

BABBLER

The Newsletter of -



BirdLife Zimbabwe
The BirdLife International Partner in Zimbabwe

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SUBSCRIPTION RENEWAL – (the very) last chance!

BirdLife Zimbabwe membership year runs from April to March and those who did not renew by the end of September will unfortunately be taken off the list. But, as we really do value your contribution, any of you who said 'I'll do it later' but didn't, have until 16 October to either go into the office, which is manned from 8.30 – 4.30 Monday to Friday or phone Hazel for the Barclays bank account number and you can deposit your subscription at any branch.

Ordinary (Individual and Family) members and Schools	US\$10 per annum
Senior Citizens, Students & Juniors	US\$ 5 “ “
Corporate members	US\$30 “ “
Members outside Zimbabwe	Africa US\$20
	Other US\$30

Quite a few members have lapsed as they have changed their details and we do not know where they are. Please remember to advise us of any change of address, e-mail or 'phone numbers, otherwise we cannot contact you.

I have been asked to reduce the size of the **Babbler** for various reasons, so in order to do so but keep the content, I have decreased the font size. This may make it more difficult to read, so I would like to hear from you, the members, what you would like – smaller print and more material or larger print and less words! *Ed*

BIRDLIFE ZIMBABWE LIBRARY FUND

The **BirdLife Zimbabwe Membership** is the **custodian** of a fine and highly regarded ornithological and conservation library collection comprised of books, reports, reprints, proceedings, journals, newsletters, audio visual materials and maps.

Over the years the BLZ Library was maintained and housed by *Honeyguide* editors and BLZ members until the inception of the BLZ secretariat office at 35 Clyde Road, Eastlea in Harare. At that time the Library was moved to this location for ease of access by BLZ staff and membership, for research purposes and general interest.

In terms of BLZ Library management:

- There is no budget line within the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) core funding, on which the office operates, to support the Library on a regular basis.
- Funded projects are unable to contribute to their use of the Library as there is no provision permitted within funding agreements.
- It is staffed by a voluntary part-time librarian who supervises and trains a library placement student from NUST each year.
- The Library is housed in a small room with no further shelving space available, no room for research and a leaking roof.
- The Library collection is maintained through much appreciated book and journal donations and journal exchanges for *Honeyguide*. Whilst the occasional publication is received as a review copy, funding to keep up to date with the latest literature would be welcomed.

Challenges – The challenges of funding constraints and lack of space must be addressed immediately.

Solutions – As an interim solution to the **space challenge**, it has been decided that a container be purchased into which the contents of the store room will be transferred. This would need a basic asbestos roof to reduce the temperature (US\$1000). The Library would then move into the store room once it has been made suitable with a ceiling, painted and further shelving and furniture obtained (US\$1000). The long term solution is a custom-built Education / Conservation / Library Centre which has recently been costed at US\$120 000.

In order to meet the **funding challenge**, a *BLZ Library Fund* has been created into which donations can be received to meet the above pressing needs (approx.US\$5000), maintain the Library collection and cover its overheads. The very first donation of US\$140 has come from the Matabeleland Branch – thank you Matland!

A few days ago, a 40-foot container was sourced at a cost of US\$2500, requiring immediate payment. We therefore appeal to members **for** donations to cover this urgent item. We must have moved our valuable collection before the onset of the rains. Please contact Dorothy on 0912-376506 and/or Hazel at the BLZ office.

For the ongoing Library project – donations, contacts with businesses willing to contribute or fundraising suggestions please contact:

Dorothy Wakeling: 304298, 0912 376506 or piumosso@zol.co.zw
Ken Dixon: 793063, 0912 324301 or lynnken@mango.zw
Hazel at the BLZ office: 481496, 490208 or birds@zol.co.zw

The '**Field Observations**' write-up that appears in all issues of *Honeyguide* depends entirely on information supplied by members and bird watchers in general. Please would members submit copies of all their field card reports and checklists direct to Colin Baker at candjbaker@zol.co.zw or CBaker@halsteds.co.zw or to Julia Duprée at dalia@netconnect.co.zw, with a copy to the Director of BLZ chip.chirara@blz.co.zw, so that the information can also be put on the database. Those without e-mail access please ensure your lists reach the BLZ office, from where copies will be sent to Colin. We would appreciate your assistance, however short or long your list is!

Guidelines for Contributors to *Honeyguide*

Honeyguide is an ornithological journal that accepts papers and articles, short notes and observations, and articles of a more general interest. Its primary emphasis is on the birds of Zimbabwe but scientific contributions from other parts of Africa, and general interest contributions from anywhere will be accepted. Wherever possible contributions should be submitted electronically, preferably as attached

files written in MS-Word, and sent to the Production Manager, Julia Duprée at dalia@netconnect.co.zw or written communications to 12 Ilanda Gardens, Catherine Berry Drive, Ilanda, Bulawayo.

It should be noted that the definitive, internationally recognised name for any bird species is its **scientific name** and this should be included on all communications except those of general interest such as "Travel and enjoying birds." The scientific names given in *Roberts VII* will generally be followed, although other names may be used in taxonomic contributions. The Editor will be glad to assist if contributors are uncertain about which name to use.

Common names are more of a problem as the standard names decreed by the international bird bureaucracy may not be favoured by all contributors, and are sometimes inappropriate. This journal will be flexible as far as common names are concerned but the Editor will impose the following practices:

1. Excessive and ungrammatical hyphenation will be avoided (see the comments in *Honeyguide* 53: 3-4, 2006).
2. The adjectives "Common" and "African" will only be applied if they are part of a long-established name, such as "Common Sandpiper" or "African Goshawk." They have apparently been added to certain names to avoid confusion between species even if confusion is not likely to occur. For example, the Crowned Eagle *Stephanoetus coronatus* is now to be referred to as the "African Crowned Eagle" to distinguish it from the extinct Madagascar Crowned Eagle *S. maheryi* or the Crowned Solitary Eagle *Harpyhaliaetus coronatus* of South America. Confusion between these species is very improbable in an article dealing with African birds.
3. Some of the new names seem inappropriate in a southern African context. For example, *Cuculus canorus* has a vast breeding range across the Palaearctic and in the British Isles, the only part of its range where it has a common name in English it is known simply as "the Cuckoo." In southern Africa it has generally been called the "European Cuckoo" which tells us something about it and accurately distinguishes it from the other cuckoo species that occur in the subcontinent. But the recommended name "Common Cuckoo" is misleading in southern Africa because other species are much more common than it is. For these species, the old names will generally be used, with the new name added in brackets, e.g. "European [Common] Cuckoo".

Please ensure that **references** are given in as much detail as possible. There are standard conventions for citing references and the Editor will ensure that they are written in this form provided enough information is supplied. References should include the name(s) and initials of author(s), the date of publication, the full title of the book or paper, the full title and volume number of a journal, and the page numbers in all instances. In the case of books, the publisher and the place where it was published should also be included.

Brian Marshall – *Honeyguide* Editor

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Please diarise these events now, as it is easy to forget later on.

Birding Big Weekend: 14/15 November

This is an annual fun event organised by the Matabeleland Branch to see how many species of birds you can spot in 24 hours (or 36, by popular request). The aim is to identify as many birds as possible in a continuous period (state your choice) within an area with a radius of 50 km, to raise money by sponsorship for branch/area activities and to have fun and increase awareness of our wonderful bird life.

Teams are limited to a maximum of four and team members must stay together as a unit and may not split into groups. At least 2 people in a team must be paid-up members of BirdLife Zimbabwe. Each bird must be seen or heard by at least 2 members of each team and only free flying, wild or feral birds will count. The birding area must be within a radius of 50 km from the start point. There is also a Garden Bird category this year for those who can't go far or are not so energetic, so the latter obviously does not count! The Judges' decision is final.

Entry forms are available from Julia Duprée, phone Bulawayo 246269 or dalia@netconnect.co.zw, Tony Alegria, phone Harare 883823 or talegria@cabs.co.zw or I can send them by e-mail. Contact me at rolly@zol.co.zw. It really does not matter how many birds you see or how much money you raise as long as you enjoy it, but some teams like to get the most birds and/or money, so let's have a bit of competition between the areas around Zimbabwe! *Ed.*

There will be a **bird ringing demonstration** at Mukuvisi Woodlands on the first Sunday of December – 6 December. This is at the same time as the monthly walk there. Come along if you want to see what bird ringing is about! There will be a picnic afterwards so bring your drinks and snacks!

Ringling Training Workshop - January 2009

A Bird Ringing Training Workshop is to be held during the second week of January 2010 at Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary. Professor Peter Mundy, BLZ Ringing Organizer, will be leading this Workshop. Trainers will be Peter Mundy, Tracey Couto, David Dalziel from Zimbabwe and Kobie Raijmakers, Joseph Heymans and possibly Tony Raijmakers from South Africa.

