

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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APPOINTMENT OF BIRDLIFE ZIMBABWE DIRECTOR

It is with great pleasure that BirdLife Zimbabwe Council announces the appointment of Ms Clare Davies as Director of BirdLife Zimbabwe, effective 1 October.

Clare was born in Gweru and had a successful career in National Parks for 8 years. She has a MSc. in Tropical Resource Ecology, her thesis being on the home range of the African Wild Dog in Hwange. Whilst in National Parks, Clare was for 6 years involved in ground and aerial surveys of elephant populations throughout the country. Other organisations she has worked for during her career include WWF and TOPAZ. Clare comes to BLZ with wide experience in conservation and is interested in all aspects of wild life.

We are sure that Clare's enthusiasm and drive will enable her to successfully direct the staff at BLZ as well as achieve results with the conservation and education programmes.

ACTIVITIES

MASHONALAND BRANCH

Regular outings

Sundays November 7 & December 5: Mukuvisi Woodlands. 6:30 a.m.

Directions: Turn off Chiremba Road into Ford Rd. (opposite Queensdale Shops) and continue down to Blatherwick Rd (T Junction). Turn right and the gate is about 150 meters on the left. Bring cash for the guard who will be on hand to unlock the gate to let cars in and out and chairs and refreshments.

Sundays November 14 & December 12: Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary. Meet at 06.30 a.m. at Marimba Shopping Centre, Samora Machel Avenue West. Bring chairs and refreshments. Beginners are most welcome and spare binoculars will be available.

Sunday 28 November: Greystone Park Nature Sanctuary. Meet at the sanctuary at 6:30 a.m. on Gaydon Road, from Harare Drive side, go past the shops and over the hill and turn right into Halford Rd (about 4 km from Harare Drive, first right after the top of the hill). The sanctuary is on your left about 200 metres from the turn. Bring chairs & refreshments.

There is no December Sunday outing or Thursday meeting.

Thursday evening meeting

November 18: Illustrated Presentation by Education Committee. Once again the Education Committee will talk about their work during the past year. Come and hear about the REAL work your Society is doing.

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

Thursday outings to Marlborough Vlei

2nd and 4th Thursdays (11 & 25 November, 9 & 23 December). 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

November 6-8 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 10: 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.

Aisleby. Sunday November 28: Telephone Julia for details and shared transport.

Sunday, December 5: Christmas Get-together at Jeanette & Eddie Cross' house, Burnside starting at 12.30 p.m. Bring your own lunch, tea, drinks, tables & chairs, etc. Braai fires will be available. Ring Julia or Penny.

EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB

Contacts: Jane Clegg ☎ 020-65610

Bridget Holland ☎ 020-61369

Sunday 26th September: Dunsinane, Smallbridge 6.00 a.m. K. Dixon 65819

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**STAFF DEPARTURES...

We are very sad to say goodbye to John Paxton who has decided to retire from his position with BLZ. As most of you know, without John we wouldn't be where we are today – an organisation that employs professional people and works on key conservation and education programmes throughout Zimbabwe. It was also John's hard work that secured for BirdLife Zimbabwe the premises at 35 Clyde Road. For this reason, BLZ Council has named the offices "The John Paxton Centre".

We wish you a happy retirement John, and thank you for your hard work and dedication to BLZ. Members of Council recently held a farewell party for John at the John Paxton Centre and a pleasant afternoon was spent in the garden when plenty of delicious red wine was enjoyed by all.

Sadly, we also have to say goodbye to Abasi Jana at the end of October. Abasi, who is well known to many members as an accomplished bird guide, specialising in the birds of the Eastern Highlands, has been working with the Education Department. He has done a good job spreading bird awareness through schools

...AND ARRIVALS

The good news is that Osiman Mabhachi returns to BLZ after an absence of six months. Osiman will be our Crane Conservation Officer and will work in the Driefontein area where he is already well known and respected amongst the communities.

