

# BABBLER

The Newsletter of -

## BirdLife Zimbabwe

The BirdLife International Partner in Zimbabwe

### ISSUE # 83 – AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2008

	<b>Mashonaland</b>		<b>Matabeleland</b>	
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	Ian Riddell	339716	Eddie Cross	240093
	Ken Wilson	745231	Judy Ross	246522
	Jennifer Carter	300082		
	Dave Rockingham-Gill	882412		

#### **NATIONAL OFFICE**

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**Education Programme Manager:** Leslee Maasdorp    **Conservation Manager:** Kanisios Mukwashi  
**Project Officer (Education):** Togarasei Fakarayi    **Conservation Officer:** Fadzai Matsvimbo  
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#### **REMINDER – APRIL 2008 to MARCH 2009 SUBSCRIPTIONS**

Changes were made at the AGM on 31<sup>st</sup> May, 2008 as follows:

Ordinary (Individual and family) members and schools	ZW\$ equivalent of US\$10
Senior Citizens and students	ZW\$ equivalent of US\$5
Corporate members	ZW\$ equivalent of US\$30
Members outside Zimbabwe	Africa US\$20/Other US\$30

**For the remainder of the current year, quarterly payments of the equivalent of US\$2.50 (or half that for pensioners, students and juniors) will be due on 1<sup>st</sup> July and 1<sup>st</sup> October 2008 and 1<sup>st</sup> January 2009. Those who wish to do so can pay the full amount due for the rest of the year in July or October. The inter-bank rate on the day of payment will be used to calculate the amount to be paid. Please contact BLZ office to get the rate.**

Please remember that, if you will have difficulties making a payment, please contact a Matabeleland or Mashonaland committee member and arrangements can be made to assist you. We don't want to lose members.

## PAYMENT

(a) By cash or cheque at BirdLife offices, Clyde Road; OR DEPOSIT INTO

(b) BirdLife Zimbabwe Barclays Bank a/c 0647523 at Borrowdale Branch, Branch Code 2147; OR

(c) BirdLife Mash CABS a/c 9012703755 at ANY CABS Branch.

**If (b) OR (c) you MUST fax or email details to BirdLife (see above addresses).** If depositing into CABS, please give your name as DEPOSITOR and email [jcarter@cabs.co.zw](mailto:jcarter@cabs.co.zw) and/or [gcarter@mweb.co.zw](mailto:gcarter@mweb.co.zw) with details as well as BLZ.

d) Matabeleland members contact Julia.

## ACTIVITIES

### **MASHONALAND BRANCH**

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

#### **Sundays 3<sup>rd</sup> August 07:00 a.m. and 7<sup>th</sup> September 06:30 a.m.: Mukuvisi Woodlands**

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, in cash or kind, 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 10<sup>th</sup> August 07:00 a.m. and 14<sup>th</sup> September 06:30 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 17<sup>th</sup> August and 21<sup>st</sup> September: 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, 16<sup>th</sup> August 07:00 a.m.: Mukuvisi Woodlands:**

Meet at the main car park off Glenara Avenue.

**Saturday Morning, 20<sup>th</sup> September, 07:00 a.m. Greystone Park Nature Reserve:** 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. Migrants will be coming back.

*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 24<sup>th</sup> August, 07:00 a.m. Thetford Estate, Christon Bank:** Meet at the Food Court/Garage, corner Second Street Ext./The Chase, where vehicles can be left and transport shared. Bring chairs and plenty of refreshments. This is an excellent venue with a variety of habitats and game as well as birds.

### **September ANNUAL WEEKEND - HIPPO POOLS**

#### **Friday 26<sup>th</sup> - Monday 29<sup>th</sup> September**

There are lodges or camping at this excellent birding site. Livingstone's Flycatcher, White-backed Night-heron, Narina Trogon and Red-throated Twinspot can be seen without leaving camp and Pel's Fishing-owl just a stroll away. Cabanis's Bunting was confirmed for the first time last year and Dickenson's Kestrel is usually found.

Transport will be shared as much as possible to keep costs down for all. If you are interested, please email Dave Dalziel at [ddalziel@cabs.co.zw](mailto:ddalziel@cabs.co.zw) or contact a committee member. The Carters will be away for most of August but can be emailed or phoned in September. Bookings will only be made when there is a commitment as all places booked were not taken up last year.

#### **Evening Meetings**

We have been advised that Old Hararians Bowls Club is no longer available as a venue. If anyone knows of a suitable venue for future talks, please contact a committee member.

