

# BABBLER

The Newsletter of -

## BirdLife Zimbabwe

*THE BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL PARTNER IN ZIMBABWE*

*Member of IUCN, The World Conservation Union*

ISSUE #64 – JANUARY /FEBRUARY 2005

### 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
	Jennifer Carter	300082	Margie Pearce	247009
			Jean Tucker	241079

### NATIONAL OFFICE

Director: Clare Davies

Education Programme Manager: Leslee Maasdorp

Conservation Programme Manager: Chip Chirara

Conservation Officer: Ngoni Chiweshe Crane Conservation Manager: Osiman Mabhachi

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### **SEASON'S GREETINGS**

Best Wishes to all BirdLife Members for a Happy Christmas and Good Birding in 2005.

### **2005 Subscription**

In order to cut down on the cost of postage, invoices will not be sent out to members but included with this issue is a subscription payment form.

Please complete the form and send it together with the appropriate amount to BLZ Office.

Your continued support for the organisation is very much appreciated.

### **Distribution of *Babbler* & *Honeyguide*, Harare and Mutare**

As a further cost-cutting measure with effect from the March/April 2005, Issue 65 of *Babbler* and future issues of *Honeyguide* (3 proposed for 2005) all Harare members are asked to collect their copies from BLZ Office or from the nearest Branch of FOCAL POINT who have very kindly agreed to perform the duties for us.

Please contact Alice at BLZ Office to let her know where you wish to collect from:

Avondale	Avondale Shopping Centre
Borrowdale	49 Sam Levy Village
Newlands	Mobil Service Station
Westgate	Westgate Shopping Centre
Town centre	Travel Plaza, Cnr. Mazowe/Josiah Chinamano
Groombridge	the Shopping Centre, cnr. The Chase / Teviotdale Road

Please let us hear from you – this will free up funds for bird conservation.

For Mutare members, *Babbler* will be sent to Carl Beel in Mutare – he will email all Mutare members before then and arrange with them where they can collect their copy.

### **ACTIVITIES**

#### **MASHONALAND BRANCH**

##### **Regular outings**

Sundays January 2 & February 6: 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 January 9 & February 13: 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.

Saturday 29 and Sunday 30 January: Alex Masterson's Marlborough Vlei Walks — 6:30 a.m. See below for directions. Please bring a tip for the security guard and remember it can be quite wet underfoot so bring suitable footwear.

Sunday 27 February: 12 Welston Road, Glen Forest and Suncrest Dam. Meet at Wingate Golf Club car park, Alpes Road, at 6:30 a.m. where cars can be left and transport shared. Bring chairs and refreshments.

##### **Thursday evening meeting**

January 20th Branch AGM which is on an informal basis when the Committee for 2004 will be decided. Reports will be given on Mukuvisi, Chivero Bird Sanctuary and Marlborough Vlei. Pies are available and a variety of salads will be provided. Please bring a knife, fork and plate.

February 17th BLZ Wattled Crane Project. Dr. Chip Charara, BLZ Conservation Programme Manager, will give an illustrated talk on the Wattled Crane Project at Driefontein.

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 (13th and 27th January and 10th and 24th February). Meet at 4:00 p.m. provided Ian Riddell is available. For confirmation contact Ian on 339716 or [gemsaf@mango.zw](mailto: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**

Thursday January 20th: Viewing and celebration of our new office. 38 Lawley Road, Suburbs 5.00 p.m. Drinks & nibbles, courtesy of Matabeleland Branch. Phone Julia.

Sunday February 6th: Branch Annual General Meeting. At Dambari Field Station, Esigodini Road (just this side of Chipangali), courtesy of the Marwell Zimbabwe Trust. Meeting starts at 11.30, followed by a bring-and-share picnic lunch. Phone Penny.

Saturday February 26th: How Mine to see millions of roosting Barn Swallows. Leave town 4.00 p.m. Phone Penny.

Aisleby, January 29th and February 26th a.m.  
Please contact Julia.

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### **EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB**

Contacts: Carl Beel ☎ 023- 416249, Jane Clegg ☎ 020-65610, Bridget Holland ☎ 020-61369

Sunday 30 January 2005: Waterfowl count around Osborne Dam 6:00 a.m. C. Beel 63058

Sunday 27 February 2005: Mutare Heights 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. Please respond during the day.

