

BABBLER

The Newsletter of -

BirdLife Zimbabwe

THE BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL PARTNER IN ZIMBABWE

Member of IUCN, The World Conservation Union

ISSUE #62 – SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2004

COMMITTEES

<u>Mashonaland Branch</u>	☎	<u>Matabeleland Branch</u>	☎	
Chair:	David Rockingham-Gill	882412	Julia Dupree	232401
Members:	Richard Dennison	747567	Penny Feather	244034
	Ian Riddell	339716	Eddie Cross	240093
	Ken Wilson	745231	Dudley Hubbard	240127
	Humphrey Rees	091-601948	Margie Pearce	247009
	Chris Rees		Jean Tucker	241079
	Jennifer Carter	300082		

STAFF

Finance Manager:	John Paxton	Education Programme Manager:	Leslee Maasdorp
Cons. Prog. Manager:	Chip Chirara	Conservation Officer:	Ngoni Chiweshe
Administrative Assistant:	Alice Chamunorwa	Education Officer:	Abasi Jana

Addresses:	PO 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

National Birdwatch and world Birdwatch

Every few years BirdLife International sets aside a 48 hour period for a world Birdwatch, an event that this year will combine with BLI's World Bird Festival. The festival itself will run over the month of October and World Birdwatch will take place on 2 and 3 October 2004.

As in previous years, BLZ, the BirdLife International partner in Zimbabwe, will participate in the World Birdwatch as well as hold a national Birdwatch over the same weekend.

This is a good opportunity for branches and members to involve as many people as possible to celebrate the enjoyment of birdwatching and the protection of wild birds. This is a “fun” weekend. BirdLife Zimbabwe will participate in the 48 hour World Birdwatch over the weekend and teams participating will all contribute to a Zimbabwean total. For our own Birdwatch the following aims and rules are:

AIMS

1. To identify as many birds as possible in a continuous, 24 hour period within an area with a radius of 50 km; e.g. 6 a.m. on 2 October to 6 a.m. on 3 October.
2. To raise money by sponsorship for the Education Programme.
3. To have fun — enjoy ourselves— and increase awareness of our wonderful bird life.

RULES

1. There is no limit on the maximum number in a team BUT team members must stay together as a unit and may not split into groups. At least 2 people in a team must be members of BirdLife Zimbabwe.
2. Each bird must be seen or heard by at least 2 members of each team.
3. Only free flying, wild or feral birds may count.
4. For Zimbabwe Birdwatch, complete either a field card or an old “Atlas” card with your species count and send it as soon as possible to the BLZ offices.
5. For the World Birdwatch submit a list of birds identified over the whole 48 hour period 2 and 3 October. A list of all the birds seen over this time will then be compiled and sent to the co-ordinator of World Birdwatch. In previous years our list has compared favourably with other countries in the world.

Should you have any questions please ask your Branch Chairman or a member of staff at the BLZ offices.

MASHONALAND BRANCH

Regular outings

Sundays Sept 5th & October 3rd: Mukuvisi Woodlands. 6:30 a.m. NOTE TIME CHANGE. 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 Sept. 12th & October 10th: Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary. Meet at 06.30 a.m. (NOTE TIME CHANGE) at Marimba Shopping Centre, Samora Machel Avenue West. Bring chairs and refreshments. Beginners are most welcome and spare binoculars will be available.

OCTOBER MEETING IS THE ANNUAL BREAKFAST. Breakfast will comprise egg and bacon rolls, tea and coffee. COST \$6000 PER ROLL. Please bring your own chair, plate, cup/mug and spoon.

In view of the cost of postage, please deposit the total amount for the number of rolls required directly into CABS Account No. 9012703755 for BirdLife Zimbabwe Mashonaland Branch at ANY CABS BRANCH then EITHER email your name, the number of persons attending and details of the deposit (amount & branch) to gcarter@mweb.co.zw OR phone 300082 or 091 417859 and leave the same details.

Sunday 26th September: Mazowe Sailing Club. Meet at Marimba at 6:00 a.m. Bring chairs & refreshments.

Sunday 24th October: Jenny Faasen’s farm at Bromley. Meet at 6:00 a.m. at BLZ Offices, Clyde Rd. Bring chairs & refreshments.

