

BABBLER

The Newsletter of -

BirdLife Zimbabwe

The BirdLife International Partner in Zimbabwe

ISSUE # 66 – May/June 2005

COMMITTEES

	Mashonaland	☎	Matabeleland	☎
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NATIONAL AGM Saturday 14th May 2005 at 10:00 a.m. at BLZ Offices

The Annual General Meeting of BirdLife Zimbabwe will be held at BirdLife offices at 35 Clyde Road, Eastlea, at 10:00 a.m. It will be followed by a braai lunch where members can chat with each other and meet the Director and other staff. Braai fires will be provided but please bring chairs, hats, food, drink, crockery and cutlery

We look forward to seeing many of you there.

HONEYGUIDE Volume 50 is available but won't be posted in Harare. Please collect your copy from the office or Focal Point.

2005 subscriptions. This is your last reminder to pay your subs.

ACTIVITIES

SATURDAY 14th MAY 2005: NATIONAL AGM/braai at 10:00 at John Paxton Centre, Harare.

MASHONALAND BRANCH

Regular outings

Sundays May 1st & June 5th: Mukuvisi Woodlands. NOTE TIME CHANGE 7:00 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 May 8th & June 12th: Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary. NOTE TIME CHANGE 7:30 A.M.

Meet at 07.30 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 May 22nd: Afdis Settling Ponds. Meet at 7:30 a.m. at 2, Helena Rd. Marlborough, where cars can be safely left and transport shared. Bring chairs and refreshments.

Sunday June 26th: Forrester Estates, Mvurwi. Meet at 6:30 a.m. at 2, Helena Road where cars can be left and transport shared. The estates are just over 100 km away and it should be a good outing. Bring chairs and plenty of refreshments.

Thursday evening meetings

May 19th: Slide Show by Darryl Tiran. Darryl is an expert birder and licensed Guide who has travelled all over the country.

June 16th: Slide Show by Geoff Lowe. Geoff is an award winning photographer who has been 'shooting' birds and other wildlife for many years.

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 (12 and 26 May and 9 & 23 June). Meet at 4:00 p.m. provided Ian Riddell is available. For confirmation contact Ian on 339716 or gemsaf@mango.zw Bring cash to pay for security. Directions drive to the end of Princess Margaret Rd. turn left, continue to the new houses. Parking is in a cul-de-sac with a small fenced off area at the end.

MATABELELAND BRANCH

Monthly Outings

Saturday May 21st: Video afternoon "Life of Birds" 3:00 p.m. Followed by bring-and-share tea. At Penny's house, Qalisa Retirement Village, Suburbs. Ring Penny on 237777.

Saturday June 18th: Bird & tree walk. Qalisa environs and Golf Course 9:00 a.m. Followed by morning tea in the gazebo. Park inside the main Qalisa barrier. Ring Penny 237777.

Aisleby, May 28th and June 25th — Saturday mornings.

Please contact Julia.

EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB

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

Sunday 29 May 2005: Mutare Golf Course NOTE: 07:00 a.m. C. Beel 63058

Sunday 26 June 2005: Vumba NOTE: 07:00 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 contact during the day or email: cbeel@zol.co.zw

Karoi Bird Club

Co-ordinator 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.

Contact Margaret Parrock ☎ 068-22005 for details.

REPORTS**NATIONAL**Maccoa Duck Action Planning Stakeholder Workshop, March 2005 at Wakkerstroom RSA

Maccoa Duck (*Oxyura maccoa*) Action Planning Stakeholder Workshop was held at Birdlife South Africa's conference centre in Wakkerstroom, RSA from 29-30th March 2005. The workshop was organized by Aldo Berruti (Africa Gamebird Research Education and Development Trust – AGRED, Johannesburg RSA) and facilitated by Steven Evans (Endangered Wildlife Trust, Johannesburg, RSA). The event was funded by the African Eurasian Waterfowl Agreement (AEWA)

I was fortunate to attend this workshop together with 17 other participants. A representative from each country in the species range and from each province in RSA was present (with the exception of Kenya). There was a relaxed and enjoyable atmosphere at the workshop as well as a lot of humour. The action plan report for this species will be complete in May/June this year. A select few of the workshop attendants (those who never slept in) were privileged to see 79 Maccoa Duck on Fickland's Dam near Wakkerstroom, early one morning.