EDUCATION PROGRAMME

Wetlands and their conservation have been to the fore in the programme. Presentations have been given to eight schools surrounding Monavale and Marlborough vleis. School groups have walked in these urban wetlands and in the Borrowdale vlei where Marsh Owl were seen by Hartman House while bird watching with our Education Officer. This wetlands awareness campaign will assist BLZ as a whole when it comes to play a bigger part in conserving these vleis.

Another wetland area Driefontein is also being targeted by our awareness programme. Eight schools scattered in the district are now taking part and will spread the message about Wattled Crane conservation. Our programme aims to benefit both people and the cranes. To maintain healthy school communities and improve the condition of those suffering from illnesses, we are starting a few pilot herb gardens. The first is being established at Taigara Primary School. The effects of certain herbs in boosting the immune system are well known. Schools will be encouraged to add nutritional crops such

as carrots, onions and tomatoes to the garden. Birds will be attracted to insects such as bees, butterflies and beetles that visit the garden. The garden when started appears fragile but with constant attention some hardier herbs like rosemary, lemon grass and mint should thrive in rural areas.

A student studying an environmental course at Bindura University, Fiona Muchecheti has joined us for a year Fiona, Abasi Jana and I have written a booklet "In the Herb Garden" to support our work

At Alfred Beit schools a successful bird festival was held in September for the Harare cluster. Some western suburb schools had transport problems. We are planning a similar festival to celebrate World Bird Watch at Tamuka School, Chitungwiza and appeal to teachers and Chitungwiza Bird Club members to make this a success on the 19th November 2004.

One or two live birds such as a trained Falcon would spark a great deal of interest at this festival. Any offers?

Chemukute and Cam and Motor Schools in the Eiffel Flats — Rio project were supported by us to put up a bird awareness stand at Kadoma show. This the teachers claimed was a winner and attracted much attention. We congratulate them on their initiative.

On the 11th November, our department is undertaking a workshop near Rusape at Serengeti Training Centre set in the granite-topped hills near Lesapi Dam. This is an event with a difference as all the teachers and children who will attend this bird identification course have been recruited by Mrs. Patience Chinyamuzore of Cheneka School. This expansion of our programme is to be commended. We hope that some Weya school teachers recruited by Mr John Vekris (a BLZ member) will also join us. Transport in their area is almost non-existent making it difficult to reach Rusape.

Our term newsletter has assumed immense importance in keeping schools in touch and maintaining interest in birds. It is not feasible to visit clusters more than once a year due to fuel cost and staff constraints. We thank NABU, our German BirdLife partner for supporting the production of the newsletter.

An unknown eagle has been nesting in a eucalyptus tree within the Cheneka school building's complex over some years it was first thought to be a Bateleur, then a Brown Snake-eagle or perhaps a Yellow-billed Kite. According to the teacher it has a yelping call.

A second-hand telescope had been donated to us. Has anyone a screw-in type tripod to donate or sell to us so we can put the telescope to use?

Leslee Maasdorp, Education Programme Manager

MASHONALAND BRANCH

McDonalds Farm, Xanadu, Ruwa: Sunday 22 August 2004 (ODS 1731C3)

There were 10 of us who set out from the BLZ Headquarters at 7 a.m. The weather was fine and hot with very little wind. The main dam by the houses has dropped a couple of metres below full and the water birds were not quite as varied as they were when I recce'd the area about 6 months previously. Notable absentees were African Fish-eagles and Fulvous Ducks.

We first investigated the lush garden between the houses and the first dam and could have spent a couple of hours there but we still had the miombo woodland and the second dam to cover. Highlights in the garden included a Senegal Coucal, a Greater Honeyguide, 4 White-browed Robin-chats and 2 Copper Sunbirds. On the dam there was a Black-crowned Night-heron perched in a tree and 4 species of duck, a Red-knobbed Coot and 3 common species of wader.

