

BABBLER

The Newsletter of -

BirdLife Zimbabwe

The BirdLife International Partner in Zimbabwe

ISSUE # 67 – JULY/AUGUST 2005

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ACTIVITIES NATIONAL

WORLD BIRD WATCH IN OCTOBER – get your teams ready! Further details next Babbler.

MASHONALAND BRANCH

Camping weekend Friday September 23rd to Monday 26th Siya Lima farm, MAVURADONHA West

There are several different habitats in this beautiful area only 170 km from Harare including vleis, rock dwalas, miombo woodland, kopjes and a dam. Verreaux's Eagle, Cabanis's Bunting, Rufous-bellied Tit and African Finfoot may be seen among many other species. The road is tarred to within 6 km of the farm though bakkies will be needed to get from the farmhouse to the campsite. The party will have to be completely self-sufficient though security, firewood and bathing water will be provided. There will be a charge for these that has not yet been advised. Members from other Branches will be most welcome. Contact Jennifer Carter (see above) if you are interested and further details will be provided.

Regular outings**Sundays July 3rd & August 7th: 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.

Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary. PLEASE NOTE THAT THERE WILL NOT BE OUTINGS IN JULY OR AUGUST WHILE WE NEGOTIATE ACCESS TO THE Sanctuary WITH NATIONAL PARKS. CHECK THE NEXT BABBLER FOR INFORMATION RE FUTURE ACCESS.

Sunday July 24th: Ewanrigg Botanic Gardens. Meet at 6:30 a.m. at BLZ Offices, where cars can be safely left and transport shared. Bring chairs and refreshments. We suggest you bring a braai brunch/lunch and make a day of it. National Parks fees must be paid for vehicles and individuals.

Sunday August 28th: Beatrice, our host will be Stof Horgen. Meet at 6:30 a.m. at Agrifoods, 33 Remembrance Drive where vehicles can be left and transport shared. Bring chairs and plenty of refreshments.

Thursday evening meetings

July 21st: Coldest month of the year! No meeting.

August 18th: Video Evening. An interesting video on birds will be shown.

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 (14th & 28th July & 11th & 25th August). Meet at 4:00 p.m. provided Ian Riddell is available. For confirmation contact Ian on 339716 or gemsaf@mango.zw. Bring cash to pay for security.

MATABELELAND BRANCH**Monthly Outings**

July: Waterfowl Counts. Throughout July – Hwange and Aisleby. Tel: Julia on 246269.

Saturday 23rd July: Talk/PowerPoint slides by Mike Roberts entitled '*Equatorial Forest Birding - Les Oiseaux du Gabon*'. At 3.00 p.m. at 12 Ilanda Gardens, Catherine Berry Drive, followed by bring-and-share tea for those who would like to participate. Tel: Julia.

19th-21st August: Verreaux's Eagle Weekend, Maleme, Matobo National Park. Lodges have been reserved, so let us have your booking early to avoid disappointment. Viv Wilson will talk to us on "*Leopards and Bio-diversity of the Matopos National Park*" on Saturday at teatime followed by communal braai. Cost of accommodation is \$100,000 per person for the weekend. Self-catering. Working weekend. Day visitors welcome. Tel: Julia or Dudley on 76781 (o), 240127 (h) or Penny

3rd September: Slides by Professor Peter Mundy on "*François Levallant's Birds of Africa*". Advance notice, details in next Babblar.

EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB

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

Sunday 31 July: La Rochelle 07:00 a.m. Carl Beel 63058 or

Sunday 28 August: Thompson's Vlei 07:00 a.m. Ken 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. 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. on the 3rd Saturday of each month.

 Contact Margaret Parrock ☎ 068-22005 for details.

