

# BABBLER



The Newsletter of -

## BirdLife Zimbabwe

The BirdLife International Partner in Zimbabwe

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### COMMITTEES

	<b>Mashonaland</b>		<b>Matabeleland</b>	
<b>Chairman:</b>	Dave Rockingham-Gill	882412	Julia Duprée	246269
<b>Members:</b>	Richard Dennison	747567	Penny Feather	237777
	Ian Riddell	339716	Eddie Cross	240093
	Ken Wilson	745231	Dudley Hubbard	240127
	Jennifer Carter	300082	Margie Pearce	247009

### NATIONAL OFFICE

**Education Programme Manager:** Leslee Maasdorp

**Conservation Programme Manager:** Dr. Chip Chirara

**Conservation Officer:** Ngoni Chiweshe

**Crane Conservation Officer:** Osiman Mabhachi

**Admin/Finance Manager:** Ms. Hazel Hatton

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## ACTIVITIES

### MASHONALAND BRANCH

**Anyone who would like to join our outings, including Thursday evening meetings, but doesn't have transport should contact a committee member and we will try to arrange a lift. We always take as few vehicles as possible and leave others in secure parking. Join us. It is always good to get into the bush and see birds.**

### SEPTEMBER 22<sup>nd</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup> – LONG WEEKEND to Ngezi National Park

Stay in National Parks lodges (12 beds available), fully equipped and with braai facilities, at Z\$1 500 000 per person, self-catering. Camping also available. Park entrance fees also payable per vehicle and per person. For enquiries or bookings contact Jennifer Carter at 300082, 091 417859, [jcarter@cabs.co.zw](mailto:jcarter@cabs.co.zw)

### **Regular outings**

**Sundays July 2<sup>nd</sup>, August 6<sup>th</sup>, September 3<sup>rd</sup>: Mukuvisi Woodlands, 07:00 July/Aug, 06:30 Sept**

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 chairs and refreshments and cash for the guard who will be on hand to unlock the gate to let cars in and out.

**Sundays July 9<sup>th</sup>, August 13<sup>th</sup>, September 10<sup>th</sup>: Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary, 07:00 July/Aug, 06:30 Sept** Meet at Marimba Shopping Centre, Samora Machel Avenue West. Bring chairs and refreshments. Beginners are most welcome and spare binoculars will be available.

**Sundays July 16<sup>th</sup>, August 20<sup>th</sup>, September 17<sup>th</sup>: Monavale Vlei Walk 7:00 a.m.** Meet on Fenella Drive, (BS Leon side) for a walk with members of the Monavale Vlei Residents Association.

**Sunday, July 23<sup>rd</sup>: Ewanrigg Botanic Gardens 7:00 a.m.** Meet at BLZ office, 35 Clyde Road, at 7:00 a.m.; vehicles can be safely left and transport shared. Bring chairs and refreshments. Braai facilities available.

**Sunday August 27<sup>th</sup>: Ngomakurira. 7:00 a.m.** Meet at Wingate Golf Club at 7:00 a.m. so vehicles can be safely left and transport shared. Bring chairs and refreshments.

**Sunday, September 24<sup>th</sup>**; Ngezi National Park – see above.

**NOTE: EVENINGS CHANGED TO 3<sup>rd</sup> FRIDAY because of scheduled power cuts**  
**July 21st, Innes Louw on Birds and Philately.** Innes will talk on this interesting subject and bring some stamps to illustrate his talk.

**August 18<sup>th</sup>: There will be an illustrated talk on birds. Speaker to be advised.**

**September 22<sup>nd</sup>: Clare Douie, a well-known local artist, will talk about birds and art.** Apologies to those who hoped to see Clare in June. We are pleased that she will be with us in September.

**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 (13<sup>th</sup>/27<sup>th</sup> July, 10<sup>th</sup>/24<sup>th</sup> August, 14<sup>th</sup>/28<sup>th</sup> September) 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**

**July 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> Walk at Hornung Park Golf Course.** (Awaiting confirmation). Ring Margie.

**July 15<sup>th</sup> Waterfowl Count at SAST and Khami Dam and walk in Khami Ruins.** 09.30 a.m. Take morning tea, picnic lunch. Ring Julia.

**July 23<sup>rd</sup> Waterfowl Count at Aisleby.** Leave town at 07.30 or meet at Barrier 08.00. Take morning tea. Ring Julia

**July 30<sup>th</sup> Waterfowl Count at Fort Rixon.** Leave town 08.00. Take morning tea and picnic lunch. Ring Penny.

**Waterfowl Counts at Hwange in July if funds permit.** Dates to be confirmed. Ring Julia

**August 12<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup>: Shashe Camp, Tuli.** Cost is Z\$60,000 per person per night plus share of Z\$1,500,000 camp fee and staff gratuity. Ring Julia.

