPTEMBER

Please see the enclosed booking slip for details.

MATABELELAND BRANCH**Monthly Outings**

Saturday 1 & Sunday 2 May. Weekend at Antelope Park, Gweru. Camping/chalets. Walks, riding, vulture restaurant – this is where the immature Egyptian Vulture was spotted. Tel. Margie on 247009 (h) for up-to-date details and rates. NOTE CHANGE OF DATE

Sunday 16 May. Whitestar Farm, Burnside. Morning walk. Bring chairs and refreshments. Tel: Julia on 246269 for details.

Sunday 13 June. The Farmhouse, Kezi Road. Day outing to this lovely environment. Plan to leave town at 9.00 a.m. Take morning tea, picnic lunch, chairs etc. Tel: Margie on 247009 (h) for details and transport if necessary.

Aisleby: Telephone Julia on 246269 or Penny on 237777 for details and shared transport.

Sunday 30 May: morning Saturday 26 June: afternoon

IMPORTANT FUTURE DATE

27/29 August 2004

VERREAUX'S EAGLE WEEKEND

Maleme Camp, Matopos National Park. Come and enjoy the antics of the fledglings impatient to leave!

Please make your own accommodation bookings. Part-weekend or day visitors welcome

Tel: Julia on 04-246269 for itinerary

EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB

Contacts: Jane Clegg ☎ 020-65610 Bridget Holland ☎ 020-61369
 Sunday 30th May: Osborne Farm 6:30 a.m. Ken Dixon 65819
 Sunday 27th June: Mutare Heights 6:30 a.m. J. Clegg 65610

The Museum is the departure point and, PROVIDED PRIOR ARRANGEMENTS ARE MADE, binoculars may be arranged. It is essential to check with the organiser shortly before the event as all visits are subject to last minute changes due to weather or local conditions. Generally return will be in time for lunch.

Karoi Bird Club

Co-ordinator: Kevin Mitchell P O Box 398, Karoi ☎ 064-6358 or Cell: 011 408023
 E-mail: mitch@afjcaonline.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 Jon Barry ☎ 055-20021
Masvingo: Contact Lynne Wilkins ☎ 039-63657
 Outings first Saturday of the month. Please contact Jon Barry for details.
Kadoma: Outings will be held at 7.00 a.m. on the 3rd Saturday of each month.
 Contact Margaret Parrock ☎ 068-22005 for details.

We urge members in Kadoma to support Margaret Parrock, Russell Chittenden and Brian Peters in their efforts to resuscitate birding in the Kadoma area. It is such a pleasure to get out into the bush with like-minded people and enjoy what this country has to offer.

NATIONALBLZ Library News – April 2004

The Library is accessible during normal working hours with the assistance of the Office staff. During May and June I will be working in the Library Tuesdays and Thursdays 9 a.m. — 4 p.m. Thereafter, my hours will be announced in *Babbler* – although I am hoping to get down to one or two mornings a week I am always willing to assist with reference searches at other times – just call me on 304298, or 091 376506, email: piumosso@afjcaonline.co.zw Loans: Reference books are not available on loan but other books may be borrowed for a month. Journals are not loaned, unless duplicates are available. Borrowers are required to register — no charge. Lost books will have to be replaced or paid for.

We are fortunate to possess a remarkable collection of books (around 400) and journals (58 titles current, 68 discontinued) which are of interest to all, not only the serious ornithologist. We are most grateful to those who have donated to the Library in the past — very recently we have received substantial and valuable donations of books, reprints and runs of journals from Dick Harwin's Estate, from Michael Irwin and Russell Taylor. Anthony Cizek has left with us on a semi permanent loan basis over 900 reprints — this grey, or hard to find literature is of great value to our Conservation Department and those out there doing research and is also relatively up to date. He has also taken the trouble to list them which is a major task. Thank you. Usually, journals are not to be removed from libraries, but duplicate sets are being made up for loan – of *Africa – Birds and Birding*, *Honeyguide*, and *Ostrich*. Donations make this possible. For your interest *Ostrich* is no longer available to us in print format — only off a website! Perhaps we can convert it onto a CDROM.