#### **Friday, 15<sup>th</sup> August - NO MEETING**

**Friday, 19<sup>th</sup> September, Alex Masterson presentation on "Birdy People Associated with Zimbabwe 1850 – 1950":** Alex needs no introduction! We expect to see many of you. Meet at Carter's house, 2 Helena Road, Marlborough. Tea and Coffee (and cake if you're lucky) will be provided but please bring other drinks and chairs. There is plenty of room and a generator if necessary. (300082, 0912329310)

## **MATABELELAND BRANCH**

### **Monthly Outings**

**August, 8<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup>, Camp at Shashe, Tuli.** Unlimited numbers, cost is \$25 billion per person per night (please note slight increase from previous notice) *payable in advance by 25 July*, plus share of \$16,000,000,000 total for hire of camp, plus share of pump diesel and staff tips. Utility vehicles recommended. Estimated total mileage: Bulawayo to Shashe return about 360 km; to Sentinel and back is about 200 km (though this will probably not take place this time around); local trips add another 100 km. For more details or to book your place ring Judy 65383(w)/ 242943 (h)/ 011-419335 (c) or Cecilia (240127 (h)/ 287692 (w)).

**August, 31<sup>st</sup>, Walk at Mabukuwene.** 9.00 a.m. meet at the Aloe Society's clubhouse. Take morning tea and lunch, for which we will be hosted by John and Jenny Brebner at their home in Inverleith Drive, Burnside. Ring Judy.

**September 20<sup>th</sup>, Survey in Tshabalala Game Park.** All day. First of two visits to update the bird checklist for National Parks. Walking and driving. Limited numbers, entry free. Ring Julia 246269.

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

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## **MASHONALAND SOUTH**

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

Contact Margaret Parrockt ☎ 068-22005 or her daughter, Coralee, ☎ 068-23644 for details.

Margaret says the birding is superb around that area and that there are African Finfoot on Claw Dam and 3-4 Black-chested Snake-eagles and a pair of African Harrier-hawk in town around the golf course area and the Barn Owls are breeding quite well – especially in the butchery building!

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## **REPORTS**

### **NATIONAL**

#### **REPORT ON THE NATIONAL AGM**

The 2008 national AGM was held at the Mukuvisi Woodland on Saturday 31 May and was well attended by 38 members, 8 Council members and the Director and national office staff. Unfortunately due to the length of the meeting the tribute to Michael Irwin was delayed and some members had left. Alex Masterson's fascinating insight into Michael's life and achievements will however be in the next issue of *Honeyguide*, accompanied by a couple of photos of the occasion. The meeting began with a minute's silence to remember Dudley Hubbard – a long-standing BLZ supporter, Council member and invaluable Matabeleland Committee member and BLZ national office's messenger, Onesimo Ndowa, who regrettably passed away during the year.

The theme of Ken Wilson's report was continuity and change. He told the meeting that there is a real danger of losing the history of ornithology in Zimbabwe, built up over the years in the field records, in the collections of egg and bird specimens, in the museums and the literature in the BLZ library, if these collections are not properly cared for. The main resource required to achieve the recovery and preservation of our historical ornithological records and endeavours is finance and it is therefore of extreme importance that funding should be found to finance the work on the *Honeyguide* Index and the Data Base Project produced by Ian Riddell, to staff and house the library and to ensure the preservation of the egg and specimen collections for future generations. The securing of funds to address these needs must be seen as a priority by Council, members and the Director during the coming year. He went on to say that change is measured against historical records and the recognition of change can only be detected by the examination and study of past records and the speed of change monitored by the collection of new data. Some of the known changes presently occurring in the local ornithological scene are the expansion of the ranges of some species e.g. the Northern Grey-headed Sparrow coming South, Woodland birds coming into the cities and towns, Eastern District birds coming West, Dry land birds moving East and

the Eastern Bronze-naped Pigeon breaking out of its restricted habitat to colonise new territories. Another example is the possible speciation of the Dark-backed Weaver in a small isolated population in the mid Zambezi Valley and as habitat changes become more permanent, new species take advantage of these changes e.g. the Red-necked Spurfowl being replaced by the more adaptable Swainson's Spurfowl in the Eastern District communal lands. In order to establish real differences from the norm and to arrive at some mathematical precision on the observations being taken, detailed studies must be undertaken which would, in the past, be challenges taken up by members of BLZ, researched and written up in their spare time and presented to the world of ornithology as new discoveries. Ken commented that sadly these stimulating projects are not now being taken up by enough of the gifted amateurs among members of BLZ. Some changes in the habitats have happened quickly and birds have responded and exploited the changes with equal speed. Examples are the hundreds of small dams in the commercial farming areas that have presented a huge opportunity for water birds to spread more evenly over the Central Plateau, which has never been quantified; the new land re-distribution exercise resulting in the increase of new habitats as old cultivated lands revert to grassland and scrub and waves of pioneering birds exploit the new habitats; and the devastation caused on these newly acquired properties by cutting out mature trees for firewood. The continuation of commercial tree destruction is bound to have a devastating effect on woodland birds especially in miombo woodland on the Plateau and the Haroni/Rusitu low altitude forest which creeps into Zimbabwe from Mozambique and which has been virtually destroyed by the felling of the dominant trees, almost wiping out the canopy-dwelling species of birds. The vegetation is now becoming a low tangled scrub of secondary re-growth. Similarly, some of the last remaining indigenous forests in the Honde Valley are being vandalized and their special bird communities are being driven from the area. Grasslands, in particular montane grasslands, are prime targets for the development of exotic forestry plantations and in Zimbabwe in the past, large sections of these uplands were planted to commercial forests, with loss of the indigenous bird communities – therefore how safe are the remaining pristine grasslands of the Blue Swallow from the predation of commercial forestry? Another example of change are vleis and dambos, once protected from cultivation by law in order to preserve the sources of perennial water flows, but which are now being used for cultivation, particularly in the peri-urban areas, encouraged by officials. This short-sighted policy is sure to affect the delivery of stored water into our rivers throughout the year for the towns and cities in their watershed. Special birds that live in these semi-permanent wet grasslands will be one of the first indicators of the failing health of these river headwater systems. He pointed out that it is investigations into these small changes of behaviour or distribution that add to the total sum of ornithological knowledge and to the global picture of how birds are adapting to change throughout the world.