**August 26<sup>th</sup> Video afternoon “Life of Birds”.** 3.00 p.m. at the Dupree’s, 12 Ilanda Gardens. Bring-and-share tea. Ring Margie.

**September 1<sup>st</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> Black Eagle Camp, Maleme, Matopos.** Ring Julia.

**September 16<sup>th</sup> Walk at Hillside Dams, followed by braai lunch.** Meet at 10.00 a.m. Ring Margie.

**Aisleby:** August 27<sup>th</sup> and September 30<sup>th</sup>. Contact Julia for details.

## **EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB**

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

**Sunday July 30<sup>th</sup>: Osborne Dam**  
**Sunday August 27<sup>th</sup>: Thompson's Vlei**

**Sunday September 24<sup>th</sup>: Vumba**

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)

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### **MIDLANDS BRANCH**

I understand that Jon Barry has left or will soon be leaving the country. This is a great loss to BirdLife Zimbabwe and to the country. Our best wishes go with him. If anyone in the Midlands area can take over from Jon, please contact the Editor BLZ office.

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### **MASHONALAND SOUTH**

**Kadoma:** Outings will be held at 7.00 a.m. on the 3rd Saturday of each month.  
Contact Margaret Parrock ☎ 068-22005 for details.

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## **REPORTS** **NATIONAL**

### **BLZ AGM**

The 25<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting of BirdLife Zimbabwe was held in Bulawayo on 27 May 2006. Five members of Council and 5 ordinary members from Mashonaland attended as well as Alice and Osiman from the national office. Carl Beel came from Mutare and there were 22 Matabeleland members, including their committee. Matabeleland was wonderful hosts and many thanks go to them for their hard work in making the event a success.

Members approved a **change to the Constitution** providing for a new class of membership called “Small Clubs”, whose individual members cannot afford full membership fees and will allow the inclusion of bird clubs such as Chitungwiza and Chihota.

In his report, the **outgoing president** Alex Masterson outlined the problems that has plagued BirdLife over the past few months, and made working relationships extremely difficult. Clare Davies and Marjy Appel the book-keeper, resigned and Dr Chip Chirara is acting director for the time being. The RSPB, who provide core funding for the running of BirdLife Zimbabwe, have however assured us of their continued support.

The ***Babbler*** and ***Honeyguide*** also have their problems – distribution being one of them. Costs for printing ***Honeyguide*** are horrendous but we are committed to continuing with this publication, which is well known internationally for its content. Funding therefore has to be sought and this will be a continuing task. Members were again urged by the editors to contribute items of interest to these publications, as material is declining and it is your input which is valuable – but do try to ensure the text is correct!

Alex expressed his thanks to the Council for their support, the conservation and education departments and their assistants for their valuable and hard work, as well as the Dutch embassy, BLI, the RSPB and our German BLI partner NABU for their contribution.

**Audited accounts** were not ready for the AGM but branches will be informed when they are available.

The **Conservation and Development** report was presented by Osiman Mabhachi in the absence of Dr Chip Chirara and outlined the conservation work done on the Wattled Cranes in Driefontein with financial support from CIDA. An aerial survey of the cranes was funded by the Disney Wildlife Conservation Fund as well as the monitoring of the Blue Swallow population in the Nyanga IBA. The Dutch government funded a project for community-based conservation and livelihood enhancement in the Eastern Highlands and BLZ worked with the Sanyatwe community to raise awareness of the Blue Swallow. Reports can be found in the last issue of *Babbler*.

In August 2005 a survey of Cape Vultures was carried out at WABAI HILL, Shangani where 5 adults and 4 immatures were recorded. This is the only known roosting (and sometimes breeding) site in Zimbabwe.

BirdLife Zimbabwe, through BLI and the Jensen Foundation, purchased Monavale vle and a conservation plan was adopted with Environment Africa and the Monavale environmental management group, which has been successful initially in stopping cultivation.

The database project is ongoing with funding from the Netherlands and co-operation from the Natural History museum in Bulawayo and auditing of Important Bird Areas is nearly complete, with a report being compiled on 17 of the 20 IBAs.

Members of staff attended various workshops including species training in Uganda, wetland symposiums in South Africa and a waterfowl ringing workshop in Botswana. BLZ continues to work closely with other NGOs and is involved in the avian “flu and Save the Wetlands task forces.

