

BABBLER

The Newsletter of -

BirdLife Zimbabwe

THE BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL PARTNER IN ZIMBABWE

Member of IUCN, The World Conservation Union

ISSUE #61 – JULY/AUGUST 2004

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|---------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|----------------|--------|
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| | Ian Riddell | 339716 | Eddie Cross | 240093 |
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| | Humphrey Rees | 091-601948 | Margie Pearce | 247009 |
| | Chris Rees | | Jean Tucker | 241079 |
| | Jennifer Carter | 300082 | | |

STAFF

| | | | |
|---------------------------|------------------|------------------------------|-----------------|
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| Cons. Prog. Manager: | Chip Chirara | Conservation Officer: | Ngoni Chiweshe |
| Administrative Assistant: | Alice Chamunorwa | Education Officer: | Abasi Jana |

| | | |
|-----------------|---|--|
| Addresses : | P O Box RV 100, Runiville 35 Clyde Road, Eastlea, Harare | |
| Telephones: | 490208/481496 | |
| Web site: | http://site.mweb.co.zw/birdlife | Office email: birds@zol.co.zw |
| Babbler Editor: | Jennifer Carter 300082 PO Box A1619, Avondale, Harare | Email: gcarter@mweb.co.zw |

BABBLER DISTRIBUTION

PLEASE help us to minimise the cost of distributing the *Babbler*. Contact BirdLife office if your *Babbler* is delivered to a Post Box/Bag in Harare and could be hand-delivered to a physical address. Remember it can also be emailed to you. Contact birds@zol.co.zw.

ACTIVITIES

NATIONAL

TEMPORARY OFFICE CLERK WANTED

A temporary Clerk is needed at BLZ Office for 6 weeks during July and August while Alice is on maternity leave. The position is mornings only and the salary will be negotiated. If anyone is interested, please contact Di Rushforth at the office.

MASHONALAND BRANCH**Regular outings**

Sundays 4 July & 1 August: Mukuvisi Woodlands. 7:00 a.m. 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 11 July & 8 August: Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary. Meet at 07.30 am at Marimba Shopping Centre, Samora Machel Avenue West. Bring chairs and refreshments. Beginners are most welcome and spare binoculars will be available. In June 105 species were identified!

Sunday 25 July: Kutsaga Research Station. Meet at 7:00 a.m. at BLZ Offices, Clyde Rd where vehicles can be left in a secure area and transport shared. Bring chairs & refreshments.

Sunday 22 August. McDonald's Farm at Ruwa. Meet at 7:00 a.m. at BLZ Offices, Clyde Rd.

Thursday evening meetings

15 July: Dave Rockingham-Gill will talk on the African Waterfowl Census. Dave has been controlling the Zimbabwe records of this continental survey for 10 years now and will have very interesting information to impart.

19 August: a visit to Patagonia and Chile. Dr. Philippa Marett will show us slides of her recent visit to the tip of South America. Those who were lucky enough to see her slides of Madagascar, Canada Mozambique and Zimbabwe know what a superb photographer and raconteur she is and how fascinating this show will be.

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 (8 & 22 July, 12 & 26 August). 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**

July – WATERFOWL COUNTS THROUGH THE MONTH. As many natural pans and dams as possible, including pans in Hwange and Tsholotsho; Mbazhe Pan; Umgusa Dam. Volunteers invited. Tel: Julia 246269, Dudley on 240127 (h)/76781-5 (O), Penny on 237777.

Friday to Sunday 27/29: Verreaux's Eagle Weekend in Matopos. Based at Maleme Nat. Parks Camp. Day participants welcome. Tel: Julia or Dudley.

Aisleby : Telephone Julia for details and shared transport.

Sunday 31 July Sunday 22 August

EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB

Contacts: Jane Clegg ☎ 020-65610

Bridget Holland ☎ 020-61369

Sunday 25th July: Burma Valley 6:30 a.m. A. Christie 64917

Sunday 29th August: Partridge Hill 6:30 a.m. B. Holland 61369

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@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 Jon Barry ☎ 055-20021

Masvingo Contact Lynne Wilkins ☎ 039-63657

Outings first Saturday of the month. Please contact Jon Barry for details.

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**BLZ Annual General Meeting

The AGM of BirdLife Zimbabwe was held at our premises in Eastlea. There was a good attendance of about 42 people. Once the formal business was over, an enjoyable social braai took place and everyone enjoyed the delicious red wine that had been donated by the Dutch Ambassador in October for the official opening of the offices.

