

BABBLER

The Newsletter of -

BirdLife Zimbabwe

The BirdLife International Partner in Zimbabwe

ISSUE # 81 – APRIL/MAY 2008

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APRIL 2008 to MARCH 2009 SUBSCRIPTIONS – due 1st April

Ordinary (Individual and family) members and schools	ZW\$50 million
Senior Citizens and students	ZW\$25 million
Corporate members	ZW\$150 million
Members outside Zimbabwe	Africa US\$20/Other US\$30

BLZ has tried to keep the subscriptions affordable in these difficult times. We don't want to lose members so if you will find payment difficult, please contact Dave Dalziel, Julia Duprée or a committee member named above. But if you can, please make an additional donation.

Additional subscriptions might be necessary later as they were in 2007/2008.

PAYMENT

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

ACTIVITIES

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 31st MAY 2008

Notice is hereby given of the Annual General Meeting of BirdLife Zimbabwe to be held on Saturday, 31st May 2008, at a venue in Harare to be confirmed later.

MASHONALAND BRANCH

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

Regular outings NOTE CHANGE OF TIME: MAY TO AUGUST 07:00 a.m.

Sundays 6th April 06:30 a.m. and 4th May 07:00 a.m.: Mukuvisi Woodlands

We hope to be back at the entrance below instead of via the Mukuvisi offices after the bridge was washed away. Watch for the monthly email or phone a committee member for confirmation.

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 13th April 06:30 a.m. and 11th May 07:00 a.m.: 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 20th April and 18th May: 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, 19th April: 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. It's a very pleasant outing.

Saturday Morning, 17th May: Botanic Gardens 07:00 a.m.

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

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 27th April: Goshu Park, Marondera 06:00 a.m. (NOTE TIME!) Meet at BLZ offices, 35 Clyde Road, Eastlea, where vehicles can be left and transport shared. Bring chairs and plenty of refreshments. This can be a very rewarding venue with birds we don't often see elsewhere.

Sunday, 25th May: Ewanrigg 06:30 a.m. Meet at 6:30 a.m. at BLZ offices where vehicles can be left and transport shared. Bring chairs and refreshments. Last year the sunbirds were best around this time.

Evening Meetings

**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.**

Friday, 18th April: Independence Day so no meeting

Friday, 16th May: Hwange Birds – slides by Ian Riddell. Ian, a well-known BLZ member and professional Guide, will show his slides of Hwange Birds and talk about his birding experiences in the Park.

MATABELELAND BRANCH

Monthly Outings

Sunday 6th April, Hillside Dams. Meet at the lower dam car park at 09:00. Join us for a walk through the area to add to our existing bird checklist and also observe the ongoing improvements being effected by the Hillside Dams Conservancy. For more details contact Julia or Judy

Friday, 25th – Sunday, 27th April (date to be confirmed) Weekend at Cawston Block, Nyamandhlovu. Peter Johnson has invited Matland to visit his ranch to draw up a bird checklist. Arrangements yet to be finalized. For more details contact Julia or Adele

Saturday, 10th May Bird walk – venue to be confirmed – hopefully Tshabalala Recreation Park. For more details, contact Julia or Judy

Saturday, 24th – Monday, 26th May Dassie Census, Matopos NP. The intention is for each team to count 2 sites, one on Saturday, the other on Sunday – but teams should be prepared to stay out and count on Monday if poor weather conditions affect either of the earlier days. For more details contact Cecilia or Julia.

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

APPRECIATION – DUDLEY HUBBARD

It was with total disbelief that we learned of the sudden death of Dudley Hubbard at the age of 49. Dudley died at home in his sleep in the early hours of Thursday, 6 March. He had recently returned from South Africa with a new leg (referred to as his ‘blade’) replacing one that had been amputated. Overnight, it seemed, he rose to his full height – after months and months of being wheelchair-bound – and mastered the art of walking without the assistance of sticks or crutches, up and down kopjes, along bush tracks and behind lawn mowers. At this point his sense of humour came to the fore when he announced that henceforth phrases such as “without a leg to stand on”, “legless” or “footloose” would cease to be legal language in Matabeleland.

