

BABBLER

The Newsletter of -



BirdLife Zimbabwe
The BirdLife International Partner in Zimbabwe

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OBITUARIES

Sadly a number of people have passed away recently:

Val Gargett – internationally known for her work with the (Black) Verreaux's Eagle, in Australia on 6 February 2010. Peter Steyn recalls 'she was a legend and it was a privilege to know and work with her'. There will be an article in her memory in the *Honeyguide*.

Nancy Irwin – wife of our Editor Emeritus, Michael Irwin, on 6 February 2010. She will be remembered by customers at Borrowdale Pharmacy, where she worked for many years and for her legendary meringues.

Rose Masterson – wife of well-known birder, Alex Masterson, on 25 February 2010.

Many will remember her beautiful garden and generous hospitality to all.

They will be missed by everyone who knew them and we convey our sincere condolences to their families and friends.

In the last issue I inadvertently left out **John Shaw's** life dates: 15 April 1936 – 5 December 2009.

David Rockingham-Gill acknowledges – 'I think we all owe a great debt to our spouses and families, who allow us to indulge our birding interests.'

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

BLZ Council has resurrected the post of Honorary Membership Secretary with the objectives of ***strengthening the connection between the Office and the Members***, ensuring the ongoing integrity of the Membership List and coordinating the growth of the Membership. Keeping in touch with the membership has been difficult over the past few years. The Administration Officer, Sabina Mapika, Council Secretary, Ken Dixon and *Babbler* Editor, Carolyn Dennison have worked together ceaselessly during the past few months to produce an accurate membership list, ironing out the irregularities of the previous years of confusion. Carolyn has been persistent in retrieving those "lost" members and encouraging them to rejoin the organization, thus bringing the membership up from around 200 a year ago to more than 400 today.

This is evidence that ***managing the Membership is no mean task and the load must be shared***. The Office will continue as the contact point for Members, performing its secretariat membership role including receiving and receipting subscriptions and maintaining the list. The Honorary Membership Secretary will support the Office in ensuring that the above objectives are met, communicate with Members and become the liaison person in this important area. Council has co-opted Carolyn Dennison to this post with immediate effect.

We were very pleased to see Dr Chris Magin, the RSPB representative for Zimbabwe, back here in early March. Council held an informal meeting with Dr Magin at which he gave a very useful presentation which gave us clarity on the overall workings of RSPB and BLI and their relationship with BirdLife Zimbabwe. For those new members, The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) is our core funding partner within BirdLife International. Briefly, this means they support the running of the office by providing funding for some salaries, membership support, utilities and a percentage for member-driven projects. This offers what can be described as a launching pad for further funding to be sourced for projects involving the conservation of birds and habitats, usually working with communities, but which are associated, very often, with threatened species of local or global concern.

I hope to meet you all at the AGM at Matopos on 5th June!

Dorothy Wakeling

piumosso@zol.co.zw

Ken Dixon adds: The increase in membership numbers is a fantastic achievement and we want to keep the momentum going and increase the numbers for 2010-2011. To do this we need members' cooperation when you phone or visit the office. Please be patient while Sabina or another member of staff deal with your request and carefully check your details. It is essential that we record up-to-date information and include any changes in address, e-mail etc. so that we don't lose contact with you again as happened during the recent challenging years.

SUBSCRIPTION RENEWAL

Our membership year runs from April to March and the 2010/11 subscriptions are therefore due on 1 April. We have had to increase the rate to cover costs of printing and distribution of our publications and any surplus will go towards helping to promote interest in birds. However, I am sure you will agree that they are still reasonable and BLZ is a worthwhile organisation to support. Donations are also very welcome!

Individual or Family members (including children under 17)	US\$ 20.00
Pensioners, Students and Juniors	US\$ 10.00

Schools	US\$ 20.00
Corporate members	US\$ 50.00
Rest of Africa	US\$ 30.00
Rest of World	US\$ 30.00

Please pay your subscriptions as soon as possible – to the office, a branch committee member at an outing or you can deposit it into the BLZ bank account – Barclays Bank NGO Centre, Branch no: 2157; Account no: 6465998. It is very important that with all direct deposits you include your name on the deposit, so that it appears on the bank statement and also advise the office and myself, either by faxing the copy deposit or by e-mail. *Carolyn*

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The National AGM will be held on Saturday, 5 June 2010 at Maleme Rest Camp in the Matobo National Park in Bulawayo.

Members are requested to book their own accommodation – chalets or camping – but to please advise Ken Dixon on lynnken@mango.zw or 0912-324301 by 21 May, so we can have some idea of the numbers. We hope to meet many of our Matabeleland members. It is a lovely venue so please make an effort to attend.

The President Dorothy Wakeling, Vice-president Neil Deacon, Honorary Treasurer Roger Castelin and Honorary Secretary, Ken Dixon are elected annually and have confirmed they are willing to stand again. Two ordinary Council members are also elected – David Rockingham-Gill is willing to stand again but Geoff Lowe has declined. Nomination and proxy papers are available on request from Carolyn Dennison and are to be submitted by 1 May please. rolly@zol.co.zw

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

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

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.

Evening Meetings are on the 3rd Thursday of each month at 5.30 for 6.00 p.m. The venue is the Avondale Sports Club on Brighton Road between Sam Nujoma Street Extension and Upper East Road. There is a cash bar and a security guard. Pies and meals like lasagne, spaghetti bolognese, cottage pie and chicken curry can also be ordered when the list goes round at the beginning of the meeting – either to eat there or take home and pop into the microwave.

Thursday 15 April – Umfurudzi Raptor Survey for the Layman

Dr Neil Deacon will talk to us about some of the interesting information that has come out of this survey. He is enthusiastic about birds of prey and this should be well worth listening to.

Thursday 20 May – Birding in Namibia

Ian will be giving us a Powerpoint presentation about the special birds and fascinating places seen in central and southern Namibia in June/July.

Saturday 17 April – 7 a.m.: Botanic Gardens

Always an enjoyable venue with a variety of sunbirds and the possibility of seeing Magpie Mannikins in the Bindura Bamboo stands. Meet in the car park and bring chairs and refreshments.

Saturday 15 May – 7 a.m.: Greystone Park

This is a splendid venue for a Saturday walk as it includes a dam, so water birds can also be spotted. An immature Ovambo Sparrowhawk and Black-throated Wattle-eye were seen last year.

Sunday 4 April - 6.30 a.m. and 2 May – 7.00 a.m.: Mukuvisi Woodland

In April the shrikes migrate to Europe and the Eurasian Hobby may still be around. In May Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters have complicated movements, but they seem to leave the Harare area during the rains and come back for winter towards the end of April. The European Bee-eaters

leave about mid April. Bird parties start to form, so if a good bird party is found, there should be lots of miombo specials. Turn off the 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 for the guard, taking into account the value of your vehicle! Don't forget refreshments.

Sunday 11 April - 6.30 a.m. and 9 May - 7.00 a.m.: Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary

There may be a few summer migrants left such as Sedge Warbler and Levillant's Cuckoo. Bird numbers may improve as National Parks had an increased presence there in March and human disturbance will hopefully be reduced. Meet at Marimba Shopping Centre, Samora Machel Avenue West. Remember to bring chairs and refreshments.