There are three main (and separate) populations in Africa (though not considered subspecies): the Ethiopian Highlands, East Africa, and Southern Africa. They occur in numbers and regularly in Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe and South Africa), and regularly, and in small numbers in Angola and Lesotho (Aldo Berruti unpublished). There are 6 species of duck in the *Oxyura* genus worldwide, one from each of Africa, North America, Asia and Europe, Australia, and two from South America. The White-headed Duck (*Oxyura leucocephala*) from Europe and Asia is threatened by interbreeding and competition from the introduced Ruddy Duck of North America.

The Maccoa Duck is a very intriguing species. This species seems to have very specific habitat requirements. It breeds in ephemeral wetlands on emergent vegetation and winters in various water bodies including saline/alkaline pans and sewage farms. One male may breed with up to 8 females. This is the only duck in Southern Africa where the male has an eclipse plumage. Sometimes the females dump their eggs in other duck species nests, and the young are raised by the other species (Dave Dalziel *pers. comm.*). There still seems to be much that is still unknown about this species especially about its exact movements. It appears to occur in low densities throughout its range (and this also seems to have been the case historically). The female of this species has been confused with the Southern Pochard (*Netta erythrophthalma*).

The figure reached at the workshop is that there are 7500-9000 remaining Maccoa Ducks in Southern Africa. In Southern Africa, the estimates for each country concluded during the workshop areas follows:

*	Zimbabwe	100-300	*	Botswana	1000
*	RSA	4500-5500	*	Lesotho	10-100
*	Namibia	2000	*	Angola	50

This species northernmost limit in southern Africa is in Zimbabwe. It is thought that this species did not occur in Zimbabwe historically (pre-approximately 1900), and has only extended its range into this country relatively recently (1900s, possibly due to increase in the number of dams). Maccoa Ducks have been sighted in three different locations in Zimbabwe: Harare South (sewage ponds, IMBWA Farm), AISLEBY (sewage ponds near Bulawayo), and around Shumba Pan and Dwarf Goose Pan in HWANGE National Park.

The major threats to this species appear to be habitat loss and/or change (mainly of wetlands). Other (possible, though many are unconfirmed) threats include (these are not in the order of priority):

- Poaching (or subsistence hunting)
- Pollution
- Disease (botulism, *E. coli* infection of yolk sac)
- Disturbance
- Competition with alien fish
- Competition with *O. jamaicensis*
- Invasive alien vegetation on wetlands
- Variable water levels
- Improved quality of sewage farm water
- Drowning in gill nets (mainly a threat in East Africa)
- Hybridization and competition (it is strongly felt that introduction of other *Oxyura* species into Africa should be avoided)
- Sport hunting
- Bird trade

Keen birders and environmentalists are asked to be on the look out for this species (or any of its possible hybrids) in Zimbabwe or elsewhere and to report any sightings to Birdlife Zimbabwe Harare **Clare Davies**, Director, BirdLife Zimbabwe.

EDUCATION NEWS

HARARE CLUSTER

For Harare cluster, a Bird Festival with schools in Harare, Ruwa and Norton was held on Friday the 18th of March 2005 at Tynwald Primary School. This was a very successful event with a huge turnout of about 150 pupils and 15 teachers. A total of twelve schools came. Mr. Mujeri, the headmaster of Tynwald Primary School gave a very exciting and welcoming opening speech. There were two competitions and children had to show their expertise to win the prizes. Bird Identification competition was aimed at assessing children's knowledge on different birds and the Poster competition had to reveal the children's acquaintance on habitats of birds. We had museum specimens and the flagship Wattled Crane used by pupils to learn identification of birds. Unluckily the teachers missed all these opportunities as they were called away to a session on running the parliamentary elections. The names of the schools that were present are Alfred Beit Primary School, Glen View 6 Primary School, Hallingbury Primary School, Tynwald Primary School, Warren Park 2 Primary School and Yamuranayi Primary School. The hall at Tynwald primary school was very attractive and well decorated with plants, flowers and with beautiful art and drawings of birds from pupils. BLZ facilitators were Leslee Maasdorp Fiona Muchecheti, Abigail Samunyanga and Council Member Dorothy Wakeling.

Taxidermy demonstration

Mr Sango and Mr Mutematsaka from the Museum of Human Science gave a fascinating demonstration to staff and BLZ members. Six birds were mounted or made into study specimens. Members who find dead birds should wrap them in newspapers and put them into a deepfreeze until they can bring them in (labeled) to BLZ offices. We can then get them stuffed and they can be used as teaching aids.