If you are seriously interested in becoming a committed ringer and wish to attend this workshop or if you wish to assist with the training, or be on the organizing committee, please contact the BLZ office as soon as possible. Peter will be visiting Harare on 23/ 24 October for planning meetings for this workshop – those interested are urged to attend. Further details will be available after this meeting. Those who have already put their names on the list will be contacted shortly.

For further information about registration and the planning meeting contact Sabina Mapika at the BLZ office – 481496 or 490208 or birds@zol.co.zw.

Dorothy Wakeling – 304298 or 0912 376506 or piumosso@zol.co.zw

MASHONALAND BRANCH

Please contact a committee member if you need transport to any of our outings. Beginners are welcome – don't worry if you do not have a pair of binos – there is usually an extra pair at most outings. Those members who have not signed an indemnity/membership form please remember to do so at any outing – a committee member will have these. Subscriptions can also be given to a committee member at any activity, but please ensure you fill in a form so we know who has paid and can check your details!

Evening Meetings are on the 3rd Thursday of each month at 5:30 for 6:00 p.m. The venue is the Avondale Bowling Club on Brighton Road between 2nd Street Extension and Upper East Road. There is a cash bar and hopefully a security guard.

Sunday 15 November 7.00 a.m.: Botanic Gardens

Meet at CABS Northridge Park – Northend Close. There is *no charge* for the Gardens.

Sunday 4 October and 1 November – 6.30 a.m.: Mukuvisi Woodland

If you have not been to Mukuvisi this year there are only a few months left to come along. Remember your New Year resolutions to come to the Woodlands at least once this year? Now is probably the time as it is warmer and it gets light pretty early. The group usually gets around 100 birds at this time of year. All the migrants should be in the woodlands now and many of the birds that are so drab in winter will be in colour. The Woodlands are looking really good this year. Turn off Chiremba Road into Ford Road (opposite Queensdale shops) and continue down to Blatherwick Road (T- junction). Turn right and the gate is about 150 metres on the left. Bring chairs and refreshments and a reasonable tip, in cash or kind, for the guard who will be at the gate to let cars in and out – please take into account the value of your vehicle!

Sunday 11 October and 8 November – 6.30 a.m.: Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary. There is the possibility of seeing Spoonbills, Common Ringed Plover, Curlew Sandpiper and Black Heron if the Lake level has dropped sufficiently. Look out for cuckoos. Meet at Marimba Shopping Centre, Samora Machel Avenue West for this pleasant venue. Remember to bring chairs and refreshments.

Sunday 18 October and 15 November – 7:00 a.m.: Monavale Vlei Walk

Meet on the BS Leon side of Fenella Drive, for a walk with guides who know this important conservation area well.

Sunday 25 October – 6.30 a.m.: Domboshawa

The 'Saturday' birders enjoyed this venue in February, had a good walk up the hill, great view at the top and saw some interesting raptors. Expect a fee of about \$2. Meet at CABS Head Office, Northridge Park, Northend Close in Borrowdale.

Saturday 14 and Sunday 15 November – 6.30 a.m.: Birding Big Day

See details above.

MATABELELAND BRANCH

Saturday 24 October: Morning walk at Hillside Dams

If you haven't visited Hillside Dams recently to see all the improvements that have been made there, then this will be a good opportunity to do so. If you have visited you will know that the area is looking lovely and there is some good birding to be had. Come and join us to learn more about what BLZ is doing to assist the Hillside Dams Conservancy and see the progress with the new bird hide. Bring chairs and morning tea. Contact Julia Duprée phone 246269.

Weekend 7/8 November: Raptor ID Course Part 3 – date to be confirmed

The final part of our 3-part course conducted by Peter Mundy. This course is limited to members only, and participants should have attended parts 1 & 2. To assist with seating arrangements please confirm your attendance in advance with Helen Lewis phone 242285 (h)

Weekend 14/15 November: Birding Big Day

How many species of birds can you spot in 24 hours? Join in this fun event while at the same time helping to bring in some much needed funding for your branch. (It really doesn't matter how many birds you see or how much money you raise as long as you enjoy your birding!) Entry forms and rules available from Julia Dupree phone 246269.

COUNTRY DISTRICTS

Mashonaland South (Kadoma) – Contact Margaret Parrock on 068-22005 or her daughter, Coralee on 068-23644 for details of any outings, which are by arrangement.

Eastern Districts – Monthly outings are on the last Sunday of the month and the departure point is Mutare Museum at 7.30 a.m. Spare binoculars and books are available for 2 people. Members with a vehicle are encouraged to attend and fuel can be provided. Contact Peter Gwidibira 011-377076 pgwidibira@mutare.matanuska.co.zw for details.

Other Areas – Those members in other areas – please send me a short account with what you have seen and where. We are always interested to hear what is happening in the rest of the country. *Ed*

RECENT REPORTS and SIGHTINGS

NATIONAL

Umfurudzi Raptor Survey

To date over a hundred raptor nest sites have been located at Umfurudzi. Efforts to establish occupancy of these nests are ongoing. Two pairs of African Hawk-eagles were confirmed to have bred, each having fledged a chick. A young Bateleur has also been seen on a nest – however this still needs to be confirmed as a breeding record. A Dark Chanting-goshawk is currently incubating eggs. Ten pairs of Wahlberg's Eagles and an African Crowned Eagle have either laid or about to lay, as they are in constant attendance at nests. Lizard Buzzards and other small hawks are busily building and preparing to breed. Oddly, a pair of Brown Snake-eagles has been seen courting at a nest site. This behaviour is out of season, but who knows? There is now access to an area of Umfurudzi known as the 'Black Granite'. This is north of Hippo Pools and offers some exciting prospects. Scouts have found a suspected Bat Hawk nest near the entrance to natural Limestone caves and there are whispers of a small hawk-eagle also nesting there. The only recent verified record of an Ayres's Hawk-eagle nest is from nearby Mutoko (O'Donoghue, unpublished data), so the chances are not entirely remote. Before I forget, an active African Barred Owllet nest was also found while looking for real raptor nests.

For those of you who struggle with raptor identification, watching raptors at their nest sites is the best opportunity to see these species close up and really get to know what they look like. All nest sites have been put on GPS and a guide is available to take you to the nests of the various species. You do not need to wait for a scheduled survey to go and look at these nest sites. The next 2 months are the best for watching many of the raptors as it is peak breeding season. A few things to bear in mind though – when approaching the nest, look around carefully first as often one of the pair will stand guard while the other incubates. Obviously if the adult leaves the nest as you approach, limit the time spent close to the nest. Often if you move away a little the adult will soon return. Try to avoid disturbing nesting birds during the heat of the day. At this time of year cold is not so much of a problem, but direct sunlight in the heat of the day could be fatal to young chicks. A few of the nest sites offer really good observation without creating disturbance. Take a bottle of water, find an inconspicuous position and enjoy. I only ask that you please feedback any observations on activity at nest sites and any interesting raptor sightings. Lastly but most importantly, beware of snakes. They are also very active at this time of year.

A few interesting raptor sightings have been reported in the last months. A Martial Eagle was observed trying to attack a young African Hawk-eagle. Dave Dalziel and friends watched a Wahlberg's Eagle hunting helmet-shrikes, apparently quite successfully. They also saw an immature African Hawk-eagle eat a kill it made in the riverbed. Surprisingly an adult pair arrived and sat close by in the same tree and also watched it eat without offering any interference. Some great photos were taken of the African Crowned Eagle at its nest (which I have yet to see). There were some other mutterings about Half-collared Kingfisher, Narina Trogons and Livingstone's Flycatcher, but I couldn't find any reference to these species in *Birds of Prey of Southern Africa* (Steyn, 1981) so don't know what the fuss was all about!

Neil Deacon

From the Director – **Dr. Chip Chirara:**

BLZ continues to function relatively well in spite of the economic challenges that the world is going through. We have faced so many challenges in the past and maybe for us it is business as usual, we still continue with our national activities. However, even in the face of the global recession our regional and overseas partners continue to support us in various ways. We are grateful to our supporters and partners, especially the RSPB and BirdLife Africa Partnership Secretariat. Their support should give us the impetus to continue with conservation work in our various areas.

Our Important Bird Areas continue to face threats caused by environmental degradation and other issues. We need to monitor our IBAs on a continuous basis. If you are visiting any IBAs please collect an IBA monitoring form from the office or it can be sent to you via e-mail upon request. You can fill this in together with your field card.

At the end of September we bade farewell to one of our most faithful and longest-serving members of staff, Mrs Leslee Maasdorp. Leslee initiated the Bird Awareness Programme and implemented it with distinction. She has been involved in the Murowa Diamond Project and this has now been concluded. We wish Leslee a restful retirement and will continue to call on her expertise in various areas of environmental education.

This year we have three students on attachment with BLZ, all from the National University of Science and Technology in Bulawayo. NUST is the only institution that offers courses in Ornithology and we need to complement this by affording the students exposure to field work. Welcome to Angella Nyadenga, Merensky Mavheneka and Memory Manzongo who is our Library placement student for 2009 – 2010. Memory is the 6th library student to be placed at BLZ.

