

# BABBLER

The Newsletter of



**BirdLife Zimbabwe**  
The BirdLife International Partner in Zimbabwe

**ISSUE # 95 – AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2010**

<b>COMMITTEE</b>	<b>MASHONALAND (Code 04)</b>		<b>MATABELELAND (Code 09)</b>	
<b>Chairperson</b>	Tony Alegria	490375 (h) 0912-438697	Cecilia Hubbard	285666 (h) 0912- 433733
<b>Secretary</b>	Ken Dixon	793063 (h)	Adele Edwards	882242 (h)
<b>Treasurer</b>	Sally Britten	308400 (w)	Jenny Brebner	242634 (h)
<b>Members</b>	Ian Riddell	492452 (h)	Julia Duprée	246269 (h)
	David Rockingham-Gill	882412 (h)	Bill Lewis	242285 (h)
	Julia Pierini	303178(h)	Judy Ross	242943 (h)
<b>Babbler Editor</b>	Julia Pierini	0912-894562	juliapierini@yahoo.com	
<b>Membership Secretary</b>	Carolyn Dennison	747567(h) 0912-210240	e-mail: roly@zol.co.zw	

National Office:

**35 Clyde Road, Eastlea, P O Box RVL100, Runiville, Harare, Zimbabwe**  
Telephone: 04- 481496/490208 (& fax) e-mail: [birds@zol.co.zw](mailto:birds@zol.co.zw)  
website: [www.birdlifezimbabwe.co.zw](http://www.birdlifezimbabwe.co.zw)

<b>Director:</b>	Dr. Chip Chirara
<b>Finance/Administration Manager:</b>	Sylvia Muzavazi
<b>IBA National Project Manager:</b>	Kanisios Mukwashi
<b>Conservation Officer:</b>	Fadzai Matsvimbo
<b>Projects Officer:</b>	Togarasei Fakarayi
<b>Education Officer:</b>	Rueben Njolomole
<b>Administration Officer:</b>	Sabina Mapika
<b>Messenger:</b>	Vengai Dengu

Office hours: Monday to Friday 8.30 – 4.30

.....

**President's Report for BirdLife Zimbabwe AGM – 5 June 2010**  
held at Inungu, Matobo National Park

**Welcome:** A very warm welcome to all of you, BLZ Members, Director Dr Chirara and his Staff, who have travelled from far and wide to be here at Inungu Guest House, Matobo National Park

to attend BirdLife Zimbabwe's 29<sup>th</sup> AGM! Special greetings go to South African visitors Greg Davies, Curator of Ornithology, Ditsong Museum, Pretoria and Hugh Chittenden, author of the Roberts Bird Guide, the companion book to the handbook, Roberts VII. Hugh is currently working on a field guide covering geographical variances within species. Alex Masterson instigated their visit to the Bulawayo Natural History Museum which was coordinated to coincide with the planned BLZ visit set up to be held prior to the AGM. Such a visit would be incomplete without the presence of Michael Stuart Irwin, Zimbabwe's famous long standing Curator of Ornithology at the Bulawayo Museum. Welcome, Michael and also Tongayi Mwedzi, Curator of Ornithology, Bulawayo. It is good to be back amongst members of Matabeleland Branch, a vigorous group who are well renowned and appreciated for the upkeep of all their long term surveys and varied activities. AGMs held in Harare in recent years have become a rather poorly attended formality. Geoff Lowe suggested we hold this year's in Matobo National Park in order to attract members from around the country keen to see the Black Eagles and other raptors for which the area is so famous. Many thanks to Cecilia Hubbard for averting a potential disaster by offering us the facility here at Inungu when Maleme became unavailable. She has been to great lengths to accommodate us here with little notice! Sadly, we have lost a number of very special members this past year. Our deepest condolences are extended to their families – John Shaw, Val Gargett, Nancy Irwin and Rose Masterson. Let us offer a minutes' silence in their memory.

**Administration:** BLZ Council has had a busy, challenging but successful year. Much has been achieved through consolidating the ground work put in place by the hard working former President, Ken Wilson and his Council. The Executive Committee has worked very closely with the Director in order to address outstanding concerns, with the best interests of the entire organization in mind, and guided by existing management structures. The main area of concern has been the improvement of administrative functioning. This is the visible interface between membership and the office. Long term ongoing inefficiencies have threatened to tear the organization apart, particularly with regard to the maintenance of an accurate membership list, which has eluded the organization for so long. It is therefore with relief that I am able to report this issue has been resolved. Through the dogged efforts of Sabina Mapika, Ken Dixon and particularly Carolyn Dennison, an accurate list is in place. Reintroducing the position of Honorary Membership Secretary on Council was a controversial and bold move, but it has turned out to be a wise decision, creating supportive and closer links between the Office and Membership. We thank Carolyn Dennison for filling this post. Mrs Sylvia Muzavazi, who has recently joined BLZ as the Finance and Administration Manager, will work closely with Mrs Dennison, to ensure that all membership matters are kept in good order. Supervisory and assessment processes are in place and being implemented. A requirement of the 2009/10 Annual Work Plan was to undertake a Membership Survey, which provides an opportunity for constructive communication. Dr Chirara has achieved this and is receiving interesting results. Now we can all concentrate on boosting the membership from 380 to 800!!

**Finance:** Council commenced its term of office, quite unexpectedly, without an Honorary Treasurer. Fortunately, Roger Castelin, a financial analyst and long standing BLZ member, stepped into the breach and offered to take on this role. Roger was officially elected at a Special General Meeting on 20 August 2009. He has requested regular detailed reporting and found the finances to be in good order. Finance Administration Manager Hazel Hatton resigned at the end of April 2010 to seek a change and improved remuneration. We extend Hazel our best wishes in her future endeavours and thank her for her hard work during the most trying economic conditions of previous years. She has seen through the March 31 2010 year end with final accounts audited and available for presentation today. Hazel has shown Mrs Muzavazi, her replacement, the system over the past month, and is available should there be any concerns. We welcome Sylvia to BLZ.