After the homestead we moved into the surrounding miombo woodland and stopped next to the second dam. In this area the highlights included 2 African Spoonbills, a Long-crested Eagle, an African Harrier-hawk, a Common Greenshank, 2 Curlew Sandpipers, 2 Black-winged Stilts, 2 African Green-pigeons,

10 Brown-throated Martins, a Dark-capped Yellow Warbler and a Grey-headed Bush-shrike. We next stopped in the patch of woodland furthest from the homestead and walked through it in a circle. We were lucky enough to see 4 Stierling's Wren-warblers and hear another to make a total count of 5. Groundscraper Thrushes were also common as we recorded 2 in this woodland and another 4 in open short grassland near the farm entrance. Other highlights from the woodland and the surrounding grasslands included a Black-chested Snake-eagle, 100 Helmeted Guineafowl, a Klaas's Cuckoo, 3 Black-headed Orioles, 4 Grey Penduline-tits, a Red-headed Weaver and a Golden-breasted Bunting.

The total species count after about three and a half hours of birding was a pleasing 108 and we look forward to our next visit to this attractive refuge so close to town. Thank you, Kim and Stef McDonald. **Richard Dennison**

Mazowe Sailing Club: Sunday 26 September, 2004 (ODS: 1730D4)

Only 7 of us made our way out to LAKE CHIVERO (stopping briefly on the way to reassure a not-unreasonably-confused driver that we were on the right road) on a pleasant, clear Sunday morning. It was good to see 4 new members attending and I was glad to be supported by Di Rushforth and John Paxton.

We walked along the side of the hill behind the sailing club, through mature miombo woodland. The steepness of the incline and the size of the trees unfortunately made it difficult to see birds at the top of the trees and we only picked up a total of 44 species but were rewarded with some good sightings. We started on a path near the water and were fascinated to see White-breasted Cormorants feasting on what was obviously an abundant school of fish. Three Grey Herons were on the edge of the water, trying to work out how to get to where the food was. I later saw a heron standing on a tiny patch of weed, way out in the lake, but he still wasn't close enough to the fish. We saw about 180 White-breasted Cormorants and 20 Reed Cormorants, 4 African Darters and 10 Grey Herons and one each of Purple Heron and Great Egret, 5 African Jacanas and 10 Grey-headed Gulls.

Immediately behind the club house, high in a tree was a Southern Hylia nest and we had good views of the large chicks being feed by both parents. There was also a pair of Spotted Creepers which stayed in the same area and we had superb views of them too.

We saw at least 8 African Golden Orioles and were treated to a family of 4 chasing each other through the trees close by. A single Black-headed Oriole was there and I now have the calls of the two species very clear in my mind as the African Golden Orioles were calling continuously. We identified only 1 raptor, an immature African Fish-eagle. One other small raptor disappeared too quickly for identification.

A pair of Pale Flycatchers sat just above head-height at the club and I saw my first two African Paradise-flycatchers of the summer. The usuals, Tawny-flanked Prinia, Arrow-marked Babbler, Dark-capped Bulbul, Black-backed Puffbacks, Southern Masked-weavers, Kurrichane Thrushes, Green-capped Eremomelas and African Yellow White-eyes were around and we saw 2 African Hoopoes and Red-headed Weavers, Cardinal Woodpecker and heard Golden-tailed Woodpecker, Brubru, Black-crowned Tchagra and Grey-headed Bush-shrike. Crested Barbet (1) and Black-collared Barbets (20) were heard and 5 Yellow-fronted Tinkerbirds and we saw Amethyst Sunbird, Miombo Double-collared Sunbird and White-bellied Sunbirds. Doves seen were Red-eyed Dove, Laughing Dove and Cape Turtle-dove.

We heard our first Black Cuckoo of the season and, as we left, a Red-chested Cuckoo was calling, very loudly.

Jennifer Carter

RIFA Education Camp, 9-13 September, 2004 (QDS 1628B2)

Although 3 of us were booked into the cottage at Rifa from the 9th, due to circumstances beyond anyone's control, I was the only one to arrive that day and the remaining 15 members of our group arrived on the 10th.

During that first day, I managed to do an afternoon walk and then a morning drive in the company of Jane Alexander who had been guiding a visiting school. Our afternoon walk was with the students and we went to Long Pan and the Zambezi river bank. A putative immature Martial Eagle was seen at Long Pan and was identified by the three white bands in the lower primary and tail feathers. However, we did not follow it up to attempt to confirm it, which was a pity as Martial Eagles were not confirmed during our stay. Other highlights on this walk were 2 Saddle-billed Storks, several Yellow-billed Storks, 2 Double-banded Sandgrouse, several Meyer's Parrots, about 20 Southern Carmine Bee-eaters and African Hoopoe, Green Wood-hoopoe and Common Scimitarbill. That evening a Barn Owl called near the camp.