Some recent acquisitions in the reference book area (received free of charge as review copies) are field guide *Birds of Africa south of the Sahara* by Ian Sinclair and Peter Ryan, Struik, 2003; *The Birds of Africa* Volume VII Sparrows to Buntings edited by C H Fry and S Keith, Helm, 2004. This is the final volume of the series — volume 1 was published in 1982! — (see the review in *Honeyguide* later this year). The line drawings by Ian Willis of weaver nest building and the gape markings of nestlings are brilliantly detailed and fascinating!; *Handbook of the Birds of the World* Volume 8 Broadbills to Tapaculos edited by J del Hoyo, A Elliott and D Christie, Lynx, 2003. The photos and illustrations are a “must see”! The foreword *A brief history of classifying birds* by M Bruce is a “must read” for those wanting a quick understanding of ornithological history. These two volumes are termed “Handbooks” as they cover all aspects of a species, not just identification which is the task of a “field guide”. Detailed bibliographic references are given — so that one can expand on the information given in the Handbook.

Remember we can assist with your search for information — all you have to do is ASK!! **Dorothy Wakeling**

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Attending the BirdLife international Conference and global partnership meeting 7-13 March 2004 was an outstanding experience. The whole programme was filled with interesting workshops, discussions and symposia. Mrs Maasdorp chaired the Birds and Education symposia and gave a presentation. It was stimulating to learn about other achievements and for her to make contact with many delegates from a hundred different countries. It made one realise how very important our international links are to our organisation.

With Dr Chirara, I put up a display of our activities, centre-stage was a panoramic landscape of Monavale Vlei as well as aerial photos of the area and conservation captions. This attracted a lot of interest.

We thank John Kelly for the photos, Ian Murphy for printing them and Dorothy Wakeling for organising all the material for this part of the display. One or two of the videos produced for this conference may be of interest to members at an evening meeting.

Back in Harare we have worked hard to visit all clusters of schools before our staff complement shrank a bit and this we have done. The newsletter will assume more importance as transport and staffing become bigger constraints.

We were delighted to have a visit from a conference delegate Jonathan Stacey from BirdLife International. He reviewed Eiffel Flats schools' progress, called at the office and had just over 24 hours RIFA camp (116 bird species recorded) and had some days at the Matopos.

Donations of books, calendars, magazines and a small slide projector have been much appreciated. Peter Ginn's gift of many bird slides will be most useful. Many are not named. Is there anyone willing to identify and label them for BLZ?

Leslee Maasdorp – Education Programme Manager

MASHONALAND BRANCH

LAKE CHIVERO, 22 February 2004 (QDS 1730D4)

With the recent departure of Tracey Couto from the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Management it seemed appropriate that we should try to take advantage of her contacts to visit the ROBERT MCILWAINE Recreational Park. It must be many years since we had an outing there as there have not been any since I joined the society about 8 years ago. Ferdie Couto arranged for us to meet him at the Turnpike Service Station at 7a.m. where we hoped to pick up someone from National Parks to act as the guide for our walk. Although we waited 15 minutes or more no one arrived from National Parks so Ferdie had to explain our intentions to the officer at the park entrance gate.

Fortunately we managed to walk in several places and covered quite a lot of ground in a variety of habitats. 13 of us started off on this outing and we were joined by 2 more at midday. Bird parties were a bit sparse through much of the woodland and Ferdie's excellent imitation of a Pearl-spotted Owlet call did not seem to be effective at attracting the birds to us. However, it was a privilege and a pleasure to be able to walk in this park and be in the presence of large mammals and mature, pristine miombo woodland. On one occasion we found the skull of an antbear which is something that I doubt that any of us had seen before. The mammals seen included giraffe, zebra, tsessebe, impala, warthog and squirrel. According to Ferdie the lake appeared to be full although we did not check the spillway. In one of the

shallow bays that we visited there was a good number of water birds which were apparently feeding on fish in the recently flooded vegetation around the lake edge. We could see large numbers of barbel moving around in the shallows and there were many fishermen around the lake trying to catch them. By the end of the day we had walked through 3 sections of woodland, 1 vlei, 1 inlet, Bushman's Point and the chalet area. Highlights at the lake edge included 2 Yellow-billed Egrets and 7 Black Herons. Raptors included 1 White-backed Vulture, Wahlberg's Eagle, 6 African Fish-eagles, 2 Steppe Buzzards, 1 Osprey and 10 Amur Falcons. It was interesting to note that the Osprey was a few hundred metres inland from the lake and, according to Ferdie, Osprey will often move well inland to consume their prey in areas where fish-eagles are present to avoid harassment by the fish-eagles. This behaviour may have led to false reports of Osprey breeding in southern Africa in the past. Other highlights included 1 Grey-headed Kingfisher, 6 Black Cuckooshrike and 3 White-breasted Cuckooshrike, Southern Hyliota heard, 1 Spotted Flycatcher, 2 Ashy Flycatchers, 5 Southern Black Flycatcher and 2 African Paradise-flycatchers, 1 Grey Tit-flycatcher, 1 Striped Pipit and 1 Green-winged Pytilia. The total species count was 113.

