

# BABBLER

The Newsletter of -

## BirdLife Zimbabwe

The BirdLife International Partner in Zimbabwe

### ISSUE # 84 – OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2008

	<b>Mashonaland</b>		<b>Matabeleland</b>	
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#### **SUBSCRIPTIONS**

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 those who are paying quarterly payments (the equivalent of US\$2.50 or half that for pensioners, students and juniors) will be due on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2008. Those who wish to do so can pay the full amount due for the rest of the year in 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 be sure to renew your membership by December or you may lose it. If you are having difficulties renewing, please contact Sabina at BLZ offices or a committee member.**

## ACTIVITIES

### BIG BIRDING DAY 2008

#### 24 HOUR SPONSORED BIRDWATCH 22/23 NOVEMBER

**AIMS:** To identify as many birds as possible in a 24 hour period and a radius of 50 km.  
To raise money by sponsorship for Branch activities.  
To have fun and increase awareness of our wonderful birdlife.

**RULES:** Teams of 2 – 4 with at least 2 being paid-up members of BLZ;  
Teams must stay together and at least 2 members must identify each species, by call or sight;  
Only free flying, wild or feral birds will count.  
The birding area must be within 50 km of the start point.

This competition is held internationally and, in Zimbabwe, is organised by Matabeleland Branch. Each team should try to arrange sponsorship, proceeds to go to a branch of your choice.

An entry form, checklist and sponsorship form can be requested from BLZ offices, Julia Dupree ([dalia@netconnect.co.zw](mailto:dalia@netconnect.co.zw)) or Jennifer Carter ([jcarter@cabs.co.zw](mailto:jcarter@cabs.co.zw)).

**Matland have issued a challenge to the rest of the country to get involved and beat them this year!!**

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### NATIONAL BLUE SWALLOW SURVEY

A national Blue Swallow Survey will be held during the **second week of November 2008**. As in 2007, this will be done by BLZ staff and members. We encourage those members who participated last year to try and visit the same places this year, as this might make it easier for the teams to find their way.

BLZ are therefore looking for volunteers for this year's survey. We will cover accommodation and fuel expenses for participants and we are registering teams of no more than four people each. We will stop the registration process once we have enough teams. To register please, send an e-mail to Fadzai ([Fadzai@blz.co.zw](mailto:Fadzai@blz.co.zw)) or phone the National Office.

**Dr. C. Chirara – Director**

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### **MASHONALAND BRANCH**

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

**Sundays 5<sup>th</sup> October & 2<sup>nd</sup> November: 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, 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 12<sup>th</sup> October & 9<sup>th</sup> November: 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 19<sup>th</sup> October & 16<sup>th</sup> November: 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, 18<sup>th</sup> October: Haka Park 07:00 a.m.**

The walk will be in the public area near the entrance gate. Vehicles will be left near the entrance gate for security. This is always a lovely area to walk in and will be quiet at this time on a Saturday morning.

**Saturday Morning, 15<sup>th</sup> November: Avondale Vlei with Alex Masterson 07:00 a.m.:** Meet at the car park on the Natal Rd side of Avondale shops. Walk with Alex and David along the watercourse here. Alex has seen African Black Duck and Giant Kingfishers her among many other species.

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

**Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> October: Ngomakurira 06:30 a.m.** Meet at Wingate Golf Club where cars can be safely left and transport shared. There is a small charge so bring some cash. We don't usually see as many species in this environment but there are a number of species we don't see elsewhere, including raptors.

**22<sup>nd</sup> – 23<sup>rd</sup> November: Big Birding Day** Your committee will be taking part so there is no organised walk. Team up with fellow birders to have fun, raise funds for your Branch and *beat the Matabeles* who have dominated this competition for too long! Contact a committee member if you want to join in but can't make up a team. See above.

**Evening Meetings – 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday of each month, 06:00 for 06:30 p.m.**

The NEW VENUE for evening meetings is **AVONDALE BOWLING CLUB** on Brighton Road between 2<sup>nd</sup> Street Extension and Upper East Road. There are security guards and a cash bar. We are back to **THURSDAY**.

**Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> October, Dr. Chip Chirara, BLZ Director** will talk about the 3 conferences he has recently attended, the Pan African Ornithological Congress (PAOC) in Worcester, South Africa, Argentina World BirdLife Congress and International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Congress in Spain, with an emphasis of what these congresses concluded about the world's birds.

**Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> October, Dr. Neil Deacon on Raptor Monitoring in Zimbabwe.** Neil is a knowledgeable birder and a falconer of note. He is very involved with monitoring of raptor species throughout the country. He will speak about the monitoring of raptors in Zimbabwe and how this is part of an international effort.

## **MATABELELAND BRANCH**

### **Monthly Outings**

**Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> October: Thabu Zinduna airfield 07:00 a.m.** Meet outside Ilanda Gardens at 07:00. Bring chairs and morning tea. For more information contact Judy Ross phone 242943.

**Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> November, Update on Southern Ground-hornbill Survey by Elspeth Parry 15:00.**  
*To be confirmed.* This survey continues to produce interesting results and members will be able to hear the latest information from the GHS team. Time 15:00. Venue to be confirmed. Talk will be followed by bring-and-share tea. For more information contact Judy Ross phone 242943.

**22<sup>nd</sup> - 23<sup>rd</sup> November, Big Birding Day.** This annual event is always a lot of fun as well as being a useful fund raiser for BLZ. Get together with a few friends and see how many bird species you can find in 24 hours. For more details and entry forms contact Julia Duprée phone 246269.

**Saturday, 6<sup>th</sup> December, Evening bistro.** Diarise this date now. Details nearer the time but once more this is sure to be an enjoyable evening and a good start to the festive season.

**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 3rd Saturday of each month.

Contact Margaret Parrock ☎ 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**

#### **Twelfth Pan-African Ornithological Congress**

The 12<sup>th</sup> Pan-African Ornithological Congress was held at Goudini Spa, Western Cape, South Africa from the 7-12 September 2008. It was attended by ornithologists and conservationists from all over the world. BirdLife Zimbabwe was represented by Dr. Chip Chirara, Ms Fadzai Matsvimbo and Mr David Rockingham-Gill. There were two other Zimbabweans – graduate students from Professor Peter Mundy who are studying at the National University of Science and Technology and the University of Cape Town.

A full report on the congress is being prepared and will be published in the next *Honeyguide*. The congress had useful information on current ornithological and conservation issues and it was also a useful platform to get contacts and exchange ideas. BirdLife Zimbabwe presented two posters, one on Wattled Cranes and the other on Blue Swallow work. The poster on Wattled Cranes was voted as one of the four best posters on display. Congratulations to Fadzai who produced this poster and manned the stands during the poster sessions. She however was not there to receive the prize because the team had to catch an early flight. The prize will be delivered to BLZ in due course.

**Dr. Chip Chirara, Director**

#### **Important Bird Areas (IBA) monitoring project report**

Important Bird Areas monitoring training workshops were conducted at Mana Pools National Park, Matobo National Park, Hwange National Park, Zambezi National Park, Chizarira National Park and Gonarezhou National Park as from July to September.

A lot of enthusiasm in bird and habitat monitoring was shown by the participants during the training workshops. All the monitoring teams in eleven Protected Areas (IBAs) focused under the European Commission funding have undergone training in IBA monitoring. The establishment of biodiversity monitoring systems at these sites will ensure the stimulation of effective conservation actions at local, national and global scales in response to threats and information on biodiversity trends.

BirdLife Zimbabwe also donated the following project resource materials and rain gauges to six Protected Areas mentioned above. The books were; SASOL Birds of Southern Africa, SASOL First Field Guide to grasses of Southern Africa and SASOL First Field Guide to the trees of Southern Africa. Such resource materials will also be donated to the other five IBAs in Protected Areas. Training and awareness of the project will be extended to government representatives, institutional focal persons and members of BirdLife Zimbabwe.