The **Education** department had a busy year which included the establishment of herb gardens in rural areas supported by the President’s Fund and a very successful Rifa camp for pupils of Rio Tinto schools. Bird Awareness Programmes were undertaken in many areas, including Sanyatwe, Juliasdale, Nyanga Bvumba/Burma Valley, Chipinge and Chimanimani as well as schools in the Driefontein area, Chitungwiza, western Harare, Eiffel Flats and Norton. An awareness campaign on the plight of the Southern Ground-hornbill is being undertaken countrywide and posters on this bird and the Blue Swallow were developed and distributed. Matabeleland branch did an excellent “In Praise of Birds of Zimbabwe” display for World Birdwatch Day. Teacher’s training workshops were held and the Chipendo brothers in Chihota organised a bird festival and have established herb gardens in at least 6 schools.

The Conservation Society of Monavale (COSMO) has been established by Dorothy Wakeling and school visits are increasing. A paper on Monavale vle will be presented at the Environmental Education Association for Southern Africa conference to be held in Harare in August. Resource material included a draft story book produced by Leslee Maasdorp called “Flying With the Birds” at a SADC-sponsored workshop and “Birds of Rifa – Chirundu” is in the final draft stage – funding will have to be sourced for publication. A Matabeleland member, Gail Amyot, generously donated US\$100 towards the translation and publication of “Birds of Zimbabwe” in Ndebele and NABU continue to support the newsletter.

The **Library** has been fully operational, manned by a student from NUST, and has been recommended as a top library for field work. Members are encouraged to make use of the comprehensive collection of books and journals we have – in fact the library has outgrown itself and suggestions for a move to a larger building are in progress. A list of books and journals for sale will be made available for fundraising and we are always grateful for donations of material for the library or education department.

Reports from the **branches** were presented, outlining their activities during the year. Mashonaland’s included the sighting of about 400 Great White Pelicans at LAKE CHIVERO in 2005 and a talk about Edmund Selous, Frederick Courtney’s brother, who minutely studied birds and wrote several books on them. Concern was expressed that no known breeding had taken place in any of the 19 known Taita Falcon nests. Members were reminded that a hide had been built at the Mukuvisi Woodlands. Matabeleland informed us of the successful fledging of 10 Verreaux’s Eaglets in the 2005 breeding season and their expectation of funding for monitoring the Barn Swallow roost at How Mine. Carl Beel from the Eastern Districts said there were a few promising young members, but generally fairly low attendances at their outings and hoped members would be involved in the Blue Swallow and other IBA projects.

Your new **Council**, who were unanimously elected, are:

Ken Wilson	President	Dorothy Wakeling	Vice president
Oscar Mitumbili	Hon. Treasurer	Carolyn Dennison	Hon. Secretary
John Saunders	Member	Dudley Hubbard	Member

Other Council members are:

Dr Brian Marshall	Research & Conservation	Ken Dixon	Education
Dave Rockingham-Gill	Mashonaland branch	Eddie Cross	Matabeleland branch
Carl Beel	Eastern Districts branch	Ferdie Couto	Co-opted

Anyone who would like a copy of the minutes of the AGM should contact Carolyn Dennison at [rolly@zol.co.zw](mailto:rolly@zol.co.zw) or phone 04-747567.

## **OTHER NEWS**

### **Dr. Chip Chirara elected to TAC**

We congratulate Chip on his election as the BirdLife International Technical Advisory Committee representative for the Southern African region. He will be attending the forthcoming CAP (BirdLife Africa Partnership) meeting in Addis Ababa.

### **New Appointment**

Hazel Hatton has been appointed admin/finance manager for BLZ. She is a member of BirdLife and some of you will already know her from our outings. She is also active in the Wildlife and Environment society, where she is the current national treasurer and Mashonaland branch chairperson. We welcome her to this challenging position. Hazel and Dr Chip Chirara will be in charge of the national office.

We now have a renewed initiative to involve members (as the members are one of the most important elements of the organisation after all) and “Put Birds Back into BirdLife”. A determined effort to reorganise the membership list and *Babbler* and *Honeyguide* distribution has already been started by Hazel and Alice.

## **COMMEMORATION OF THE WORLD MIGRATORY BIRD DAY IN ZIMBABWE** **INTRODUCTION**

Twice a year, the changing of seasons, occurs the phenomenon of bird migration, which has fascinated man for thousands of years. The fact that it is such a common strategy among birds indicates that it must be a successful adaptation.

Zimbabwe joined the rest of the world in celebrating the World Migratory Birds Day (WMBD) during the weekend of 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> April 2006. The event, hosted by BirdLife Zimbabwe, took place at the City of Chitungwiza’s Imbwa Sewage Ponds, to the south side of Manyame River. Actually this was the first year this day was put on the International calendar as an annual World event by the Secretariats of the Convention of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) and the Agreement on the Conservation of the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA).