The following were elected to Council at the AGM:

| | |
|---------------------|----------------|
| Alex Masterson | President |
| Dave Sheehan | Vice-President |
| Oscar Mitumbili | Hon. Treasurer |
| Debbie Gundlach | Hon. Secretary |
| Rolf Chenaux-Repond | Council Member |
| Ferdie Couto | Council Member |

In addition, the following are representatives of committees and branches:

| | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------|
| Dorothy Wakeling | Education |
| Brian Marshall | Research and Conservation |
| Michael Irwin | Publications |
| David Rockingham-Gill | Mashonaland Branch |
| Julia Duprée. | Matabeleland Branch |
| Carl Beel | Eastern Districts Bird Club |
| Jon Barry | Midlands Branch |
| Kevin Mitchell | Karoi Branch |

Di Rushforth, Administration Manager

BLZ Library News – June 2004. Hours: 8.30 a.m. – 4.00 p.m. Monday to Friday

In July I will be in on an irregular basis, however, the Library is always accessible through the BLZ staff. In August I will be in during the first week or two training a library student from NUST who will be on placement with us until May 31 2005. I will be happy to assist with in-depth reference queries at any time – call me on 304298 or contact me through BLZ.

The use of the Library has picked up considerably for leisure, research and study purposes. We have received further donations of books and journals, as well as videos from David Rockingham-Gill. Thank you. We continue to look for donations of bird books, journals – back issues of *Honeyguide* and *Bulletin of African Bird Club*, especially the *Supplement Literature Review*, *Ostrich* from 2003; videos, bird calls on CD, tape, Roberts Multi Media; maps – QDS, general maps of Zimbabwe; dictionaries – English and ornithological, especially by Lack; slides; bird photos; reprints/separates. Anything of ornithological interest covering Zimbabwe and the region will be gratefully received.

Hard copy printouts of the catalogue sorted separately by classification number/subject, author and title are now in the Library for reference but the best searching is on the computer database using the dictionary search method; instructions to use the computer catalogue are sitting by the computer.

Dorothy Wakeling

MASHONALAND BRANCH

NGOMAKURIRA: Sunday 25th April 2004 (ODS 1731C1)

We have neglected Ngomakurira for at least the last 7 years as we were not sure about the security of our vehicles. It was only when Dave Rockingham-Gill pointed out to us that there was a police detail on duty at the car park that we decided to go there. A good turnout of 16 of us set out from Helensvale shops on a partly cloudy and warm day. In fact the weather was perfect for climbing the kopjie as it was just cool enough to stop us from getting hot. According to Graham Carters GPS reading the top of the kopjie is about 300 metres higher than Harare.

There are 2 approaches to the top of the kopjie as one can either walk up the northern or the southern end. The northern end is the one that is usually used by visitors and the southern end is longer and flatter and tends to follow the 4x4 track to the beacon. Accordingly we split up into 2 groups with the northern group going into the better rock birding area and the southern group going into the better miombo woodland birding area. Most of us made it to the top where the 2 groups met and enjoyed the panoramic view.

The rock birds were quite plentiful as we came into significant numbers of Speckled Pigeons, chats and buntings as soon as we climbed out of the tree line and onto the open granite area. Unfortunately the group that came up the southern route did not see so many of the rock birds by the time they descended the northern route as many of those birds had dispersed by late morning. There were also quite a few visitors other than the BLZ party as the total number was estimated to be 40 by mid morning. The special for this area is the regular sighting of good numbers of Cape Buntings and we were not disappointed as 8 were counted altogether. Other rock bird highlights included 2 Augur Buzzards, 2 Lanner Falcons, 1 Rock Kestrel, 20 Speckled Pigeons, 10 Rock Martins, 2 White-necked Ravens, 14 Familiar Chats and 2 Mocking Cliff-chats, 8 Lazy Cisticolas, 6 Striped Pipits, 20 Red-winged Starlings and 10 Cinnamon-breasted Buntings.

Highlights from the surrounding miombo woodland and fields included a Black-chested Snake-eagle, 2 Whyte's Barbets, 6 Eastern Saw-wings and a Brown-crowned Tchagra. The total species count was 68.

