

# BABBLER

The Newsletter of -

## BirdLife Zimbabwe

The BirdLife International Partner in Zimbabwe

ISSUE # 69 – November/December 2005

### COMMITTEES

	Mashonaland	☎	Matabeleland	☎
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	Ken Wilson	745231	Dudley Hubbard	240127
	Jennifer Carter	300082	Margie Pearce	247009

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## ACTIVITIES

### NATIONAL

#### BIG BIRDING DAY 26/27 November 2005

National fund-raising event organised by Matabeleland Branch. Planned to deliberately coincide with that for BirdLife SA to economise on fuel for members who compete in both events.

Note revised rule – maximum 4 per team, 2 must be BLZ members.

Entry forms and sponsorship forms are available from all branches — Matabeleland (Julia), Eastern Districts (Carl Beel), Midlands (Jon Barry), Mashonaland (Dave Rockingham-Gill), Karoi (Merle Mitchell), Mashonaland South (Margaret Parrock), Victoria Falls (Daryl Tiran 011 610222), BLZ office Harare (Alice).

See *Babbler* for contact details.

Branches may retain the funds they raise.

For further information telephone: Penny on 09-237777; or Dudley 09-76781-4 (o) and 09-240127 (h); or email Julia on [dalia@netconnect.co.zw](mailto:dalia@netconnect.co.zw)

### MASHONALAND BRANCH

Regular outings

Sundays November 6<sup>th</sup> & December 4<sup>th</sup>: 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.

Annual breakfast will be at Mukuvisi on Sunday 6th November.

BACON & EGG ROLLS \$25 000 per roll + tea. Contact Jennifer Carter to order by Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> November. Bring your own plates, cutlery, mugs and chairs. Guaranteed 100+ species on the walks.

Sundays November 13<sup>th</sup> & December 11<sup>th</sup>: Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary. 6:30 A.M.

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/Sunday, November 26<sup>th</sup>/27<sup>th</sup>: Big Birding Day. There is no regular outing as Mashonaland committee is fielding a team. Will those getting up teams and those without a team but wishing to take part in Harare please contact Jennifer Carter and perhaps some match-making can be done.

There is no additional Sunday outing in December.

Thursday evening meetings

November 17<sup>th</sup>, Dr Brian Marshall, Professor of Biological Science at UZ will talk on birds and fish.

There is no Thursday evening meeting in December.

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

2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Thursdays (10<sup>th</sup> & 24<sup>th</sup> November & 8<sup>th</sup> & 22<sup>nd</sup> December). 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.

## **MATABELELAND BRANCH**

Monthly Outings

4<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> November: Camp at Tuli. A bird and archaeological weekend, including a visit to the Sentinel Ranch dinosaur on Saturday or Sunday. Cost is approximately \$40,000 per head per night (check nearer the time), plus share of camp fee of \$100,000. Self-catering, only beds and mosquito nets supplied. Tel: Julia or Dudley 09-76781-4 (o) and 09-240127 (h).

Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> /Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> Big Birding Day

Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> December, Christmas Get-together. Bring and share lunch, 12.00 p.m. at Mabukuwene Nature Reserve. Bring tables and chairs, cutlery and crockery. Tel: Penny or Dudley.

Aisleby: last Saturday or Sunday of every month. Contact Julia for details.

## **EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB**

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

Sunday 27 November: Valley Lodge 07:00 a.m. Carl 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](mailto:cbeel@zol.co.zw)

## **Karoi Bird Club**

Co-ordinator: Merle Mitchell P O Box 398, Karoi ☎ 064-6436

## **ACTIVITIES**

Rydings School Walks are conducted the first Saturday each month at 6.30 a.m.

**MIDLANDS BRANCH**

Gweru: Contact Jon Barry ☎ 055-2002 1

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****EDUCATION NEWS****Response to the Southern Ground-hornbill campaign.**

Some interesting information on the habits of Southern Ground-hornbills in communal areas and targeted schools in our project has been received. This provides a picture of the threats to the birds. The Education Manager will be giving a presentation on the ground-hornbill at the forthcoming 4<sup>th</sup> International Hornbill Conference in South Africa.

