

BABBLER



The Newsletter of -

BirdLife Zimbabwe

The BirdLife International Partner in Zimbabwe

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ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 30TH JUNE 2007

Notice is hereby given of the Annual General Meeting of BirdLife Zimbabwe to be held on Saturday, 30th June 2007, at National Parks Lodges, Lake Chivero, Zimbabwe.

National Parks accommodation has been reserved for Friday and Saturday nights and activities will be arranged for those who attend. All bookings made through the BLZ national Office must be for 2 nights – 29th/30th June - anyone wishing to stay for a shorter/longer period will have to make their own reservations through National Parks Head Office. Current rates are as follows and a deposit for 2 nights using these rates is required:

1 bed roomed chalet (2 beds)	ZW\$45,000.00 per night
2 bed roomed chalet (4 beds)	ZW\$60,000.00 per night
2 bed roomed standard lodges (4 beds)	ZW\$80,000.00 per night
2 bed roomed standard lodges (6 beds)	ZW\$100,000.00 per night
2 bed roomed executive lodges (6 beds)	ZW\$120,000.00 per night

Reservations can be made through the BLZ National Office on 481496/490208 or e-mail birds@zol.co.zw and must be accompanied by the total deposit required. All bookings are on a first come first served basis and are subject to availability. All accommodation at the lake is self catering. Deposits must be paid before the 1st April 2007 when National Parks will open bookings for this period.

National Parks rates are increased on a quarterly basis and there will be an additional fee to the deposit paid. Those members who have paid their deposit will be advised of the increase as soon as National Parks release the new rates. This additional amount will need to be paid before the weekend of 16th June. Any member defaulting will lose their booking and deposit.

2007/2008 SUBSCRIPTIONS

These become due on the 1st April 2007 as a result of a change in our financial year end from December to March. The new rates are as follows - :

Ordinary (Individual and family) members and schools	ZW\$20,000.00
Pensioners and students	ZW\$10,000.00
Corporate members	ZW\$60,000.00
Members outside Zimbabwe	US\$20

As these rates are very reasonable, anything extra members would like to give in the form of a donation would be much appreciated. The subscriptions may be subject to change later in the year.

PAYMENT (a) by cash or cheque at BirdLife offices, Clyde Road; OR DEPOSIT INTO (b) BirdLife Zimbabwe Barclays Bank a/c 0647523 at Borrowdale Branch, Branch Code 2147; OR (c) BirdLife Mash CABS a/c 9012703755 at ANY CABS Branch. If (b) OR (c) you MUST fax or email details to BirdLife (see above addresses). If depositing into CABS, please give your name as depositor AND email jcarter@cabs.co.zw and/or gcarter@mweb.co.zw with details as well as the BirdLife office. d) Matabeleland members contact Julia.

ACTIVITIES

NATIONAL

Art Exhibition – featuring well known Zimbabwean artists will take place at the Art Gallery, Doon Estates for two weeks with the official opening night being Friday 4th May. Contact Hazel if you wish to attend the opening.

Mini Bird Fair. Saturday/Sunday 23rd / 24th June 2007 – being held in conjunction with the Mukuvisi Woodland Anniversary fair. Branches are encouraged to send details of activities and projects they are involved in for display at the fair. Please forward all relevant information along with photographs etc. to the office, for more information please contact Hazel at BirdLife offices.

MASHONALAND BRANCH

Please contact a committee member if you need transport to any of our outings. We want to see you!

Regular outings NOTE CHANGE OF TIME FOR MAY TO 07:00

Sundays April 1st 06:30 a.m., May 6th 07:00: Mukuvisi Woodlands,

Its close and a very rewarding birding area. Migrants could be passing through both here and Chivero.

Sundays April 8th 06:30 a.m., May 13th 07:00: Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary, Meet at Marimba Shopping Centre, Samora Machel Avenue West. Bring chairs and refreshments. Beginners are most welcome and spare binoculars will be available. The White-breasted Cormorants are breeding again and there is plenty of food for them.

Sundays April 15th and May 20th: 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. Corn Crakes have been seen there as well as other special vlei birds!

SATURDAY MORNINGS, April 21st and May 19th: Botanical Gardens 07:00 a.m.

Some members have requested outings on Saturday mornings so we are giving these a try. Whether they are continued will depend on the response. Meet in the car park at Botanic Gardens. This is a really good birding spot and, again, migrants could be passing through.

Sunday April 22nd: Chikupo Caves, Masembura 6:30 a.m. Meet at Wingate Golf Club at 6:30 a.m. where vehicles can be safely left and transport shared. Bring chairs and refreshments. Mottled Swifts should be seen and Rufous-bellied Tits have been seen at this site.

Sunday, May 27th Welston Road and Sun valley Dam, 07:00 a.m.: Meet at Wingate Golf Club at 07:00 where vehicles can be safely left and transport shared. Bring chairs and refreshments.