Baboons, dassies and klipspringers were also seen. **Richard Dennison**

THETFORD ESTATE – 23 May 2004 (ODS 1731C1)

It is about 5 years since we visited Thetford Estate. A good turn out of vehicles met at the Estate office and after being met by Mark Brightman, as many as possible piled into his safari-kitted-out Landrover and with the remainder in convoy we set out to the Dikitira Hills on St Gerera. Yellow-throated Longclaws were popping up in the dry maize and a Lizard Buzzard darted away through the miombo as we neared the hills with the Bushman paintings. These were really special but being chipped away by itinerant miners due to some ridiculous belief that the ground paint cures AIDS! As we viewed the paintings a faintly heard bird party down the hill drew some of us away and we eventually caught up with the Retz's Helmet-shrikes-in-charge, about 6, though the Southern Black Tits remained hidden. But really nice were the 3 Familiar Chats and a pair of Boulder Chats that lured us further and further down slope, as well as the solitary Mocking Cliff-chat also seen here. Being some way down the hill most of us decided to continue down to the river below and the African Crowned Eagle nest that Mark had pointed out just across it in a tall tree, while he drove the Landrover around to meet us. Unfortunately the nest hasn't been used for a time though the eagles are frequently seen in the area but

they didn't oblige us this time. A Brown Snake-eagle did over-fly and another was seen later and that wrapped up the raptors for the day except for an African Fish-eagle at the main dam and the 10 White-backed Vultures we saw overhead later.

From the nest we crammed into the Landrover and stopped off at a small dam whilst the drivers continued on to pick up the remaining vehicles. One vehicle was particularly lucky to flush a Bronze-winged Courser on their way back! Many of the usual water birds were around the dam including a Giant Kingfisher and 4 Grey Penduline-tits were seen by some (here or elsewhere?), about 10 Violet-backed Starlings were in the trees below the wall and about 50+ Miombo Blue-eared Starlings were whizzing to and fro, with a few Orange-breasted Waxbills in the grass. After a break we went back to the office, game watching along the way and flushed a good number of African Pipits from open ground. From there a quick drive over the main dam, which had lots of exotic waterfowl as well as 6-8 African Darter, about 10 Egyptian Goose and Comb Ducks and a pair of White-rumped Swift. Here we waited awhile as the 3 elephants were brought down to see us, or vice versa, and then on to the White-fronted Bee-eater colony near the Mazowe River; there are usually more than the 6 we saw!

Back at the office the majority returned to Harare whilst a few of us picked up a few more species in the vicinity and then we too eventually left, seeing a Purple Widowfinch on the phone lines.

A few of the other birds seen included a Brown-throated Martin, 2 Miombo Tits, 3 Southern Hyliota at the office, 2 Lazy Cisticolas were reported from the office lawns (rather out of habitat!), 1 House Sparrow, 2 Pale Flycatchers and 3+ Red-backed Mannikins. Birds that were abundant were Green-capped Eremomelas, African Yellow White-eyes and Bronze Mannikins. Only 1 each of Variable Sunbird, White-bellied Sunbird & Scarlet-chested Sunbird! 98 species was the total for this venue. Darryl & I visited the hills and viewpoint over Mazowe Dam, at the end of Christon Bank, on our way back and most notable was a male Broad-tailed Paradise-whydah, along with Retz's Helmet-shrikes & White-crested Helmet-shrikes together and the usual Rock Martins. The dam itself was astonishingly low considering the abundance of late rains!

Many thanks to John Bredenkamp for allowing the visit and Mark for arranging it. We must do it again sometime.

Ian Riddell

[Talk on ornithology in Zimbabwe by Michael P Stuart Irwin, Thursday 20 May 2004](#)

Michael stood and talked to us for over an hour on a chilly Thursday evening about birders and birding in this country since the beginning. It was not nearly long enough and I was disappointed when he stopped.

I started off taking notes but gave up after a while because there were so many interesting things and I didn't want to miss them. If any of you get a chance to listen to Mr. Irwin, take it!

The talk was generally split into pre-Colonial, Colonial, Between the Wars and post Second World War. Did you know that the first known specimen from this country was a Pel's Fishing-owl collected by David Livingstone's brother in the 1860s and taken to Tring Museum in England? Even before the Pioneers, tourists were visiting Victoria Falls, sometimes having to wait for days for permission from Lobengula to pass thorough.