Our website has been revamped and it is now up and running. Should you have articles for the website, please send them to the Director by the 25th of every month, when the site is updated.

Important Bird Areas (IBA) Monitoring Project Report

The final draft of the National IBA Status Report for 2008 that has been produced will be circulated to the Parks and Wildlife Management Authority, Forestry Commission and Allied Timbers Holdings Pvt. Ltd for comments, before the report is published in November. The intention is to launch the report to publicize BirdLife Zimbabwe's work on Zimbabwean IBAs and to influence conservation of Protected Areas designated as IBAs. Site monitoring teams continue to provide feedback on monitoring progress in IBAs and the results are satisfactory despite a few challenges such as inadequate fuel to cover huge areas. BLZ anticipates receiving more information from members and other stakeholders who occasionally visit the IBAs.

T-shirts were also produced as promotional material for site monitoring teams. Such awareness material will ensure that most of the people are informed about IBAs as priority sites for the conservation of birds in Zimbabwe. There are also plans to produce calendars for 2010 as part of our framework strategy for communications and information about IBAs. There is generally a need to improve awareness of the project at local and national levels.

The BirdLife International-Africa Secretariat is collaborating with *Nature Uganda* in hosting a Training of Trainers Workshop on "Translating biodiversity monitoring results into concrete action through advocacy at local, national and international levels". Advocacy is useful in influencing policy formulation process, translation of policy into action through appropriate implementation channels, decision making at various levels, lobbying, behavioural changes, and allocation of resources towards environment conservation and sustainable development. The workshop runs from 5-10 October and will be held at the Imperial Botanical Beach Hotel, Entebbe, Uganda. Those attending are representatives of BirdLife Partners (Chief Executive Officers) and Senior Protected Area personnel (focal points) from the eight project-implementing countries.

Kanisios Mukwashi – IBA National Project Manager

Malilangwe Trip for Murowa

The long-awaited wilderness trip took place between 20 and 25 August 2009. Sixteen children, teachers, our project scout and facilitators making a party of thirty-four, were lodged in comfortable Hakamela accommodation. The trip was inspirational for young and old. The conservancy is teeming with game – 25 of the large mammals were seen and the children, who had never even seen pictures of most of these animals, were astonished. Only two pupils had seen an elephant and a lion – at the Harare Show! They were eager to learn all they could from the professional guide Dave Winhall and local scout Salani who stimulated interest from the largest beast the elephant (which is very fond of *Acacia tortilis*), to one of the Small Five – the ant-lion. On the last full day, only the elephant and rhino had been seen of the Big Five, when Hugh and Dave took the groups on a game drive. Buffalo made the third sighting of the Big Five (there are 2000 of these on the estate). A special treat was offered to the pupils by the Malilangwe manager – a day into night drive. Somehow animals look more mysterious and frightening in darkness and many were seen – impala everywhere, some asleep on the airstrip while we were star-gazing. Two excellent guides, Fortune Musuka and Time Mtema drove us in two Land Cruisers and just after seven o'clock, Time radioed he had found the big cats and we raced over to see two lionesses, a young male and a small cub walking purposefully through the woods. Our groups could not wait to tell the adults at the camp!

It was a rare pleasure for me to be with pupils who knew common birds and they quickly added to their life lists. The Saddle-billed Storks and a pair of Pel's Fishing-owls were exciting finds. Big birds nesting were African Hawk-eagle and White-backed Vulture.

The trip would not have been possible if Dave Winhall and Hugh Maasdorp had not used their small trucks the whole time and Murowa Mine provided transport to and from camp for the pupils. The adventure provided great opportunities for learning about Zimbabwe's spectacular wildlife.

Leslee Maasdorp – Manager of Murowa/BirdLife Zimbabwe Project

Birds Seen at the Mana Pools National Park Game Count – 23-29 September 2009

Birds seen in the *Acacia albida* parkland and along the Zambezi River:

One Great White Pelican was seen flying over Long Pool in the middle of a day and more were reported up-river in a pan by a safari concessionaire. Four Rufous-bellied Herons were seen and Dave MacFarlane thought they were more common along the river this year. At Rod Huck's campsite at Mcheni a flock of 46 Yellow-billed Storks were loafing in a mud patch. I only saw one Bateleur and at every place where we came to on the Zambezi, we saw a pair of African Fish-eagle – the pair at Mana Mouth were with a very large juvenile. We only saw one flock of Crested Guineafowl, but Jill Bruce reported a flock of about 30 and said they were more easily seen this year. In empty grassland to the south of Long Pool a pair of Crowned Lapwing had hatched 3 chicks, which were a day or two old and froze to the ground when we got out to look at them. Four Long-toed Lapwings were seen at Mana Mouth. A Water Thick-knee had a clutch of two eggs in Nyamepi Camp, near Vetiver grass at campsite 20. During the time I was there I counted 40 Meyer's Parrots and thought there might be 150 Meyer's Parrots in the 50 km² of *A. albida* woodland that we game count. I saw no Lilian's Lovebirds this year. Why? Bohm's Spinetail were seen in several places – to try to count the flock size of this bird is always a problem but I managed to count 12 over Chine Pan at the start of a transect, at 2.30 p.m. one afternoon. There was a flock of 60 Southern Carmine Bee-eaters nesting near the lodges. I saw three Southern Ground-hornbill families this year, and found a Red-billed Hornbill nesting high up on an *A. albida* trunk. The baboon pressure on the parkland terraces must be huge and so it was interesting to see hundreds of African Grey Hornbills and Red-billed Hornbills migrating from the mopane woodland in the early morning, before 6 o'clock. One man I met said he saw two Barn Swallows cross the river – maybe the first this hot season? A Rattling Cisticola was the only cisticola recorded, in Vetiver grass near Mana Mouth. The most abundant bird was the Red-billed Quelea, but the next must be the Meves's Starling, mostly feeding on the Wild Mango *Cordyla africana*. Red-billed Oxpeckers are always of interest and I saw them on impala, kudu, eland buffalo and hippo. A first for me was seeing an elephant lying down.

It must be nearly 20 years since Peter Mundy and I wrote the Mana Pools Bird Checklist and Dave MacFarlane asked a very good question – what birds are not here now? Anyone like to take up the challenge?!

It was decided that we would write up our results for the 17 years we have game counted and if anyone wants to take part in the exercise, please let me know. I will try and write up the bird part, leaving the animals to others who know how to convert hippo numbers into biomass/km²!

David Rockingham-Gill

And I will add what I consider the highlights of my trip too! My static count was on the Mashayeni River, which is at the bottom of the escarpment and the pools watched were beside a colony of breeding White-fronted Bee-eaters – 50-60 in all. It was amazing to see them come out of the nesting holes in the bank where they had roosted, all at the same time at 05.55 – a wave of colour and sound. At dusk I had watched anxiously as 3 squirrels had scampered up the bank and disappeared into holes, but surmised they had gone there to sleep for the night and not to eat baby birds! Double-banded Sandgrouse came in but it was too dark to see clearly and I estimated 40-50 birds and a Freckled Nightjar (ID'd on distinctive call) came down to drink. A Black Sparrowhawk flew through the little gorge looking for a chance to catch doves drinking at the pools and a pair of African Hawk-eagles circled higher in the sky.

I was not concentrating on birds, but spent a few days after the count at the river in the vicinity of Mcheni and enjoyed watching a male Greater Painted-snipe with a chick – when I could find them in the scope sights! They were wonderfully camouflaged against the mud and grass and I wondered if the siblings had been trodden on by a hippo or buffalo or eaten by one of the many crocs lying on the sandbanks. Other highlights were 5 African Skimmers, 2 Black Storks, 4 White Storks, about 30 African Openbills and the Yellow-billed mentioned above, 6 White-browed Coucal all drinking at a pool, Arnot's Chat, more than 30 Red-billed Oxpeckers on a buffalo herd – and one of my favourite birds with their impossibly long eyelashes and booming call – Southern Ground-Hornbills, 4 groups in all.

Carolyn Dennison

One of the NUST students on attachment at BLZ, **Angella Meris Nyadenga** wrote- Some journeys are too long, some tiring and some boring. Only the journey to and from Mana Pools National Park for the 17th annual game count event proved to be different – exhilarating, refreshing and unforgettable! I joined the Birdlife Zimbabwe team from 24-28 September on this journey to the north and never having been on a game drive before, I found them to be soul-refreshing. It was unreal yet so pleasurable to be so close to the animals and birds, identifying and listing them as we went. Standing on the edge of Mana Mouth, breathtaking scenes stood before us – the majestic Zambezi River flowing gracefully and peacefully and hippos snorting and grunting joyously within its waters. Not to be outdone

were the birds of the air flapping and gliding by, much to our appreciation. The Hadedda Ibis, Saddle-billed Stork and African Pygmy-kingfisher were among the birds that graced our presence. Nauseous and reluctant I joined a team for my first game count and not knowing what to expect I was fear and regret-laden. It however turned out to be an enjoyable and unforgettable experience walking in the thick forests so close to the animals and emerging at the end of the transect alive! It was thrilling to see elephants, waterbuck and lions so close you could almost touch them and well-lodged in my mind is the near-death experience we encountered, when a sub-adult elephant charged towards us and luckily we escaped unhurt thanks to our armed ranger, Shadreck. This 'little' event may have disturbed me, but if you think it will stop me from doing more game counts you are absolutely wrong!

