

BABBLER

The Newsletter of -

BirdLife Zimbabwe

The BirdLife International Partner in Zimbabwe

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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 3rd February & 2nd March: 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 10th February & 9th March: 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 17th February & 16th March: 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, 16th February: Botanical Gardens 07:00 a.m.

Meet in the car park at 7:00 a.m.

Saturday Morning, 19th January: 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.

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!

Sunday 24th February: Tavistock Farm, Beatrice 06:30 a.m. Meet at 6:30 a.m. at Agrifoods, 33 Remembrance Drive where vehicles can be left and transport shared. Bring chairs and plenty of refreshments.

Sunday, 23rd March: Craighall Farm and Wild Geese 06:30 a.m. Meet at 6:30 a.m. at Wingate Golf Club where vehicles can be left and transport shared. Bring chairs and refreshments.

Evening Meetings

FRIDAY, 15th February: Ant Clarke will talk on Parrots and Parrot Beak and Feather disease which affects both wild and pet parrots. Ant is a long time member and former chairman of the Federation of Bird Societies.

FRIDAY, 21st March: Easter Friday so no 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

NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

**THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF
BIRDLIFE ZIMBABWE, MATABELELAND BRANCH**

will be held on

SATURDAY 16 FEBRUARY 2008 AT 10.30 AM

at

6 Betsi Gordon Close, Burnside, Bulawayo

Monthly Outings

Sunday, 24th February: Day outing to Jean and Tom Cranston's farm, Kensington. Leave town at 9.00 a.m.; take morning refreshments, picnic/braai lunch and all utensils etc. Ring Julia.

Sunday, 2nd March: Verreaux's Eagle, Dassie & Raptor Surveys – Briefing, 9.00 am at Inungu Lodge, Matobo Hills. See details below. Picnic lunch, provide own eating and drinking utensils, chairs and tables. Survey team members please confirm your attendance to Julia on 246269.

Saturday, 15th March: Day outing to Judy Ross's cottage, 2 Shelduck Road, Ntaba Moyo, Burnside. Meet on the roadside outside Ilanda Gardens at 9.00 am to go in convoy, if you wish. Take morning tea, picnic lunch, all eating and drinking utensils, tables and chairs. In the morning we will go for a walk(s) in the bush and to a nearby dam. And after lunch Judy will talk to us about her bee activities. Ring Penny on 230414.

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 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**

The Rio Tinto Birdwatch Event November 2007 Report (QDS: 2030C2)

Murowa Diamonds

An interacting Rio Tinto Birdwatch Event 2007 was held on the 24th of November 2007 in Murowa. This is an annual Rio Tinto Birdwatch Event and is vehicle for promoting the Rio Tinto – BirdLife relationship throughout Rio Tinto and to BirdLife partners – a global programme promoting collaborative involvement, delivered at a grass roots level. BirdLife Zimbabwe and Murowa Diamonds organised the event over the months. Birdwatch participants including those from the local schools were accommodated at the mine site and they arrived a day before. The Birdwatch event kicked off early in the morning (0500hrs) with the three guides leading the three groups in three different sites. At 1000hrs walks came to an end and all participants this time joined by 11 members of the steering committee gathered at the mine (Gazebo). Welcome, introductions speech presentation, poster and prize giving followed this and then lunch was served. After lunch management led by Managing Director (MD) went to Baradzamwa Primary School for a tree planting and guests from the community were ferried home.

Bird Watch sites

Three sites, namely Mupape Dam near Gundekunde, Mvuto and Murowa Mine, were surveyed at this year's birdwatch. Mupape Dam situated roughly 10km from Murowa Diamonds Mine supports reasonable populations of water birds and stores a reasonable quantity of water all year round. Mvuto site, which is 6km from the mine, is characterised by wooded, rugged, hilly, rocky terrain and the mine site is mainly composed of mixed woodland and the tailings dam. All Birdwatch participants were divided into three groups and each site was allocated a group with at least one guide leading the group, a first aider, a security officer and birdwatching gear that included pairs of binoculars. David Gray, assisted by Togarasei Fakarayi, led Gundekunde group. Tony Wood and Jimmy Muropa, assisted by Alexander Shonai and Mrs Leslee Maasdorp, led Mvuto group, and last but not least Ian Riddell, assisted by Elina Chindimba, led the group in the mine site.

Schools and community involvement

This year Murowa Diamonds had managed to accommodate selected members of the birdlife clubs from the local schools at the mine for one night. Participants from each school were 5 kids and one teacher and this added to 25 pupils and 5 teachers altogether from the 5 schools in the Bird Awareness Programme. Logistics at the mine could not accommodate all pupils of the local birdlife clubs. However, there is hope that those who did not take part in the Birdwatch event this year will do so next year. Eleven members of the steering committee had also come on the day in question and took part in the event.