The next morning we drove up to the middle road and then came back along the tar road to Chirundu and visited several pans along the way. Pans near to Rifa Camp were mainly dry but those on the northern side of the tar road were quite full. We looked for Arnot's Chat and managed to pick up 5 in the cathedral mopane. Water birds were well represented at the wet pans and highlights included several African Openbills, a Spur-winged Goose and several Black-winged Stilts. It was also a good morning for raptors as we saw Tawny Eagles, African Hawk-eagles, Bateleurs, African Fish-eagles and a pair of Black Sparrowhawks. Other highlights included 5 Crested Francolin, a Greater Honeyguide, Mosque Swallows, Ashy Flycatcher, Retz's Helmet-shrike and Red-headed Weaver.

Most people arrived around midday on the 10th and two groups went for a walk at around 3:30 p.m. Unfortunately, I did not go on that walk as I was in the 4th day of 'flu' which would stay with me until I returned to Harare. Highlights added to our bird list from these first group walks included Green-backed Heron and Rufous-bellied Heron, Glossy Ibis, Western Banded Snake-eagle, Common Greenshank, Curlew Sandpiper, Little Stint, Ruff, Water Thick-knee, Temminck's Courser, Collared Pratincole, Lilian's Lovebirds, Horus Swift, Brown-throated Martin and Yellow-breasted Apalis.

On the 11th we visited the sandy floodplain in front of the hot-spring in the morning and 2 pans on the northern side of the tar road in the afternoon. In the morning, we saw Purple Heron, Little Bittern, Hooded Vulture and White-backed Vulture, Wahlberg's Eagle and Black-chested Snake-eagle, African Goshawk, 4 Greater Painted-snipe, Kittlitz's Plovers, a Giant Kingfisher, Brown-throated Martin, Yellow-bellied Greenbul, African Paradise-flycatcher, Red-billed Oxpecker, Lesser Masked-weaver, White-winged Widowbirds and Cut-throat Finches.

That afternoon, 2 vehicles approached the pans via Chirundu and a third vehicle via the middle road. At both pans, water birds were again well represented and added highlights included Three-banded Courser, African Green-pigeon, 6 Bohm's Spinetails, Lesser Honeyguide, Southern Ground-hornbills, Golden-tailed Woodpecker and Bearded Woodpecker.

Most exciting for those in one vehicle was when a Wild Dog chased an impala into the pan right in front of them as they were sitting having sundowners. The impala attempted to swim the long axis of the pan but the resident crocodile reacted immediately. It came like a torpedo from the side of the pan, its wake visible just below the surface. Suddenly, it surged up beside the impala, grabbed it by the neck and pulled it under the water. Calm reigned for perhaps 10 minutes then the crocodile dragged the carcass to the side of the pan to begin eating it. In the meantime, two other Wild Dogs arrived and the trio greeted each other and trotted off. It just wasn't the impala's day! All three vehicles were lucky enough to see at least one of the dogs.

Sunday was our last full day and we visited the cottages downstream of CHIRUNDU in the morning and Vulture Point in the afternoon. For birders, it is disappointing to find that the sewerage plant is being developed behind and below the cottages and most of the riverine forest in the area has been destroyed.

However, the swimming pool area continues to be well populated by birds. New birds seen were Marabou Stork, Yellow-billed Kite, White-fronted Plover, 9 African Skimmers, 6 African Mourning Doves,

Grey-headed Parrots, Klaas's Cuckoo, Crowned Hornbill, Bennett's Woodpecker, Sombre Greenbul, Burnt-necked Eremomela, Green-winged Pytilia, Purple Widowfinch and Steel-blue Widowfinches and a solitary Golden-breasted Bunting. At Vulture Point, we added 2 Goliath Herons and a Squacco Heron.