Leslee Maasdorp, Manager Education Programme

MASHONALAND BRANCH

Dr Chip Chirara, Crane Conservation at DRIEFONTEIN: 17th February 2005

Once the technical hitch had been rectified we were given an insight into the good work Chip and Osiman Mabhachi are doing in the Driefontein area.

Chip very gently introduced his topic by giving us a subtle reminder that we all need to be able to adjust to change if we are to survive in this life.

The focus of the community work being done in the wetlands of the Driefontein grasslands is to preserve the habitat of bird and other species of the area and particularly the Wattled Crane.

Through this aspect of education and awareness BirdLife Zimbabwe staff has been accepted by the officials and people of the area and this very important groundwork will make future conservation efforts possible. It is a slow process but through perseverance BLZ will win through.

By attending talks such as the one given by Chip members are given the opportunity of understanding the role of the professional staff and those members who were there I'm sure, as I did, learned much more about some of the work being done.

Thank you, Chip, for a very professional and interesting talk and for giving up your time.

Di Rushforth

Ngoni Chiweshe. PAOC and Verreaux's Eagles: 17th March 2005

Disappointing few members turned out to hear BLZ Conservation Officer, Ngoni Chiweshe talk about the Pan African Ornithological Conference, held in Tunisia last November and his research on Verreaux's Eagle in the Matopos. Ngoni was with the National Parks ornithology unit for some 14 years before joining BLZ, working with notable ornithologists such as Dr. Peter Mundy.

Delegates to PAOC are kept busy participating in workshops and presentations and have little time for sightseeing. However, Ngoni managed one outing to a fairly remote lake inland from the more popular tourist areas. Tunisia is in the happy position of being able to protect its important habitats for migratory birds because they are generally small and are very important to the country's economy because of the tourists they attract.

Ngoni has been researching the breeding success of Verreaux's Eagles in the Matopos and how it is affected by the availability of prey for more than 15 years. He is grateful that National Parks are allowing and assisting him to carry on this important research since he left them to join BirdLife. His statistics gave us fascinating insight into the direct effect of food availability on the successful raising of young. The eagles' prey is overwhelmingly dassies but those pushed to territories in the communal areas surrounding the Park are forced to eat a much larger proportion of other species, including domestic fowl. The latter are much less successful at raising young. Part of the research includes an annual dassie count, done in the 30 minutes after sunrise when dassies are not yet on the move. Breeding success rates are in direct proportion to the dassie population and drop in years when there are fewer dassies i.e. after drought seasons and, in one particular year, after disease reduced the dassie population by more than 50%.

Thank you, Ngoni, for making the time and effort to share your research with us. **Jennifer Carter**

Dr. Philippa Marett. A Visit to Chile: 21st April 2005

Dr. Marett's superb photography enabled us to share her trip to Chile, starting in Patagonia in the south. We visited a national park on the edge of the 'torres', towering mountains with amazing rock structures and colours. The park has many lakes fed by melting glaciers and we were taken right up to the edge of a glacier – closer than would be allowed in a more regulated country!

From this sea-level environment, we went to the extreme north of Chile to a desert some 3500 metres above sea-level. The trees in this area, which is in a rain-shadow on the 'wrong' side of the Andes Mountains, have evolved by turning in on themselves and they look more like moss growing on rocks than trees. The few trees that look like trees are hardly more than a metre high. We saw a wonderful photograph of 3 Silvery Grebe on the highest lake in the world that I won't be surprised to see winning prizes in National Geographic or Getaway!

Most of us don't manage to travel to such different places and we are grateful to Dr. Marett for taking the time to show us something of how the rest of the world looks.

Jennifer Carter

12 WELSTON ROAD and Sun Valley Dam, GLEN FOREST 27th February 2005 (QDS: 1731C1)

A good turnout of about 22 members joined us on this outing. The weather was partly cloudy with a light wind after recent good rains. The vegetation cover was good on both properties and the conservation efforts of our hosts at 12 Welston Road, Sue and John Hollaway, appear to be paying off. The dam at Sun Valley was spilling and it was good to see that it held a small crocodile.