**Attachment course run by SADC Regional Environmental**

Mrs Maasdorp attended this course and produced a book on three short stories on birds for school use. She exchanged news and ideas with participants from Mauritius, Tanzania, Namibia, Zambia and South Africa.

Thank you all for the gift of a splendid pair of binoculars given to me for my birthday at the AGM. I appreciate your generosity. Good wishes to you all.

**Leslee Maasdorp**, Education Programme Manager

**MASHONALAND BRANCH****SALLY PERRETT died October 2005**

During the 1960s, Rhodesian Ornithological Society (ROS — now BirdLife) experienced a dramatic increase in membership. Amongst the many new members was a lady by the name of Miss Sally Perrett, a schoolteacher from England teaching at Selborne Routledge School in Harare.

I found her name first mentioned in *Honeyguide* in 1968 where it had appeared in a list of members who had sold more than 50 books of tickets for a lottery run by ROS in support of a planned bird observatory at Lake McIlwaine, for which more than £1 800 was raised.

Sally was born in Longport, Somerset on 16 June 1918, and grew up on a dairy farm. At an early age she passed her LRAM and kept her interest in music all her life. She passed away at Blue Kerry Retirement Village in Harare on Sunday, 16<sup>th</sup> October, 2005.

Sally joined the ROS/OAZ/BLZ almost 40 years ago and quickly became an enthusiastic, adventurous and knowledgeable birdwatcher. She visited a great many birding spots on bird club outings, often in the company of her friends, Monica Fiorini and Sibyl Duncanson; from the Honde to the Zambezi Valley, from Chipinda to Hippo Pools. Sally was a regular on John Shaw's monthly bird counts at the Mukuvisi Woodlands stretching over quarter of a century and John was once heard to remark that, had it not been for Sally and Monica, he would have walked by himself on many a rainy wet season or cold winter morning.

Sally spent much time at Seldomseen in the Vumba with Alec and Cecilia Manson and managed the place at times when the Mansons were away. She also celebrated many a memorable Christmas there in the company of the Harwin family.

For her contribution to the Society, Sally was made an Honorary Life Member. She was on the Mashonaland Bird Club committee for years and eventually became the Chairman. She was also on the national committee and was Membership Secretary for a long time. She took an interest in book-binding, and many volumes in our library are bound by Sally. She also wrote the AFDIS page in the *Honeyguide* in a most entertaining manner for many years.

Sally was interested in lots of other things besides birds. She was in Toastmistresses and public speaking, which later became ITC. She spoke on birdy matters on the radio. She loved gardening and made cards using dried flower arrangements. Her sports were fishing, tennis, golf and swimming. She knew hundreds of people and what all their kids were up to. After she retired she moved from Frank Johnson Avenue to Blue Kerry in Steppes Road, and was fondly remembered there for Scrabble.

Above all, Sally was a kind, loyal and humorous lady — a delightful and wonderful friend to many of us. We mourn her passing, but the happy days spent birding with her will keep the memory of her alive for many years to come.

### **Rolf Chenaux-Repond and Dave Rockingham-Gill**

#### **Liz Travis, 31<sup>st</sup> May, 1944 — 14<sup>th</sup> October, 2005**

It was with great shock and sadness that we heard of Liz's untimely death after a short illness just 3 weeks after she and her husband, Stuart, joined us for a wonderful birding weekend at Hippo Pools.

Liz had been a member of BLZ for a number of years and a keen birder even longer, after her family moved to the Copperbelt from England when she was just 9. She loved getting out into the bush and she and Stuart attended many long weekends with Mashonaland Branch, as well as Thursday evening meetings and Sunday outings.

When Liz left Arundel School, where she boarded, she signed up for articles with DeLoittes in Lusaka, later moving to Harare. She became a CA after she and Stuart were married and joined Lonrho, where she worked all her life.

She and Stuart were a pillar of the All Souls Church, in Mount Pleasant. About 12 years ago they and some friends started a partial care group and their involvement was the source of some wonderful friendships.