On the final morning, 2 groups walked up the stream bed past the Southern Carmine Bee-eater nesting colony to try to find Livingstone's Flycatcher. Although none was found, here and at the camp more highlights added to the list were Hadedda Ibis, Lizard Buzzard, Little Sparrowhawk, Gabar Goshawk, African Scops-owl, African Barred Owlet, about 400 Carmine Bee-eaters (and many White-fronted Bee-eaters), Racquet-tailed Roller, Grey-headed Bush-shrike and Collared Sunbird.

A very respectable total of 180 were seen. **Richard Dennison**

September 16th: Presentation "Birds of Zambia" by Carl Beel, Chairman of EDBC

A good turn-out of over 30 members enjoyed an interesting, entertaining and superbly presented talk by Carl Beel on the birds of Zambia. We were dazzled, not only by Carl's technical wizardry that had pictures of birds appearing superimposed on the background of Zambian miombo woodland at the click of a button, but also by his knowledge and well-thought out presentation. Add to this a good dose of humour and we were well entertained as well as educated.

Zambia is almost covered by large swathes of miombo woodland, much more than occurs in Zimbabwe, with some granite hills, large seasonal wetlands and the occasional forest and river estuary. We also saw a picture of Carl jumping over the Zambezi River which has its source in northwest Zambia! The miombo has many of the species that we get in Zimbabwe but also Zambian variants of other species. The wetlands have huge numbers of waders that we get very excited about when they stray across the border and some unique species, such as the Shoebill.

In many cases, particularly that of the Shoebill, it is very difficult to get to the areas where the birds can be seen. When Carl was exploring Zambia, they had to take everything they needed with them as there was very little infrastructure in the National Parks and areas of interest. Although there has been some development and tourist lodges are being opened, it is still the same in some areas.

Carl described how he and others found a new species of double-collared sunbird in one of the granite areas. It had been accepted that the bird occurring on the large hill was the same as that occurring in the miombo but observers realized that the habits were slightly different and the bird was slightly bigger. It was eventually declared a new species.

Finally, Carl asked why many Zambian species that occur in the extreme south do not cross the Zambezi and come into Zimbabwe. Birds that could probably be seen from Zimbabwe with a powerful telescope do not cross the river. It is an interesting question.

Thank you, Carl, for a very entertaining evening.

Jennifer Carter

MATABELELAND BRANCH

Verreaux's Eagle Weekend 27th — 29th August Maleme MATOPOS (ODS: 2028D1, etc.)

Eight birders from Mashonaland, 4 from Midlands and even 2 from Malawi joined Matabeleland branch for the Verreaux's Eagle weekend at National Park's Maleme Camp in the Matopos where the Matabeleland branch have been monitoring Verreaux's Eagle nests for more than 40 years.

We were given excellent documents with notes on how to find a nest, what to observe at the nest, what the birds might be up to in any given period, results of the previous 5 years, reports from the end of May and July and a map of the Matopos with nests marked. There were 62 marked nests and 7 were highlighted for visiting during the weekend. Some nests require a long trek to reach and, as the weekend went on and we realised the enormous amount of effort and time that a few individuals in Matabeleland put in to continue this survey, we were very impressed by their dedication.

The weather had turned cloudy and cold on Friday and was still so as we made our way to nests 111a/b on the edge of the Park, a km or so from the Tuli road. We walked a few hundred metres to a small kopjie from where we could see a chick of about 8 weeks on the nest on another kopjie a short distance away, easily visible. The parents were nearby keeping a close eye on us. Leaving the birds, we made our way to some rock paintings nearby, a wonderful example of their kind.

We moved on to nest 76 where we observed from right next to the Tuli road with the nest was quite a distance away. But we were able to see a small head with an adult bird on guard.

We then partly retraced our steps and turned off to Mwizilume Dam, closer to Maleme, in a spectacular valley. There we found another nest and two adult birds nearby on the top of a high rock. As we watched, the adults swooped down to give us a display so close it was breath-taking.

In the afternoon, we went the other side of Maleme. We couldn't see what was happening on the nest so an energetic few walked and climbed to it. There were the sad signs of an attack on the nest with the eaglet killed, probably by a baboon. We went on to a site where there had been a nest in previous years but although we walked all around the kopjie, the nest could not be found.