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### **Karoi Bird Club**

Co-ordinator: Kevin Mitchell PO Box 398, Karoi ☎ 064-6358 or Cell: 011 408023

E-mail: [mitch@africaonline.co.zw](mailto: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. Please check whether there will be a walk on New Year's Day or Saturday 8th January.

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### **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.

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### **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.

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## **REPORTS**

### **NATIONAL**

#### ZIMBABWE BIRDWATCH 2004

This event, held on 23 October, attracted only 5 entries. These produced an overall total of 250 sightings: Entries were checked and adjudged by Matabeleland Branch, as promised, with the following results. Copies of the composite list can be obtained from the Harare office.

It will be noted that, as promised, Matabeleland soundly beat Mashonaland into 2nd place. It's the judges' opinion that the Committee Creepers came ahead of the Lame Ducks only because they were able to move more quickly — they also had the distinct advantage of *et als* on their team. Caesar, unfortunately, were unable to move at all, so did well to achieve the sightings they did. Matabeleland has now recruited a new team doctor, so we expect to sweep the board next year.

**Results**

5 teams entered: Mashonaland x 1, Karibaland x 1 and Matabeleland x 3

1 <sup>st</sup>	Fourteenth Timers	166 species	H. Erwee & S. McAdam
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Committee Creepers	135 species	R. Dennison <i>et al</i>
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Lame Ducks	120 species	P. Feather & J. Duprée
4 <sup>th</sup>	Kariba	108 species	N. and D. Adamson & N. Blyth
5 <sup>th</sup>	Caesar	82 species	C. & D. Hubbard
Composite sightings (all entries)		250 species	

**EDUCATION PROGRAMME**

As the year draws to a close, festivals and trips to see birds feature on the schools calendar. The Chitungwiza Festival attracted 68 students and 8 staff members from six primary schools. Singers decked out in bird masks and actors in a play in ostrich feathers delighted the audience. Competition winners came from Tamuka (our host school), Dudzai, St Aidans and Budirirai. This cluster has longed for a trip to Kuimba Shiri but could not afford it. Now seed money has been collected by Hartman House Environmental Club. They donated an amount to be used for this purpose, added to it was a donation as well from the Mashonaland Branch for this trip. Excited children and teachers accepted the \$160 000 with thanks.

At a visit paid to Renco Mine and reported on by Mrs Maasdorp and Mr B Peters at the November Mashonaland Branch meeting, a quiz was held. Our big surprise was the recruitment of four additional schools to the programme by staff of the original schools proving that appreciating birds is a popular activity. All schools provided pupils for a bird walk at the Rupike Irrigation Dam; Renco provided the bus and refreshments.

On 11 November a workshop for Rusape teachers and learners was held in the picturesque setting of Serengeti 5 past Lesapi Dam. Arrangements were made by Mrs Patience Chinyamunzore and a traditional lunch for 35 participants was provided. Some of us tried okra as a vegetable for the first time. It was also the first time we had included schoolchildren in a training workshop. They joined in for part of the day and then enjoyed exploring the rocks surrounding the dam.

In the New Year, we plan to visit clusters of schools we were unable to get to in 2003. In February 2005, our programme includes a visit to Chipinge (with a Tanganda venue), Chimanimani and Vumba/Burma Valley, short drama, poster and poem presentations should be presented.

Results of the art competition will be announced in the First Term newsletter. Some schools sent in good artwork and winning entries together with Hartman House's excellent pictures will be put on display at an evening meeting of the Mashonaland Branch – BLZ.

A training workshop for Weya teachers (Chendambuya) will be held early next year.

As postage is very expensive, any schools with email should contact me and we could arrange to send the newsletter through the email.

The raptor nesting regularly at Cheneka School, Rusape needs identification and the school would appreciate this interest. Phone before visiting as the grounds are fenced and locked.

**Leslee Maasdorp**, Education Programme Manager

**CONSERVATION PROGRAMME****Zimbabwe Bird Database**

BirdLife Zimbabwe secured funding from the Dutch Embassy to computerise data that have been collected by BirdLife Zimbabwe members and staff over the past 50 years. The main activities for this project involve the computerisation of information contained in the Special Species Survey cards, Field Cards and Nest Record Cards. A species index to *Honeyguide* is being created as well. The Field Cards and Nest Record Cards are held by the Natural History Museum in Bulawayo and these are being

computerised by a computer student from NUST under the supervision of Professor Peter Mundy. The project ends at the end of August.