Murowa Diamonds and BLZ involvement

Murowa Diamonds' staff had greatly supported the Birdwatch event. Each member of staff brought his/her spouse and two children. BLZ staff, members and scouts were also among the leading people for this event.

Painting Competitions

Painting competitions organised by BLZ were successfully carried out. Posters from the 5 schools were displayed and guests had an opportunity to have a look at them. Prizes from BLZ and Murowa Diamonds were awarded to the winners. Mukwakwe Primary school produced the best poster, and the second one was from Chinembeure Secondary. The best drawing of a bird, a Carmine Bee-eater, was on Baradzamwa Primary's Poster.

Tree planting

In an effort to mark the onset of tree planting season and as part of Birdwatch event, a tree-planting exercise was carried out at Baradzamwa Primary School situated approximately one kilometre from the mine in the afternoon. Participants for this were Murowa Diamonds' management and their spouses led by MD, BLZ, members of the steering committee, Baradzamwa Birdlife club members and some local community members. Indigenous tree seedlings were provided by a local community run nursery and BLZ nursery that was established at a local secondary school as part of BirdLife-Murowa Diamonds Project in the area. The event was a success since the area had just received the first rains in the previous days and conditions for planting were conducive.

Bird sightings

The birders had compiled a list of bird sighted. A total of 131 bird species were identified, 27 up from last years' Rio Tinto Birdwatch Event in the same area. The mine area had recorded the highest number of bird species.

Togarasei Fakarayi (Projects Officer)

Impression of the Murowa Bird Watch Event 24th November 2007

The detailed planning of this event took place over many months between Murowa Diamonds Head Office, the Mine staff and BirdLife Zimbabwe. As so many staff participants and BLZ personnel travelled from Harare and other centres with their families, their board and lodging at the Mine was carefully planned. Three buses set off with all these travellers on Friday and everyone was treated to a good lunch at the new lodge near Gweru on the way.

Bird watching began at 0500 hrs for 140 participants. Some were bussed to their sites, others walked on the Saturday morning. Leading the groups as guides were BLZ members but there were not enough of them to cope with such numbers, so in 2008 we hope to recruit at least six members to act as guides instead of three.

Leading the party to Mupape Dam near our Gundekunde School was Dave Gray and he later reported that most kept up on the long walk including a small boy, scarcely older than a toddler. Everyone was pleased to see four Black-crowned Night-herons and the group saw and heard two Yellow-billed Kites and a Wahlberg's Eagle.

At the rocky hills of Mvuto, Tony Wood, Jimmy Muropa and Alexander Shonai worked hard to see 58 bird species. A nesting pair of Yellow-billed Kites was flying around. On a steep wooded hill the Southern Ground-hornbill had been nesting but had deserted the site as people walked on a footpath below. The enormous granite boulders did not produce the expected Boulder Chats but provided a fine playground for the children. I sat on similar rocks at the end of the walk with all members of the party and together with the Murowa Diamonds Managing Director Mr. Cameron McRae discussed the gully erosion. This informal chat has led to the local villagers and our scout Alexander doing some reclamation work in the eroded valley.

Ian Riddell led the Mine walk and he was followed by over sixty folk. In the varied habitats over 97 birds were seen. At the tailings dam a Hadeda Ibis sat serenely on a nest in a leafy tangle, the same nest as last year. A Grey Heron nested nearby and a White-fronted Plover was among birds feeding on the shoreline.

Report back by the bird guides took place in the gazebo where from toddlers up to Dr. Chirara, everyone was decked out in special T-shirts. The crowd was in a festive mood and cheered when it was announced that last year's number had been beaten by 27 – 2008's total bird species seen was 131.

The jovial Mine administration Manager Mr V. Bhasera as the MC assisted me with prize giving. Each school in a competition had produced a huge poster on birds and even I was surprised at how colourful and effective they were. Most of the prizes distributed by Mrs. Sue McRae were coffee table bird books donated to our education project by BLZ members. Thank you to the donors.

Murowa Diamonds is thanked for its hospitality, excellent food and other refreshments and the birding and company. Children were so welcome and really excited about sleeping in tents. This event promoted not only awareness of birds but also a really good relationship between the community, Murowa Diamonds and BirdLife Zimbabwe. **Leslee Maasdorp**

IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS

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 Bvumba Highlands and Banti Forest.