REPORTS**NATIONAL****ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING HELD 14TH MAY 2005****Summary of the audited financial statements at 31 December 2004**

Income	2004	2003
Subscriptions	3 420 478	1 066 880
Donations	883 900	1 846 491
Interest received	33 515 850	15 154 269
Sales (t-shirts)	1 087 700	264 102
Sundry income	80 106	35 915
Dividends received	923 605	1 038 734
Currency variance	4 745 940	-
Increase in value of shares	27 598 025	-
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	72 255 604	19 406 391
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Expenditure		
Honeyguide production (2 issues)	16 921 211	487 280
Babbler (six issues)	3 949 675	1 385 715
Grants to projects	33 167 767	15 593 284
Grants to branches	11 900 000	83 870
Depreciation	2 647 474	1 266 021
General expenses	876 480	22 267
Subscriptions payable	679 433	451 936
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	70 142 040	19 290 373
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SURPLUS FOR YEAR	2 113 564	116 018
DEPRECIATION RAISED ON FUNDED ASSETS	2 513 567	1 140 946
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TO ACCUMULATED FUNDS	4 627 131	1 256 964
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BIRDLIFE ZIMBABWE COUNCIL

The council for the next year is as follows:

President	Alex Masterson	Vice-President	Ken Wilson
Hon. Treasurer	Oscar Mitumbili	Hon. Secretary	Debbie Gundlach
Member	John Saunders	Member	Ferdie Couto

The new Administration Manager is Mrs Marjie Appel who will be working part-time at the office.

EDUCATION NEWS

At the end of May, a tour of the Eastern Highlands to run three workshops was nearly grounded by the fuel crisis. BLZ members and organisations saved the day, special thanks to Mrs Verna McGregor and Tanganda Estates for providing the fuel. Another member Leonard Taipi provided his expertise at the Chipinge event. Chimanimani has teachers who are sponsored members but no one else in the wider community belongs to BLZ. Tanganda provided board and lodging for trainers and transport, tea and a venue for the New Year's Gift and the Masterson's provided a night stop-over. All this sponsorship helped towards funding the workshops.

The Bvumba/Zimunya cluster is yet to have a workshop. A useful morning was spent with Chitakatira Secondary School, Mr Peter Madziwana of Seldomseen helped with this and the Burma Valley visit, thanks to him and Seldomseen. At clusters went on a bird walk and participated in a quiz contest.

Results of the quiz contests

Burma Valley cluster

Valhalla Primary was 1st, Kaswa Primary was 2nd and Masapa was 3rd. On the walk with Mr Madziwana, a flock of White Storks was seen on 23rd May 2005.

Chimanimani Cluster

Rusitu Primary (1st) won a pair of binoculars from NABU bringing to three pairs among 12 schools. Kwirire Primary (2nd) Chimanimani Primary (3rd). Chimanimani Primary as host school provided tea and a venue. Many of the eight teams travelled long hours in a bus to attend the event; all showed enthusiasm and a better understanding of birds and their threats.

New Years' Gift – Chipinge Cluster

Ten schools with 43 pupils and 14 teachers were brought to the venue by Tanganda and Southdown. One of the schools is in Tamandai communal area. Ratelshoek Secondary came first and was delighted to win a pair of NABU sourced binoculars. Three schools in this 13-school cluster have binos. Jersey Secondary was placed second and Zona Primary third. All teachers asked the Education Manager to bring even more posters, magazines and books next time. She encouraged them to become interested in the special birds of Chirinda Forest. Almost no one had ever walked in it except for the Tanganda Training Officer who helped organise our workshop.

Appreciation of Mrs Gisela Locherer's support

Mrs Locherer has helped connect us to NABU, our German bird club partner and has brought out binoculars and books for distribution in our project. She has actively and cheerfully worked on the Honde and Haroni-Rusitu schools projects and we thank her and wish her and her husband the best in their retirement.

Slide shows for the Harare Cluster

Mrs Julliet Van Ongevalle has put together slide shows for Belvedere Teachers Training College, Hallingbury and Southerton Primary School. These have been well received. Mrs Maposa and her bird club at Southerton have been doing outstanding work and have produced a well-presented report.

Awareness programme for the Southern Ground-hornbill

All schools where this endangered bird occurs or used to be found will be contributing to this project and sending in sighting records. Many teachers in the past have been concerned about the plight of this magnificent bird.

Trip to Rifa

A brief weekend trip was made by Mr Geoff Lowe and Mrs Leslee Maasdorp to show off the mid-Zambezi IBA at Rifa to Mr Chris Magin of RSPB.