Thursday evening meetings

September 16th: Presentation “Birds of Zambia” by Carl Beel, Chairman of EDBC. Carl lived in Zambia for some years, has published a book on Zambian birds not in *Roberts*, was editor of the Zambian Ornithological Society newsletter and explored all parts of Zambia for their Bird Atlas project.

October 21st: Quiz Show Using Roberts CD questions. Don't feel intimidated. We have great fun and the top birders don't necessarily win!

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 4 Thursdays (9 & 23 September, 14 & 28 October). 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

WORLD and NATIONAL BLRDWATCHES

Elsewhere you will find details of the 48 hour World Birdwatch and 24 hour National Birdwatch. We — BLZ Matabeleland — have undertaken to co-ordinate this year's events, which is not something we usually do but thought we would this time.

Now turn to item 2 under "Aims". It has been agreed that in exchange for our co-ordination efforts, all funds raised by Matland participants will be handed back to us for our own projects!

So, please make an extra effort to drum up as many teams as possible, and obtain as much sponsorship as possible, because not only do we badly need the cash down here, we are famous for beating Mashonaland at this game and see no reason why we shouldn't give them a particularly sound thrashing this year. Give me a ring if you need info or assistance. **Julia Duprée**

Monthly Outings

Sunday 12th September: Verreaux's Eagle day with Matobo Conservation Society. Meet at Maleme Camp at 09h00. Bring picnic lunch and morning and afternoon tea. Ring Penny 237777 or Julia 246269.

Friday 17th September: Video viewing. Replacing UK Raptors and the Matopos World Heritage presentation. Followed by a simple bring-and-share finger supper for those who would like to stay on and chat. 5.30 p.m. at Penny's house, Qalisa Retirement Village, Suburbs. Ring Penny for directions and parking arrangements.

Sunday 17th October: Outing to Big Cave Camp, Kezi Road. Leaving town at 8.30 a.m. Bring morning tea, picnic lunch, chairs etc. Ring Julia for details.

Aisleby: Telephone Julia for details and shared transport.

Sunday 26 September Sunday 31 October

ADVANCE NOTICE: BOOKINGS REQUIRED

November 6th — 8th Camp at WEZ camp, Tuli. Dormitory accommodation plus camp sites. Rates 20,000 per person plus share of 70,000 camp fees for two nights. Bookings to Julia.

Wednesday, November 10th: Talk/slides by Graham McCulloch from Botswana on his flamingo research at Makgadikgadi. At 12 Ilanda Gardens, Ilanda 5.30 p.m., followed by bring-and-share finger supper. Limited secure parking (plenty on roadside) so essential to phone for arrangements. Ring Julia.

EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB

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

Sunday 26th September: Dorowa Minerals 6:00 a.m. A. Christie 64917
Sunday 31st October: Bird Watch 2004 6:00 a.m. C. Beel 63058

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 PO Box 398, Karoi ☎ 064-6358 or Cell: 011 408023
 E-mail: mitch@africaonline.co.zw

Secretary: Merle Mitchell PO 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 Library News – August 2004 Hours: 8.30 a.m. – 4.00 p.m. Monday to Friday

We welcome Abigail Samunyanga who is on attachment from the Library Science Department at NUST, Bulawayo. Abigail will be working full time in the Library until 31 May 2005 under my supervision. She is kept very busy putting data onto the computer – cataloguing reprints and journal articles. We are building up a data base which refers to articles from *Africa, Birds and Birding, Ostrich* and topical articles from other journals. *Honeyguide* has been indexed in depth by Ian Riddell. This database is accessible in the Library.

For your interest we have the following video titles available on one week loan:

An introduction to the Birds of Southern Africa I Ken Newman; The Life of Birds: finding partners I David Attenborough; The Falkland Islands: where nature is still in charge Penguin Islands (Falklands); The World of Survival series; Gibbons Birds of Southern Africa: a 100 minute video-sound guide to over 300 common & garden birds; Birds, Eagles & Farmers / Endangered Wildlife Trust; Where have all the trees gone? Made in cooperation with the Forestry Commission of Zimbabwe.

We are still hoping for a donation of Guy Gibbons Roberts Multi Media CD Rom and any other tapes / CDs of bird calls!

We are missing *Ostrich* 1966 Supplement 6 – if anyone has a copy to donate or sell to the Library we would be most grateful.