The main reason for choosing Imbwa Sewage Ponds (seven of them) for the WMBD celebrations was that the ponds offer good and accessible birding all-year round as compared to most of the water bodies closer to Harare. It was also easier to observe migrants, mostly waterfowl in good numbers than anywhere else around Harare.

### **Why Bird Migration**

Bird migration helps to advocate that nature conservation requires international cooperation. Today, in a world saturated with news about global environmental issues, nobody questions this concept any more. Migrants may act as sensitive environmental indicators and early warning systems. Above all, migratory birds are the common property and the responsibility of many nations, and are therefore extremely valuable in establishing bonds of interest between countries.

The migratory birds programme has certainly been a key catalyst in bringing not only conservationists of different nations together, but in getting governments to adopt joint strategies for protecting a form of wildlife that does not recognize national boundaries and continental divides. Migrants form a link between countries, and in doing so emphasize the need for international cooperation (as opposed to a national focus) for effective conservation.

Migrant birds often link wealthy developed nations, where many migratory species breed and in which conservation organizations are well established, with less developed countries like Zimbabwe, where the majority of the migrants spend the winter and where conservation movements and the practices of sustainable development are still in their infancy. They are thus particularly useful for promoting the concept of conservation dialog among states between their breeding and wintering grounds and also along their migration routes.

This special commemoration day, whose theme was “Migratory Birds need our attention now” was launched by the two Secretariats (CMS & AEWA) at a time when Migratory Birds the world over, are at the centre of negative publicity due to being perceived to be the main vector of spreading the Pathogenic form of Avian Influenza (H5N1).

The international launch of the WMBD took place at Laikipia Estate, close to one of the main migratory bird flyways in Africa in the Great Rift Valley, Kenya. Mrs Kuki Gallmann, a committed conservationist and well-known novel writer on her life in Africa, owns Laikipia Estate.

The Zimbabwe event started at 09:00 on Saturday the 8<sup>th</sup> with a bird watching and waterfowl counting tour around the seven sewage ponds by all the invited guests, led by Chiweshe and some BirdLife Zimbabwe members. BLZ provided pairs of binoculars and bird field guidebooks that were shared by all the participants during the bird watching tour. Thereafter we all gathered at the farm offices where various talks on bird migration, Avian Influenza and Bird Ringing were made by Mr D. Rockingham-Gill (BLZ Mashonaland Branch Chairman and also BLZ’s National Avian Influenza Task Force representative) and N. Chiweshe (BLZ’s Field Conservation Officer). Posters and fact sheets were also displayed around the venue for the benefit of the invited people.

Kids are naturally curious about the environment in which they live, and birds are a terrific window into that environment. We were given a special treat of songs, poems and poster presentations on migratory birds by school children from Chihota Communal Lands just before lunch. It was indeed a great performance by these children who had prepared such fascinating and informative presentations at a very short notice. Because children are the environmental caretakers of the future, it’s important that we do all we can to foster their interest in the natural world. Migratory birds, because of their popular appeal and conspicuousness (mass concentrations, high visibility, and dawn choruses), are ideal for introducing the general public to the value, importance and beauty of wildlife and the need for nature conservation in general.

The best conclusion one could draw from the presentations is that birds connect us with nature. They help us understand how nature functions and what it requires to persist in the face of change.

**Ngoni Chiweshe, Conservation Field Officer, BirdLife Zimbabwe**

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## **MASHONALAND BRANCH**

### **Stapleford Farm, Zvimba District: Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> April, 2006 (QDS: 1730D2)**

As many members were still away from town on their Easter holidays, a disappointingly small group of only 5 took part in the visit to this new venue WNW of Harare on the Lomagundi Road opposite Afdis. The habitat consisted of arable land, recently harvested of its soya crop, paddocks grazed by racehorses and fallow areas with tall grass dotted with clumps of trees and woodland. This is the area chosen by Neil Deacon, who recently gave us that fascinating talk on Taita Falcons, for hunting with his hawk-eagle. The grassland apparently holds many rabbits, rodents and doves that provide regular suppers for the bird who also catches food for Neil's other birds of prey recovering from injury and unable to hunt for themselves.

