

BABBLER

The Newsletter of -

BirdLife Zimbabwe

The BirdLife International Partner in Zimbabwe

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CONGRATULATIONS TO DR. CHIP CHIRARA

The Members and Staff of BLZ, wish to congratulate their Director, Dr Chip Chirara, on his recent appointment to the position of Chairman of the Council of the African Partnership, CAP. This is a very prestigious position and brings great credit to Dr Chirara, who was previously Chairman of the Technical Advisory Committee of the Southern African Group.

Dr Chirara becomes the Chairman of the African Partnership which is made up of 23 partners and is one of 5 Regional Groupings which make up the Global Partners of Bird Life International.

CAP has in the past met annually but will now meet every two years. Every fourth year all the Partners attend a Global meeting to discuss BLI Strategy over the next 4 years. The last meeting of this kind was held in Johannesburg in 2003. CAP works out the strategic plan for Africa and prioritises research plans for the Region in line with the funding that is available. The main function is to drive the Regional Programme to achieve the agreed goals, to share lessons learnt in the Region, exchange ideas, and set up Site Support Groups, a CAP initiative that is being taken up by other Regions.

Dr Chirara is now one of the leaders in the corporate world of BLI and will be at the heart of the committees that make global decisions that will affect the fate of birdlife throughout the planet. We wish him well in his new post and are confident that he will bring success for himself and increase the respect that the other CAP members have for BLZ as an association that values the wonders of birdlife.

ACTIVITIES

MASHONALAND BRANCH

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

Regular outings

Sundays 2nd December & 6th January: Mukuvisi Woodlands 06:30 a.m.

Directions: Turn off Chiremba Road into Ford Rd. (opposite Queensdale Shops) and continue down to Blatherwick Rd (T Junction). Turn right and the gate is about 150 meters on the left. Bring chairs and refreshments. Also a reasonable tip for the guard who will be on hand to unlock the gate to let cars in and out, remembering the price of a loaf of bread and the value of your vehicle.

Sundays 9th December & 13th January: Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary 06:30 a.m.

Meet at Marimba Shopping Centre, Samora Machel Avenue West. Bring chairs and refreshments. Beginners are most welcome and spare binoculars will be available.

Sundays 16th December & 20th January: 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. Remember your gumboots if the rains have been good.

Saturday Morning, 15th December: Mukuvisi Hide 07:00 a.m.

Meet in the MAIN car park, where the public entrance is off Glenara Avenue at 7:00 a.m. The walk will take you to the hide overlooking the pond and to the Long-crested Eagle nest.

Saturday Morning, 19th January: Greystone Park Nature Reserve 07:00 a.m.

Meet in the car park, on Halford Rd off Gaydon Road at 7:00 a.m. The dam and the walk below the dam give a good range of habitats and a surprising number of species.

On Saturdays, bring chairs and refreshments for a cuppa while you tick the list – Dave still aims to get you away by 9:00 a.m. for shopping!

No 4th Sunday outing in December

Saturday and Sunday, January 12th & 13th: Alex Masterson's Vlei Walks 6:30 a.m.

Directions: drive to the end of Princess Margaret Rd, turn left, continue to the new houses. Parking is in a cul-de-sac with a small fenced off area at the end. Bring some cash for the guard. This outing replaces the 4th Sunday outing for January. Don't forget your gumboots.

Evening Meetings

No evening meeting in December

FRIDAY, 18th January, Mashonaland Branch AGM where reports for 2007 will be presented and a new committee elected. Anyone who would like to join the committee should contact a current member.

Please bring a plate of snacks for bring and share and stay for a chat after the meeting

Venue: Bowls Pavilion, Old Hararians Association, Drummond Chaplin Street, Milton Park.
Time: 6.00 for 6.30 p.m. A cash bar will be available. Security is provided and, if necessary, **POWER BY GENERATOR.**

MATABELELAND BRANCH

Monthly Outings

January. Waterfowl counts at various locations, including Aisleby and Hwange. Details to be confirmed. Contact Julia.

Saturday, 9th February: Matabeleland AGM. Details to be confirmed later.

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

EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB

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

Contact Carl Beel on 020 65525 or 023 416249 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

Important Bird Areas (IBAs) Project Report

The Important Bird Areas project in Zimbabwe is focusing on eleven of the twenty IBAs that are in protected areas in Zimbabwe. The project areas are Matobo Hills National Park, Save-Runde Junction, (Gonarezhou National Park), Middle Zambezi Valley (Mana Pools National Park), Chizarira National Park, Hwange National Park, Chimanimani Mountains, Nyanga Mountains, Batoka Gorge, Robert McIlwaine Recreational Park (Lake Chivero), Stapleford Forest and Chirinda Forest. The new IBA project manager has visited Chimanimani Mountains during the Blue Swallow survey in October.