Dudley was a giant of a man in all respects. His humanity, courage, compassion, generosity and sense of humour touched the lives of all who met him. Those of us who came to know and work with him relied heavily on his wisdom and foresight not to mention his guidance, and greatly respected his determination to achieve all he set out to do, particularly to assist others.

Dudley was a loyal supporter of BLZ Matabeleland. To quote our previous long-time Chairman, Martin Smith, “(Dudley) had a very useful habit of getting things done, one of the first being the (Ashton) hide at Aisleby, which would never have been completed without him.” Dudley together with Cecilia co-ordinated the Black Eagle and Dassie Surveys with meticulous attention to detail and put in hours of hard work not to mention generous financial contributions. Dudley was a Matland Committee member and a member of the BLZ National Council and the Executive Committee.

He is irreplaceable and is very sadly missed by all of us, mainly as a friend and also as a loyal supporter of BirdLife Zimbabwe.

Our heartfelt sympathy goes out to Cecilia, Clare and Paul and members of their families.

Julia Duprée

NATIONAL

Director's Report

BirdLife Zimbabwe's New Year begins in April and we hope it will be a better year than 2007/2008 for both our organisation and the country. BirdLife Zimbabwe continues to carry out conservation projects under serious economic and environmental challenges. The Eastern Highlands project was well-executed and lessons learnt from it will be presented at the World Conference in September. The Murowa Project being run by our Education Department has been another success story. Plans to extend this project by another year are now at an advanced stage. The IBA project is underway and details about this project will be communicated by the IBA Manager. A new project has been launched at Mbazhe Pan Sanctuary with the Gezekhaya Community and we will continue with the Eastern Highlands Project. The Barn Swallow Project at How Mine is one shining example of a Branch-run project. We hope conditions in the coming year will allow us to do even more work for the conservation of Zimbabwe's birds.

The BirdLife Zimbabwe National Office finally managed to get broadband connection. This has freed up the two telephone lines we have. All members of staff can now be reached on their individual e-mail address and this has greatly improved communication with our local and international stakeholders. Please note that the general e-mail address birds@zol.co.zw has been maintained.

BirdLife Zimbabwe also encourages members to be involved in the organisation's projects. Of course some projects are so specific and time-bound that only full-time staff has to be involved. Where it is possible, we always want our members to be involved. In the coming year there will be limited funding for branch/members projects, thanks to the RSPB. When this is confirmed we will invite proposals to be submitted to the Director who will liaise with the donor for approval. This small fund will also support waterfowl counts and ongoing projects like the Matabeleland Branch's Black Eagle survey. More information on this will be sent to Branch chairs.

It with great shock and sadness that I learnt of the death of one of BLZ most loyal members, Dudley Hubbard. Chris Magin of the RSPB and myself spent a day with Dudley, his wife Cecilia and Julia Dupree at Matopos after the Matabeleland Branch's AGM. Dudley was a jovial person and always provided good company. On behalf of the National Office, I offer my sincere condolences to Cecilia and all members of his family. May his soul rest in eternal peace.

Dr. C. Chirara, Director

IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS (IBAs) monitoring project report

Important Bird Areas project launch was held successfully at Parks and Wildlife Management Authority headquarters on the 25th of January. The profile of the project was raised to all stakeholders who were present. Permission has been granted by National Parks and the Forestry Commission to access nine Parks' estates and Chirinda Forest respectively. Permission is being sought from Allied Timber Holdings to access Stapleford.

The Important Bird Areas (IBA) project concentrated on training of site monitoring personnel during the month of February. The first training workshop was hosted by Nyanga National Park. Participants were drawn from IBAs in the Eastern Highlands that included Chimanimani National Park, Chirinda Forest, Nyanga National Park and Bvumba Highlands. Bvumba Highlands is one of the nine IBAs outside protected areas and therefore not being focused on the EC funding but BirdLife Zimbabwe intends to monitor the site with funds from other sources. The second training workshop was conducted at Lake Chivero Recreational Park. More than twenty participants attended. IBA monitoring has commenced in four sites that received training. Baseline data and information that exists in IBAs is very useful in completing IBA field data forms.