#### African Waterfowl Census

The July Zimbabwe African Waterfowl Census was sponsored by Wetlands International and was jointly coordinated by BLZ and David Rockingham-Gill. Close to twenty sites were counted and the data was collated and computerised by BLZ. Eight students from three universities were involved in the July census and we hope to include more in the future. Members who would want to take part in the January census should contact the office for forms and information.

#### Crane Conservation in the Driefontein Grasslands

The project is sponsored by CIDA and focuses on conservation in areas that were opened up for resettlement after 2000. BLZ has set up communal gardens away from the sensitive wetlands. These have been accepted by locals who have set up committees to oversee Wattled Crane conservation and gardening activities. The project has the support of the local leadership and the Gutu Rural District Council.

In August Ngoni Chiweshe, Jack Amonie and Togarasei Fakarayi carried out a survey of cranes in September/October. They counted 138 Wattled Cranes and 142 Grey Crowned Cranes. Osiman Mabhachi has returned to BLZ and will continue with good work that he initiated six months ago.

**Dr. C. Chirara**, Conservation Programme Manager

#### 11<sup>TH</sup> Pan African Ornithological Congress

Ngoni Chiweshe attended the 11th PAOC that was held at Djerba Island, Tunisia (20-25/11/04). Over 200 delegates representing 46 countries from three continents (Africa, Europe and America) attended the congress. Chiweshe's trip was made possible through sponsorship from BirdLife International African Partnership (BLIAP) and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB). Chiweshe gave an oral presentation entitled 'Verreaux's Eagles and hyraxes — the two flagship species in the conservation of wildlife in the Matobo Hills, Zimbabwe'. A paper of his presentation will be published in a special issue of the journal *Ostrich* which will appear early next year. Chiweshe is also preparing a brief summary report on the proceedings of the 11th PAOC which will be published in the forthcoming *Honeyguide* issue.

It is worth informing members that the next PAOC (Year 2008) will be held in South Africa. The actual venue is yet to be announced. South Africa was the only country that submitted a written application to host the next PAOC while Botswana requested verbally. However, Botswana will be considered top priority that is, if South Africa withdraws — which is unlikely. More news in the next issues of *Honeyguide* and *Ostrich*.

**Ngoni Chiweshe**, Conservation Officer

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### **MASHONALAND BRANCH**

#### Obituary

We were very sad to lose committee member, Humphrey Rees, who died of a brain tumour, in November 2004.

Humphrey came to the then Southern Rhodesia in 1957 for a brief visit and never left! He took a job at Charter Estate and later became a Conservation & Extension Officer in Enkeldoorn. For a time, he leased Chinkangas Farm in Karoi North, close to Miami. Later still, he became head of the veterinary department for Pfizer's. During this time he had ample opportunity to study the flora and fauna of the country and became very knowledgeable, particularly about birds.

Humphrey was a very cultured man. He loved history and was an expert on Waterloo, was a great follower of cricket, sailed dinghies and once sailed from Kariba to Binga and back. He played tennis, loved music and had been a member of BirdLife Zimbabwe for some years. He was married three times, most recently to Chris, who he met on a bird walk at Christon Bank in 2002.

In his memory, Humphrey's friends have donated \$200 000 to BirdLife Education Committee. We thank them for that.

We extend our condolences to Chris and his family. The world was richer for having known him.

Brookmead Farm, BROMLEY: Sunday, 24 October 2004 (ODS 1831A2)

There were about 10 of us who set out from the BLZ Headquarters at 6 a.m. on a glorious fine and hot day. Jenny Faasen was our host for this outing in the Bromley area. On our arrival, there was a Senegal Coucal perched on a fence-post in the garden. There are a pair building a nest in the top of a bougainvillea and we watched them all the time we were in the garden.