We are grateful that Liz's last outing with us was one of the more spectacular, where she had great sightings of Pel's Fishing-owl, White-backed Night-heron, Livingstone's Flycatcher and Dickinson's Kestrel as well as many others and, after the camaraderie of the day and evening, sat late with Stuart for a night-cap on the banks of the Mazowe, enjoying the African night.

She was quiet and competent, a very able and loyal friend, loved reading and bird watching, and will be missed very much.

All at BLZ offer Stuart our deepest sympathy.

### **Jennifer Carter and Dave Rockingham-Gill**

#### Tavistock Farm, BEATRICE, Sunday 28th August, 2005 (QDS: 1830B4)

Eleven members set out from Agrifoods premises for Tavistock farmhouse turnoff which is about 3 km beyond Beatrice on the right. Unfortunately Ken Wilson's car was subjected to a smash and grab robbery attempt when he stopped at the traffic lights opposite the Mbare Hospital. A bag was snatched through the broken back window but fortunately was retrieved from the thief by bystanders.

Upon arrival at the farmhouse we were met by Christine Hawgood, the Hawgoods' children and 2 of their friends. Stof Hawgood was away on a business trip.

Christine led us on a walk from the house through vlei paddocks and down to an extensive weir on the Mupfure River. About half of the vlei grassland had been burnt and the small dams they contained were either dry or very low after a fifth year of low rainfall. At the start of our walk, the cold south easterly wind was blowing quite strongly, but later this weakened and the day became quite warm. To the left of

the vlei was a fairly large field of irrigated barley and to the right were dairy cow paddocks. This type of environment is unusual for our outings as we are usually in woodland or forest.

We knew in an unusual environment when we encountered a pair of Temminck's Coursers as we entered the burnt vlei. Dave Dalziel explained that these birds breed at this time of the year and they lay black eggs in burnt areas so that the eggs are camouflaged. Other highlights in the vlei included 2 Yellow-billed Storks, 2 Red-billed Teals, Three-banded Plovers, Crowned Lapwings, Blacksmith Lapwings and African Wattled Lapwings, about 120 Wood Sandpipers, 6 Red-capped Larks, 6 Chestnut-backed Sparrowlarks, 40 African Pipits, 4 Magpie Shrikes, 10 Wattled Starlings, 1 African Quailfinch and 4 Long-tailed Paradise-whydahs.

At the end of the vlei we entered a patch of mixed acacia and riverine woodland which bordered the weir. Here we encountered several waterbird species including a Giant Kingfisher. We also identified White-fronted Bee-eaters and a Yellow-bellied Greenbul. In the adjacent barley field we encountered several species of swallow including a solitary Barn Swallow which probably found the barley suitable for overwintering.

When we returned to the house Christine provided us with tea and cool drink while we investigated the garden birds. Bird highlights in the garden included Senegal Coucal, Black-headed Oriole and Grey-headed Bush-shrike. When we did the bird list we discovered that we had recorded a pleasing total of 86 species.

Christine told us that we had only visited part of the various habitats to be found on the farm, so we would very much like to spend a whole day looking at all of them some time in the future.

Thank you very much for your hospitality Christine and Stof.

**Richard Dennison**

Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> September, 2005: Talk by Clare Davies, Director of BirdLife Zimbabwe

Clare wrote extensively in the last *Babbler* about the trip she and Chip Charara made to the African Partnership Meeting (Cap) in Kribi, Cameroon in July 2005 and her highly entertaining talk to about 30 members was more about the place than the business of the meeting.

Cameroon is a very different kind of African place than we experience here. It is a country of grey skies, rain and damp, at least while Clair and Chips were there. All this rainfall results in wonderful forests that are under threat from development, as in most countries around the world, although Cameroon is apparently taking steps to preserve at least some of their forests. We saw photos of wonderful forests by the roadside that were described as secondary implying that there were even more spectacular primary forests. We also saw hillsides where the forest had been cleared to make way for human occupation.

Unlike Zimbabwe, that has none, Cameroon has several endemic species including one that has defied categorisation and has finally been placed in a family by itself. Birds were not in much evidence during the visit but Clare did get a photo of the Great Blue Turaco, which is indeed great and blue. She took a field trip to see a magic rock out in the sea that is supposed to have great powers and an air of mystery. Clare was unimpressed!