On our way to our rendezvous spot we pulled up to watch a group of 30+ Long-tailed Paradise-whydah feeding on the road and disinclined to give way. These were in all stages of plumage from full tails to black shorts. We met Neil at a shaded parking place a few fields from the main road and were immediately made aware of the abundance of doves, Laughing Dove, Cape Turtle-dove and Red-eyed Dove. Helmeted Guineafowl and Swainson's Spurfowl were also feeding on the dry grass seeds. Our walk took us first along a grassy track where we saw flocks of whydah, Red-billed Quelea and Common Waxbill. A Namaqua Dove sat atop a tree and Zitting Cisticola displayed all around us while the Rattling Cisticola called from the bushes. On the edge of the paddock, we paused for a while to sort out the sunbirds; was it a Marico Sunbird or a very large Purple-banded Sunbird that teased us as it flitted from bush to bush in the company of White-bellied Sunbird, Scarlet-chested Sunbird, Miombo Double-collared Sunbird, Amethyst Sunbird and Copper Sunbird? Jennifer and Graham, with the best sightings, were in no doubt it was a Marico, the bird was nearly as big as a nearby Southern Masked-weaver, but others remained sceptical. The Copper also caused some discussion but there was no doubt about the Chestnut-vented Tit-babbler, Southern Black Flycatcher, and Fork-tailed Drongo etc.

Suddenly, Neil, up to this point calm and deferential, became extremely animated as the first raptor was espied; a Black Sparrowhawk. Then came, in quick succession, 3 Lanner Falcon, 2 Amur Falcon and possibly a juvenile Ayres's Hawk-eagle. Wanting a better view of the latter, Neil clambered through the fence and set off in hot pursuit through the tall grass. However, conclusive identification proved impossible and we began to wander back towards the parked cars for our first cup of coffee and Jennifer's delicious, albeit burnt, ginger biscuits. As we sat 2 Hooded Vulture circled high above, no doubt, tempted by the biscuits but too late to join in the feast.

It was now past prime birding time but there were still many habitats to visit. A densely vegetated kopje revealed Mocking Cliff-chat but we failed to locate the Meyer's Parrot that had been heard. Grey-backed Camaroptera were also there. The rest of the grassland failed to render its secrets so we headed for the smelly ponds which were also devoid of birds. A nearby Acacia, though, was abustle with sunbirds picking off the insects and washing them down with nectar. We once again saw virtually the full range. Eventually, we repaired to a grove of gums for our second coffee break. While sitting here, we added a few more species to our list; 2 Greater Honeyguide at a bee's nest, a family of Magpie Shrike and more vultures.

Having thanked our host for the excellent birding, we set off for home passing through the cultivated fields and past the pigpens. A scan of the soya fields yielded Crowned Lapwing and a fair number of Temminck's Courser and Red-capped Lark. Our last 2 birds, fittingly, were raptors; a Long-crested Eagle as we left the farm and another on a lamp post in Bluff Hill. These additions to our list brought the total to 84 species. **Ken Dixon**

### **CHRISTON BANK Botanic Reserve: Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> May (QDS: 1731C1)**

With a number of regulars away at the Nation AGM in Bulawayo, only 6 of us met on a glorious winter morning, travelling to Christon Bank in two vehicles. We took a large man to watch over the vehicles while we birded. It was warm enough to discard jackets and jerseys when we arrived soon after 7:30. The reserve continues to suffer from illegal gold-panning and wood-poaching but is still a beautiful area to bird in.

We left the car park down a path close to the right-hand fence and immediately saw activity on the other side of the fence. It was still cool enough to want to find patches of sun to stand in while we identified Lesser Honeyguide, Cardinal Woodpecker, Grey-backed Camaroptera and Southern Black Tit. The 3 Boulder Chats running on the rocks were the only ones seen that day.

As we made our way slowly down the hill, an African Goshawk flew low over the trees. The only other raptors we saw were a single Verreaux's Eagle, possibly immature, flying just above the kopje and later two more soaring high above the rocks, calling.

Several Lazy Cisticolas dropped down to the ground as we passed and Red-faced Cisticola called nearby. A Senegal Coucal, Purple-crested Turaco, Ashy Flycatcher and a Natal Spurfowl were heard briefly and Helmeted Guineafowl flew off in alarm.

As always, the barbets were in evidence, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird, Crested Barbet and plenty Black-collared Barbet. We searched in vain for the yellow morph Black-collared seen a couple of years ago.

A Black-headed Oriole followed us around and a Black Cuckooshrike had not yet left to winter in the lowveld. Giant Kingfisher and Brown-hooded Kingfishers were seen and a young Amethyst Sunbird vied for our attention with a Miombo Double-collared Sunbird.

As we reached the fence on the other side of the reserve and turned to start back up the hill, some group members heard the distinctive sound of an African Broadbill. Unfortunately, he only performed half-a-dozen times before shutting up so we were unable to find him. But it was a very exciting moment.

Red-backed Mannikins and their Bronze Mannikin cousins were seen, the shrikes were represented by Tropical Boubou, Black-backed Puffback and Orange-breasted Bush-shrike and White-browed Scrub-robin and White-browed Robin-chat were around. With canaries, waxbills, doves and the other usual suspects, a total of 52 species were counted, not a lot but not bad for the time of year and we were all glad to be out on this beautiful day.