Dorothy Wakeling

EDUCATION PROGRAMME

Our programme continues to expand. In mid May at the headmaster's request, Abasi Jana & I held a workshop for three schools at Norton (on fringe of the lake Chivero Recreational Park IBA code 2004). One of the three schools, Dudley Hall, has always had an excellent record in environmental education

and this has had a spin-off on the other institutions. Another notable influence on several of the participants was the screening of the Toyota wildlife series on ZTV1. This small cluster is prepared to pay its way. (Birdlife Zimbabwe education funds are low.)

Also in May, four schools at Renco Mine and the nearby communal areas were drawn into Rio Tinto /BLZ funded bird awareness programme. Headmasters were pro-active and scored highly in the bird identification test.

Three schools at Eiffel flats in this cluster competed in a quiz competition recently. Chemukute secondary school came first, followed by Eiffel Flats and Cam & Motor primary schools.

The long awaited Matabeleland workshop was held in mid June, with Bulawayo trainers, Julia Dupree and Penny Feather, making all the local arrangements. BLZ trainers, mesdames Maasdorp and Wakeling, together with Ngoni Chiweshe, completed the team. Teachers from twelve schools and the three original Phase One schools, receive training funding for this long overdue workshop. This workshop was set aside by BLZ eighteen months ago.

The Matabeleland branch members made big contributions in time and resources. We are also grateful to the following Bulawayo firms for the funding of this event: ACOL Chemical Z\$250 000, Zimflow Z\$125 000, Marvo for 300 exercise books and finally Lobels for the delicious biscuits.

Many of the targeted schools are situated around the Matobo Hills, a very important bird area. It is hoped that a spin-off from the awareness programme will be better conservation measures in the Matobo National Park and surrounding areas. But urban birds in Bulawayo may also benefit from this programme, as the city offers habitats for many different species of birds.

The term newsletter keeps the participants in the school programme in touch with BLZ trainers and with each other. It acts to stimulate interest by providing articles, news of schools and activities for the term. To expand and brighten this newsletter, we sought funding and were delighted to receive sponsorship from NABU – a German bird club.

Identification of our birds is still a difficult activity. We are thinking of producing cards, showing common birds, to help assist teachers and learners alike.

Recently, I gave a talk to a teacher-training group about Rifa birds and I showed illustrations of the four species of vulture likely to visit the skin & bones laid out for them. I stressed that the Cape Vulture was unlikely to be seen. The report of the watch mentioned how the trainee teachers had enjoyed the spectacle and that many vultures were seen, together with the Cape Vulture!

Mr Abasi Jana is moving to Harare, to work on the national programme and with his expertise in birds and the education programme, identification skills should improve as he makes contact with the school clusters.

We have been fortunate that so many people have given donations of field guides, binoculars, posters and bird magazines. A big thank you to the Carters, Professor Peter Frost, Mrs W. Lee, Ruth Paice, Dorothy Wakeling and Mrs Jacko Williams. Also a special thanks for Tony Alegria's gift of plants for the schools and to the anonymous donors.

Leslee Maasdorp, Education Programme Manager

MASHONALAND BRANCH

Visit to EWANRIGG BOTANIC GARDEN: Sunday 27 June 2004 (QDS 1731C2. Goromonzi District)

28 Mashonaland members of BLZ went to Ewanrigg on 27 June 2004 and the temperature to begin with must have been only a little above freezing, but we saw 90 species on a very cold day and the average species list for the park is only 61 in recent years

In 1977 from the 34 Field Cards, then existing, (1962-1975), I published a list of the Birds of Ewanrigg. From the 8 cards I have from 1997-2004, there is a surprising difference between the list of those days and the list of now. The 22 years unaccounted for are either on field cards or on Atlas cards in the Bulawayo Museum.

The area of the park is 286 ha. The present checklist is over 200 species but there is much to be added to the Ewanrigg list. The famous Aloe Garden is probably only 86 ha in the developed walking area. I suspect many more birds could be added from over-flying waterbirds and birds from the 200 ha of Miombo Bushveld, which stretches all along The Christian Road to the Shamva Road. I reckon another 86 species could be added easily. The altitude is between 1250-1356m.a.s.level (Rumeri Beacon).