In this issue we are updating members on IBA work that has been done and plans for the remaining part of 2007. The main stakeholders have been identified e.g. Parks and Wildlife Management Authority (PWMA), Forest Company of Zimbabwe, CIRAD, The World Conservation Union (IUCN) and World Wildlife Fund (WWF). The focal persons from each stakeholder at national level have been nominated pending confirmation of acceptance. The nature of work in the IBA Project is collaboration in biodiversity monitoring with existing institutions. Present work includes stakeholder analysis through questionnaires to characterize main collaborating stakeholders, defining their current and potential roles and responsibilities and defining their fears, interests, problems and expectations in the IBA project. Development of awareness and project publicity materials is underway. A short training course on the application of geographic information systems (GIS) and remote sensing (RS) in IBA will be organized by end of 2007 or early 2008. It is anticipated that the mapping of IBA boundaries would be done in the process.

PWMA is processing BLZ 2008 permit to access Important Bird Areas under Parks Estates. Permission will be sought from the Forest Company of Zimbabwe to access IBAs under Forestry Estates. Checklists of all the 20 IBAs will be produced during the course of the project and members' input will be kindly sought in this regard. For further information on the project do not hesitate to conduct the office.

Kanisios Mukwashi, Conservation Manager

Chirinda Forest (IBA Code ZW008)

Chirinda Forest is located in the Eastern Highlands of Zimbabwe, situated 30km south of Chipinge town. This forest covers two rounded hilltops of Mount Selinda that rises to 1,200m altitude from the surrounding plateau and Mozambican coastal plain. The largest part of the forest is covered by beautiful evergreen moist forest with dominant trees being *Chrysophyllum*, *Craibia* and *Trichilia*. One of the most significant features in this forest is existence of the Big Tree (giant specimen of *Khaya anthotheca*) that is considered to be over 1,000 years old and is a National Monument. There is one species of butterfly which is endemic to the area. The key bird species in this IBA are Swynnerton's Robin and the Chirinda Apalis. Increase of human population around the forest in recent years has become a major threat to this IBA because of increased cutting of trees for firewood and cultivation. More work needs to be done in monitoring this IBA which falls under the jurisdiction of the Forestry Commission.

Blue Swallow Survey, 26th October – 4th November, 2007

BirdLife Zimbabwe members and staff carried out a national Blue Swallow survey in the Eastern Highlands between 26th of October and the 4th of November 2007. Areas explored were Bvumba, Nyanga, Honde Valley (Nyanga Lowlands), Penhalonga and Chimanimani. Seven teams carried out the work and over 200 Blue Swallows were recorded. The report on the survey is being compiled. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to members who participated in the Blue Swallow survey. We value and appreciate their involvement as they took time off their work to undertake this important survey. The quality of the data that was collected is of high standard and most people took time to record other species as well. **Dr. C. Chirara**

On Saturday 27 October, it was very misty and drizzled at times at the Alumina Mine near Penhalonga. Only the Blue Swallows were flying around. On Sunday 28 October the weather improved – it was sunny but cool with some mist. All BLZ members at the various sites saw Blue Swallows during the recording times between 10.00 – 11.00 hours. As they flew close by or perched on fences nearby, the white feathers on each bird could be easily seen. By lunchtime, not many were still flying. **Leslee Maasdorp**

Blue Swallows at Mountain Home, Penhalonga, Mutare on the Estate of J.O. Meikle

The following notes are of a talk by John Meikle given on the occasion of the Blue Swallow (*Hirundo atrocaerulea*) Survey, 26th-28th October 2007. This group has been present in the Alumina Mina area of the estate for many years and has been regularly observed by John. The order of the remarks, recorded by Ken Dixon, has no significance,

1. The Swallows arrive with the northwest wind between the 2nd (2003) or 3^d (2004) and the 17th (latest). After the first appearance they disappear for 3-4 days before settling in.
2. They leave around the 4th April (2004 and 2007) after a post-guti southeast wind.
3. Birds fly in mist thanks to their near impermeable plumage but not in heavy rain.
4. Time is spent resting, perched on barbed wire fence in good weather but seem not to land in mist.
5. Traditionally they nested in ant-bear holes but this animal has now been poached out and they have taken to using prospecting mine shafts, about 1m x 30cms which were dug by the UN after the Mozambique Civil War. These are usually about 4-8m deep with footholds down one side used by the swallows for their mud cups. These shafts have been cleared around the entry by J Meikle and marked with a post.
6. It is important not to approach the holes while the swallows are building nests or laying, as they will abandon. Later, the nestlings can be observed without danger of driving them away.
7. The wheezy chee-chee-chee call is diagnostic.
8. Although there seems to be suitable habitat up to 1912m, the swallows are not seen above 1750m. This may be due to the absence of nesting sites above that altitude.
9. They need a combination of short grass and forest patches with suitable nesting sites.
10. On one occasion a group of 15 was seen apparently sand-bathing.

MASHONALAND BRANCH

Hippo Pools 14th – 17th September 2007 (QDS: 1731B2)

The Mashonaland branch went back to Hippo Pools for its annual outing this year after a 2 year break. Although it is disappointing that the economic hardships and the shortage of fuel means that we cannot go further afield to places like RIFA and the Eastern Districts, we still did not manage to fill the accommodation booked, as only 10 people out of 12 places managed to attend. In my opinion these outings are a very satisfying combination of being in the bush, good birding and good company.

