


# BABBLER

The Newsletter of -

## BirdLife Zimbabwe

The BirdLife International Partner in Zimbabwe

ISSUE # 76 – JUNE / JULY 2007

	<b>Mashonaland</b>		<b>Matabeleland</b>	
<b>Chairman:</b>	David Dalziel	490033	Julia Duprée	246269
<b>Secretary:</b>	Jane Rautenbach	334955	Adele Edwards	882242
<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
	Ken Dixon	793063		
	Dave Rockingham-Gill	882412		

### **NATIONAL OFFICE**

**Director Designate:** Dr. Chip Chirara

**Education Programme Manager:** Leslee Maasdorp

**Crane Conservation Officer:** Osiman Mabhachi

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

**Administration Officer:** Alice Chamunorwa

**Address:** P O Box RV 100, Runiville  
35 Clyde Road, Eastlea, Harare

**Telephones:** 490208 / 481496

**Web site:** <http://site.mweb.co.zw/birdlife>

**Office E-mail:** [birds@zol.co.zw](mailto:birds@zol.co.zw)

**Babbler Editor:** Jennifer Carter 300082  
PO Box A1619 Avondale  
Harare

**Email:** [gcarter@mweb.co.zw](mailto:gcarter@mweb.co.zw)

## **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING SATURDAY 30<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2007**

### **CHANGE OF VENUE**

The National AGM will now be held at BirdLife Zimbabwe offices at 10:00 a.m. on Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> June followed by a braai. Fires/skottels for cooking and puddings will be provided but please bring your own chairs, drinks, salads, meat, crockery (including pudding bowls), cutlery and glasses. (If you are prepared to supply a pudding, please contact Jane Rautenbach or Jennifer Carter.)

## **ACTIVITIES**

### **NATIONAL**

#### **Volunteers Wanted – National Blue Swallow Survey 2007**

This year BirdLife Zimbabwe intends to carry out a national survey of the Blue Swallows in the whole of the Eastern Highlands. This will be done during the first week of October. We are kindly asking members to be involved in this survey, which will be done in conjunction with office staff. We would like

to have at least six teams of between two and four people. BLZ is currently preparing a list of all sites where the bird has been sighted. Those who want to be involved either as individuals or as teams should send their names to the BLZ office. We will stop registering teams once we have the sufficient teams/individuals. All expenses for the survey including fuel will be covered.

**Dr C. Chirara, Director Designate**

### **IBA Monitoring Project**

The IBA Monitoring Project is a regional project being coordinated through the BLI Africa Secretariat in Nairobi. There were a few logistical problems with the donors of the project. We have been told the project is ready to start but we think fieldwork will start after August. A map and list of IBAs in Zimbabwe was printed in the last *Babbler*. Members will be kept informed on the project and how they can help. **Dr C. Chirara, Director Designate**

**Mukuvisi Woodlands Anniversary Fair/BLZ “Mini Bird Fair” Saturday/Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> / 24<sup>th</sup> June**  
09:00 to 17:00 each day. BLZ will have a stand at the Mukuvisi Woodland’s Anniversary Fair. Safari walks have been planned for both days starting at 3 p.m. and we intend holding a colouring competition for children. **HELP IS NEEDED FROM BLZ MEMBERS:**

To lead/assist with the walks at 3 p.m. each day;

To man the stand for a 2/3 hour period either day to relieve those who will be there all day, both days; this is just a matter of answering queries and promoting BLZ and it’s fun;

If you have any colouring pens/pencils or crayons that are no longer needed that you could donate.

**If you can help**, please contact Jane Rautenbach (334204 W/334955 H) or Hazel at the office.

Members are urged to make an effort to support this event (even though fuel is a problem). There are many activities planned and there will be plenty of various craft stalls. It should be a great day out. The theme is based on the great outdoors and there will be displays of gun dogs, raptors, SPCA dog shows as well as having the opportunity to shoot at the air rifle booth or even have a try at archery.

### **MASHONALAND BRANCH**

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

### **Annual Weekend – Hippo Pools, Friday 14<sup>th</sup> – Monday 17<sup>th</sup> September**

We will be going to Hippo Pools again this year, hoping to see Pel’s Fishing-owl, White-backed Night-heron and Livingstone’s Flycatcher again among the many other species.

Please contact Jennifer Carter if you are interested in going. Details of the trip will be relayed as we get them.

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

### **Sundays June 3<sup>rd</sup> & July 1<sup>st</sup> 07:00: Mukuvisi Woodlands, 7:00 a.m.**

Directions: Turn off Chiremba Road into Ford Rd. (opposite Queensdale Shops) and continue down to Blatherwick Rd (T Junction). Turn right and the gate is about 150 meters on the left. Bring cash for the guard who will be on hand to unlock the gate to let cars in and out and chairs and refreshments.

**Sundays June 10<sup>th</sup>, July 8<sup>th</sup> 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.

### **Sundays June 19<sup>th</sup> and July 15<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. Corn Crakes have been seen there as well as other special vlei birds!