Our thanks go to Ferdie for all the time and effort that he put into making this day a success.

Richard Dennison

DOUBLE RO Ranch, 28th March 2004 (QDS 1730D2)

Double Ro Ranch turnoff is close to the 38km peg on the Lomagundi road, so it was important that we shared transport for the 13 members who turned up for this outing. Unfortunately Robyn Gilmour was unable to join us as she was laid up with a broken ankle. We were therefore left to our own devices and probably walked a bit further than necessary as a result. Fortunately the weather was overcast and windy for most of the time so we did not get hot. However, the lack of sunlight did reduce bird visibility. We parked near her son's house, set out through the grazing paddocks and found that the grass cover was thick and tall and significant areas were flooded. Our walk took us in a large loop of about 6 km down to a stream and back through some cattle pens to our cars. Birds were much in evidence in the clumps of trees on the anthills scattered about in this open savannah. Highlights in this area included 1 African Cuckoo Hawk, 8 Crowned Lapwing, 1 African Snipe, 1 Greater Honeyguide, which followed us around for about 2 km, 6 Rufous-naped Lark, 6 Grey Penduline-tit, 2 Groundscraper Thrush, 6 Croaking Cisticola, 5 Spotted Flycatcher, 1 Pale Flycatcher, 4 Cape Longclaws and 15 Yellow-throated Longclaws, 5 Yellow-mantled Widowbird and 2 Long-tailed Paradise-whydahs.

After a quick drink we drove to the main dams to look for water birds and vultures. The main dam wall is a reliable area for Copper Sunbirds and those in the lead vehicle managed to see a pair of these birds as we drove past. We parked under some gum trees and then walked back over the flooded spillway to the old vulture restaurant area near the top dam. It was as we came to the top of the outer edge of the dam wall that we nearly stood on a 3m crocodile. The Gilmours no longer rear crocs commercially so this one was probably released from captivity, as it seemed quite unconcerned by our presence about 2m away. As far as I know the vultures are no longer regularly fed at Double Ro, but either I am wrong or someone forgot to tell the vultures as we counted 130 White-backed Vultures, 15 Hooded Vultures and 1 Lappet-faced Vulture scattered about the ranch.

After the main dam we also paid a visit to the derelict crocodile rearing pens to look for waders. Unfortunately, the effluent settling ponds were overgrown with grass but we did see large numbers of Blacksmith Lapwings and Three-banded Plovers perched on the roofs of the buildings. Highlights seen in the dam area, including total numbers of each species for the whole ranch, included 4 Marabou Stork, 70 Egyptian Goose and 2 Grey Crowned Crane seen at cattle pens in the distance, 1 African Fish-eagle, 1 Lanner Falcon, 1 Eurasian Hobby, 20 Three-banded Plover and 40 Blacksmith Lapwing, 15 Wood Sandpiper, 1 Jacobin Cuckoo, 150 Barn Swallow and 2 Cape Wagtail.

We then drove back to our original well shaded parking area near the son's house for final refreshments and the species call-over. While we were there we witnessed a Black-chested Snake-eagle eating a snake as it flew and were also amazed to see a Booted Eagle fly past! At first we could not identify the Booted Eagle as so few of us had seen one before. However, the combination of pale underparts, contrasting black and white under-wings, white band on the rump and small size enabled us to fix it. Our thanks go to the Gilmours for a very successful day in which 114 species was counted and it was such a pity that Robyn was unable to join us. **Richard Dennison**

(It was a thrill when the Greater Honeyguide that followed Richard came several times to where we were drinking our tea to try to persuade us to follow him and expose the honey for him. I felt very guilty letting him down! Ed.)

Slide Show by Ian Riddell – Thursday, 19th February

Once again we were entertained by Ian's excellent slides and erudite commentary. Ian showed us slides from his days in the Mana Pools area, displaying not only birds but trees, fungi and other creatures. He pointed out the changes in the environment over the years and the causes and effects of the changes.