Thursday, April 19th: Dave Rockingham-Gill, Zimbabwe Red Data Book – the way forward. Work has begun to produce a Red Data Book for endangered birds in Zimbabwe. Dave, a well-known local amateur ornithologist, will be telling us how it is going to be done. See you there!

Thursday, May 17th: Michael Stuart Irwin, an Armchair Chat on His Life in Birding. Michael needs no introduction as a world renowned ornithologist whose book is constantly consulted in Zimbabwe and beyond. He is fascinating to listen to. Don't miss it.

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 and, if necessary, power by generator.

MATABELELAND BRANCH

Monthly Outings

Saturday, 21st April: Bird Ringing Demonstration by Peter Mundy. Any time from 2.00 pm. At the Mundy's home, Magora, Kabot Drive, Willsgrove – first road left after Hotel Rio, second plot on right. Peter Mundy is now the National Ringing Co-ordinator and is willing to organise a course for anyone seriously interested in taking this up.

Saturday & Sunday, 5th & 6th May: Dassie Survey, Matobo National Park. Details to be confirmed depending on weather and foliage conditions. Ring Dudley on 76781 (o); 240127 (h); 011-203238 (c) or Julia 246269.

Sunday, 20th May: Matland's Southern Ground-hornbill Survey in the Matobo Hills. Talk by Elspeth Parry, followed by question and answer session and bring-and-share tea. 3.00 pm at 18 Lawley Road, Suburbs. Ring Julia on 246269.

Please Note: There are plans for additional functions and, once confirmed, details will be circulated in Matland Musings.

Aisleby: Visits to Aisleby in future will be arranged on a flexible basis and on demand. Ring Julia on 246269.

EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB

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

Outings around the Mutare area on the last Sunday of every month. Contact Carl Beel.

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

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**

Blue Swallow Project, Nyanga

The office was closed for 2 days during December whilst the staff visited one of our projects in Nyanga for a familiarisation tour. The Blue Swallows (*Hirundo atrocaerulea*) are one of nine globally threatened species to be found in Zimbabwe. BLZ have been working with the community in the

Nyanga area for some time to ensure that the grassland habitat preferred by the swallows is not destroyed by unsustainable farming practices. A site support group has been initiated by BLZ with the intention of encouraging the members who are drawn from 63 landholders in the area to work closely with agricultural extension officers, the local council and BLZ staff. The aim is to manage the wetlands in the area and in doing so, conserve the natural habitat of the Blue Swallow. A committee of 7 members have been formed who oversee the management of the project.

8 staff members of the National Office went on the trip, for some a first time visit to Nyanga. We met Tendai Nyagope who is the project co-ordinator in the area and most members of the SSG (Site Support Group) committee. We were accommodated at the Geoff Cox Adventure Camp, which has now been refurbished into 2 self-catering cottages. I would recommend to members who intend travelling to Nyanga to consider staying there, the rate was very reasonable. The 2 cottages each have 2 bedrooms and a sitting room with self contained kitchen.

We only had 1 full day in Nyanga and it was certainly taken up with a lot of birding! Of course top of the list were 6 pairs of Blue Swallows, 1 pair constantly posing on top of grasses in the sun for some time. Other specials included Helmeted Guineafowl, Blue-spotted Wood-dove, Tambourine Dove, Livingstone's Turaco (Lourie), and Speckled Mousebird.

Hazel Hatton

EDUCATION

Conservation of Monavale Vlei

It is wonderful that most of the schools in Harare start appreciating the conserved areas full of wildlife very close to their schools. They have started coming to the nearby Monavale Vlei where they learn about the value of wetlands, the birds, the plants and the animals that are found in this mini park. Pupils even watch the mammals such as wild pig, bushbuck and a civet cat. Tribute to the organizers, Dorothy Wakeling's reception is well commended. Everyone admires Jimmy Muropa's talk and explanations during a guided tour of the vlei, sometimes with big school groups. Monavale is a very good attraction and is an added dimension for Bird Awareness Programmes in schools. The education officer takes pupils and students from colleges to this wetland and it is a well-recommended Bird Awareness Programme activity that enhances learning of birds and their habitats. Groups from Marlborough Primary, Hallingbury Primary, Southerton Primary, Belvedere Primary, Hartman House, Gateway High and Belvedere Technical Teachers' College have all enjoyed their walks in the vlei. Very often, a photographer, Jonathan Pilch who is a member of COSMO is present. We encourage schools to continue with this learning exercise for it pays to take classroom work outside into the field. Just let BirdLife know when you want to go. At times, BirdLife organizes walks and schools would be invited in these events. **Julliet Masama, Education**

World Wetlands Day, 2nd February 2007.

This was a great day for the Bird Awareness Programme schools as the venue was Kuimba Shiri at Chivero. Despite being overcast, no rain fell and the children could all admire the large eagles, speak to the parrots and walk through the aviaries.