Sunday 18 April and 16 May - 7:00 a.m.: Monavale Vlei

Meet on the BS Leon side of Fenella Drive to see a variety of birds – and enjoy the walk.

Sunday 25 April - 6.30 a.m.: Bushman's Rock, Bromley

This is a beautiful place and definitely worth a visit. There is a dam, miombo woodland and kopjes and a variety of game. We have been invited to stay for lunch and Tony will bring charcoal and a drum for those wanting to braai. Meet in the main car park at Mukuvisi Woodland, where you can leave your vehicle if sharing transport.

Sunday 23 May - 7.00 a.m.: Ewanrigg Botanic Gardens

It is always interesting to explore this pleasant venue and see the variety of sunbirds – hopefully we will tick the Western Violet-backed! Meet at the car park of CABS head office, Northend Road. There will be a Parks entry fee.

MATABELELAND BRANCH

Friday 9 April - Know Your Owls

Hillside Dams Boma, at 5.30 for 6 p.m. We will be showing a DVD on owls compiled by Mashonaland branch chairman, Tony Alegria. Come and brush up on your knowledge about owls in these very appropriate surroundings.

Saturday 24 April: Natural History Museum Ornithology Collection

The Curator of Ornithology, Tongayi Mwedzi, will be taking us 'behind the scenes', talking to us about the collection and showing us some of the skins. Meet in the car park in front of the Museum at 09:00. Bring chairs and refreshments to be enjoyed in the gardens afterwards.

Sunday 9 May: Peri-urban Perusal

Last September our events co-ordinator, Judy Ross, organized a very enjoyable event which had participants darting around within the city centre and suburbs and coming up with a surprising and impressive list of species, found in unusual places. This time we will be including areas slightly further afield. Meet at 09:00 (venue to be confirmed) and bring your drinks, lunch and chairs.

Weekend 21-23 May: Hyrax Census

This will be the fourth census carried out by the branch in conjunction with the Verreaux's Eagle Breeding Survey. More teams are needed so if you are prepared to get up early on a cold, dark winter's morning, to climb a kopje and be in position before sunrise to observe dassies emerging from their dens, please contact Cecilia Hubbard. It really is a most enjoyable weekend!

COUNTRY DISTRICTS

Mashonaland South (Kadoma) – Contact Margaret Parrock on 068-22005 or her daughter, Coralee on 0912-739370.

Eastern Districts – Monthly outings are on the last Sunday of the month and depart at 7.30 a.m. from the Mutare Museum. Spare binoculars and field guides are available. Members with a vehicle are encouraged to attend and fuel can be provided. Contact Peter Gwidibira 0913-524844 or pgwidibira@mutare.matanuska.co.zw for details.

Other Areas – Those members in other areas – we are always interested to hear what is happening in your bit of the country. Please send in what you have seen. *Ed*

RECENT REPORTS and SIGHTINGS

Common Mynas Reach BULAWAYO

Recently Common Mynas, *Acridotheres tristis*, have been reported from various localities in Zimbabwe. It is now apparent that they are becoming more numerous and widespread in the southern and western parts of the country. Six birds were present at FALCON COLLEGE, ESIGODINI sometime in October 2009 but disappeared soon afterwards. This is the second sighting of mynas from Esigodini following the sighting of a pair of birds which were later shot on a dairy farm in December 2007. On 29 October a single myna was shot in Matetsi Unit 3. This is the most north- westerly sighting received from Zimbabwe to date. On 3 November and again on 11 November 2009, a single myna was seen by I.C. Riddell at Rutenga. This is the first confirmed sighting of a myna from this location although I was informed that they had been seen at the Rutenga post office in 2007 but was unable to locate them thereafter myself. Three mynas were seen in CHIREDCI Village in November 2009 and probably the same 3 were seen again in mid-December 2009. The first sighting of these birds in this part of the lowveld was on a farm some years ago but these birds were shot.

Alarming mynas have now been reported from Bulawayo. Two reports of sightings were received from 2 different persons in Bulawayo on probably the same day. As these reports were received following a fresh publicity campaign and as birds had already been reported earlier from areas to the north of Bulawayo it seems likely that the mynas had reached Bulawayo earlier but had been overlooked! On 17 February 2010, 4 birds were seen near Coghlan School at the corner of 14th Avenue and Parirenyatwa Street, Bulawayo. Six birds were also seen between 11th and 12th Avenues and Josiah Tongogara Street, Bulawayo on about 17 February. It is thought there may be 2 different flocks.

I am eager to continue to monitor the spread of this invasive species and urge you to report sightings of mynas to wildfire@mweb.co.zw.

Geoff Lowe

CAP 2010 – Kasane, Botswana

The 2010 Council for Africa Partnership (CAP) meeting was held in Kasane, Botswana from 15 to 19 March. The meeting was attended by more than 70 delegates from across the African Region and Europe. The BLZ Director has been on the Africa Regional Committee from 2007 and ended his tenure after this meeting, when he was replaced by Professor Emmanuel Obot, the outgoing CAP Chair and Director of the Nigeria Conservation Foundation. Mr Mourad Amari of Association "Les Amis des Oiseaux" (Tunisia) is the new CAP Chair.

Topics under discussion at the CAP meeting included Climate Change, Sustainability of IBA Monitoring, Regional Conservation and Fundraising. Many partners are developing projects for Livelihoods, Environmental Education and Biodiversity Conservation. The time for discussion was limited, and the outcome of the meeting will be synthesized by the Africa Regional Secretariat. A lot of discussion centred on sustainability of IBA monitoring. There were case studies from Kenya and Botswana. In these countries most of the monitoring is being done by other stakeholders like Protected Area staff with the BirdLife partner playing the role of facilitator. In this case monitoring can be sustainable if it is mainstreamed into these organisations' activities.

BirdLife is also involved in lobbying governments to deal with the issue of climate change. The partnership had a strong representation in Copenhagen (BLZ was represented by Mr Togarasei Fakarayi) and a lot of input into the discussions.

Monitoring common birds is increasingly becoming a priority for most African partners of BLI. In Zimbabwe, the Worldbirds database has been set up and will be launched in April 2010. Members will be encouraged to upload their observations on a website. Environmental Education is one way of ensuring sustainability of activities and there is a strong push to strengthen this section in most partner organisations.

The Zambian Ornithological Society was upgraded to Partner Designate. We look forward to collaborating with our partner organisations from neighbouring countries in future. I am happy to share the CAP synthesis report with interested members once it is sent to us.

Dr. C. Chirara – Director

Important Bird Areas (IBA) Monitoring Project Report

Two experience-exchange workshops were conducted at Nyanga National Park and Robert Mcllwaine Recreational Park; the objectives being to share knowledge about BA monitoring, to exchange experiences in IBA monitoring and to learn about bird identification. In the Eastern Highlands, site monitoring teams from Stapleford Forest, Chimanimani Mountains, Chirinda Forest and Nyanga Mountains attended. The other workshop at Robert Mcllwaine Recreational Park, Harare involved participants from Save-Runde Junction (Gonarezhou National Park), Middle Zambezi Valley and the host.