**Jennifer Carter**

### **Talk by Dr. Neil Deacon on the Zimbabwe Falconry Society, Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> May**



We were grateful that Dr. Neil Deacon returned to give us more of his time but unfortunately repaid him by failing to get the projector working in the absence of the usually resident expert, Graham Carter. So Neil was forced to use only his lap-top and we all had to gather round as close as possible.

Neil spoke of the Rules of the Zimbabwe Falconry Society which are designed to give as much protection as possible to birds of prey while encouraging a responsible interest in falconry.

The Society has a grading system which ensures that inexperienced falconers cannot keep birds that are unsuitable to their expertise. It works closely with National Parks who issue licences for keeping raptors and are unlikely to issue a licence to anyone without recommendation for the Society. Before anyone is recommended, at least 2 "A" Grade members of the Society will have inspected the applicant's premises and watched him handle a bird. Those who wish to join the Society must pass an examination on the Society's rules which include references to National Parks statutes.

Neil was due to give his presentation at the International Raptor Conference in June where the Zimbabwe system is to be closely looked at as a model for other countries.

Many thanks to Neil for a fascinating talk. **Jennifer Carter**

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## **MATABELELAND BRANCH CONDOLENCES**

The Branch has very sadly lost four valued friends during this last quarter. We shall miss them all very much and offer our deepest sympathy to their families.

Margie Broomberg died in March, Harry Erwee and Ian Milton in April and Father Odilo in early June.

Margie joined the branch only last year. She quickly became a popular participant of our events and exhibited a lively interest in all things environmental, not just birds.

Harry has been a member since time immemorial. He devoted his life to the wellbeing of the environment – its birds, animals and plants. Apart from his other activities, he undertook regular monthly bird counts at Aisleby for years, and latterly was involved in progressing our Barn Swallow project with the management of How Mine.

Ian was a dedicated and knowledgeable bird enthusiast who joined the OAZ (forerunner of BLZ) 30 years ago. He travelled extensively in all directions on birdwatching expeditions ending up in Wales, Trinidad and South America. One epic trip took him from Northern Rhodesia to Kenya by caravan passing through Tanganyika, Nyasaland and all parts east.

Father Odilo was a very well-known, popular and revered participant in all aspects of Bulawayo life. To us, though not a member *per se*, he was part of our branch. His love and understanding of the Matobo Hills, its ecology and wildlife were unparalleled. Even at the age of over 90 he continued to show a lively interest in our activities, including the Verreaux's Eagle survey. On all this he was kept regularly informed, and he had no difficulty in outshining most of us with his knowledge of raptors and the environment in general.

### **Verreaux's Eagle Survey: 14<sup>th</sup> – 19th April**

We kicked off our survey this year with a very enjoyable working camp at Inungu Lodge, set in wonderful country, in the back of beyond, somewhere in the MATOPOS Hills. A lovely old establishment with a historical store at one end, huge verandahs, several bedrooms, a large kitchen and pantry and all cons – some more mod than others but all served their purpose. The facilities were increased by the establishment in the back garden of a large and luxurious shower manufactured, transported and erected by Dudley and Cecilia. This was a friendly affair which added to the social side of camp life by enabling us to gather round and converse with the one inside.

Our days from dawn to dusk were hard work, rewarding and enjoyable despite armies of pepper ticks and acres and acres of tall aggressive spear grass – well it wasn't dawn to dusk really as there was usually a bit of a lunch break in the middle. We visited and assessed two-thirds of the territories we shall look at this year, and found several pairs of Verreaux's Eagles actively housekeeping which we hope will bode well for the production and successful fledging of chicks.



In addition to Verreaux's Eagles, we saw 99 bird species of which 10 were raptors, including five Augur Buzzards at close quarters.

We are grateful to Bruce Moffat for his generosity in allowing us to stay in Inungu Lodge and we very much look forward to the next monitoring trip from there!

### **Visit to Stretton Farm, Figtree: 14 May 2006**

Five vehicles bursting at the seams found sufficient fuel for the 130 km round trip to this lovely quiet farm in the vicinity of Marula. The charming little house, designed and constructed by the Boyes, sits a little way back from the edge of the dam in a lovely natural garden with a glorious outlook. In addition to Inge herself at intervals, it houses a family of Barn Owls.