The icing on the cake was the Minister of Environment and Tourism's address which he directed mainly to the children. Flanked by the magnificent Bateleur, Grace, and the African Fish-eagle, he gave the children a quiz on the environment and held them spell bound. As a facilitator for our project, he did so well.

The theme was "Fish for Tomorrow" but speakers did not dwell on the sustainability of the fishing operations at Lake Chivero but rather on personal issues like more money for fishing co-operatives. Eight of our schools attended, each bringing a party of about eight, and they so enjoyed the adventure. They were Alfred Beit, Hallingbury, Marlborough and Mukurumbira from Harare and Dudley Hall, Norton1 and Pinper from Norton.

The schools outside the project; Chivero, Lake McIlwaine and Kintyre (represented by the entire school) have asked to join the programme which falls within the Lake McIlwaine cluster, as did Matoranhembe Secondary of Zvimba.

Wetlands day celebrations have become important events for BAP and schools since the memorable one we held at Marlborough Vlei in 2005.

Leslee Maasdorp, Education Programme Manager

News from schools and bird watchers.

At our recently held workshop in the Robert McIlwaine Recreational Park (IBA), the warden put the Hornbill Lodge at our disposal.

Teachers came from schools in and around the IBA except for one, Mrs Janet Katambo, who trekked in from Murombedzi. She got up in time to catch the 04:30 a.m. bus into Harare and then left the bus near the park turn off and started to walk, expecting to find the game park just off the main Bulawayo road. We by chance drove by when she was three or four km along the dusty road and it was with some relief that she got into our truck. At the end of the day's proceedings, she explained how determined she was to make it to the workshop and firsts for her were to be in a Game Park and to use a pair of binoculars. Her school, Maturanhembe High, will surely benefit from the energy and enthusiasm. She will start up a Bird Club in her school.

From the other end of the country, near the Pungwe Bridge, 20km from Aberfoyle, is an underprivileged school called Zindi where the good birder and teacher Mr Addmore Masvikeni runs a bird club. Two young pupils wrote a list of birds seen which included Augur Buzzard, Lizard Buzzard, Grey-backed Camaroptera and Copper Sunbird. Their letter ends as follows; "Unfortunately some of the habitats are now being destroyed so as to plant *Jatropha*".

Terry Fallon and party saw two pairs of Blue Swallow going into nests at Nyadzima Falls, Nyanga National Parks in December 2006.

At our 29 Blair Road Borrowdale home, we have attracted Blue Waxbills, which seldom appear, by scattering fine seeds. The usual dozens of Red-billed Firefinch, Laughing Doves and Red-eyed Doves and four Southern Grey-headed Sparrows are always around. While the flocks of Bronze Mannikin have been tempted away in February by local grass seeds.

Leslee Maasdorp, Education Programme Manager

NATIONAL ALERT! LOOKOUT FOR COMMON MYNAS IN ZIMBABWE

The Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* was listed by the IUCN in 2000 amongst the top 100 most invasive species in the world. In the last 10 to 15 years, it has undergone a range expansion from the Johannesburg, Pretoria area where it was introduced many years ago.

Since 2000 it has become established in Gaborone and parts of southern Botswana and lone birds have been seen as far north as Kazungula. It is not yet established in Francistown. It has also reached Maputo. Mynas reached Mussina in late 2003 or early 2004 but they are not yet very common there. They are now widespread in the Limpopo Province of South Africa.

Earliest sightings for Zimbabwe date from 2004 when the bird was seen in the Chiredzi and Beit Bridge / West Nicholson areas. Birds were occasionally seen in the Beit Bridge area during 2005, 2006 and early 2007 but they do not appear to be well established there. In 2007 additional reports (unpublished) have been received from the Buby Valley Conservancy, West Nicholson, Colleen Bawn and a lone bird was seen on a farm near Turk Mine. There have been no reported sightings from Bulawayo yet but they may have been overlooked. Since some of these sightings are of single birds or pairs it appears the birds are spreading widely. Amongst the reports were breeding attempts using nests of the Crested Barbet and Red-billed Buffalo-weaver.

The Common Myna is an alien invasive species and may be controlled. Mynas compete with indigenous birds for food and nesting sites and will displace hole nesting birds including Barbets and starlings from urban areas. They will also nest under the eaves of buildings.

Please report all sightings of Common Mynas in Zimbabwe, providing the following details: Where seen, date, number of birds and behaviour (whether breeding, inter- action with other species etc.) to Geoff Lowe, email wildfire@mweb.co.zw or to Birdlife Zimbabwe.