**BLZ and RSPB:** Dr Chris Magin, RSPB representative to BLZ, visited in March to ensure everything is in good order for the annual review ahead of the renewal of the contractual arrangement between RSPB and BLZ. RSPB is BLZ's core funding partner and both organizations are full partners within the BirdLife International structure. The Annual Work Plan, derived from the Strategic Planning Workshop of 2009, provides the structure with which to implement the chosen activities and against which reporting and assessment takes place. Six monthly and annual reports are submitted by the Director to RSPB describing implementation of activities. Put very simply, core funding supports the running of the Office, giving BLZ a structure recognised by donors, and from where the staff look for funding to fulfil

the objectives set out by the relationship with BLI – working with species, habitats, sites and people, in order to conserve birds. Conservation projects on the go at the moment are the IBA project, Driefontein Wattled Crane, Mbazhe Pan, Wildlife Clubs and so on. This official structure can be used by and is of benefit to Members wishing to seek funding to pursue ornithological surveys, write-ups of data, publishing, etc. Donors are very unlikely to be interested in funding projects initiated by individuals or a club on its own. This is why it is vital for this connection with BLI and RSPB to be maintained. Equally important is the requirement of a solid membership component. RSPB does not fund non-membership based organizations, nor can such a group become a member of BLI. So, it is the task of Council to ensure that the Office and the Membership work well together. We need each other to survive. This year, for the first time, I insisted that all Councillors receive Chris Magin's Trip Report, a fully comprehensive document sparing no detail, as it gives a clear idea of our different roles and functions. Councillors also met informally with Chris and he reinforced the connection between the two organizations with his presentations on how BLI and RSPB operate, their aims and objectives and links. He suggested we approach BTO and African Bird Club for funding for our surveys and activities, as well as secure local funding.

**Funding:** As we have now seen, funding is central to many of our activities. Gratitude is once again extended to the RSPB for its continued support of BLZ by the provision of GBP 30,000 core funding to run the Office. This last year, this amount was eroded by more than US\$15,000 by unfavourable exchange rates, compared to previous years, and further eroded by a high cost of living. Our Director and his staff must therefore be congratulated for keeping the Office going given these radical constraints. We have full confidence in their ability and expertise to source further conservation project funding, which will, to a certain extent, supplement the RSPB funding for the running of the Office. Funders of the various projects, EU, Prins Bernhard, NABU and others are also thanked for their support.

An extraordinary fundraising initiative by past BLZ Presidents Alex Masterson and Dave Gray in April resulted in a donation to BLZ of US\$8,000.00 towards the publication of *Honeyguide* and improvements to the Library, for which we are most grateful. Mashonaland Branch Members raised US\$1075 towards the Library – so much appreciated. A precedent has now been set for members to get involved in fundraising in order to maintain these and other long term ornithological activities, such as writing up existing surveys. In addition we can source donors for specific activities, from local corporates or benefactors, but cannot do this until we have concept notes and project proposals ready and waiting. Dr Chirara will assist with the preparation of these proposals, should we require it.

**Highlights and Appreciation of Progress made:** (Full reports to be presented later in this meeting).

- Branch Chairpersons Cecilia Hubbard, Matabeleland and Tony Alegria, Mashonaland, and their committees have continued to arrange enticing birding outings for most weekends of the year and monthly evening meetings. These are very well attended due to extensive promotional efforts. BLZ must be one of the most successful clubs in the country.
- Long term surveys: Mukuvisi outing led by Dave Dalziel, Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary outing lead by Richard Dennison, and the Monavale outing lead by COSMO continue year in year out on a monthly basis; Matland conducts the Verreaux's Eagle, Dassie, Aisleby, Barn Swallow Surveys and the African Waterfowl Survey; Neil Deacon leads the Umfurudzi Raptor Survey with regular reports submitted to Council, *Babbler* and journals. The commitment of these members is immense and greatly appreciated. The records collected are invaluable and will be written up in the fullness of time. Thank you to all.
- *Honeyguide* editorial team, Brian Marshall, Julia Duprée, Michael Irwin and Ken Dixon continue to produce an outstanding journal with two issues published for 2009, bringing it up to date for the first time in many years.
- *Babbler* editor, Carolyn Dennison has handed over the editorship to Julia Pierini. Carolyn has been a fine editor, raising *Babbler* to great heights, and we thank her for her hard work.