Both workshops were conducted in a similar manner, involving group exercises, discussions and interaction of participants from different IBAs. Good practices were learnt from the experiences of each site monitoring team and individuals. Areas where site monitoring teams involved other stakeholders in data collection, received more information than areas where monitoring was conducted by the site monitoring teams only. Other stakeholders working/visiting IBAs can contribute immensely to basic IBA monitoring. Challenges in monitoring methods and compilation of the IBA monitoring form were also reviewed, discussed and recommendations made. Monitoring teams should be encouraged to work as a team to minimize subjectivity when scoring the status of IBAs; be familiar with the IBA monitoring form; be consistent in data collection and compilation of the form; actively involve other stakeholders in monitoring; verify data from other sources and submit a completed form by October of each year.

Participants were also taught about bird identification to familiarize them on IBA “trigger” bird species, which qualifies the sites as IBAs. Most of the participants were able to identify most of the water birds at Lake Chivero during a field exercise. However more practice is required by all site monitoring teams in order for them to be able to identify other bird categories such as restricted-range and biome-restricted species, such as Zambezian biome species in the Middle Zambezi Valley and Robert Mcllwaine Recreational Park; and East African Coast biome species and South-East African Coast Endemic birds in Save-Runde Junction. The capacity being continuously built will ensure that there is sustainable and effective monitoring of IBAs.

Kanisios Mukwashi – National IBA Project Manager

BLZ Member Participation in IBA Monitoring

Conservation of Important Bird Areas (IBAs) and monitoring of the functioning of IBAs in maintaining bird species biodiversity requires a multifaceted approach and the inclusion of all stakeholders. Formal monitoring of IBAs is influenced by objectives set out by donors, some of which are conditions that need to be met in order to secure further funding for continuation of the programme. While the objectives are in keeping with global objectives of bird conservation NGOs, they may appear removed from the principal aim of conserving birds as here is little effort dedicated to actual research on birds themselves. Much time is spent ensuring protection of the habitats within IBAs, as ultimately it is these that determine diversity of bird species that may survive there. Since BLZ, or indeed its governing body BirdLife International (BLI), cannot dictate how IBAs are managed, the key stakeholders, in our case mostly parastatals, need to be convinced of the value of bird life and perhaps then advised of best ways to conserve this diversity. This is very much an oversimplification of the process the Zimbabwean IBA project has been involved in over the last few years, but hopefully puts the role of ‘the office’ in context. The official Zimbabwean IBA report will be released to interested parties (including members) in due course so we can see exactly what has been achieved. It should be mentioned that Zimbabwe is considered one of the better African countries in terms of meeting the objectives outlined by BLI, so the staff of BLZ are certainly performing, in this respect.

Ultimately conservation of IBAs is the responsibility of all stakeholders and many members have expressed interest in this activity. Formal monitoring of Mcllwaine National Park was the subject of a dedicated meeting of Mashonaland branch. However, progress of any formal monitoring of IBAs hinges upon a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) being reached between BLZ and the Zimbabwe Parks & Wildlife Management Authority. This MoU will, amongst other considerations, outline conditions of access by BLZ members to National Parks for the purposes of IBA monitoring. Various factors have delayed signing of the MoU, but it is understood that this will take place in the very near future. In the interim, the current position stands whereby certain ‘expert’ members may be invited to accompany official IBA monitoring excursions. As the IBA project has progressed, data deficiencies in certain areas, especially a lack of current species lists, have emerged. So it is very likely that members will be asked to assist with collection of this data.

The above considerations in no way limit the extent of informal or *pro rata* monitoring of IBAs that can be conducted by BLZ members. Following consultation with members, a simplified form has been drafted to guide assessment of the environment and habitat within IBAs by general members. This form is available on request from the BLZ office, or me, and everyone is encouraged to fill in forms and/or do a checklist when visiting any IBA or part thereof. Member assessment will surely provide valuable detailed insight and perspective into the situation on the ground. In addition, stakeholder participation is considered an important component of the IBA programme, so we might earn Brownie points with BLI too! The bird life of Zimbabwe is our resource so we must conserve it. However, it is very important that everyone wishing to participate in informal or *pro rata* IBA monitoring understands that they are subject to exactly the same conditions and requirements as any other member of the public entering a National Park. Please do not let your enthusiasm result in an arrest for unauthorized wanderings!

Hopefully this clarifies the position as regards monitoring of IBAs. Should anyone have further questions, I will try to answer these. I look forward to being inundated by forms and check-lists.

Dr Neil Deacon

neil@dab.co.zw

Species of Global Conservation Concern in Zimbabwe

Endangered	Vulnerable	Near Threatened
Malagasy Pond-heron	Slaty Egret	Maccoa Duck, Lesser Flamingo
Egyptian Vulture	Lesser Kestrel	Red-footed Falcon, Taita Falcon
White-winged Flufftail	Cape Vulture	White-backed Vulture, Pallid Harrier,
	White-headed Vulture	Southern Banded Snake-eagle, Bateleur , Martial Eagle , Denham's Bustard
	Lappet-faced Vulture	Chestnut-banded Plover, Corn Crake
	Grey Crowned Crane	Great Snipe, Eurasian Curlew
	Wattled Crane	Black-winged Pratincole, African Skimmer
	Blue Swallow	Lilian's Lovebird, European Roller
	Swynnerton's Robin	Plain-backed Sunbird, Melodious Lark

The above table is a list of globally threatened species found in Zimbabwe, for 2009. The classification follows the IUCN Red List criteria, which have eight categories namely: **Extinct**, **Extinct in the Wild**, **Critically Endangered**, **Endangered**, **Vulnerable**, **Near-threatened**, **Least Concern** and **Data Deficient** – however Birdlife International provides the information on birds. The status of birds depicted here are those that are globally threatened. The categories arise from analysing global populations rather than local populations. If our local population is doing well, whilst the global population is declining, then the species is likely to be in a category that shows the trend of the global population rather than the local population. This can only be changed if the local population is a significant percentage of the global population. The list for 2009 has seen the addition of three new species to the list (in bold on the table), bringing the total to 32 species. Justifications have been put forward for these changes.

Grey Crowned Crane

Justification: This species has been uplisted to **Vulnerable** because habitat loss and the illegal removal of birds and eggs from the wild have driven rapid declines during the past three generations (45 years). Further clarification of the rate of decline across its range may result in a further uplisting to **Endangered**. Populations in many areas, including Kenya and Uganda, have experienced rapid declines. These are the countries with the biggest populations of Crowned Cranes with 17 000 to 20 000 and 13 000 to 20 000 respectively, hence the uplisting. However, populations in Southern Africa are stable and even on the increase.

Bateleur

Justification: This species has been uplisted to **Near Threatened** because it is suspected to have undergone moderately rapid declines during the past three generations (41 years) owing to habitat loss and incidental poisoning and pollution. The global population is consequently believed to approach the threshold for classification as **Vulnerable**. The global population is estimated to be 10,000-100,000 individuals. There have been significant population declines and/or range

contractions suspected in many regions. These include Botswana, Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Namibia, Nigeria (an estimated decline of at least 50% in 30 years and now essentially confined to protected areas), Somalia, South Africa, Sudan, parts of Zambia, Zimbabwe, and possibly parts of Tanzania. In some areas, however, the species is not declining and remains widespread and common.