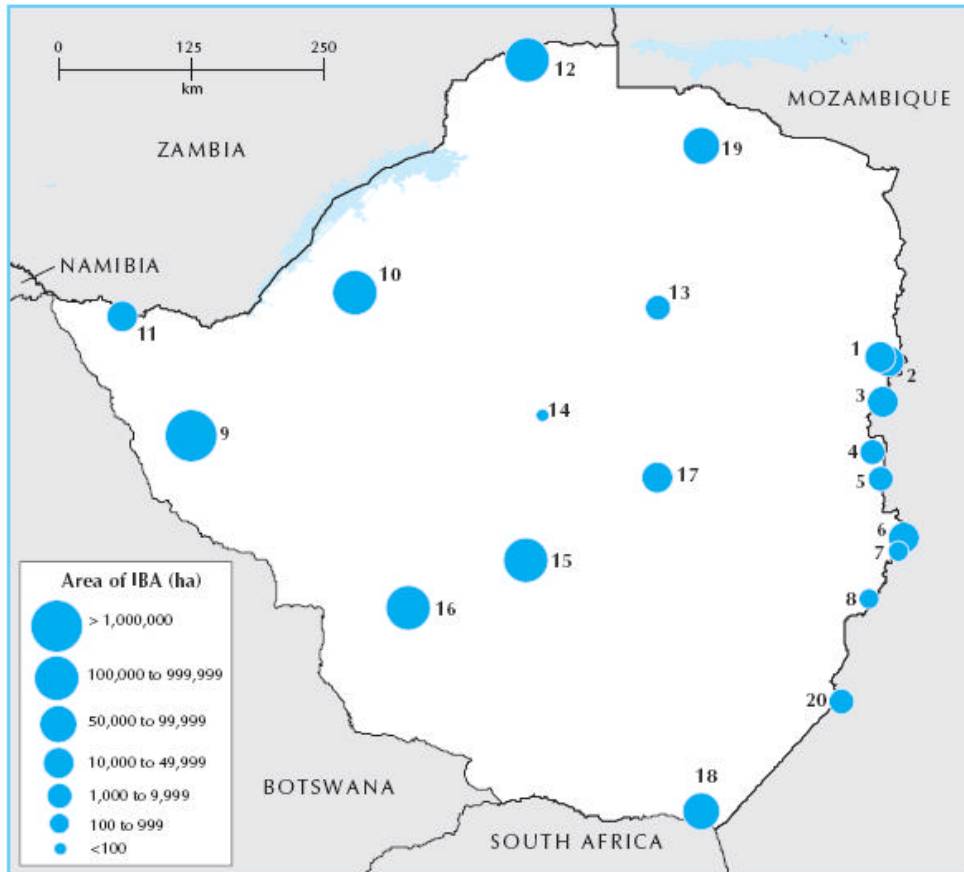
Alex Masterson recalls seeing 4 or 5 Indian Mynas in Unity Square in the 1950s but they did not thrive.

Towards a Proposed Red Data Book on Birds for Zimbabwe

Calling on everyone out there to tell me what birds they think are Regionally Extinct, Critically Endangered, Vulnerable, Near Threatened, and Of Least Concern in Zimbabwe. Even if you have given one bird or one family some thought, please let me know your thoughts.

David Rockingham-Gill, pforbes@mango.zw or 4 Fernleigh Road, P.O. Borrowdale, or 882412

Zimbabwe's Important Bird Areas (IBAs)



BirdLife International's Important Bird Area (IBA) Programme is a global initiative aimed at identifying and protecting a network of critical sites for the world's birds. The sites are selected according to agreed global criteria. In Zimbabwe we have 20 IBAs. In later Babbler, more information on selected IBAs will be provided. **Dr C. Chirara, Director Designate**

Site name	IBA Code	Region
Nyanga Mountains	ZW1	Manicaland
Nyanga lowlands/Honde valley	ZW2	Manicaland
Stapleford Forest	ZW3	Manicaland
Bvumba Highlands	ZW4	Manicaland
Banti Forest Reserve	ZW5	Manicaland
Chimanimani mountains	ZW6	Manicaland
Haroni–Rusitu junction and Botanical Reserves	ZW7	Manicaland
Chirinda Forest	ZW8	Manicaland
Hwange National Park	ZW9	Matabeleland North
Chizarira National Park	ZW10	Matabeleland North
Batoka Gorge	ZW11	Matabeleland North
Middle Zambezi valley	ZW12	Mashonaland West
Robert McIlwaine Recreational Park	ZW13	Mashonaland West
Sebakwe Poort	ZW14	Midlands
Wabai Hill (Debshan Ranch)	ZW15	Matabeleland South
Matobo Hills	ZW16	Matabeleland South
Driefontein grasslands	ZW17	Midlands, Masvingo
Limpopo–Mwenezi flood-plain and pans	ZW18	Masvingo
Mavuradonha mountains	ZW19	Mashonaland Central
Save–Runde junction	ZW20	Masvingo, Manicaland

MASHONALAND BRANCH

Mbizi Game Park: Sunday, 22nd October 2006 (QDS: 1731C3)

Under the leadership of Richard Dennison, a party of 10 gathered at Mbizi on a fine and hot day, starting as usual down by the dam which was about 3 metres below full. Overall the dam yielded 29 species including Grey Heron, Purple Heron & Squacco Herons, Great Egret, Little Egret & Cattle Egrets and African Spoonbill.