The President reported that during the year the Director, Dr Chip Chirara, was appointed to the Technical Advisory Committee of CAP (the Council for the African Partnership) as a representative for Southern Africa and recently was appointed Chairman of CAP for the year 2008/9. This was a singular honour for Dr Chirara personally and by association also for BirdLife Zimbabwe. Dr Chris Magin of RSPB visited BLZ in March 2008 and attended the Matabeleland branch AGM.

Touching on membership, Ken said that the key requirement for any association is to have regular group activities throughout the year and in spite of all the current constraints BLZ have managed to continue the outings and leisure evenings, which have been surprisingly well attended in the two main cities. During the year the Executive Committee has repeatedly requested the administration department to provide an accurate membership list – not such a difficult task one would have thought – and one that has still not been completed satisfactorily.

Going on to Research and Conservation, he reported that BLZ had declined participation in a new South African atlasing initiative, as with the dwindling numbers of birders and the inability to move freely throughout the country, no meaningful data would be obtained. The Monavale Vlei project is full of promise and can become the venue for many interesting long term projects. A decision of a research and conservation workshop held in August 2007, was to try to channel some of the membership enthusiasm into a new ringing initiative, but this is presently on hold due to time constraints amongst the main ringers. Tracey Couto has taken over the co-ordination of the annual Waterbird Census and the Matabeleland branch are very involved with local projects such as the Southern Ground-hornbill Survey, Barn Swallows at the How Mine roost, the Verreaux's Eagle Survey, the Dassie Survey and a new birding centre at the Hillside dams. The Eastern Districts branch was rejuvenated by undertaking a

survey of Swynnerton's Robin sites under the guidance of Carl Beel and some interesting data has been collected, which he hoped will continue. The small population of Wattled Crane in the Driefontein area are still vulnerable to disturbance and their continued survival depends on further funding to monitor the progress of this bird in this part of Southern Africa. BLZ are working closely with the Parks and Wildlife Authority and are endeavouring to sign a Memorandum of Understanding that will form a partnership between the two entities. The biggest co-operative effort is the current Important Bird Areas (IBA) project. He mentioned that Council needs a replacement for Professor Brian Marshall as the Research and Conservation member, to be the interface between Council and the Research and Conservation Manager.

Mention was made of the tremendous efforts and excellent results over the year in the field of education and Leslee Maasdorp congratulated for being recognised for her work by being invited to the next BirdLife World Convention in South America, to share her talent with the wider circle of BLI partners from all over the world.

The President thanked the Council and Executive Committee members for their continued support over the year – particularly the hard working Secretary, Carolyn Dennison, the enthusiastic and dynamic Vice President, Dorothy Wakeling and the Treasurer, Ken Fisher, for keeping an eye on the finances in these difficult inflationary times. Thanks went to the guides, especially Dave Dalziel and Richard Dennison, the *Babbler* editor, Jennifer Carter, the Matabeleland Branch for their continued excellent performance in all fields and to Margaret Parrock in Kadoma for keeping a spark of interest going in the Midlands. Thanks also went to all the contributors to *Babbler* and *Honeyguide*, especially Colin Baker and Ian Riddell and to Brian Marshall and Julia Duprée for their very hard work editing the journal, with the assistance of Michael Irwin.