At 12 Welston Road, we first visited the river valley and most of the birds seen here were observed by people who stopped about three quarters of the way down and spent about 20 minutes observing the opposite hill and the riverine forest. Highlights on this leg included 3 Whyte's Barbets, 2 Terrestrial Brownbills, 3 Lazy Cisticolas and 4 Neddicky. On the way back we dropped off most of the party at the homestead and about 7 of us continued on to the southern ridge where we encountered our only bird party. It was on this leg of the walk that we saw some of our most uncommon birds including 2 African Golden Orioles, 2 Southern Hylionas, a Collared Flycatcher, 4 Pale Flycatchers and 2 Wood Pipits. The Collared Flycatcher was seen by 2 of our members of whom Gisela had seen it before in Europe and for Dave it was a lifer.

We then returned to the homestead for tea before departing for the nearby Sun Valley Poultry Farm. Thank you, Sue and John, for another very pleasant outing and especially for the Collared Flycatcher. At Sun Valley we were met by one of the managers who kindly directed us to the dam access road. We parked in some paddocks on the southern side of the dam and then split up into 2 walking groups so that we could cover both the dam wall and the south bank. The dam was very weedy and it was this waterweed which had created a suitable wading habitat for about 20 African Jacanas and 40 Wood Sandpipers. Other highlights around and on the dam included 1 Little Bittern, 4 Hottentot Teal, 20 Red-billed Teal, 1 African Rail and 20 Common Moorhen. In the surrounding paddocks and the river valley the highlights included 1 Black Cuckoo, 4 White-fronted Bee-eaters, 1 Lesser Honeyguide, 4 Icterine Warblers and 2 Yellow-throated Longclaws. Though the Black Cuckoo was clearly visible it took us a little while to identify it because it was sitting on a fence post and not calling.

Thank you, Sun Valley Poultry Farm, for a very interesting walk which boosted our total of bird species identified on the outing to 97. **Richard Dennison**

Easter Sunday 27th March – HARARE BOTANIC GARDENS (QDS: 1731C3)

Perfect weather greeted us a group of about 25. The Botanic Gardens is a guaranteed worthwhile retreat to discover the many usual and several quite unusual Harare birds. The small dam provided many species, with Magpie Mannikin groups taking the limelight (Red-backed Mannikin, Bronze Mannikin and Magpie Mannikin can be often be seen on the same branch or tree at this dam). A resident Green-backed Heron appeared, the African Jacana male has reared his successful brood of 4 offspring, the busy family enjoying the low water level with exposed water weed to forage on. This is the pair's second brood this season. The first brood hatched during high water and the roaming precocious chicks being confined to the water edge and lilies were soon preyed upon by a resident slender mongoose. The pair of Red-knobbed Coot has also had a very successful year, hatching 6 & rearing a selected 2, the other 4 chicks apparently culled off by their seemingly 'doting' parents! The coots were not on the dam during our visit – preferring the swimming/diving environment during high water level. Black Crake and a pair of Common Moorhen including grown juveniles of both species were easily seen. The reeds offer a breeding refuge to many weaver & bishop species, with nesting Thick-billed Weavers resident.

A lucky sighting was of a pair of on-passage Tree Pipits foraging on the lawn under the spreading *Acacia abyssinica* grove. A passage Woodland Kingfisher had been seen the day before and after – Sod's Birding Law. Grey-headed Kingfishers have bred this year with an adult and juvenile visible. African Hoopoe, Common Scimitarbill & Green Wood-hoopoe were seen. The Evergreen forest produced many species including a lone Tambourine Dove the Black-throated Wattle-eye remaining elusive – despite their prime food competitor the ubiquitous African Paradise-flycatcher having recently flown north. The many varieties of fruiting trees feed the Purple-crested Turaco, barbet, & mousebird families – all well represented. The drying & freshly mown lawns having recently seeded, provided ample sustenance for many finches – Black-throated Canary, Streaky-headed Seedeater, Southern Grey-headed Sparrow, Pin-tailed Whydah, Red-billed Quelea, Red-billed Firefinch and Blue Waxbill were seen in quantity. Dark-capped Bulbul and Kurrichane Thrush (pronounced koo-

ree-chaa-ne & not as in hurricane!) both shared the prize for being extremely ubiquitous, several being in sight at any given point anywhere in the gardens! No raptors were seen.