Numerous White-backed Duck [White-faced Duck?] were present together with Egyptian Goose, Red-billed Teal, African Black Duck and a single Comb Duck. The dam also provided Pied Kingfisher, Giant Kingfisher & Malachite Kingfishers while the in the woodland were Brown-hooded Kingfisher, Grey-hooded Kingfisher and Striped Kingfishers.

In the grassy vlei areas, we found Yellow-throated Longclaw, Rufous-naped Lark, Zitting Cisticola, Croaking Cisticola & Rattling Cisticola together with Helmeted Guineafowl and a solitary Natal Spur-fowl. As the party moved into the woodland proper, an immature African Fish-eagle created great debate but was eventually seen with a pair of adults. The only other raptors seen were Lizard Buzzard and Steppe Buzzard.

The woodland, which in places was overgrown with almost impassable lantana, produced Jameson's Firefinch & Red-billed Firefinch, Green-winged Pytilia and three sunbirds. Conspicuous by its absence was the Variable Sunbird but we did not move into the garden area around the lodge. The nest of a Spotted Thick-knee which contained the large remains of a single egg and a close-up view of a Fiery-necked Nightjar caused interest. The only starlings seen were Violet-backed Starling and there were no Woodpeckers recorded.

Overall, a very pleasant outing with not only 103 species but also sightings Impala, Giraffe, Tsessebe, Vervet Monkey, Bush Leguaan, Scrub Hare and Dassies.

Many thanks to Mervyn Senior for allowing the visit, his Game Guide for taking us into the restricted areas and to Richard for leading.

Pat Saunders

Xanadu Farm, Ruwa: Sunday, 26th November 2006 (QDS 1731C3)

When we met at the BLZ headquarters we were concerned that this outing might get rained out, as the weather was cloudy, windy and cool. However, although it remained much the same for the rest of the morning, with occasional light rain, we had the added incentive that our hosts, Kim and Stef McDonald, had promised all nine of us an English breakfast after our walk! Kim was at their house to greet us when we arrived at about 7 a.m. and we arranged to be back for breakfast around 9.30 a.m. Although the dull weather made birding in the miombo woodland slightly difficult, we could easily have kept birding until 10 a.m. because of the variety of habitats to explore.

We drove about 2 km to the far end of the miombo woodland, the wetland below the second dam and the dam itself. In this part of the woodland, the dull and windy conditions made the birding difficult but we were lucky enough to see two Stierling's Wren-warbler and a family of four Southern Hyliota. In the open grassland, vlei and dam, the visibility was better and the highlights included 1 Black Cuckoo, 2 Croaking Cisticola, 5 Yellow-throated Longclaws and a large number of Red-billed Teal – totalling 230 birds. The McDonalds keep game animals on their property and we managed to see giraffe, sable, zebra and duiker.

We then drove back towards the houses and stopped off at the miombo woodland next to the second dam, where we added more birds to our list. On our return we drove along the wall of the first dam and found that there was a greater variety of water birds in this dam.

This is possibly because they feel more secure close to the McDonald's homes. Highlights here included 2 African Spoonbill, 1 Spur-winged Goose, 1 Red-knobbed Coot, 3 Marsh Sandpipers and 3 Black-winged Stilts.

Back at Kim and Stef's home, we discovered that they had set up the breakfast table complete with Xmas crackers in the gazebo overlooking the dam. We were treated to a sumptuous English breakfast with a Xmas theme, cooked by our host. This was followed by a tour around their beautiful garden and

the adjacent shoreline, where from a nearby tree we put up five Black-crowned Night-heron– they must have been watching our festivities – which landed close by in exposed positions giving us excellent views. We also saw a Long-crested Eagle.

Thank you Kim and Stef for such a special treat. **Richard Dennison**

Brookmead Farm, Bromley: Sunday, 25th February, 2007 (QDS: 1831A2)

On this Sunday there was a clash between this outing and an event at Mukuvisi Woodlands at which BLZ had a stand and a 4*4 Club outing. As many of our regular participants in BLZ outings were committed to the other outings, they did not turn up for this one, but it was good to see some members that we have not seen much of in the past. 7 of us left BLZ headquarters on a cloudy, cool and windy morning for Brookmead farm south of Bromley. Jenny Faasen, our host, had warned us that emergent farmers were now settled all around her homestead and so she had arranged with her neighbour for us to bird-watch on his farm.