Casa Msika, Lake Chicamba, Mozambique: 23-27 August 2009

Observant birders who have travelled the Vumba area may have spotted the sun's rays illuminating the waters of a large dam lying to the east, most easily seen at sunrise and late afternoon, enticing landscape photographs out of those who carry a camera as well as binos! On the few occasions when I have looked down at the aforementioned view, I have always wondered what lay below, both from an adventurer's point of view as well as a birder's. Now, had I been a fisherman, I would have known a lot more about Lake Chicamba than I did. This particular body of water, I have discovered, is regionally and internationally famous for its fishing, in particular for bass, carp and bream. During our stay there, all other visitors carried rods instead of binos, hailing from Mozambique, Zimbabwe, South Africa and even Europe. (What is the fisherman's equivalent of a twitcher? A hooker?). The lake is sprawling, with large bays formed out of the several rivers which flow into the dam, one of the northern ones of which is called the Msika River. "Casa" I learnt is Portuguese for house, and so hopefully you can now work out for yourself a little bit about Casa Msika, the lodge we stayed at on the shores of the lake, where we had been asked to compile a list of birds for the area.

Surprisingly there were only four takers for the trip and we quickly found ourselves filling out the paper work involved in border crossing. We were never asked for Yellow Fever certificates, even though it was clear from my passport that I had been in Zambia a few weeks before. The Zim side was reasonably quick, the Moz side a bit longer, but after about 50 minutes we were onto the remaining 50km stretch from the border to the lodge. As we passed the completely domesticated countryside all around us, I wondered what type of birding lay in store! White-necked Ravens competed with domestic chickens for the most common species, but then again, it is still a change from the usual Pied Crows we have up on the central plateau! Much to my relief, a short distance after turning off the main road leading to Chimoio (of Shoprite fame), we encountered a boom, with one of those wonderful inventions leading away on either side. I say wonderful because without this particular fence demarcating this particular boundary onto private land, the last remaining patch of naturally-occurring miombo/mixed miombo woodland would otherwise have disappeared. The land on which the lodge is situated is some 450ha in extent and is predominately woodland, albeit hilly at times as a granite dwala is the main feature of the spur between the Revue and Msika rivers, between which the fence runs. In some places *Lantana* has become a real problem, although the Sombre Greenbuls don't think so, as they nearly out-numbered the Dark-capped Bulbuls. The only other distinct habitats present were the grassy area between the woodland and the shoreline and the water body itself. The water level was low and numerous dead trees protruded from the water, not unlike Kariba. An invasive species of exotic *Acacia* shrub has taken over large areas of the grassy shore and the birds rather seemed to enjoy it. I have not travelled all around the lake, but apart from another private property opposite the lodge, most other land in the area is considerably degraded.

We did come here to bird, so after settling in we headed up the shoreline and back along the entrance road through the *miombo*, picking up our first twenty species or so. African Pipits and Zitting Cisticolas were common along the grassy patches, the muddy shoreline being surprisingly devoid of waders, although the Green-backed Herons could almost qualify as they seemed at ease out in the open – quite contrary to their normal behaviour of hiding in cover. Only an African Darter and Reed Cormorants were evident on the water. A solitary Woolly-necked Stork was present along the shore throughout our stay. The scrubby patches held the usual assortment of birds like White-browed Robin-chats, Bronze Mannikins and Blue Waxbills as well as Red-faced Cisticolas. The walk back to the chalets produced Scarlet-chested Sunbirds, Red-throated Twinspots and Terrestrial Brownbills. Around the lodge, Pale Batis proved to be quite common, along with Red-faced Crombecs, Yellow-breasted Apalis and Green-capped Eremomelas. Some Lemon Doves were seen foraging by the workshop, an interesting record for miombo woodland as one usually sees them in the nearby Vumba forests. The restaurant area is set on a raised platform close to the shore, and Little Swifts nested under the structure, with African Palm-swifts taking up residence in the palms around the swimming pool. As one leaves after dinner, shine your torch up into the dry fronds where they live as this provides one with a unique opportunity to see how they hang on vertically throughout the night, and one of their small half-crescent nests where the eggs are glued on with saliva may even be seen.

The next morning we embarked on a rather long trek up over the dwala, down through the thicket scrub on the other side and onto a firebreak-type road. Here we encountered Grey Penduline-tit, Brown Snake-eagle, Purple-banded Sunbird and Trumpeter Hornbills and Crowned Hornbills, with Klaas's Cuckoo and

Grey Tit-flycatcher ID'd on call. We followed this northward until the fence line which we followed down to the Revue inlet, where good views were had of Green-winged Pytilia and Jameson's Firefinch. A few reeds were present near the water and held African Reed-warbler and Lesser Swamp-warbler. Brimstone Canary, African Firefinch, Red-faced Mousebird, Yellow-bellied Eremomela and Grey Heron were new to our list. One of only two sightings of White-faced Duck was here and surprisingly no other species were recorded, not even Little Grebe. We returned along the shoreline, although opting to hug the tree line where the going was a bit easier. We again came across a firebreak which led up through some woodland to an old croc farm and along the way we picked up White-breasted Cuckooshrike, Variable Sunbird and Amethyst Sunbird, Stierling's Wren-warbler, Yellow-bellied Greenbul and Laughing Dove. Towards the end of the spur, we encountered a flock of 26 African Jacana – again out in the open without their preferred habitat of floating/submerged vegetation to forage in, obviously as a result of the rather low water level. That evening we picked up Osprey, Lanner Falcon, African Green-pigeon and African Wattled Lapwing, with some good views of the white face and flanks of the Red-necked Spurfowl. During the nights we recorded African Wood-owl, Square-tailed Nightjar, Water Thick-knee and on the last night Barn Owl.

The next day, we set off to explore an area about 45km up the Tete road where a commercial farmer has been trying to conserve a large tract of pristine mature woodland, mainly *miombo*, although also mixed lowland forest/woodland in places. The quality of the habitat was excellent and we anticipated some good birding with Arnot's Chat abundant along the entrance road. We headed to the Mukombeshi River first where Black Stork was flying overhead, and not much else. There were plenty of people about so the birds were not showing themselves. We headed away from the river (which is the farm boundary) and into some dry mixed woodland where we picked up excellent views of Black-eared Seedeater amongst the usual Black-backed Puffbacks, Southern Black Flycatchers, Brubru's and associated common species! The temperature was rapidly rising as we headed down a dry river bed which flows into the Mukombeshi. Foraging in the sand and reeds were two confiding Cabanis's Bunting, who obviously don't know they are supposed to stay in woodland! Further along we ticked off Collared Sunbird, Retz's Helmet-shrike and White-crested Helmet-shrikes, Bateleur, Little Sparrowhawk and Purple-crested Turaco. A sound somewhat like that of the Tree squirrel back home was emanating from a thicket – which revealed a Sun Squirrel. This species is darker and has bands on the tail. However, a green bird flew out into a nearby bush and suddenly the sound was coming from there! It turned out to be an Eastern Nicator, which showed itself rather well and Richard picked up a lifer – a Red-winged Warbler. On our return Dark-backed Weaver was recorded as well as calling Greater Blue-eared Starlings. We headed back to the entrance road and had lunch by a river crossing. Crested Guineafowl were flushed by a passer-by and Bennett's Woodpecker was about, but not much else. After a short siesta, we headed back to the mature *miombo* closer to the main road. This proved to be a good decision and by walking along the road we encountered some excellent woodland birding in the heat of the day! First up, and after much discussion as to head colour, was a Brown-headed Parrot. It was remarkably confiding and allowed us to see how surprisingly different the field guides can be! Racquet-tailed Roller was next and several of these birds showed themselves along the road, proving to be rather common. Miombo Blue-eared Starlings flew overhead calling, with Golden-tailed Woodpecker and later the Bearded Woodpeckers showing themselves. Rufous-bellied Tits were well seen several times, with Southern Hylia also common. Many other more common species were present, but I am only mentioning those new to our list, and not recorded at Casa Msika. A calling African Scops-owl and a Striped Kingfisher completed the list of new species and altogether we recorded 88 species, of which 30 were new. On our return we stopped off at a dam built for the commercial farming operation some 20km or so along the Tete road. Here we recorded Comb Duck, White-necked Raven and Little Rush-warbler as new species.