### **Saturday Morning, June 16<sup>th</sup>: Greystone Park Nature Reserve 07:00 a.m.**

Meet in the Reserve car park, off Halford Rd, which is off Gaydon Road, on the right just over the hill coming from Greystone Park shopping centre. This is a nice little area with a small dam. Bring chairs and refreshments.

### **Saturday Morning, July 21<sup>st</sup>: Marlborough Vlei 07:00 a.m.**

Directions: drive to the end of Princess Margaret Rd, turn left and continue to the short cul-de-sac on the vlei side with a small fenced off area at the end. Bring some cash for the guard.

**Sunday June 24<sup>th</sup>: Ewanrigg Botanic Gardens 7:00 a.m.** Meet at BLZ offices, 35 Clyde Rd, at 7:00 a.m. where vehicles can be safely left and transport shared. Bring chairs and refreshments. As at beginning of May, charges were \$25 000 per person. We will try to update you closer to the time.

**Sunday, July 22<sup>nd</sup> Stapleford Farm, 07:00 a.m.:** Meet at the Carters', 2 Helena Rd, Marlborough at 07:00 where vehicles can be safely left and transport shared. Bring chairs and refreshments.

**Thursday, June 21<sup>st</sup>: Carl Beel on Swynnerton's Robin in Zimbabwe & Mozambique:** Carl's presentation of Birds of Zambia a couple of years ago was superb. He is an excellent ornithologist and has been finding Swynnerton's Robins in some interesting places. NOT to be missed.

**Friday, July 20<sup>th</sup>: Tony Alegria: Astronomy – another way to get use out of your Binoculars!** Tony, a BirdLife member, is a man of many parts. He will bring a telescope and you should bring your binoculars – and wrap up warmly.

**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 June 9<sup>th</sup>, Cowdrey Park Sewage Ponds, 2:00 p.m.:** Walk led by Eddie Cross. Meet 2.00 p.m. at the Crematorium. Bring tea. Ring Eddie and Jeanette on 240093 or Adele on 882242 (h)/470729 (o).

**Saturday June 23<sup>rd</sup>, World of Birds. Video afternoon 3.00 p.m.:** at the Dupreés, 12 Ilanda Gardens. Bring-and-share tea. Ring Adele or Julia on 246269. (Power cuts permitting).

**Saturday, July 14<sup>th</sup>, Birds and Rock Art. Talk by Paul Hubbard.** Details to be confirmed.

**July: Waterfowl Counts throughout the month** Ring Julia on 246269.

**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](mailto:cbeel@zol.co.zw)

---

## **MASHONALAND SOUTH**

**KADOMA:** Outings will be held at 7.00 a.m. on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday of each month.

Contact Margaret Parrock ☎ 068-22005 for details.

---

## **REPORTS**

### **NATIONAL**

On behalf of COSMO, BLZ & Environment Africa – Welcome to Monavale Vlei, to celebrate –

### **WORLD MIGRATORY BIRD DAY 2007**

This is a global event, celebrated all over the world, to highlight the threats & dangers to Migratory Birds. The first WMB Day was launched in April 2006 at a meeting in Nairobi. Two UN Environmental Programme bodies – African-Eurasian Migratory Water Birds Agreement (AEWA) & the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) agreed to hold a combined annual event to highlight the plight of all Migratory Species in a shrinking world.

The Theme for the 2006 event was: “Migratory Birds Need Our Support Now”.

This event proved to be very popular & was celebrated in 46 countries throughout the world & so it was decided to make W M Birding an annual event.

This year, 2007, the theme of the WMBD is: “Migratory Birds in a Changing Climate”.

This is to highlight the adverse effects global warming might have on migratory bird species. For example:

- a) Global warming may cause the gross reduction or complete loss of some habitats
- b) A change in migratory patterns or the routes birds follow
- c) An increase in competition for food between migrants & residents

The general public are probably unaware that these insidious changes are taking place & only when it is too late will the cry go up “where have all the birds gone”. And in Roman times, the poet Virgil wrote, “Hell is a place where no birds sing”, so even the tough Romans appreciated their birds.

It is small events like this, coming together early in the morning, to a small urban wetland, that we bring the plight of migratory birds to the notice of the General Public & ask them to get involved in trying to minimise the effect on birds of climate change.

This is a tall order, you may say but it is surprising what ordinary people, (NOT Governments or their servants) can achieve in rectifying man-made destruction, once they become a determined force, have the scientific evidence on their side & a vigorous spokesperson to champion their cause.

Monavale Vlei may be only a small wetland in an urban area but was saved from annihilation by the determined combined forces of COSMO, BLZ & EA. This was the work of a dedicated single-minded group, determined against all odds to save a small piece of national wetland, with all its associated Flora & wildlife. This may still prove to be the breakthrough we need to save some 100's of similar endangered wetlands & give the country back, the annual streams & rivers that were once derived from these highveld water sponges.

Africa receives more migrants from Europe & Asia than any other land mass. South & Central America have fewer from North America, while India & Australasia receive hardly any migrants by comparison. Of the 589 species of birds living in Europe & Northern Asia, 238 are long distance migrants & 185 travel to Africa in the Northern winter.