The training covered aspects of IBA monitoring (state, pressure and response), adapting IBA field data forms, effective coordination and reporting. Participants explored major conservation issues that affect biodiversity and integrity of habitats and sites. They also expressed their willingness to collaborate in site monitoring and conservation actions. Efforts are being made to ensure that basic monitoring kicks off in all the IBAs as soon as possible.

The IBA National Project Manager attended an Annual Planning and Review Meeting in Botswana in March. The purpose of the meeting was to review progress for the period April to December 2007, develop plans for the period January to December 2008, review expenditure for period April to December 2007, amend and adopt the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, identify key problems and make recommendations to be considered by the Project Steering Committee for improving the delivery of the project results. Zimbabwe reported reasonable progress for 2007 and made a presentation of the intended outcomes for 2008. All partners were encouraged to perform outstanding activities from year one as quickly as possible in order to catch up with the year two work-plan. Lessons were learnt from the experiences of other African partners implementing the IBA monitoring project.

We need the assistance of members in producing checklists of all the 20 IBAs in Zimbabwe. For further information on the project please contact the office.

Kanisios Mukwashi, IBA National Project Manager

BLZ Library

The Awakening

To someone who has grown up in an environment whereby birding is more of like a habit than a hobby, this would seem like a shocking statement. Before I joined BirdLife Zimbabwe as an Attached student, it never occurred to me that bird watching existed, worse still, I could never give myself time to stop for a while, listen to a bird call or watch the bird as it moved from one patch to another. I could never understand the importance of birds in our environment. Today, my life has taken a new dimension. My interest in birds has grown and is developing into something tangible. Below are a few notes, which deal with the significance of birds, which, I would like to share with all the BLZ members.

- **Predation on invertebrates** – Birds control the population of insects. Loss of such a control would result in pest outbreaks.
- **Seed dispersal** – birds help in the removal of seeds from their parent tree. Seed dispersal is quite important in the survival of the human race.
- **Consumption of carrion** – Scavenger birds such as vultures help to remove carcasses in places such as farms.
- **Rodent control** – Birds further help to get rid of rodents. Instead of purchasing rodents, one only needs birds to come and do the job for him.
- **Pollination** – Birds help to increase productivity through the process of pollination. Loss of such would lead to reduced yields.
- **Birds as Indicators** – birds act as environmental indicators. They act as environmental monitors. In the old days, miners used to take canaries with them down the mine. The canary acted as a gadget to determine the availability of oxygen underground. If the bird died, this meant that the oxygen was no longer sufficient enough to support the miners

Dylas Gudoshava, Student (Library)

BirdLife Zimbabwe Library is kindly asking for donations of the following items: -

- **Map book for Zimbabwe**
- **Street Map for Harare**
- **Telephone Directory**
- **Dictionary**

Thank you very much!

MASHONALAND BRANCH

Friday, 15th February: Carl Beel, Birding in and around Mutare

Carl kindly stepped into the breach when the scheduled speaker was unable to come and spoke about his years of birding around Mutare. It was fascinating to see the maps from Google Earth, showing his house and the various walks he was able to take to watch birds, without even having to get in a car. Carl said the quantity of species in his garden was disappointing but not the quality with sometimes as many as 15 Silvery-cheeked Hornbills roosting there.

But Cecil Kop was close by with all the buntings including Cabanis's Bunting among the species seen regularly. Carl told us where to go to see Black-winged Bishops (Fire-crowned) and White-starred Robin as well as Green Twinspot.

Outside Mutare, there is Stapleford where Carl found Swynnerton's Robin, Osborne Dam and, of course, Bvumba. Further afield there is Burma Valley.