- Ringing: South African ringing trainers Kobie and Tony Raijmakers and Josef Heymans took time off to come up to Harare and join Peter Mundy, BLZ Ringing Organizer, Tracey Couto and Dave Dalziel in running the enormously successful week-long Training Workshop at Lake Chivero in January 2010, with 17 trainees attending. The outcome is that Dave has held 20 ringing training sessions since then and the Coutos, three. What a remarkable achievement – many thanks to Dave, Tracey and Ferdie, and the trainees for their dedication. Younger members, including Fadzai and Innocent from the office, are attracted to this aspect of birding.
- Access to field cards held at the Office: Innocent Magunje has entered recently received cards onto a database. The physical cards are filed and accessible according to QDS. Dave Rockingham-Gill has updated the register. Members are welcome to refer to these cards.
- Access to field, atlas, special species and nest record cards at the Bulawayo Museum: this is being discussed with the Director of the Museum.
- Access to Garden Bird Survey results: Ian Riddell has offered to write up this Survey.
- The resuscitation of the Garden Bird Survey is under consideration.
- Neil Deacon has formulated policy on Data Ownership which has been passed by Council.
- The IBA programme has created strong links between BLZ and National Parks, with the MoU in its final stages of completion.
- Neil Deacon has worked closely with the Director and Conservation Department on the IBA Project and eagerly awaits the MoU with Parks, so that Members can join in monitoring the transects – this remains the hold up. However, Members may continue birding in IBAs and submit their field cards as usual.
- Ken Wilson and his committee have completed the Red Data List, which has been placed in *Babbler*. Comments are requested ahead of publication in *Honeyguide*.
- There are plans afoot to publish a new edition of *Birds of Zimbabwe*. Note the invitation in *Babbler* #94, to participate at the outset with this project.
- The BLI Africa Regional Conference was held at Kasane in Botswana in March. Dr Chirara represented BLZ and acquitted himself well once more. He sat on the selection committee for the new Regional Director for Africa and Dr Julius Arinaitwe was chosen for the post. His predecessor, Dr Hazell Thompson, has been promoted to Deputy Director of BLI. On behalf of Council and BLZ, I extend congratulations to Julius and Hazell on their promotions. Chip is a fine ambassador for BLZ and is well respected by the BLI management. He is one of two people from Africa who have been selected for nomination to sit on Global BLI Council – this is a great achievement and we commend him whether or not he is selected.
- Office Staff members continue to achieve good things under the calm, wise but firm direction of Dr Chirara. I am impressed with their efforts and thank them all for a good year's work. BLZ has a good reputation in the environmental and governmental arena and is often being looked to for advice. Toga Fakarayi excels at finding projects and funds – he is off to Canada on leadership training ahead of a bird scaring project at Driefontein, Rueben Njolomole has worked extremely hard with virtually no funding keeping the BAP going alongside his Wildlife Clubs, for which he has received acclaim from near and far, Kanisios Mukwashe too, is achieving great things with National Parks, alongside Fadzai Matsvimbo. Fadzai has succeeded with the World Birds Database. She is ready to train Members to take part in this database. Fadzai is highly regarded by Members who have worked in the field with her, for her ornithological prowess and ringing abilities – she is currently working on her Masters Degree studying the Blue Swallows and coming up with interesting results. Innocent Magunje is good in the field in the ID area as well as ringing. Students Welensky, Angela and Memory

have assisted the organization and in turn learnt much in their year with BLZ. I wish them best of luck with their studies and hope they will take an interest in ornithology. I have enjoyed worked at various tasks alongside Chip since he arrived at BLZ and feel we have both adjusted to this latest one and have established a constructive working relationship.

- Dr Rob Rees has been approached by Council to be the Conservation and Research Representative and has accepted, for which we are most grateful.

Finally, I would like to thank the Councillors very much for their hard work and support over this past most interesting year, most especially the Executive Committee members whom I have worked with more closely: Neil Deacon has given of his remarkable expertise, time and support in assisting with admin issues and conservation concerns, Ken Dixon has been a most willing, helpful and diligent secretary, also assisting with admin tasks, Roger Castelin has kept a watchful eye on the very important financials. Geoff Lowe is standing down – I thank him for his contributions after many years on Council in various capacities – he will continue with his work on the Common Myna. Mrs Leslee Maasdorp, Education Representative, attended this last meeting only, after completing her work at BLZ in October, and being out of town for the other meetings. She has offered to continue as Education rep. David Rockingham Gill has been stimulating the field card and historical aspect! Welcome, Carolyn, back on Council, thank you for all the dedication in consolidating and coordinating the Membership arena for BLZ.

BLZ is a remarkable organization endowed with extraordinary resources. With the confidence gained from sound management systems and positive communications now being in place, BLZ is poised to reach even greater heights in all areas, including attracting further funding to achieve its conservation and ornithological goals. Thank you for a constructive year and for your support. Much has been achieved.

**Dorothy Wakeling** President

### **A Brief summary of deliberations of the 29<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting of Birdlife Zimbabwe held at Inungu Guest House, Matopos, Bulawayo on Sat 5 June 2010 at 10 a.m.**

The meeting was attended by 38 members and 6 non-members.

**Director's Report:** Dr Chirara first reminded those present of our objective; to conserve birds both for ourselves and as an inheritance for future generations. His report in note form: 1. 2009-10 is the first year in our Strategic Five-Year Plan. 2. Membership Survey: analysis of results should guide the way ahead re improved relationship between Office and Membership. 3. Projects: IBAs until 2011, species work completed or underway on Blue Swallows, Swynnerton's Robin, Wattled Crane, waterfowl counts etc. 4. National Parks: good relations established; \$500 for Verreaux's Eagle Permit waived. 5. Students: useful resource for Office. Selected by Prof Mundy from among his NUST students.

**Treasurer's Report** in point form: 1. Loss for the year mainly due to fall in value of £ sterling. Need for active fund-raising. 2. The finance team was congratulated on keeping the actual loss to only \$146 after a difficult year.

**Research and Conservation Report:** Fadzai Matsvimbo's report in note form: 1. Field Cards: 1,182 most recent cards already recorded on the database, aiming to complete all 10,000 in 2010. 2. Waterfowl Count; disappointing overall figures for recent counts. 3. World Birds: online data collection system established at office to which members' data can be added and information downloaded. 4. Field Visits: staff with EDBC members had seen 100 Swynnerton's Robins in Chirinda Forest in 2009 but that project was now complete. At Driefontein, 34 Wattled Crane and 114 Grey Crowned Crane were noted in April and 35 Wattled and 63 Crowned in November. 5. Monavale Vlei: purchase still not completed but COSMO continuing with good conservation work. 6. Common Myna: National Parks policy is to eradicate this invasive species but it is difficult to shoot birds in the centre of Bulawayo where some occur.

**Ringing Report:** Dr Mundy reported on the successful training week at L Chivero where 400 birds of 71 species had been ringed. D Dalziel and T Couto are holding further sessions in Mashonaland.