About half the birds settle in the Sahel region bordering the Sahara Desert, even though it is the inhospitable dry season, it is still better than where they come from. The other half fly on through Angola, Zambia, Malawi, Tanzania & Mozambique through to South Africa, many stopping along the way to over winter.

The main routes into Africa are channelled to avoid the worst of the Sahara Desert & so birds come through Spain & down the western border of Africa or eastwards through Syria, Israel & Egypt & then down the Nile Valley. Some birds use Italian Peninsula to cross over the Mediterranean to Africa & do fly across the middle of the Sahara (1,500 km) – taking a small bird 35 – 40 hours flying time, for which it has enough fuel (fat reserves) if it does not meet head winds or inclement weather.

The main reasons birds migrate to Africa is because of the abundant food in summer & the favourable climate. Eruptions of insect food, which included locusts, armyworm, crickets, flying ants, termites & other insects, were banquets for insectivorous & omnivorous birds & even raptors. These huge food resources provided sustenance for their stay in Africa & fuel for the return journey.

However, swarms of insects are not conducive to the growing of crops & the use of insecticides has greatly reduced this bounty for the migrants & has probably had an adverse effect on the number of migrant birds. There is a perception – not a mathematical certainty – that some migrant bird populations have declined during the last century & this could be related to the loss of the swarms of insects in Africa. However the changes in land use in many parts of Africa may result in the resurgence of this natural cornucopia for migrants & resident birds.

A small number of birds have failed to take the journey back to Europe & have settled down in Africa to become breeding residents e.g. White Storks breeding in Bredasdorp, Booted Eagles breeding in the Western Cape, European Bee-eaters in at least 4 locations in South Africa & Namibia. This is a natural change in the habits of a small proportion of the main population, which are content to stay all year

round in a new, but suitable, environment & decide not to make the long haul back to their original home. Thus some birds may already be pre-adapted to climate change by taking the decision not to take the return trip to their original breeding area but to remain in their winter home as a breeding resident in a new climate zone.

BLZ & our partners in COSMO & EA have been prevailed upon by the organisers of WMBD to do something, to bring to the public's attention, this special bird day & we have chosen to do our bit at Monavale. Other countries will also be having bird walks, rallies, educational programmes, public events, speakers, etc., to mark this day in their own way.

For those who wish to enter, there is a WMB Day sponsored painting competition; details can be obtained from their website – [www.worldmigratorybirdday.org](http://www.worldmigratorybirdday.org).

Finally it only remains for me to thank you all for coming to Monavale on this special WMB day & for participating in the activities this morning & for the rest of the year, telling your friends & others who will listen, that in the era of climate change, migrating birds may be at risk of being depleted as they move from continent to continent in search of food, space & suitable places to breed.

*Speech given by Ken Wilson, BLZ President, on 12<sup>th</sup> May 2007.*

### **World Migratory Bird Day 12<sup>th</sup> May 2007, Monavale Vlei**

This year's World Migratory Bird Day was celebrated at Monavale vlei. The theme was 'Migratory birds in a changing climate.' The changing climate is perceived to affect migratory patterns for the birds. These changing patterns ultimately affect the survival of the birds. Migratory birds face the challenge of shrinking habitats. We are all challenged to protect habitats that ensure survival of both migrants and resident species. The event was attended by students and teachers from Belvedere, Marlborough and Southerton Primary schools. There were also students from the Natural History Club of Prince Edward High School. Student teachers from Belvedere Teacher's College together with their lecturer also turned up. Members and staff of BLZ also attended the commemoration. The event kicked off with a walk through the vlei. Mr Ken Wilson gave the opening speech. Rolf Chenux-Repond gave the main speech. We split into three groups for the walk on the vlei. Unfortunately this year's WMBD was held rather late, there were no migrants for us to see!! I hope the next celebrations will be in time when most migratory birds are still present. **Fadzai Matsvimbo, Research Technician, BLZ and Global Avian Influenza Network Surveillance (GAINS)**

## **DIRECTORS'S REPORTS**

### **Visit to the RSPB**

I visited the RSPB from the 18<sup>th</sup> March – 5<sup>th</sup> April. The purpose of the visit was mainly to attend an in-house training course on 'Succeeding as a New Manager' and update both the RSPB and BirdLife International on the conservation programme in Zimbabwe.

Meetings were held with Graham Wynne, Chief Executive of RSPB, Alistair Gammell, Director of International Operations and Paul Buckley, among other staff. Further meetings were held with staff at BirdLife International and these include the CEO Dr Mike Rands and Dr Leon Bennun, head of the Science and Policy Department.

I had the opportunity to discuss the drafting of the Red Data Book for Zimbabwe with Dr Stuart Buchart. There were consultations about IBA Programme with Lincoln Fishpool, and several other projects that BLZ is involved in were also discussed. Visits were made to some RSPB reserves including Minsmere, Paxton Pits and Rainham Marshes Reserve. The RSPB has several reserves throughout the UK and these are well-managed by core staff and volunteers. The RSPB involves volunteers in many of its activities and this helps them cope with huge amounts of work and also reduces staff costs.