My brief synopsis does not do justice to Clare's very entertaining and humorous talk that we all thoroughly enjoyed. Thank you, Clare.

Jennifer Carter

HIPPO POOLS, UMFURUDZI, 23<sup>rd</sup>-26<sup>th</sup> September, 2005 (QDS: 1731B2)

Those of us who were a tad disappointed not to be off to Rifa as usual owing to persistent fuel problems were richly rewarded for transferring our booking to Hippo Pools. The long weekend was, in every way, an unqualified success and we must offer our thanks to Jennifer, Geoff and Richard for combining to organize it. We now know why we failed to find the Livingstone's Flycatcher for the last few years at Rifa; they were all at Hippo Pools!

Having driven in convoy from Harare, the main group of 9 arrived in time for lunch. One short stop at Amm's Shaft (1731B1) produced a lifer for some, Black Stork, nesting in an old shaft. Those of us tall enough to see over the wall, and eventually all, were able to see 2 young on the nest and a parent on watch above.

A km before the camp, one car was lucky enough to spot 5 Sable not far from the road, one of very few

mammal sightings. The portents were not good due to widespread burning and the seemingly mindless destruction of a swathe of woodland through the entire safari area for the passage of a new power line.

Shortly after landing, Ian and Jane were off on a canoe trip that brought reports of Red-billed Oxpeckers and African Black Duck to whet our appetites. Fortified by lunch and, for some, a snooze, our first exploration of the riverine bush and riparian forest got under way. Many of us had already spotted exciting birds like Black-throated Wattle-eye and Red-throated Twinspot and seen the first of the abundant Scarlet-chested Sunbirds and White-bellied Sunbirds and Red-headed Weaver in the creepers around the chalets. On the river banks and sand bars were African Pied Wagtail, a Senegal Coucal and Three-banded Plover, Water Thick-knee and a few waders including Common Sandpiper and Wood Sandpiper, Little Stint, Common Greenshank and African Jacana. The woodland was full of the calls of Black-headed Oriole, Orange-breasted Bush-shrike and Grey-headed Bush-shrike, Klaas's Cuckoo and there were woodpeckers everywhere, Cardinal Woodpecker, Bearded Woodpecker and Golden-tailed Woodpecker. For some of us, the African Paradise-flycatcher was the first of the summer and Purple-banded Sunbird also caused a stir. A pair of Bearded Scrub-robins was not as shy as the book says they are. Little Bee-eaters and a couple of Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters swooped around below and in the canopy and both Ashy Flycatcher and Pale Flycatchers hunted at eye level.

By the time we got back our numbers had been boosted by the arrival of the Saunders and the Travis's. Dusk on the riverbank found most of us lined up staring at the water hoping for hippo, nightjars, perhaps owls and a night-heron. The Freckled Nightjar did not let us down (the next night a Fiery-necked Nightjar was heard) and a Green-backed Heron flew past but most by then had turned their attention to the braai. Some unexpected cloud cover made Tony's planned star-watching a bit tricky. A pity, as we'd all been looking forward to seeing his 'coat-hanger', especially Jane. The Dennisons had an African Wood-owl calling near their lodge and a Spotted Eagle-owl was also heard. Saturday dawned cool and clear so Richard decided to repeat the previous day's walk, an excellent choice. Once again, we had non-stop oohs and aahs as we discovered more and more species new for the trip; my first Willow Warbler of the summer, lots of Jameson's Firefinch, Common Scimitarbill and Green Wood-hoopoe. Ian and Tony had wandered off in search of the Pel's Fishing-owl but it was Pat and John who first spotted it flying lazily from one tree to another. After a frantic search, its silhouette was at last made out shrouded in light foliage whereupon half of the group, adrenalin pumping, crept off to get a better view from the riverbank. Eventually we all had near perfect sightings and excitedly compared impressions and striking features; its rufous plumage, black eyes. Strangely, birds nearby seemed to ignore its massive presence. When our pulses were back to normal, birding continued. We saw our one and only Bateleur, flocks of Red-backed Mannikins and Bronze Mannikins, 6 Red-winged Starling and 3 Yellow-fronted Canary.