Jenny led us off from the farmhouse in a westerly direction, which was opposite to the way we went in May last year. As is often the case these days we split up into 3 loosely associated groups in order to cover more ground and to enable people to bird at their own pace. This can be a bit risky if a group happens to wander onto recently settled land where the new occupiers may not welcome the intrusion. We first passed through a patch of acacia woodland and ran into a significant bird party which included an African Pygmy-kingfisher, 3 Chestnut-vented Tit-babblers, 3 Stierling's Wren-warblers, a Green-winged Pytilia, 2 Violet-eared Waxbills and 2 Golden-breasted Buntings. Birds not associated with this party included 4 African Green-pigeons and 3 Bushveld Pipits. The Bushveld Pipits were lifers for Ian Riddell and in retrospect we probably should have spent more time exploring this patch of acacia. However we moved on into more open mixed savannah and fallow fields containing patches of either short or long grass. Recent rain in the Bromley area had greened up the grass which was still short in burnt patches. These fallow lands proved to be quite rewarding for us as we do not often encounter them. Highlights in the short grass included 2 Temminck's Coursers, 5 Red-capped Larks, African Pipits and Buffy Pipits, 4 Cape Longclaws and 4 Yellow-throated Longclaws and about 150 African Quailfinches. In the long grass we encountered 10 Rufous-naped Larks and 15 Cuckoo Finches. To complete our circular route back home we passed through patches of miombo woodland and into the homestead garden where the highlights included 2 African Golden Orioles and 2 Black-headed Orioles, 8 Miombo Tits, 6 White-browed Scrub-robins, 3 more Stierling's Wren-warblers, 4 Wood Pipits, 6 shrike species and 4 species of sunbird. In the sky and perched in trees we identified a pleasing 7 species of raptor, namely; 1 Yellow-billed Kite, 1 Wahlberg's Eagle and 1 Black-chested Snake-eagle, 2 Steppe Buzzards, 1 Lizard Buzzard, 1 Ovambo Sparrowhawk and 2 White-backed Vultures. Back in the garden we relaxed in the shade with our tea and carried out the call over. We came up with 105 species and many of these were similar to those found in Chiota communal land to the west. Our thanks go to Jenny for her enthusiastic support for this outing and we hope to visit this interesting area regularly in the future. **Richard Dennison**

GREYSTONE PARK Nature Sanctuary: Sunday 28th November, 2004 (ODS 1731C3)

Eleven birders turned up at this jewel in the HARARE suburbs on a cloudy but dry and warm morning. A lot of work has been done since our last visit and bridges across previously un-negotiable streams and well-kept paths allowed us to walk all around the small dam. The sanctuary special is the Red-collared Widowbird and we saw at least 10 of these including some males just starting to get their breeding plumage that made us refer to our guide books. Around 50 Village Weavers were nesting on the reeds and 25 Southern Masked-weavers (also nesting) and 4 Spectacled Weavers were seen. Noisy Red-faced Cisticolas were all around with 1 Rattling Cisticola heard. The dam yielded a Purple Heron, 4 each of Black Crake, Common Moorhen and African Jacana with Common Waxbills, Speckled Mousebirds, Bronze Mannikins and Dark-capped Yellow Warblers also in the reeds and trees.

We heard single Red-chested Cuckoo and Diderick Cuckoos, saw African Paradise-flycatchers and Southern Black Flycatchers and several shrikes. Six Thick-billed Weavers flew from the top of a tall tree.

A good total of 57 species was recorded, if you live in the area, we recommend it as a wonderful place for a morning or evening. Our thanks to Roger Fairlie and his committee. Please support them.

**Jennifer Carter**

BLZ Education Programme Briefing, Thursday 17th November

BLZ's greatest asset, Leslee Maasdorp, spoke of the Education programme's work during the year, emphasising how the Committee is developing partnerships with local schools and businesses to further the education in conservation of young Zimbabweans.

First, we saw pictures of the launch of the Shona Version of the BLZ book, Enjoy the Birds of Zimbabwe. We congratulate the Committee on the completion of this wonderful project. There is a tremendous eagerness in Zimbabwean schools to learn about the environment and its protection and development and wherever the education programme is started schools make great

efforts to be included. The partnership in Eiffel Flats now encompasses several schools, including a local private school. They are assisted in setting up bird gardens and planting shrubs and trees. Another partnership has been formed with Rio Tinto who are very conservation conscious at their mines. Brian Peters, Conservation Manager for Rio Tinto in Zimbabwe, and a hunter and a keen birder, spoke of the work Rio Tinto have done with BLZ at their new mine Renco, in the lowveld and we saw photos of school children from the area looking at birds on the new dam.