I have been to Seldomseen and done some birding in the Bvumba but Carl's talk made me and the others who heard him want to go back soon. Thanks, Carl, for giving up your time to share your birding haunts with us.

Jennifer Carter

Tavistock Farm, Beatrice: Sunday, 24th February (QDS: 1830 B4)

12 members assembled at Agrifoods for the outing to Beatrice and were immediately offered an aperitif to whet their appetites for a super day's birding. The Rock Doves lined up on the roof waiting for breakfast were being closely observed by a Lanner Falcon on a higher roof obviously selecting his own breakfast. Which of the well-fed pigeons he selected we did not discover as we were soon on the 50km journey to Tavistock, a large, busy dairy farm with abundant maize and soya produced as winter feed for the cattle.

So extensive is the farm that we had a wide choice of habitat beginning with a pleasant walk through fields down to the river. There were Abdim's Stork, Crowned Lapwing and Blacksmith Lapwing, Barn Swallow and Lesser Striped Swallow with the occasional Common House-martin and Lilac-breasted Roller. The most obvious bird everywhere all day was the Rattling Cisticola. Near the river we encountered reeded pools which offered Yellow-mantled Widowbird, Little Rush-warbler and African Reed-warbler, Lesser Swamp-warbler and Greater Reed-warbler. A large clump of Acacia yielded Terrestrial Brownbul, Tawny-flanked Prinia, African Yellow White-eye, Chin-spot Batis and a Black-collared Barbet.

Small groups found various routes through or around the fence separating the fields from the river. A loud cry from DRG alerted us to the fact that the fence was indeed electrified but mouth to mouth was fortunately not necessary. His strangled cry did however disturb a possible Blue-throated Sunbird that IR was watching. In fact this was almost certainly a junior White-bellied Sunbird this far west. The most exciting bird on the peaceful Umfuli River was a lone Southern Carmine Bee-eater on a transverse wire while an African Fish-eagle and a Grey-headed Gull flew overhead and a Red-breasted Swallow dived low to drink.

At the pumping-station village, 3 White-fronted Bee-eater sat on the wires.

High above, we spotted a dozen White-backed Vultures.

Our next habitat was the seeps, occasionally flooded low areas over which Amur Falcon and Rock Kestrel were hunting. Several Red-backed Shrike were seen and various widows, White-winged Widowbird, Southern Red Bishop, Pin-tailed Whydah and the only Purple Heron. Interesting was a Marico Sunbird in a small Acacia.

The last area visited as a group was a dam near the farmhouse with Comb Duck, Red-billed Teal, Little Grebe, Reed Cormorant and 2 Little Bittern. Sedge Warbler and Southern Masked-weavers could be heard everywhere. By now we were all hot and tired and the shade of the verandah and garden was most welcome. This area also gave us some common garden birds like the day's only White-browed Robin-chat, Black-headed Oriole and African Golden Oriole.

A small group decided the venue was worth further investigation and with Mike Hardcastle, our friendly, unassuming host and guide, we drove to another dam, delightful woodland and the gravel pits. The small, partly weed-choked dam held White-faced Duck, Comb Duck, more Red-billed Teal and 10 Egyptian Goose; in the woods we found Brubru, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird, Green-backed Honeybird, Spotted Flycatcher and many others. The partly-flooded gravel pits provided perfect, tranquil habitat for waders; Common Greenshank, Ruff, Wood Sandpiper, Three-banded Plover; and a Malachite Kingfisher for good measure. What a lovely setting to bring to a close the day's birding; the lunchtime count of 100 now reached 123. Many thanks to our hosts from all of us.

Ken Dixon

MATABELELAND BRANCH

AGM, 16th February

As usual there was an excellent attendance by our supportive members, 48 of whom settled themselves comfortably into chairs dotted around Bill & Helen Lewis' beautiful kopje garden. Reports were presented by Dudley Hubbard (Verreaux's Eagle Survey), Cecilia Hubbard (Dassie Survey), Vernon Tarr (Raptor Survey), Elspeth Parry (Southern Ground-hornbill Survey), Eddie Cross (accounts) and myself on the Barn Swallow Survey, behaviour or otherwise of the 2007 Committee, African Waterfowl Census, a couple of grots about the national office (good opportunity as they were present with us!) and Birding Big Day.