As we were recovering from the morning's excitement, Ian returned from a local foray to invite us to see Livingstone's Flycatcher just past the campsite. And there they were, difficult to focus on as they flitted about in the sunlight in the canopy but there was no doubt, the elusive little flycatcher had at last been tracked down. By 15:30 we had calmed down enough to contemplate a further outing, this time by car, to the Mopane Forest which Ian had surveyed earlier while we were having lunch. En route, we encountered a Double-banded Sandgrouse which attempted to lead us away from her defenceless chick by feigning injury. At the Big Baobab, famous for its bees, where Ian once again starred by climbing the honey seekers' vertical line of pegs, we split into 2 groups, the fit and fast following Geoff to the Umfurudzi dry river bed and the rest to the Mopane. At the river, a Dickinson's Kestrel sat patiently watching the 2 Hamerkops' nests and we saw the first swallows of the trip, 3 Lesser Striped Swallows. The other group reported a Brown Snake-eagle and Boulder Chat plus lots of Golden-breasted Buntings and Cinnamon-breasted Buntings.

This second evening was clear and the African Wood-owl called almost as clearly as the Gibbons tape. Also heard were a lone Red-chested Cuckoo and both Fiery-necked Nightjar and Square-tailed Nightjar.

On the Sunday, some opted once again for the river while others walked inland in search of the African Crowned Eagle's nest. It was a hot, hard walk through the hills with very little vegetation or birdlife but we were rewarded by seeing the parent Crowned Eagle on the nest and Jameson's Firefinch among the rocks. The return was much easier and in the course of it we first heard then saw one of the Umfurudzi specials, Racquet-tailed Roller. Nearer the camp, a bird party contained Familiar Chat, Retz's Helmet-shrike and

Grey Penduline-tit. We were pleased to discover, on returning, that those who had missed out the previous day had all seen the Pel's and the Livingstone's.

After lunch, a small group decided to flush out the rare White-backed Night-heron which we'd seen but been unable to confirm the previous evening due to the failing light. This time we took the canoe and soon flushed it from the riverside bushes. There was no doubt now and all were able to confirm the sighting as it flew past the campsite. It was observed again later in the reeds opposite the camp, showing off its white back and calling frequently in the hope that a female might be in the neighbourhood. Later, the main group took a walk downriver where there is mature woodland and less bush. One area, both in the shallow river and higher up the bank, was pitted with deep holes excavated by the local gold panners who, we were told, make a good living from their occupation. Birds were fairly plentiful in the bare trees, especially Little Bee Eaters and Lesser Honeyguide. Euplectes, possibly Southern Red Bishop, pecked the seeds from the path ahead of us and flew up into the bushes at our approach and a Lizard Buzzard landed above us.

On Monday morning we took our final walk, some opting once again for the riverine bush while others chose a longer route leading to the Umfurudzi before making a final traverse of Pel's country. Behind the camp, a Wahlberg's Eagle was seen, the herd of Sable, Cinnamon-breasted Bunting and a Golden Weaver. On the way back, we again had fantastic views of Livingstone's Flycatcher, the perfect way to set the seal on a most enjoyable and successful stay. The final count was a marvellous 162 species. Do, please, use this delightful camp. Ian Jarvis, the leaseholder, deserves support for his determined attempt over many years to keep the facility open. **Ken Dixon**

#### Talk by Michael P Stuart Irwin, Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> October, 2005

Michael had some 30 of us engrossed for nearly an hour as he spoke of bird and mammal extinctions. He told us that as recently as around 12-15 thousand years ago the Americas suffered a massive extinction of some 43 large mammal species including elephants, huge buffalo, other large ungulates and four predators, including the Sabre Tooth and a large cheetah, which lived on them. At the same time, on the African continent, very few species were lost. It has been suggested that the first native Americans, crossing the then dry Bering Straits, hunted them out in a mere 3 000 years but Michael is skeptical. The species that died out were grazers rather than browsers, and the species that preyed on them, and Michael is of the opinion that a massive loss of food sources was the more likely cause. He went on to speak of other extinctions that were brought about by human intervention, particularly on various islands around the world. Michael fascinated us all with reports of pygmy elephants found at one stage on Mediterranean islands, of large and small flightless birds on islands all over the world, helpless against man and the exotic predators he brought with him to these previously secure places. Michael's vast knowledge of and fascination with all aspects of the natural world and his ability to share this knowledge are amazing. We thank him for taking the time to talk to us and for bringing his lovely wife, Nancy, with him. **Jennifer Carter**

### **MATABELELAND BRANCH**

#### Peter Mundy's Power Point Talk

Many of our members turned up to this event on a Saturday afternoon, which we hope was gratifying to Peter who had given up his very limited leisure time to come along.