This farm is in sandveld south of the watershed and this would probably explain why we managed to see a western bird in the form of Bushveld Pipit during the dry season on our last visit. However, this was the wet season and no western birds were encountered this time. Jenny took us on farm roads in an approximately 5km loop past grasslands, fallow fields, a small dam and through patches of miombo woodland. In the grasslands and vleis around the dam the birding highlights included about 50 Amur Falcon, 4 Rufous-naped Lark, 4 Croaking Cisticola, 2 Yellow-throated Longclaw, 1 Cuckoo Finch and 2 African Quailfinch. As we approached the miombo woodland, we encountered a small bird party that included 2 Southern Hyliota and 2 Yellow-bellied Eremomela. Other woodland highlights included 1 flying Black-chested Snake-eagle, 1 African Harrier-hawk (Gymnogene), 1 Levillant's Cuckoo, 4 Whyte's Barbet and 2 Grey-headed Bush-shrike.

As we were fairly tired and the day had warmed up by the time we returned to the house, 5 of us stayed in the garden to relax and bird-watch while 2 of us explored a nearby patch of mixed acacia and broad-leaved woodland. This woodland added 4 Swallow-tailed Bee-eater and 2 Pale Flycatcher while the seated birders added more common garden species but nothing unusual.

Our total bird species count was 71 and this may have been higher if the weather had been more conducive to birding at the start of the morning. Thank you, Jenny, for your hospitality and for arranging a successful walk under difficult circumstances.

Richard Dennison

Climate Change by Professor Chris Magadza: Thursday, 15th February:

Some 25 members were privileged to hear Chris speak on a subject about which he knows a great deal, supported by some very interesting slides. As usual, I became so engrossed that I failed to make notes and will be unable to do justice to Chris's talk. I must buy a tape-recorder!

Chris made it clear that climate change is inexorably affecting Africa. In particular, he spoke of how the Karoo is already threatened as well as the Cape. Southern Africa is drying out and the desert is encroaching.

The affect on birds is that, as these unique habitats, the Karoo and the Cape fynbos shrink or even disappear, so will the special bird species that rely on these habitats. With changes all over southern Africa and, indeed, with Europe warming up, many migrant species won't need to travel here anymore.

Chris pointed out that although there is no general consensus among scientists about the causes of climate change, all are agreed that change is speeding up and, as early as 50 years from now, African populations will be severely threatened by lack of water.

Unfortunately, Chris's talk was interrupted by a power-cut and he had to finish it by candle-light and without his electronic presentation. We apologise to Chris for not having the foresight to provide for this eventuality.

Thanks, Chris, for giving up your time to give us a most interesting talk.

Jennifer Carter

Alex Masterson, Special Birds in Mashonaland: Thursday, 15th March After the embarrassment the previous month, we were ready for ZESA when Alex gave his presentation to a good turnout of over 30 members, encouraged by Alex's fame as a speaker and by the promise of alternative power if necessary. It was necessary as OH were without power from 10:00 a.m. that day and we thank Graham Carter for hauling along a very heavy generator (with the help of Max the gardener) and getting everything set up. Thanks also to Tony Alegria and CABS, who provided the lap-top and the projector. And so, Alex gave his Power Point Presentation by candle-light!

Alex spoke of how special Zimbabwe is in terms of birding. Mashonaland is the southern-most reach of miombo woodlands which are home to several species only found in miombo. It has many diverse habitats, from the Zambezi Valley to the Great Dyke at 6000 feet. The vlei/dambo house 10 different cisticolas, 3 species of Longclaw, Crakes and Flufftails.

In Harare CBD, Lanner Falcons and Peregrine Falcons find high-rise buildings an adequate substitute for the cliffs and kopjes of the bush, with an excellent food source in the pigeons and dove that abound. He showed us photos of a Lanner nesting on a building overlooking Unity Square, carefully monitored by Neil Deacon, a falconer who spoke to us last year. Swifts are also to be found using these concrete kopjes. Ducks, Stilts and Pied Avocet are found at the sewerage farms and Marabou Storks and African Sacred Ibis frequent the rubbish dumps.

He mentioned how, with the development of a man-made forest in and around Harare, the birds that prefer open grasslands, such as Wahlberg's Eagles, Common Fiscals, White-bellied Sunbirds and Scarlet-chested Sunbirds among others, are being replaced by Long-crested Eagles, Tropical Boubou and Variable Sunbirds.

All in all, it was an entertaining and thought-provoking talk. Thank you, Alex, for giving us your time.
Jennifer Carter

MATABELELAND BRANCH

Greyville: Saturday 24th February 2007 (QDS: 2028B1)

On a cold and blustery Saturday morning 7 birders went to the outskirts of the City to Greyville, a smallholding in a lovely setting, owned by Neil and Kitty Baxter. The main occupation is horses, and it has excellent stables and horse facilities. The star of the show appears to be a miniature horse stallion, said to be a tyrant who rules the roost with an iron foot!