I also attended a student conference on Conservation at Cambridge University from 27<sup>th</sup> – 28<sup>th</sup> March. There were very interesting talks on conservation including a plenary lecture by Professor Norman Myers who talked on Biodepletion, Covert Sources of the Crisis. Prof Myes thinks human activities have brought the Earth to the brink of biotic crisis. With the current trends in human population growth, biologists consider that coming decades will see the loss of large numbers of species. There were other interesting talks by postgraduate students from around the world, including Africa. Overall, the trip was very useful and many lessons were learnt that will be useful to BLZ.

Many thanks to Dr Chris Magin who facilitated and organised the trip, the RSPB for funding and several RSPB and BLI colleagues who helped during this useful visit. **Dr. Chip Chirara**

## **CONSERVATION**

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 this issue we focus on two IBAs where BirdLife Zimbabwe has been working in the last few years, the Driefontein Grasslands and Nyanga Mountains.

### **Driefontein Grasslands (IBA Code ZW17)**

The Driefontein Grasslands (IBA 17 on map) is located in Central Zimbabwe and is sometimes described as the 'Driefontein Triangle' because it lies between Chivhu, Mvuma and Felixburg. The key species in the area is the Wattled Crane. Other interesting species recorded in this area include the Grey Crowned Crane, the Kori Bustard, Secretarybird, Black-bellied Bustard (Korhaan), Black-chested Snake-eagle and the White-backed Vulture among others. During the IBA identification process, almost all the area was privately owned. In the last six years communal farmers have settled in the area under the government's fast track resettlement programme. The former ranching area is now occupied by smallholder farmers who rely on maize cultivation mainly for domestic consumption. Because rainfall in the area is very erratic and the soils are poor, communities are utilising wetlands for production of vegetables and other crops. This is major threat to the breeding and survival of the Wattled Crane.

BirdLife Zimbabwe has been working with communities since 2003 to promote sustainable utilisation of wetland resources. Mr Osiman Mabhachi, the Conservation Officer, has set up two Site Support Groups in the area and maintains good communication links with the traditional, political and local leadership in this IBA. Through funding obtained from CIDA, BLZ managed to construct a community garden for one community in order to reduce the number of individual plots on the sensitive wetlands. The Cranes continue to breed in the area and the population has remained stable over the past five years. The Driefontein Grasslands is accessible to visitors though you might need to notify the BLZ office and prior arrangements can be made with the communities.

### **Nyanga Mountains (IBA Code ZW1)**

The Nyanga Mountains (IBA 1 on map) is located in the Eastern Highlands. The Nyanga National Park forms the core of this IBA which extends into commercial farms, forestry plantations and communal farms. The key species in this area is the Blue Swallow an Afro-tropical summer visitor which breeds and forages in the grasslands. Other important species recorded in the area include the Pallid Harrier and the Taita Falcon. The Wattled Crane has also been recorded in the National Park and Sanyatwe area though they have not been any sightings of the species in recent years. The major threat to the montane grasslands in this IBA is invasion by alien tree species, mainly wattle and pine. Invasion of these species is continuing in communal areas as locals mainly utilise the big trees, allowing the juveniles to grow and establish.

BirdLife Zimbabwe is working with the Sanyatwe community (in the vicinity of London Store) in a project '**Developing local institutional capacity for community-based IBA conservation and livelihood enhancement in the Eastern Highlands of Zimbabwe.**' The aim of the project is to work with the communities to reduce the degradation of the grassland habitat in this area. In the past year nine pairs of Blue Swallows were sighted in Sanyatwe and three bred in the area. In the past three years BLZ has also been carrying out annual surveys of the Blues in the whole of the Nyanga Mountains IBA. Nyanga is a major tourist area and is very accessible and safe. **Dr C. Chirara, Director Designate**

### **Wetlands and Poverty Reduction Training Workshop**

I attended the Wetlands and Poverty Reduction Training Workshop organised by Wetlands International during the period 23 April – 5 May 2007. The course was held at the Uganda Wildlife Education Centre in Entebbe, Uganda. The main objective of the workshop was to improve the technical capacity of African wetland practitioners so that they can influence policy and decision makers in mainstreaming sustainable wetland management into conservation and poverty reduction strategies in their own countries. The course curriculum was divided into four modules namely **Integrated Water Resource Management, Wetland Valuation, Policy Setting and Advocacy and Financial Mechanisms**. The course was very relevant to me as the Officer responsible for the Driefontein Crane and Wetland Conservation Project as it enabled me to identify opportunities for new interventions. My knowledge of

integrated wetland management was enhanced and this will help me in mainstreaming livelihood issues in current and future conservation projects. Sharing experiences with practitioners from other countries inspired me greatly. The course made me realise that Zimbabwe does not have resource-specific environmental policies and that issue of analysing the economic value of resources is not being prioritised by conservationists in Zimbabwe. Having been embarrassed at being the only participant from a country that has not ratified the Ramsar Convention, my recommendation is that Zimbabwe should ratify the Convention before the next meeting of Ramsar Contracting Parties. There is also a need to lobby for the formulation of resource-specific environmental policies and strategies for effective policing of the country's natural resources and threatened fauna and flora.