Martial Eagle

Justification: This species has been uplisted to **Near Threatened** because it is suspected to have undergone moderately rapid declines during the past three generations (56 years) owing to habitat loss and incidental poisoning and pollution, and is consequently believed to approach the threshold for classification as **Vulnerable**.

Threats: The species suffers from direct persecution (shooting and trapping) by farmers, indirect poisoning (these two threats by far the most important causes of losses), drowning in steep-sided reservoirs, electrocution on power poles, and habitat alteration and degradation. Deforestation may be having less of an impact on this species than on other large eagles as it can utilise man-made structures for nesting. Reduction in natural prey may lead to an increase in predation on domestic animals which may in turn lead to increased persecution by farmers. In some areas birds may be taken for use in traditional medicine.

Fadzai Matsvimbo

Elsewhere in this issue of *Babbler* is the provisional **Red Data List** compiled by the BLZ committee, which members are asked to comment on. This is your chance to express your opinion, so please make an effort to do so and send them to Tony Alegria on acaply@mango.zw by the end of May. *Ed*

Comment on Global Lists vs. Country Lists

BLI Partners are required to monitor and conserve Globally Threatened birds occurring in their countries. In Zimbabwe we have three Endangered Species on our Global List, Malagasy Pond-heron, Egyptian Vulture and White-winged Flufftail. These species have been recorded in this country in the past and are therefore of great relevance to us. BLZ is required and obliged to regularly check for their presence and monitor their status where relevant. Evidence from long-term monitoring will be used to confirm their presence or absence in our country and only then can they be officially removed from our list.

Therefore, BLZ already does continue looking out for these species during monitoring programmes, for example: Malagasy Pond-heron at the bi-annual waterbird surveys, Egyptian Vultures monitored at Wabai Hills, White-winged Flufftail at Monavale, Marlborough and other Harare Vleis. This reporting should be sufficient to fulfil conservation strategy requirements, as well as support their removal from our list.

Our national Zimbabwe Threatened species may not be Globally Threatened – however they remain of enormous concern to us and we must continue our efforts to preserve them! In any case, there is an initiative by BLI to monitor common birds throughout the world.

MASHONALAND

Komani Estate – 31 January 2010

This was our annual Environmental Audit for submission to the European Union – a favourable report ensuring the continued export of fruit and vegetables to Europe – and therefore a serious business for the 8 brave BLZ members who assembled in the rain under a heavy grey sky. Most had come prepared with gumboots and umbrellas, remembering that last year one vehicle had had to be rescued by 4WD tractor. This vehicle wisely spent the morning in the car park, later providing a safe haven for the bedraggled driver.

As we dressed suitably for the prevailing weather several birds were heard or seen; White-browed Scrub-robin and White-browed Robin-chat, an African Paradise-flycatcher with young, Southern Grey-headed Sparrow, Red-eyed Dove and a Common Fiscal. Our first port of call was the miombo woodland near the farm buildings, where our most interesting ticks were African Cuckoo and Common Cuckoo, Neddicky, Black Cuckooshrike, Green-capped Eremomela, Green Wood-hoopoe, Stierling's Wren-warbler and Willow Warbler. The presence of much long, thick wet grass, unpleasant for the walkers, attracted Croaking Cisticola, Rattling Cisticola and Red-faced Cisticola, lots of waxbill and Black-headed Heron. A copse of acacia in the muddy paddock revealed Burnt-necked Eremomela, Green-winged Pytilia and more Willow Warbler. A Long-crested Eagle sat disconsolately on a fence and White-faced Duck and Red-billed Teal flew down

to the river. A Black Coucal called continuously while Senegal Coucals showed themselves in many spots. The vlei opened up before us and the courageous few stomped steadfastly through the soaking tufts towards it. Two of us generously forwent that pleasure in the interests of covering the higher but still wet fringes. The intrepid 5 who had forded the river twice and followed its course for a kilometre or so were rewarded with that rarity - an African Grass-owl, as well as Rosy-throated Longclaw, Spur-winged Goose, Common Greenshank, African Wattled Lapwing, African Snipe and Wood Sandpiper, amongst others. Higher up we had seen many Yellow-mantled Widowbirds and White-winged Widowbirds, Levillant's Cisticola and Cuckoo [African Cuckoo Hawk?] and Lizard Buzzard. Both groups saw the lone Pallid Harrier.

Our weary walk back through a gum plantation and granadilla fields was generally pretty sterile but a Black-chested Snake-eagle was seen near the car park and en route we picked up Golden Weaver and Spectacled Weaver, Double-collared Sunbird and Variable Sunbird and Streaky-headed Seedeater. The total species count of 100 was 12 more than last year, so we trust our European friends will still be able to eat some Zimbabwean produce in 2010.

Ken Dixon

Birds of the Night Part 3 – 18 February 2010

Tony's slide-show at Avondale Sports Club began with a diversion – a few slides showing the opulent mansions where the rich and famous live. We ooh'd and aah'd at a jet-port here, a private beachfront there... but felt better when we saw the photo of Tiger Woods' new place – a kennel complete with restraining chain!

This part of Birds of the Night acknowledged crepuscular (active at twilight) species such as robins as well as true nocturnal birds. I was interested to learn that some birds become nocturnal when they migrate and travel at night, resting during the day. Examples of this are kingfishers and warblers, but the main species under the spotlight were coursers, flufftails, dikkops or thick-knees (shame on those who chose the names!) and night-herons. Tony had researched these thoroughly as usual and had slides of drawings and photographs, Latin names, breeding details and interesting habits. For example, the Egyptian Plover plays dental hygienist to crocodiles, the Beach Thick-knee eats crabs, female thick-knees do the "nest" building (a scrape in the ground – why sweat the chores?) and the Senegal Thick-knee has adapted to city life in Cairo and nests on roof-tops. Those of us who were really paying attention should be able to say "Double Banded Courser" in six languages. Tony finished by listing the twelve coursers, dikkops and flufftails that live (or stop over) in Zimbabwe and ran a quick bird-call quiz before thanks and pie-time. Despite the low attendance we did mop-up all the pies that were for sale. Well done Tony and birders!

Sally Britten

MONAVALÉ VLEI – 21 February 2010

The tall wet grass doesn't make the Vlei a very attractive early morning venue these days, so it was a small group of the faithful and a dog that climbed down from the viewing platform and very soon disappeared into the undergrowth. Sadly, the Dwarf Bittern did not show but Little Bee-eater, Southern Masked-weaver, Dark-capped Yellow Warbler and Rattling Cisticola did and the Zitting Cisticola and Pale-crowned Cisticola could be heard but not seen above us. Interesting among the Grey-rumped Swallows was a family of White-throated Swallows, who have been appearing regularly for some time. A Black Coucal was first heard and then seen plus a Senegal Coucal and the usual stream-side warblers. Perhaps the most welcome sighting was a Marsh Owl which rose briefly from the dense grass, circled and landed nearby. The Yellow Bishop was in its usual spot while elsewhere many Yellow-mantled Widowbirds and Red-collared Widowbirds and even more Southern Red Bishops performed their rituals for us.