It is interesting to note what was not seen originally, and what is there now, showing development of land & water and denser scrub in the gardens. Still most records are from Aloe flowering time and we still have no records from April, October & November. Ewanrigg needs visitors!

Not seen previously, seen from 1997– 2004

African Darter	White-breasted Cormorant	Egyptian Goose
Great Egret	African Fish-eagle	African Sacred Ibis
African Goshawk	Long-crested Eagle	Little Sparrowhawk
African Harrier-hawk		Tambourine Dove
Swainson's Spurfowl	Natal Spurfowl	Black Cuckoo
African Green-pigeon	Klaas's Cuckoo	Terrestrial Brownbul
Purple-crested Turaco	Senegal Coucal	Speckled Mousebird
Miombo Tit	Red-faced Mousebird	White-crested Helmet-shrike
Retz's Helmet-shrike	Giant Kingfisher	Whyte's Barbet
Copper Sunbird	Lesser Honeyguide	Thick-billed Weaver
Eastern Saw-wing	Magpie Mannikin	Red-backed Mannikin
Purple Widowfinch	Grey-backed Camaroptera	
Brown-crowned Tchagra	Green-winged Pytilia	Cinnamon-breasted Bunting

References – *Babbler* numbers 32, 50 & 52. Field Cards: 13482, 13786, 14199, 14342, 14415, 14796, 14797 & 27/6/2004.

D.V. Rockingham-Gill

KUTSAGA Research Station: Sunday 25th July 2004 (QDS 1731C3)

Eight of us went out to Kutsaga Tobacco Research Station. The dam was low and the weather fairly crisp but at last warming up.

It seems that Kutsaga TRB did not make editorial comment in *Sunbird* 1-105, and then only recently in *Babbler*. The first field cards I could find a note of were 2877/8-5.3.1961 and 1.10.1961. Then there were 340 field cards lodged over 10 years by J.A. Shepard from 22.6 1968 – 16.3.1977. So the place has been well covered but the results not written up to my knowledge. If anyone wants to know the field card numbers I can supply them from our handwritten catalogue.

We saw a couple of visiting Hamerkop; I say this because I saw no nest.

An African Sacred Ibis flew over and 6 Red-billed Teal were on the dam. 3 White-backed Vultures flew overhead and we heard a Lizard Buzzard. There were two flocks of 30 Helmeted Guineafowl and we heard Swainson's Spurfowl very early in the morning. A Common Sandpiper was there and spread around the dam were 15 Three-banded Plovers and 7 African Snipe were in their muddy niche. 2 Giant Kingfishers and a Malachite Kingfisher were noted:

Some other birds noted were Lesser Honeyguide, Brown-throated Martin and 2 Fiery-necked Nightjar. Among the smaller birds noted, and not yet in the *Babbler* reports, were 3 Cape Reed-warbler, 1 Dark-capped Yellow Warbler, 3 Little Rush-warbler, 3 Yellow-bellied Eremomela, 5 Green-capped Eremomela and both Jameson's Firefinch and the Red-billed Firefinch. We also heard African Quailfinch flying overhead.

Our thanks to Anxious Masuku for allowing us to visit. See *Babbler* 45 p.5 & Sip.3 & 4.

D.V. Rockingham-Gill

Talk on the African Waterfowl Census by Dave Rockingham-Gill, Thursday 15th July 2004

Some 12 people were glad to have braved a very cold evening to hear DRG talk about the African Waterfowl Census. We sat in the bar area instead of the hall as it was warmer in there. Many of those attending have taken part in the census over the years.

Dave gave us statistics about water birds taken over the years. It has become apparent that the building of dams around the country had a significant effect on water bird numbers. Generally it would take

about 4 years for birds to start using a new dam. Habitat changes, particularly to wetlands, have a significant effect. Ability to record numbers, dependant on access to various areas, also has an effect on statistics.

Thanks to Dave for spending the time to prepare such an interesting talk.

Slide Show by DRG. Thursday 19th August 2004.

Thanks also to Dave for stepping into the breach when Dr. Marett was unable to present her slide show. Dave prepared a series of slides of robins, kingfishers and bee-eaters from the BirdLife archives, mainly by Peter Ginn. The 20 or so people who attended thoroughly enjoyed the open discussions about the pictures and species being shown.