Leslee Maasdorp, Manager Education Programme

Conservation Department**Status of the specially protected birds in DRIEFONTEIN grasslands**

The Driefontein grassland is one of the Important Bird Areas (IBAs) in Zimbabwe that supports significant populations of protected bird species. It is the key breeding area for cranes in Zimbabwe. Over the past five years, the area had experienced a massive land use change from predominantly cattle farming to arable crop production. This had significant repercussions on the survival, distribution and number of specially protected species of birds in the Driefontein area.

Recently, a study on the assessment of threats to specially protected birds and their habitats was carried out in the area. Main objectives of this study were to identify threats to protected bird species and evaluate the remaining habitats. Research efforts focused on selected specially protected birds comprising Wattled Crane and Grey Crowned Cranes, Secretarybirds, the African Fish-eagle, the Black-chested Snake-eagle and the Black-bellied Bustard.

The findings of the study have shown that human activities are major cause of threats to specially protected birds in the Driefontein grasslands. The chief threat among others is habitat loss and degradation mainly due to uncontrolled agricultural activities and/or intensification throughout the area. Threats encountered by the specially protected species of birds have also been extended to other less specialised bird species and biodiversity. May I point out that some sites or habitats in the area are still in a satisfactory status although they are now vulnerable to degradation. Results of habitat evaluation have indicated a gradual deterioration of the remained habitats in the Driefontein grasslands.

Despite all these threats to birds, it is interesting to note that quite a number of local people in the area have started developing positive attitudes towards birds. The Crane Conservation Project on the ground at the present moment is playing a pivotal and crucial role for this positive development.

Recommendations

Since crop cultivation seems to be gaining momentum in the area, integrating conservation into agricultural practices is crucial. The threats to birds and their habitats need to be reduced. This can be achieved through implementation of proper strategic measures to control agricultural activities, cattle grazing and uncontrolled veld fire in the grasslands.

Many people in the Driefontein grasslands are dependent on birds' habitats, wetland and grassland resources for their livelihood. There is a need to maintain present natural and socio-economic functions of these resources. Sustainable utilization rather than total protection must therefore be advocated. There is need of a holistic sustainable management strategy for wetlands and grasslands (important bird habitats) in the area so as to ensure long-term survival of these resources and the specially protected bird species. That means taking into account their socio-economic, cultural and biophysical characteristics. Such a strategy must be ecologically sound, economically viable, socially just, humane and adaptable. Increased conservation education to the local people and capacity building is essential in order to achieve conservation goals in the area.

For more information, please refer to the student's dissertation.

Togarasei Fakarayi (Student on attachment to BLZ)

MASHONALAND BRANCH**Chikupo Caves, MASEMBURA Communal Land, Bindura District, 24th April 2005 (QDS: 1731A4)**

We had a good turnout of 9 cars for this venue, but unfortunately some left before lunch. It was a good, fine day with few clouds and no jerseys required. The Kraal head there, was a charming old man, and most helpful. The rock paintings at Chikupo are in three parts, Eastern end (24m x 4m high), Western end (23m x 6.4m high), and at Lower Chikupo, 200m to the west of the well known galleries, in a cave with a domed roof.

We saw no water – but two waterbirds – one Hamerkop flew over, and Cattle Egrets were a common sight in 2s -5s, some perched in the earlier part of the day, and later close to cattle, some of which looked a bit thin.

In the kopje country we had two separate sightings of Augur Buzzard. One of which was stooping on, and trying to chase off, White-necked Ravens, out of their territory, but with little success. Norman Kennaird was telling me that he thought that near Juliasdale and Nyanga, Augur Buzzard have got quite scarce, and have been pushed out by the Ravens which have increased tremendously due to less disposal of the waste by the hotel managements. Back at Chikupo we also recorded Pied Crow, the Masembura Primary and Secondary Schools are nearby.

In the afternoon, the more nimble climbed to a known Cape Eagle-owl nest, but there was no one at home, however, this is where we saw the second pair of Augur Buzzards, only about 4 km from the other pair.