I myself have heard Peter talk before on the life (including the doings, undoings and wrongdoings) of Monsieur Levaillant and his cronies. But he — Peter — has the rare gift of turning a previous presentation into something completely new and fresh, and this time was no exception. In fact it bore no resemblance to his previous presentation; it was completely new and fresh.

His ability to remember names and dates, and to wheedle out tiny details, is exceptional and what we didn't hear and see about the French Revolution is not worth knowing or looking at. In fact, had I earlier on in life had the benefit of listening to him, I might have been able to avoid twice failing History at 'O' level.

The book is beautiful, quite outstanding. It's large, heavy, printed on high quality special paper (French, I think) with an elegant typeface and stunning colour illustrations. These, apart from being eye-catching, are very interesting and quite a give-away as to what went on in those times in different climes.

Bird (and beast) collecting was a very cut-throat business then, it seems, and to keep ahead of the pack one had to be mighty innovative. For instance, our boy (actually Peter's boy) managed to cobble together bits and pieces of this and that from different specimens to produce a rare and eye-catching bird, the like of which had never been seen before — nor has it been seen since — which was undoubtedly snapped up at vast cost.

Working on this book, Peter says, provided one of the most thrilling opportunities of a lifetime. This was when he was permitted to put his arms around a real live 100-year old stuffed vulture. Well, the mind boggles — my lips must remain sealed.

We're already looking around for another topic on which we can ask Peter to speak — hopefully next year — so watch this space.

Thank you, Peter, for a thoroughly enjoyable and amusing afternoon, and for sparing the time to come along. **Julia Duprée**

#### World Birdwatch — Saturday, 22<sup>nd</sup> October

We must compliment our very smart band of helpers who pitched up at the Museum on opening day immaculately attired in BLZ tee-shirts and polo shirts, all wearing different colours and in some cases different styles. I had forgotten how many versions of these garments we have now produced, but suffice it to say the team was smart, eye-catching and energetic — forming an exhibition in themselves!

We had put together a multi-faceted display entitled “2005 WORLD BIRDWATCH — A Tribute to the Birds of Zimbabwe” in the Courtyard of the Natural History Museum. This has been well received by the Museum as it effectively enhances and complements their existing exhibition of beautiful paintings and fact sheets on the World Heritage sites in Western Region — Matobo Hills, Victoria Falls, Great Zimbabwe and Khami Ruins.

Our contribution consists of laminated bird and environmental posters and information sheets. The species are grouped into those appropriate for each World Heritage area and displayed with captions in the relevant sections.

The Museum provided “touchy-feely” skins of several species (some of which have unfortunately suffered through an overdose of touch-and-feel through the years). Visitors were then directed upstairs to the fabulous collection of mounted specimens and round to the ground floor standing displays.

Two special features focus on the Verreaux's Eagle Survey in the Matobo Hills and the Southern Ground-hornbill in Matabeleland and the southeast lowveld, based on Leslee Maasdorp's information. We have expanded this latter project and will continue an ongoing campaign to collect up information through the distribution of a simple poster and questionnaire to as many of the relevant rural areas as we can. Several leaflets were distributed on Saturday.

Throughout our exhibition we are running a bird quiz the answers to which can be found in the displays. On the day, answer sheets were marked and prizes handed out on the spot. These were large posters of the Matobo birds — the original was painted by Penny Feather — and were extremely popular.

The exhibition will remain in place at least until the end of the month. The quiz will be monitored by the Museum's Education Officer who holds the sheets and a collection box for answers which we will empty regularly. When we left on Saturday, the Museum staff, including security and police personnel, had caught the bug and all were participating!