**Education Report:** Rueben Njolomole informed the meeting that the number of schools involved is rising again thanks to the Jensen Foundation and interest in schools around Mbazhe Pan and Driefontein. Wildlife Clubs: a web-based system aiming at exchange of information

between African schoolchildren is being put into place. In the Eastern districts funding was being sought to revive interest in schools in this area.

**Publications:** 1. *Honeyguide*: Thanks to Brian Marshall and his team the journal is now up to date. MPS Irwin, Editor Emeritus, exhorted members and professionals to write up all their research and observations. C Baker was singled out for praise for his continued excellent reporting of Field Observations. 2. *Babbler*: C. Dennison has retired as editor. She was thanked. She remains as Honorary Membership Secretary. J. Pierini now editor. 3. Membership: BLZ has 380 paid-up members and makes 46 exchanges of journals. **Branch Reports:** *Mashonaland*: T Alegria, Chairperson, reported good turnouts at all activities. There had also been longer visits to Mozambique, the Vumba and Rifa (Zambezi Valley). *Matabeleland*: C Hubbard, Chairperson, stated that Branch is thriving and embracing diverse activities. Verreaux's Eagles, dassies and waterfowl are all maintaining numbers and the Garden Bird Survey is to be resuscitated.

#### BLZ Council for 2010/2011

President: Mrs Dorothy Wakeling

Vice President: Dr Neil Deacon

Honorary Secretary: Mr Ken Dixon

Honorary Treasurer: Mr Roger Castelin

Research and Conservation Representative: Dr Rob Rees

Education and Extension Representative: Mrs Leslee Maasdorp

Council Member: Mr David Rockingham-Gill

Council Member: Mrs Helen Lewis (appointed after the AGM with agreement of the Meeting)

Editors: *Honeyguide*: Dr Brian Marshall, Mrs Julia Dupree and Mr Ken Dixon

*Babbler*: Miss Julia Pierini

Branch Representative, Mashonaland: Mr Tony Alegria

Branch Representative, Matabeleland: Mrs Cecilia Hubbard

Honorary Membership Secretary: Mrs Carolyn Dennison

#### **Any other business:**

-Report on Field Cards: D Rockingham-Gill's register up to date. All members encouraged to fill in Field Cards for all excursions. Observations will be added to database.

-Ringing Returns – dead birds or netted birds found with rings: Send to D Dalziel, P Mundy and T Couto.

-Nest Record Cards: these should be sent to Tongayi Mwedzi Curator of Ornithology at Bulawayo Museum

-Special Species Cards: should be sent to I Riddell or F Matsvimbo

-Avian Flu research: Josphine Mundava, NUST PhD student, reported on her comparative study of ducks

-Helicopter Flights over the gorge at Victoria Falls: G Blair said that such flights will cause environmental damage in the gorge. They must be banned.

#### **NB The full version of all reports can be obtained from the national office**

*A very special thanks to Cecilia Hubbard for hosting the AGM and to Tony Wharam who provided and funded the AGM lunch for 44 people.*

#### **BABBLER EDITOR**

Hello – for those of you who don't know me, I'm Julia the new Ed. Please feel free to write to me with your contributions, ideas, suggestions etc for the next issue!

#### **\*\*SUBSCRIPTION RENEWAL\*\***

Our membership year runs from April to March and **all** 2010/11 subscriptions were 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 (high density)	US\$ 20.00
Schools (private)	US\$ 50.00

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

Please renew your subscriptions promptly (or you may forfeit your membership – 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 please also advise the office and Carolyn (rolly@zol.co.zw), either by faxing the copy deposit slip or by e-mail.

## **FORTHCOMING ACTIVITIES**

Contact a committee member if you need transport to any of the events. **Members, non-members and beginners are welcome** – don't worry if you do not have a pair of binos – there is usually an extra pair at most outings. There are no BLZ charges for any bird walk or evening presentation. However there may be entry fees (e.g. National Parks) or a tip required depending on the location. Remember to always bring chairs and refreshments.

### **MASHONALAND BRANCH**

**Evening Meetings are on the 3<sup>rd</sup> 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.

**Thursday 19 August – Tuli Circle Talk 5.30-6.00 p.m. Avondale Club**

A diverse wilderness with the Shashe River basin running to join the Limpopo River welcomes you to Tuli Circle. R. Dennison will be telling us about what to expect to see there!

**Thursday 16 September – Gorongosa and Katapu 5.30-6.00 p.m. Avondale Club**

Gorongosa hosts a variety of distinct ecosystems and as a result some very unique birds. Come hear about them from A Shears and J Francis (subject to confirmation) who have been there!

**Saturday 21 August – 7 a.m.: Botanic Gardens**

There are always plenty of specials to see at this venue. At the last outing here African Goshawk, Lanner Falcon, Little Sparrowhawk, Whyte's Barbet, Greater Honeyguide, Spotted Flycatcher, Violet-backed Starling and lots more were spotted here. Meet in the car park.

**Saturday 18 September – 7 a.m.: Greystone Park Nature Preserve**

During our last visit in May some of the specials reported were Tambourine Dove, Lizard Buzzard, Egyptian Goose and Purple Heron. Come join us at this delightful venue on Halford Rd.

**Sunday 1 August and 5 September – 7.00 a.m.: Mukuvisi Woodland**

Copper Sunbird, Red-backed Mannikin, Black Sparrowhawk, Brown-backed Honeybird, Bearded and Bennett's Woodpeckers, Spotted Creeper and Miombo Tit among the specials seen in June and July. 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 a reasonable tip for the guard, taking into account the value of your vehicle! Don't forget refreshments for after the walk when we record the number of species.