Sideshowes were put on by Elspeth, Bruce McDonald and Evans Mabiza featuring their work on the Ground-hornbill Survey; and Judy Ross with our merchandise, who established herself in the bar – a rather popular venue as she attracted a large clientele. And two wonderful surprises befell us – we were presented with a very large hamper by Lobels Biscuits (in the form again of Dick Cottam) for the raffle, and a large quantity of beautiful enamel bird lapel badges by the Cranstons for fund raising – most of our members refuse to wear lapels but do like to decorate their hats for which these were very popular. At the time of going to press three-quarters of the stock have been sold!

Visitors to the meeting included Chris Magin from the RSPB in UK and Chip Chirara, Director of BirdLife Zimbabwe based in Harare – they both have the title of Dr but we don't use those down here, nothing higher than Temporary Manager.

The 2007 Committee was elected en bloc minus one who is having a year off and plus another who is having (hopefully) a few years on.

We are grateful for the excellent discipline of those present. They enabled us to start and finish the meeting on time, they kindly refrained from asking tricky questions, there wasn't a sign of a heckle, and they tried their level best not to ramble on and on if they did succeed in gaining the floor. It's also an undeniable fact that they became increasingly hungry and thirsty as the morning wore on without a formal tea break.

Just about everyone stayed on for lunch and the party finally broke up at teatime. Warm thanks go to our hosts and all those who helped – Jeanette Cross our highly skilled raffle seller who flogged her wares with great (financial) success; Judy as earlier mentioned who flogged hers with equal (financial) success; Cecilia Hubbard who stepped into the breach to assist us by putting together a professional set of accounts for Eddie's approval – and at short notice produced lunch for myself and our visitors; the GHB team for taking a great deal of care to produce their excellent display; and the Lewises who organized their whole garden around us and laid on the braai fires.

Julia Duprée

Visit to the Randalls: Saturday, 2nd February

Returning home at 11 a.m. on Saturday morning, I had a message on my answering machine from Julia. The Randalls had invited us to see the Abdim's Storks and African Sacred Ibis coming in to roost. We were to meet at Julia's at 5.15 p.m.

The first strange happening was 3 vehicles bringing 5 people all arrived early!! Did this trigger a jinx?

Our vehicle travelled through North End having to take a deviation to avoid the potholes. We met up with the second vehicle (we had slimmed down to 2 instead of 3 vehicles) – stranded on the side of the road short of Falls Road Garage. They had tried, unsuccessfully, to ramp over a cauldron size pothole. Feathers didn't help that flight! The wheel rim was bent and the tyre flat. As 5.30 p.m., meeting time at Falls Road Garage, had passed we thought to advise those meeting there. Discussion took place to re-sort passengers and to leave the men to do the dirty work. As this discussion was protracted, in traditional African style, it subsequently proved unnecessary as those due to meet at the garage joined us coming from town – back to normality?

Thereafter we travelled without further incident to 20km from Bulawayo (not near the Veterinary or other bumps or roadblock), turning westward into the aquifer / irrigation areas. Intensive farming was seen on both sides, dairy cattle and crops including vegetables. What a pleasure to arrive at the green haven of the Randall's farmhouse. This comprised a tshongololo complex. The first house was built in 1956, then an extension for the growing family and finally 'ye olde English' style, leaded paned, double

story from the 1970s. All thatched, cool and restful. The outlook down grassed banks, across the Umgusa River, flooding over the weir, was into indigenous bush with roosting egrets. The Randalls had developed the current efficient farm out of this bushveld.

With a quick glance at the few Abdim's Storks already at the roost, there was much activity putting out tables and chairs, glasses and bottles. As silence grew, attention went to the increasing number of Abdim's Storks and African Sacred Ibis coming in. The roost was a dead gum tree to the side of the house.