Prior to his report the Director, Dr Chip Chirara introduced BLZ office staff to the members – Kanisios Mukwashi is the IBA Monitoring Project Manager, replacing Osiman Mabhachi who left BLZ to further his studies in the UK and has now been appointed the African Cranes, Wetlands and Communities Programme Coordinator, based in Johannesburg. Fadzai Matsvimbo joined BLZ permanent staff at the end of the Avian Influenza Project, Togarasei Fakarayi is the Conservation Projects Officer and Rueben Njolomole the Education Officer, assisted by Juliet Masama and Sabina Mapika the Administration Officer. Chip stated that the question that should continue to be asked is – ‘Are our interventions making any difference to the conservation status of birds?’ He said that the activities of the entire organisation, from the members’ activities to the projects that are run by the national office, make what BirdLife Zimbabwe is today and he is certain that BLZ are making a positive contribution to the conservation status of Zimbabwe’s birds. In answer to the question that is often asked – “Who and What is BirdLife Zimbabwe?” – he stated that the members who represent the organisation in the various constituencies as individuals, corporates and institutions are BirdLife Zimbabwe and thanked members for their contributions under difficult circumstances. He reminded members that it is up to them to decide what they want BLZ to do and urged them to start thinking about the next 3-year Strategy Plan, which is due in 2009. Major achievements included funds being made available for national office activities despite serious cash flow challenges caused by hyperinflation, e-mail communication greatly improved since the installation of broadband and security lights installed around the office. On projects and funding, BLZ has retained funding from the RSPB, with modifications to the traditional budget so there is possible funding for field research projects by members, who can apply through the director, for funds for projects that contribute to BLZ’s overall conservation goals. Funding has been obtained from the Global Environment Facility for ecotourism development at Mbazhe Pan Sanctuary near Nkayi and the Global Avian Influenza Project will be continued to May 2009. Additional funding from the Rio Tinto/BirdLife International Programme for the Murowa Education project will enable this to continue until next year. The Eastern Highlands Project has been selected by BirdLife International to be presented at the World Conference in Argentina in September, showing how highly regarded BLZ projects are by international partners. BLZ continues to work closely with the RSPB and BirdLife International, Gary Stafford and Dr. Neil Deacon who attend to injured birds and the Ministry of Education, the Environmental Management Agency, the Parks and Wildlife Management Authority, COSMO, Allied Timbers, Forestry Commission, Environment Africa and others. BirdLife Zimbabwe continues to take students from the universities on attachment in the library, conservation and education departments and this has produced positive results. In conclusion, Chip stated that BirdLife thrives on

teamwork and on building partnerships and by working as a team we should utilise our various strengths and together celebrate the continued existence of our birds and their habitats.

Kanisios Mukwashi gave a progress report on the IBA project and showed members a brochure that has been produced by BLZ. Fadzai Matsvimbo gave a detailed report on the other projects being undertaken by the BLZ national office.

With regard to the audited accounts, the President stated that the auditors, JSM Consultants, advised that they are unable to finalise the audit before this AGM as there are still a number of issues to be resolved. They revolve around the valuation and treatment of project expenses and balances, due to the incorrect use of exchange rates. This problem may stem from the previous year. When the accounts are ready, members will be notified of a Special General Meeting to approve the financial report for the year April 2007 to March 2008.

The Education report was presented by Leslee Maasdorp and included the Murowa project, the World Migratory Bird Day at Marlborough Sewage Ponds and work in progress for events for Harare schools and the Bird Awareness Project, which continues in outlying areas, although transport constraints are a major problem. Leslee reported she had visited the Umgeni Centre at Howick, KwaZulu Natal and the offices of SADC Regional Environmental Education Project. The student Everness Shava had assisted in the development of posters, notices and the booklet on mammalian carnivores and collected data for her dissertation on "The Effects of Human Disturbances on Miombo Woodland Birds at Mukuvisi Woodlands and Catholic University Woodlands". The Matabeleland branch does excellent work with education and produce very good material. Donations of posters, pictures, books and binoculars are much appreciated.

Dorothy Wakeling expressed disappointment that little has been achieved in the last two years with regard to refurbishing the store room so the library can be moved. The BLZ library is an outstanding collection and valuable resource and not being used by members or research workers due to space constraints. An agreement was made with the Niven Library to access their data base and it is hoped a copy of the *Handbook of the Birds of the World* Vol. 13 would be received. Documentation in the library is maintained using professional library systems and the current library student, Dylas Gudoshava was complimented on her work and being awarded a BAT scholarship. Dorothy commented that the library is a valuable specialist asset of the BLZ membership and its management should be of concern.

Julia Duprée pointed out that the latest double issue of *Honeyguide* is now 9 months late due to problems beyond her control, but should be out shortly. Michael Irwin told the meeting that the journal is a major source of information for publications such as the *Handbook of the Birds of the World*, which has thousands of references from *Honeyguide* and it is a priority to sustain and publish it regularly. The future of conservation of birdlife is in the member's hands and he urged them increase their observations and contributions to *Honeyguide* and pointed out that having edited it for 24 years, he would want to see it continue. Jennifer Carter reported that distribution of the *Babbler* other than by e-mail is proving rather difficult as the postal system is not reliable and welcomed all contributions.