Rehabilitating a Long-crested Eagle – Thursday 18th March

Vernon Dickinson amused about thirty members with an entertaining tale about rescuing and rehabilitating a Long-crested Eagle which was found with a broken a leg near Borrowdale Brook HARARE. The bird was nearly starving when Vernon found it and was resuscitated with best steak until a supply of frozen day-old chicks was found. Despite devoted attention during the several weeks of its recovery, the eagle never looked or came back after he was released, to Vernon's chagrin. Thanks to Vernon both for rescuing the bird and coming to tell us about it!

Those attending had an unexpected bonus as the same evening Lars Hillstrom, a visiting ornithologist from Sweden, showed us slides from his presentation on Siblingicidal Behaviour in Red Kites which he gave to an International Ornithology Conference in Japan. Lars was part of a team that studied these birds in one of their strongholds, a reserve on the East Coast of Spain. Some bird species, such as the Verreaux's Eagle, will always lay two eggs with the chick from the first egg killing his smaller sibling. In others, like the Red Kite, this behaviour is not invariable but appears to increase where there is pressure on the food supply and other resources. It was more prevalent in densely populated areas than in less populated areas. It was a very interesting subject and talk and BLZ members enjoyed a good exchange of ideas with Lars at the end of the talk. We are grateful to Lars for contacting us and offering to give us his presentation and I know that he thoroughly enjoyed his visit to Zimbabwe, especially his bird walks with Ian Riddell.

Jennifer Carter

MASHONALAND SOUTH

Lion Farm, Kadoma, Saturday 3rd April 2004 (QDS 1829B4)

At last, a mustering of birders, and how rewarding for the morning walk through miombo, mopani and mountain acacia of original growth. Lion Farm and Lasting Impressions, a Christian Youth Camp, is situated 20 kilometres east [southwest?] of Kadoma on the Brompton Mine road. The property is along the Umsweswe River, below the Claw dam wall, so the vicinity is idyllic for birds and mammals. The morning was crisp, clear and fresh, and the birds were active feeding and calling. An excellent sighting and calling of five African Golden Orioles. Two female Black Cuckooshrikes high in the branches, being harassed by a pair of Southern Black Flycatchers. A Square-tailed Nightjar, disturbed by the dogs, gave us a superb viewing. The pairs of Cinnamon-breasted Buntings calling high in the trees took patience to locate. A handsome Black-chested Snake-eagle perched on an electric pole, and a Shikra hidden in the trees were a thrill.

The total list was 34 species with some new finds and some unknown. Thank you to all concerned

Margaret Parrock

MATABELELAND BRANCH

MATOPOS Hills World Heritage Inscription – 20 February

BLZ – represented by Dudley Hubbard and I – was invited to this very special ceremony when the UNESCO certificate of inscription of the Matopos Hills on the list of World Heritage Sites was presented. What a wonderful achievement and a challenge for the newly elected Matobo Hills World Heritage Management Committee, whose immediate task is to submit a revised Management Plan to UNESCO by July 2004! The committee consists of five members representing the National Museums, National Parks and the Matobo Conservation Society (including BLZ), as well as traditional leaders, Matobo and Umzingwane Rural District Councils, Matobo Committee, Commercial farmers and the tourism sector. Having achieved World Heritage status, the challenge is to maintain it!

Verreaux's Eagle Survey – 5 March: Our team briefing took place during the most mega thunderstorm of the season, which came over the hill without warning and produced lightning at waist level. However, we were comfortably ensconced in the Hubbards' friendly house, and after the proceedings were complete we partook of a superb bring-and-share supper. Once again we are to be assisted by at least 12 teams and we are most fortunate to have such enthusiastic support.

Walk at Qalisa BULAWAYO – 14 March: (QDS 2028B1). This was organised by Auriel and Chris Hansen who very unfortunately were unable to get back from SA to enjoy it themselves. We were joined by about eight residents of Qalisa, who were all provided with checklists of residents' sightings to date, to which we managed to add a few species. To start off we went in and out amongst the lovely gardens, initially seeking a non-present Icterine Warbler, and latterly hearing and seeing Acacia Pied Barbet and Black-collared Barbet and watching mature and immature Common Fiscals hunting from their perches in the conifers. We then moved onto the golf course where we had a thoroughly enjoyable ramble successfully avoiding the local hazards, such as flying golf balls and irritated golfers. Sighting of the morning was a Wahlberg's Eagle which flew in to perch near its nest, peered down at us, then proceeded to preen and pose to perfection. Despite the chilly and overcast day, little red and yellow bumble bees (Southern Red Bishops) buzzed officiously over the Mexican marigolds, a pair of African Paradise-flycatchers fluttered and draped themselves glamorously in riverine shrubs, and Barn Swallows descended to rest on the greens. Back into the compound we went and wound our way to the very attractive gazebo where an especially warm welcome and superb spread of tea, coffee, biscuits and cakes were waiting us from the "Friends of Birding People". We have resolved to repeat this event ere too long!