The status report for all IBAs being monitored will be produced after the submission of filled-in IBA monitoring forms from sites. A follow-up to IBAs in the Eastern Highlands is being organized in order to supervise progress on work done so far.

**Kanisios Mukwashi, IBA National Project Manager**

### **Zimbabwe's Threatened Species**

The following list is the record at BirdLife International for the list of threatened species in Zimbabwe. The criteria used are the IUCN ones, and BirdLife International is the authority on birds. The list is referred to as the IUCN Red List for the birds of Zimbabwe.

Whilst there are other criteria, the ones listed below are usually for the birds that need immediate attention and even quicker action.

#### **Endangered**

Malagasy Pond-heron  
Egyptian Vulture  
White-winged Flufftail

#### **Vulnerable**

Slaty Egret  
Lesser Kestrel  
Cape Vulture  
White-headed Vulture  
Lappet-faced Vulture  
Wattled Crane  
Blue Swallow  
Swynnerton's Robin

#### **Near Threatened**

Maccoa Duck  
Lesser Flamingo  
Red-footed Falcon  
Taita Falcon  
White-backed Vulture  
Southern Banded Snake-eagle  
Pallid Harrier  
Denham's Bustard  
Corn Crake  
Chestnut-banded Plover  
Great Snipe  
Eurasian Curlew  
Black-winged Pratincole  
African Skimmer  
Lilian's Lovebird  
European Roller  
Melodious Lark  
Plain-backed Sunbird  
**By Fadzai Matsvimbo**

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## **MASHONALAND BRANCH**

### **CONDOLENCES**

It was with great sadness that we heard of the death on 18<sup>th</sup> September of **Ann Paxton**, wife of John. John is a long-time member and past President of OAZ and BirdLife Zimbabwe.

Ann was Chairman of OH Bowls section and John met her when she was manning the bar for BirdLife Mashonaland evening meetings. We were all delighted when they married and Ann became part of the BirdLife 'family'. Ann and John were thereafter together behind the bar for most Mashonaland branch meetings unless they were on their travels visiting one or other of their joint families.

Ann was capable, forthright and welcoming and her cheerful support enhanced our evening meetings, which she enjoyed. Unfortunately, the bowls meant that we didn't see as much of her on our outings as we would have liked.

On behalf of members and staff of BirdLife Zimbabwe, we extend our deepest sympathy to John and to Ann's family on the loss of a dear wife, mother and grandmother.

**DOUBLE RO Ranch, Mount Hampden: Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> July, 2008 (QDS 1730D2)**

17 lucky members gathered in Marlborough at 7 a.m. in a wide variety of apparel, some dressed for the beach and others for the Arctic, for a morning's wonderful birding. By 1 p.m. we had a list of over a 100 birds of which most individuals saw at least 70. In fact the count at the end of the walk was 98 but this was supplemented by the results of a 5 min stop at a Kenya Coffee Shade tree on the way out.

The start was held up temporarily by a rather over-officious security guard who refused us entrance at the gate designated by Robyn Gilmour the previous evening. However, we eventually met up with our knowledgeable host and drove to the starting point. Much of the terrain was rough, dry pasture with occasional copses dominated by Msasa, Mnondo and Acacia, all holding a few birds. At first it was the Grey Go-away birds, Black-shouldered Kite and Black-collared Barbet that caught our attention but Buffy Pipit, Rufous-naped Lark and Yellow-throated Longclaw were found in the grass. Overhead flew Grey-rumped Swallow and Purple Heron and Black-headed Heron en route for the dams. Of particular interest was a Msasa with a bee's nest which had attracted both Greater Honeyguide and Lesser Honeyguide. A Lizard Buzzard could be heard calling constantly and was one of three seen that day.