In the Colonial period, Swynnerton was at Mount Selinda and the National Museum was started in Bulawayo, mainly for the collection of specimens for mining. In the 1930s, Smithers took over as the curator of the museum, Michael Irwin was there too – and there was a shift from entomology. Currently the museum holds the largest collection of bird specimens in the southern Hemisphere and in Africa with 90000 birds, 2 000 skeletons and 10 000 eggs! It also houses collections of mammals, fish etc. The collection is pan-African, not only holding southern African species. Irwin got specimens from Somalia and Kenya. Smithers and Irwin assisted in identifying and went on many expeditions.

Michael ended with a strong defence of collecting specimens, insisting that it is the best way of collecting data for studying, now and in the future. For example, there are numerous specimens of Grey-headed Sparrows and when held in the hand, the differences between the Southern Grey-headed Sparrows and Northern Grey-headed Sparrows species can be more easily identified. For your information, the Northern is a much larger, stockier bird with a heavy black bill. The Southern is smaller and slimmer and the bill is only black during breeding otherwise horn coloured (I have Southern in my garden!). I haven't done any kind of justice to Michael's talk and I apologise to him for that. I warned you all not to miss it. Next time he talks to us, make sure you are there, even if you have to cancel your holiday!

Thanks, Michael, it was fascinating! **Jennifer Carter**

Talk by Alex Masterson on BLI Building on Experience Course, Thursday 16th June 2004

Alex spoke to us about the courses he went on to Melbourne, Australia and Quebec, Canada, as BLZ representative on the Building on Experience. The course is not about birding nor was there much spare time for birding as a huge amount of work was got through.

The purpose is to teach the smaller, poorer birding organisations how to become self-sufficient. This is done by getting your hands on the vast amounts of donor cash out there, looking for a home. To do this, you need to know how to prepare a proposal which lays out what research you want to undertake, how much it is going to cost, what you expect to achieve and how your results can be monitored. It seems there is a very regularised format expected by all these organisations.

Alex did manage to get out to see some birds though in Melbourne, the birds, large Magpies, came inside and wandered around the residence anyway! There were also Purple Gallinules running around the grounds in numbers. The Sulphur-crested Cockatoo got the thumbs down as a loud and raucous bird but other parrots were as beautiful and with mellow voices. He fell in love with the loon in Canada — no wonder, it must a spectacular bird to see live. Thanks, Alex, for another entertaining talk. **Jennifer Carter**

MATABELELAND BRANCH

Antelope Park, GWERU Friday 30th April to Sunday 2nd May 2004 (ODS 1929B3)

The 6 birders from Matabeleland Branch organized an excellent weekend breakaway in Gweru. They were joined by 8 Mashonaland birders, arriving early Friday morning and getting straight into the exploration and spotting of the various midland specials, found around the lodge, amongst the thornveld and riverine waterways. The Midland Birding Team joined us on 2 occasions, enlightening us on their area specialities. With perfect weather conditions prevailing we were extremely fortunate, as the very chilly early morning starts soon became hot sunny days. Prior to our arrival they had 3 days of nasty biting winds and miserable rain conditions.

Apart from the many smaller midland specials, the definite quest was to get a sighting of the Egyptian Vulture and the Cape Vulture. A few birders visited the vulture feeding area on Friday after lunch, obtaining a prolific sighting of recently fed vultures — resting on the ground and languishing calmly in the trees, were about 90 White-backed Vultures, 6 Lappet-faced Vultures and a lone immature Hooded Vulture. Rumbblings started then about the very obvious differences between juvenile Cape and White-backed Vulture. The Cape is definitely of greater size and has pink breast-skin patches and a thick red/pink neck. No Cape Vultures were present at this sighting. The next day the area was revisited but only a few vultures remained. A dark immature vulture sitting in a tree suddenly exposed two dark coloured breast 'objects', partly obscured by branches. The 'scope was put onto this bird immediately for closer examination. 'Possibly a Cape' was mentioned by a few members of the party. This aroused very vigorous discussions and explanation and refresher notes as to the discerning differences, SIZE AND NECK COLOUR!!. The bird in question then flew off, now definitely a White-backed, exposing its distinguishing wing patterns and similar size to the other White-backs thermalling, (the guys that shouted out Cape Vulture were definitely left looking quite Lappet-faced; in fact they could have put a Red-faced Cisticola to shame!). Later that day, we were treated to a revealing vulture-flypast near a small dam. White-backed Vultures, Lappet-faced Vultures, Hooded Vulture and few mature Cape Vultures were seen. We had a good visual of a Black Stork flying in the same direction. A pair of Tawny Eagles put on an inspirational display of aerial agility, with an undulating nuptial flight.