Walk in Maureen Norton's garden – 3 April: (QDS 2028B1). O, all ye who pitch'd up not, knoweth not what ye hath misseth. But the four of us who did had a super morning. We set off along a beautifully prepared path, through head high Mexican marigolds and waist high grass – the whole area was looking really beautiful. Darting about were Blue Waxbills and Green-winged Pytilia, heard but not seen were Long-billed Crombec, Acacia Pied Barbet, Crested Barbet and Black-collared Barbets, and seen but not heard Red-backed Shrike and Kurrichane Thrush. At the boundary European Bee-eaters and Red-faced Mousebirds flew over and a Yellow Bishop buzzed around. It then took a 10 minute crawl (by only one of us, the others pretending they didn't know what was going on) into the undergrowth to track down who was singing the most beautiful song of the day, full of trills and melodies – a Southern Grey-headed Sparrow! Our path took us past the house, round the sunken garden and into the pool area where we spent quite some minutes studying and discussing the origin of several splats of white poo; the answer came when the origin itself, perched above us (who would ever risk looking upwards?), rustled the branches of a combretum as it flew off – a Spotted Eagle-owl. We saw and heard White-browed Robin-chat and White-throated Robin-chat, Tropical Boubou, Brubru and Black-backed Puffback, not to mention those ever-cheerful Dark-capped Bulbuls and the evocative notes of the Cape Turtle-dove.

Sitting on the verandah and consuming vast quantities of tea, delicious herb bread and cake, we watched the antics of a Kurrichane Thrush taking advantage of the bathing facility kindly laid on by Maureen for her customers. No-one else was allowed near and it must have taken all of ten minutes of splashing and diving before the thrush was completely satisfied with its appearance. We discussed the worldwide concern over the decrease in House Sparrows, and nipped off to reassure ourselves that Maureen's resident pair actually existed. Well, they didn't. So we'll have to return to verify this claim, and of course have another chance to get at the bread and cakes again.

AISLEBY – 28 March (QDS 2028B1). Aisleby is always a pleasure to visit, but despite this only three of us went. The whole area was lush and overgrown, UMGUSA Dam had filled but was yet to spill, and some of the roads were impassable due to recent heavy rainstorms. There was a most promising rich perfume as we approached – lots of smell, lots of birds!

The top holding ponds had attracted a mass of waders, including nine Common Greenshank, Little Stint, Curlew Sandpiper, Marsh Sandpiper, several Wood Sandpipers and four beautiful Common Sandpipers, a couple of Black-winged Stilt and a largish group of twitchy Ruff of which an uncommon number of males had white head and neck plumage. Ducks were represented by a group of 12 sub-adult White-faced Duck plus their parents, Hottentot Teals and Red-billed Teal and half a dozen Cape Shoveler one of which waddled ashore to display its ostentatious bright yellow legs – there's always one, isn't there! Plovers consisted of half a dozen Three-banded Plovers, and Lapwings by several Blacksmith Lapwings and about three African Wattled Lapwings. On the spoil heaps there were still a couple of Yellow Wagtails poking around, not a sign of

the usual Kittlitz's Plover anywhere, but African Pipit and African Sacred Ibis abounded throughout the farm. Then a flash of colour and there were two White-fronted Bee-eaters hawking over the pasture and returning to perch next to a sludge canal, and behind us a super view of a Meves's Starling (yes, you erstwhile disbelievers, they do exist and what's more they have bred').