Dave Dalziel reported that the Mashonaland Branch has had another very busy year with over fifty outings, evening meetings and other member activities. He urged members to support these functions, details of which are in the *Babbler* and reminders sent by e-mail.

He thanked the many people who contributed to the success of the branch, including people that allowed access to their land or came to speak or gave of their time taking walks etc. and most importantly thanked the members, because without them there would be no Birdlife. He asked members to think about what they want out of being a member of Birdlife and what sort of activities they want to participate in.

The Matabeleland Branch is very enthusiastic and Julia Duprée reported that although schools were having problems visiting the How Mine Barn Swallow Roost, posters and leaflets have been produced. She mentioned that of 12 Ground-hornbill nest sites seen only 2 were in trees – the rest were in granite, showing how the birds have adapted to a changing environment. Verreaux's Eagle breeding activity is apparent at many of the nests and last season 20 out of 22 chicks survived. The Dassie Survey was

successful and informative with 218 animals counted. Many reports are coming in from survey teams and members of the public who are becoming increasingly aware of the Raptor Survey.

Although there was no report from the Eastern Districts as Carl Beel has left the country, they are still involved with the Swynnerton's Robin and Blue Swallow projects and members were requested to send in reports.

The President announced that Council member and Secretary, Carolyn Dennison had tendered her resignation, which was reluctantly accepted. He and the Vice President expressed their desire to step down after a 2-year stint, but an appeal for nominations from the floor to fill these posts brought no response. Ordinary Council members Ferdie Couto and Geoff Lowe were willing to stand again if elected. As election of officers could not be finalised, it was proposed that this be included in the agenda for the Special General Meeting that would be called to approve the audited accounts. In the meantime Ken and Dorothy would continue with their positions. Since the AGM the treasurer has also resigned due to pressure of work, so members are asked to please submit nominations for any of these posts to Ken Wilson, Dorothy or Carolyn.

The proposed amendments to the Constitution were approved by the members present. Ken Wilson pointed out that the first Constitution was drawn up to accommodate the aspirations of an association of amateur birders, with honorary officers drawn from the membership to fill executive posts to run it. Now that BLZ is a partner with BLI with specific obligations and provided with core funding by BLI, a full time director and staff are required and this change of structure should be reflected in the Constitution. He stated that the proposed amendments will be sufficient to address the new needs of BLZ and the wishes of the members.

As current subscription rates are meaningless in the hyper-inflationary environment, an increase in fees was discussed. Members agreed to set the annual subscription for ordinary and family members and schools at US\$10 per annum or US\$2.50 per quarter, according to the Barclays Bank interbank rate on the day of payment. Pensioners would be half that rate but anyone unable to pay these fees should approach their branch chairperson, as BLZ does not want to lose members. Corporate fees are US\$30 or equivalent.

We hope there will be more member participation in the coming year – bird watching is a wonderful way to refresh one's soul, especially in these difficult times and there is always a bird somewhere! We thank the individuals, companies and donors and look forward to your continued support of BirdLife Zimbabwe. Anyone wanting a copy of the AGM minutes and/or the various reports in detail please contact **Carolyn Dennison** on [rolly@zol.co.zw](mailto:rolly@zol.co.zw) or telephone Harare 747567.

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## **MASHONALAND BRANCH**

### **EWANRIGG BOTANIC GARDENS, Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> May 2008 (QDS: 1731C2)**

On a fine and cool morning 6 members gathered at the BLZ headquarters by 6.30 a.m. and were joined later by another 5 at Ewanrigg. There was one police roadblock just before the Enterprise and Mutoko road junction but they did not trouble us and the rest of the journey was quite uneventful in these troubled times. On the way in and within our quarter degree square we had seen a Black-shouldered Kite and a pair of Senegal Coucals. I mention these birds because there was some good humoured debate at the call-over at the end of our walk when Martin Harrison felt that if we were going to include the Coucals which were a few hundred metres from the Ewanrigg entrance we should include the kite seen near the turnoff from the tar road.

We had decided to visit Ewanrigg a month earlier than usual because we expected the aloes to peak at this time, but as it turned out only about half the aloes were in bloom as we were too late for some and too early for others. Another disappointment was that the Coffee Shade Tree was yet to bloom and this tree was full of birds when it bloomed in previous years, so I think we should revert to June next year. We also found that the artificial ponds were all empty and I believe this significantly depressed the bird count. National Parks later told us that the lack of electricity had limited their ability to pump water to these ponds. Last year we had the water but the general tidiness through weeding and grass cutting was

a lot less than this year. However, the parks staff were friendly and helpful and have kept the toilets very clean.