Jennifer Carter

MATABELELAND BRANCH

OUR JULY WATERFOWL COUNTS

Thanks to financial assistance from the national office, and the dedication and generosity of our team members, counts were undertaken at a total of 55 pans and dams in Matabeleland. Unfortunately, despite everyone's best efforts we were unable to cover the remaining half-a-dozen pans, due to vehicle sickness. We are working on the actual figures — meanwhile here are a few observations.

MBAZHE PAN: We had estimated this would be a round trip of about 360 km — well, it turned out to be 447 km, partly due to road realignments and greatly due to the challenging route reminiscent of Botswana — no identifiable roads just animal tracks, plenty of dongas, wash-aways, seasonal rivers and camouflaged accesses. On our way through Nkayi, we called in to the Police Station to say hi, were told that the route was difficult to find but basically turn left right after the Shangani River, first left after the borehole, right at the school and Bob's your uncle. Fine if all this had, in some way, been connected to mileage. Someone said that something should happen after 1.5 km, and so we spent a long time waiting for this, but never found out what the something was nor where it fitted into the overall scheme of things. And then we saw the river with its lovely trees — just as well it was such an interesting environment as we spent the next 2 hours in it seeking the advice of every resident available on how to get down to the pan. In the end we found we had apparently recruited a team of little bodies who ran ahead of us all the way up the ridge and then back down to the shoreline.

It's beautiful, a shallow wide pan forming almost a reverse oxbow around the end of a ridge, and surrounded by mixed woodland set back from the shoreline. There weren't an enormous variety of birds — but look at what we did see! Ten African Openbills, a Wattled Crane, a pair of Saddle-billed Storks and three fluffy juveniles (which at first we thought were Marabous), 105 Grey Crowned Crane and 21 wading, wheeling and whistling Common Greenshank, presumably overwintering. We counted 884 birds of 24 waterfowl species, including nine special species, and recorded an overall total for the trip of 75 species – quality rather than quantity maybe.

HWANGE: On Sunday we stopped at a Tshabema side pan on the Chivesa road. On a pan to the west of the road, we watched a group of Red-billed Teal. There were five, which flew off and circled, four of them landing at the other end of the pan. The remaining teal cruised backwards and forwards close above the water. Then we thought we were in an IMAX theatre! With a whoosh of air through its wing feathers, a Tawny Eagle flew from behind and over us from the east. It struck the itinerant teal (although this wasn't totally obvious at the time). It then immediately flew vertically like a fighter jet and flipped over backwards, landing where the teal had disappeared in the long grass. All we could see was the eagle's neck and head. It stood there for a few minutes, apparently waiting (we thought maybe for the teal to appear in of the grass). Then it flew up and away with the teal in its feet. At no time while we watched had it looked at its feet or put its head down — hence our doubt that the teal had been stunned by the first blow!

So on our arrival the count was 5 Red-billed Teal and on departure it was 4!!! **Julia Duprée**

EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUBOSBORNE Dam; Sunday 30th May 2004

After teaming up to reduce the number of cars, five vehicles left for Osborne Dam. Along the Nyanga Road, a Long-crested Eagle on a pole marked the turnoff to Osborne Dam. A Black-shouldered Kite was hovering nearby. The first stop en route was the bridge across the Odzani River. African Pied Wagtails jumped over the rocks in the river. Some ducks flew in and landed near the bridge. At first they were hiding behind some reeds, but eventually the African Black Ducks showed very well for all. A Giant Kingfisher flew across the bridge and sharp eyes picked out African Wattled Lapwing and Three-banded Plover. A Little Rush-warbler was singing unseen in the reeds. Pied Kingfisher flew by and a Half-collared Kingfisher passed at lightning speed under the bridge. After this promising start we continued to Osborne Dam. Below the dam, 2 more Giant Kingfishers sat on the wires. Entry formalities took nearly forever, but soon we were walking over the top of the dam, which had Familiar Chats, African Pipits and Grey-rumped Swallows. A cold wind kept raptors out of the sky. An Augur Buzzard sat miserably in the top of a tree, waiting for better times. We followed a small trail along the lake. A few miombo birds showed themselves, but the star birds were a pair of Boulder Chat, specially staked out two weeks earlier in preparation of the trip. As they were hopping over the rocks and on the branches everyone managed to get a good look at this Zimbabwean special. Near a small quarry on the way to the campsite, a Mocking Cliff-chat revealed its presence with its song but kept out of view. Apparently some members had counted on having a quiet breakfast before birding. At the campsite, hunger and thirst could finally be appeased with imaginative sandwiches. A Lesser Swamp-warbler gave snatches of song from the nearby reeds while a lone Egyptian Goose flew over the lake. A noisy Green-backed Heron emerged from the shore as the group prepared to explore the area near the campsite. As Carl had to go back to Mutare early, Gary lead the group along a walk through the bush and along the lakeshore. Bird life was much less in evidence than earlier in the day. It was a big bonus that Gary is an experienced guide and the walk could focus on many aspects of nature. Much was learned about various trees and flowers. At a small lily-covered lagoon an African Jacana was seen and Back Crake was heard. After an exciting morning the walk ended near lunchtime. **Carl & Bart**