The next day we spent some time around camp, with an early morning walk along the entrance road and back along the base of the hills. Not far out of camp we picked up Grey Waxbills, which put us properly into birding mode, although we didn't see much else that morning other than a brief glimpse of the Grey Tit-flycatcher and the white wing patches and outer tail of the Fiery-necked Nightjar as it flew off. With a packed lunch we headed off to have a look at the dam wall. The low range of hills is impressive, but heavily impacted by human settlement and not as good a birding venue as they looked from afar. The dam site itself is also impressive, located in a remarkably narrow and short gorge. The hydro-electric plant is clearly not fully functional, although that could be due to the low water level. However, the amount of water being let out is still considerable and the river downstream of the wall is holding a large volume of water, clean, clear and with a strong current. Birding around here was difficult as the authorities kept thinking our binoculars were taking pictures, which are not allowed, but a walk a few kilometres downstream from the wall could be very worth while, with species like African Finfoot and Half-collared Kingfisher in mind. We looked hard for falcons and kestrels but had to make do with Rock Martins, Speckled Pigeons and Red-winged Starlings as new species. For our afternoon walk we were dropped off at the beginning of the property and walked back along the Msika shoreline. Orange-breasted Waxbills were our first new tick, followed by Speckled Mousebirds, with the shoreline here holding a few more species than one first glimpses. Wood Sandpipers and Common Sandpipers showed

well, along with their ever present friends the Three-banded Plovers. Two male Greater Painted-snipe flushed up in front of us, landing again in the open where we had good views of them. Here is another species one does not normally find out in the open with no cover. The next surprise was a single overwintering Little Stint, which was rather confiding in letting us get quite close before taking flight.

Our last morning was cold and overcast, but a last wander around often proves fruitful, and Cabanis's Bunting put in an appearance to make our final count for Casa Msika 138 species, with an additional 38 species seen elsewhere totalling 176 altogether. Both venues were oases of trees amid desolation caused by charcoal production.

A summary of interest for Casa Msika would be as follows:

- Woolly-necked Stork • Osprey • Greater Painted-snipe • Lemon Dove • Red-faced Crombec (abundant)
- Grey Tit-flycatcher • Pale Batis (abundant) • Grey Waxbill • Cabanis's Bunting • Both Mousebirds in same area.
- All three Firefinches and no Widowbirds!
- No Starlings, Rollers, Larks, no Common Fiscal Shrike. Michael Irwin mentioned that as far as he knows birds such as Miombo Double-collared Sunbird, Streaky-headed Seedeater, Bar-throated Apalis, White-throated Robin-chat, Boulder Chat and Cape Bunting seem to stop at the border with Zimbabwe, although the habitat is the same and sure enough, we did not see them!
- For a large water body, unusual to have no White-breasted Cormorant, Terns or Gulls, but then again, we did not cover much of the lake itself.

Damian Newmarch

MASHONALAND

Lanark Farm – 26 July 2009

A small group visited Lanark farm late in July. A beautiful cool, bright morning saw eager birders looking forward to a good morning. This is usually an excellent area only 30 km out of Harare on the Beatrice Road, where we are often able to see some birds not found very often around Harare. On the way to the large dam from the picnic area the people in the front car had good views of an African Cuckoo Hawk. The bird numbers at the dam were much lower than usual, but we did see African Black Duck, Water Thick-knee and a number of the more common ducks like Egyptian Goose, Red-billed Teal and White-faced Duck. Some of us had a brief glimpse of a Rufous-bellied Heron and White-backed Vultures were spotted above. On our way back to the picnic area, lots of Helmeted Guineafowl were to be seen along the road and a Black-chested Snake-eagle patrolled the sky. From there we walked through the woodland to the small dam and Lizard Buzzard, Southern Hyliota and Greater Blue-eared Starling among others were soon added. At the small dam there were small numbers of Comb Duck, African Wattled Lapwing and African Jacana. The best sighting however, was a couple of Rufous-bellied Heron sitting in a dead tree after being disturbed. As we did the list Marabou Stork and Giant Kingfisher were seen and we watched Black Crake feeding and chasing each other around the small pool. A Secretarybird was an interesting sighting on the way out. We ended the morning with 80 species.

Our thanks go to the management and staff at Lanark Farm for allowing us to visit this very interesting area.

Dave Dalziel

Bird Migration and Ringing: 20 August 2009

A good crowd gathered at the Avondale Sports Club for this presentation. David Rockingham-Gill's formidable knowledge of birds gathered steadily over many years enabled him to keep up an interesting and detailed commentary to the slides. Ready on each table was an excellent bird-migration chart depicting the main species that journey between Africa and Europe and their routes. There were arrows going in several directions and Dave explained that bird-migration can be: East-West e.g. Broad-billed Roller; West-East e.g. Swallow-tailed Bee-eater; South-North e.g. Greater Striped Swallows and North-South e.g. White Stork. The first-mentioned direction tells you where the birds breed. There are further migration classifications like "local", "trans-equatorial" "trans-continental" and the birds themselves add variety to the subject by ranging in size from willow warblers (not much bigger than your thumb) to storks (large enough to quell the "where did I come from?" question in Victorian families!). We all feel our heartstrings tugged by tiny birds on the migration treadmill but in fact the big ones, particularly large water birds like storks and flamingos, are even more in need of our sympathy and help. In recent times, a number of International Bird Areas (IBAs) have been identified and are being kept wild to give migrating birds a better chance of successful journeys. Even so, numbers of migrating birds are definitely dropping because of reduced habitat. White Storks come all the way from Russia to Central Africa and prefer to fly over open country, not forests or oceans. The flocks are spectacular but over inhabited areas (especially Italy apparently) the birds are being shot for the pot. Accidental man-made dangers also lurk. Dave told us that in 1995 a jet plane flew into a flock of storks over Israel, writing off the plane and a number of

birds. Happily this accident resulted in a careful study being made of stork movements, Israel altered their aeroplane flight paths and there has been no repetition.

While flying is the usual means of bird migration, it is not the only one. The penguins of our southern hemisphere are certainly birds that migrate but flying is not an option. The little African Penguins commute annually from Cape Town to Cape St Francis by swimming at “three times the speed of Kirsty Coventry”! (I enjoyed that word-picture!) And penguins generally finish off with a walk. The Emperor Penguins of Antarctica stand shoulder high to an average human but leg-length was not on their evolution plan. And yet after the female has laid a single precious egg, her male partner rolls it onto his feet, snuggles it up in a handy fold of fur and fat and shuffles to ‘The Place where Nature has decided that all Emperor penguin eggs shall be incubated’. This wonder is also part of “the regular seasonal movement of birds”, part of migration.

After a short break for questions and comfort, Tony amused us with the cautionary tale of ‘The Barn Swallow Who Did Not Migrate’ one year and then we turned the charts over for “Ringing”. The practice of capturing, ringing and releasing birds in order to study their well-being and movements only began early last century. David is a seasoned bird-ringer himself, having caught and ringed Violet-backed Starlings. People who do bird-ringing tend to stick to one species as there are different techniques to perfect, different data to be recorded and skilled and speedy handling of the birds is all-important. Again David was a mine of information, particularly on the local scene. He presented a series of slides listing who ringed what and could personally comment on most of these people.

Sally Britten

Mukuvisi Woodland

The woodlands are looking really good this year despite an increase in the amount of tree cutting that is taking place. In December last year we had a male Narina Trogon and although I doubt we would be so lucky two years in a row there are usually a few seen in the woodlands towards the end of the year. We have been having good sightings of Black Sparrowhawk and the Long-crested Eagle has been seen on the nest over the last couple of months. ‘Our’ Wahlberg’s Eagles should be back now – the male is a very dark phase bird while the female is one of the palest Wahlberg’s I have ever seen. The Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters will have gone now but the European Bee-eaters should be back in large numbers. Eurasian Hobby usually make an appearance before the end of the year and we sometimes get birds like Red-backed Shrike passing through on migration. The water has been less polluted the last two months so there may be a chance that the African Black Duck and perhaps even the Green Sandpiper will be back. Ian saw a Grey Tit-flycatcher in September – a first for the Woodland.

Dave Dalziel

LAKE CHIVERO BIRD SANCTUARY

Highlights of the outing on 9 August included a good turnout of 16 people, 27 Squacco Heron, 235 Grey-headed Gull, 73 Red-eyed Dove, 1 African Wood-owl at the Safari Lodge and 7 Lesser Masked-weavers. Total count was 94 bird species.

Highlights of the outing on 13 September included no White-breasted Cormorant, 353 Reed Cormorant, 74 Great Egret, a Hottentot Teal with 3 chicks, 3 African Rail, 2 African Green-pigeons and a Purple-banded Sunbird. The good news is that there have been occasional National Parks armed patrols and the birds seem to have responded positively. Total count 84.