Bvumba Highlands (QDS: 1932B2)

The Bvumba Highlands are 25km south-east of Mutare and form the central section of the Eastern Highlands. The Bvumba drops down to the to the Chicamba Real dam and Revue river in Mozambique to the east and, and to the Save river valley in the west. Much of the Bvumba consists of privately owned farms and small holdings. A large part of the area is under Pine and Wattle plantations. The eastern slopes are well forested while the western sides are drier and merge into *Brachystegia* woodland. Mists are common and provide an important source of moisture to the forest. The key species are the Blue Swallow, Swynnerton's Robin and the Plain-backed Sunbird, species of global conservation concern. Forests that are well protected in this area are those that fall under the Parks Estate. The Bunga Forest is protected within the Bunga Forest Botanical Reserve. The Bvumba grasslands are threatened by the invasion of non-native wattle and pine species as with other high-altitude grasslands in the Eastern Highlands. This poses a great threat to the survival of Blue Swallows. In a recent Blue Swallow Survey, carried out end of October 2007, no Blue Swallows were recorded in the Bvumba area. Agriculture and plantations restrict the regeneration and expansion of forests.

Banti Forest (QDS: 1932B2)

Banti forest lies south of the Bvumba Highlands, across the Burma valley. It forms part of the international boundary with Mozambique and is bounded by commercial farms and resettled farms. It is not easily accessible. It can be reached through dirt roads from Himalaya Police Station. The vegetation consists of montane grassland short with patches of grassland in high valleys and small patches of wet forest. The forest falls under the management of Forestry Commission. There is no infrastructure and the area is used for cattle grazing by farmers close to the forest. Banti Forest has nine of 18 bird species of the Afrotropical Highlands biome and one of the three bird species endemic to the Eastern Highlands, Roberts' Warbler. In the recent Blue Swallow Survey, none were recorded at Banti Forest. There are threats to this area include the settled communities who are clearing land for cultivation and cutting down of trees for firewood and construction material.

Dr. C. Chirara, Director

Annual BLZ staff outing Vumba, 6th – 8th December 2007

On the 6th of December 2007, all BirdLife Zimbabwe Staff as well as students on attachment visited Vumba for an annual outing. The following people went on the tour: Dr Chirara, Hazel Hatton, Leslee Maasdorp, Kanisios Mukwashi, Fadzai Matsvimbo, Togarasei Fakarayi, Reuben Njolomole, Onisimo Ndowa, Sabina Mapika, Admire Charehwa, Dylas Gudoshava and Everness Shava.

The Vumba area is a typical rainforest in which most of the time it is misty and raining. The inhabitants said that it rains almost throughout the year. Mountain fog is common and is dispersed if there is a slight wind only to recur when the atmosphere is calm. The terrain is rugged with thick evergreen forest that is lined with huge climbers and some bushes in the undergrowth; no wonder the air is fresh with the increased carbon dioxide fixation.

We visited Seldomseen (a Bird Sanctuary in Vumba established by Mr and Mrs Manson) on the 7th of December. It was a very interesting walk in the Witchwood Botanical Garden (thanks to Bulawezi's guidance we did not see any witches!). We will not forget his expertise in birds, especially imitating the calls. It is amazing how he knows the calls so well, and if it was not for him, I bet we would have seen fewer than ten birds in that rainforest, not mentioning the overcast and drizzling weather. The following is a list of the twenty-four birds we either saw or heard calling at the sanctuary, thanks to the ingenuity of Bulawezi: -

Cape Batis, Livingstone's Turaco, Barratt's Warbler, Dark-backed Weaver, Bar-throated Apalis, Dark-capped Bulbul, Olive Thrush, White-tailed Crested Flycatcher, Square-tailed Drongo, Orange Ground-thrush, Yellow-streaked Greenbul, Swynnerton's Robin, Tambourine Dove, White-starred Robin, Red-capped Robin-chat, Olive Bush-shrike, Pin-tailed Whydah, Red-chested Cuckoo, Eastern Saw-wing, Olive Sunbird, Eastern Bronze-naped Pigeon, African Dusky Flycatcher, White-browed Robin-chat, Roberts' Warbler.

Bulawezi said that the population of some bird species dropped since Cyclone Eline hit the Eastern Highlands. One such species is the Green-winged Pytilia (Melba Finch) and one might wonder if there is a link between the decrease of this species in the Vumba and an increase in the same species in Greater Harare. If the species are coming from the Eastern districts, why travel the long journey? Twelve BirdLife Zimbabwe members were invited for dinner on the 7th of December. Among the invited guests were Ms Dale Hanmer, Mr and Mrs Brightman, Mr Carl Beel and Mr Peter Magosvongwe.