On the journey between Madziwa Mine and Hippo Pools most of us stopped to check the mine quarry where the Black Stork nest is and here we found 3 juveniles at the nest. Other highlights seen by various parties driving in included the first ever record of a Cabanis's Bunting and a Dark Chanting-goshawk. The three of us that got to Hippo Pools first arrived at about mid-morning on Friday, settled in and then went on a mid-day bird walk upstream of the Mazowe River through the riverine forest. At the start of our walk there were many birds to be seen in the flowering trees around our chalet and highlights included 2 pairs of Livingstone's Flycatcher – one of the Hippo Pools specials – Yellow-breasted Apalis, Yellow-bellied Greenbul and Purple-banded Sunbird. Away from the chalets we found several Klaas's Cuckoo, several Ashy Flycatcher, Trumpeter Hornbill and Red-throated Twinspot. Our walk ended at the Umfurudzi River where 3 Red-billed Oxpecker were seen on cattle. At about 2 p.m. we returned to the chalets to find the other 5 members had arrived and had managed to pick up a Narina Trogon in the nearby riverine forest lining the downstream inlet. Our host, Ian Jarvis, told us that a leopard had recently killed a duiker near the dam wall in the hills behind the main complex. Six of us went for a walk in this area later that afternoon and saw a Wahlberg's Eagle and a Bearded Scrub-robin as highlights.

Each evening we anticipated the flypast along the river of the White-backed Night-herons that we had seen on our last trip. We were not disappointed as we saw either one or both birds of the pair every evening at about 15 minutes after sunset. Later we would pick up the calls of Fiery-necked Nightjar and

Freckled Nightjar followed by the calls of African Wood-owl, African Scops-owl and African Barred Owlets and Thick-tailed Bushbaby.

After coffee and biscuits at first light on Saturday, we set off on a 4-hour walk upstream through the riverine forest to about 400 metres past the Umfurudzi River confluence. Thankfully the government crackdown on gold panning had effectively stopped this activity in the national park for the past several months, but cattle were still straying in from the communal land. The Flame Combretum (*Combretum apiculatum*) were in full bloom and attracting a lot of birds including 4 species of sunbird, 2 species of oriole, 2 species of weaver, Red-backed Mannikins and hundreds of Yellow-throated Petronia. Other highlights included Brown Snake-eagle, Water Thick-knee, a pair of nesting Giant Kingfisher near the chalets, Swallow-tailed Bee-eater and Grey-headed Bush-shrike. At lunch time two more members arrived but they would only be with us for a day. That afternoon most of us drove to the African Crowned Eagle nest site and had good views of one of these eagles at the nest. Three of us did not go on the drive and went on a 1km walk downstream to the weir and back along the air strip through the back dam. The party on the drive picked up a Red-billed Hornbill and large numbers of Cinnamon-breasted Bunting in the hills while the river walk added African Green-pigeon to our list.

On Sunday morning nine of us drove to the mopane forest near the big baobab and then walked to the baobab, back through the mopane forest into the hills along the yellow route for about 2.5km and back the same way to the cars. Our walk was a very pleasant one and near the baobab heard Racquet-tailed Rollers which Ian Riddell went to look at. About a kilometre past the mopane forest we encountered a herd of about 20 sable antelope and heard more oxpeckers. Ian Riddell took off by himself along the blue route up a kopje to the west of us and found a pair of African Crowned Eagle, a pair of African Hawk-eagle and a Grey Tit-flycatcher. At the back of the same hill the rest of us saw a pair of Augur Buzzard at a nest and a pair of Mocking Cliff-chats. We also heard Boulder Chat, saw Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill, Rock Martin, Retz's Helmet-shrike and Lazy Cisticola and Croaking Cisticola(?). Back at the chalets we managed to track down a male Narina Trogon in the same riverine forest near the chalets where one was seen on Friday and most of us had good views of it. Geoff Lowe returned at about 2 p.m. after a long, hot walk to the Verreaux's Eagle nest site and reported that although he had failed to find the Verreaux's Eagle, he had found another pair of African Hawk-eagle potentially breeding at a nest and a pair of Lanner Falcon. That afternoon the Carters drove to the mine shaft and observed the Little Swift colony there, while the rest of us took short walks both up and downstream of the chalets.

Monday was our day of departure and in the morning Ian Jarvis arranged to ferry us across the river to look at a Spotted Eagle-owl nest in the small game sanctuary in the communal land. The owl nest contained 2 eggs and one of the parent birds was nearby. We also added Swainson's Spurfowl, Yellow-bellied Eremomela, Pale Flycatcher and White-browed Sparrow-weaver to our list there. The whole time we were in the sanctuary we were followed around by a tame female eland which had to be shepherded by two of Ian's workers. Unfortunately this animal decided to follow us back across the river where it caused a stir amongst a party of campers. Fortunately Ian's staff managed to coax it back across the river to the sanctuary.