The river was flowing, but slowly through the reeds which hid Dark-capped Yellow Warbler, Little Rush-warbler, African Reed-warbler and Lesser Swamp-warbler while the bushes and small trees had Yellow-fronted Canary and Brimstone Canary, Red-billed Quelea, White-browed Scrub-robin, and Amethyst Sunbird and Marico Sunbird and Little Bee-eater. Meyer's Parrot called from taller trees in the distance. As we neared a small reedy dam on the river, Neil came running up in pursuit of a juvenile African Goshawk which settled in view for confirmation of identification but turned out to be another Lizard Buzzard, or rather one of the pair that had been calling earlier. Luke and Ian found Brown-hooded Kingfisher, Purple Heron and Miombo Blue-eared Starling in the dense bush here.

From this point small groups made their way back by various routes towards the cars for a necessary break. Carolyn's very necessary break on a tree covered ant-hill led to the sightings of the day, a Barn Owl for Carolyn and Carolyn for the Barn Owl. We all had excellent views (of the bird) as the owl held its position in the tree, moving only head and eyes. Overhead we noticed a few White-backed Vulture and Marabou Storks, far fewer than formerly, Robyn informed us. A Magpie Shrike sat on a nearby anthill.

After a pleasant break for breakfast, we moved to the dam area. Our list quickly lengthened as we spotted many small birds in the reeds such as African Stonechat, Levillant's Cisticola and Red-faced Cisticola, Red-billed Firefinch, Copper Sunbird and Orange-breasted Waxbill and Common Waxbill. The open water was not extensive but there were Reed Cormorant, White-faced Duck, Egyptian Goose, Black Crake, Common Moorhen and 2 Hottentot Teal. We were all delighted to find an African Purple Swamphen, the first most of us had seen for years. Flocks of Wattled Starling moved from tree to tree and among the hirundines, African Palm-swift, Wire-tailed Swallow, Grey-rumped Swallow and White-throated Swallow were identified. The only waders noted were Three-banded Plover and a solitary Wood Sandpiper.

When the count was finally made at 13:00 extras noted were a Marsh Owl, a Cardinal Woodpecker and 2 African Grey Hornbills. Just to beef up the raptor count a Black-chested Snake-eagle sailed into view. What a fantastic morning. Sincere thanks were offered to Robyn Gilmour by all participants.

**Ken Dixon**

### **Christon Bank Nature Reserve, Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> August, 2008 (QDS: 1731C1)**

What a cocktail! A perfect late spring morning, miombo woodland in all shades of red, orange, green and brown and 12 eager Mash Branch birders, one all the way from Vic Falls, at a venue only 30km from Harare.

This reserve lies adjacent to Thetford Estate on the slopes falling down to the Mazowe River and is criss-crossed by meandering paths which seem to invite exploration of all the undulating area. And there were birds everywhere but not at all easy to find. Our first sighting was a group of Grey Penduline-tit in the crown of a Msasa, then the first of very many Yellow-throated Petronia, Chin-spot Batis and a Toppie (Dark-capped Bulbul) or two. As the path descended steeply riverwards we picked up African Yellow White-eye, Black-headed Oriole, Emerald-spotted Wood-dove, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird and African Grey Hornbill. On the rocky kopjie in the distance a sharp eye picked out a Mocking Cliff-chat and 2 Lesser Striped Swallow. The call of the Black-crowned Tchagra could also now be distinguished. A group of Purple-banded Sunbird enjoyed the new red growth on a Msasa and we heard Brown-hooded Kingfisher and an African Goshawk.

We slithered down the steep slope to the river, being careful to avoid the deep square mine shafts, in the hope we might come across African Broadbill but it was not to be. White-browed Robin-chat sang though, and we had close-up views of a Grey-headed Bush-shrike. Another welcome sign of summer was a persistent Klaas's Cuckoo, presumably a resident. In a rare clearing we found Bronze Mannikin and Red-backed Mannikin, a big flock of Jameson's Firefinch and spotted a Lizard Buzzard overhead.