Did the birds kill the tree? Help it on its way? Or use a dead one out of choice? Why? Very exposed: giving good visibility for observation of predators from sky or earth? Dumb birds not benefiting from protection from the elements? Height they could get from the few green leafed trees and a few did. Or is it a reason we can't conceive of, coming from their bird brains? (Any avian answers gratefully received) It could have been for exercise as the purchase seemed very unstable – a bird gym?

The birds came in small groups: as initially observed first some Abdim's; then a mixture of small groups of each, with Sacred Ibis dominating the later groups. Most Ibis perched in the middle surrounded by Abdim's Storks with a denser 'base' of Abdim's. Material for a thesis? Lots of volunteers to spend observation time in these beautiful surrounds! Any finance available for such a research project? Final count was about 110, split about 50/50.

Julia's 'sundowners' (self provided) flowed smoothly. Anticipating a departure home for supper we were ambushed by Ann with home-made pizza from home-grown tomatoes ... And home-made ice CREAM (never will Dairyboard taste good again!) – what greater thanks can we give for a super evening! **Margie Pearce**

Visit to the Cranstons, Sunday 24th February

On Sunday 24 February 17 people in 6 vehicles set off for the 20km drive to the Kensington smallholding of members Tom & Jean Cranston. A warm welcome and offer of freshly made tea and scones briefly diverted our attention, but we were quickly reminded of our purpose by the loud calling of Grey Go-away-bird and Green Wood-hoopoes (Red-billed), and by the constant activity in a large clump of cane of Southern Red Bishops and weavers – which were so intent on their own affairs they allowed us to approach close enough to see the whites of their eyes and positively ID them as Lesser Masked-weavers. While still in the garden we saw a pair of Crested Barbet at the nesting hole they have drilled in a Syringa and a delightful flock of Black-faced Waxbill feeding around the hen houses.

Our ramble led us through long grass, past old fields – where both White-bellied Sunbird and Marico Sunbirds were observed feeding on the bright orange wild flowers, into acacia scrub and ended at a small dam near the homestead. This was undoubtedly the highlight of our day where, after having already heard Diderick Cuckoo and Red-chested Cuckoo, we now saw both Levaillant's Cuckoo (Striped) and Jacobin Cuckoos – the latter spending some time splashing and bathing in the dam. We also watched a pair of Southern White-crowned Shrikes feeding their youngster and had the opportunity to observe the difference in the facial markings of the adult and juvenile.

The male Pin-tailed Whydah and Long-tailed Paradise-whydahs left us wondering whether to rejoice with them in their entrancing displays, or sympathise with the difficulty of flying with such an awkward tail! And the Willow Warbler moved around in the branches directly overhead giving us ample time to study and photograph it so we could all agree, after much debate, what it was. On our return to the house Jean & Tom again produced all sorts of tasty goodies to add to the rather meagre fare we had brought for our own picnic lunches. A great day – glorious weather, good company, attractive surroundings and lovely birds (59 species recorded). Thanks Tom & Jean for your hospitality and generosity.

Adele Edwards

Briefing For the Matobo Surveys, Sunday 2nd March

Sunday dawned bright and clear for our meeting on the verandah of Inungu Lodge to brief our teams for this year's Verreaux's Eagle, Dassie and Raptor Surveys. Not only did everyone arrive, everyone arrived on time which got us off to a flying start.

Dudley Hubbard opened the proceedings by handing out a wodge of paperwork, reports from last year's three surveys, passes, maps and forms related to this year's Black Eagle Survey and Dassie Surveys, and stressed the importance of accurately completing report forms for each site, and submitting these by the three critical deadlines.

Cecilia Hubbard followed with details of this year's Dassie Survey, and reminded the teams of the request that they remain flexible and willing to stay on for a third day in the event that inclement weather prevented satisfactory surveys on either of the first two days.

Vernon Tarr presented his Raptor Survey and introduced the teams to the new format report forms, explaining the reasons for the information requested.