We stopped for tea at the Muddy Puddle where, as usual, we were treated to superb views of nonchalant African Purple Swampphen and flitting Black Crake, Glossy Ibis (but not a sign of either of our Hadeda Ibis), Black-winged Stilt high-stepping in the oozing sludge, African Jacana and Common Moorhen. European Bee-eaters were twittering, dipping and diving overhead along with African Palm-swifts and Barn Swallows. A walk along the dam wall produced a super view of a Green-backed Heron in the swamp, and an intriguing sighting yonder of a creeping body which after some time turned out to be a Squacco Heron! Two White-backed Duck silently emerged from the weedy water's edge, preceded by two Red-knobbed Coots and a single Little Grebe and out in the middle a White-breasted Cormorant was fishing. Perched high in the acacia were Brimstone Canary and a Purple Widowfinch (Indigobird) – lovely colour combination – and lower down an anxious little Tawny-flanked Prinia sat with her beak clamped round a large bunch of wriggling grubs patiently waiting to feed her piping young. Below the spillway we saw the elegant Little Egret fishing in the murky river and African Jacana clambering about on the floating grass nearby. I suppose we covered about 45% of the area, but as usual it was a most enjoyable excursion. **Julia Duprée**

EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB

Thompson's Vlei – CECIL KOP Game Reserve MUTARE: Sunday 29th February (QDS 1932D3)

A damp and drizzly day was what greeted us on this Sunday morning. The first bird of the day was an African Harrier-hawk, seen by Stanislaus and Carl. We were at the Thompson's Vlei area of the game park by a quarter to seven. Crossing the rocky ridge of miombo woodland we saw a fine male giraffe, darkly coloured and magnificent and a lifer for Peter, the birding guide at White Horse Inn.

We parked at the vlei, and were immediately treated to wonderful views of the Silvery-cheeked Hornbill in good light. We heard Red-chested Flufftail calling from the tall reedbed, and also Livingstone's Turaco and Purple-crested Turacos from the woodland beyond.

Red-collared Widowbirds were in full mating sport, and we spotted the telltale golden back of the Yellow Bishops. Some cisticolas were identified by Carl as Singing Cisticola, which we had not seen before at the game park.

Walking alongside the vlei, we heard Terrestrial Brownbuls, Sombre Greenbuls and Yellow-bellied Greenbuls and the ever-present Dark-capped Bulbul and barbets aplenty with Crested Barbet, Black-collared Barbet and Whyte's Barbet and Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbirds around on the day. On the road at the top end of the vlei we listed Red-throated Twinspots, Green-winged Pytilia, Red-backed Mannikins and Bronze Mannikins, African Firefinch, and Pin-tailed Whydahs, working the long grasses. Above them, we saw Lesser Honeyguide, African Paradise-flycatcher, Golden Weaver, Spectacled Weaver and Thick-billed Weaver. In a spot with good cover, we heard the sweet song of the Marsh Warbler and that of the White-throated Robin-chat and also, more distantly, the calls of both the Orange-breasted Bush-shrike and Gorgeous Bush-shrike. The rain was becoming a bit more persistent now, so we did a short circuit and found Green Wood-hoopoe and Grey Waxbills before heading to the picnic site for coffee.

Here we were able to add White-faced Duck (just the one), Common Sandpiper, Malachite Kingfisher and Pied Kingfisher, (to add to the Brown-hooded Kingfisher and Striped Kingfisher we had seen earlier), African Pied Wagtail, Common House-martin, Barn Swallow and Lesser Striped Swallows hawking over the dam, Hamerkop, and Steppe Buzzard and Augur Buzzard. Undoubtedly, my highlight of the day was to end things off with a Booted Eagle, a pair in fact, circling against a backdrop of many hundreds of European Bee-eaters. My gut feeling was that there may have been swarms of insects aloft, as between the bee-eaters were many White-rumped Swifts and African Palm-swifts and the swallows too. It was perfect weather for it, with the warmth and light rains earlier. In the company of a lazy crocodile and two plump and dusty rhinos, we called it a day, with a total of 80 birds species listed. **Jane Clegg**

Hillside Golf Course, MUTARE: 28th March 2004 (QDS 1932D3)