Everyone was very impressed by the wonderful work being done by Leslee and her committee and the commitment of Rio Tinto to conservation and education in Zimbabwe

**Jennifer Carter**

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## **MATABELELAND BRANCH**

### Fascinating Flamingos

The last time (and probably the first, actually) that I met the wild-haired Graham McCulloch was in Francistown a few years ago at BLB's farewell party which, being a natural cliff-hanger, he got to just before it ended. After a couple of quick beers, he readily agreed to come to Matland and give us a talk, albeit in Irish, for which I realised we would need an interpreter. Of necessity this matter was not progressed until it all came about this month. However, it was immediately apparent, on Graham's arrival, that (most) things were now very different—not only had the hair calmed down, the accent had too, which made life a lot easier. The cliff-hanging tendency was still there, however, as he got here only just in the nick of time, yet proceeded to deliver a very professional and interesting presentation to the BFA on his 3-year research on the ecology of Sua Pan and its flamingo populations.

The next day, we took Graham with us on our trip to the Tuli Circle, which was well attended and fascinating, to put it mildly. It also opened our collective eyes – his to the fact that we, as a bunch, are not your everyday, typical birdwatchers; and ours to the fact that his talent lies not only in the study of birds, but also in the collection of suggestive-looking rocks, the like of which have never before been encountered in the area.

The following week, Graham put together for our members a less scientific (at our request!) but equally enthralling talk with wonderful slides. He proved to be a knowledgeable and versatile speaker and a very popular guest who we look forward to hosting again at some time in the future

Graham kindly donated to BLZ a copy of his beautifully presented thesis in two volumes which earned him his doctorate last year, and which is held in the Library in Harare. **Julia Dupree**

### TULI TRIP 6-8 November 2004 (ODS 2129C3/2229A1)

We went down on Saturday morning, having sent 'staff' (in the form of Cecilia and Dudley Hubbard!) the day before to organise the camp for us. What a fascinating place and a lovely campsite. The width of the river is amazing — dry, of course, but for one or two seeps and puddles — and the riverine trees unbelievable. Sleeping arrangements were by choice friendly and al fresco, on the verandahs or under the trees. Saturday night catering was a treat and delicious — a chicken and rice and veg potjie with accompaniments prepared and served by our chefs, Cecilia. Thereafter the standard of food dropped. We recorded 141 species (well, 139 if you don't count the unconfirmed ones) without trying too hard (and with little assistance from our imported expert who had turned his attention to geology, as aforementioned). What we didn't see was an African Mourning Dove. I have to tell you now that this bird does not exist, as this is the third time I've been guaranteed a sighting in its typical habitat, and it simply doesn't appear, so the call we heard must have been a tape recording.

One (remaining nameless) amongst us pointed out a Gory Bustard (Kori Bustard) to her favoured friends, whilst the unfavoured were identifying a Cinnamon-breasted Bunting. Others watched a fly-past over the river by Yellow-throated Sandgrouse. We all saw African Cuckoo, Red-chested Cuckoo, Black Cuckoo and both Klaas's Cuckoo & Diderick Cuckoo, and several of us heard African Scops-owl, Pearl-spotted Owlet and Verreaux's Eagle-owls and owlets, as well as Fiery-necked Nightjar, Rufous-cheeked Nightjar and Square-tailed Nightjars — so apparently we weren't sleeping too well. Raptors were represented by a Martial Eagle floating high over the river, and African Fish-eagle and African Harrier-hawk, as well as Shikra in various locations.

We unfortunately didn't see but heard the unmistakable boom of Southern Ground-hornbill and haunting 'cowak-cowak' of Grey Crowned Crane. There were lots of the really pretty species — Meves's Starling and Violet-backed Starling, Retz's Helmet-shrike and African Green-pigeon — and super views of Red-headed Weaver and Spectacled Weaver along with Southern Masked-weavers and

Golden Weavers swimming in the bird bath. And in the river were White-fronted Plover and Barn Swallow which came down to rest.

That was at and around the river. On Sunday we went several kilometres away to a dam attached to an irrigation scheme. The vegetation en route and on the shoreline was fascinating — presumably unique to the area — and the dam which was full of dead trees provided excellent sightings of Greater Painted-snipe, Water Thick-knee, African Spoonbills who don't seem to have the hang of perching or what to do with their bills, a couple of heavily disguised Green-backed Herons, and elegant African Darter and both White-breasted Cormorants & Reed Cormorants hanging themselves out to dry. And floating in the water, or hanging about on one leg were four species of duck and goose.

This was a trip with a difference, and one which we plan to organise again in an extended format next year.