The morning culminated in a pleasant tea and cake circle, with the final count in at 73 species, rather quiet compared to the annual count at 170 species. Only 3 species of the “Bot. Gdns 5 Big Whiteys” Magpie Mannikin, Red-backed Mannikin, Tambourine Dove were seen – missing were the White-throated Robin-chat & Black-throated Wattle-eye. We encourage the use of the Gardens. They offer many diverse habitats being surrounded by a 20 acre agricultural research centre, the Royal Golf Course and leafy evergreen suburb of Alex Park. There is always plenty of water around, from burst pipes along the road, and also small dams and reservoirs. The gardens are kept in respectable condition and the small restaurant provides a great venue for tea and scones amidst beautiful trees and birds. PLEASE TAKE OBVIOUS SAFETY PRECAUTIONS, as there is a ‘no go security area’ on the kopje, and always walk with a group, another person or dogs. Taking fancy camera / binocular equipment is not recommended. **Darryl Tiran**

MATABELELAND BRANCH

Obituary – Ron Hartley

We pay tribute to the memory of Ron who tragically died on 5 April. Ron was totally dedicated to the welfare of birds, and made an enormous personal contribution towards the breeding and conservation of falcons in particular. He was a loyal member of Matabeleland Branch, and a caring friend always ready to offer moral and physical support wherever he could. We remember Ron with affection and admiration, not only for his talent, boundless energy and infectious sense of humour but because he was unique. Our thoughts are with Dimps and Emma and the other members of his family.

AISLEBY Farm (QDS: 2028B1)

Due to circumstances such as the general election and fuel shortages, Sandy McAdam and I, for the first time in 7 years, were unable to undertake our monthly bird census for the month of March. In place of our monthly report, a few items of interest will be commented on.

Cattle Egrets. Since the drying up of Ibis Dam, which robbed the Cattle Egrets of their established roosting place, we have been unable to locate their alternative roost. It has been noticed towards late afternoon that large flocks of birds fly towards the southeast and it has been suggested that they were probably heading towards the cess pools at the COWDRAY PARK sewage works but we have been unable to confirm this. The only way to determine their actual roost is to station several observers along the suspected route.

Comb Duck. As with Little Grebes, the Comb Ducks disappear from the Upper UMGUSA Dam in January and February and then return in March in substantial numbers made up mainly of juveniles. For instance, in January this year we recorded only one bird and two in February whereas in a private visit in March in excess of 45 birds were recorded. Obviously they depart to breed elsewhere and return in March.

Storks. The substantial number of White Storks recorded during January was replaced in February by 301 Abdim's Storks feeding in the lands being prepared for the winter wheat crop. Large acreages have been planted with paprika and it will be interesting to observe if this will have any effect on the presence of the birds normally encountered in these areas. I have noticed signs of bird damage on the fruit of the few plants of paprika I have in my garden, presumably inflicted by Dark-capped Bulbuls.

Greater Painted-snipe. As mentioned earlier, Bird Dam is the preferred habitat of painted-snipe and in February we had an excellent view of a female at close quarters. She was decked in brilliant colours and did full justice to her name. She was closely watching a male having a bath in the stream close by and was obviously anxious for him to return to the nest to continue with his brooding duties. He obliged and returned to where we thought the nest was and she returned to the dense vegetation around the dam.

Cuckoos. Only one of each of the six species was present at Aisleby Farm which clearly indicated that they have moved on.

Ibis Dam. Still no water in this dam and although the vegetation was burned during a controlled fire in December, the limited amount of rain we had in early January stimulated the growth of the bulrushes. New shoots were appearing in an extensive area. The serious drought we are experiencing

at present may assist the Municipal Council and BirdLife Zimbabwe to effectively control the weed as the drought progresses. It could be an opportune time to consider utilising methods such as herbicides to eradicate the vegetation instead of trying to do it manually or even mechanically.

Harry Erwee

Birding through thick & thin – a day out at Anglesea Farm, 19 March 2005 (QDS 2028A4)

Seven enthusiasts met at the Churchill at a civilised 9.30 a.m. (where 5 piled into a BMW and the rest into a Toyota truck) and thence proceeded about 40 km down the Kezi Road to the Matobo Hills. A couple of gates later (Jersey cows grazing peacefully) we reach the homestead, to be warmly greeted by our hostess Joan and our first sighting of a host of European Bee-eaters, so colourful and quick in flight, picking off the bees feeding on eucalypts in full flower.