During the morning we undertook a bird walk in the grounds of the Museum and saw a surprising variety of species, including two Crested Barbets feeding chicks inside a hole — one going in with a mouthful as another flew out, right in view of the children.



Although it was fairly quiet on Saturday, we expect the attendance to increase on weekdays, as there are currently more or less continuous groups of school children being escorted through the Museum by their teachers.

We are grateful to the Museum staff who provided invaluable assistance, guidance with the displays and enthusiasm. We on both sides would like to make this an annual event and discussions on the future calendar will be held before year end. **Julia Duprée**

## **TAIL FEATHERS**

### WHITE PELICAN FLOCK AT LAKE CHIVERO

Thanks to a few birders who reported a flock of approximate 400 Great White Pelican, seen at Lake Chivero since the beginning of September 2005. Our recent visit concluded that there are definitely a few groups that total between 380-400 birds. They are currently congregating in the northwest part of the lake, visible from the dam wall or Botanic Arboretum drive during midday, but appear to disperse & possibly overnight at MANYAME Dam.

All birds appear to be adult, with no grey/brown juvenile plumage noted, although a moult is in progress in certain individuals. All are in good condition and many adult males display a brown throat/crop patch (breeding plumage?). I suspect this large flock of pelican vagrants are from the east – Mozambique / St Lucia, as Zim has recently experienced relatively strong easterly winds – and are now en route to the October / November breeding grounds in the Botswana / Namibia, and may be just awaiting the first seasonal rains.

By any remote chance, are there any SA Pelican researchers with satellite tracking on this flock, which will help solve the many questions? A flock this size was last seen in the early 1990s at Chivero / Darwendale (Manyame water system). **Darryl Tiran.**

The birds were still there during the October visit to Chivero. Ed.

### The Flight of the Bumble-bee

It was November 1997 and I was standing on the verandah steps of my flat in Greendale, HARARE. At two thirty in the afternoon all was quiet at the birdbath and seed trays.

I saw a Cape Turtle-dove (*Streptopelia capicola*) flying towards my garden and assumed it was coming in to drink or feed. As the bird started to “brake” I noticed a small dark object coming in on the bird’s left side. I hardly had time to appreciate that the dark object was on a collision course with the dove, when the impact took place. The dove actually tumbled and rolled four or five times and succeeded in landing, somewhat dazed, inside the fence bordering my garden.

The dark object which turned out to be a Bumble-bee (Carpenter-bee) landed on a grass verge about 7 meters from the dove but, recovered quickly and flew directly towards the dove, as if intent on revenge for the mid-air collision.

I shall never know whether it was the Bumble-bee’s intention to attack the dove, as it flew into the mesh fence and damaged its wings and wing casings. It crawled into a nearby flowerbed where I found it dead, later that afternoon.

The dove, having recovered from its mid-air surprise, obviously decided that it could manage without food or water and flew off from whence it came.

(With no apologies to Mr. Rimsky-Korsakov)

Mike Marriott, Greendale, Harare

### Avian Influenza — Bird Flu

Julia Duprée has sent some information from WHO and NHS guidelines about avian influenza from which I have extracted some parts. Anyone who would like to receive an email of the full, very long article, please email the Editor.

#### *What is avian influenza?*

Avian influenza, or “bird flu”, is a contagious disease of animals caused by viruses that normally infect only birds and, less commonly, pigs. Avian influenza viruses are highly species-specific, but have, on rare occasions, crossed the species barrier to infect humans. (Ed. It is now thought that the 1918 epidemic that killed more than 20 million people worldwide, including my grandfather in Zimbabwe, was bird flu.)

In domestic poultry, infection with avian influenza viruses causes two main forms of disease, distinguished by low and high extremes of virulence. The so-called “low pathogenic” form commonly causes only mild symptoms (ruffled feathers, a drop in egg production) and may easily go undetected. The highly pathogenic form is far more dramatic. It spreads very rapidly through poultry flocks, causes disease affecting multiple internal organs, and has a mortality that can approach 100%, often within 48 hours.