Having returned to the car park we set off again immediately in the opposite direction from our morning walk. Notable sightings were Green-capped Eremomela, Lesser Honeyguide and Green-backed Honeybird and Ashy Flycatcher. 2 Black Stork then flew over, probably from their breeding ground on the Mazowe. Brubru, Long-billed Crombec and Brown-crowned Tchagra were eventually spied. We observed 5 Black-backed Puffback engaged in a noisy territorial battle.

As we had split into two groups at the start of the walk it was interesting to hear what the other group had seen. Their species absent from our list included Grey Tit-flycatcher, Lazy Cisticola, White-breasted Cuckooshrike and Southern Masked-weaver. As with us, the predominant Sunbird was the White-bellied Sunbird. Our final count was 70 species from an unforgettable stroll through delightful woodland.

**Ken Dixon**

### **Friday 19<sup>th</sup> June, Alex Masterson on Birdy People of Zimbabwe 1850 - 1950**

With Tony Alegria driving the computer, Alex spoke to a dozen or so members of the first naturalists who came to Zimbabwe in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was a fascinating view of the people who came and increased the knowledge of birds in our country. There were Jamieson, Livingstone, Ayers and Delagorgue and, after the turn of the century, Swynnerton and Priest, who wrote 3 books on birds of Rhodesia.

As usual, Alex entertained us with his vast knowledge and enthusiasm. Thanks very much, Alex, for giving us your time.

**Jennifer Carter**

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## **MATABELELAND BRANCH**

### **Cowdray Park Water Fowl Count, Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2008**

This was the last of the winter 2008 waterfowl counts conducted by Matland. After overcoming the challenge of navigating our way to the sewerage works we were immediately rewarded by a sighting of an immature African Harrier-hawk (Gymnogene) which had us all guessing at his identity for a while!

Despite the weather being cool and windy there was plenty of bird activity. The dozens of Little Grebes (Dabchicks) (count = 134) seemed to want to make counting as difficult as possible for us, ducking and

diving and darting behind clumps of reeds. The Red-billed Teal (29) and White-faced Duck (81) seemed to delight in waiting for us to nearly finish counting them before taking off to land behind us on the pond we thought we had just finished counting! Other more plentiful species included African Sacred Ibis (35), African Jacana (19), Black Crake (14) and Hottentot Teal (11). More uncommon species included: Grey Heron (3), Common Moorhen (4), Hamerkop (2), Egyptian Goose (3), Fulvous Duck (3), Cape Shoveler (8), Southern Pochard (2) and a solitary Comb Duck (Knob-billed) and an African Purple Swamphen (Gallinule). Amongst the migrants, a White Stork and a Wood Sandpiper were surprising early arrivals.

Having walked three sides of the ponds we felt we had counted most of the waterbirds so on the last stretch we were able to pay more attention to the birds in the bush bordering the area. Species seen included: Yellow-fronted Canary and Black-throated Canary, Magpie Shrike (Long-tailed), Arrow-marked Babbler, Miombo Double-collared Sunbird, Laughing, Cape Turtle-dove and Namaqua Doves, Wire-tailed Swallows and Lesser Striped Swallows, Black-shouldered Kite and Black-chested Snake-eagle.

**Adele Edwards**

### **Shashe Camp, Tuli, 8<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> August 2008**

Do you know how far it is to Tuli from Bulawayo? I can't recall but for every kilometre away from civilization the worries and woes of daily life slipped away. There were 13 travellers of various descriptions. The weather was perfect, the birdlife varied, the food outstanding and the road interesting.

Early morning chorus was full of joyful song and trying to sort out who belonged to which song a real trial. But we ended up with 106 species. The descriptions of the White-breasted Cuckooshrike were perfect and it was found in a flash – certain arguments over the few waterfowl made for lively debate. Unusual were Namaqua Sandgrouse and fluffy chick, a sighting always disputed as it's "out of territory" but some years back in classical style a specimen was shot to prove the point and these Sandgrouse continue to occur, along with Double-banded Sandgrouse. White-fronted Plovers love the middle of the river and five owl species appeared here and there – Barn Owl, African Scops-owl, Southern White-faced Scops-owl, Pearl-spotted Owlet and African Barred Owlet. Other less familiar species (for those of us who live in Bulawayo) were Southern Ant-eating Chat and Southern Boubou.