On Sunday morning, we planned a vulture feeding. The lodge gathered many assorted carcass pieces to tempt the birds down. The site was devoid of any vultures. The majority had headed in an easterly direction the day before. However a few sluggish remnants sat in the very far distant trees, watching the carcass pieces being scattered, while the birding vehicle maneuvered into position for optimal viewing, behind a large tree-covered termitaria. The Midlands Bird Team also arrived in the nick of time to witness this grand vulture spectacle. We waited, waited further, and waited even more. The vultures from the trees eventually headed straight towards the fleshy bones. Our hopes were then dashed as they literally turned their beaks up at our meagre offerings, flew straight over our heads proceeding to join their mates in the big blue eastern sky. This happened again with a few more birds. Obviously they were still sufficiently full, having had grand pickings elsewhere the day before. The prolific midlands vulture "flock" are apparently a common sight on many surrounding farms, feeding off cattle carcasses and

snared game. Our carefully placed carcass pieces remained totally untouched for several hours until our departure back to the lodge the only bird that actually inspected them was a Cape Glossy Starling! However, several excellent sightings and comparisons of the vultures were had during the weekend, by all participants, and were a definite highlight on the many varied activities done.

The birding and game viewing was great. After many delightful breakfasts, basic lunches, and braais at night, and the very mentionable home-baked treats by Maureen, our lists of sighted species grew. This particular niche area has many different vegetation types ranging from open grassland, thornveld, riverine, dam, miombo to mopane woodlands.

Midlands Birdlife members treated us to a spectacular outing to an 'island' of trees and open grassland waterway in the heart of the SOMABHULA flats [Vungu River]. This produced many unusual species including prolific numbers of Marico Flycatcher and 3 pairs of Crimson-breasted Shrike in territorial vocal behaviour. Attempts were made at flushing out the rare Monotonous Lark plus the Cape Longclaw. Several larks did flush but flew off at such incredible pace, one had to really sharp to pick up any definite features. They were noted to be very 'stocky and short tailed'. Several African Quail-finch and Desert Cisticola were seen. The amazing discovery of a cisticola nest near the parked vehicle was marvelled at, and so was the spotter who spotted this very cryptic nest in the rank grass; an unusual tangle of green grass and spider web moulded to the shape of an old-fashioned milk bottle. The nest opening pointing directly upwards. From the pictures taken, Alex Masterson informed us that it's a Zitting Cisticola nest, as the Desert Cisticola builds a similar shaped nest but has the opening offset to one side, possibly for wind protection, having a reinforced spider web 'step' into the nest cavity. A flight of about 140 Banded Martins went repeatedly up and down the open grasslands along the watercourse; a Grey Crowned Crane was peacefully feeding. A sighting of the rare late-season Pallid Harrier [withdrawn, was a Black-shouldered Kite!] was noted, plus several Black-shouldered Kites.

Prior to the superb farewell lunch provided by the lodge, our bird list was revisited, numbering 146 species in total, very conservative for a late autumn weekend, with most migrants having moved north. Notable sightings included the ever abundant Marico Sunbird, Hottentot Teal, Three-banded Coursers many found in the lodge grounds, Acacia Pied Barbet, Sabota Lark, Chestnut-vented Tit-babbler, Burnt-necked Eremomela, prolific Magpie Shrikes and Southern White Crowned Shrikes, Red-billed Buffalo-weaver, Long-tailed Paradise-whydah males still in full plumage, Ashy Tit, Secretarybird seen hunting, killing a snake with brutal blows by its limbs, plus the site with awesome potential — the vulture restaurant.

Antelope Park is situated just outside Gweru, offering superb river lodges, camping and chalets, providing good food and diverse activities, from bush walks with sub-adult lions, elephant riding, horse trails, game drives, canoeing or just relaxing around the peaceful gardens, watching the birds go by. Thanks go to BLZ Matabeleland and Midlands for a wonderful weekend and good company. Looking forward to meeting up again on the Verreaux's Eagle weekend in August.

Darryl Tiran

This enjoyable weekend has been excellently covered by Darryl, so all we would like to do is add just a couple of comments to give you a hint of what else went on.

It was a very pleasant surprise to learn that we were to be joined by expert contingents from Mashonaland and the Midlands. This afforded us not only the opportunity to meet the others; it also guaranteed production of a comprehensive and well-informed checklist!