Thereafter there was much discussion on the various site allocations and locations, following which lunch in one form or another was had.

It was a very enjoyable event, and we thank the survey co-ordinators for their clear and efficient presentations, the survey teams for attending and the Hubbards for their usual warm hospitality.

Julia Duprée

TAIL FEATHERS

Opportunist or what?

Some Harare motorists will be aware of the burst water-main in Derry Circle, Emerald Hill, which has resulted in a steady stream flowing over the area for many, many months past. This has caused subsidence across the road which has restricted traffic to a very narrow strip between the end of it and the service station wall.

In early March, at around 9:00, I approached the hazard with the required caution and thought I saw a disturbance within the largest pothole. As I reached it, a head popped up, followed by a body – a Pied Crow! Which possibly decided that a wheel was unlikely to invade its space and slowly sank down again and re-submerged itself – I kid you not and I have a witness! The driver of a following car a couple of minutes later also came across said crow which, ablutions apparently completed, climbed out of the pothole, shook itself and flew away.

Rita Mills

Unusual Bird Sightings – Harare

Senegal Parrot *Poicephalus senegalus*

Endemic to West Africa. A small grey head, green chest and yellow, orange-yellow or red lower breast belly and vent. Overlaps slightly in the east with Meyer's Parrot *Poicephalus meyeri*, where single juveniles are hard to separate. Voice is similar to Meyer's Parrot.

Reported to me recently is the sighting of a Senegal Parrot in a Hatfield garden by one of our members. He confirms the bird has been in the area since the end of last year and is regularly seen in the garden, and it is now mixing with flocks of Meyer's Parrots and is possibly pairing with one.

Black-cheeked Lovebirds *Agapornis nigrigenis*

I have been told that these birds are no longer found in Zimbabwe; however I have seen them alive and thriving in flocks consisting of Lilian's Lovebirds *Agapornis lilianae*, in a garden in Borrowdale!

The above sightings could most possibly be a case of escaped captive birds that have now adapted to local conditions. Does anyone else know of cases of unusual/vagrant bird sightings, it would be interesting to hear of them, and to document them. Please let us know at the office, it would also help if you are able to give definite locations where the birds are seen regularly.

Hazel Hatton, BLZ Finance Manager

House Sparrow nesting in a fence pole

It seems like the House Sparrow is continuing to do what it knows best. I have witnessed over the past four months of a pair or pairs of House Sparrows nesting in a fence pole next to our house in the western suburbs of Harare. This phenomenon has only been reported for the eastern suburbs, but it seems like

it's widespread throughout Harare. I have been looking at this nesting site for a while but could not tell if the pair(s) successfully bred because I don't spend the day at home five days a week. From my own point of view I would say the pair(s) which breeds in the pole might be successful because the site is out of reach of children, so not being tempered with although it is in the high density suburb.

House Sparrows in this area so much established such that where ever you are and a small bird calls it surely may be the sparrow.

On another note, if anyone has a zeal for waders I would suggest they go to David Whitehead ponds for I witnessed it when I went for the waterfowl count. Almost a quarter of the total numbers of the birds were waders. **Admire Charehwa, Student (BLZ Conservation)**

A stitch in time – Variable Sunbirds (Yellow-bellied) Nesting.

Nest building started on the 23rd of January 2008. The nest materials included the following: Florets of *Panicum maximum* for the outer layers, *Rynchelitrum repens* for the inner lining. The nest was almost complete during the first day. The birds probably roosted in the nest during the first night as I saw them coming out of the nest in the morning around 6 a.m. Nest building continued on the 24th and when I checked in the evening, the nest was shabby but looked complete. On the 27th I was surprised to see five eggs in the nest and I wondered if the birds were using one nest as a group! When I had checked the previous day not even a single egg was in the nest. Or could there be some parasitic birds that also laid eggs in the nest?

The following week, our hedge had to be trimmed and it so happened that I was just in time to save the poor nest! Unfortunately the nest was exposed and some kids tried to pull the nest off the branch and for the second time I was there to save the nest!