As mentioned before, Paul Tubb and his wife travelled from Malawi to attend the weekend. Paul was at Reps some 40 years ago and participated in the survey then. Amazingly, many of the nests are still in the same places as they were then.

At the scout camp on Friday morning (see below), we were able to observe another chick on a nest across the valley. In spite of the cold, cloudy weather, at 7:30 a.m., the adults were seen carrying a dassie to the nest. Through the 'scope, we watched the mother tenderly feeding her chick. We arrived at Maleme to report our sighting and were very smug when we heard that Mat'land hadn't known about the chick. The late rains had made the nearly road impassable in May and in July the observer of the site was away.

At Maleme camp itself, we were delighted to hear that a pair of African Crowned Eagles was preparing a nest. While everyone else went off that afternoon, I sat for more than 4 hours watching as I had never before had a really good look at an African Crowned Eagle. The camp is above an amazing valley of tumbling rocks with trees growing between the rocks. You could look down into the nest from the balcony of Fish Eagle Lodge and I sat just below it. The female sat on a tree between me and the nest and eventually the male returned, perched for a short while on the branch above her then hopped down and they mated! After another few moments, the male glided away and then soared above the valley, calling and displaying for some time before moving off again. In all that time, I didn't see him flap his wings once! When he had gone, the female flew to nearby trees and placed a couple of branches on the nest before sitting on and near it the rest of the afternoon. As I sat alone in the silence, there was a fruiting fig just below and a number of different birds visited it. The Red-winged Starlings all came to feed together and it was very different to see Purple-crested Turacos from above, in the sunlight, I could see their magnificent colours. Later in the afternoon I was joined by the others and we saw a pair of Ovambo Sparrowhawks nest-building even closer than the eagles, a pair of African Fish-eagles flew below, there were Yellow-billed Kites close by and we saw a pair of Black Sparrowhawks fly into the valley! Magic! We also looked down onto both species of dassie on the rocks below, there were monkeys and baboons about and I was visited by Banded Mongooses and a Rock Elephant-shrew as I sat quietly.

On Saturday evening, we had an excellent braai at Fish Eagle Lodge and talked of many things, particularly birds!

The next morning we walked down through the rocks to the dam and saw Ashy Flycatchers, Cape Buntings and Cape Batis among other species.

I know that many members from other parts of the country have never been to the Matopos or have not been for a long time. I urge you to visit as soon as you can. It is a World Heritage site because it is unique in the entire world, let alone in Zimbabwe. And the birdlife is spectacular.

We thank Matabeleland Branch, in particular Julia, Penny and Margie, for allowing us to join them on this special weekend and for their warm hospitality.

AISLEBY (ODS: 2028B1)

Those of us from Mashonaland travelled to Bulawayo on Thursday as we felt the distance was too far to go for just 2 nights and we were interested in seeing Aisleby that we had heard so much about. Julia Duprée met us at 11:30 at the edge of town and led us out to Aisleby where we were joined a bit later by Penny Feather.

[text missing...] sunshine along to the UMGUSA Dam wall. A flowering tree (don't ask me for names) was full of superb Marico Sunbirds, White-bellied Sunbirds and Scarlet-chested Sunbirds and Tawny-flanked Prinias, Zitting Cisticolas and Rattling Cisticolas shouted from across the path. Shrikes were represented by Common Fiscal, Black-backed Puffback, Magpie Shrike, Southern White-crowned Shrike, Orange-breasted Bush-shrike and Tropical Boubou. We also saw all the expected doves, Giant Kingfisher and Brown-hooded Kingfisher, African Grey Hornbill, Crested Barbets & Black-collared Barbets and Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird, Blue Waxbills, Jameson's Firefinch and Red-billed Firefinch. Back at the clubhouse, we spied Grey Heron, Black-headed Heron and Green-backed Heron, Great Egret and Cattle Egret and a pair of Saddle-billed Storks, using a telescope. On the water were Little Grebe, White-faced Duck, White-backed Duck, Comb Duck and Maccoa Duck, Hottentot Teal and Red-billed Teal, Spur-winged Goose and Egyptian Goose, in their hundreds. White-winged Terns flew overhead.