We from Bulawayo arrived in a bunch (a small one), and after off-loading our kit onto the old campsite (re-opened specially for us), potted up the hill to join the Mashonaland members ensconced at the old vulture restaurant. Here – we quickly perceived – was a problem. A disagreement about some vulture or other, apparently. Someone dashed over to ask if we had a picture showing a vulture with blue spots – or was it pink – spots? We had. Someone else snapped his field guide shut, declared that "I'm for White-backed" and repaired to the car in a frump. And another, a sinister shape in heavy disguise, stood motionless on the edge of the rumpus, keeping himself to himself and saying nothing – absolutely nothing, nothing about anything.

Although this dispute remained in place for the duration (and probably to this day), the ice melted rapidly when one amongst the group spotted our catering department, Maureen, sitting under our front wheel, making our tea.

We had a really enjoyable afternoon with the Midlands down in the Somabhula grasslands where we saw a marvellous cross-section of bush, water and grassland species. Many were little and brown, several represented 'firsts', and a few were highly coloured or would have been if they were still wearing their breeding gear. We want you to know that it was Matabeleland who first spotted the Pallid Harrier [see above]. This was initially challenged by Mashonaland as it should not have been there. But it was there, flying up and down for everyone to see, and eventually it was confirmed as a pukka sighting by all present — bar one.

Saturday evening's communal braai gave us a good chance to talk to each other over a drink – or two or more – and to hear some really interesting things about some really interesting things.

Sunday morning dawned perishing cold and drought-stricken as far as the Matland camp was concerned. Imagine our shock (and thirst) when only a bottle-shaped hole remained where once our milk had stood. Suspicion fell on the one who dashed off early to have a shower, failed to dash back again, and was then spotted (and filmed) hiding in the bushes on the far side of the dam. A search revealed the missing bottle (together with its brother, which had been legitimately removed) in a tent hidden under a particular mattress. All one can say is that obviously this person is not a princess — because we all know what happened with the princess and the pea, and this one clearly had no such problems with hers.

We are planning to host an Antelope Park weekend as an annual event, perhaps in summer when the migrants are around. It was a pleasure to meet the Mashonaland contingent and very good to see the Midlands group up and running again. We hope to meet up with the latter on a more regular basis (once they confirm that they've got rid of winter) – and would really like to do the same with the former (if they could move just a bit nearer).

Julia Duprée

Whitestar Farm, Burnside: Sunday 16 May 2004 (ODS 2028B1)

Eleven of us spent a very enjoyable morning at this most attractive venue. We parked in the vicinity of charming old-style dwellings with their lovely treed gardens full of flowering aloes. Jean led us on down to the dam situated in thick acacia where our eyes lit upon a Grey Heron and a Red-knobbed Coot towing two fluffy chicks. A couple of Reed Cormorants were perched on rocks, and over our heads flew a Hamerkop, which collected a mouthful of mud and flew off again through the trees and out of sight. A second one came in, took a look at us, did a dramatic aerial about-turn and went off again. One was later seen flying into the reeds, then emerging to mince its way elegantly along the spillway wall — having obviously watched us doing just that ten minutes earlier. Meanwhile, the heron had caught a fish, failed to swallow it in one gulp, dropped it and lost it to a speedy cormorant.

In the acacia we came across a party of Blue Waxbills and Green-winged Pytilias, heard White-throated Robin-chat and White-browed Scrub-robin, and saw three of the barbets and all four sunbirds – Miombo Double-collared Sunbird, White-bellied Sunbird, Marico Sunbird and Scarlet-chested Sunbird. We also saw a Praying Mantis' egg chamber still intact, and hunted for a naked Helmeted Guineafowl whose feathers we found on the shoreline. A welcome cup of tea and home-made goodies were enjoyed on the lawn watching for sunbirds on the aloes — which saw us coming and stayed away. A super day out, which yielded 30 species, and which we would very much like to repeat in the future.