In the woodland we recorded no Laughing Doves, some Red-eyed Doves, about 6 Cape Turtle-doves, and maybe heard 20 Emerald-spotted Wood-doves. Geoff Lowe managed a lifer in the Cinnamon-breasted Tit (Rufous-bellied Tit). (Chikupo is a must if you want to see this species). Many of us saw the Miombo Tit. About 14 White-crested Helmet-shrike were seen in a flock, and there was a small flock of 6-8 Chin-spot Batis – which I thought was unusual. They normally occur in pairs.

Bar-throated Apalis and Grey-backed Camaroptera were heard. The only 3 sunbirds seen were the Miombo Double-collared Sunbird, the White-bellied Sunbird and the Scarlet-chested Sunbird. The Miombo Double-collared Sunbird was particularly common. Jameson's Firefinch was recorded, Blue Waxbills were common, and a pair of Bronze Mannikin was seen. Two Magpie Mannikins were the rarest birds of the day. Yellow-fronted Canary and Streaky-headed Seedeater were both seen in the mazhanje trees (*Uapaca kirkiana*). Here these trees are very dense and, at this time of the year, had only small fruit on them.

References to previous visits: *Babbler* 57 p.6 of 24/8/03 and *Babbler* 47 p.3 of 25/11/2001.

Animals seen were 3 klipspringers and about 15 Vervet Monkeys. Chacma Baboons were heard in the early and late part of the day, but not from about 10h00-16h00. In Roberts, Mammals of South Africa (1951) pp 100-101, Masterson's Free-tailed Bat (5 specimens) and the Rhodesian Free-tailed Bat (6 specimens) were both collected from these caves by the President's Dad, the late H.B. Masterson, then Assistant Native Commissioner, Bindura District, in the mid 1940's. In the Mammals of the Southern African Sub-region by Skinner & Smithers (1990), these two bats were obviously merged with another Free-tailed Bat species.

D.V. Rockingham-Gill

AFDIS, Stapleford, Zvimba District – Sunday, 22nd May 2005 (QDS 1730D2)

Twelve of us met at Afdis settling ponds on a cool, sunny morning but we soon warmed up as we made our way through thick grass behind the pools. As we passed the pools, there was a pair of Hamerkop, augmenting their already large nest in a nearby gum tree, 6 Three-banded Plover and 2 Black-winged Stilts as well as several Wattled Lapwings. We saw 8 of these and 4 Blacksmith Lapwings. Other water birds seen were 10 Black Crake, an African Purple Swamphen, 6 Egyptian Goose and 7 Hottentot Teal and 2 Red-billed Teal and an African Rail were heard.

Behind the ponds, we saw a family of 5 Cut-throat Finches, a Black-shouldered Kite, 1 each of Thick-billed Weaver, Spectacled Weaver and Golden Weaver and several Southern Masked-weavers, 6 Speckled Mousebirds, Blue Waxbills, Tawny-flanked Prinia, Miombo Double-collared Sunbird, White-bellied Sunbird and a number of Variable Sunbirds. A flock of 18 African Sacred Ibis flew over, disturbed by the other group, with numbers of Red-eyed Dove and Laughing Dove but only 2 Cape Turtle-doves.

Back on the short grass near the ponds, we heard a Yellow-throated Longclaw and saw Orange-breasted Waxbills. It was nice to see a pair of Cape Wagtails skulking near another pond, blending in with the dead bushes and grey soil.

A Long-crested Eagle glided low over the vlei that surrounds Afdis and a Black-chested Snake-eagle soared overhead. Adult and immature African Fish-eagles and a Lizard Buzzard completed the list of raptors.

About 20 Cattle Egret stalked around the short grass and a Grey Heron and 3 Black-headed Herons flew by in their usual leisurely fashion. There was one each of the more colourful species: Black-headed Oriole, Little Bee-eater, Lilac-breasted Roller and Brown-hooded Kingfisher. The shrikes comprised several Common Fiscals on the small trees planted around the short grass, Black-backed Puffback, Tropical Boubou and White-crested Helmet-shrike. Warblers around the water and on the edges of the vlei were several Dark-capped Yellow Warbler, Lesser Swamp-warbler and Little Rush-warbler.

All in all we saw 71 species, not bad for a winter's morning. (When I got home, I saw 25 species in my Marlborough garden in 30 minutes including over 20 Marabou Stork on their way to the Pomona dump.)