The area wraps you in a deep sense of peace and you find yourself learning to look into the bush not at it and becoming part of it – this is the magic of Tuli. If you have been once you will go again – it has a handle on your soul. Thank you to everyone who made the trip so memorable.

**Judy Ross**

### **Walk at Mabukuwene, Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> August 2008**

On Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> August a good number of members arrived at Mabukuwene Aloe Gardens at around 9.00 a.m. for an enjoyable morning of bird watching. We split into two groups – the first (not in order of importance, of course) being led by Jenny Brebner and the second group led by Julia Dupree.

Unfortunately, most of the aloes were past their prime, but the teams still managed to identify all four sunbirds normally found in the area. Bulawayo residents are extremely fortunate to have such a beautifully natural area of bush right in the midst of the suburbs and the beauty of the gardens was thoroughly enjoyed by all the “twitchers” as well as the birds themselves. We were fortunate to spot 38 species, 37 of which were identified. However, we were left with one unhappy UFO (Unidentified Feathered Object). We were privileged to see a Spotted Eagle-owl observing us at close quarters. It was gratifying to see that all the bird baths were filled indicating that the garden is still well looked after. There is a large Hamerkop nest on the southern boundary of the garden but it appears not to be used any longer as was verified by Rod Tourle who bravely (or foolishly!) clambered up to scrutinise the nest at close quarters!

After the walk we retired to the “Mabukuwene tearoom” for our packed teas before adjourning to John and Jenny Brebner’s lovely garden for lunch. After feeding time, many of us took a gentle stroll around the Brebner’s garden and added a few more species to the list. (We were even introduced to their



resident White-browed Robin-chat (Heuglin's Robin), aptly named "Napoleon" as his call is a constant refrain for "Josephine, Josephine, Josephine!").

**Helen Lewis**

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## **TAIL FEATHERS**

### **Familiar Chats in Harare**

On the 25<sup>th</sup> August 2008, I noticed a pair of vocal Familiar Chat at Agrifoods where I am employed. These birds were still there when I last checked on 27<sup>th</sup> August. They were between the back wall of a large warehouse and the wall bordering our rail siding which is an area kept fairly barren of vegetation because of the railway lines. With the economic depression this area is relatively undisturbed and probably mimics their preferred habitat of rocky slopes. We are also within a kilometre of Harare Kopjie which is a possible habitat for this species. I believe that this is an unusual sighting for the built up area of Harare.

**Richard Dennison**

### **Aggressive Babblers**

Recently a pair of Arrow-marked Babbler were fighting on our driveway. This fight went on for a couple of minutes before I needed to move them out of the way to get my car out. However, the birds were so engrossed in their struggle that I had to stand over them and wave my arms to break them apart. In the meantime other flock members were very noisy and occasionally one or two joined the fray.

**Richard Dennison**

### **Scarlet-chested Sunbird Nesting**

The first Saturday of September, I noticed a pair of Scarlet-chested Sunbirds in our garden in Marlborough. The female kept returning to the same place, among the new leaves of a large tree in front of the veranda, and I realised that she was starting to build a nest. The next day, we watched as she brought what seemed to be a small piece of paper and kept dropping it and flying down to catch it. She was very persistent. By the time of the Mashonaland Branch committee meeting on the Wednesday, I was able to show the others a rather straggly concoction of spider-webs, leaves and small pieces of cardboard and paper. It wasn't up to much but by the following Sunday, in a strong, gusty wind, it was much more substantial and swayed with the branch but not on its own. She seemed to be furnishing the inside with a fluffy, white substance, probably from nearby flowers. She was also stealing from a nearby nest, perhaps one built by an Amethyst Sunbird (also the female) at the end of last summer. By the end of the day, the other nest had blown away and we found a piece of it in the garden. The male was around during the day but did not take any part in the nest-building.