**Julia Duprée**

#### AND NEARER TO HOME

Field Outing. In October we went to Big Cave Camp (QDS 2028D1), a very attractive lodge set in the beautiful surroundings of the MATOPOS. This is owned by the Waddy family who very generously gave us free range of their extensive property which we spent the day exploring. Although it was hot, dry and the trees leafless, we nevertheless logged 48 species and had excellent sightings of Red-headed Weaver working on its nest, dangling at the end of the thinnest twig imaginable. Colourful species were represented by African Green-pigeon, Mocking Cliff-chat, Orange-breasted Bush-shrike and Lilac-breasted Roller, the verbose species by Red-chested Cuckoo insisting all day that “it will rain” (I don't speak Afrikaans), a ‘prooping’ African Scops-owl, piping Tropical Boubou and a telephonic Brubru. The sweet-sounding models included Back-headed Oriole, Dark-capped Bulbul, Willow Warbler and Sabota Lark. But our favourite sighting was of a pair of Verreaux's Eagles which quietly glided overhead and came to rest, facing outwards, in a cave high on a nearby kopje. Now we know how they spend their day once the kid has left home. In between our bird watching, we seemed to do nothing but eat and drink – tea, lunch, then tea again, all accompanied by various home-made goodies. This lovely lodge makes a tranquil weekend getaway, close to town but in the middle of wonderful wilderness. It is an environment that is highly recommended.

Education. Penny Feather and I officiated at the launch in Matabeleland of “Enjoy the Birds” Shona version booklet which took place in the Environmental Section at the Hillside Teachers' College. We were invited to introduce BLZ and gave a rundown of the projects currently undertaken nationally and by the Matabeleland Branch.

Visitors. We had the pleasure of hosting Paul Buckley and Chris Magin from the RSPB in UK for 3 days in Matabeleland, during which time we took them to the Matopos, to the Natural History Museum and to our new office in Suburbs, as well as hosting them at a Committee meeting followed by supper. Shortly thereafter Michael Irwin came to work in the Museum, and at the same time Peter Mundy returned from the launch of his book in South Africa on the life of Levaillant. So this gave us an irresistible opportunity of having a get-together for members to meet and talk to two of our leading ornithological experts present in the same room at the same time!

**Julia Duprée**

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#### **EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB**

##### VUMBA: Sunday 26th September 2004 (ODS 1932B2)

Disappointed at the cancellation of our outing to Dorowa but keen to take advantage of a wonderful morning, 4 faithfuls, Ram, Herbert, Carl and myself set off up the Vumba Road with nothing very specific in mind except an early return to town.

A short discussion and some bird activity persuaded us to visit some of those patches of forest along the main Vumba road which one normally ignores in the interests of getting to a specific destination on time.

We examined 3 of these and were richly rewarded, counting some 50+ species, including some Vumba specials and a few summer arrivals. In fact, despite the lovely morning, activity didn't begin until about 8.00, although we saw plenty before that time. Our first recognised call was the Black Cuckoo followed by the Red-chested Cuckoo and soon 2 Narina Trogons but they were far away – perhaps near the White Horse! Both Lesser Striped Swallows and Eastern Saw-wings sat and warmed themselves above us and both Tinkerbirds



[Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird and Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird] tapped away. Cape Batis were numerous and noisy.

Our next stop produced Yellow-streaked Greenbul and Striped-checked Greenbul and Dark-backed Weaver, White-tailed Crested Flycatcher and African Dusky Flycatcher and a Dark-capped Yellow Warbler. A few Chirinda Apalis worked through the fresh foliage. Sitting at the roadside was a Long-crested Eagle and a Lizard Buzzard called overhead. Then I eventually managed to hear a distant African Emerald Cuckoo.

The third forest patch was more lively and we were pleased to have long, clear views of White-starred Robin sitting on a fence post. Attracted by some leaf disturbance we soon found an Olive Thrush but no Swynnerton's Robin despite a long wait. Then a Black-fronted Bush-shrike finally showed itself and an Olive Bush-shrike was heard. A Yellow-billed Kite was spotted as we cruised down to town, very satisfied with our session. **Bridget Holland**

#### World Birdwatch commemoration: Sunday 31 October 2004

Although, strictly speaking, World Birdwatch Day was on 3 October, today's commemoration was still within the World Bird Festival month of October. This trip was different from other EDBC outings in having no fixed venue, and in lasting for the day.