Socialising in an 'out of the office' atmosphere is very important in team building, thus contributes to the smooth running of operations at the national office.

Personally I wanted to see the Swynnerton's Robin, but all the same it was not bad since we heard it calling. Maybe better luck next time!

Everness Shava (Student, BLZ Education)

MASHONALAND BRANCH

John Naested, Goromonzi, 25th November, 2007 (ODS: 1731C4)

In these days of expensive and scarce fuel it is helpful if we do not have to travel far to our outings. This was the case with John Naested's outward bound type of school near Ruwa. About 11 of us attended this outing and we were shown how to get both to it and around the property by Basil Rushforth to whom we would like to express our thanks. The infrastructure of the school was impressive and so was the view across a nearby valley from the highest buildings.

The miombo woodland on this property is conserved but not large as we only had to walk about 1.5km to cover it. However it is augmented by the gardens and the views of woodland on surrounding properties. Basil and Di Rushforth did comment that we were unlucky not to have seen as many birds as they had managed to see on previous visits as our total species count was 54. However we did see some special birds such as 2 African Cuckoo Hawk, 1 Meyer's Parrot, 4 White-rumped Swift, 1 African Pygmy-kingfisher which posed nicely for all of us, 3 Broad-billed Roller, 1 Lazy Cisticola and about 8 African Paradise-flycatcher. We also saw several male Black Cuckooshrikes, a number of Sunbirds and heard a Lizard Buzzard.

After our walk John very kindly treated us to tea, coffee and biscuits while we did our call-over.

Thank you very much for your hospitality, John.

Richard Dennison

Marlborough Vlei, Saturday 12th January

Alex did well to give this one a miss (Ed: he got his dates wrong but he was there on Sunday!); it was cold, overcast and pretty miserable, the light was appalling and there were fewer birds than in recent memory. However, our small band of 7 dedicated vlei-trudgers contained enough experience to replace in some measure Alex's expertise and after a respectable wait set off into the cold, smelly fastness of Marlborough Vlei.

In fact, during the period of hesitation, several Amur Falcon flew past and Ian Riddell spotted a distant Peregrine Falcon while Rattling Cisticola called incessantly. And an Amethyst Sunbird landed on a lone Acacia. Not long after, a male Montagu's Harrier, the only harrier of the morning, was seen flying along the river towards the sewage works. Although the vlei was entirely waterlogged, walking through the area was not difficult but most of the birds a-wing were Yellow-mantled Widowbird, Southern Red Bishop and Red-collared Widowbird with the occasional Dark-capped Yellow Warbler, African Stonechat and Pin-tailed Whydah.

In the reeds we could hear Lesser Swamp-warbler (Cape Reed) everywhere, African Reed-warbler and Little Rush-warbler, the occasional Great Reed-warbler and Sedge Warbler, one of which gave super views of its fancy eye-stripe. My abiding memory will be of the Marsh Owl that rose from in front of us and displayed its golden wing patches before sinking into the grass again. We had to stumble quite a way before coming across our first Black Coucal although it had been calling for some time. Diderick Cuckoo called constantly, too, as it harassed the Weavers.

There were few hirundines; a Barn Swallow or two, African Palm-swift and Little Swift. The heron were Purple Heron, Black-headed Heron and Squacco Heron and small groups of White-faced Duck, Red-billed Teal and Hottentot Teal flew over us, as did African Sacred Ibis and a Black-shouldered Kite.

As the rain approached and we turned back towards the cars at last, a Streaky-breasted Flufftail was flushed. They could be heard all around though it wasn't until after the card had been called that Ian at last heard a Pale-crowned Cisticola to add to the Red-faced Cisticola, Croaking Cisticola, Zitting Cisticola and Levillant's Cisticola.

To a Pom like me, even after 16 years, this is still a strange Zimbabwean ritual but I wouldn't miss it for the world.

Ken Dixon

BLZ Mashonaland AGM, Friday 18th January 2007

A pleasing number of members turned up for the BLZ Mashonaland AGM.

Chairman Dave Dalziel had this to say: 'The branch had organized over 50 outings and evening meetings during 2007. These included monthly visits to Mukuvisi, the National Parks Chivero Bird Sanctuary and Monavale Vlei as well as visits to Rolf Hangartner's Wattled Crane Sanctuary at Mutorashanga, Stapleford and Marirangwe Farms outside Harare and the Naested's at Goromonzi. Saturday morning walks were started at members' request and, being well-attended, were continued all year. We need other venues for these walks, apart from Harare Botanic Gardens, Greystone Park Nature Reserve and the other side of Mukuvisi and suggestions will be welcomed.