### **Progress in the Eastern Highlands**

The Eastern Highlands project is progressing well. The project annual report was compiled and submitted to BirdLife International in February. I presented a progress update to BirdLife International Programme Coordinators during a telephone interview in March. Issues discussed during the interview ranged from implementation approaches used, field experiences, lessons learnt, problems encountered and project impact on poverty and the environment. Blue Swallow surveys and monitoring of the sites continued in the Sanyatwe area during the period January – March 2007. The Field Assistant reported seeing 9 pairs of Blue Swallows in March and discovered 2 new breeding sites. On the 17<sup>th</sup> of April, I presented a progress report to the Environment, Agriculture and Tourism Committee Meeting of the Nyanga Rural District Council. **Osiman Mabhachi, Conservation Officer**

## **EDUCATION**

### **Working with schools**

We are very grateful that our BAP activities in schools are expanding. The Ministry of Education Seke District is very happy with our programmes with selected schools in Chitungwiza and Seke areas. They have pledged their support and wish to expand the BAP to all Chitungwiza schools, both secondary and primary since they have come to appreciate the need for environmental education in order to improve their teaching through the use of natural resources.

We have also developed links with Association Project Network (ASPNET), UNESCO and Mukuvisi Woodlands who also work with schools. These links will benefit mostly Harare and Chitungwiza schools. For this term, festivals are being held in Harare, Norton and Chitungwiza clusters and for Chimanimani, Vumba, Chipinge, Honde Valley, Renco and Rusape, competitions will be held during the third term.

Schools responded very well to the World Migratory Birds Day commemoration on 12 May. Schools present were Marlborough, Southerton and Belvedere Primaries. Belvedere College came with their lecturer Mr Mharapara who has shown interest in the studying of types of grasses at Monavale vlei through projects of student teachers. Prince Edward High also attended and they have shown interest in joining BAP for schools. We encourage schools to keep participating and learn more about birds and their habitats. **Julliet Masama-Van Ongevalle, Education Officer**

### **BLZ/Murowa Project**

BirdLife Zimbabwe/Murowa Diamonds Project is a Bird Awareness Programme (BAP) of BirdLife Zimbabwe run in partnership with Murowa Diamonds. The aim is to promote conservation of the biophysical environment, leading to enhanced benefits for people, birds and other wildlife. A stakeholders meeting was conducted on the 27<sup>th</sup> of March 2007 at Murowa Community Hall, where the project was officially launched by BLZ facilitators (Mrs. Leslee Maasdorp and Togarasei Fakarayi) and the company representatives of Murowa Diamonds (Diason Ziso, Godfrey Guvava and Tsitsi Taruvinga). A follow-up teachers training workshop was conducted on the 29<sup>th</sup> of March 2007 and was attended by enthusiastic heads and teachers from the five schools in the programme.

In an effort to assist, strengthen and enhance an effective and comprehensive BAP in Murowa Community, BLZ has appointed two scouts from the community. These scouts came to Harare for a week-long training course at BLZ in April this year. They have acquired conservation education, bird identification skills and ideas from the training and are expected to put these skills and ideas into practice in Murowa Community during project implementation. Plans are underway to set up a nutrition garden at Gundekunde Primary School and a nursery garden at Chinembeure Secondary School as part of this year's activities. However, knowledge and information sharing as far as these gardens are concerned will cut across all the five schools in the programme.



---

## **MASHONALAND BRANCH**

### **Cannonkopje Crane Centre, Mutorashanga: Sunday, 25<sup>th</sup> March 2007 (QDS: 1730B1)**

3 vehicles containing 12 members made the 120km journey to Mutorashanga at the invitation of Rolf Hangartner and his son, Alex. That we had arrived at the correct location was confirmed by the pair of Wattled Crane in the garden. The rest of the breeding group were at the breeding pens nearby. Although Wattled Cranes only breed naturally 10km away, this project to ensure the continuation of the species in Zimbabwe was set up in 1988. Cranes bred here are reintroduced to secure habitats in the wild. The Hangartners also involve local schools and communities in the project.

In other parts of the garden were a group of 9 Grey Go-away-birds, Red-billed Firefinch, Fork-tailed Drongos, Grey Hornbill, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird and Black Flycatcher. Grey-rumped Swallow and Eurasian Bee-eater overflowed us. As the general habitat was grassland with scattered kopjes we were surrounded by Zitting Cisticola and Croaking Cisticola, Orange-breasted Waxbill and we could hear Natal Spurfowl and Flappet Lark. A bird party in some trees included Black Cuckooshrike, Miombo Double-collared Sunbird and Jameson's Firefinch.