**Sunday 8 August and 12 September – 7.00 a.m.: Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary**

Last month some really good birds were reported e.g. Little Bittern, White-backed Vulture, African Rail, Red-chested Flufftail, Bennett's Woodpecker. Come & see them and others for yourself! Meet at Marimba Shopping Centre, Samora Machel Avenue West.

**Sunday 15 August and 19 September – 7:00 a.m.: Monavale Vlei**

In June and July some really good species were seen including Marsh Owl, Green-winged Pytilia, Cuckoo Finch, Black Stork, African Harrier-hawk and lots more. So don't miss out on this month's walk! Meet on the BS Leon side of Fenella Drive

**Sunday 22 August 7.00 a.m.: Chedgelow Farm**

This promises to be an interesting venue. BLZ hasn't been there for a while but Tree Life were there recently and the Miombo Woodland is still there so we'll be looking for the Miombo specials (Spotted Creeper, Miombo Tit etc) as well as water fowl on the dams etc. Meet at Mukuvisi offices to leave cars and share transport.

**Sunday 26 September – 7.00 a.m. : Chikupo Caves (Masembura Communal Lands)**

Mottled Swift was the special to see at this venue. We'll be going back to see if they're still there as well as Cape Eagle-owl, Rufous-bellied Tit, Boulder Chat, Lazy Cisticola, Mocking Cliff-chat etc. Meet at the CABS head office, Northend Road.

**BirdLife Zimbabwe – Mashonaland have also organised three away outings** to which all BLZ members are invited. If at any venue only limited numbers can be accommodated, it will be a case of first come first serve – paying the required deposit will secure a place!

**Outing 1:** (September 2010) **Tuli Circle** (distance from Harare approx 715km). The venue is the Wildlife & Environment Zimbabwe (WEZ) Shashi Wilderness Camp on the Shashe River. This is a totally self-catering destination. Leave early Friday 10<sup>th</sup> – birding on Sat, Sun & Mon – return on Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup>.

**Outing 2:** (October 2010) **Vilancoulos, Mozambique** (distance from Harare approx 780km and there is a border to cross). The venue is the Archipelago Resort near the town of Vilancoulos! There is a reasonably priced restaurant on site but you can self-cater. Leave very early on Friday 1<sup>st</sup>, bird on Sat, Sun & Mon – return home on Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> or come back to Casa Msika (approx 470 km) on Chicamba Dam, bird on Wed & Thurs – return home on Friday 8<sup>th</sup>. This venue has no self-catering facilities, but has a reasonably priced restaurant on site. A winter bird count was conducted last year and now a summer count is required at Casa Msika.

**Outing 3:** (October 2010) **Gorongosa and Katapu, Mozambique.** (Distance from Harare to Gorongosa approx 465 km and there is a border to cross)  
The first venue is Chitengo Safari Camp where there are thatched rooms (no self catering facilities) or camping where you can self-cater or eat at the Chitengo Restaurant on site. Leave Harare early on Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup>, bird in Gorongosa (including Mount Gorongosa) on Sun, Mon & Tues.

Leave on Wednesday for the second venue (Katapu on the Zambezi River, some 220 km further on) and bird on Thurs, Fri & Sat – leave for home on Sunday 31<sup>st</sup>. Still awaiting information on the Katapu region, once received, the info will be emailed to interested members.

The birding “holiday” destinations above are simply booked by a \$50.00 deposit per person. 4x4 or 4x2 vehicles are the first choice although standard bakkies will suffice for Mozambique. Depending on availability of vehicles, some juggling may have to be done re who goes with who. When booking, kindly advise if you have a suitable vehicle which you are willing to use. To book or for more information, contact Tony Alegria on: [talegria@zol.co.zw](mailto:talegria@zol.co.zw) or Julia Pierini on: [juliapierini@yahoo.com](mailto:juliapierini@yahoo.com)

We aim to have presentations (or at least some pictures) regarding birding (and facilities) on the above outings. As usual, these will take place on the third Thursday of the month.

***MATABELELAND BRANCH***

**Sunday 15 August: Joint Outing Matobo Conservation Society**

BLZ will be joining up with members of the Matobo Conservation Society (MCS) for a day of birding in the Matopos. On arrival at our destination we will split into groups, mixing members of both societies, and do a walk through various habitat types to see what we find. This will not be an MCS epic hike but a relatively short walk allowing plenty of time to stop and peer into every bush and behind every rock. Meet at the Churchill Arms car park at 8:15 for 8:30 departure. Destination is Mtsholeli Dam. Parks entry fees will have to be paid. For Zimbabwean residents these are \$4 per person and \$2 per car.

**Saturday 4 September: Walk at Lakeside**

This will be the third time in recent months we have visited this location and each time our list of species seen in the area has grown. Meet at the Hotel Rio at 09:00; bring morning tea. For more information ring Cecilia on 287692 or 0912433733.



## **Weekend 29-31 October: Cawston Block To be confirmed\*\*Please note change of date\*\***

Our trip planned for the end of August has had to be postponed; we now hope to be there at the end of October. Weekend in tented camp or own tents, central catering. Details and cost to follow. Ring Julia on 246269.

### **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 [pggroup.gwidibira38@gmail.com](mailto:pggroup.gwidibira38@gmail.com) 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**

#### **Library Report**

A 20' container in very good condition has been purchased and is in place at BLZ. Back issues of journals, education and archived materials have been transferred into the container and are readily accessible. Next week electrical and ceiling installation, roof repairs and painting will take place in the stock room making it ready for the Library move! Grateful thanks go to students, Memory Manzongo, Angela Nyadenga and staff Rueben Njolomole and Vengai Dengu for working on this mammoth move. Thanks, too, to Dave Rockingham-Gill for his advice and inputs and to the donors whose contributions have made this possible.