This morning, more than two weeks later, she flew out of the nest as we came into the garden. The male has been around and we hope she is brooding. We have been seeing both her and the male around the garden.

The nest is about 3 metres from the ground, almost above the swimming pool (the Amethyst's nest was above the pool at around the same height). It looks about 17 cm long and maybe 30 - 35 in circumference. If the bird is sitting on eggs, they will take about 2 weeks to hatch and 2 more to fledge. How privileged we are to be able to observe this so closely!

**Jennifer Carter**

### **State of the World's Birds – from BirdLife International**

In 2002 the world's governments made a commitment to reduce the rate of biodiversity loss by 2010. State of the world's birds provides a progress report, based on birds. The messages are mixed. We know more, and have identified clearer actions, than in even our last assessment in 2004. Global awareness of the issues and their urgency is growing. Yet the state of the world's biodiversity, reflected by its birds, is still getting worse – and faster than ever. Birds are sounding the alarm: it's time to listen, and make real and positive changes.

Birds comprise nearly 10,000 living species—the building blocks of biodiversity. Birds are found nearly everywhere, but each species is unique in its ecology and distribution. Many have small ranges and most are restricted to particular kinds of habitat. Taken together, they provide a picture of how biodiversity is distributed, and serve as valuable indicators for global environmental change. Common birds are in decline across the world, providing evidence of a rapid deterioration in the global environment that is affecting all life on earth – including human life. All the world’s governments have committed themselves to slowing or halting the loss of biodiversity by 2010. But reluctance to commit what are often trivial sums in terms of national budgets means that this target is almost certain to be missed.

These are some of the stark messages from *State of the Worlds Birds*, a new publication and website ([birdlife.org/sowb](http://birdlife.org/sowb)) launched today at BirdLife International’s World Conference in Buenos Aires. “Birds provide an accurate and easy to read environmental barometer, allowing us to see clearly the pressures our current way of life are putting on the world’s biodiversity”, said Dr Mike Rands - BirdLife's CEO.

The report highlights worldwide losses among widespread and once-familiar birds. A staggering 45% of common European birds are declining [1]: the familiar European Turtle-dove *Streptopelia turtur*, for example, has lost 62% of its population in the last 25 years. On the other side of the globe, resident Australian wading birds have seen population losses of 81% in just quarter of a century [2]. Twenty North American common birds have more than halved in number in the last four decades [3]. Northern Bobwhite *Colinus virginianus* fell most dramatically, by 82%. In Latin America, the Yellow Cardinal *Gubernatrix cristata* – once common in Argentina – is now classified as globally Endangered [4].

Millions of White-rumped Vultures *Gyps bengalensis* recently flew in Asian skies. In just sixteen years populations have crashed by 99.9% - the species is now classified as Critically Endangered [5]. Widespread birds like the Eurasian Eagle-owl are believed to be vanishing from Middle Eastern forests [6]. Seabirds - including Critically Endangered Chatham Albatross *Thalassarche eremita* – are disappearing from the world’s oceans [7].

“Many of these birds have been a familiar part of our everyday lives, and people who would not necessarily have noticed other environmental indicators have seen their numbers slipping away, and are wondering why” said Dr Rands. “Because birds are found almost everywhere on earth, they can act as our eyes and ears, and what they are telling us is that the deterioration in biodiversity and the environment is accelerating, not slowing.”

*State of the Worlds Birds* identifies many key global threats, including the intensification of industrial-scale agriculture and fishing, the spread of invasive species, logging and the replacement of natural forest with monocultural plantations. However, Dr Rands warns: “In the long term, human-induced climate change may be the most serious stress of all”.

The encouraging news is that conservation works and is relatively cheap. Direct action saved 16 bird species from extinction between 1994 and 2004. But conserving biodiversity now urgently needs more financial support.