After lunch we headed for the ponds and saw Wood Sandpipers (they were everywhere), Ruff, Common Greenshank, Black-winged Stilt, African Jacana, Black Crake, Red-knobbed Coot, Three-banded Plover and had excellent views of African Purple Swamphen. Blacksmith Lapwings and Wattled Lapwings wandered among the feet of the cattle.

We moved across the river to the lands and found Black-shouldered Kites, Crowned Lapwings, Helmeted Guineafowl, Hamerkop, African Sacred Ibis and Swainson's Spurfowl. We checked up on the Kittlitz's Plover family and eventually, to everyone's relief, saw all 4 babies, just little bundles of fluff. After 4 hours of afternoon birding, we had ticked 104 species and hurried back to town to fill our tanks before heading out to Gordon Park Scout camp in the Matopos where we had acquired accommodation for the night.

We are very grateful to Julia and Penny for giving up their time to take us to Aisleby when they already had their hands full with the Verreaux's Eagle weekend. **Jennifer Carter**

EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB

Partridge Hill, VUMBA: Sunday, 29th August 2004 (ODS 1932B2)

After Saturday's drizzly, cold conditions – Sunday's birding up the Vumba was a little tenuous – but Sunday morning brought with it fine weather and the Bird Club ventured up to Partridge Hill to our hospitable hosts, Mandy and Pat Retzlaff

Partridge Hill has meandering forest walks and as usual with forest birding one hears more than one actually sees. One member ticked off three lifers, namely Dark-backed Weaver, White-starred Robin and Chirinda Apalis. The Chirinda Apalis, which is uniformly grey in colour, flitted in the foliage on the forest path edge and gave us a wonderfully clear view. This apalis is one of the two endemic birds in the Vumba, the other being the Roberts's Warbler which we also heard and identified by its strident call. The forest yielded Cape Batis, Olive Bush-shrike, Black-fronted Bush-shrike, Orange Ground-thrush, Livingstone's Turaco, Cape Robin-chat, Tambourine Dove, Olive Thrush and Red-faced Crimsonwing.

The forest path led to an open protea patch; here we saw a fair number of sunbirds namely Bronzy Sunbird, Collared Sunbird, Variable Sunbird and Olive Sunbird. Here too we caught sight of a good number of Cape Canary — they were much debated but the grey nape was diagnostic. They seemed to be all over the place and more dominant in presence than the Yellow-fronted Canary.

The bulbuls were well represented, as they normally are up the Vumba, with good views of Stripe-cheeked Greenbul and Bird Club members also heard Terrestrial Brownbul and Yellow-bellied Greenbul.

The only raptors around were Long-crested Eagle, a high flying African Harrier-hawk and the clicking African Goshawk,

Mandy and her pointer, Popeye, flushed a Lemon Dove from the forest floor near to where a good sighting of a Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird was had by Jane.

Back to the Retzlaff's house for a cup of tea, chat and compilation of our morning's bird list — 40 birds in all. Thanks again to Mandy and Pat for hosting our Bird Club and their warm hospitality — a rewarding outing for us all.

Karoi Bird Club

Once again, striking postal workers have denied us, or at least postponed, the pleasure of reading Merle Mitchells's letter from Karoi. Watch this space...

TAIL FEATHERS

PLEASE HELP...DALE HANMER ASKS "Would anyone who has ever seen a Red-capped Robin-chat in Zimbabwe or Mozambique between April-September, please phone (020-62353 evening) or e-mail dhanmer@mweb.co.zw with approximate date (month: early, mid or late) and Place with approximate altitude (high, mid (c.1200m) or low would do)." Regards, Dale Hanmer.

Wattled Cranes near MVUMA: On the 13th September, en route from South Africa, we saw a pair of Wattled Cranes approximately 10 metres away from the side of the main road in a small spruit. The immediate area had been burnt previously, but showed fresh regrowth of grass. Interestingly this pair seemed unaffected by the passing traffic which included heavy trucks. The location was the 209km peg from Harare, or 18km on the Masvingo side of Mvuma [1930B3].