Special species from past years have included Magpie Mannikin and Red-backed Mannikin and Western Violet-backed Sunbird. The Magpie Mannikin can only reasonably be expected to be around if there is some flowering Bindura Bamboo nearby and this did not seem to be the case. A Western Violet-backed Sunbird was seen to fly over us by 2 of our members and we failed to see the Red-backed Mannikin. As the day warmed up it turned out to be very pleasant and we did see some good birds. In total, 7 species of sunbird were seen; as well as Violet-backed, Purple-banded Sunbird and the more common Variable Sunbird, Miombo Double-collared Sunbird, Amethyst Sunbird, White-bellied Sunbird and Scarlet-chested Sunbird were identified. Of the 5 raptors we saw, one was a Little Sparrowhawk at the top of a large kapok tree which made it look tiny. Later on, near the Raffia Palm we were lucky enough to count 3 African Green-pigeons in a fruiting fig tree. Other highlights included a Southern Hyliota, 3 Ashy Flycatcher near the car park, a mixed flock of 9 White-crested Helmet-shrike and 7 Red-headed Weaver, 2 Red-winged Starling, a Green-winged Pytilia and 2 Steel-blue Widowfinches.

**Richard Dennison**

### **Friday, 18<sup>th</sup> July, “A Brief History of Astronomy for Beginners”**

Tony Alegria, a stalwart member of BLZ in Mashonaland, not only prepared and presented his Powerpoint talk but brought his own generator to make sure we weren't disappointed. The venue had been hit, along with vast swathes of Harare, by a sub-station fire, so it was warm beer by candle-light at the bar for those who had managed to gather together enough cash, and a lecture room lit by the lap-top for all of us.

We were grateful for the generator as Tony talked of astronomers through the centuries who had come up with sometimes amazingly accurate figures for various measurements. This only by observation and without the instruments that we take for granted today and that have opened up the skies so much in the last couple of hundred years.

Some scientific conclusions, such as the fact that the earth is round and that it moves around the sun, were dangerous to espouse. The Church believed differently and what the Church said was law. To argue was heresy and at least one martyr was burned at the stake for his beliefs. Many learned tomes, written by the ancient Egyptians, were destroyed on the orders of the Church. Fortunately, at least some had been copied into other languages and were saved for modern man to marvel at the knowledge the men acquired with so few tools.

We were then brought back into the 21<sup>st</sup> century as Tony used a wonderful computer program to show us the movements of the planets as they orbit the sun at different rates. This is much to complex a subject to be covered in a 30 minute – or was it 60 minutes – talk but I am sure that all of the 20 or so members who attended will be looking at the sky differently from now on.

Thanks, Tony, for giving us your time and sharing your knowledge.

**Jennifer Carter**

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## **MATABELELAND BRANCH**

### **Martyn's Home, How Mine Area, Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> June 2008**

Sunday 8 June saw a typical BLZ Matland motley crew heading off for a new venue – the small holding of Darryl & Vey Martyn, about 15 km from Bulawayo, off the How Mine road. The Martyns have recently moved to this plot and have just started working on the garden, though they plan to leave much of it in its natural, undeveloped state – which is very attractive for birds. We started with a walk around the perimeter of the property, which is situated on a somewhat rocky slope – making the walk quite a challenge for birders whose eyes tend to be focussed upwards, rather than at their feet! We found 15 species in this area including a Brown-hooded Kingfisher, Brown-crowned Tchagra, Black-backed Puffback and Senegal Coucal; but undoubtedly our most unusual sighting was 7 White-backed Vultures riding the thermals overhead. After this ramble we adjourned to the front lawn for tea, with the promise of much bird activity at the bird baths. Unfortunately the birds had other ideas! While earlier we had seen a number of birds, including both Dark-capped Bulbul and Yellow-bellied Greenbuls, drinking from a water storage drum, no birds were going to visit the bird baths while we were so close and



watching. As time was, as usual, racing by we let the birds win and got back into our vehicles for a short drive to a nearby dam. Here we picked up another 12 species including both Malachite Kingfisher and Pied Kingfisher, Crowned Lapwings, Little Grebes and Hamerkops, and had a wonderful view of a Black-chested Snake-eagle that flew off from a stand of gum trees. A most enjoyable morning – many thanks to our hosts, the Martyns.