Our total species count was 147 for the Umfurudzi National Park but only 146 for the QDS in which we were based, because the Black Stork were not in that QDS. This was fewer than on our last visit and missing specials included Dickinson's Kestrel, Pel's Fishing-owl, Collared Sunbird and Broad-tailed Paradise-whydah. However we did find 14 diurnal raptors, some of which were potentially breeding and other breeding birds. **Richard Dennison**

Education Department Report, Friday 16th November 2007

There was a disappointing turnout to hear Leslee Maasdorp talk about the achievements and challenges she faced during 2007. Leslee is a truly marvellous and inspiring lady, now over 80 years old (forgive me, Leslee) who did more for conservation in Zimbabwe in 2007 than almost anyone you can mention. This is because Leslee travels Zimbabwe, assisting schools and teachers to create oases of growth in the so often barren schools grounds, to help teach the children of Zimbabwe about the importance of trees and shrubs and grass, and therefore birds, in their lives and their future.

The department concentrates on 4 areas:

1. Bird Awareness;

2. Greening of School Grounds;
3. Community Involvement;
4. IBAs

In her travels, Leslee has witnessed great destruction of the bio-diversity of Zimbabwe over the years. The cutting down of trees and indiscriminate burning has created areas with short grasses and no trees and, with current rainfalls and climate, no chance of the trees being replaced.

At Glenview, a patch of woodland has been developed over the last 10 years because the 2000 children (hot-seating) never had an opportunity to see woodland. Now each class has a plot and can grow things such as paw-paws to take home to their parents. Birds are attracted to the gardens and the children can see those as well.

BLZ now has a contract with Murowa Mines to generate habitat at the school. Although there is a large dam nearby there is a single tree for shade. BLZ employ 2 people, Alexander to teach about birds and Elena who runs a tree nursery. An unfortunate side-effect of the developing vegetable gardens is pesticides for the bugs which are killing the birds! Also, 1st December, just before schools break up, is National Tree-planting Day. The trees are planted and then the schools are closed for 6 weeks! The conservation groups at the schools are now setting up rosters of children, particularly at Murowa, who will see to it that the trees and plants are watered during school holidays. There is now a cluster of 5 schools in the area, each having received BLZ books, Bird Field Guides and a new pair of binos.

Leslee tries to get the teachers to understand that anything on the ground – pebbles, straw, etc. – is better than bare ground as they will not only stop dust but stop rain run-off and erosion of the soil.

In Harare, there is a cluster of 30 schools and an annual festival is held. This year **Southerton Primary School** came first and the teacher, **Mrs. Maphosa**, kindly came to tell us about her Bird Club. With 50 members, it is almost too big. The children enjoy seeing the birds and have provided bird-baths at which they can watch them. Some have volunteered to go to the school twice a week during the holidays to keep the baths full. They like to identify the birds they have seen using the Field Guide. The children draw pictures of birds with awareness messages such as “Don’t take eggs from nests!” which they hang up around the school. Mrs. Maphosa has arranged for the Club to have a Bird Awareness day each year at which they try to raise the awareness of the other children through song and dance, poems, posters and plays, written by the children themselves. The parents also enjoy coming to see what their children have done and learn in the process. The resource books provided by BLZ help the teachers to educate everyone on how to integrate all areas of conservation and club members persuade their parents to help birds by planting crops for them! The Club has had successful campaigns changing attitudes, for example, to owls. **Well done, Mrs. Maphosa!**

Community involvement, epitomised by the parents supporting their children in the Bird Club at Southerton School, is very important at Murowa and this year 150 people will attend the Rio Tinto International Bird Day there, including BLZ Mash members Dave Gray and Ian Riddell. The chief and headmen are involved and the miners’ families (who live elsewhere) are coming to see the diamond mine for the first time and to join the bird-watch.

At the IBAs, the Education Department is very involved with the Blue Swallow and Southern Ground-hornbill surveys and are trying to get the locals to become observers. Blue Swallow posters have been distributed to schools, hotels, lodges, etc. throughout the Eastern Highlands. The Eastern Highlands Tea Estate at Aberfoyle and Tanganda Tea Estate near Chipinge are very supportive, the former having produced a Blue swallow poster in Shona and the latter providing food and transport to the workshop. When Leslee’s transport broke down, they provided a vehicle for her while they repaired it.

At the end of the meeting, Rolf Chenaux-Repond presented a number of books to Education from **Celia Manson** of Seldom Seen fame.

What I have reported here is only a small part of what Leslee has to tell us. The schools out there, particularly in rural areas, are battling with little or no resources. They are desperate for any small support from us. **If you have any magazines, not just about birding or conservation but Fairlady, Essentials etc. etc., please take them to the office for Leslee to distribute. If you have plants or trees or books or cash, they will all be most welcome. Leslee deserves our support.** Jennifer Carter.