Onward down to the little dam, surprisingly still holding some water, over which a Great Egret is presiding with Blacksmith Lapwings creating on the shoreline, all watched by the most magnificent (luckily apparently benign) Jersey bull.

Then, back through the farm and turn right into a magical area of kopjes, secret valleys and vleis. The long road down to the valley supports almost insurmountable (for the BMW) anti-erosion humps necessitating the disembarkation of 3 passengers. And we decide that in any case it is time for the first of our many tea breaks, sitting on rocks overlooking a view of white sand, pink grass and awesome scenery. Meanwhile, the Toyota plodding along behind spies an immature African Hawk-eagle trying to catch dassies but whose many efforts failed abysmally.

Moving on, we follow young Adele crawling through a fence (not realising there is a convenient gate just up the road) and through a dry dam, thence led by Julia in a fight through viciously sharp bamboo and over the dry river bed. This area produces prolific bird sightings, including swifts, Chin-spot Batis, Willow Warblers, African Paradise-flycatchers and Black-backed Puffbacks with their kid. Soaring above all on the thermals is a Wahlberg's Eagle; a bonus indeed!

Just around the corner is our destination – a rocky outcrop, apparently spectacular when gifted with rain as water curls through crevices creating beauty, serenity and hectic bird life. But a few puddles remain attracting many Cinnamon-breasted Buntings and then Penny says “we’re being watched” and there, perched high on typical Matobo boulders, is a pair of Verreaux's Eagles!

Heading back to the vehicles and on up the hill to our shady lunch spot, the group identify several flying objects not always in agreement until our books reveal the answers. Then Jane spots a Martial Eagle gliding across our immediate vista – another bonus closing an adventurous, healthy bird outing. But it's always sad casting eyes backwards to those magnificent MATOPOS Hills – enhanced by a glorious Zimbabwe sunset.

Point: have learnt that whilst moving through the bush it is essential to recognise bird calls, as often sightings are elusive, defeating our eyes – birds are so quick in flight – but the chirp, screech, song, etc. reach anxious ears confirming that life still exists in the sky. Long may birds fly! **Jane Watson**

Worringham Vineyard – 16th April 2005 (QDS 2028B2)

Nine of us squeezed into two small cars to save on fuel and set off for the vineyard, which lies 20 kilometres or so southeast of Bulawayo. We based ourselves in the owners green and shady garden before venturing forth down the valley to Lunka Lodge dam. A stroll round the edge brought us to the spillway and within 3 metres of a White-breasted Cormorant which was very reluctant to fly. A Little Egret flew past showing off its yellow feet and a Green-backed Heron took off in front of us. A small hawk circled above the water with barring on its tail and no white on the rump it was most likely to be an Ovambo Sparrowhawk. We had excellent views of a pair of colourful White-fronted Bee-eaters and heard the double notes of a White-throated Robin-chat. A bit later on there was the most beautiful gentle song emanating from a nearby thicket. A Garden Warbler perhaps? Then the sweet notes turned into loud churrs like a Glossy Starling and the penny dropped, as it were; this must be the aforesaid robin!

We returned to base for a picnic lunch and were serenaded by a group of Magpie Shrikes, with intermittent bass notes provided by Arrow-marked Babbler. A wander round the garden area afterwards revealed many common Matabeleland birds. A hosepipe left to irrigate a fruit tree proved a great attraction in the heat of the day and small birds like House Sparrows and Southern Grey-headed Sparrows, Blue Waxbills and Green-winged Pytilias were busy visiting it the whole time.

As we returned to the vineyard for lunch we were intrigued to see a stream of locals making their way there with wheelbarrows and 20 litre containers. Making enquiries we discovered that the management sell off the 'rough' wine by the litre and it is obviously very popular! As Julia was unfortunately unable to be with us on the outing having had a recent operation to her feet, we decided to buy her a couple of litres as a pick-me-up! It might just be drinkable if well diluted with soda water! **Penny Feather**

EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB

MUTARE Heights, 27th February 2005 (QDS: 1832D3)

Overcast weather and light drizzle frightened off many birders. It turns out that staying away or in your bed, or going elsewhere, is always a mistake.