But we were there for the birds, which did not disappoint. The dam was only ¼ full, or ¾ empty, whichever way you like to look at it - just a puddle - but there we found two Saddle-billed Storks displaying, a Grey Heron just standing around and a Hamerkop trying to fish by following the Saddle-bills through the water. Ashore were Kittlitz's Plovers and Three-banded Plovers, Wood Sandpiper and Common Sandpiper, an African Pied Wagtail and also in the vicinity an African Sacred Ibis.

Walking in the acacia woodlands we saw and heard what you would expect to see and hear – Orange-breasted Bush-shrike, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird and Crested Barbets, Red-backed Shrikes and Magpie Shrikes, a Brubru and a Laughing Dove or two – but no Cape Turtle-doves. The grassland produced a good variety ranging from Rufous-naped Lark, Wattled Lapwings and Crowned Lapwings and a little Spotted Flycatcher on the fence. Overhead flew a Black-chested Snake-eagle, Yellow-billed Kite, Red-breasted Swallows and Barn Swallows, and an African Palm-swift.

We ended the morning with tea in the garden under a huge Ficus and watching the antics of the Saddle-bills again. Our total number of birds identified was 40. Prior to our departure Kitty showed us the sad sight of a Lilac-breasted Roller with a broken wing, picked up by Neil sometime that morning. We had seen its mate feeding on the ground. However, once home we contacted a lady who takes care of young and wounded birds, so hopefully it will recover sufficiently to enable it to be moved into a large aviary, as it most certainly would not survive in the wild.

Jeanette Cross

Bomani Camp, Hwange National Park: 2nd – 4th March 2007 (QDS 1927A2)

Friday 2nd March saw a group of 18 members, in 6 vehicles, set off for Bomani Camp, on the boundary of Hwange National Park, near Ngamo Gate. Our drive took us through beautiful teak forests and ended with a 20 km section through deep sand, which tested both the drivers and the vehicles. The camp was a welcome oasis and we were all glad to wash off the dust, both internally and externally.

Our exploration of the area began with a walk in the late afternoon to two nearby pans where we saw a variety of water birds including 45 Egyptian Goose, African Spoonbill, Red-billed Teal and Hottentot Teal, Spur-winged Goose, African Sacred Ibis, Comb Duck, Greenshank and Wood Sandpipers. Spoor of hippo, lion and many antelope around the pan were a reminder that perhaps we shouldn't only be focusing on birds in the air! A beautiful moonlit night, with good food, great company, and a background chorus from jackal, hyena and Pearl-spotted Owlet made a wonderful end to our first day out.

Early next morning we set off for a drive through nearby Tsholotsho Communal Land, where the scenery alternated between forest and open grassland, with several depressions filled with water, reeds, water lilies and an abundance of birds. Besides more water birds the area was filled with flashes of colour – Lilac-breasted Roller, Purple Roller and Broad-billed Rollers, European Bee-eaters, Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters, Southern Carmine Bee-eaters and Little Bee-eaters and dancing Grey Crowned Cranes. On our return to camp for brunch we were met by a Dickinson's Kestrel, perched on a dry tree immediately in front of our accommodation. We went off again in the late afternoon for a drive through the camp's concession area, visiting several pans before driving back along the railway line, with views of wildebeest & zebra on the open Ngamo plains within the Park on the other side of the line, and one tantalizing glimpse of 2 Wattled Crane. Sightings included: Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill, Red-billed Hornbill, Grey Hornbill, Bradfield's Hornbill and Southern Ground-hornbills, Abdim's Stork and Saddle-billed Stork, Red-billed Spurfowl and Swainson's Spurfowl, plus the raptors - an immature Gabar Goshawk, Bateleur, Tawny Eagle and Wahlberg's Eagle, Steppe Buzzard and Yellow-billed Kite. Our last stop was to enjoy snacks and sundowners, or six, whilst watching the full moon rise – magic!

Sunday saw us head for the Park – and birds aplenty: 168 Blacksmith Lapwings at Ngamo Pan, a solitary White-winged Tern and 2 Whiskered Terns; 4 species of vulture (Hooded Vulture, White-backed Vulture, White-headed Vulture and Lappet-faced Vulture), Black-chested Snake-eagle and Brown Snake-eagles, a closer view of our Wattled Cranes and a pair of Secretarybirds at their nest. We drove through fascinating country - open plains dotted with game, Ostrich & palm trees; enjoyed lunch at Scots pan, where we could not only watch all the birds, but also animals, now including elephant, sable and eland; and then on the return trip were kindly treated to a delicious tea at Linkwasha Camp at the invitation of Willem and Trish Botha.