MUTARE Heights; Sunday 26th June, 2004 (QDS 1832D3)

Starting off at the ungodly hour of 0630, 17 keen members of the EDBC voyaged up to CECIL KOP, Mutare Heights, just past the caravan park. The miombo woodland was deathly quiet in the early winter darkness, but as the sun rose up, the birds came to life. First up was the Cape Bunting – a lifer for many. In particular, notice was made of its distinctive chestnut wing bar and grey coloration. Soon after a party of miombo birds was spotted flitting about the sun-flecked canopy. Amongst them were Southern Hyliota, Miombo Tit, Miombo Rock-thrush, Lazy Cisticola and a high flying group of about 20-odd Mottled Swift. Disappointingly, we could not find neither the lovely Rufous-bellied Tit nor the Spotted Creeper, although we heard the latter whistling away comfortably from some moss-covered msasa branch. At this point; our group split up, with one lot being so lucky as to come across Orange-winged Pytilia, and the other happening upon its equally cute relative, the Grey Waxbill. One of the reasons we enjoy birdwatching this area is the sheer diversity of species – from miombo to rock to forest inhabitants. Our list here is swelling beautifully. By the end of our walk, a total of 42 birds had been identified. Taking into account the brutally cold weather and the shallow sunshine, we all agreed that the birds had come to the party. **Bridget Holland**

BURMA VALLEY: Sunday 25th July 2004

5 of us set off from the Museum on a cool but sunny Sunday, excited at the prospect of our first descent into the Burma Valley for a long time. Although we passed his home, Peter Gwidzira came down to town to make sure he didn't miss us, dedication which is an example to us all. On arriving at Verna and Alan McGregors' home, we were joined by Peter Buttress who had come down from the Vumba. On leaving the tar we soon encountered Rufous-naped Lark on the arable land and plenty of Helmeted Guineafowl. It took us some time to sit down to the tea and biscuits waiting for us as the garden as usual was alive with birds, the noisiest and biggest of which were the Silvery-cheeked Hornbill. As the sun had not yet reached the aloes there were few sunbirds but the Purple-banded Sunbird was one of the first to show, accompanied by Red-winged Starling and African Yellow White-eye. Just beyond the fence in the forest

edge were Square-tailed Flycatcher, lots of Yellow-bellied Greenbuls and Terrestrial Brownbuls, Kurrichane Thrush, Little Bee-eater, Dark-backed Weaver and Spectacled Weaver.

When we had had tea, Verna led us on a walk through the garden and farmyard where we found Yellow-breasted Apalis, Collared Sunbird, Scarlet-chested Sunbird and Amethyst Sunbird, Lesser Honeyguide, both Bronze Mannikin and Red-backed Mannikin. On the arable land was an African Pipit and in the scrub around the yard lots of Red-billed Firefinch and other familiar species. Overhead were Lesser Striped Swallows and Grey-rumped Swallow, African Goshawk, Lizard Buzzard and Bateleur. Doves were finally singing by now, Red-eyed Dove, Cape Turtle-dove and Emerald-spotted Wood-dove. On returning to the house we spent an interesting half-hour trying to identify a few calls with the help of the CD-ROM.

Back in the garden a Black-throated Wattle-eye was spotted by some but missed by me. However, I made up for that later by super views of a Gorgeous Bush-shrike on the track side leading to my front gate, just after having been dropped by Carl.

Our thanks to Verna and Alan for sticking it out in the Valley and welcoming us so warmly. Let's hope to visit this area again soon. We saw 57 species overall.