Richard Dennison

(We saw about 20 Great White Pelicans on 11 October. In September/October 2005 up to about 400 pelicans were seen on the Lake. *Ed.*)

Mbizi Game Park – 30th August 2009

There was a good turnout at our Mukuvisi meeting place for the visit to Mbizi Game Park. There were large numbers of White-faced Duck on the main dam at the main picnic area, with many loafing on the hyacinth while other flocks flew backwards and forwards with much whistling. Other water birds were few and far between but we did see Squacco Heron, Great Egret, Purple Heron and Grey Heron, Hamerkop, Red-billed Teal, Egyptian Goose and Three-banded Plover.

As we headed towards some promising woodland Mr Senior arrived and gave us information on the area and told us how the game park was now one of the few places in the area with trees. Monkeys and bush babies have increased in number and may be having an affect on the breeding success of some birds. We were given permission to roam anywhere we wanted and were invited to the lodge area.

We split up into smaller groups to do some woodland birding. Klaas’s Cuckoo, Greater Honeyguide and Lizard Buzzard were calling and White-backed Vultures were spotted above. Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters were present and some people saw Common Scimitarbill, Green Wood-hoopoe and African Hoopoe. Golden-tailed Woodpecker, Cardinal Woodpecker and Bearded Woodpecker were all seen or heard. A Striped Pipit was seen around the granite outcrops and a couple of Ashy Flycatchers were present. This was interesting because although we see them at Christon Bank and Ewanrigg they are very seldom seen at Mukuvisi or Cleveland Dam. Over the years we have seen a number of ‘acacia’ birds in this area,

but there were few this year. Chestnut-vented Tit-babbler was seen by most people but we missed many *acacia* birds we have seen in the past.

As there were a number of people in the picnic area having lots of fun and making lots of noise we moved to the lodge/conference area to have tea and do the list. We had a look at the pool with a view over the top of the miombo woodland, which was in full spectacular spring colour. A number of birds we had not seen were in the garden and at the end of the day we had seen 98 species and had had a very rewarding morning.

Many thanks to Mr Senior for allowing us free entry and the use of the gardens for tea.

David Dalziel

Hippo Pools, Umfurudzi – 11-14 September 2009

A quick visit was organized to Hippo Pools by Pat Kelly and me for the weekend as we had heard there were photographic opportunities to be had of Half-collared Kingfishers, Livingstone's Flycatcher, White-backed Night-heron and other interesting birds. It was just warming up and the Hippo Pools camp area is looking fantastic. Lots of green grass, water in the river, flowering bushes and trees and, of course, great birds. There were many sunbirds around camp, the Scarlet-chested Sunbird being the most common but there were excellent views of Purple-banded Sunbird, Collared Sunbird, White-bellied Sunbird, Miombo Double-collared Sunbird and Amethyst Sunbird. The Livingstone's Flycatchers were still numerous and small flocks could be encountered around the camping grounds and further downstream. Narina Trogons were heard in the campsite area and later we had fantastic views of a male. A female was only seen briefly downstream of the camp when she was flushed from a tree with a small flock of African Green-pigeon. There have been some big veld fires and large areas have been burnt but we saw Racquet-tailed Roller, White-crested Helmet-shrike and Retz's Helmet-shrike among other woodland birds. Interestingly, there were dozens of Red-billed Hornbill in the area where we only saw a few in early August. The White-backed Night-heron were roosting on the island during the day and could be seen early in the morning or late evening. On a couple of occasions a female African Finfoot was seen swimming along the bank or near the island. The Half-collared Kingfisher was present most of the time and was seen feeding fledged young. It seemed to favour the inlet where the camp's canoes are kept and we soon recognized its call and could see the brilliant blue as it crossed the river or flew along the bank. The African Hawk-eagle nest near camp had a very large chick. A little further away we had a look at an African Crowned Eagle nest and noticed green leaves had been placed in the nest. An adult was seen close by and we watched and listened to the calls for a short time, before leaving them to get on with, what we hope is a successful breeding attempt. A young African Goshawk was watched catching large insects from the tops of trees in the camp area. The African Wood-owl called every night in the camp area while African Scops-owl and Pel's Fishing-owl could be heard a little further away. On the way out we checked the Black Stork nest. There had been three chicks when we looked in early August but there were only two on this trip. They were walking around the nest area and will hopefully fledge successfully. Over the three days we saw a little over 100 birds which we thought was quite good as most of the time was spent trying to get photographs of specific birds and very little time was spent actively bird watching. Hippo Pools is really worth supporting. One wonders what would be left in this area were it not for the dedication of all the staff at this camp.

Dave Dalziel

A Bird Ringing Career – 17 September 2009

Dave Dalziel is a skilled bird ringer with several years of accumulated experience to draw from and his informative presentation on bird ringing certainly left the numerous members who came to listen to him with plenty of food for thought. At this point in time, there are not many expert ringers left in Zimbabwe but one of our best, Dale Hanmer, who ranks among one of the top amateur ringers in Southern Africa, was honoured with the BLSA Owl Award by Birdlife South Africa on 5 June 2009 for her work in the field.

What exactly is the purpose of bird ringing? Basically, it involves marking individuals so that they can be recognized later on, thereby increasing our knowledge concerning their migration, dispersal, longevity, moult & breeding, DNA etc. This collection of scientific information can then lead to the introduction of effective conservation measures. Yet, the individual birder generally also has his/her personal reasons for going into ringing and it can be any or all of these: getting out, hunting, pursuit of knowledge, seeing interesting places etc. The people with the most knowledge about our bird life are people with hands-on experience – for example falconers, people with an interest in oology and caged birds.

But how does one get started? Ringers are classified into 3 categories: Grades A, B & C with the beginner starting off as a C-Grader. Grade C ringers are trained by experienced ringers but before any ringing can be done, permission to set traps needs to be obtained from National Parks and permission for ringing from BLZ. Before the ringing begins, the prospective ringer also needs to be clued up on the identification of the birds he/she is going to trap! The easy part lies in choosing which traps to use e.g. mist nets, walk-in traps, drop traps, cannon traps etc. The ringer then needs to identify the right habitat to trap the desired birds e.g. Ewanrigg Botanic Gardens is good for sunbirds, David Whitehead Ponds is/was good for waders, Darwendale is good for ducks etc. Once the ringer has trapped his birds, he

needs to be aware of their individual reactions to being trapped. Thick-billed Weavers for example, can give nasty bites! He/she then needs to know about bird handling, how to extract them from the nets, how long they can be kept, the order of release, problem birds, how to transport them and how to minimize injuries. Another factor important in bird ringing is being aware that other critters besides birds are also likely to be trapped e.g. bats, beetles, snakes....Cattle may wander into nets as well and passers-by may even take advantage of the traps to make away with the birds! The rings used in ringing generally range between 1.8 to 26mm and are in aluminium alloy, incoloy or stainless steel. The measurements of birds (weight, wing length etc) are taken on site as are the growth rates, mass, race and sex. The ageing of the birds is assessed as well. All the collected data can then be evaluated, new and updated information relating to the birds made available, and conservation measures proposed and implemented.

The technique sounds relatively simple and straight forward – but a couple of fundamental issues remain to be tackled before a prospective ringer can start work. The first is: To ring or not to ring?! A real dilemma! The fact is that certain birds should not be ringed without very careful consideration. A number of raptors have talons that can hurt the ringer and feathered legs that moult and the feathers get compacted beneath the ring. The Malachite Kingfisher has a short tarsus – the rings are liable to fill with mud when nesting and would cause damage. Ringing rare birds e.g. Blue Swallows, might create nest disturbance and jeopardize breeding. And the last all important issue to be dealt with is to decide whether to 'ring and fling' or operate within a project. All Southern African ringers participate in the global SAFRING research project, providing a cumulative database of ringed birds which is the resource upon which studies of survival and movements are based. In addition, ringers are encouraged to have their own research projects. Dave concluded his presentation by giving examples of projects with methods including the use of colour ringing. A big thank you to David and to Pat Kelly and Jane Rautenbach for contributing their photographs.

Julia Pierini

Greystone Park Nature Reserve – 19 September 2009

I always enjoy our walks around this little reserve and at this time of year there are very few areas of long grass and thick weeds for us to negotiate. There was quite a lot of activity on and around the dam when we first arrived. An African Jacana was brooding its chicks on the far side of the dam and there were scores of Village Weavers nesting along the dam wall. Black Crakes were busy chasing each other and there were Common Moorhen staying close to the reeds. Malachite Kingfisher, Pied Kingfisher and Giant Kingfishers surveyed the birdwatchers and had probably decided it was still too cool to fish but a solitary Squacco Heron was happily fishing. A couple of African Spoonbill flew over but may have thought better of landing with so many people traipsing around. Some of the party noticed a Black Kite (or Yellow-billed Kite to most of us) passing through and a Gabar Goshawk was heard in the near-by suburb. White-rumped Swift, African Palm-swift, White-throated Swallow, Grey-rumped Swallow, Wire-tailed Swallow and Lesser Striped Swallows could be seen most of the morning, racing through the sky and dashing down to drink.