Eight enthusiasts gathered on an overcast morning to try and see as many birds as possible. Birding started at the meeting point near the MUTARE museum with Diderick Cuckoo, Common Fiscal and Greater Blue-eared Starling. En route through town we picked up House Sparrow and (reluctantly) Rock Dove. We worked our way up the VUMBA, birding as we went. The first real stop was near some forest just below the cloudline. Barratt's Warbler was in full voice and a Yellow-throated Woodland-warbler showed itself at close range. Bar-throated Apalis and Chirinda Apalis were both calling and eventually both seen. The Black-fronted Bush-shrikes were very noisy and gave a good performance. As we strolled along the road a White-starred Robin appeared on the forest edge and meters further an Olive Bush-shrike was working its way along low bushes on the other side of the road. After some Cape Batis and Yellow-streaked Greenbul, we were getting sufficiently cold to take up Bart's offer of coffee at Ndundu. Along the way we stopped in another patch of forest with active White-tailed Crested Flycatchers, Red-capped Robin-chat and another White-starred Robin. Orange Ground-thrush was singing and glimpsed a few times. Then a Swynnerton's Robin started calling and responded well to an imitation of its call. A second bird joined in and we had good views of this forest special. Before reaching Ndundu we made yet another stop, this time near some bracken to record Wailing Cisticolas, African Stonechat, Dark-capped Yellow Warbler and Malachite Sunbird.

While sipping coffee and tea, the weather really started deteriorating, the mist thickened and it started to drizzle. Through the window we saw a Willow Warbler. The Bronzy Sunbird in the parking lot remained very active despite the weather, as did a Western Olive Sunbird with its yellow pectoral tufts exposed. We returned to town and proceeded straight up Christmas pass to the MUTARE Heights. The cloud-line had come down considerably, but we managed to bird in miombo just underneath it. Birding here took a very slow start and birds stayed frustratingly out of view. Eventually we located a bird party with Southern Black Flycatcher and Chin-spot Batis. An unusual song sparked some debate about buntings and penduline-tits but turned out to be a singing Southern Hyliota. Miombo Tit worked its way along the bark and then a real bunting was located; a beautiful male Cabanis's Bunting, singing its heart out from the top of a tree. A Red-faced Crombec flitted through the branches and a Spotted Creeper provided the grand finale. We decided to try for Cape Bunting somewhat higher up the mountain. While having a second round of coffee and tea, clouds closed in more and more and the drizzle nearly turned into rain. It was obviously time to move again.

We now headed eastwards towards OSBORNE Dam. Away from the mountains and lower down the weather cleared a bit. The first stop was at the bridge across the Odzani River. An African Black Duck swam lazily on the river and a Three-banded Plover was tending a chick. Garden Warbler warbled in some thickets and Hadedda Ibis was making a lot of noise. A Water Thick-knee and some African Wattled Lapwings also called nearby but out of sight. Unexpected was a male Cuckoo Finch perching briefly on some reeds. Once gone it could not be relocated. A few kilometres further we had a stop near some thickets and open grass, which yielded Golden-breasted Bunting, Rufous-naped Lark and Red-breasted Swallow. Another lark was flushed and turned out to be a Flappet Lark. Time was running out fast on this dark day. It was considered too late to go and pay park fees, so we decided to approach the lake through the communal area. While crossing the hills White-necked Ravens were seen to harass some raptors. These turned out to be a nice pair of Verreaux's Eagles. We reached the lake near Jenya School. The dam is always rather bird empty, but with a lot around the edges. There were some

waterbirds such as Little Grebe, African Black Duck, a Purple Heron and some Reed Cormorants. The telescope picked up African Darter and White-breasted Cormorant. Along the edge we heard Chestnut-vented Tit-babbler and Long-billed Crombec. An African Harrier-hawk was hopping around some rocks; it wasn't clear what he (or she) was after over there. A few Common Sandpipers, Wood Sandpipers, Blacksmith Lapwings and African Wattled Lapwings frequented the waters edge. Lesser Swamp-warbler sang from the reeds and a Black Crake walked out of them. After Egyptian Goose and African Pied Wagtail it was time to call it a day. Back on the hill the Verreaux's Eagles were wheeling around and some pairs of swifts were thought to be African Black Swifts. On the way home the last addition of the day was probably an African Paradise-flycatcher flying across the road in front of the car. This was a thoroughly enjoyable day with 164 species in total. Had the weather been good, much more would have been seen as many common birds remained hidden all day

**Carl Beel**

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### **MIDLANDS**

Outings continue to be held on the first Saturday of each month. Various areas of interest to the six or seven members who continue to participate are visited. We vary our visits between sandveldt and shorelines and kopjes with dense bush.