Having enjoyed the obligatory cup of tea when everyone was able to show off their home-made goodies, we gathered our unruly flock together (with difficulty and the essential firm hand of Adele), and set off along the dam wall towards the other side. This took quite some time as there was plenty to look at including a quite unidentifiable waxbill or some such immature little thing, an African Darter hanging out to dry, a Reed Cormorant swimming, an African Jacana mincing around and a couple of Little Grebes with two miniscule fluff pots bobbing along like corks. Along the shoreline we negotiated enormous muddy diggings (there are no elephants, rhinos or hippos here so it must be a bush pig?) and across on one of the islands was a Great Egret and the Darter hanging out to dry again. And there were several bird parties in the wide variety of trees and bushes – Long-billed Crombec, an orange fronted Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird, Chin-spot Batis, Black-headed Oriole and White-browed Sparrow-weavers, for starters.

By now it was lunchtime and we returned to find that Inge had lain on a marvellous braai fire, Harry was preparing to undertake the cooking and a couple of Groundscraper Thrushes were watching from the electricity wires above. We had a marvellous meal, sharing a great variety of delectables including a special asparagus salad that Inge had prepared – well, not absolutely completely voluntarily but without much option, because one amongst us had donated a tin of precious asparagus and none of the rest of us knew how to make this salad. It was absolutely delicious.

After all this food (and a certain amount of drink), we took ourselves off (well, not everyone managed it) down the nearside track to the bottom of the dam, stopping on the way to look at a Green-backed Heron, Black Crake, Pied Kingfishers, Little Bee-eaters and (some say they saw, others say they heard) a Crimson-breasted Shrike, and to discuss whether or not those starlings were Cape Glossy Starling, Greater Blue-eared Starling or Miombo Blue-eared Starling – the latter prevailed. One of the excitements of the day was the sight of two White-backed Ducks swimming at high speed from one end of the dam towards the other. And, following straight on from that, another excitement - lo and behold, two diminutive African Pygmy-goose pottering around in the water lilies!

This dam is quite small and until recently was used by herds of uninvited drinkers. It has only recently started to refill, yet its reeds and water lilies are already mature and prolific. What is also remarkable is how quickly it has become populated with such a variety of waterfowl. Any fool can stick a duck on a pond and it will stay there, but there aren't many (people, I mean, not fools) who have their very own White-backs and Pygmies which have voluntarily taken up permanent residence.

All in all we saw a total of 40 species, excluding those we couldn't identify.

Inge has kindly invited me and my ladies to return for another visit any time, which we will definitely do. Just one detail, however, will have to be negotiated – Harry. He's a rather critical detail, as we don't know of any other detail who can handle a braai like Harry can.

### **NATIONAL AGM: 27 May 2006**

For the first time for years Matland Branch hosted the National AGM in Bulawayo, and we feel it all went off successfully. Thanks to the public holiday, our visitors were able to spend longer with us than perhaps they otherwise could have done, and this gave us a chance to get to know each other better and partake of useful discussions.

The meeting itself was chaired by Alex Masterson who handled the proceedings professionally, sympathetically and with great clarity. He called a spade a spade when it was a spade and something else when it wasn't. It was the first time that our members became fully aware of the problems within

the National office in the last year or so and the repercussions this has had on our branch and possibly the others – they will speak for themselves.

Proceedings, which started at 10.00 and didn't finish till late lunchtime, were frank and amicable, and during this time a lot of what was on one's chest was got off it, and a great deal of discussion took place on the operation, staffing and necessity of a national office and the importance and funding of *Honeyguide*. Suffice it to say that formal minutes will be produced by Council at the appropriate time.

Dudley Hubbard and Eddie Cross have joined the Council. With the right attitude and co-operation on all fronts we hope that things will come right sooner rather than later.

There was a certain amount of jollification throughout the weekend. On Friday evening our visitors, their hosts and our Committee foregathered at Ilanda Gardens for a bring-and-share supper – and we are grateful to all those who contributed to a wonderful spread. The chitchat was non-stop.

Next day it was off to the Matopos Lions Club premises where we found they had laid out the room to make it attractive and very welcoming. They also laid on tea and biscuits. One amongst us first of all forgot to bring the biscuits generously sponsored by Lobels and had to go back for them. Then forgot to collect one of our VIP guests whose hostess had gone off to work. This is an aging branch, one must bear in mind, but it was not a good start to the day.

Soup and rolls were provided for lunch by the Lions Club, as was a bar, and we then all repaired to base for a break, before regrouping in Burnside for a walk in the vlei. At dusk sundowners were imbibed by the large gathering which had arrived for dinner in Brooks' Bulawayo Bistro, a wonderfully friendly, intimate, candlelit venue with a fire, music, 3 courses and copious beverages.

The next day most had collapsed, but the intrepid went off to Tshabalala for a birding expedition and then headed for home.

We offer grateful thanks to the Lions Club, Matopos, for providing the venue and lunch, to the BLZ Council for their contribution towards the costs, to Sue Brooks for allowing us to completely rearrange her house for the bistro, to Jeanette Cross for aiding and abetting on all fronts, to those who provided the delicious meal, and to our members who provided accommodation to the visitors.