Julia Duprée

THE FARMHOUSE, Kezi Road: Sunday 13 June 2004 (ODS 2028B3)

The day dawned bright (cold) and clear for Sunday's outing to The Farmhouse on the Kezi Road. We had been looking forward for some time to visiting this lovely area in the MATOPOS close to Bambata. A merry group of 16 set off through unspoiled bush, first to the dam and then up the hill to a lookout giving magnificent views over the countryside. Bird-wise it started pretty well with a Yellow-bellied Greenbul and two Groundscraper Thrushes pausing to give us excellent sightings. Then there were a couple of Chin-spot Batis — and then not much for quite a while. But, pottering back in two groups from the lookout via another route we came across wildebeest and a couple of interesting bird parties. The latter were dominated by a largish group of White-crested Helmet-shrikes calling away at top voice, aided and abetted by a Black-backed Puffback, a Cinnamon-breasted Bunting, two Miombo Double-collared Sunbirds

a silent Tropical Boubou, a pair of less silent Mocking Cliff-chats, a Golden-breasted Bunting, Yellow-fronted Canary, a bossy Tawny-flanked Prinia, Retz's Helmet-Shrikes and Cardinal Woodpeckers minding their own business. Finds of the day were a Grey Penduline-tit's nest and its construction team nearby, and two excellent sightings of Cape Batis. A pair of Verreaux's Eagles, from their nearby territory, spent considerable time swanking with their aerial displays, so naturally got the attention they sought.

We partook of lunch in the beautiful garden next to a pool and waterfall, watching several Cape White-eyes [! Cape Wagtails, African Yellow White-eye?] drinking at a leaking pipe as they squeaked and fluttered through the trees, and being watched by a Brown-hooded Kingfisher. But sighting of the day was of a stropky, diminutive Yellow-spotted Dassie single-handedly and successfully chasing off a troupe of Vervet Monkeys!

After lunch a walk in the other direction increased our day's total to 43 — 44 if you include the resident ostriches.

Julia Duprée

The day from another perspective

With Betty at the helm, Mother (in her 93rd year) as passenger and me in the back, we take the Kezi Road to THE FARMHOUSE. Arrive at 9.30 a.m. with several sturdy vehicles at the gate — all very secure and what a good turnout.

10.00ish: We form a circle, drink and eat, carry out introductions, take pictures, and then the group of bird enthusiasts walk off into the Matopos wilderness. I am here with Mother, sitting quietly.

11.00 a.m.: The clouds are closing on the morning's azure sky, but allowing the sun a glimpse, too sparse for warmth. All my mind absorbs, as I write, is the sound of water flowing from a rock and gently cascading into a pool where folk can swim (I used to!). The absence of sometimes noisy tourists reveals nature — bird sounds, the odd fly (its winter!), even the distant buzz of bees. Butterflies flash from flower to grass, flying, playing blissfully — this is tranquility personified.

12.30 BLZ returns to eat, drink and record bird sightings. As they walk into view three Verreaux's Eagles glide across the sky augmenting a scene special to Matobo Hills, BLZ team settle, enjoying lunch and appreciating clean air, silence, nature "bliss in the bush".

1.30: BLZ off again, Mother and I here alone — lovely. Sky and weather erratic but interesting. Mother and I witness a beautiful butterfly, with yellow wings and brown body, sipping from the birdbath.

BirdLife folk have been so good to Mum and we shall certainly involve her in future activities.

The day folds about 3.30 as we all board vehicles and head back to "boisterous Bulawayo", leaving behind our unique Matobo Hills which host such a wealth of amazing flora and fauna.

Long may we continue to enjoy, observe and conserve

EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB

Valley Lodge, Sunday 25th April 2004

About 10 members turned up for a walk around Valley Lodge MUTARE. Things started quietly but the star bird from the previous trip to this place was still around. Some calls and small birds flying over were quickly identified as Magpie Mannikins. Some msasa woodland on the side of the lodge slowly revealed some of its birds. Some Amethyst Sunbirds were flitting through the canopy and a Bearded Scrub-robin produced a snatch of song. A black bird flitting between the leaves proved to be a Black Cuckooshrike. It was a male with a yellow patch on the lesser coverts of the wing. This form is relatively rare but a similar (or the same?) bird was seen on the previous walk in this place. A honeyguide flew over and away and was suspected to be a Lesser Honeyguide. Relatively good views were obtained of a Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird and Chin-spot Batis. African Paradise-flycatcher and Ashy Flycatcher were also picked up. Glimpses of a possible Green-backed Honeybird remained just that. We moved on to the bamboo thickets. Some of the bamboo was still in flower and Magpie Mannikins were still common. Terrestrial Brownbul and Yellow-bellied Greenbul were gurgling in the background. White-browed Robin-chat kept on repeating twenty-three. In a thicket along the small stream some twinspace noises were heard. Opinions were divided on the identity of these twinspace, but after some careful stalking they turned out to be the more common Red-throated Twinspace. As we slowly worked our way back we added Yellow Bishop, Brown-crowned Tchagra and Brubru. Back at the lodge we were treated to a sumptuous breakfast. Many thanks to our hosts Rob and Barry Truscott. We will be back, **Carl Beel**

MIDLANDS BRANCH

Five members set out for Ngamo Dam GWERU where Grey-rumped Swallows were settled and then flying. We also saw a Goliath Heron, which is unusual on the Highveld and also Black Crakes. There were 31 Grey Crowned Cranes and also Egyptian Goose feeding outside a dairy farmer's pens.