“Effective biodiversity conservation is easily affordable, requiring relatively trivial sums at the scale of the global economy”, said Dr Rands. For example, to maintain the protected area network which would safeguard 90 percent of Africa’s biodiversity would cost less than \$1 billion US dollars a year – yet in a typical year the global community provides around \$300 million.

“The world is failing in its 2010 pledge to achieve a significant reduction in the current rate of loss of biodiversity”, said Dr Rands. “The challenge is to harness international biodiversity commitments and ensure that concrete actions are taken — now!”

## **Action for Vultures**

The Indian government has ordered a crackdown on companies selling the drug responsible for the near-extinction of vultures.

**Diclofenac, which causes kidney failure in vultures, has been responsible for a 99.9% decline of Critically Endangered White-rumped Vulture**

A letter from the Drug Controller General of India, Dr Surinder Singh, has warned more than 70 drugs firms not to sell the veterinary form of diclofenac, and to mark human diclofenac containers 'not for veterinary use'.

In 2004, suspicions that diclofenac was responsible for the catastrophic decline in vulture numbers were confirmed when the drug, present as residues in the carcasses of cattle, was found to cause fatal renal failure in *Gyps* vultures.

A study led by Dr Vibhu Prakash from the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS, BirdLife in India), published this April showed that the population of White-rumped Vultures *Gyps bengalensis* in India was dropping by more than 40% every year. The species' numbers have dropped by 99.9% since 1992 to about 11,000, from tens of millions. Populations of Indian *Gyps indicus* and Slender-billed Vultures *Gyps tenuirostris* [both races of Long-billed Vulture] have fallen by almost 97 per cent in the same period, to 45,000 and just 1,000 respectively.

Two years ago, following a meeting of the Indian National Board for Wildlife in 2005, chaired by the Prime Minister of India, the manufacture of veterinary diclofenac was outlawed.

Now vets are dodging the ban by using the human form of diclofenac for livestock, despite an effective and safe alternative drug being available.

Dr Nita Shah, Head of the Vulture Advocacy Programme at BNHS said: "This step by the Indian government demonstrates its determination to tackle the vulture crisis and we are very hopeful that other measures will follow. "Measures that make veterinary and human diclofenac less easy to use are crucial if we are to save these birds. Steps to make meloxicam, which is safe for vultures and just as effective in treating livestock, more widely available are just as important."

In his letter, Dr Singh said drugs companies should 'strictly implement' the ban on veterinary diclofenac and properly label human diclofenac containers and literature. This action would 'help in saving the vulture population and ecological balance in the animal world', Dr Singh said.

One major pharmaceutical company, Boehringer Ingelheim, has become the first to support the work of the BNHS and RSPB to protect remaining vultures from poisoning with diclofenac.

Chris Bowden, Head of the RSPB's Vulture Recovery Programme, said: "Vultures are critical to the way of life for millions of people in India and the contribution from Boehringer Ingelheim is hugely welcome. "Vultures need immediate action from across the board to stop vets using diclofenac and to support the captive breeding programmes that are so badly needed to prevent the extinction of these fine birds."

*Editor's Note: I am told that diclofenac is now being used throughout Africa. The endangered species list for Zimbabwe above already has 4 species of vulture on it.*

## **NOTICEBOARD**

### **Field Cards Available**

An updated Field Card, which includes changed bird names is now available by email on request from [birds@zol.co.zw](mailto:birds@zol.co.zw) or in printed form from the BLZ office at 35, Clyde Road, Eastlea, Harare.

A list of changed names with old and new is also available.

### **Your observations**

Recording bird sightings is interesting and enjoyable. BLZ would like to know what you see and where so please send completed cards, with QDS or identifiable area, by email to [chip.chirara@blz.co.zw](mailto:chip.chirara@blz.co.zw) or hard copy to BLZ, 35 Clyde Road, Eastlea, Harare. Also, please look out for the species mentioned as endangered or threatened above and notify the office if you see them, indicating the number and place.

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