Monavale Vlei, Sunday 18th November 2007

18 birders arrived for a two hour stroll around Monavale Vlei with a total of 67 species counted including those heard calling from the woodland fringes and those flying over. The grass is just coming through after the fierce fires of a couple of months ago and 87mm rain recorded for the first half of November. The vlei birds - White-winged Widowbirds, Yellow-mantled Widowbirds, Red-collared Widowbirds, Yellow Bishops, and Southern Red Bishops are changing into their breeding dress but still moving in large mixed flocks. The abundance of Orange-breasted Waxbills is remarkable. Warblers heard: Lesser Swamp-warbler, African Reed-warbler, Little Rush-warbler. Seen and heard (listen for the duet call of this bird) Dark-capped Yellow Warbler. The Kurrichane But tonquail flushed by Rolf Chenaux-Repond was a pleasing record. Raptors – the ever present Long-crested Eagle emerged from the reeds at the confluence of the streams, Black-shouldered Kite and Gabar Goshawk. Many European Bee-eaters..., Cisticolas: Croaking Cisticola, Zitting Cisticola, Red-faced Cisticola, Rattling Cisticola. Jimmy saw a Cuckoo Finch earlier on in the week.

If you wish to take a stroll on Monavale Vlei call our Vlei Scout, Jimmy Muropa on 0912 772771 – he will happily show you around. He has great knowledge of the Vlei after more than two years of daily hands on experience. **Dorothy Wakeling**

The 15th Mana Pools Game Count 21st - 24th September 2007.

We (Geoff Lowe and the much extended Rockingham-Gill family) were in position earlier. Bird watching takes second place to concentrating on game, so bird counts were low, nevertheless some very good sightings were had.

At Nyamepi Camp in front of our tent, two Long-toed Lapwings, two Squacco Heron and a Rufous-bellied Heron came to visit our patch of waterweed once a day. A White-crowned Lapwing had two eggs that were found and eaten by a leguaan. It was too early for palaeartic waders but those recorded were Common Sandpiper and Wood Sandpipers, Common Greenshank and Little Stint. At Mana Mouth, I counted 105 Southern Carmine Bee-eaters excavating about 60 nest holes and 26 White-fronted Bee-eaters amongst them digging 13 nest holes. The latter are easier to count than the Carmines. 100 African Openbills flew past the camp and settled further downstream, some one said they then made up a flock of 400. In a nearby Kigelia (Sausage) Tree, a male Red-headed Weaver fed on its flowers. We heard African Mourning-dove and well away from the river I saw 5 African Green-pigeon in a green woody climber. Further away from camp at Green Pond there was a lone Hippo with a Grey Heron and a Cattle Egret on its back at the same time. There we saw a Western Banded Snake-eagle drinking at 3 in the afternoon, and 7 Spur-winged Goose were there too. Further upstream I found my first Bateleur nest, there were remnants of a broken egg on the ground (Not certain it was a Bateleurs egg). 30 Marabou Stork were settled at a drying pool one day, but the next morning they walked about a kilometre attracted by a dead waterbuck ram killed by a lioness for her three cubs. About 60 White-backed Vultures and 6 Hooded Vultures were also waiting for her to move and there was a Lappet-faced Vulture circling overhead and on its way down. One flock of 14 Red-billed Oxpecker was on a small herd of 8 Eland. They here also recorded on Hippo and Buffalo. Last year we counted 30 on a herd of 200 Buffalo. We also saw them on a wider range of game, including Kudu, Impala and, unusually, a sub adult Elephant. Helmeted Guineafowl numbers have dropped probably due to predator pressure. Whenever the cover is poor, because of poor rains, their numbers fall. Baboon and Vervet Monkey numbers were high. I counted 12 Swainson's Spurfowl and note a slight increase in their numbers or was it better visibility? I saw no Bohm's Spinetails and no African Skimmers. Hazel Hatton lent me her field card and not recorded by me were Glossy Ibis, Purple-crested Turaco, African Scops-owl, Greater Honeyguide, Eastern Nicator and Southern Red Bishop.

What is important is that our field card should be reviewed and should be compatible with the South African Bird Atlas Project.

Visits to out of the way places will always be of interest. **David Rockingham-Gill**

Bird Slides by Dr. Harrison, Friday, 19th October

Dr. Harrison got interested in bird photography many years ago after being invited to join Peter Ginn, renowned ornithologist and bird photographer, in a hide at Peterhouse. Since then, he has spent many hours in hides in all sorts of inhospitable places and conditions, pursuing his hobby to professional standards. Alex Masterson has dragged him off to flooded vleis to photograph Flufftails and Crakes; he

has sat on the edge of granite kopjes for hours on end and even overcome vertigo to climb a 5 storey scaffolding to photograph a raptor on the nest. Having spent several hours up there, he was about to leave when the bird obliged and Dr. Harrison got his picture.