**Adele Edwards**

### **SAST Water Fowl Count, Sunday, 13<sup>th</sup> July 2008**

January & July are the months when Matland do waterfowl counts. On Sunday 13 July a team of 5 did the first count of the season at SAST (Southern Areas Sewerage Treatment works near Khami). The day started cool and grey and, instead of clearing as had happened the previous day, the weather grew progressively worse. We always tease our chairman about the amount of luggage she takes on any trip, but on this occasion we all wished we had taken not only another jersey but our beanies and gloves as well, and were drawing straws to decide who got to scribe – and so couldn't keep their hands warm in a pocket. Initially there was much activity in the thorny scrub which borders the sewerage works, with Chestnut-vented Tit-babbler, Blue Waxbill, Jameson's Firefinch and Red-billed Quelea being seen, but these birds soon had the sense to hide themselves away in the sheltered thickets. However there were still many water birds to hold our attention. Chirruping from the reeds edging the ponds made us realise that there were many more Black Crake and Moorhens than we were counting, but we recorded 16 and 23 respectively, including 6 immature birds of each species. On the water we saw a few Hottentot Teal, plenty of Red-billed Teal and White-faced Duck, four Comb Duck, 7 Cape Shovelers and – some of the chosen few spotted a lone Yellow-billed Duck! On such a dull day it was quite difficult to distinguish between the different species at a distance but the bright yellow bill of this duck made it stand out from the rest. There were sightings of single Crowned Lapwing, Malachite Kingfisher and Green-backed Heron. Black-headed Heron and Grey Herons did not appear as plentiful as in the past. We also had two Black-shouldered Kites and a Black-chested Snake-eagle hovering overhead.

We look forward to the formal report produced by Wetlands International which includes an overview of the waterfowl counts. Meanwhile it would be interesting to put together our own analysis of the results to confirm whether our impression of previous sightings is fact or a trick of the mind. It might also make us feel better about spending such an uncomfortable morning if we knew we were contributing something meaningful to what is known about the waterfowl of the region!

**Adele Edwards**

### **Verreux's Eagle Breeding Survey**

The first reporting period for the 2008 Verreux's Eagle Survey ended on the 31st May 2008. 104 nest sites situated within 75 territories were allocated to observers. Of the total allocated, 72 nests within 56 territories had been checked for occupancy and breeding. Reports indicate 31 territories are occupied. Breeding activity is apparent at 24 nest sites, and it is pleasing to note that incubation was confirmed at 4 of these sites.

**Cecilia Hubbard**

### **Hyrax Survey**

Birdlife Matabeleland Branch conducted the annual census of the two species of Hyrax found in the Matobo National Park. This is only the second census conducted by this Branch, but the 16<sup>th</sup> overall. The survey was carried out from 24<sup>th</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup> May 2008, with seven teams taking part.

The weather for all three mornings was cool, clear and sunny. A total of 40.75 hours was spent in the field with viewing at the sites conducted from first light to approximately 9.00 a.m. There has been an increase in the number of animals counted in 2008 (218), compared to 2007 (186). However, the overall total is low in comparison to previous years.

The National Office is thanked for funding this project. **Cecilia Hubbard**

### **Rehabilitation of a Juvenile Southern Ground-hornbill**

On 12 June 2008, a juvenile Southern Ground-hornbill *Bucorvus leadbeateri* was picked up by Marnie Delpont of Anglesea Farm alongside the Kezi road south of Bulawayo in the Police Station/Matopos Research Station area (2028B 42°40'S; 51°50'E). The bird was found to be in an exhausted and emaciated condition but there were no apparent injuries.

After several days within an enclosed compound and regularly fed it was able to stand and walk, but when I saw it the following week its balance was not good.

Juveniles up to 18 months old are not self-sustaining and depend on the group for help in feeding. There are wandering females that attempt to join other groups but may not be accepted. Southern Ground-hornbills are voracious eaters and reared in captivity they require 12 day-old chicks plus wild caught food daily. Tinned dog food can be used but a large quantity is required. Marnie and Jeanette Delpont used beef and shot some pigeons, as beef alone is too fatty.

After two weeks, the bird flew and has not been seen since. There is one group of Southern Ground-hornbills just to the north-east of Anglesea Farm and several more to the south-west and directly south, but they are at some distance.

We are very grateful to the Marnie and Jeanette Delpont for their care and interest. As these hornbills may only breed every 8 years and live sometimes to 40 years every bird is precious.

**Elsbeth Parry, The Southern Ground-hornbill Team**

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## **TAIL FEATHERS**

In the afternoon of 6 April, 2008 while sitting on my verandah in Alexandra Park in Harare, I witnessed an unequal contest between a resident Crested Barbet, *Trachyphonus vaillantii Ranzani* and a bush locust, *Phymateus viripides*.

The barbet is a regular nesting bird in March and April in a hollow horizontal branch in a nearby *Chorisa sp.* tree growing on the roadside verge. The barbet had caught a large bush locust, *P. viripides*, which it took to ground on a paved patio and proceeded to dismember – first the six legs and then the four wings. The coup de grâce was when the head was crushed by the heavy bill. Then the whole of the green/yellow sausage-shaped abdomen was systematically crushed by the two mandibles, presumably to macerate the internal organs inside the tough outer exoskeleton, which remained intact. The crushing and squeezing process took about 3 minutes. The limp body of the bush locust was then taken back to the nest; presumably to feed the barbet's young. The bush locust was 90mm long and represented a large protein-rich meal for the young birds.