This year we have attended three Mukuvisi fares and manned a Birdlife stand. This takes a great deal of organisation and time. A number of members joined us and we are very grateful. Jane and Hazel did most of the organisation. We signed up about thirty new members, met people, made sales and most importantly raised the profile of Birdlife.

Komani ranch asked us to do a bird watch and report at the end of January. We did the report for the first time in 2006 and did a second in 2007. The count and short report are included in their environmental report to the EU. We thank Komani for the generous donations they have made to Birdlife, Mashonaland Branch.

The National office organised a Blue Swallow survey and many of our members took part. Over 200 swallows were seen and the office is to be congratulated on organising the week. A small party of Mashonaland birders joined Matabeleland for the Verreaux's Eagle weekend. If you have never been it is worth making a plan to join them and seeing what the Verreaux's Eagle survey is all about.

The above is a brief record of what has happened over the last year. More important though is where we go from here. There is a suggestion that we should be more projects orientated. Matabeleland is very project-orientated and has three major projects, Verreaux's Eagle Survey, How Mine Barn Swallow roost and the Southern Ground-hornbill survey. We have started a Red Data Book project which we hope most of you will be able to see and make comments on before we publish. Council would also like us to be more proactive in raising funds and making ourselves more visible to the public."

Dave also thanked the committee for their support and gave the report on Mukuvisi. Richard Dennison reported on Chivero and Dorothy Wakelin and Jimmy Muropa on Monavale Vlei (see below).

Jennifer Carter

Monavale Vlei: In its unusual state this summer and not any other time for a couple of years to come. The 2007/2008 rainy season started on a fantastic note with widespread massive rains. These rains brought great and amazing changes on Monavale Vlei. In fact, these rains have not been experienced in years on the vlei. The vegetation is lush with wonderful scenic view of fast growing grasses and flowers. Vlei crinums were in full bloom providing a beautiful outlook in harmony with Pimpernel flowers. Flame lilies also brought a floral wealth and a unique charm to the vlei. With the onset of massive rains much of the vlei, if not the whole of it, was flooded and waterlogged. This brought in plenty Barbels and other fish species in unimaginable vlei areas further away from the stream. Several giant Bullfrogs were noted on the vlei and are breeding. Olive Grass Snakes and Three-striped Grass Snakes were sighted on several occasions.

Mammal sightings included that of the Scrub hare, the elusive Bush pig and Duiker. It is a pleasure to report the presence of a baby duiker, which I must say is doing well and looking healthy. It was also with delight knowing of the presence of Porcupines within the vlei area as they have been spotted in the evenings.

Bird wise it was amazing! Early December saw the arrival of a lone Woolly-necked Stork that is unusual around Monavale Vlei. It stayed for exactly five days. Dorothy Wakeling captured photographs of this bird. Was it in transit or part of some form of range expansion? Next saw the

arrival again of a flock of Wood Sandpipers for a couple of days – this was unusual. Another new listing for Monavale Vlei was the Great Egret, which numbered more than forty birds during their short stay, plus a few little egrets. On January 11, 2008 two Southern Carmine Bee-eaters made a surprise appearance, hawking the seemingly easy and abundant insects available.

During this summer season some interesting bird species seen/heard calling include the specials which were: White-faced Ducks, Purple Herons, Wahlberg’s Eagles, African Cuckoo Hawks, Peregrine Falcon, Kurrichane Buttonquail, African Crakes, Levillant’s Cuckoo, Lilac-breasted Roller, Namaqua Doves, Red-breasted Swallows, Lesser Striped Swallows, Greater Striped Swallows, Meyer’s Parrots, Wire-tailed Swallows, African Stonechat, Cuckoo Finch, Zitting Cisticola, Red-backed Shrike and Brimstone Canary to name but a few. Much of the common and resident bird species are now in full breeding dress. Special mention to Streaky-breasted Flufftails that have since arrived and are almost always heard calling in the early mornings. Striped Crakes have not been spotted or flashed out as yet. However, they are surely expected anytime.

Since November 2007 we have had four St. Johns College students visiting Monavale Vlei for their geography project and this is ongoing. Dumping has greatly reduced with only a case noted and a cleanup conducted. Our third Sunday monthly bird walks still continue with good attendances. It’s brilliant out here on Monavale Vlei and well worth a visit!

Jimmy Muropa, Vlei Scout

Latest Up-date: On the walk at Monavale on Sunday 20th January 2008, the Striped Crake and Dwarf Bittern were seen and three Streaky-breasted Flufftails heard – Dorothy Wakeling.