#### **D Wakeling**

#### **Important Bird Areas (IBA) Monitoring Project Report**

Much of the time was spent on the development of the 2009 National IBA Status and Trends Report and the preparation of project audit documents that were submitted to the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), based in the UK. The final draft of the 2009 national status report is being reviewed for publication. The biodiversity information gathered from IBAs in Protected Areas over the years of monitoring will also be useful for the 10<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Conference of Parties on the Convention on Biological Diversity that will be held from the 10<sup>th</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> of October 2010 in Nagoya, Japan. A visit to Lake Chivero was also made in June to assess the deforestation in the Bird Sanctuary. There was evidence of deforestation of *Terminalia sericea* on approximately 0.015 km<sup>2</sup> (1.5 hectares) of the Bird Sanctuary. The trees that were targeted by the poachers were dead trees that burn easily and have an easy market as firewood. A meeting was held with a National Parks official in charge of the area and there are plans by the Parks to seriously consider regular patrols in the Bird Sanctuary and to construct fire breaks to reduce tree damage by unprescribed veld fires.

**Kanisios Mukwashi** - National IBA Project Manager

### **MASHONALAND**

#### **Pitta Quest**

On Friday 11<sup>th</sup> December 2009, Ferdie Couto, Darryl Holme, Tony Wood and the author set out on a Pitta Quest (African Pitta – *Pitta angolensis*) in two 4-wheel drive vehicles. Our destination was a Campfire project about three hours drive from Mushumbi Pools in the Zambezi Valley, which is a recognised pitta breeding stopover.

Our birding for species other than the pitta was somewhat incidental, so our final count of a mere 84 species over the three day weekend was a reflection of our total focus on the main target rather than representative of the birdlife in the area!

We stayed at a Campfire lodge called Mana Angwa on the banks of the Angwa River. The facilities were basic but comfortable and the staff friendly and helpful. They need all the support they can get.

On the afternoon of the day we arrived our guide took us into wet and slippery riparian forest where we spent a frustrating few hours hearing pitta calls (often in response to the recorded call that one of our number had on his cell phone) but failing to see “The Bird” (all the locals refer to the Pitta as “The Bird”).

After a good night's sleep we set out at first light next day and spent the whole day seeking but not finding although again pitta calls were frequently heard. We walked for miles and slipped and slid in muddy conditions. Halfway through the day we were joined by Mackenzie, the son of our first guide. Mackenzie was a more experienced birder and our hopes were raised. We were eventually rewarded by a visit to a beautiful gorge on the Angwa River with stunning views from the top of sandstone cliffs – but still no visual pittas!

Sunday was our last day as some of us had to be back in Harare for business reasons on Monday morning. Again we set out at first light and spent several hours on our pitta quest coming close to calling birds but still with no success. We were beginning to despair of ever seeing the elusive bird prompting the author to pen the following lines:

There must be a bird called a Pitta  
'cos I've seen it in all of the books;  
It forages round in leaf litter  
And in quite inaccessible nooks

It's harder to find than a rainbow  
Though its colours are roughly the same  
And whether you know it or don't know  
You will always remember its name.

About twenty minutes before the deadline we had set for leaving, our guide called us excitedly and led us to a spot just metres from the camp kitchen where we were finally rewarded by excellent sightings of the elusive bird!

Although described in the 'books' as being thrush sized, in real life one gets the impression that they are significantly larger. The eye-brow stripe is very visible as is the red belly. The blue markings are only really obvious in good light.

**John Dawson**

### **Visit to Hippo Pools**

Ever since hearing about the wonderful selection of birds that Hippo Pools has to offer it's been on our list of things to do. We finally made it up there in May to be welcomed by the beautiful camp on the banks of the Mazowe surrounded by lush lawns and magnificent trees.

There is an abundance of trails around the campsite so we wasted no time pulling out our binos. The first of our sightings were Cape Turtle-dove, Red-eyed Dove and Emerald-spotted Wood-dove as well as White-crested Helmet-shrikes and Retz's Helmet-shrikes and even a shy Terrestrial Brownbul in the undergrowth. Other sightings included the Brown-hooded Kingfisher and Pied Kingfishers and the Giant Kingfisher which we saw flying low over the water. We also saw several birds of prey, a Wahlberg's Eagle and a Lizard Buzzard.

We had a bit of an adventure when it was suggested we take a quick walk to visit an African Hawk-eagle nest site that was 'just over there'! An hour later we arrived at the nest but the impressive structure was well worth the walk. Unfortunately, we only got to catch a glimpse of one of the parents as it flew off when we approached the nest. On our way back, we passed a tree that was home to a bushbaby with young – probably not the same one that raided our kitchen the night before and tucked into our French loaf!

Some new bird species for us were the Ashy Flycatcher, Brown-crowned Tchagra, Bearded Scrub-robin, Common Scimitarbill and some Livingstone's Flycatchers, and right there in the camp, we saw Black-throated Wattle-eye and a Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird. Water birds included the African Finfoot, as it drifted along the edge of the river by the overhanging reeds and on a bank nearby were an African Wattled Lapwing, and a Water Thick-knee.

So, all in all, a short but rewarding weekend, with about ten new species for us, but we will definitely be back to find the elusive Narina Trogon!!

**Debbie Wiggins**

### **Hippo Pools: better than watching a documentary!**

During a visit to Hippo Pools Wilderness Camp from 24<sup>th</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup> May 2010, the proprietor, Iain Jarvis, and I were fortunate to witness two rather unusual wildlife occurrences.

Whilst seated in front of the camp for a 5 p.m. sundowner we noticed a large bird near the top of a Baobab and silhouetted above the skyline in broad daylight. With the aid of Iain's spotting scope it was identified as a Pel's Fishing-owl! It stayed there until nearly 6 p.m. and was heard calling during the night in trees along the riverbank near the camp sites.