Jennifer Carter

Slides by Darryl Tiran & Geoff Lowe

These two stalwart Mashonaland members gave even more of their time to present shows of their slides on 19th May and 16th June respectively.

Darryl was resident at Fothergill Island for a couple of years and showed interesting slides of the flora and fauna in the area taken during his stay. We saw photos of elephants with floppy trunk syndrome, all bulls. It was Darryl's opinion that the syndrome was caused by a plant that thrived in the area. The syndrome was seen mostly in these bulls, which spent much of their time in the area and not in elephants residing in other areas on the lakeshore, so the theory of it being caused by oil in the water, or other pollution was not convincing. Darryl's sunset pictures were superb and we saw many excellent slides made us all wish we too could have shared his experience of living on the shores of Kariba.

Geoff has long been involved with BirdLife and chose to show slides of some of the many outings he has been on, particularly to Rifa Camp. Those who have been to Rifa in September would have been astonished at pictures of the river right up to the camp, making it impossible to walk to the pump site as we usually do, after the flood-gates at Kariba were opened in February 1999. Other photos of vehicles being manhandled through mud on the road between Chirundu and the camp one December explained why the Club does not visit Rifa during the rainy season! The slides were very interesting and were enjoyed by those who had used precious fuel supplies to get there.

Both Geoff and Darryl had amusing photos of elephants at Chirundu. Darryl had one of an elephant drinking out of the hotel swimming pool – taken from IN the pool! And Geoff's, which raised a cheer, was of elephants helping themselves to maize from the back of a low loader on its way to Zambia – with Zimbabwean maize!

Thanks to both Geoff and Darryl for entertaining evenings!

Jennifer Carter

MATABELELAND BRANCH

We're busy, very busy, and although we've had to somewhat change our style (fuel or lack thereof) we have nevertheless achieved some pretty good bird watching.

AISLEBY DOES IT AGAIN!

The crème de la crème – guess what it was? A Spotted Crake and we've got pictures to prove it. First seen on 5 June, then again on 19 June 2005. Described in Roberts' as "Uncommon non-breeding Palearctic migrant, December to April (rarely May)" and by Sasol as a "Rare summer visitor; a secretive species, easily overlooked". Who says! May's gone, summer's gone, so what on earth is it still doing here? And why has it chosen a place exposed to frequent, close walking traffic? It has a special den in the grass up the bank and under a bush, to which it calmly retreats when it sees bodies coming along the path. But not for long – you see the grass twitching, and out it pops, to continue pottering up and down a narrow mud beach on the edge of a holding pond. Marvellous!

VERREAUX'S EAGLE SURVEY MATOPOS – PROGRESS REPORT

At the end of the first reporting period (March to May) Dudley Hubbard's analysis of the 95 reports produced by survey teams reveals that of the 64 territories surveyed so far, 31 have birds in occupation, 11 of which are actively house-keeping or incubating. Of these busy bees, 8 reside in the National Park, 2 in commercial farmland and 1 in communal land. A few territories in far-flung areas remain to be checked when fuel supplies allow.

Then there's interesting news and bad news. The interesting item is that one pair has re-occupied a tree nest, originally attributed to Black Sparrowhawks, at the top of an old eucalyptus – they have used this nest before. Only three VE tree nests have been recorded during the life of this survey, the other two fell into disrepair some while ago. And, the bad is that a pair lost their eggs to baboons that were seen devouring them after incubation had started.

Qalisa Bird and Tree Walk, BULAWAYO

This event in fact turned more into a tree walk! We met, 15 of us, in the Qalisa car park where we remained rooted to the spot (note the subtle wording) for the next half hour. This was because our leader, Ian McCausland – who is an absolute expert on trees – jumped out of his car with Margaret, said good morning, and dived straight into his subject, as apparently we were surrounded, right there, by interesting trees. He started with the *Acacia karoo* under which we were standing, and then talked about out all its indigenous neighbours. And we became so totally engrossed that it was at least another half hour before someone pointed out that there were, actually, a couple of birds flitting around, what were they?