As we marked the morning's list we were able to add the garden birds behind us; Lesser Honeyguide, Purple-crested Turaco, Whyte's Barbet, Crested Barbet and Black-collared Barbet, Black-headed Oriole etc. Then the Long-crested Eagle appeared to be added to our raptor list of Amur Falcon, Black-shouldered Kite, Gabar Goshawk and African Cuckoo Hawk. About 60 species recorded in all and still breakfast to look forward to!

Ken Dixon

NGOMAKURIRA – 28 February 2010

It needed a bit of a self-motivation session outside the locked CABS car park to get the 10 of us and the dog on our way on a dreary, drizzly Sunday morning. But we came to the conclusion that

we were out of bed and far from home so we might as well go through with it – and of course it was the right decision. This lovely walk in the granite so near to Harare is always a joy.

Only one of our number did the longish climb to the summit area, as both the steep path up to the open rock and the granite itself had been rendered too slippery for most of us by the abundant rains of the previous week. There were few birds to greet us except a Rattling Cisticola and a White-browed Robin-chat but when we came out from under the Mountain Acacia at the top of the path, an African Harrier-hawk was spotted, probably hunting for lizard on the rocky outcrop above us. We looked for Cape Bunting in vain, finding only Chin-spot Batis and Streaky-headed Seedeater as we sheltered from the driving rain. At this point most of us decided that we would make for the rock paintings which could be reached without too much climbing on exposed rock. The rain soon relented and we followed the path through the woodland along the stream and saw a dassie and a squirrel, but very few birds apart from the Rock Martin on the cliff face. There were Lazy Cisticola as usual, Yellow-fronted Canary, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird and two insistent Yellow-throated Petronias and a Black-backed Puffback. On our stroll back across the granite we found more birds, including both male and female Mocking Cliff-chat who shared the apex of a huge rock with Cinnamon-breasted Bunting. Surprisingly a Cardinal Woodpecker was seen and a Variable Sunbird.

Back at the base we met up with others who had taken different routes and seen species like Augur Buzzard, Black-crowned Tchagra and Brown-crowned Tchagra, Lanner Falcon, Grey-backed Camaroptera, Miombo Double-collared Sunbird and Pale Flycatcher. Two Bronze Mannikins busily brought in nesting material as we chatted and a Purple-banded Sunbird put in an appearance. In all we managed 56 species, a creditable effort.

Ken Dixon

Pamuzinda (Strathmore on map Selous 1830A2) 8-10 March 2010

Four of us went to Pamuzinda Lodge for a very pleasant three days birding and saw plentiful game and 130 bird species. One of us had won this prize at the Mana Game Count and our thanks go to Phil Dobinson for his generous donation.

A female White-faced Duck was seen leading her 3 flightless ducklings, possibly a week old, across a plain but we saw a side-striped jackal about 150m away, so hoped they managed to reach water. Whilst canoeing, we saw an African Black Duck and White-backed Vultures catching a thermal. Two Hamerkops had a nest in a tree by the river, an African Fish-eagle had one opposite our sundowner spot – it raised a chick last year – and a pair of Meyer's Parrots was nesting near the elephant's stable, where there was a 3-month old elephant calf. About 30 White-rumped Swifts were always circling above the river and the lodges but I saw very few swallow nests and certainly we saw no Lesser Striped Swallows. Along the river we did not see the resident African Finfoot, but heard the Yellow-breasted Apalis. In acacia bush we found a pair of Southern Yellow-billed Hornbills, 6 Magpie Shrikes and 3 Southern White-crowned Shrikes and many White-browed Sparrow-weavers on the boundary of the acacia/mopane woodland.

In the garden, in taller acacia woodland, we recorded a pair of Grey Tit-flycatchers, a Yellow-bellied Eremomela, Cinnamon-breasted Bunting and a Cut-throat Finch and saw a pair of Marico Sunbirds feeding on *Leonotis*. Spotted Flycatchers were numerous, as they are much more visible as they hunt to put on weight before migrating back to Europe. We saw many Red-billed Firefinch and a male Steel-blue Widowfinch, their parasite, was chirping from a high song perch, protecting his territory. We found several bird parties in the miombo woodland – one consisting of Cardinal Woodpecker, Crested Barbet, White-breasted Cuckooshrike, Southern Black Tit, Grey Penduline-tit, Fork-tailed Drongo, Kurrichane Thrush, Southern Hyliota, Green-capped Eremomela, Brubru and Red-headed Weaver. Southern Black Tits were common. The moon was on the wane and we only found a Barn Owl and a Fiery-necked Nightjar.

The mopane woodland held most of the Swainson's Spurfowl and after walking about 20 km, and been past them three times, we finally found a pair of Arnot's Chat and nearby a female Black Cuckooshrike! Incidentally, Arnot's Chat is named after David Arnot, a law agent at Colesberg and adviser to the Griqua Chief, N. Waterboer. He contributed fossil reptiles, mammals, birds and insects to the South African Museum, between 1858 and 1868.

Thanks to Canaan, our guide, who was a fund of information. One of the stories he told us was that while a guide in Hwange, he found a Blue Waxbill which had been killed in a spider web.

D V Rockingham-Gill

Winter Birding in Botswana – 18 March 2010

An audience of 31 members and friends gathered to witness Julia's engaging presentation at the Avondale Sports Club. This trip took place in June 2009 when a group of 10 family and friends gathered in Gabarone for a visit to this relatively quiet desert park on the edge of the Kalahari in southeast Botswana – Khutse Game Reserve. The game park is famous for its population of Brown Hyena, subject of the well-known book, *Cry of the Kalahari*. In fact only one of these was seen in the middle of the last night of the tour and that only by those members of the group still huddled around the fire after dinner. However, birds and other mammals were plentiful.

Birding began outside Harare along the road down to the Botswana border post at Plumtree. In Francistown they were met with the sight of a large flock of Marabou Stork circling the city rubbish dump. More birding was conducted en route to Gabarone – Brown Snake-eagles were seen perched at regular intervals on the telephone posts – and whilst they were broken down awaiting rescue, Marico Flycatcher, Black-faced Waxbill and Acacia Pied Barbet were spotted. Further birding took place in Gabarone – Red-billed Francolin, Marico Sunbird and Purple Rollers were among the birds seen and of course also in Khutse Game Park. Obviously some of the birds and mammals can be seen in similar habitats of Zimbabwe; Lilac-breasted Roller, White-backed Vulture, Southern Pied Babbler, Northern Black Korhaan and Red-crested Korhaan, Crimson-breasted Shrike, Cut-throat Finch, wildebeest, kudu, just to name a few. However, there were also springbok, gemsbok, red hartebeest and Kori Bustard and many larks, like Sabota Lark (around Gabarone), Fawn-coloured Lark and Rufous-naped Lark. While on the journey to the Park Double-banded Coursers were spotted and Red-billed Hornbill were common, whilst inside the Park was replaced by the Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill. The pans, artificially filled for the dry season, contained some notable birds of prey – Bateleur, Martial Eagle and Black-chested Snake-eagle, Red-necked Falcon (chasing Red-headed Finches), White-headed Vulture and Secretarybird. Perching on the shrubs along the roads, the Southern Pale Chanting-goshawk was a familiar sight, together with the Chat Flycatcher and the Ant-eating Chat. The acacia trees and scrub were home to Chestnut-vented Tit-babbler, Violet-eared Waxbills, Scaly-feathered Finches and Burchell's Starlings.