The following day we returned to the same spot around 5 p.m. hoping the owl would return. During the day I had noticed an African Finfoot swimming up and down the heavily tree-lined river bank, unperturbed by the three resident hippos nearby. As we were settling down to look for the owl two hippos were submerged right in front of us and a third had about half of its head above water.

I then again noticed the finfoot and it was paddling directly towards the hippo. It stopped about a metre from the hippo then suddenly darted forward and firmly pecked the hippo on the head, right between the eyes! With a mighty whoosh all three hippo retreated rapidly upstream and the finfoot appeared to follow them. The hippo reappeared a little downstream soon after and the finfoot continued on paddling upstream in a straight line and well away from the bank.

The "fight" was over and the referee's decision was unanimous: African Finfoot won by a Technical Knock Out!

**Colin Ferguson** [cferguson@mailcan.com](mailto:cferguson@mailcan.com) 0712 860 091

### **'Little Astronomical Movements' 17 June**

The talk was held as usual at the Avondale Sports Club: a short presentation on "Little Astronomical Movements" by Tony Alegria followed by a slide-show by Nick Hart and Erin Murphy of their own bird photographs.

Tony explained that he used "Little" in his title because of the relative insignificance of distances within our solar system (e.g. earth to sun is approx 150 million km) when compared to the enormity of inter-stellar distances (e.g. our sun and Polaris, the North Star, are about 430 light years apart) and the importance of a point of reference was shown by some simple-sounding questions about the direction of movement. Without a point of reference the only answer was: "it depends where you are looking from!" With that taken into account, we were taken through the little movements of the earth's rotation, the moon's non-rotation and the sun's very non-standard rotation, discovered from the observation of sunspots. We heard that our moon is ever-so-slowly escaping from the earth. Tony then moved on to talk about galaxies. Beautiful spiral galaxies look static to us observing through telescopes but there is plenty of movement both within and without. Our solar system is actually hurtling around our own galaxy (the Milky Way) at 300km / sec! This movement is safe enough but euphemistic astronomers know that the Milky Way and the Andromeda galaxy will "pass through each other" in about seven million years time (other astronomers use the term "collide") which is very interesting considering everything in the universe is supposed to be moving outwards from one big bang!

Nick brought us back to earth with his photos taken at Seldomseen in October 2010. Some of his subjects had made the most of the cover afforded by the forest and were hard to spot. As one of those who went on the trip and was usually the last to see something (and frequently unable to identify it) I was most impressed. Among the pictures taken, there was an African Emerald Cuckoo, Barratt's Warbler, Bronzy Sunbird, Buff-spotted Flufftail, Cape Batis, Gurney's Sugarbird, Olive Bush-shrike, Tambourine Dove, Swynnerton Robin, White-starred Robin, Red-faced Crimsonwing and some lovely views and a Samango monkey.

Erin's pictures came from several places including Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary, Mukuvisi Woodlands, Hippo Pools and her garden too. There were pictures of a Lizard Buzzard, Blue Waxbill, a Gabar Goshawk, Swallow-tailed Bee-eater, Pied Kingfisher, Southern White-faced Scops-owl and a Spotted Eagle-owl chick, a juvenile Southern Masked-weaver, an Ashy Flycatcher and my personal favourite, a flock of African Sacred Ibis. Very well done to both Nick and Erin. And keep on clicking those cameras!

**Sally Britten**

### **Marlborough Vlei 19 June**

Tony arrived early but had seen only 2 species by the time I arrived spot on 7 a.m. He spent a couple of minutes trying to persuade me that we should go back to our warm beds but then more stalwart birders turned up so we had to get on with it! The grass was long and wet, the

vlei spongy and in places smelly, the light so bad birds in all directions were but dark silhouettes. There may have been 2 Pearl-breasted Swallows but there were certainly lots of Grey-rumped Swallows and a Black-headed Heron. As we trudged through the tussocks we picked up Little Rush-warbler and Black Crake in the reeds and Black-shouldered Kite overhead. One mystery bird could have been an African Marsh-harrier as it was a harrier and there should have been no others present but we can't claim it due to its rarity. One species always flitting around in small flocks was the Orange-breasted Waxbill always so pretty whatever the weather and light. Birds appeared sporadically, a flock of Thick-billed Weaver, a lone Saddle-bill Stork, a solitary Reed Cormorant, plenty of noisy African Wattled Lapwing and a few Crowned Lapwings. The cisticola family was represented by Croaking Cisticola, Rattling Cisticola and Levaillant's Cisticola.

It had warmed up by now but the grass made walking hard work until we reached a burnt patch which offered the morning's best birding as we were able to observe at leisure a large mixed group of male, female and young Southern Red Bishop, 2 with orange heads, Red-collared Widowbird, Yellow-mantled Widowbird and Yellow Bishop, Common Waxbill and Pin-tailed Whydah, all feeding on the ground. I know many of us say 'Euplectes' and move on ignoring the challenge of separating the species but we were of sterner stuff and worked hard at it until our duty was done. Back at the car park we had a Gabar Goshawk and then spent a lot of time trying to identify a small raptor on the power lines. Eventually, it showed enough diagnostic features to make it a Shikra, our 27th and last species of the morning.

**Ken Dixon**

### **Monavale Vlei 20 June**

After sludging through Marlborough Vlei the previous day would you believe that 3 of the group turned up again on Sunday at Monavale Vlei? Strange but true! It was cold once again but soon warmed up and we had good paths thanks to COSMO's bush-cutter. All in all a more pleasant experience. And there were more birds, or more eyes to see them. 52 species total including all the usuals like Black-shouldered Kite, 3 Gabar Goshawk, 2 Long-crested Eagles, numerous Orange-breasted Waxbill, a Senegal Coucal, Dark-capped Yellow Warbler, heron and African Sacred Ibis. As at Marlborough, Grey-rumped Swallow were busy breeding in large numbers. The warm sun also meant we could find Little Bee-eater, sunbirds and seedeaters in the flowering trees on the margins. A species seen fairly often recently and again on Sunday was African Black Duck, a pair. Then, back at the cars the Lesser Honeyguide and the Purple-crested Turaco made us aware of their presence. We had 49 at the first count but managed to find 3 more to satisfy our hunger for more before we left.