And so it went on as we moved around the lovely Qalisa environment, trespassing across people's gardens, peering at their rockeries (and into their houses), discussing the ingenuity of their plastic water-lily pads and why they hadn't got plastic water-lily flowers, and admiring a wonderful group of olive trees planted in open grassland. Trees and shrubs were examined, their ID properties expertly explained by Ian, and most of us felt confident that we could now talk with authority, until it came to the test when only one of us correctly identified an *Acacia robusta* –easy-peasie, silly, because it's *obviously* an *acacia* and it *obviously* has hefty leaves, so what else could it be?

We did see some birds, around 20 species (not keen on even numbers, so we'll make it 21), including pretty little Cut-throat Finches, a Common Fiscal, chattering White-browed Sparrow-weavers, Groundscraper Thrushes, sunbirds and – the most appropriate scene of all – a Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird feeding on the berries of a *Ziziphus mucronata*, just as we were talking about this very subject!

Morning refreshments were served in the gazebo where a spread of delicious cakes and biscuits awaited us. At this point, a quick head count revealed that our group of 15 had swollen to something like 20 – now, what does that tell you?

VIDEO AFTERNOON

The Feather family (what's the collective name for a bunch of feathers? – answers on a postcard please) hosted 18 of us to a very enjoyable Saturday afternoon's video viewing where we watched an episode of the Attenborough series "Life of Birds". This particular episode featured a Lyre Bird imitating cameras, a car alarm and a chainsaw, which had us not only in stitches (actually that's an unfortunate word to use in the presence of the footless around here) but wondering how on earth they get these scenes on camera! No wonder this wonderful series took 10 years to produce.

We are planning to work our way through the other 12 episodes, so our Saturday afternoon sessions will continue for quite a while to come, albeit on a rather irregular basis. A warm thank-you to our hosts and to everyone who provided such a super selection of eats.

Julia Duprée

KAROI BIRD CLUB

RYDINGS School, Saturday 7th May 2005 (QDS: 1629D3)

Four of us took our walk around the top dams and woodland at 6:30 a.m. on a crisp morning, in time to watch a light mist evaporate as the sun warmed up. We discovered our 2 Hottentot Teal were still with us – we first saw them in April – and the White-faced Duck, where 4 in April were, were down to 2. A lot of African Jacana, for us, 12 in all, 3 Pied Kingfisher, the resident Malachite Kingfisher and, just as we were leaving, a pair of Giant Kingfisher flew in. We heard Black Crake, saw 5 Little Grebe, 3 Reed Cormorant, a Black Heron, fishing, with a Little Egret standing by hoping to get a peek at the shaded

area under his wing! There were 6 Wattled Lapwing and 4 Blacksmith Lapwing and a single, each, Green-backed Heron and Three-banded Plover. Standing on the dam wall looking downstream, we were puzzled over a bird atop a small thorn tree with black head, rusty breast and pale yellow belly. Foxed, we had nearly given up when the bird obliged by landing in a bush in front of us on the dam wall – a male Long-tailed Paradise-whydah minus his long tail-feathers! Some of us are a bit slow! A grey shadow landed in a large Ficus and we got a good view of a Shikra (Little Banded Goshawk). We only managed 40 species.

We have since seen no less than 7 Magpie Shrike flying together, 7 White-crested Helmet-shrike, a Black-chested Snake-eagle and a Black-shouldered Kite.

In the garden in Karoi, we were visited by 6 Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters on 24th May and the resident family of Arrow-marked Babblers raised yet another noisy foster child, a Levaillant's Cuckoo. The flowering Erythrina and aloes have attracted the sunbirds, and a pair of Southern Black Tits was also in the tree.

Driving on Rydings, 16th April, as we rounded a corner in a lightly wooded area, we disturbed about 12 Quail on the ground under a thorn tree but they were so quick we couldn't identify them. We, however, discovered a chick had been left behind when there was a soft whistling from the scattered ones and the chick was answering. We got a glimpse of its head, of which the side was beige 'chick' colour and, as it turned its head, there was a broad stripe of brown from the neck over the top?? As we were picnicking, a little later we walked back along the road in the same vicinity and disturbed the same, or another group of 7 or 8. Same story, too quick, but this time a clucking mother disappeared into the undergrowth instead of flying and it sounded like chicks were with her. We thought we would identify them from the Bird Tapes but no whistling calls were recorded. They were probably the Harlequin Quail as we have seen pairs flying up from the grassy roads...only 102 species for May.