At the Nalatale Quarry, a Verreaux's Eagle was sitting on her nest. One flying and only one Black Stork and there were no fresh spats. Three Speckled Pigeons were also observed. Unfortunately was unable to complete the full day of excellent birding.

John Barry

KAROI BIRD CLUB

RYDINGS School, May 2004 (ODS 1629D3)

For one reason or another, we had no walk for May but several of us go walking on the farm weekly and here are some of the birds we have seen.

On the dams, a single African Darter (at last!), 2 Reed Cormorant, several Little Grebe, 2 Little Egret, a Red-billed Teal with her half-grown chicks, African Jacana with chicks and 4 Pied Kingfisher. On the bank, African Wattled Lapwing and Blacksmith Lapwing, Three-banded Plover, a single Grey Heron and a pair of Saddle-billed Storks are back.

Of the woodland birds, 21 Red-faced Mousebirds were seen on a single termite mound covered with a fruiting shrub. The Magpie Shrikes are still present and a pair of Common Fiscals was spotted on the boundary fence. The little seed-eaters, hardly visible when foraging in the short grass, were in groups comprising Blue Waxbill, Green-winged Pytilia, Pin-tailed Whydah, Red-billed Firefinch and Steel-blue Widowfinch. Little gleaners were Long-billed Crombec, African Yellow White-eye, Chin-spot Batis and Green-capped Eremomela.

The Orange-breasted Bush-shrike never fails to please as do the African Golden Oriole with their rich colour. Nine White-backed Vultures were present, after a dead mombie. Lizard Buzzard vocal. Meyer's Parrots courting and incubating Grey-rumped Swallows were present.

But the find of the month were 4 Dusky Lark seen in a burnt area, their wing-stretching and the pattern under the eye, on the cheek, differentiating them from the Groundscraper Thrush.

Barn Owls have bred well this year in the area — two nests of 10 chicks each, one in a Hamerkop nest and one on the floor in a borehole room. With a few others round and about, there are 30 chicks which are going to receive rings!

Merle Mitchell

TAIL FEATHERS

VUMBA Birding: (ODS 1932B2)

We spent a week at the end of April at SELDOMSEEN with Kevin, Viv and family — pure birding, ringing in fact, and what a treat to see some of the birds in the hand. The colour of the Variable Sunbird, the small size of the Swynnerton's Robin, the almost neon white (if there is such a thing) of the star on the White-starred Robin and the minuscule size of the Yellow-bellied Waxbill. All so fascinating, but number-wise, the Olive Sunbird took the cake. There always seemed to be one or two in each net visited, 25 of them in total, ringed! Dale Hanmer very kindly came and spent a day with us — the only wet day — and much was learnt.

Merle Mitchell

Black stork over Greendale HARARE (ODS 1731C3)

We had a lone Black Stork over the garden this morning in Greendale at 9.30 a.m. Gliding slowly ± 100 feet, then into a thermal, 5 turns and away. It came from the Mandara side of town heading over the garden towards the Msasa industrial sites. Bright red legs and bill, a very good view against a deep blue sky. This is my first record for our garden, and my first over Harare City/Suburbs. The closest I've seen

them before is over the old Larvon bird gardens about 7 years ago and near the Shamva turn off just past Umwindsdale about 9 years ago.

It was on the same directional path over our garden regularly used by White-backed Vultures and not so regularly anymore by Marabou Storks.

Are there any other records of Black Stork over Harare? I know that they are at Domboshawa and that they have to fly over areas to get from A to B, I just can't remember any records for Harare. **Grant Nealon**

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.

Total contributions for the sponsored members is \$75 000. Thanks to the following -

Peter Frost J E Johnson Mary Snook Mrs. L M Spong

New members

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SHOP 5, PATRIC COURT, 113 NELSON MANDELA AVE, HARARE – TEL/FAX 733463