MATABELELAND BRANCH

National Birding Big Day, 24th / 25th November 2007

With the exception of the Committee Creepers from Mashonaland, this turned out to be the *Matabeleland* Birding Big Day! But, what is very important to us personally, of course, is that it went very well and everyone apparently had a ball. This is a real fun event and we congratulate and thank all participants for your support, enthusiasm and fundraising efforts. We also thank the many generous donors.

Sandy McAdam writes: Our team of “Harry’s Hasbeens” consisted of Julia Duprée, Penny Feather and myself. The day got off to a good start at Aisleby where we spent most of the day with pleasant weather. In the middle of the afternoon we headed out to the Matopos but rain clouds were gathering and the light was not good after 4.30 p.m. We spent the night in the Matopos and got up early morning when we got some wonderful birds, and finished off our count at 7.15 a.m.

Looking back on previous counts, at least 10 out of 20 birds which were fairly common species and included previously were not encountered this year. A tidy sum – an *extremely* tidy sum – was raised in sponsorship by all our Matland teams – in fact it was a sum *more tidy* than we’ve ever raised before. So the results (slightly biased towards Matland you will note) are:

	Position	No of species	TeamName	Leader
Matland	1	169	Harry’s Hasbeens	Sandy McAdam
Matland	2	116	The Avian Bunny Huggers	John Brebner
Matland	3	90	Cranston-Lewis	Tom Cranston/Helen Lewis
Mashland	4	83	Committee Creepers	Richard Dennison
Matland	5	52	Sharjoy	Joy Kets
Matland	6	37	Feathered Friends	Adele Edwards

A composite list will, as usual, be submitted to South Africa for inclusion in the southern African Birding Big Day competition, and is available by email to anyone who would like a copy.

And in case anyone outside Matland is listening – yes, we shall run this event again this year, and we in Matland will double the number of participating teams. So there you are – we’ve laid down the gauntlet, count yourselves challenged!

VERREAUX'S EAGLE, DASSIE AND RAPTOR SURVEYS

This year's surveys will kick off with a one-day debriefing and briefing on 2 March at Inungu Lodge. Reports for all three of the 2007 surveys are just about finalised.

The Verreaux's Eagles have really done their bit again – we have 18 fledglings, 4 more than last year, 8 more than 2005 and 11 more than in 2004. There were another two chicks which unfortunately didn't make it beyond the white fluffy stage, and we haven't counted the second hatchling that we witnessed being severely attacked under Cain & Abel rules.

Our survey teams worked incredibly hard. They were allocated 104 nest sites though not necessarily all to be covered in one season. They surveyed 86 of these and subsequently monitored the 42 which were found to be active.

The expanded survey included inspection of territories and nest sites thought to have been abandoned or derelict for many years. Three such territories produced surprises. A new nest appeared on an old site unoccupied for 10 years until 2005 when a lone female eagle was seen and in 2006 when a pair was resident but made no attempt to breed. Observers noted eagles in another territory vacant for the past 15 years. Nest building was apparent with one bird carrying appropriate material, but not to the original site, so a new site will be searched for this season. And the third excitement was the appearance of a fledgling in a territory thought to have been derelict or abandoned for many years.

Now you know why we all queue up to join the Verreaux's Eagle Survey!

However, of concern is the apparent increase in take-over attempts of Verreaux's Eagle nests by Lanner Falcons. One was seen fighting with a Verreaux's Eagle just above a nest containing a small chick. The chick was not seen again after this. Two other pairs of Lanners were noted in close proximity to active nests, one interfered with the eagles' breeding activities, the other appeared after the eaglet had fledged. We intend to monitor this situation very closely during this breeding season.

The two-day Dassie Survey, however, did not produce such good results. We saw a total of 186 animals at the 20 sites monitored, less than the previous low of 193 in 1993, albeit these represented 28 sites.

We believe that two main factors were responsible. The first was the effect of late rains which brought on abundant foliage masking all or part of most sites; and the other was particularly unfavourable weather on the second day when only 38 dassies were noted as opposed to 148 on day one.

The restored raptor survey brought in some interesting sightings which are currently being analysed. It will be expanded and fine-tuned during the current season.

We are grateful to the organizers and leaders of these surveys who put in hours of hard work and carry out their assignments with diligence and enthusiasm.

Julia Duprée

TAIL FEATHERS

Weather conditions affect Barn Swallows on Lake Kariba

We moored our houseboat near Elephant Point, Lake Kariba on the nights of the 30th and 31st of December 2007. It rained almost incessantly over the period and was cold. At night a howling gale got up strong enough to rock the boat.

Barn Swallows sought shelter on the rolled up awnings of the boat where they huddled together at night. On both mornings after the first and second nights 3 flew off and 3 died, and on the second night six others were found dead next to the boat. Some exhausted birds landed on our shoulders during the day – we tried unsuccessfully to feed them insects and it was assumed they died from starvation, cold and exhaustion. All those that died were immatures.