In total we recorded 137 species – this was a memorable trip and a good time was had by all! Our thanks to Matupula Safaris for allowing us the use of their facilities at Bomani, to Gail Amyot for setting up the trip and arranging our outings, to Julia Duprée for coordinating it all, and to Jeanette Cross and John Stakesby-Lewis for organizing the catering. **Adele Edwards**

MATABELELAND PROJECT UPDATES

The Verreaux's Eagle, Dassie and Raptor Surveys. Twelve teams forgathered at Inungu Lodge over the weekend of 17/18 March where nearly everyone camped in the grounds. On Saturday morning Dudley presented a very professional and well received briefing to those present whilst Cecilia handed out comprehensive files containing all you need to know, and forms for the return of all information that the organisers need to know. Thereafter the rest of the weekend was thrown open for us all to participate in a 'Dassie Treasure Hunt' to look for our allocated Dassie watching sites for the Survey in May. We all found them, and this in the face of gloomy predications that we wouldn't, because the rain at the beginning of March had caused explosive vegetative growth, resulting in tall grass and well-clad trees! Mighty proud of ourselves, we then went on a Black Eagle nest check which indicated little activity – it's early days. It was a great pleasure to have with us for the weekend – and the previous week as well – Allison and Patrick Duncan from France. Allison holds a high position in the Ligue pour la Protection des Oiseaux (the BirdLife Partner in France) overseeing projects and delivering presentations all over the world, and Patrick is a Senior Lecturer at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique and has just completed a survey on zebra at Hwange.

This was a particularly successful event, hard work but much enjoyed by all, and our thanks go to Dudley and Cecilia Hubbard for their efficient arrangements and warm hospitality.

Barn Swallow project, How Mine. Sign-writing for the last two signs is completed this week and the signs will be erected shortly. Full colour, high quality, informative leaflets have been printed and handed out to visitors, a programme for the Mine schools has been prepared and our invitation to other schools to organise bus trips to the swallow roost was taken up by Sikhulile School last week.

Southern Ground-hornbill Survey. This has been intensified and expanded. Further interviews were undertaken earlier this month at schools and kraals in the eastern Matopos by Elspeth Parry and Zelda James, with another session planned for early April. These interviews are producing valuable information, and the precise territories of Ground Hornbill groups are flagged onto a 1:250,000 map. We intend to restructure this survey into a community based operation, overseen by supervisors, which we believe will not only increase knowledge and awareness amongst the population, but also improve the security of the hornbills.

Aisleby. In addition to informal visits, the monitoring of Aisleby is now headed by Sandy McAdam who undertakes intensive detailed, all-day surveys each month with the assistance of four members alternating monthly two at a time. Records of sightings are sent to Colin Baker for his use and onward transmission where appropriate. An analysis of trends will be prepared in a few months time when this stepped up survey has run for a year.

National Waterfowl Census. This national project is now co-ordinated by Matland, and we commend Dave Rockingham-Gill for his work over many years on this census. His contribution will be hard to follow. All counts in Matabeleland were carried out as planned, with the exception of Fort Rixon. Five teams covered many pans in the north, north-east and west of Hwange; four went to Aisleby, and three to SAST at Khami. Five reports have also been received from Mashonaland. The results will be collated and dispatched to Wetlands International in Dakar under cover of a report.

All project reports by Julia Duprée

TAIL FEATHERS

Speckled Mousebirds taking over...!

As I compile this *Babbler*, I overlook our back garden in Marlborough. Six Speckled Mousebirds have been enjoying a communal sand bath under a lemon tree but have just been routed by a couple of Arrow-marked Babblers. The Mousebirds have made their home here, roosting in a thick hedge. Imagine my mixed feelings when I watched them feeding on tender young lettuce seedlings the other evening! Blue Waxbills, White-browed Robin-chat, Bar-throated Apalis, Golden Weaver and European Bee-eater overhead have all caught my eye as I try to work. Aaahh, the Babblers have moved on and the Mousebirds are completing their ba.... No! A highly offended Babbler chases them off again!

Jennifer Carter

AND.....

There is a Variable Sunbird nest near our kitchen window which we have been watching for some time. Firstly, the nest is being used for a second time, we presume by the same birds that built it and reared young from it some months ago (before the winter). Secondly, this morning, we saw a Speckled Mousebird ripping the back of the nest apart gathering nesting materials for its own nest. The sunbirds were very agitated and were attacking the mousebird but to no avail. One or two other birds, Southern Masked-weaver and Southern Grey-headed Sparrows, were taking an interest in the incident. We checked the nest and confirmed the presence of 2 warm eggs.

We guess that various birds do use the materials from other birds' nests for their own nests but we have not come across a bird using the material from a currently occupied nest.

Rob Kelly

NOTICEBOARD

Honeyguide: If anyone doesn't want to keep their copy of Honeyguide, please return it to the office rather than destroy it. In particular, there is a shortage of the last issue.

The National Office requires a small refrigerator. If you have one for sale or could possibly loan one, please contact the office.

Next Babblers will be produced in May for June/July. Please let me have articles and notes for Tail Feathers by 19th May. Ed.

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