The shallow dam yielded Egyptian Goose, White-breasted Cormorant and Reed Cormorant, African Jacana and a Grey Heron. The damp area surrounding the dam held Rufous-naped Lark, Senegal Coucal and Black Coucal and many Yellow-throated Longclaw plus Yellow-mantled Widowbird and Red-collared Widowbird. A Red-backed Shrike looked out of place perched on a reed over the water.

From the dam we made our way along some riverine bush to a spot where the river cut off our progress. Here there were Common Waxbill, Lesser Swamp-warbler, 2 Giant Kingfisher & a group of 5 noisy Pied Kingfisher. Working back up river in the bush we found very little except Tropical Boubou, Terrestrial Brownbul and White-browed Scrub-robin. The only way back to the farm for lunch, we were told, was to walk 200m along a narrow, slippery spillway separating the dam from the marshy land below. For some of us who find even the concrete bridge in Mukuvisi intimidating this was a frightening experience - my legs are still shaking. However, we all made it safely in the end.

At the far end of the dam we came into a dense thicket at the foot of a group of kopjes in which were some rock paintings worth a visit, although Ilse was not convinced. The face of the kopje ahead revealed Speckled Pigeon, Rock Martin and Red-winged Starling but we failed to find Boulder Chat. From the rock paintings we made our way back to the farm for a well-earned picnic lunch.

The afternoon session began with a cursory visit to the huge breeding pens but there was no sign of the crane. We then drove 3 kilometres past various areas of water. On one dam we found 2 African Pygmy-goose, Little Grebe and 2 Malachite Kingfisher, the younger of which tempted some of us to think 'Half-collared' but the shallow, still waters were the wrong habitat. In the kopjes nearby Ian did see both Mocking Cliff-chat and Boulder Chat but once away they failed to reappear. At last raptors were spotted; 2 Long-crested Eagle.

After the list had been compiled we were treated to a welcome cup of tea and a sumptuous Schwartzwaeldekerstorte supplied by our knowledgeable, generous hosts whom we would wish to thank heartily for a great day out. In all we saw 96 species. **Ken Dixon**

### **Chikupo Cave, Masembura, Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2007 (QDS: 1731A4)**

This is usually an interesting venue with some interesting birds and today was no exception.

Unfortunately the Mottled Swifts had finished breeding and dispersed so none of those were seen!

On arrival about 6 Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters flew over the cars; a good start. Everyone headed off into the valley north of the hill but I decided on the strenuous option and headed to the caves. A lot of small birds were flitting about, Tawny-flanked Prinia, Bar-throated Apalis, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird, Southern Black Tit, African Yellow White-eye, etc and a good number of Miombo Double-collared Sunbirds. Heading into a small patch of woodland I noticed some strange cries and a few biggish birds were disturbed – raptors? No, owls & hoping for Southern White-faced Scops-owl I snuck quietly about and disturbed them a few more times until eventually clear views proved them to be African Wood-owls! 2 adults and at least 2 youngsters, still wailing off to the left. More strange calls in the open near the cliff were never solved but here on the edge of the woodland was the amusing sight of over 30 Red-winged Starlings quietly peering into the canopy at the owls.

Then the heart-straining 'walk' up the west access, ideal for seriously accelerating the heart rate and fully stretching the calf muscles! But well worth any effort for the spectacular panoramas and achieving



the main aim of getting up here – finding the Cape Bunting... and the quiet. Zhenje's cliffs looked good for the swifts but none were evident, 2 Lizard Buzzards and White-crested Helmet-shrikes called far below along with many others, Rock Martin wheel overhead. Across to the seep/spring that trickles over the caves and a perch on a rock was productive. Black-throated Canary and Cinnamon-breasted Bunting were some of the more interesting birds coming to bathe and drink at the stream/pools and then on the right an alarmed gathering gathered to shout at a snake at a seep – at least 10 canaries plus about 6 Yellow-fronted Canary, Southern Masked-weavers, Chin-spot Batis and others. Abandoning my vigil to sneak up on the excitement a Cape Bunting (at last) flies to a rock near me; everyone disperses as the snake slips under the rocks.

The mountaintop woodland was quiet but I didn't linger and headed east to the descent. But taking a short-cut before the gentler slopes where we flushed Freckled Nightjar last time I opt for a new route; this turns out *rather steep* & requires tiny steps and *definitely* 'no-slip' boots, and into the north valley. Eventually I hear a bird party, most satisfying with Grey Penduline-tit, Green Wood-hoopoe, about 5 Retz's Helmet-shrike with the White-crested, a couple of White-breasted Cuckooshrike, Miombo Rock-thrush and Rufous-bellied Tit (yes!), amongst others.

Hurrying back to the group it turns out they saw this party earlier including Whyte's Barbet, 4(!) tits, and back at the caves 2 Lanner Falcons and a Black-chested Snake-eagle somewhere along the line.