On the 1st and 2nd of January 2008 while motoring through Chirundu to Lusaka and back we came across huge flocks of Barn Swallows hawking in the air.

Richard Maasdorp.

Hippo Pools, Mazowe River, Shamva District, 6-8th October 2007 (QDS: 1731B2).

I turned 60 in October and to celebrate, Penny and I went into the bush together. We left Harare on Friday the 6th October 2007 and on our way past the Wardens Camp to Hippo Pools, Pen said I hope we see Narina Trogon, (she had not seen one before) and I said I hope we see White-backed Night-heron.

We lit our fire overlooking the river and moved into Mahogany Cottage where we had a wonderful night

under a clear October sky.

Next morning we walked up river to the Umfurudzi River junction with the Mazowe, and saw 3 Black Storks fishing in a pond ably assisted by 3 Hamerkops and a Malachite Kingfisher. Many good birds were seen on the walk including two African Fish-eagle, 3 Broad-billed Rollers, Red-headed Weavers, Grey-backed Camaroptera (Bleating Warblers), Yellow-bellied Greenbul and Terrestrial Brownbuls, Natal Spurfowl and 4 Trumpeter Hornbills, none of which we have in Harare gardens.

Making breakfast on the fire at 09h30, we heard the low mournful hoot hoot hoot of the Narina Trogon, and a fine male was just above our house. Ian Jarvis is convinced they breed in the campsite. After breakfast Pen read a book and I went off optimistically to look for Livingstone's Flycatcher. At the end of the campsite, I heard my first African Paradise-flycatcher of the season, and it landed (maybe aggressively) right next to a Livingstone's Flycatcher. Trying to count the group size was a failure, but I got as far as three, when my attention switched to the loose bird party, all around me. There were Scarlet-chested Sunbirds and Purple-banded Sunbirds, Klaas's Cuckoo, Black-backed Puffback, Orange-breasted Bush-shrike, Greater Honeyguide, Black Cuckooshrike, Terrestrial Brownbuls and the Bearded Scrub-robin. I went back to camp very chuffed. In the afternoon, while crossing the River in a canoe, I saw three White-backed Night-herons and I can say I had the best birdwatching day of my life! We also saw many of the birds reported on by Richard Dennison in September 2007, (Babbler No 79). Next morning when we left for home, we saw a Bateleur close to the Wardens Office and there were no Black Storks in the Amm's Mine Quarry, but a Lanner Falcon.

Later at home I look up my new Roberts (all 5.2 Kg of it) and see Livingstone's Flycatcher is named after Charles Livingstone. Monday morning I stop off at the BLZ library and want to borrow the note in BulBoc where Michael Irwin restricts the Livingstone's Flycatcher to Zumbo, but I can't remember the reference, so I look up their new Roberts, and it says named after David Livingstone, arguably the most famous missionary explorer that ever lived. The newer impression of the 7th edition is different.

Who was Charles Livingstone (CL) (1821-1873)?

David (DL) was the second son of Neil Livingstone and CL was his youngest brother (8 years younger than David) and, I suppose, born in Blantyre, Scotland. He worked in local factories, and on the advice of his brother, he went to America and entered theological college where he became ordained. 17 years later he came home, and met DL, who invited him on the Zambezi Expedition. He left his wife in New York State. He caused untold trouble on the expedition, as a terrible tell-tale, which saw the dismissal of Thomas Baines and Thornton from the Expedition. Kirk described him as a sneaking mischief maker and a dandy. Eventually DL, saw through his brother, too late, and Kirk said he was only kept on the Expedition out of Charity. However, Kirk says CL "made a good collection of birds of which I am right glad".

He left the Zambezi Expedition in 1863, when sickness forced his return to the UK, and he co-authored the book "Narrative of an Expedition to the Zambezi and its tributaries, and the discovery of Lakes Shirwa and Nyassa 1858-1864" by D & C Livingstone, John Murray, London, 1865.

In October 1864 he accepted a post of British Consul in Fernando Po, and later his district was enlarged to include the Cameroon Coast and the mouth of the Niger River. He died of malaria near Lagos in 1873, aged 52 – the same year David Livingstone died.

Some of our birds and animals are named for him:

Livingstone's Wheatear (*Oenanthe pileata livingstonii*) is now a subspecies of the Capped Wheatear. Livingstone's Antelope (*Neotragus livingstonianus*) from north eastern Zimbabwe, is now the Suni. Livingstone's Lourie (now Livingstone's Turaco) *Turacus l. livingstonii* and Livingstone's Flycatcher (*Erythrocerus livingstonei*) are all named after Charles Livingstone.