*P. viripides* has three defence mechanisms at its disposal, all of which were totally ineffective in preventing its death. Firstly *P. viripides* is a large insect and in consequence the two wings and six legs are large appendages, and the hind legs carry a parallel row of short tough spines. The forewings of this bush locust are light green which blend in well with green foliage, but the larger hind wing which is generally only exposed in flight, is brightly coloured in reds and blues with thick colourful venation. When the bush locust is threatened by a predator, the insect suddenly opens the forewing to reveal an expanded, large, aggressively-coloured hind wing and it is thought that this flash of colour would intimidate or deter a predator. In addition to the hind wing flash the insect releases evil-smelling foam from the top joint of the hind leg. This foam is thought to be distasteful and gives the insect some protection from predators.

Obviously the Crested Barbet was not intimidated or deterred by the spiny legs, the flashing hind wing or the evil-smelling foam.

The question has to be asked – have these supposed defence mechanisms ever been seen to work and if so, against which predators?

**Ken Wilson, 41 Basset Crescent, Alexandra Park**

## **The Effects of Deforestation**

Walk through the jagged stumps and stubble of a forest clear-cut, and you probably won't see any small animals, or hear birds singing. Where once the rich, loamy smell of forest soil perfumed the air, you'll smell only car fumes, the immediate change to that specific environment is shocking. What are the deeper effects of deforestation on the environment and economy?

## **Environmental Effects**

The planet has lost its forests due to human activities such as logging, mining and petroleum exploration, agriculture, and urban sprawl. One immediate and devastating effect of this deforestation is **loss of biodiversity**. Forests are incredibly rich in plants and animals; home to the world's species. Most forest animals, and nearly all of the plants, are unable to survive outside of the forest ecosystem, so when the trees are cut down, they die. Two-thirds of the world's vascular plants live only in forests, along with 2,600 species of birds, and a staggering 30 million species of insects! Humans haven't yet discovered all of even the mammals that live in forest environments. Every one of these new discoveries is critically endangered due to deforestation. This is cause for concern because of the intrinsic value of each species. They have been striving and surviving for millions of years, developing exquisite adaptations to their forest homes, yet we as a species are mowing them down in the blink of an eye. The second effect of deforestation, larger even than biodiversity losses, is **global warming** which was discussed in Issue number 82.

### **Economic Effects**

Desperate and ever-growing populations in developing countries are often tempted to take the short-term profits of deforestation, by selling the timber and then establishing a farm or ranch on the cleared land. However, the soil is deceptively poor, and degrades quickly under intensive use. Slash-and-burn agricultural land is usually depleted in just two years; then, the farmers have to clear more forest for a new plot. After the initial cash flush from selling the trees is gone, the local population actually grows poorer than it was with the forest intact. Once the trees are gone, people have no more wood for building, heating, or cooking. They have to either use alternative fuels such as animal dung, or go in search of wood farther afield. Another financial burden of deforestation is the long-term loss of the forests' **environmental services**, such as water filtration, rain-making and wild food production. People living in clear-cut areas have to build water treatment plants (or clinics to deal with water-borne illnesses), and import drinking water. They can't hunt or gather wild fruits and plants to eat, so they depend on expensive and distant markets for an increasing percentage of their food, as well. Loss of **potential eco-tourism** constitutes yet another cost of clear-cutting. As forests and the wonderful plants, birds and animals that inhabit them become rarer; people from developed countries are willing to spend increasing amounts of money travelling to see these marvels.

It takes 300 or 400 years for a forest to regenerate, after it's been cleared. Deforestation has catastrophic consequences, both environmental and economic, for people all around the world. The only way to preserve what's left, and to give the areas that have already been stripped time to recover, is to account for the true value of intact forests, and compensate local people accordingly. Forests are worth so much more alive and breathing than they are dead and burning.

**Dylas Gudoshava (Attached Student, Library)**

## **NOTICEBOARD**

### **African Bird Club Subscriptions**

Members of African Bird Club are reminded that subscriptions are due. Subscriptions are \$100 million and are payable at BLZ offices. Take it with you to the AGM.

If you wish to join the African Bird Club which regularly sends out an excellent journal reporting from all over Africa, please contact the office.

**BLZ WishList**: BLZ are hoping to acquire the following items. If you have any of them to sell or donate, please contact Hazel at the BLZ offices: digital camera, 3 x GPS, generator, 2 vehicles, gas bottle, lamp and stove, flipchart holder, PowerPoint projector, photocopier, steel office cabinet, office chairs & cabinets, vacuum cleaner, hosepipe, borehole pump, notice board, office blinds.

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