The talk was illustrated by superb coloured photos, some taken by Julia herself and others by Pat Kelly. These were cleverly collated into a Powerpoint presentation. Question time at the end produced comment on the cost and the need to book several months in advance to gain entry into the National Parks and camping accommodation in Botswana, which is in contrast to the less expensive and more relaxed conditions in similar reserves in Zimbabwe. Perhaps all those World Cup supporters will come here after all!

Ken Dixon

Xanadu Farm, Ruwa – 28 March 2010

Sixteen members of the Mashonaland branch went to this well conserved farm. Near the cattle handling facilities there were 3 Abdim's Storks strutting around on the lawn, while most of the population has departed for North Africa by now. On the dam we picked up a couple of Purple Heron and a Little Bittern. About 20 African Sacred Ibis were there too along with a flock of domestic geese. Someone saw a Long-crested Eagle in amongst a group of Pied Crows. Other raptors seen were the Little Sparrowhawk, a melanistic Gabar Goshawk and 4 Amur Falcons. (About 40 were seen on the way out near Mabvuku, but the majority seemed to have left for Manchuria).

A Red-chested Flufftail was heard near the lower dam wall, where there was a very nice display of hundreds of flowering red hot pokers attracting sunbirds – five species were seen. In the middle of this were a male African Stonechat and various cisticolas, Orange-breasted Waxbills and Common Waxbills, Thick-billed Weavers. A pair of African Fish-eagles called from a tree at the edge of the dam. There were Blacksmith Lapwings near the water and 6 Crowned Lapwings in a well-grazed maize field. The only waders were Wood Sandpiper and Common Sandpipers. Not far away Red-breasted Swallows and Greater Striped Swallows were in evidence. Several Red-backed Shrikes were spotted and one male seemed to have a cicada in its bill. The miombo woodland was very active and while bird parties were not recognized [recorded by 1 group; following spp. & others] there were Brubru and Black-backed Puffbacks, Southern Black Flycatchers, Chin-spot Batis, Miombo Double-collared Sunbirds and Streaky-headed Seedeater. Black-headed Orioles were calling all around. The Yellow-bellied Eremomela and the Stierling's Wren-warbler gave the writer very good views.

In all we saw 113 species of birds, some introduced game like giraffe, impala, waterbuck and zebra, and a 2m sluggish, non-banded variety of Egyptian Cobra. A very pleasant and enjoyable morning.

David Rockingham-Gill

MATABELELAND

Annual General Meeting – 20 February

The 2010 Annual General Meeting of the Matabeleland Branch of Birdlife Zimbabwe was held on Saturday 20 February. The cool, wet weather and conflicting activities meant we did not have as many in attendance as we have done in the past few years but it was still a good turn out. Our hosts John and Jenny Brebner did a great job – rearranging all the furniture in their home so we had somewhere warm and dry to sit, and still managing to provide enough braai fires under the carport. The only disappointment was that there was no opportunity to do a quick bit of birding in their lovely garden.

Cecilia Hubbard's Chairman's Report reminded us all of the many activities that had taken place over the last year – a proud record of achievement considering the still difficult circumstances. Our financial position is stable and we were able to keep all projects going, despite the fact that due to financial constraints the National Office was unable to maintain its traditional financial support of projects.

The Project Co-ordinators presented reports which brought us up-to-date on the various projects: the Verreaux's Eagle Breeding Survey (which is entering its 47th consecutive year of reporting), the Hyrax Survey, the Raptor Survey of the Matobo Hills, and Aisleby, where monthly monitoring continues. Reports prepared by Julia Duprée were presented in her absence by Cecilia Hubbard on:

- African Waterfowl Census – in January and July a waterfowl census is carried out in at least 4 locations providing members with the chance to both have some excellent birding and contribute towards an international survey.
- Birding Big Day – an event which is growing in popularity and which we hope to see many more teams from around the country joining in for 2010.

The election of office bearers saw the 2009 committee being returned unchanged, i.e.

Chairman	Cecilia Hubbard
Vice Chairman	Bill Lewis
Treasurer	Jenny Brebner
Secretary	Adele Edwards
Members	Julia Duprée and Judy Ross

We wish them a successful year in office.

Tongayi Mwedzi, Curator of Ornithology at the Natural History Museum in Bulawayo, has been spending some time in the Matopos travelling around with Elspeth Parry and Bruce MacDonald and their team who are doing an independent survey of Southern Ground-hornbills in that area. Tongayi updated us on some of the results of the surveys and also spoke about his own work with the children – at each workshop he takes a group of children for a walk and, using binoculars, helps them identify some of the more common species of birds. Peter Mundy updated us on some developments in the birding world, speaking amongst other things about the recent bird ringing workshop held at Lake Chivero in January, and the activities of the Endangered Wildlife Trust Bird of Prey working group.

Adele Edwards

Barn Swallow Notes

Although the branch no longer has a formal Barn Swallow project, members continue to monitor the roost at How Mine. A few years ago a couple of the biggest gum trees in the plantation were cut down; after that there was concern that the number of swallows using the roost had dropped – they certainly shifted their area of concentration to a different part of the plantation. However the numbers observed last season were as high as ever. But it does appear that the Barn Swallows are arriving later and leaving earlier. This impression is confirmed by the South African Animal Demography Unit which has reached the same conclusion, based on the results coming in from phase 2 of the South African Bird Atlassing Project. (See article in *Africa – Birds & Birding* Vol. 15

No 1). At the AGM it was suggested that the swallows' early departure could be linked to a lack of termites and the meeting debated possible reasons for this lack. It will be interesting to monitor the situation.