Merle Mitchell

TAIL FEATHERS

From Birdlife International Web site 1st June 2005

Some of this may be of interest for Babbler – there was no reason given for the decline and no other birds found in Zim were mentioned in the article.

“BirdLife International's annual evaluation of how the world's bird species are faring shows that the total number considered to be threatened with extinction is now 1,212, which when combined with the number of near threatened species gives a total of exactly 2,000 species in trouble – more than a fifth of the planet's remaining 9,775 species.

“Of the species currently in trouble, 179 are now categorised as Critically Endangered, the highest level of threat. These include the Azores Bullfinch *Pyrrhula murina*, one of Europe's rarest songbirds, which has been in decline since the early 1990s, with fewer than 300 individuals left. However, the Portuguese Government, following work by BirdLife Partners SPEA (BirdLife in Portugal) and the RSPB (BirdLife in the UK), has recently declared the entire home range of the species a Special Protection Area (SPA).

“Several species from Europe appear in the list for the first time, like European Roller *Coracias garrulus*, for which key populations in Turkey and European Russia have declined markedly.”

Dave Dalziel

Wintering Violet-backed Starlings (Amethyst) HARARE

This year it has been interesting to watch a small group of Violet-backed Starling as they assemble at the top of an *Acacia* tree in our Hogarty Hill, Borrowdale, garden every morning at between 6.30 and 7.00 a.m. There are normally 6-8 of them, with 20 being the most seen together. In this group females and juveniles seems to outnumber the males by about 5:1.

Most winters I come across the odd bird or group that has over-wintered. This flock, however, seems intent on sticking it out this year by remaining in the same general area. But why this should be, I'm not too sure. Certainly the days so far this winter have been very mild, but it has been cold at night. Maybe this is becoming another of our normally migratory species that is adopting Harare as its year-round home.

Has anyone else noted a similar occurrence in this, or any other, bird that should have been far away by now?

Colin Baker

VICTORIA FALLS, June 4th – 11th

The annual Nomad's Golf Nationals were held at Elephant Hills this year and we were lucky enough to attend. The golf course itself is a wonderful birding area and we saw more animals there than in the Zambezi Game Park! A huge male baboon blissfully ignored us walking close by as a much smaller female groomed him. A magnificent waterbuck ram and numerous impala and warthogs were unfazed by the golfers but, on one day, a young bull elephant took exception to men wandering around with sticks and scattered golfers and caddies with a mock charge! One caddy turned to run, ran straight into a tree, gathered himself and took off again only to trip over the golf bag he was carrying! The young elephant was not about to give way and National Parks staff had to be called to chase him with shots over his head before the golf could continue!

Now to the birds: African Pied Wagtails were everywhere and Little Bee-eaters and White-fronted Bee-eaters were seen as well as White-crested Helmet-shrikes, Long-billed Crombecs and Bronze Mannikins. Blue Waxbills and Forked-tailed Drongos were seen in numbers and I spied a single Southern Black Flycatcher. I forgave myself for not having noticed Southern Black Flycatchers as a novice birder in Matabeleland. They are out-numbered by about 200 to 1 by Fork-tailed Drongos! I saw a few Ashy Flycatchers, lots of Red-billed Hornbills and African Grey Hornbills and the inevitable Pied Crow.

Driving around the game park yielded only 15 mammals; 4 magnificent, fat sable bulls, 3 kudu, 3 giraffes, 3 warthogs, a slender mongoose and a hippo! The birds were good with the specials being a Collared Palm-thrush, skulking in bushes near the river, a pair of African Hawk-eagles, soaring and calling, a Martial Eagle, an immature Bateleur, a Dark Chanting-goshawk, 2 Black-shouldered Kites and a Purple Roller.