At the last outing two Pied Avocets were watched shoreline feeding in a small farm dam in the Hunter's Road area. This was the first recording in this area as was a Common Greenshank at a night storage pond. The interest of the few members is there and these outings will continue.

**Jon Barry**

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### **KAROI BIRD CLUB**

RYDINGS School, 23/ 24 October 2004 (ODS 1629D3)

The Kurrichane Thrush had nestlings, African Palm-swift nestlings in the Washingtonia, Crested Barbet in and out of a hole in a gumtree but what was so interesting was that Kevin was doing some ringing and an African Pygmy-kingfisher was netted. The size and colour in the hand has to be felt and seen to be believed. Not only that, but there was an African Emerald Cuckoo being very vocal — not showing itself, of course, but the first time ever we have heard one here and then in the village that same week for two days, then that was it! All the same, good of him to call!

**Merle Mitchell**

RYDINGS School, Saturday 6th November 2004 (ODS 1629D3)

We had four on our walk this morning — three adults and one junior. We usually start off at the two little dams, which still had good water in them, and continue down through the woodland. We were pleased to see 16 Little Grebe on the water, together with 5 Egyptian Goose, a single Black-winged Stilt plus one Common Greenshank. There were a Malachite Kingfisher and a Pied Kingfisher working hard for breakfast. Blacksmith Lapwing and African Wattled Lapwing were on the shoreline, together with Helmeted Guineafowl down for a drink, Wood Sandpiper and African Jacana in the shoreline weed, and a quick glimpse of 2 Black Crake. A lone Reed Cormorant was on the lone stump while Mosque Swallows and Barn Swallows wheeled over the water, all crowned by an African Fish-eagle flying past and landing on the far side of a large tree on the opposite bank so that only his white head was visible against the white background cloud — hard to spot! Yellow-throated Longclaw were busy in the short shoreline grass, while Croaking Cisticola and Rattling Cisticola were calling in the taller grass — and the ever-present Rufous-naped Lark, not to be forgotten. No more to see there we wended our way through the woodland. The usual doves, Senegal Coucal, Swainson's Spurfowl, Spectacled Weaver, Orange-breasted Bush-shrike, Black-crowned Tchagra to mention a few but nothing unusual, to bring us to a total of 47 species

**Merle Mitchell**

**TAIL FEATHERS**In the Garden, KAROI (QDS 1629D3)

Levaillant's Cuckoo has been very vocal and a pair of African Scops-owls, in the garden opposite. African Paradise-flycatchers, nesting and scraping. Very disappointed in them! A pair built a nest in the hanging twigs of a *Zanha africana* only for it to be destroyed by another lot of paradise-flycatchers. A couple of weeks later the nest was rebuilt, two eggs laid and, after 9 days of incubation, that jealous lot were back — one egg fell out and the other was left in the abandoned nest! Arrow-marked Babblers — 3 of them running round and round a small bush, pausing, as if hiding, and then off again. I do believe they were having a game — would they?

Two flocks of Green Wood-hoopoe, one on the power cable, the other in the Msasa, complaining with much bowing and swaying – fascinating!

Birds coping are so special – an African Green-pigeon, one foot limp, squatting on a branch so it was able to tear and feed on the fruit of the *Zanha africana*, and the Red-eyed Dove, with the same problem wanting a drink. It landed awkwardly on the edge of the birdbath, took time to balance on its one good foot as best it could, but how was it to get its bill to the water? No problem – it lunged its bill into the water to rest on the base of the bath and in that way it was able to suck up the water it needed!

**Merle Mitchell**

**NOTICEBOARD**Serious Help Needed

BirdLife is spending huge amounts keeping the BirdLife vehicles going. Are there any members in Harare who are willing to give up some time to help maintain them? Please contact Clare at BLZ office.

Field Cards

If anyone has any field cards, please bring them to the next Mashonaland meeting so Dave Rockingham-Gill can accession them for next year's report

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](mailto: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 AND INCLUDE THE QDS (see the Karoi reports) or enough information (road, mile peg etc.) so that we can work it out. Thanks, Ed.

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

Books: the following are only some of the books for sale at the office

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
The Atlas of the Birds of Sul Do Save, Southern Mozambique:	Vincent Parker

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