The hills around Mutare were shrouded in mist on a gloomy overcast morning as members turned up for a walk along the greens of the golf course. On arrival an African Goshawk was clicking overhead and as

we stepped onto the green a Spur-winged Goose appeared from nowhere. Although birds were very quiet a male Amethyst Sunbird and a pair of Golden Weavers were soon picked up. Between the low clouds along Mutare Heights a group of about 15 Amur Falcons was seen moving east. The only vocal bird of the walk was the White-browed Robin-chat, calling 'twenty three' from every patch of thicket. A Marsh Warbler broke into song as we approached, piling one imitation upon another. All other singers were very reluctant; a Singing Cisticola produced a few notes, and so did a Red-faced Cisticola. The forest patches looked empty most of the time. Terrestrial Brownbills and Yellow-bellied Greenbills were quietly calling unseen in the undergrowth, but sharp eyes picked up some silent Dark-backed Weavers and a Cape Batis. Four Whyte's Barbets showed off well and these or others didn't leave us for the rest of the walk. Silhouetted against the bright sky a colourless Ashy Flycatcher gave itself away by its call. An African Paradise-flycatcher only gave its call. Around the ponds we found some Red-backed Mannikins and a few Thick-billed Weavers. A disturbed Black-headed Heron came to perch in the top of a tree. While making our way back to the cars Peter looked over his shoulder in time to see 5 majestic Silvery-cheeked Hornbills crossing the golf course. Drizzle started, a few African Yellow White-eyes, a Red-backed Shrike and a Hamerkop signalled the end of the walk and brought the trip total to just under 50. **Carl Beel**

KAROI BIRD CLUB

RYDINGS School, 6th March 2004 (QDS 1629D3)

Four of us started out at the main dam on a dull, overcast morning. Over the wall and along the fence-line we went as it seemed too dark in the woodland for birds. Not a good morning species-wise — we only found 42. The small top dams and adjacent woodland always yield more. Never much in water birds on this main dam as there is no weed cover, so it is usually a Reed Cormorant on the dead tree together with a pair of African Pied Wagtail, Pied Kingfisher, Blacksmith Lapwing, and we did see a Green-backed Heron which we had not seen for a while. Then the usual woodland birds — Natal Spurfowl, Orange-breasted Bush-shrike, White-browed Scrub-robin, Grey-backed Camaroptera, Levaillant's Cuckoo and Red-chested Cuckoo, Willow Warbler, Amur Falcon and African Paradise-flycatcher, still here.

Through the month we saw Magpie Shrikes on the farm, a flock of 12 Green Wood-hoopoe, Brubru, Pearl-spotted Owlet, Black Coucal and, on the top dam where there is good weed cover, Little Grebe, White-faced Duck and Red-billed Teal, the latter with a good crop of chicks. It always fascinates me to see the chicks swimming bunched up close to the mother, as one as though they were attached!

In the village, we have had Spotted Eagle-owl quite vocal and once a Southern White-faced Scops-owl during the month together with a Fiery-necked Nightjar. We also had a visit from Retz's Helmet-shrikes. Our overall count for Rydings and the village for the month was 110. Rydings is 8 km from the village. A Red-billed Teal raised chicks in the shrubbery inside the school fence at Rydings, approximately 200m from the main dam. They had to be rescued by the master as they took off through the courtyard in the opposite direction to the dam! She must have had a plan in mind — not clear to us!

Merle Mitchell

TAIL FEATHERS

Collared Flycatcher, Shawasha Hills HARARE (QDS 1731C3)

On Sunday 1st February, I saw a Collared Flycatcher, *Ficedula albicollis*, single male seen in prime breeding plumage, hunting insects from an acacia tree, in the Shawasha Hills residential area (near the new Villa's development). The bird was very close, in excellent light, and quite unperturbed by my presence. His white forehead was unmistakable. **Darryl Tiran**

Orange-winged Pytilia, 23rd February 2004 (QDS 1932D4)

On a recent visit to Outward Bound CHIMANIMANI — it was my third year in a row — I had a pleasant surprise at the centre. Once again I had the opportunity for a few days to indulge in A.J. Beasley's "Birds of the Chimanimani Mountains" checklist of 1995.

It happened on my first outing within the grounds of the centre when I spotted what I initially thought to be a pair of Green-winged Pytilias. As this was not on the systematic list in the above publication, they deserved closer observation. The pair was obligingly perched in a Water Berry tree (*Syzygium cordatum*). I was able to get within 10 metres for closer inspection and, after about 5 minutes, realized that they may, in fact, be Orange-winged Pytilia. Yes! The male had unmistakable orange wing panels and the red ear coverts. Next day I had a glimpse of the pair very close in the same area. They did not call and I saw no evidence of nesting in the vicinity.

As M.P.S. Irwin says, these attractive *Pytilia afra* are known in the Eastern Highlands, nowhere common and unlikely to be seen above 1500m. Outward Bound is circa 1220m. Beasley does not even include the species in his list that might occur in the Chimanimani Mountains. In view of this, I would be interested to hear of any other sightings in the district.