David Rockingham-Gill, (pforbes@mango.zw, 4, Fernleigh Rd, PO Borrowdale)

LOOK OUT FOR COLOURED-RINGED AMUR FALCONS.....

Peter Fehervari of BirdLife Hungary has requested us to look out for ringed Amur Falcons.

"I'd hereby like to raise your attention to the fact that 1000 red-footed falcons have been colour-ringed with individual combinations this year in Hungary in the scope of a LIFE Nature project. Our main aim is to estimate post-migration mortality but we hope to get some additional information concerning the migration routes of the species.

So whenever you spot a red foot in the field please remember to check the legs. We've used 8 colours: black, white, red, orange, yellow, green, blue, mauve (purple) and of course a metal ring."

Please email Hungarian Ornithological and Nature Conservation Society (MME) at mme@mme.hu or contact a committee member.

..... AND EGYPTIAN GEESE

Little is known about the movement patterns of the Egyptian Goose, even though their numbers are increasing and some ring recoveries are over distances of more than 1000 km!

The Percy FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology at the University of Cape Town is undertaking a research project that seeks to understand where Egyptian Geese move to and from, when, and why. Birds are ringed with an engraved colour ring (as well as the standard SAFRING metal ring). Each colour ring has a unique combination of three letters which enables us to recognize each bird when it is re-sighted.

Although we will also be tracking birds using satellites, the success of the project is strongly dependent on re-sighting these ringed birds – and this is where we need your help. Should you encounter a colour-ringed Egyptian Goose, no matter where you are in southern Africa, please try to note the following information:

- The three letters on the colour ring – inscriptions should be read from the ground up.
- The background colour of the ring.
- The exact locality.
- The habitat (e.g. lake, wheat field, golf course).
- The date and time.
- Any other information of interest, such as what the bird was doing at the time.

Please report the sighting to Egyptian Goose Project, Percy FitzPatrick Institute, University of Cape Town, Rondebosch 7701, or e-mail: mduduzi.ndlovu@uct.ac.za. Tel: 021 650 3290; Fax: 021 650 3295; or send an SMS with the information to 083 769 5273.

NOTICEBOARD

Books for Sale

Cecilia Manson, whom many of our members will remember from "Seldomseen" in the Bvumba where she lived with her late husband Alec for many years, wants to dispose of some books and I wonder if the following list could be circulated with the next "Babbler".

African Insect Life – Skaife – 1953; Birds of Cyprus – Bannermann – 1958; The Canaries, Seed eaters and Buntings of Southern Africa – Skead – 1960; Sunbirds of Southern Africa – Skead – 1967; Gamebirds of Southern Africa – Clancey – 1967; Review of the Genus *Cisticola* (2 Vol.) - Ibis – 1930; Foreign Bird Keeping – Boosey; A Checklist of the Birds of Southern Rhodesia – Smithers, Irwin & Paterson – 1957; The Birds of Southern Rhodesia (Vol. Livingstone's 1 1 & 4) – Priest – 1935; A New Dictionary of Birds – Landsborough-Thomson – 1964; An Atlas of Speciation of African Passerine Birds – Hall & Moreau – 1970; The Birds Faunas of Africa and Its Islands – Moreau – 1966; Book of British Birds – Readers' Digest – 1969; Birds of the Southern Third of Africa – Mackworth-Præd & Grant – 1963;

Tauraco (Journal of Afrotropical Ornithology Vol. 1/1, 1/2, 2/1) – Dowsett - 1988/89; First Pan-African Ornithological Congress – The Ostrich – 1959; Fourth Pan-African Ornithological Congress - SAOS 1980; South African Red Data Book – Birds – Brooke – 1984; The B.T.O. Guide to Ageing & Sexing (Field Guide No.10) - Bto – 1963; Identification for Ringers (1, 2 & 3) – Williamson – 1962-68; Bird Ringing (Bto Guide No.16) – Mead – 1974; Birds of the Kruger & Other National Parks (Vol. 1, 2, 3 & 4) – Nat. Parks Board SA – Identification Guide to European Passerines – Svensson – 1975; The Palearctic Birds Migration Systems – Moreau – 1972.

Persons interested in any of the above can contact me on Tel 303591 or rochen@mango.zw with an offer. **Rolf Chenaux-Repond**

Contributions The Education Department would be grateful for contributions of any type of magazines or books to hand out to schools, particularly in rural areas. Please take them to BLZ offices in Eastlea or contact a Mashonaland committee member to arrange collection.

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