67 species all-told. **Ian Riddell**

---

## **MATABELELAND BRANCH**

### **Southern Ground-hornbill Survey, Matopos**

Our industrious team undertook another trip to the southern fringe of the Matobo hills in April this year during the first school term. Elspeth Parry and Zelda James visited five schools. With the unstinting help and cooperation of the heads and many teachers, they were able to interview a wide range of pupils from the areas surrounding the schools. As before, good and bad omens were identified in association with the birds and similar myths and legends were repeated, but a reverence for their preservation predominated. Unfortunately for the birds, two strangers had been brought into the area to assist in building and they had killed and eaten three of the birds. This practice is unknown amongst the Matobo people. The roosting and possible nesting habits of several bird groups in these particular granite hills have been map referenced for future investigation.

The most recent trip on 11 May undertaken by Elspeth Parry, Bruce MacDonald and Evans Mabiza covered earlier terrain in the west/central Matopos. Two definite nest sites were located. At one, the pupils at a nearby school had watched the chick being fed by the adults, according to the Headmaster. During this visit a pair of Lanner Falcons was seen investigating the site. The second site was of great interest as the granite configuration was previously unknown to the author. This consists of a two-meter diameter deep hole in the centre of a high, large granite boulder accessible only by rope. A local resident advised that in 1967 some "white men" had done just that. This hole appears to be used as a night roost, the birds flying in every evening. One would assume it also contained a nest, but this needs further observation.

The destruction of window panes by Ground-hornbills at practically all the schools visited is a major problem, causing BLZ Matland some anxiety and posing a problem to the birds' survival. Children are sitting in draughty classrooms, extremely unpleasant conditions in the winter months or rainy weather. Few have warm clothing and most are barefoot. The team feel that a new approach is required to encourage protection of the birds amongst the communities. Plans are being formulated to introduce a pilot project, initially at one or two schools, to assist the schools and pupils solve their problems and thus hopefully protect Ground-hornbills from destruction. Details will be revealed at the appropriate time. **Elspeth Parry**

### **Dassie Survey, 4-6 May**

We have just returned from a remarkable weekend in the Matopos doing something we've never done before - but it's something we shall do again, at least annually, and possibly a second time later this year. Inungu Lodge was invaded by all sorts of persons who festooned themselves around the place, both within and without the dwelling, in and on a variety of containers – ranging from a caravan to mattresses on the verandah, a truck, tents, a trailer and (safely out of the reach of marauding lions) a brand new, shiny roof tent. These aforementioned persons form the nucleus of the Verreux's Eagle Dassie Survey

subgroup (*BEDS*), one of the many active (we could say *flailing*) arms of Matabeleland Branch - which we keep telling you about.

Anyway, I digress. We were there to carry out the Dassie Survey, previously undertaken by National Parks. On advice, the survey has been reformatted to take place over two days (instead of the erstwhile 28-30), by ten or more teams, each covering one site a day (so a total of 20 sites), within the Matobo National Park, preferably during the month of May.

Well, we're investigating the timing. This year favourable weather caused the trees to cling onto their foliage later than usual, partially shrouding some of our sites from view. And Simon-Oliver-David's law dictated that there was a cold snap, wind, and a front which moved in at the critical time on day two. Hardly conducive to frozen dassies emerging to recharge their batteries, their temperatures and their tummies.

Anyway, briefing took place on Friday evening, when we were joined by Colum Zhuwau and his team of from Matobo National Parks, Ongai Musemburi from the ORU in Harare, and Touch the Wild guides Lonely Masiane, Melusi Ncube and Mduduzi Ndlovu. Our heads buzzing with information, we eventually dispersed to enjoy sustenance of one type or another - in most cases both, and in the latter case probably double - then toddled off for a short, sleepless night, afraid that we might not wake in time to leave at 5.00 am as instructed. We need, however, not have worried - at 4.30 there was a massive clanging, shouting and gnashing of teeth perpetrated, we were to discover, by our usually friendly, hospitable and tolerant host. Obviously his moment had come, and he felt the need to reinforce the fact that he was in charge of the exercise (which is a lie, he's only in half-charge if not a third), the joint and all that happened within and without. (On Sunday, despite begging him to use a little tinkling bell, we thought it prudent to awake and arise well before time.)

On both mornings, National Parks arrived with a flourish, bang on time and in immaculate uniforms. Touch the Wild came quietly, slightly early, and also immaculately kitted out. The inmates and outmates floundered about in the dark, some speechful and some not, some with hair brushed, most with not - but nonetheless all were up and away on schedule.

We were to sit at our sites from dawn till sun-up. Well, speaking personally, dawn was a long time coming and the sun never upped (in my bit of our patch). The scenery was wonderful and we waited in nervous anticipation (because we'd come without our cattle clicking counters) for a flurry of dassies to emerge from their dens. Well, that as such didn't happen but during our 3-hour stint we spied a few (but more than most other teams, I might add) - a family of Yellow-spotted adults, juveniles and pups and then two adult Rock. Really good!

We have to say that our team at site 12/12-A2 would have done better than anyone else but for three negative influences. Firstly, distraction. The chap on the neighbouring site, located high on a dwala, kept walking up and down, up and down, from the top to a little cup further down the rock face, and we could not help but watch and admire his agility on a sheer slope - akin to a gecko. Then, just as we were getting back on the job, an invisible body uttered a series of bloodcurdling warning screams (as only dassies can). And the third and final straw was a hungry African Hawk-eagle hunting just below the top of the ridge. Well, if you were a dassie, would *you* have emerged in the circumstances?