R.S. Harrison, 13, Paley Street, Triangle.

GETTING AWAY FROM IT ALL

With the cost of travel getting more expensive and stress levels getting higher, I thought I would give members details of some places not too far from Harare. I am sure that other centres have places that could be given a mention (Matabeleland Branch and some Harare members are visiting Antelope Park near Gweru in May) but these are the ones that have come to my attention.

CAROLINA WILDERNESS, 39km south of Harare

We recently had a very pleasant weekend at Carolina Wilderness & I thought that readers might be interested in the info below. Being so close to town it is an ideal spot for a short break – which we all seem to need fairly frequently in these stressful times.

They have a lot of game on the farm. The catering was excellent, and the Lodges were very comfortable and well fitted.

2 Fully thatched lodges – each lodge sleeps four. Lovely entertaining boma situated on well-maintained lawn leading overlooking dam. Bass Fishing, 3-person canoes available. Game Drives and walks. Farmhouse catering or self-catering on offer. Lodges, Self-catering are \$100 000.00 per lodge per night with a special mid-week rate (Prices subject to change).

Contact Sheryl on 062 2408, 091-202072 or 091-202073 for bookings. Email: gsdk@ecoweb.co.zw

Hippo Pools Camp, Umfurudzi

Members may not be aware that Hippo Pools has reopened recently. Booking as before at Bronte hotel Phone: 730123 or 721429; Email: wildernessafrica@zol.co.zw or wildernesstrust@msasa.co.zw

Hope this is of interest. I feel that the local people who are trying to carry on need as much support as possible and I'm sure BLZ members travel quite a lot.

Liz Travis

JESSA LODGE, less than 100km northwest of Harare in the scenic Maringambizi Nature Area, just past Muriel Mine. Bed and breakfast, with a kitchen and dining room for self-catering other meals. Sleeps 8 in two chalets but camping on the lawns is also allowed. There is good birding and marked hiking trails in this lovely mountainous area. Children welcome.

Contact BLZ member, Barbara Scheidler on 091-224853 for details.

The Aloe, Cactus and Succulent Society of Zimbabwe in association with the National Herbarium and Botanic Gardens celebrate the natural riches of our botanical heritage in the eastern highlands. National Botanic Gardens, Harare: Sunday 16 May 2004: 8 a.m. to 4.30 p.m.

COST: \$1000 per person payable shortly after booking

BOOKINGS: Telephone: 884003 or 747218 or 339175 Email: dorichards@mango.zw or mjkim@pci.co.zw Post: Box CY 300, Causeway, Harare

Delivery: 24 Southam Rd, Greystone Park or 62 Hillside Rd, Hillside or 15 Cheshire Rd. Avondale

Many of our members will be interested. The full and varied program is too long to print so contact above for details.

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 bakerc@msasa.co.zw and not to the email address that currently appears in *Honeyguide*.

BABBLER REPORTS AND OBSERVATIONS

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.

<u>New Members</u>	Malcolm and Sonja Moodie	Luke Wilson	Jane Currie
Samuel Chandiwana	Karen Chidzere	Pamela Feremba	T Jerahuni
Julius Dhanda	Lawrence Mufambisi	S Chihwita	Benson Sekenhamo
Ethel Chingogoro	Stanley Uta	Phillip Kasinamunda	Changorora Blessing
Mrs. L Lehman	F Muturugudu		

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

Sponsored Membership Fund

The sum of \$132 000 has been donated since the last *Babbler*. Thanks to all those who contributed.

Books for sale – offers – please contact Alice at the office

Field Guide to the Birds of Southern Africa	Ian Sinclair 2nd edition revised and updated
My Book of Wild Birds of Zimbabwe	Bill Kirby and Sally Perrett
Southern African Birds, A photographic Guide	Ian Sinclair
BirdWatch Zimbabwe	Derek Solomon and Jacko Williams
Wankie Birds	Peter Steyn
Fundamentals of Field Ornithology	
The Birds of Zimbabwe	Michael P Stuart Irwin
Sasol — Birds of Southern Africa checklist	PAR Hockey
Gardening with Birds in Zimbabwe	Derek Solomon
Birds of the Highveld	Peter Ginn
Bird Safari	Peter Ginn

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.

T-shirts — adults & junior

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