#### *Do migratory birds spread highly pathogenic avian influenza viruses?*

The role of migratory birds in the spread of highly pathogenic avian influenza is not fully understood. Wild waterfowl are considered the natural reservoir of all influenza A viruses. They have probably carried influenza viruses, with no apparent harm, for centuries. They are known to carry viruses of the H5 and H7 subtypes, but usually in the low pathogenic form. Considerable circumstantial evidence suggests that migratory birds can introduce low pathogenic H5 and H7 viruses to poultry flocks, which then mutate to the highly pathogenic form.

In the past, highly pathogenic viruses have been isolated from migratory birds on very rare occasions involving a few birds, usually found dead within the flight range of a poultry outbreak. This finding long suggested that wild waterfowl are not agents for the onward transmission of these viruses.

Recent events make it likely that some migratory birds are now directly spreading the H5N1 virus in its highly pathogenic form. Further spread to new areas is expected. (Ed. On 26th October it was reported that 6 wild swans died of bird flu in Croatia and bird flu has now been confirmed in birds in Turkey and Romania.)

#### *Can any migrating bird carry the flu virus or are there only certain types of birds that will spread the flu?*

Not every species of birds is equally susceptible to the flu virus, and not just migratory birds are susceptible. Avian influenza viruses are found more commonly in water birds (ducks and geese), shorebirds and gulls. Birds such as sparrows and pigeons tend not to be as readily infected. It is not clear why shorebirds are more susceptible to avian influenza infections and simple access to water is not the answer, as even when birds are exposed directly to the virus, species such as pigeons are more resistant.

#### *Is the media exaggerating the potential danger of bird flu?*

There is a lot of coverage in the media, and it’s hard to keep up with what everyone is saying, but I think the issue is important. Highly pathogenic, H5N1 is a clear danger to poultry and its threat to wild birds is real. Although the number of human cases has been small so far, the potential for the virus to change into a more serious threat to humans is also real. So some level of public awareness, including media coverage is appropriate.

#### *Which viruses cause highly pathogenic disease?*

Influenza A viruses have 16 H subtypes and 9 N subtypes. Only viruses of the H5 and H7 subtypes are known to cause the highly pathogenic form of the disease. However, not all viruses of the H5 and H7 subtypes are highly pathogenic and not all will cause severe disease in poultry.

On present understanding, H5 and H7 viruses are introduced to poultry flocks in their low pathogenic form. When allowed to circulate in poultry populations, the viruses can mutate, usually within a few months, into the highly pathogenic form. This is why the presence of an H5 or H7 virus in poultry is always a cause for concern, even when the initial signs of infection are mild.

## **NOTICEBOARD**

### GROUND HORNBILL RECORDS

The staff at BLZ would like your Southern Ground-hornbill records for Zimbabwe. They are going to a Ground-hornbill Workshop in South Africa in early November and need all the information they can get can get.

It seems that there is a healthy population in the Mana Pools National Park and the Matusadona National Park, with good numbers below the Zambezi escarpment between those two places.

With the drought severe there, and so much of the area burnt, visibility is very good, especially on the Makuti – Kariba Road.

### **Dave Rockingham-Gill**

### ZIMCONSERVATION

Brian Gratwicke, whom many members know, is a Zimbabwean conservationist and naturalist whose main interest is fish. He is now Assistant Director of the ExxonMobil/ CEPF “Save the Tiger Fund” in Washington DC but retains his passion for his homeland and is actively trying raise funds for the protection of Marlborough Vlei. He would be pleased to hear from folks in Zimbabwe and can be contacted at zimconservation@yahoo.com.

Brian has suggested that BirdLife members would be interested in the following website:

<http://www.zimconservation.com/index%203.htm>

...that contains news about various aspects of conservation in Zimbabwe.

We all have friends and relations outside the country who might also be interested in keeping up with news of what is happening in conservation in Zimbabwe and in supporting the Zimconservation effort. Why don't you tell them about it too?

### For Sale

There are some lovely bird books for sale at BLZ Office. Please contact Alice or Dorothy.

Lovely new bush hats, with the BLZ logo on the front, beautifully made, with air-conditioning panels on each side and medium verandas. They come in small, medium and large. The hats are also available in white and no print.

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