Everyone's enthusiasm, not to mention energy, was boundless. No sooner had we returned and had breakfast (in some cases people even *washed*) off we went again for the rest of both days to check our - or someone else's - Black Eagle territories.

This was a wonderful weekend, we enjoyed the exceptional hospitality of the Hubbard family to whom we offer our warm thanks, the unbeatable environment and the fact that all our expenses were paid for by the National Office. (Thank you, Chip. We actually had some wherewithal left, so we'll spend it wisely on your behalf, which as you know, we're pretty good at.) **Julia Duprée**

### **Barn Swallows At How Mine**

We're just over half way through our 12-month contract, all production work has been done, all signs installed and our interim report has gone off to the Netherlands.

We went down to How Mine, four of us and our wine, to see what was what with the swallow population. There were still millions there and clearly the numbers had not diminished as had been suggested earlier on.

We joined up with Laften Tembo, our marvellous Swallow Warden, and had the pleasure of meeting for the first time new member, Webster Mawire, who also lives at How Mine. On departure we asked Webster to keep an eye on the roost and let us know as soon as the swallows departed.

Guess what? The next day, Friday 13<sup>th</sup> April, they went. Just upped and went, just like that, without a word or backward glance. Someone suggested that perhaps they were upset by our new sign depicting pictures of the raptors that grab them on their way into the roost. Others felt that now they knew the way home, thanks to our other new sign indicating the migration route, someone senior in the ranks made a sudden decision to lead the flock off, so that they had enough time to breed and raise the kids before returning to How Mine. Who's to say!

So from September onwards, watch this space. **Julia Duprée**

### **Talk To Birdlife Botswana (Francistown)**

I've just returned from a routine shopping trip to Francistown. One of the highlights of the visit was the opportunity to address members of BLB Francistown Branch to bring them up-to-date on the Verreaux's Eagle Survey and our other activities.

I had great pride in telling them of our active and supportive membership, the latest on the Black Eagle Survey, new Dassie Survey, Southern Ground-hornbill Survey, Aisleby Survey and Barn Swallow project, and was able to show off our *Enjoy the Birds* education booklets in two languages, *Honeyguide*, Matland Musings, teeshirt production, Waterfowl Surveys and Birding Big Day. And, as I told them, *there's more* – there will be our IBAs!

They were extremely receptive and came up with one or two excellent suggestions for fund-raising, which we will investigate forthwith – probably fifthwith actually, as the firstwith to fourthwith slots are already filled. But their over-riding comment was that we in Matland make them breathless just listening to all that we are doing. Not surprising since at times we make ourselves breathless! **Julia Duprée**

---

## **TAIL FEATHERS**

### **Endurance Flying – par for the course**

Four Bar-tailed Godwits have flown their way into the record books with non-stop flights of more than 10,000km from New Zealand to the Yellow Sea. The godwits, tracked by satellite transmitters, did not stop to eat or drink on the first leg of their northern migration, which will end in Alaska.

Dr Phil Battley, an ecologist at Massey University's Palmerston North campus, said it had been suspected that the birds could fly such distances but now it had been proved. No other animal had shown such endurance, he said. Dr Battley said it was the first time transmitters had been implanted in New Zealand into the female birds, which took from 6 to 7 days to cover the route, flying up to 2km high at an average speed of 56 km/h. Two of the birds had flown from Golden Bay at the top of the South Island and two from the Firth of Thames, covering distances of 10,063km to 10,205km.

When the godwits set out from New Zealand they are clinically obese but they lose about half their bodyweight in each leg of the migration. Upon arriving in the tidal flats of the Yellow Sea, off China and South Korea, they would land with drooping wings, have a big drink and then stay on for a month or two to refuel. "It's the equivalent of riding the Tour de France but keeping it up for a week non-stop."

The godwits would then head to Alaska where they were expected by mid-May.

In September they would return, flying in a straight line across the Pacific Ocean to the New Zealand coast, from Parengarenga Harbour in the Far North to Invercargill.

*From a New Zealand newspaper. Roberts' gives the birds' size as 36-40 cm & wingspan as 200-230.*

## **NOTICEBOARD**

### **African Bird Club**

Interested in joining the African Bird Club? Fees are payable to the BirdLife Zimbabwe National Office, and are held by BLZ for small conservation projects in Zimbabwe. The fees are always double the current BLZ fees and are now \$40,000 per member.

For your fees you get two high quality, informative bulletins (journals) each year which include ABC news, details of events worldwide, unique round up of ornithological news from all around Africa, species identification papers illustrated with photographs and coloured drawings, research papers and survey results on Afro-tropical and Palaearctic-African migrants, conservation studies, site guides and trip reports, members letters and literature reviews.

**PUBLISHED BY JAY KAY PUBLISHING**

SHOP 5, PATRIC COURT, 113 NELSON MANDELA AVE, HARARE – TEL/FAX 733463