The first sounds came from Kurrichane Thrush, Black-crowned Tchagra and Lazy Cisticola. Willow Warblers were also around. An early raptor was the Augur Buzzard, perched high up in a tree. A bit further a Cinnamon-breasted Bunting gave its short song from a perch on the side of the road. Birds in the miombo started stirring. One of the first to appear was a Southern Hyliota, quickly followed by a few Grey Penduline-tits. A male Miombo Rock-thrush sat prominently on top of a stick. Some minutes later, two males sat barely two metres from each other on some overhead wires; an indaba or a boundary dispute? After several Streaky-headed Seedeaters we had good views of a Black-eared Seedeater. A family of three Common Scimitar-bills busily investigated lichen crusted branches. A Striped Pipit showed well on top of a rock and in some nearby trees a brilliant male African Golden Oriole needed sunglasses to be looked at. Several flycatchers joined the list: African Dusky Flycatcher, Southern Black Flycatcher and Spotted Flycatcher. The many flowering mistletoes had good numbers of sunbirds in attendance, mainly Amethyst Sunbird and Miombo Double-collared Sunbird, but also a few Variable Sunbirds. Miombo birds had been showing up here and there but we spent some time locating a really good bird party. Once we got it we had White-breasted Cuckooshrike and Black Cuckooshrikes, Brubru, Black-backed Puffback, Spotted Creeper, Green-capped Eremomela, Miombo Tit and Rufous-bellied Tit and more Southern Hyliotas. While making our way back to the car some noisy sunbirds drew our attention and in the same tree was the male Collared Flycatcher! The first views were frustratingly short but we quickly relocated the bird and managed to follow it. We had fantastic views, both perched and fly-catching, for several minutes. We left the bird, negotiated a path round some baboons, looked up a last time at the Augur Buzzard low over our heads and went happily home. **Carl Beel**

Visit by EDBC to the lower VUMBA, Sunday 27th March 2005

When no one else showed at the museum on this beautiful Sunday, Carl and I decided it would be in order to ignore the intended destination and head off up the Vumba, scene of many wonderful sightings in recent months. Our first stop was near Inn on the Vumba to identify a squashed nightjar (no, that's not one of the new names). Even in the hand with good reference books this was a difficult job but we eventually settled on Freckled Nightjar. On to Lawrenceville road which was, at the top end, still rather shady and cool. Much further down we at last emerged into sunshine and pulled off the when birdsong was heard from the miombo. Carl immediately recognised the song of the Bearded Scrub-robin which I caught sight of whistling its lungs out in the top of a tall Msasa. A narrow, well-used path led us deeper into the woodland and we were soon surrounded by miombo birds; African Paradise-flycatcher, Red-faced Crombec and Chin-spot Batis in abundance, canaries, Ashy Tit, Stierling's Wren-warbler and various sunbirds. Although the vegetation was dense and characterised by much Mukwa there were more open spots from where we could spot African Palm-swift, Little Swift and Common Swift, Barn Swallows and a Common House-martin and the usual Eastern Saw-wing. Higher in the sky were noisy groups of European Bee-eater presumably arguing over whether to leave now or after the elections. Later we were to see a pair of circling Peregrine Falcon, the morning's only raptor.

As we progressed further into the wood crossing many babbling streams, we were surprised to find so many crombecks at each stop. Eventually we came out into some degraded farmland where the long grass was perfect for Singing Cisticola, Red-collared Widowbird, Pin-tailed Whydah, Tawny-flanked Prinia, Common Waxbill and Yellow-bellied Waxbill. The scrub gave way to Macadamia plantations full of Dark-capped Bulbul, a coucal and a Brown-hooded Kingfisher. At this point we joined a

track, which eventually led us back to the road and, much further on the car. A thoroughly enjoyable round walk that we shall do again. **Ken Dixon**

MIDLANDS BRANCH

Birding outings continue. A report was submitted on the visit to SEBAKWE POORT, KWEKWE with the sighting and photographic record of the single pair of young Black Storks fledgling that were seen there. The March outing was at Whitewaters Dam, Gweru and Shurugwe and on Long Valley Farm. My wife and I will be attending the Matabeleland Black Eagle Observation team meeting in Bulawayo, by invitation of Julia Dupree.

I have the intention of being present at the AGM in May. **Jon Barry**

MASHONALAND SOUTH BRANCH

KADOMA, Kanyemba Farm Umsweswe River. Saturday 19th February 2005 (QDS 1829B4)

Even at 7 a.m., Kanyemba farm, 25 km south of Kadoma, the weather was hot and very dry. We, the few faithful, walked along the soya and maize fields and were rewarded with 43 species. Crop fields always have good insect density, and the close observation of two pairs of Marico Flycatchers perched in the morning light was rewarding.