It is very sad to note that when I was away for the whole afternoon one Saturday and no one was at home, I came home afterwards to see nothing on the branch where the nest was! Furthermore, there was no one to ask about it!

Hedges are living fences and are environmentally friendly therefore, they are recommended in place of walls. However, if they are not trimmed in time, valuable wildlife will be lost. Indeed a stitch in time saves nine – think about it. **Everness Shava, Student (BLZ Education)**

Bird Migration

The following article from the BLI web-site raises some moot points.

1. Is it feasible that birds somewhere in Africa know that Europe is having a mild winter and good weather and decide to go back early or is there some other trigger? Surely conditions in the place the birds are during the European winter would have more affect than conditions in Europe?
2. Have there always been some early arrivals but we haven't known about them because there hasn't been internet sites to record sightings i.e. ARE birds migrating earlier?
3. What is the trigger for birds to migrate? Shortening days where they are would surely be the most likely trigger as that doesn't change year to year.

Dave Dalziel says that migratory waders are putting weight on rapidly and will start to depart over this full moon period. Which means this week if they haven't left already? Let me have your comments on this interesting subject. Editor

Spring Alive sees early arrival of migratory birds to Europe

In recent weeks, participants in BirdLife's Spring Alive campaign have been spotting the arrival of migratory birds all around Europe. Spring Alive invites citizens – especially children – from all over Europe to record their first sightings of Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*, Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*, Common Swift *Apus apus* and White Stork *Ciconia ciconia*. The campaign, which is implemented nationally by BirdLife's European Partners, is being promoted in 28 countries.

“The first arrivals were spotted very early this year, possibly due to the mild winter and good weather in Europe”, says Joanna Kalinowska, coordinator of the Spring Alive project. Some of very first Barn Swallows were spotted in Cyprus on the 11th January by the Executive Manager of BirdLife Cyprus,

Martin Hellicar.

“The arrivals in Central Europe are extremely early this year as well”, said Aleksander Kalinowski, who sighted the first White Stork in Poland on the first of February and entered his sightings through the Spring Alive website. “Due to my early sightings, I will unfortunately not have a chance to wear a spring bracelet this year”. Mr Kalinowski was referring to the ‘Martenica bracelet’ which is exchanged from the 1st March by Poles, Bulgarians, Romanians and Moldavians. Each person wears the bracelet until they spot their first White Stork of the year.

Already more than 700 sightings have been recorded online. However, lots of migratory birds are yet to arrive in Central and Northern Europe. The peak period is expected to be between late March and early April.

NOTICEBOARD

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.

HARARE AND SURROUNDS BIRDING HOT SPOTS

Harare City limits

Harare Botanic Gardens	Pond/mixed vegetation	Entrance fee
Willy's Dam – Greengrove	Man made pond with island/Wetland	Free
Cleveland Dam Recreational site	Medium sized dam	Small fee
Haka Game park	Game park, miombo, wetland	Entrance Fee
Marlborough Vlei	Wetland/sewage/'guide' Mashonaland visiting site	No charge / BLZ
Monavale Vlei	Wetland/'guide' Mashonaland visiting site	No charge / BLZ
Bluff Hill vlei	Wetland	No charge
Crowborough Sewage Ponds	Sewage ponds	City Council clearance required
Greystone Park Nature area	Small dam	No charge
Mukuvisi Game Park	Open/miombo/dam/hide Mashonaland visiting site	Entrance fee / BLZ

Out of City within +/- 35kms

Ewanrigg Botanic Gardens	Winter must/aloes	Entrance fee
Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary	Dam/hide/miombo Mashonaland visiting site	Free/By arrangement/BLZ
Chivero National Park	Varied	Entrance fee
Christon Bank Botanical Garden	Varied	Free
Mbizi Game Park (behind Airport)	Varied/dam	Entrance fee
Ngomakurira	Granite outcrop	Entrance fee
Darwendale dam	Dam	Entrance fee

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PUBLISHED BY JAY KAY PUBLISHING

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