Walking through the trees and below the dam wall African Hoopoe, Green Wood-hoopoe, Orange-breasted Bush-shrike, Brown-hooded Kingfisher and Striped Kingfishers were all in evidence. Flocks of Greater Blue-eared Starling were in the tops of the trees and Terrestrial Brownbuls were chattering as they sorted through the leaf litter. A Natal Spurfowl was heard which is a nice bird for suburbia.

A beautiful day and 75 birds seen – what a great way to start the weekend!

Dave Dalziel

Christon Bank

The Tree Society was having a walk on Sunday 20 September, so a few of us decided to go a little earlier and do a bit of bird watching and then join them. A quick walk half way to the river at the bottom of the reserve and we had seen some interesting birds. Boulder Chats were located by their squeaky-gate call and we managed to get good views of them bounding up the rocks. Western Violet-backed Sunbird and Purple-banded Sunbird were seen in the same tree. The Purple-banded Sunbirds were building a nest – the male did not seem to be doing any building but he spent a huge amount of energy driving the female to greater effort! After our short bird watching activity we turned our attention to trees – they may not fly away and they may all have 'a label' but it is going to take me a long time to learn to read those labels!

Dave Dalziel

Gosho Park, Marondera – 27 September, 2009

Our annual visit to this attractive reserve was once again popular, 23 participants gathering at Mukuvisi to share transport. We actually began birding at 07.45 which in hindsight is rather late for a beautiful summer morning. We were fortunate to have the local expertise of Colin de Beer and Pete Jackson from the Marondera group, which over the years has identified 243 species in this large area of stunning miombo woodland and vlei with its towering rocks. Any birds which might have been calling to attract us were unfortunately drowned out by the pervasive cicadas who maintained their din throughout our walk and over most of the park. Or that is our excuse for a rather disappointing count of 71 species from three groups all taking quite different routes!

One of our most welcome sightings was a Golden-breasted Bunting on the road as we drove in to our base at the permanent camp. The *Erythrina lysistemon* still in flower produced many good birds – Miombo Double-collared Sunbird, Amethyst Sunbird, Variable Sunbird, White-bellied Sunbird and one Scarlet-chested Sunbird and any number of Streaky-headed Seedeaters. The msasas, though extremely attractive to us, didn't hold many birds – only one or two Southern Hyliota were seen and a few Miombo Tits and Southern Black Tit, one White-breasted Cuckooshrike plus a Striped Pipit and a Wood Pipit but more Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird and Yellow-fronted Canary, Green-capped Eremomela, Violet-backed Starling, Southern Black Flycatcher, and loads of Black-backed Puffbacks. Woodpeckers were few and far between but both Golden-tailed Woodpecker and Cardinal Woodpecker were recorded. Another loner was a Brown-hooded Kingfisher. One of the specials that did not fail to appear was the Boulder Chat on the high rocks along one of the streams. The only cuckoo was Klaas's Cuckoo and that probably resident and 3 African Green-pigeons appeared briefly. The creepers held Red-faced Mousebird and Jameson's Firefinch lower down. The only summer visitors were 4 African Paradise-flycatchers and one Wahlberg's Eagle. The other raptor noted was an African Goshawk and there were very few African Palm-swifts and no swallows above us.

Despite minor disappointments, compared to a wonderful list compiled a few days earlier by Ian Riddell, I'm sure none of us regretted leaving home for a walk through some of the most alluring woodland in the country. At \$2 per head it's a bargain outing.

Tony Alegria

MIDLANDS

Ngezi Dam – 28-30 August 2009

Four of us went to Ngezi Dam for a weekend at the end of August. The first surprise was that as the Platinum Mine has been expanding, they have graded and widened the dirt road which passes right in front of the Ngezi Dam National Parks entrance. This is so the mine can collect sand from a river bed nearby for their expansion scheme. The next surprise was that we had the whole place to ourselves. It really was a pity as this location was well used at some time in the past as evidenced by the number of camp sites all around the dam. We were greeted by Boulder Chats as we arrived at our chalet (basically just a normal house with two huge bedrooms, each with two beds) and soon we also saw Mocking Cliff-chats. In a bird party, some 5 Yellow-throated Petronias were mobbing a Golden-tailed Woodpecker – something I had never seen before. The other highlight were four Racquet-tailed Rollers all sitting on a small branch enjoying the late afternoon sun. Altogether 110 species were seen including many water birds as one would expect. The only members of the duck/geese family to be seen were White-faced Ducks and Egyptian Goose. Of note were the more than 20 African Spoonbills seen in groups of twos or threes scattered around the dam – no big groupings at all.

Tony Alegria

MATABELELAND

Update on Matobo Community Project – Bulawayo. August 2009

An excellent and productive 2nd term in which 18 trips were made to 32 schools.

During this time we accomplished the following:

- Distributed stationary/pens and pencils, sports equipment – all donated by the British Embassy.
- Put up educational posters in classrooms.
- Distributed books from Book Aid International – courtesy of the Bulawayo Rotary Club South.
- Gave 32 workshops to Conservation Club members on 'Endangered Species' to include the Southern Ground-hornbill, (and in some cases, to other interested pupils)
- Distributed blankets from anonymous French and Scottish donors to orphans.
- Distributed second-hand clothing within the communities.
- Mrs Parry spoke to several SDC committees and answered queries from their members.
- Distributed a questionnaire asking Head of Schools for an assessment and opinions on the project – from the schools and the communities.
- Recorded further Ground-hornbill nests and roosting sites. We now have 25 confirmed nests and we have information collected from pupils that require follow up in these coming holidays that may lead to further nests and roosts.
- Visited a local Chief to update him and his community on the ongoing success of the project.

This is our 22nd trip of the year and to date we have done 4 500 km. We have targeted the orphans at all the schools – at some of these schools this category makes up 75% of each form and we distributed blankets in July.

Elsbeth Parry

Morning Walk at Lakeside 22 August

The morning started with a fair, cool breeze that had most birds taking shelter in the acacia woodland scattered on the 'islands' of the dried up dam. Above our heads hovered a Black-shouldered Kite. Strolling along the well-marked path heading towards the main 'island', we were rewarded with White-bellied Sunbirds and Scarlet-chested Sunbirds flitting from tree to tree. Whilst watching their antics, a couple of White-browed Sparrow-weavers made themselves known. Making our way towards the dam wall, we were rewarded with a Wahlberg's Eagle soaring on high, with Southern Yellow-billed Hornbills alerting all of its presence. The area at the back of the dam wall – where the cool breeze couldn't reach – proved to be alive with birdlife. A pair of Bearded Woodpeckers displayed themselves and shouted at each other for all birders to confirm their identification. The wind lessened and many species took to the air and sat in more exposed positions. Red-faced Mousebirds, Chestnut-vented Tit-babblers, Red-billed Quelea all made themselves known. The Chin-spot Batis, Blue Waxbills, and Jameson's Firefinches made sure they weren't left off our checklist as they eventually showed their presence. On descending the wall, a pair of Brown-hooded Kingfishers sat posing for the photographers, whilst not to be outdone by them, a Chin-spot Batis sat atop a dry stick to ensure he could be captured on camera. Finally, partaking of our tea seated on chairs, old tyres, and other convenient perches, an African Pipit ran around giving us a closer inspection. The highlights of the day have got to be the sighting of the Long-crested Eagle as it flew around its territory, with the Black-chested Snake-eagle taking to the air to show that his space had been invaded.

A good morning was had by the 16 members who took part, with a pleasing total of 46 species having been recorded.

Cecilia Hubbard

September Suburban Surprise – 13 September

This unusual event, concocted by Judy Ross, was indeed a surprise in the suburbs in September! The idea was to cover areas we don't usually cover – from a bird watching point of view – and see what came up. Four teams, mostly consisting of 4 people in one vehicle, had no idea what to expect – until each was handed a large envelope containing smaller envelopes with instructions and a map of the City and suburbs. The first instruction took them off to their *FIRST STOP* where they were expected to stay for one hour and record all they heard and saw (well, not *everything* they saw and heard – just birds of course). Towards the end of their hour they were permitted to open the second envelope marked *SECOND STOP*, directing them to where they were expected to spend another hour, ditto (i.e. record all they heard and saw connected to birds). And so on for the *THIRD STOP*. And it all ended with a voucher for free entry to the *SEPTEMBER SUBURBAN SURPRISE LUNCH STOP* – Hillside Dams!

Well, the *STOPS* were wildly varied in habitat and location, ranging from the centre of town to the suburbs. Some of us found ourselves in bird-friendly areas such as Hornung Park Golf Club, others of us couldn't find ourselves at a dam where we were supposed to be, and yet others were posted to locations within the dry and dusty city where you wouldn't expect great numbers of self-respecting birds to live. One *STOP* was unmanageable, as being where it was and it being a Sunday it was full of cars, people and activity whereas when 'recced' during the week it was quiet and empty. It turned out to be a thoroughly enjoyable event and between us we logged a total of 69 species – not bad for a morning in town.