The result of this dedication was a truly memorable evening for BLZ Mash members. Dr. Harrison decided early on to aim to illustrate the distinctive, identifying feature of a bird. Thus his photo of Spur-winged Goose at Lake Kariba showed the spurs on the 'elbow' of the wings and the White-starred Robin displayed his star. He explained that, to capture a bird returning to the nest, you need first a perch near the nest for it to land on for a moment, and perhaps a leaf over the entrance, to force the bird to pause long enough for the remote to be clicked. With the powerful lenses needed for bird photography, it is essential to use a tripod and a remote. Pushing a button on the camera causes a blurred picture.

Dr. Harrison has learned a great deal about birds, having watched them for so many years. It was a special evening, listening to him impart his knowledge and watching wonderful photos of birds of all sizes and in many places. Thank you, Dr. Harrison, for an evening to remember. **Jennifer Carter**

MATABELELAND BRANCH

Barn Swallow Project

Our one year contract with Vogelbescherming Nederland (VBN) came to an end on 31 October but we are very chuffed to have been granted a 12 month extension. Thus we're steaming at full speed ahead to complete what we set out to do. As you know, the "Swallow Season" is limited to the months of October to early April – our contract started two months into this season, and although we worked up front to complete printing and get the signs up and running – well, not exactly running but firmly pegged into the ground – we only had half a Swallow Season left before off they went, on 14 April, back to Europe, where they reckoned the grass was greener – too true!

But Africa is irresistible and having done what they went to do (lay their eggs and raise the kids), the swallows started returning to How Mine on 3 October since when their numbers are rapidly building up. You've probably noticed them whizzing all over the place, ducking, swinging and diving overhead. A couple of weeks ago they gave us somewhat of a fright as there they all were, hundreds of them, lined up on the wires, looking very much as if they were preparing to leave again.

Two schools have so far visited the roost and we're expecting several more. And a lovely surprise awaited us during our last trip to host a visiting school. There they were, dressed in their best, Tembo's Team – twelve members of How Mine Primary School Standard 6 who form the nucleus of a new conservation club, led by our Swallow Warden, Laften Tembo!

If you're in our area, why not make time to go out to How Mine in the early evening, enjoy a sundowner and the awe-inspiring sight of millions of Barn Swallows streaming in over your head to roost. It is a truly unique experience (as the safari companies would say)! **Julia Duprée**

Southern Ground-hornbill Survey

Our Survey team, Elspeth Parry, Zelda James, Bruce McDonald and Evans Mabiza, has not been standing still. They have made several long trips into rural Matobo Hills, carrying with them books, clothes, food, window glass, putty (you-name-it-they've-got-it) for distribution to various schools.

To quote from Elspeth's latest report, the *raison d'être* of the Southern Ground-hornbill Survey in the Matobo rural areas is to assess the viability of the birds and involve communities in their preservation and conservation; and to disseminate other appropriate methods of conservation by the establishment of conservation clubs in each school.

It is felt that by involving communities at school level, not only will we obtain relevant data on Ground-hornbill nests, roosts, numbers, sexes and ages, but also the threat of extinction will be removed from the birds. One way of achieving these goals is to enable the repair of school windows broken by Ground-hornbills. The other is to establish conservation clubs at each school. Both are well under way. The windows at two schools have been repaired, and a third will be done before year end. Glass and putty is supplied by Matabeleland Branch sponsors and labour by the communities themselves. So far 9 conservation clubs have been established, each involving 10 children and 2 leaders from areas around their school, and a teacher in charge. Each has been supplied with a starter pack of notebook and pens for recording bird movements, sexes etc., a coloured sheet of growing phases and sexes, books on conservation and a bird poster.

To date 20 groups of Ground-hornbills have been confirmed and logged on a survey map, and aerial photographs of rural Matopos have been acquired to assist in locating and identifying roosts and nest sites. Plans for next year include more of the same, with visits to another 20 schools in order to spread the word about the birds!

The survey team has carried out its work quietly and modestly and its members are to be congratulated for taking this survey far beyond the mere distribution of questionnaires, which is how it all started. They have shown the utmost respect and courtesy to provincial officials and the communities from whom they sought and were granted permission to move around in the rural areas and communicate with the people. This has led to an excellent working relationship between everyone involved.

And they've done all this without a formal budget! However, we are grateful to the Harare office for supplying fuel vouchers sufficient to cover their mileage to date.

We are also indebted to Rob Stirling for supplying window glass at a reduced rate, and Harold Westwood of the Bulawayo South Rotary Club who donated educational books sourced from Book Aid International, the Ranfurly Library Service. Their kindness and generosity is much appreciated.