Adele Edwards

COUNTRY DISTRICTS

Hippo Valley Estate CHIREDDI – 27 January to 1 February 2010

Sixteen members of the Mashonaland East Natural History Society spent five enjoyable days at the luxurious Nyarhi Lodge, one of two Mteri Dam lodges that belong to Hippo Valley Sugar Estate. Hippo Valley is a vast complex of cane fields, canals, furrows, ponds, many culverts and a private game park which borders on the Runde River to the east and Chiredzi River on the west. The lodges are within the park which incorporates the large Mteri Dam and the main water canal to the sugar plantations. Mteri Game Park area is 18,000 ha and the main canal is 32 km long. Nyarhi Lodge is operated by the Hippo Valley Safaris Department and is situated on the shore of the Mteri Dam which was built in 1993 to supply the sugar estate with water. The dam remains quite full all year round from run-off in the natural catchment, but can also be supplemented by water pumped from the Runde River. It is a very popular fishing venue, especially for bass. A game guard accompanied us as a navigator and to keep a wary eye out for any danger. Poachers and their dogs are a constant problem but are vigorously pursued with good success. Elephant are deliberately kept out of the park because of the destruction they would cause to the cane crop, but it does contain a herd of about 120 buffalo as well as eland, kudu, impala, warthog and of course crocodiles. A large herd of resident giraffe hosted both Red-billed Oxpeckers and Yellow-billed Oxpeckers. I counted 16 birds on a group of 3 giraffe standing in the shade, sheltering from the midday sun. The habitats vary from areas of acacia thornveld, dense acacia/albizia forest, riverine forest, open mopane woodland, mixed woodland, rocky outcrops, wetlands, dam and canal verges and typical lowveld shrub vegetation. Our daily program was to drive to one of these habitats and spend time birding in that vicinity. In the five days we spent there, three were hot and humid and for two days it rained and drizzled on and off most of the day – a welcome relief from the heat. During the inclement periods birding around the camp was very rewarding.

On one afternoon excursion we parked the vehicles on the bank of the Runde River and most of the group managed a vigorous hike down quite steep slopes to the vast sandy stretches of riverbed below with a little stream and pools at the far side, but not many different birds were seen. The most productive birding was done at the effluent – settling ponds fed from the sugar mill and as it was not in operation at this time, the water levels were quite low but full of birds. Seven species of stork were seen, including Abdim's Stork, large numbers of White Storks and Marabou Storks and between 10-12 Woolly-necked Storks, a single Saddle-billed Stork, 2 Yellow-billed Storks and several African Openbills. Interestingly a juvenile Marabou Stork was sighted with yellow tags in both wings but it was too far away for the numbers to be identified. A large flock of Ruff as well as small numbers of Little Stints, Common Sandpipers and Wood Sandpipers, Three-banded Plovers, Blacksmith Lapwings, Comb Ducks, White-faced Duck, Squacco Heron, Little Egret, African Sacred Ibis and Hadeda Ibis and Egyptian Goose were also seen. Large colonies of Golden Weavers, Village Weavers and masked-weavers and their nests festooned the acacia trees around the ponds, each species in an adjacent tree. Only about two thirds of the settling ponds were within view so no accurate counts were made.

We missed out on the flamingos which are commonly seen here – possibly they had already migrated to their breeding grounds.

At the lodge there were several Baobab trees which had been transplanted from the valley below before the dam filled and they were full of Red-headed Weavers interspersed with Lesser Masked-weavers and their nests. The latter also nested in a palm tree and under the eaves of the thatched lodge.

Several more species of birds were also building nests while we were there — including Blue Waxbills, other weavers and a Grey-headed Bush-shrike, which probably knew more than we did with regard to the rains! The comings and goings of the colonies were easily observed from the dining area and the bar balcony. Diderick Cuckoos were blatant with their nest visits, perching in the tree and not being harassed by the Red-headed Weavers. A lot of fuss and noise was made when all birds in the vicinity gathered to confront and harass a large snake that was spotted in a tree at the lodge.

Other notable sightings were Crested Guineafowl, a family of Southern Ground-hornbills and flocks of Southern Carmine Bee-eaters and Meves's Starlings were everywhere. The Baobab trees were in flower so the Epauletted fruit bats (I think Peter's Epauletted fruit bat - *Epomophorus crypturus*) were out in full force at sundown, providing easy prey for the local Bat Hawk. During the day the bats roosted under the eaves of the thatch and were easily observed from the balcony. The cane fields were not investigated much due to the presence of buffalo; sightings were made only from our vehicles on the main road to and from the park.

The total number of bird species recorded was 182 and a copy of the compiled list given to the lodge for their reference and use. As a group we felt that there was probably a lot more to be seen and we would welcome the chance to visit again, perhaps at a different time of the year. Thanks to the friendly and helpful staff, who made sure that all our needs were immediately taken care of.

On the trip back from Chiredzi to Chivhu no cranes were seen in the Rietfontein area, where Wattled Cranes and Grey Crowned Cranes have been seen by our members in the past.

Vee Hadingham

Please contact Vee for details for the Lodge – veeh@zol.co.zw - Ed

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TAIL FEATHERS

Bat Hawk – a new raptor species for UMFURUDZI

On 5 March 2010 I had the pleasure of accompanying Dr Chris Magin of the RSPB for two nights at Umfurudzi. There are always misgivings when taking a VIP to a study area as this seems to be a cue for all birds in the vicinity to spontaneously migrate elsewhere. I was comforted by prior knowledge that there was a Brown Snake-eagle incubating on a nest, so at least one raptor species was guaranteed. However, on this occasion most seemed to be behaving themselves as we were treated to sightings of 20 diurnal raptor species over the 3 days. The highlight of the trip was Bat Hawk, seen on two of the days. These are the first records of Bat Hawk in Umfurudzi since commencement of the study in August 2008, and a first for Chris. The first sighting was of one perched in a tree on top of a hill that allowed close enough approach to clearly see the distinctively shaped bill of this species. Early morning of the second day a Bat Hawk was perched in full sun on a tree over the river from the camp. Since this was the first clear day after weeks of rain, perhaps this unusual behaviour was prompted by some much needed sunbathing. We also had close and unhurried viewing of Lanner Falcon (adult and juvenile), Martial Eagle (adult), African Goshawk (adult and juvenile), Dickinson's Kestrel (adult), Little Sparrowhawk (adult) and Gabar Goshawk. Two individuals, one grey phase (adult) and the other melanistic (juvenile) of the latter were conveniently perched near one another in the same dead tree by the road, providing ample opportunity to point out the differences between adult and juvenile and discuss the genetics of melanism. We ended up going to the Brown Snake-eagle nest twice in order to get photos of the female incubating. Brown bird in poor light just doesn't work! Other species seen soaring or on the wing included Verreaux's Eagle (adult), Steppe Eagle, Wahlberg's Eagle, African Hawk-eagle (immature), group of 9 Steppe Buzzards, Augur Buzzard (juvenile), African Harrier-hawk, Black Sparrowhawk (adult), Eurasian Hobby and a pair of African Crowned Eagles displaying near a nest site. There was a fleeting glimpse of an African Cuckoo Hawk crossing the river and a Lizard Buzzard was heard calling in the woodland. Despite intensive search of the riparian forest on two mornings we failed to find Pel's Fishing-owl, which was a species Chris was especially keen to see. However, we did hear them calling amongst vociferous vocalization of numerous African Wood-owls.

Still we missed out on a few raptor species that are commonly seen, even breed, in Umfurudzi, including African Fish-eagle, Dark Chanting-goshawk, Shikra and Bateleur. On the way home, but outside the Safari Area, we saw a Dark Chanting-goshawk and then, closer to Harare, Black-shouldered Kite, Amur Falcon and Long-crested Eagle. These last species brought the weekend tally to 24 species of diurnal raptor. So all in all, a pretty good weekend 'R-n-R' (raptors-n-raptors). Chris diligently filled out a field card of all birds seen (more than 80 species that we could identify). These were also going to be entered on the World Birds website.