Here are a few details. The second column represents the total number of sightings and hearing over the three *STOPS* – which, for instance, could include Laughing Doves seen or heard 3 times, once in each *STOP*. The third column shows the number of different species counted only once even if they occurred at all three *STOPS*. (I've made this sound more complicated than it is, but it's early in the morning and a grotty, gutti day which discourages the brain from swinging into action).

Team 1	City Caravan Park Raylton Library Country Club	74	43
Team 2	Borrow St. Swimming Baths ZITF Bullring Ascot Racecourse	62	48
Team 3	Bulawayo Club Anglican Cathedral Hornung Park Golf Course	49	28
Team 4	Natural History Museum Moth Centre Moffat Reservoir	38	28

A detailed report will be available soon for anyone who would like to see who saw and heard what where. Next time the plan is to extend further outwards and possibly to include one extra, alternative *STOP* should difficulties arise with any of those selected, as happened above. Grateful thanks go to Judy for her hard work, ingenuity and enthusiasm and to all who supported her by participating.

Julia Duprée

Raptor ID Course – Aisleby – 26/27 September

After a number of postponements we finally managed to reschedule part 2 of our 3-part Raptor ID course for 26 & 27 September – but it was worth the wait. On Saturday afternoon sixteen of us gathered at the home of Bill & Helen Lewis, for our ‘classroom’ session. Peter did a quick recap of the most important points covered in part 1, when we reviewed raptors as a group and eagles in particular. He then proceeded to take us through the buzzards, hawks, and kites; ably supported by Helen showing us the various birds in *Roberts Multimedia*.

Next morning we met at the entrance to Aisleby. Once again we were lucky with our raptor sightings, seeing seven species in the course of the morning – Black-chested Snake-eagle, African Fish-eagle, Wahlberg’s Eagle, White-backed Vulture, Black-shouldered Kite, African Harrier-hawk and a falcon which we think was a Lanner Falcon. The only problem was that the birding is always so good at Aisleby that there were so many distractions! In particular the pipits continued to challenge us – though in the end we decided they were all African Pipits. And to be honest the distractions were not the only problem. The other problem was that while everything seems so obvious when Peter was talking to us in the ‘classroom’, the identification was not so simple and straightforward in the field! Shortly after we arrived we had an excellent sighting of a Black-chested Snake-eagle (black head, white belly, black & white under the wing) hovering above the field next to the road – the only eagle to regularly hover for any length of time. Later in the morning we had progressed to the top end of the lands where we found another large black and white eagle atop a pylon. Out came the telescopes while we debated whether it was another Black-chested Snake-eagle or a Martial Eagle. Some of the group then walked forward to flush the bird, but even when it flew there was divided opinion. Admittedly it was a very hazy day, the light was poor and, because of our position the bird was lower than us as it flew away so the under-wing was not clear. Those closest to the bird as it flew off confirmed it was in fact another Snake-eagle.

So while we all felt we learnt a lot, we also realized there is still a long way to go! Once again our sincere thanks to Peter for so generously sharing with us his time and expertise.

Adele Edwards

ABIDING BIRD MYSTERIES

Our Editor Emeritus, **Michael Irwin**, stresses that there are a whole lot of interesting and intriguing problems that remain unresolved and must be highlighted. Some of them will be in the next few issues of *Babbler* and we encourage members to add a bit more purpose to the ‘fun’ bird-watching and help increase our knowledge and understanding.

The Boubou Bush-shrike Problem

We are I think rather favoured in that we have no less than three well-defined biological species of the *Laniarius* group of boubou bush-shrikes in Zimbabwe, even if two of them somehow just make it. They are firstly of course, the Tropical Boubou *L. aethiopicus* found virtually throughout but the other two are of much more restricted distribution and present a real challenge in more ways than one. The first of these is the Swamp Boubou *L. bicolor*, confined to a very limited area along the Zambezi River upstream from the Katombora Rapids where it is more closely associated with swamps, as well as in riparian forest. It is also readily distinguishable by its all-white underparts and is larger in size. The case of the Southern Boubou *L. ferrugineus* is a bit more complicated and where the bird books tell you, even if incorrectly, that it more or less replaces its tropical counterpart to the southward in a line roughly corresponding to that of the Limpopo River along the international border with South Africa. But this in fact is more simply where the more southerly form *transvaalensis* intergrades with the more northerly *limpopoensis* on our side of the river more or less and in fact one is largely indistinguishable from the other. In other words, they are one and the same species and thus conspecific and where gene-flow is complete! But don’t be discouraged, as the true Southern Boubou does indeed occur as a full species but only in a very limited area in the extreme southeast of the country along the lower reaches of the Runde River near its junction with the Save. And so far there is only the one museum specimen to prove the point, but in this case it is the much more distinctive form *savensis*, which is not only much more diminutive in size, but lacks the shiny black upperparts of the tropical and is much more heavily washed with buff below. Here there is an actual geographical overlap between the two forms and they appear to behave as good species, with the Tropical in the richer riparian along the river, while the other is confined to drier thickets away from water. So just like the Swamp Boubou, there is rather strict ecological separation where they meet. This of course is known as sympatry when two closely related species co-exist without interbreeding. And in each case of course there are supporting differences in voice where they behave as good species as well as differing morphologically and even though they may merge gradually elsewhere within their range as already shown. And a very similar situation also repeats itself in north-western Zambia and in adjacent Angola, where *bicolor* and *aethiopicus* do much the same thing and merge imperceptibly so that the one becomes the other! It is all simply part of the broader speciation process within this dynamic bush-shrike complex. And where if there are ecologically supporting differences, two immediately related forms can co-exist without recognising one another. But such instances are often contentious and where taxonomists disagree and simply part of an ongoing speciation process; complete in one area and not in

another and something not easily explained or appreciated in the average field guide. But the interesting point here is that while the relationship between the Tropical and Swamp Boubous is relatively well documented, that between the Southern and Tropical where diminutive *savensis* is found, remains poorly known although it may be conjectured that there is a more extensive overlap between the two and certainly so within adjacent Mozambique, where the situation as well requires to be more clearly resolved on the ground. And this is certainly where we can do something ourselves in order to find out what actually happens on the ground and how exactly they interact with one another and meet all the criteria necessary in support of the biological species concept. Seeing is believing, so why not get down there to that part of the lowveld and discover what the situation really is. And of course, write it all up afterwards for *Honeyguide!*

TAIL FEATHERS

Kevin Shaw saw an **Osprey** on 17 December 2008 at the De Hoop Nature Reserve outside Bredasdorp in the Western Cape. He took several photos of it until the bird finished its meal and flew off. Looking at the photos that evening he noticed a ring on its right leg. After enlargement and enhancement using photographic software he managed to read the entire number except the prefix on the bird's leg. An e-mail to the raptor group/ringing unit in Helsinki University, Finland, said the bird was ringed as a nestling on 9 July 2008 was re-sighted 5 months and 8 days later, 10 968 km south, in a straight-line distance. This is the 5th and most southerly Osprey re-sighting/ringed bird recovered in South Africa. Zimbabwe has one, also from Finland. The vast majority of northern Scandinavian Ospreys go to West Africa, over Italy/Sicily and Gibraltar. A small percentage comes east of the Mediterranean Sea, over Egypt and down the Nile / Rift Valley Lakes route to us. My estimate is that 50 are in this country and 2000 in South Africa in any one year.

These digital cameras might be able to become useful tools in identifying bird rings, without controlling the bird, and we might be able to identify the prey of Ospreys/birds, to the species level.

Reference: Shaw K. (May 2009) Observation on a ringed Osprey. *Gabar*. Vol.20. No 1, pp 34-36.

David Rockingham-Gill

On the morning of 27 September on Sussexdale farm, Glen Forest (1731C1) I saw a **Spotted Flycatcher** on the edge of some *Acacia* scrub. This is my first record of this bird in September and my previous earliest sighting was on 8 October 2006. I cannot find any references in *Honeyguide* going back over 20 years of any September arrivals and Michael Irwin gives the earliest recorded date as 10 October in his 1981 book.

So is this Zimbabwe's first record for that month? If anyone has any September records in this country of this Palaearctic migrant I shall be happy to hear from you.

Colin Baker

candjbaker@zol.co.zw or PO Box BW 168, Borrowdale. Harare

A few sightings **Neil Deacon** has found interesting were:

15/09/2009. ±08:30. A pair of African Hawk-eagles soaring over a gum tree plantation on the corner of Lomagundi and West Roads, Avondale West, Harare.

15/09/2009. 18:16. A Pennant-winged Nightjar flying around my house in Mt Hampden.

22/09/2009. I learnt from Colin Jasakara that Peregrine Falcons are incubating eggs on the Eastgate Building. So late!

29/09/2009. 08:16. Saw a Peregrine Falcon perched on a ledge on the Eastgate Building.

1/10/2009 07:00. A pair of Saddle-billed Storks flew low over my house towards the direction of Harare.