#### **VIDEO AFTERNOON: 10 June 2006**

What a performance – honestly! We always have our video viewing at Penny's house because she has a video machine and we don't – well we do, actually, we have three: two are not very well, and the old thing we're left with is in a bedroom (which is not very chummy for visitors) and refuses to be moved. But Penny's gone away on holiday – mighty thoughtless considering.

Anyway, to cut a very long story short, and after working on the problem for a week both here and in Francistown, a video machine was procured, installed and tuned with the assistance of Harry – yeah, the same who's a dab hand at braais – who sat on the floor for ages and got it all set up. The locally purchased machine we have ended up with (the fourth) we expect will work properly simply because the one who sold it to us is near at hand and not out of reach over the border.

Everyone arrived clutching the usual delicious goodies for the bring-and-share tea and we sat down and watched the final episode of "The Life of Birds". After tea we decided to have a look at another episode, so started with episode one again. All went absolutely swimmingly and we felt relaxed and confident that we had now got the hang of things.

Then – wait for it – up onto the TV screen comes a message in large red letters saying "sleep". I was just mulling over this when all of a sudden everything shut down and unambiguously went to sleep. (My computer "snoozes", it doesn't sleep.) However, with great presence of mind, and a good deal of advice from the wings, we collectively decided that I should take the bull by the horns and press the 'On' button. *Voilà* – on it all came, back to life, and we successfully reached the end of "To fly or not to fly". What an incredible series this is.

By the way, what I forgot to mention that when making the tea, I tripped out the circuit for all the kitchen sockets, putting off both kettles, the fridges and the toaster. I suppose someone is trying to tell me something.

## **SOUTHERN GROUND-HORNBILL SURVEY**

This is ongoing and, as I said at the AGM, we're going hammer and tongs in slow motion – plodding with this exercise on behalf of Leslee Maasdorp. We have now received back 37 completed questionnaires from young and old alike in rural Matopos. Another 6 schools in the Matobo area were visited on Thursday (8 June) by me with Elspeth Parry at the wheel and Dr Alan Pugh of the Rotary Club who kindly provided the fuel. A further 18 questionnaires were handed out. The plight of the hornbills was discussed on one side, and the plight of the schools and their broken windows on the other. More on this anon. Plans are afoot to expand into the Plumtree area.

As a matter of interest, our Ground-hornbill tee-shirt design is produced from photos we took of the Anglesea Gang during one of their sorties! This is a previously unrecorded group. Our photographs of this group were also made available to Leslee Maasdorp and Ngoni Chiweshe for inclusion in their presentations to the recent Southern Ground-hornbill workshop in South Africa.

## **BARN SWALLOW PROJECT**

As lots of people now know, our very hastily put together competitive proposal for the protection of the Barn Swallows and their roost at How Mine has been short listed by VBN (BirdLife) in Holland and we're thrilled to bits. We were chosen as third out of eight proposals submitted from the whole of Africa, the first three to qualify for funding, if sufficient money can be raised in Holland during the summer. Harry Erwee and Sandy McAdam subsequently progressed the project with the Mine management, and it is now for Sandy and I to complete this valuable work. Make no mistake – if VBN are unable to fund us, we shall find another way of turning this project into reality. Keep your fingers crossed for us – better still, uncross them and come and help! Thank you to Colin Gillies who has already supplied us with material for signboards, a very valuable donation.

### **Aisleby**

We are extremely fortunate in that Sandy McAdam will be continuing the formal surveys that she and Harry have undertaken for the last few years. Sandy will put together a team to monitor the area once a month and thereafter submit reports. This is wonderful for us and the information she supplies will be submitted to Colin Baker and others where relevant. Meanwhile, we will continue with our less formal visits to Aisleby for anyone who would like to come along – your smallest wish is my command, any excuse will do! **Julia Duprée**

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## **NOTICEBOARD**

**The ASSISTED MEMBERSHIP FUND is available to those, including current members, who cannot afford the increase. Contact BirdLife or your Branch to be a beneficiary. Contributions to the fund are always welcome.**

Goods and Chattels from Matabeleland

Julia says 'We now have brilliant new T-shirts in 4 sizes, 4 gorgeous colours, superbly printed in 2 designs – Black Eagle and Ground Hornbill (we are very friendly with the top screen printer in town – if not in the country). As a special favour, we will allow these to be purchased by even those who are not members of Matland Branch or the Black Eagle and Ground Hornbill survey teams. The price is a mere snitch at \$900,000 each (1 million to non-members). There are also a few green (printed) and white (plain) bush hats – same prices. Speak to Alice in the office or Julia.'

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