Julia Duprée

Hillside Dams Walk. On Saturday 15th September 2007, 10 members gathered for a walk at Hillside Dams. The area has been a bird sanctuary for many years but of late low maintenance and poor security have resulted in a decline in popularity and fewer visitors. However there is a new initiative afoot to rehabilitate the Dams and the Hillside Dams Conservation Trust has invited input from BLZ Matabeleland as well as other interested parties. With this in mind, we spent a happy couple of hours wandering around the area, covering the upper dam, the aloe garden, and part of the wilderness area with open grassland and scrub. We recorded 42 species of birds including: at the dam – Little Grebe (Dabchicks), Blacksmith Lapwing, Three-banded Plover, Hamerkop, Pied Kingfisher, African Pied Wagtail, Grey Heron & Wood Sandpiper; and on our wander – Harlequin Quail, White-winged Widowbird, Lesser Honeyguide, Orange-breasted Bush-shrike, Southern Red Bishop & Red-billed Quelea. We discussed suggestions for development of the area while enjoying a cup of tea, and adding a few more species to our list, and will be submitting a report to the HDC Trust. If any other members/readers have had any experience with similar projects and would like to share their ideas we would be glad to hear them. **Adele Edwards**

The Soapstone Birds of Great Zimbabwe: Meaning and Significance

On Sunday 11 November Paul Hubbard again gave BLZ a most interesting talk which stimulated a lot of interest and discussion. The following is Paul's summary of his talk:

The soapstone birds first came to light in 1889 when the explorer Willie Posselt removed one from the site of Great Zimbabwe and carried it back to South Africa. During later excavations, a further four and a half birds were recovered by Theodore Bent and sent to the South African museum, while two more recovered by Richard Hall in 1905 remained in Zimbabwe. Since their discovery, many ideas about their function and meaning have been advanced from the fanciful to factual. Most researchers agree that the birds represent birds of prey. It is not possible to identify species because the carvings have human and avian elements combined in fantastic ways. It is only through interpreting the carvings in light of where they were found at Great Zimbabwe as well as the living cultural traditions of the Shona and Venda peoples, that sensible ideas may be developed. Contenders for the avian model of the stone birds include or the African Fish-eagle, Crowned Hornbill or various species of hawks. Current research favours the idea that the birds incorporate elements of the Bateleur Eagle due to the universal importance and significance of this bird in Shona culture today. Examining the use of the birds in the iconography of the nations of Rhodesia and Zimbabwe, the importance of these artefacts to the people of these nations is apparent; surprisingly for very similar reasons. **Paul Hubbard**

Visit to Nesting Colony of Carmine Bee-eaters

A good number of us (25 in all) set off for Randells' Farm, about 25 km to the North of Bulawayo, on 17th November. The objective was to see the Southern Carmine Bee-eaters which have nested there intermittently for a number of years. We were not disappointed; the birds put on a great show. We estimated there were up to 200 present, many of which were bringing large insects such as dragonflies and hornets to their young in the nest holes. The nesting colony is situated in a high vertical bank overlooking the Umgusa River and is fairly secure from predators, both animal and human. Sometimes White-fronted Bee-eaters nest alongside the Carmines but we saw very few of this particular species on

this visit. There was, however, a flock of about 12 Horus Swifts which wheeled about close to the Carmine colony, but none was seen to enter a nest hole. Several Barn Swallows were also present, hawking insects above the river. A few of the Carmines perched in trees growing out of the riverbank and sunbathed, twisting their heads on to one side.

Nearby was a pair of Jacobin Cuckoos which perched together in a small tree and mated. One was the usual black and white colouring; the other was the more uncommon dark form.

We all enjoyed a picnic lunch in the Randells' beautiful garden set high above the river. A small owl, thought to be Pearl-spotted Owlet, perched in one of the large shady trees, also eating its lunch. It was quite active for the middle of a hot day. A few times it flew between the trees, causing some alarm amongst the other birds, and once was seen to be carrying an item of prey in its feet.

We are very grateful to Colin and Anne Randell for inviting us to visit their farm once again. They are always most hospitable and theirs is a beautiful venue, full of birdlife. **Penny Feather**

TAIL FEATHERS

It's not all gloom and doom in the Botanic Gardens.

As there had been a little overnight rain on the 8th Nov and the 9th dawned sunny and warm, I decided to visit one of my favourite haunts, the Botanic Gardens, Harare. What a providential decision! Despite the dried up lake, the brown lawns and the plethora of 'dry' trees, the area was abuzz with activity and song.

First, not far from the restaurant, I spied a Namaqua Dove (*Oena capensis*), far from its more normal dry, rural habitat, in a small bare tree enjoying the morning sunshine. Further on, as I followed the tarmac path through the Highveld Riverine Section I was scouring the large Msasas for miombo specials, even normals, when I caught sight of a blue-green back and long tail about 5m above the ground. Could it be? Yes it was, a Narina Trogon (*Apaloderma narina*)!! Within the next few minutes I had two opportunities to view it better, once from the side in another tree and then, in all its glory as it flew towards and past me about 3m from the ground. In the perfect morning light, it was by then about 8.10, the crimson underparts of the male were stunningly beautiful.

I'm well aware both species occur annually in Harare, but what a privilege all the same. **Ken Dixon**

Bird Casualties

BLZ Head Office continues to receive birds that have been injured, including recently a young dove was brought in that had fallen into a drum of oil, a African Yellow White-eye juvenile that appeared to have broken its leg and 5 Bronze Mannikin chicks.