Rich & Sue Bell

Our very own BirdLife Zimbabwe member and bird artist, Sue Bell, has recently had a very important sale of one of her bird paintings. Through Richard Rennie Gallery, Sue sold a pastel painting measuring 100 x 80cm of a Southern Red Bishop. This painting was presented to President Robert Mugabe at the opening of the Agricultural Show. This is a great achievement and we wish her well in her artistic career.

Observations: As I sit in my study preparing this *Babbler* on a hot October day, I overlook my back garden [HARARE] with a bougainvillea hedge and other trees and flowers. Earlier, as the spray was on, Variable Sunbirds, including an immature male, splashed among the wet leaves, bathing themselves thoroughly but avoiding the direct spray. A very wet Crested Barbet was hardier, just turning his back as the spray came around. Now the spray has been moved and I can see a Southern Black Flycatcher, Blue Waxbills and female Southern Masked-weaver. There is the Tawny-flanked Prinia and the Bar-throated Apalis and a Greater Blue-eared Starling chasing off a Pied Crow.

The European Bee-eaters I reported as arriving in August were apparently passing through, on their way to South Africa. I didn't see them again until last week and they are now overhead. A White-browed Robin-chat is mimicking an Orange-breasted Bush-shrike and Red-billed Firefinches have joined the Blue Waxbills.

Pilansburg Game Park

We spent 24 hours in the Pilansburg Game Park in early May. It is a very interesting place, reputedly the largest volcanic crater in the world (25 km across), quite far west, with a lot of acacia scrub and not many tall trees except at the camps. We identified about 90 species, although we had to stay in our vehicles in the park except at a couple of picnic sites, and Graham took ill in the afternoon.

We were thrilled with 5 'lifers', a Short-toed Rock-thrush, a Kalahari Scrub-robin, Black-necked Grebe, Yellow-billed Duck and Burnt-necked Eremomela. Raptors were in short supply with only African Fish-eagle, African Hawk-eagle, a Shikra and a Black-shouldered Kite seen.

Most of the usual suspects of acacia scrub were there; plenty of Marico Flycatchers, some Crimson-breasted Shrikes, Cape Glossy Starlings, Chestnut-vented Tit-babbler. There were 3 thrush species at the camp, Groundscraper, Kurrichane Thrush and Olive Thrush, and we saw only one magnificent Marico Sunbird, showing off close by as we ate our breakfast.

We had good sightings of elephant, rhino and kudu as well as other plains species. Pilansburg is well worth a visit and we hope to get back and spend more time there. **Jennifer Carter**

NOTICEBOARDSUBSCRIPTION RATES FOR 2005

Individuals / Families: \$50 000 Pensioners & Students: 520 000
 Corporate / Companies: \$1 000 000

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.

New members

Robert Nesham

Sponsored Members

Chipo Chaora	Chipo Zvorwadza	Edith Kugara
Snodia Zunga	Elison Dandazi	Linda Chiyangwa
Farai Mhaka	St Andrews High School	H Kwekweta
Obey Mahlupeka	Peter Murambi	Abigail Rugoho

Items for sale: please call Alice at the office or on 011 611116

Books

Newman's Birds of Southern Africa – the green edition:	Kenneth Newman
Southern African Birds – a photographic guide:	Ian Sinclair
Southern African Birds (SASOL) – a photographic guide:	Ian Sinclair and Ian Davidson
Birds of Southern Africa – checklist and alternative names:	Compiled by P.A.R Hockey
The Important Bird Areas of Southern Africa:	Edited by Keith Barnes
Birds of the Highveld:	Peter Ginn
Wankie Birds:	Peter Steyn
Field Guide to the Birds of Southern Africa – 2nd edition:	Ian Sinclair
The Birds of Zimbabwe:	Michael P Stuart Irwin
Birds Afield:	Peter Ginn
Aids to Bird Identification in Southern Africa:	Gordon Maclean
The Atlas of the Birds of Sul Do Save, Southern Mozambique:	Vincent Parker

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