A party of Southern White-crowned Shrikes hunted from the top of shrubs, European Bee-eaters and White-fronted Bee-eaters and Amur Falcons were all perched or feeding from the high electric pylons over the fields. A single Broad-billed Roller seen near the homestead was thrilling. A small group of African Golden Orioles displayed their beautiful yellow plumage in flight across the fields, a flock of Red-billed Quelea raced away into a tree.

Many calls were heard but identification was difficult in the thick thorn scrub. A pair of resident Egyptian Goose was at a weir on the main river, as were Kittlitz's Plover and Three-banded Plovers and Wood Sandpipers. The doves, Red-eyed Doves, Cape Turtle-dove, Laughing Dove and Emerald-spotted Wood-dove are all definite species in hot areas. A Wahlberg's Eagle at his nest and a Steppe Buzzard were the only raptors.

To all concerned many thanks. It is rewarding that we can continue to have outings in areas around Kadoma.

Margaret Parrock

KAROI BIRD CLUB

RYDINGS School, Saturday 5th February 2005 (QDS: 1629D3)

Four of us did the walk on an overcast morning. Ko Voorn, another of our long-time members, back from Holland after several months, is leaving us so this was his last walk with us. We have enjoyed his loyal participation. We decided to do the woodland walk near the main dam and so avoid the long wet grass. The dam, usually quiet, surprised us with 2 mother White-faced Ducks, each with a flotilla of 6 chicks! 2 Red-billed Teal, 6 Pied Kingfishers, a Malachite Kingfisher, Reed Cormorant and White-breasted Cormorant were on the dead trees, Grey Heron, Blacksmith Lapwing and a single Common Sandpiper around the edge; overhead, a fly-past of 5 Comb Duck and on the power line, Barn Swallow, Wire-tailed Swallow and Lesser Striped Swallows. Yellow-throated Longclaw were on the dam wall and, as we entered the woodland, a pair of Neddicky let us know they were there – nice to see them again. The woodland was quiet though Crested Barbet and White-browed Scrub-robin did not let us down.

Back over the dam, we heard both Orange-breasted Bush-shrike and Grey-headed Bush-shrike and Black-crowned Tchagra. Red-faced Mousebirds flew over – during the month we saw a group of 30. Down below the wall, Senegal Coucal, Red-collard Widowbird and Yellow Bishop showed themselves. Back at our starting point, Rufous-naped Lark welcomed us at his usual calling post, the corner of the roof. In the end, we managed 47 species. During the month of February, we saw Magpie Shrikes, 50-60 Amur Falcons and the number of Black Coucal on the farm have increased to at least 4. A flock of 16 Green Wood-hoopoes was seen. Our total for February, for the school and village was 113. No walk was done in March but we did record 122 species seen.

Merle Mitchell

TAIL FEATHERS

From KAROI

We saw a flock of 40 Pied Crows flying over the village! Senegal Coucal raised a chick in the top of a Cyprus tree in our back garden. A Laughing Dove chick fell out of the nest, which we saved from a Grey-headed Bush-shrike and put in a wire hanging basket — the nest was unreachable. We lined the basket with black shade-cloth and some leaf litter and hung it lower down. Mother has happily continued to feed the chick but has not sat on the nest at night. So we bring the basket inside for the night! We spent an hour watching a bird party pass through our front garden at the end of March and counted 25 species — aren't bird parties the best!

Merle Mitchell

NOTICEBOARD**FIELD OBSERVATIONS FOR HONEYGUIDE**

CHANGE IN EMAIL ADDRESS: send to **candjbaker@mango.zw** (please note that email addresses are NOT case-sensitive).

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.

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.

Appeal for Bird/Wildlife pictures for the John Paxton Centre. The walls of BirdLife Zimbabwe offices are rather bare. Michael Irwin graciously lent his pictures to the office but now has need for them. Anyone who has any pictures they could give/lend to BirdLife please contact the office.

BirdLife is grateful to the following members who contributed towards the building of the hide at Mukuvisi Woodlands.

Tony Alegria, David Dalziel, Graham and Jennifer Carter, Richard Dennison, Ken Dixon, Ken Wilson, Darryl Tiran, Patrick Smet and Dorothy Wakeling.

FOR SALE: There are various bird books available to buy at BLZ offices. Please contact Alice.

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