Ken Dixon

KAROI BIRD CLUB

RYDINGS School: 3rd July, 2004 (QDS 1629D3)

We were 3 for this walk on a very frosty morning, so to begin with we did our observing from spots of weak sunlight! The dams produced Little Grebe, Malachite Kingfisher and Pied Kingfisher, Red-billed Teal, African Jacana, Great Egret, Blacksmith Lapwing and African Wattled Lapwing, Three-banded Plover and African Pied Wagtail and, in the grass, African Stonechat and Yellow-throated Longclaw. Woodland birds included Long-billed Crombec, Grey-headed Bush-shrike and Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird among others. Yellow Bishop, African Hoopoe and Helmeted Guineafowl were in the short grassland, Grey-rumped Swallow and Mosque Swallow overhead, and Lizard Buzzard calling in the distance. Nothing out of the ordinary – 52 species in all.

Other seen during the month were 2 Saddle-billed Storks, 8 African Sacred Ibis, 22 Crowned Lapwing, 3 Temminck's Courser, Little Bee-eater, Southern Black Tit, Green-winged Pytilia, Pin-tailed Whydah, both White-crested Helmet-shrike and Retz's Helmet-shrike, Red-billed Oxpecker, Meyer's Parrot and Black-chested Snake-eagle amongst the total of 85 species for the month.

RYDINGS School: 14th August, 2004 (QDS 1629D3)

This was a bit of a shock thirteen turned up for the walk! Eight adults and 5 juniors, though two of them took off on motorbikes in the opposite direction. It only gained us two more species above last month's count, mind you, but it was most encouraging to have a few more. We saw African Jacana with 4 chicks, racing over the weed with their spindly legs. A group of Black-backed Puffbacks were having what appeared to be an argument, and we spent much time viewing what we hoped might be a pair of Buffy Pipit — but alas, after debating it at length, we could not decide, in spite of comparing them with obvious African Pipit conveniently close by. We saw Namaqua Doves, which have appeared again, and the motorbike riders spotted two Red-billed Oxpeckers on the horses. The White-browed Scrub-robin was back to scolding us again, and an immature African Fish-eagle flew by. A single Black Crake was seen, not common at this possie, and we tried to see the ring the Blacksmith Lapwing had recently received. Stories were told between times; of course interesting was Danny's Dark-capped Bulbul – reared by hand from a small chick and now ruling the roost. When its 'parents' return from the day's work, it is let out of its cage, scolds the cat and virtually takes over the household — but what is interesting is that it mimics other bird calls — Grey Go-away-bird, Kurrichane Thrush whistle, Fiery-necked Nightjar and African Green-pigeon to a T! Then there is the one-legged Red-headed Weaver that managed to construct its nest, handicap and all, in the tree outside the back door. Maybe that is why the count was not much more! We noticed during the month at least 2 nest holes being prepared by Meyer's Parrot but, after a while, the bees seemed to take over — nice one! Bronze-winged Coursers were spotted — three of them. They bred here last season. We saw a Grey-rumped Swallow disappearing down its ant hole, so quick, and a Grey Heron sailed in majestically to land on the shoreline while Hamerkop flew busily overhead. **Merle Mitchell**

TAIL FEATHERS

As the Crow Flies?

Researchers have cracked the puzzle of how pigeons find their way home: they just follow the main roads! Zoologists now believe that it is likely that crows and other diurnal birds also choose AA-suggested routes, even though it makes their journey longer.

Some pigeons stick so rigidly to the roads that they even fly around roundabouts before choosing the exit to lead them back to their lofts!

The findings, following 10 years of research by animal behaviouralists at Oxford University, stunned the researchers. The latest GPS systems have been used for the last 18 months to track the birds to within 4 metres.