Neil Deacon

The **African Cuckoo Hawk** is described in *Birds of Africa* (1982) as "little known". Various authors seem to think it is migratory. Certainly in Kenya, Zimmerman and others say it is a non-breeding visitor to central and southern Kenya from May-November (peak July-September) while Irwin (*Birds of Zimbabwe*) describes it as resident, "but in some places at least there is evidence of movement, and it is known to pass through Kariba in November." The *Atlas of Southern African Birds* says seasonal movements are suspected in the Transvaal, but this is not confirmed by the present analysis (1997), while Ian Riddell says most sightings at Lake Chivero are between August and April. (Recent Reports *Honeyguide*, 50(1) – 2004)

Does anyone have long term records that they could look up to show migration in Zimbabwe? I am thinking of the Matopos Raptor Survey, the Mukuvisi Woodland Survey or the Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary records in particular.

Please let me know what you think.

David Rockingham-Gill rgill@zol.co.zw

I have forwarded *Babblers* to Life Members residing in South Africa and thought you may be interested in some of their comments:

Dear Carolyn,

I do enjoy browsing through the *Babbler* and Michael Irwin's contributions are always so stimulating, especially the Inaccessible Island Rail which I failed to see when I landed there by helicopter with only 20 minutes on land.

Once again, thank you and congratulations on an interesting publication.

Best wishes,

Peter Steyn

Hi Carolyn,

Thank you very much for the *Babbler*. I enjoyed reading about the familiar places written by familiar faces! Probably the most interesting observation I can make is the incredible number of members whose names I recognise!

A couple of comments on articles:

I am sure that Sweet Waxbills were recorded on Wedza Mountain by Tracey & John Jones.

The area south of Peterhouse provided some excellent birding, but was rough country. The area around Piccadilly Circus on the Ruzawi River road had great birding.

I recorded the Buff-spotted Flufftail at Rakodzi Farm Garden while I was at Peterhouse – a lone male calling for some weeks. Jen Mitchell who still lives there may have records.

I am not as active in the birding world as I used to be as my wife has been unwell for some time. Nevertheless I am part of the Lakes Bird Club and much involved in the introduction of birds to schools. This is mainly through illustrated talks during National Bird Week – which came about through a suggestion I made years ago to someone in Birdlife SA – and the production of posters on birds which are presented to schools where I and my group give talks. I have helpers in Sedgfield and Knysna and between the three groups we talk to a couple of thousand primary school kids (or learners as they call them down here).

My bird tours have of necessity become rather rare, but still provide opportunities to visit the drier west of SA. If any members are visiting George please ask them to contact me in advance in case I can help them with local birding.

Best

Peter Ginn pgbs@cyberperk.co.za

The **Common Fiscal** is well known for its habit of impaling its various food items on sharp objects such as barbed wire and acacia thorns. I recently read that this bird was seen using *Strelitzia* flowers to stick grasshoppers etc on. As these striking plants are flowering at the moment, I wonder if anyone has noticed a similar practice? *Ed*

Anyone in Johannesburg on 1-2 May may like to visit the **Sasol birds & birding fair**, which will be held at the Johannesburg Zoo in Gauteng. The focus will be on the variety of birds associated with marine and fresh-water habitats. One of these wetland specialists, the Lesser Flamingo, is BirdLife South Africa's Bird of the Year. Both days of the fair are filled with activities for children, topical lectures, workshops and guided bird walks. There will also be a wide variety of exhibitors displaying their wares in the area around the bandstand. Binoculars, camera gear, bird books, bird

feeders and much more will be for sale! Could be fun. For more information about the Sasol birds & birding fair go to events@birdlife.org.za

Lesser Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus minor*). This year the fair celebrates what is probably South Africa's most attractive and majestic waterbird, the Lesser Flamingo. It is found over much of sub-Saharan Africa, and marginally in India and Pakistan. Large numbers frequent the Great Rift Valley Lakes and various pans, lakes, lagoons and estuaries in southern Africa. Gatherings of tens or even hundreds of thousands of Lesser Flamingos are one of Africa's wonderful spectacles.

Interestingly, despite numbering several million individuals, the Lesser Flamingo only breeds at six sites worldwide. In Africa these are Lake Natron (Tanzania), Etosha Pan (Namibia), Sua Pan (Botswana) and Kamfers Dam (South Africa). Breeding is irregular and infrequent, and climate change is expected to further reduce the frequency of the breeding events. The Lesser Flamingo is listed as "near-threatened" in The Eskom Red Data Book of Birds of South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland, with a declining population caused by low recruitment through human-induced threats at the breeding sites being responsible for the species' current precarious status.

The following news items are from Birdwatch:

Oldest Osprey returns

A female Osprey, thought to be Britain's oldest, has returned to her nest for the 20th consecutive year. First seen on 23 March, she is estimated to be at least 25 years old which is three times the average age of an Osprey. She arrived back at her nest, at the Scottish Wildlife Trust's Loch of the Lowes reserve in Perthshire after flying 3,000 miles from her winter home in West Africa. About 200 pairs of osprey breed in Scotland. Emma Rawling, SWT Perthshire Ranger, said: "We are truly amazed at the tenacity and endurance of this particular female Osprey. Defying her age, she has made it back to us again and from initial sightings she looks like she is in remarkably good condition. She is now waiting for her mate to arrive to begin her 20th breeding season. So far, this one bird has laid 55 eggs, 46 of which have hatched into chicks which have successfully left the nest."

The Lake District's female Osprey has also been seen at her traditional nest at Bassenthwaite. She arrived on 26 March and any young produced by this year's pair will be fitted with radio tracking devices. Nathan Fox, of the Lake District Osprey Project, said: "It's quite early for Ospreys to be back here, but that could be just the way of the weather. The bird spotted on Friday and early Saturday is female and is un-ringed, which is promising because our regular Ospreys are also un-ringed."

New African shrike

A new species of shrike has been described from the Albertine Rift of central Africa following DNA analysis. Specimens were originally collected 100 years ago but the bird was not suspected to be different from other species at the time. The bird *Laniarius willardi*, is one of the black boubou shrikes found in central Africa, but it is distinct in possessing blue-grey eyes. Although it was first collected in 1910, and the eye colour noted, the collectors at the time didn't think it was anything special. More recently specimens were taken in 1997 by research scientists who mentioned the eye colour to Dr Gary Voelker, assistant professor of wildlife and fisheries and curator of birds with Texas AgriLife Research. DNA analysis has shown that it is a distinct species. "Clearly it was noticed before, because as we started to look at comparative material from other natural history collections, we saw that several specimens collected in 1910 were noted to have had grey eyes," said Voelker. "But it apparently never occurred to those collectors that their find was potentially something different than other black shrikes that might have been collected in the same basic region. Another significant aspect of this particular species is that it occurs in a narrow elevational band between 1200 and 2000 metres. Those birds collected in 1910 were taken from sites that are now likely completely deforested to make way for tea plantations which grow successfully to about 2000 metres elevation. Above that level, *Laniarius willardi* gets replaced by another shrike species that looks exactly like it except for the eye-colour difference."

RED DATA LIST

This will be a separate attachment