In the rain forest, we were delighted by a pair of Mountain Wagtails that showed their smart grey, black and white outfits, turning this way and that a few feet from us. We heard but did not see up to half-a-dozen White-browed Robin-chats in a bush by the path. The Blue Waxbills sat happily as we passed 3 feet away – indeed all the birds – and, unfortunately, the baboons – seem very habituated to humans. We also saw Violet-backed Starlings and Red-winged Starlings, African Golden Orioles, Green Wood-hoopoe and a host of other birds as well as 3 bushbucks. On the river outside the rain forest, a day later, I saw 6 Trumpeter Hornbills.

We didn't have enough time for birding and must return to the Falls to do more birding and less golf (watch out for a domestic!). We want to spend hours in the rain-forest as we are sure there is much more there to see there. Taita Falcons can be seen, from a distance and with patience, if you know where to watch.

Jennifer Carter

Another "Get Away From It All" destination

Gary Hensman's Lodge is up on top of the highest hill in the Manyame range with fantastic views. Not many birds up there, although Duncan Parkes and Fyn O'Donoghue pay regular visits to look for the Western Banded Snake-eagle and Brown Snake-eagles. There is also a small dam near-by which might produce some interesting birds – Narina Trojan? Further down is a beautiful spring, which again could produce some birds of note.

The Lodge is a self-catering unit, with 1 double bedroom, 1 bedroom (3/4 and single bed) and 1 bedroom with 2 singles. Everything is provided, including a cook! Charge: \$50,000 pppn for the Lodge.

Contact Gary at ghensman@zol.co.zw

NOTICEBOARD

Painted Dog Conservation Project Seeks Photos

Since 1989, Painted Dog Conservation (PDC) has been labouring to conserve the painted hunting dog, *Lycaon pictus*, one of Africa's most endangered species. Starting in 2002, in a bold move to the win support of rural villagers, the organization began building a "Community Conservation Education Complex" (CCEC) across from Hwange National Park Airport. The CCEC includes a rehabilitation facility for injured and orphaned painted dogs, a children's bush camp and a visitor centre.

The visitor centre, due to open early next year, will be free to the public, and include a beautiful interpretive hall that will cover not only painted dogs, but the Hwange ecosystem to which they belong as well. Over 100 displays are planned, each with colour photographs. PDC has a list of photos, being sought as donations for the displays**. PDC is also seeking donations of recordings and specimens. Contributing photographers whose pictures are chosen will be clearly recognized in a credit beneath the photo.

Contributors are greatly appreciated. Digital images must be of a sufficiently high resolution for printing, but low-resolution digital samples should be sent by email. Arrangements will then be made to acquire high-resolution versions of chosen photos. Please state original resolution of photo and name of photographer clearly in email. Posted prints that are clearly labelled with photographers name and address on the back will be returned after being scanned.

Anyone interested in supporting this effort should contact BLZ member **Bruce Lombardo**, PDC's Education Coordinator, who splits his time between Harare and Hwange (where land lines, cell network coverage and email reception are quite unreliable, so please be patient):

(011) 619 325 – cell; pdcbruce@mweb.co.zw (018) 710 - Hwange office; P.O. Box 72, Dete
(04) 301 836 - home in Harare; deliveries will be welcome at 49 Quorn Ave., Mt. Pleasant, Harare
THANK YOU!

**** The list is a long one and can't be printed in full. It includes bee-eaters, francolins, hornbills, ducks, vultures, herons, painted dogs, particularly interaction with puppies or between packs, many other mammals, Leopard Tortoise, many trees and a host of other things. It should be attached with your emailed Babler or contact the Editor or Bruce for a copy.**

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.

FOR SALE

1. Field Guide to North American Birds (Eastern Region)
2. Field Guide to North American Birds (Western Region)

Both published by the Audubon Society USA 1977. Illustrations by colour photographs; size about 190x100x35mm.

Interested persons to contact Rolf Chenaux-Repond on Tel. 303591 or by e-mail on rochen@mango.zw

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

New Members

John Vekris	I Speight	R Etheridge
Mr and Mrs G Putterill	Mr and Mrs D Meikle	Mr and Mrs K Goosen
Mr and Mrs B Lewis	B Martyn	Mr and Mrs Brebner

Donations

Mwanga Lodge	John Vekris
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Legacies and Wreath Funds

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

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