Southern White-faced Scops-owls have also been brought in, one of them, which was very young, is now being trained at Kuimba Shiri as a falconry bird and another recent arrival is being treated for injuries also at Kuimba Shiri, I am waiting to hear from Gary Stafford as to how it has fared.

Nests do get blown/knocked out of trees and I ask members to put them back into a tree/hedge where they think the nest came from. If the nest has been badly damaged then substitute it with a suitable size box. Observe the nest for about an hour or so and the chances are the parents will hear their calls and will find them. No matter how hard humans try to feed chicks of wild birds we cannot take the place of their natural parents who like all parents know what is best for their offspring (especially mums)!

I would like to thank Harare Central Veterinary Surgery and Chisipite Veterinary Surgery for their assistance with the wild birds that we take to them and to Gary Stafford and Neil Deacon who always answer my calls of help particularly with raptors that members of the public bring to BLZ offices.

Hazel Hatton

Terms Used To Describe Bird Status and Abundance

With reference to the above in the last *Babbler*, I am concerned that what is common for big birds is not common for small birds, etc. For example, 10 Ostrich equates to about one million Quelea and to describe 10 Ostrich per hectare in a day as fairly common rather than abundant is misleading. **Richard Dennison**

From BirdLife International website

Vulture-killing drug licensed in Tanzania 07-11-2007

Investigations by WCST (Wildlife Conservation Society of Tanzania, Birdlife in Tanzania), have confirmed that Diclofenac has been licensed for veterinary use in the country. Diclofenac induces fatal illness in vultures of the *Gyps* genus. Its use to treat livestock in the Indian subcontinent has driven three *Gyps* species to the brink of extinction.

An official from Tanzania Ministry of Livestock told Paul Nnyiti of WCST that Diclofenac is licensed and stocked in veterinary centres, and available under prescription by qualified veterinary personnel.

“This is shocking news, and means that the threat is far greater than we thought.” said Paul Nnyiti of WCST. “We now fear that Diclofenac may also already be licensed and used in other African countries. BirdLife Partners must work quickly to alert governments and veterinary organisations to the dangers of the drug, and campaign for licenses to be revoked and Diclofenac to be withdrawn from sale throughout the African continent.”

Conservationists appalled at Red-footed Falcon massacre 08-10-2007

52 Red-footed Falcon, listed as Near-Threatened by BirdLife, have been found shot at Phasouri in Cyprus, a well-known poaching 'black spot'. The finding has appalled conservationists throughout Europe, and has led to BirdLife Cyprus renewing calls for action on the issue.

Red-footed Falcon is a colonial species that nests and migrates in groups. The species is strictly protected in the EU as it has suffered severe declines in its main, eastern European breeding range in recent decades.

BirdLife Cyprus report that this incident is by no means the first time illegal shooting has resulted in the killing of birds of prey and other migrants, such as European Bee-eaters *Merops apiaster*, at Phasouri on the Akrotiri peninsula of Limassol. "This terrible situation has dragged on for the past few years without the authorities taking appropriate action to stop it." said Mike Miltiadous, Research Officer of BirdLife Cyprus. "For years, BirdLife Cyprus has been calling for effective anti-poaching action on the peninsula, which is the most important autumn migration stop-over area on the Island for thousands of birds, and birds of prey in particular," added BirdLife Cyprus Manager, Martin Hellicar. "This anti-poaching action has plainly failed to materialise, with the results that illegal shooters have become increasingly bold, making this act one of the worst cases of illegal bird killing ever reported in Europe".

BirdLife Cyprus also called for an immediate ban on shooting on the entire peninsula. Although almost all the peninsula is a protected reserve, a narrow coastal strip along the west is open for hunting of Eurasian Turtle-dove *Streptopelia turtur* and Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix* from early September to mid-October. But the real draw for many hunters is not the meagre numbers of this legal quarry but the huge numbers of Bee-eaters *Merops apiaster* and Yellow Wagtails *Motacilla flava*, both strictly protected species under Cyprus and EU law.

NOTICEBOARD

Contributions BLZ Mashonaland has noticed a large number of second hand bird books and magazines at the Flea Markets. Please would members consider donating Bird and Wild Life books and magazines to Birdlife for the Education Department?

XMAS SHOPPING

We have T Shirts, caps and hats, ceramic aromatherapy oil burners and bird feeders, also wooden feed trays and nesting boxes (these need to be ordered) available at the National Office, so come and do your Christmas shopping at BLZ – at least we have something to sell unlike most stores!

WISH LIST FOR NATIONAL OFFICE

The staff is now able to get out and do a lot more field work than previously, so BLZ need various items of camping equipment such as gas lights, gas rings, camp stretchers, etc. If you have any that you no longer need and can donate to BLZ, we would be most grateful. If you wish to sell at reasonable prices, we would be willing to buy suitable items.

Can anyone help with hose pipes for the garden? We will consider buying if at reasonable price.

Thanks to Olive Thornton for her donation of plants for the BLZ headquarters garden.

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