Professor Tim Guilford said, "For long-distance navigation and for birds doing a journey for the first time, they will use their inbuilt compasses and take sun and star bearings. But once homing pigeons have flown a journey more than once, they home in on a habitual route. In short, it looks like it is easier for a bird to fly down a road and then turn right. They are just making their journey as simple as possible." His team carried out dozens of tests with pigeons in Oxfordshire, releasing them between 10 and 20 miles from their lofts, each with a tiny GPS tracking device attached to their backs. They found that most flew straight down the A34 Oxford bypass. "It was comical watching one group of birds that we released near a major A-road. They followed the road to the first junction where they all turned right and a couple of junctions later, they all turned left!" Not all birds did it all the time but there were enough occasions when they did for the researchers to build up a pattern. "We even had one bird flying down the road, going round the roundabout, taking one of the turnings off that to another roundabout then leaving the road. Up until now, we have always thought about the way birds go in terms of the energetics of flight efficiency which is the most direct route home ... 'as the crow flies'. But the answer is, they don't go as the crow flies and it is my hunch that neither do crows! As they get familiar with the environment, they just follow the obvious features, which often don't take them directly home." Thanks to Dave Grey for the article from *The Daily Telegraph*.

Fruit eating Bar-throated Apalis HARARE

I have been feeding birds in our garden for a number of years, first with just seed and then bone meal. In the last six months I have been putting out fruit, mainly apples with the occasional banana.

A few weeks ago I noticed a Bar-throated Apalis paying some attention to the apple and I assumed that it was looking for fruit flies or some other insects. It then began pecking at and eating the apple. A few days ago the Dark-capped Bulbul had not yet opened up the apple but there was a little banana in a holder to which the apalis flew and proceeded to eat the banana.

Has anyone else noticed this happening? Two good Birders to whom I related this occurrence, said they had not witnessed this behaviour.

David Gray, Borrowdale.

Observations from a KAROI Garden. In the middle of June, in the garden, we noticed a family of 8 Arrow-marked Babblers rearing a Jacobin Cuckoo. Now, we had a family earlier in the year rearing a Levaillant's Cuckoo! The same family? The family with the Jacobin Cuckoo also had 3 of their own young at slightly different stages—one with adult plumage, arrows and all, but still with the gape showing, and feeding itself, one with adult colour but no arrows and still receiving food and one a much paler grey, all still receiving food, all with gapes showing and dark eyes. They were here in the garden for a good 3 weeks. We had not noticed a Jacobin around these past couple of years. The cuckoo put up an endless, sort-of-babbler call, begging for food.

We also had a Grey-headed Bush-shrike feeding a pair of young chicks, their plumage already the same as the adult, so attractive. What was interesting was the feeding habit of one of the adult birds. It had a half dried-up rat, which it was pinning to the Lady Chancellor tree. It would find a spike on a stem, or anchor it in the fork of the twigs and then commence to tear off pieces. One of the young did receive a tit-bit occasionally but the adult practically cleaned up the biltonged rat. **Merle Mitchell**

Early Summer

European Bee-eaters were back over my garden in Marlborough HARARE on 21 August, quite early for them, though they were seen at LAKE CHIVERO even earlier last year. Ian Riddell saw a Yellow-billed Kite at MANA POOLS on 30 July and one was seen just outside Harare mid-August.

On 14 August, I rescued a nearly fully-fledged African Yellow White-eye that had fallen out of a tree where its parents were calling frantically. It was yellow all over, but with no white around the eye, and could only manage to fly a few inches off the veranda. It hopped confidently onto my arm and probably would have been equally welcoming to the cat had he arrived first! We put it back in the tree and it hopped up from branch to branch. I hope it stayed there another day or two until it could fly! This bird must have come from an egg laid around 20 July. *Roberts* says that incubation is 11 days and nestling about 14 days and breeding in Zim is August to February, mainly September/October.

Jennifer Carter

NOTICEBOARDFIELD 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, FA

New members

Thetford Estates	Moses Munhenga
Mr & Mrs D. Du Plessis	Richard Coltam
Mr J. Erasmus	Mr & Mrs J. Cupido
F. Siajeya	M. Peacocke
David Madiba	Anne Jackson
Cossam Mahachi	Dr A. Monadjem
T. Fakarayi	Tynwald Primary School
Bart & Petra Woersten	

Looking for binoculars in good condition: Mrs Stableford, 48 Lewisam Ave., Chisipite, Harare Telephone (04) 490269

Legacies and Wreath Funds

A reminder that if any of our members would like to remember BirdLife Zimbabwe in their wills and so make a contribution to our work in conservation and education, this would be greatly appreciated. Another way is to make a contribution in memory of a loved one by Wreath Funds whereby money is donated to the charity in lieu of flowers. Please contact the office for further information

PUBLISHED BY JAY KAY PUBLISHING

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