**Ken Dixon**

### **Seldomseen Bird Ringing outing 19-21 June 2010**

Over the weekend of the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> of June we went to Seldomseen holiday cottages Vumba to do some bird ringing with Dave Dalziel.

We caught 50 birds in total, 40 of which we put rings onto. The other 10 were controls, that is they were ringed by another ringer and by the difference of the numbers on the rings, compared to the numbers on our rings some of the birds appear to be a number of years old. We caught a Tambourine Dove, 2 Terrestrial Brownbul, 3 Yellow-streaked Greenbul, 3 Stripe-cheeked Greenbul, 1 Kurrichane Thrush, this was a control, 1 Olive Thrush, 8 Orange Ground-thrush, 2 of which were controls, 2 White-browed Robin-chat, both were controls, 2 Cape Robin-chat, 1 White-starred Robin (control), 1 Swynnerton's Robin one of the prettiest birds of the weekend, 1 Bar-throated Apalis, 1 Roberts's Warbler, 1 Cape Batis, 2 White-tailed Crested Flycatchers, another very pretty bird! Especially in the hand. 1 Olive Bush-shrike, 1 Variable Sunbird, 15 Olive Sunbird, 1 a control and 1 Red-faced Crimsonwing. A very successful weekend.

**Forest Worsley**

### **Controls: Birds retrapped on 19-20 June 2010 that were originally ringed at Seldomseen**

<b>Birds retrapped</b>	<b>Date retrapped</b>	<b>Date first ringed</b>	<b>Ring no.</b>
White-starred Robin	6/19/2010	4/24/2004	AF13424
Kurrichane Thrush	6/20/2010	9/8/1998	465252
Stripe-cheeked Greenbul	6/20/2010	9/11/1993	BD1087
Yellow-streaked Greenbul	6/19/2010	4/6/1996	BD21522
White-browed Robin-chat	6/19/2010	11/3/1998	BD21594

---

Orange Ground-thrush	6/21/2010	9/11/2001	BD55444
Orange Ground-thrush	6/20/2010	12/10/2003	BD68998
White-browed Robin-chat	6/19/2010	Data not recorded	F08698
Olive Sunbird	6/19/2010	4/23/2004	GA28327
Yellow-streaked Greenbul	6/19/2010	3/21/97	BD21550

---

**Total: 10**

---

### **Haka Park 27 June**

A lovely sunny winter morning and we were numerous, too many to bird all together. Fortunately, some wanted to travel to the furthest corners, others just drive around and the majority, to walk in the miombo woodland /or by the dam and river. I chose the latter and was rewarded with a wonderful morning's birding. When we gathered at 10.30 to pool our observations it was found 107 species had been recorded, a great total for a cool, breezy day. We had hardly left the main gate when enticing sounds were heard from the msasas near the path and we plunged into the woodland, aware that on such a morning parties of miombo birds might be hard to locate. In fact, that first party with its flag species the White-breasted Cuckooshrike kept a few of us on its trail for over an hour. A feature of this party and the other groups we found was the diminutive but attractive Stierling's Wren-warbler a species often recorded because of its 'clippety-clop' call but rarely seen. On Sunday it was everywhere from the ground to the canopy. Also present were Miombo Double-collared Sunbird, Green-backed Honeybird, Scarlet-chested Sunbird, Grey Penduline-tit and Green-capped Eremomela. Those two specials we rarely succeed in finding, Spotted Creeper and Southern Hyliota offered fleeting views but were seen again later. It was also a good day for woodpeckers; we had Bennett's Woodpecker on two occasions, Golden-tailed Woodpecker and many Cardinal Woodpeckers. As we advanced through the undergrowth an African Cuckoo Hawk glided overhead and two Fiery-necked Nightjars flew up from the ground. It was very cool down by the river and all we found at first were a pair of Hottentot Teal, African Jacana, Common Moorhen and a Red-knobbed Coot. Then an African Purple Swamphen was spotted in the reeds. Our walk through the long grass parallel to the river produced only African Stonechat, Yellow-throated Longclaw and Yellow Bishop plus a few Common Waxbills. Back on the fringe of the woodland we saw an African Fish-eagle and a Brown Snake-eagle gave excellent views as it was mobbed by a melanistic Gabar Goshawk and Pied Crow. Our route back through the miombo was not without excitement with Greater Honeyguide, another Spotted Creeper and Southern Hyliota and myriad commoner birds. Back at the entrance we called the list and discovered that many more waterbirds had been seen, including African Pygmy-goose, Red-billed Teal, African Black Duck and White-faced Duck. Other raptors were Black-chested Snake-eagle, Black-shouldered Kite, Lizard Buzzard and African Goshawk. Two groups had seen a Spotted Eagle-owl. Lots of common birds were missing like White-browed Robin-chat, Southern Grey-headed Sparrow and Red-billed Firefinch but super birding all the same.

**Ken Dixon**

### **Lucky break, 5 July 2000**

A little while ago there was a flash of movement by the lounge window, followed by a thump, and the glimpse of another bird sharply pulling up to avoid a similar collision. Oops, another window casualty, I thought, but rather strange as birds never fly into these windows – there is no through-view or anything to fool a bird into thinking there is one. But all was made clear in seconds, the second blur of grey was a Gabar Goshawk and it had alighted on the small fig tree 6m away, peering down concernedly at its prey.

Why didn't he come down and collect breakfast? He couldn't see me sitting here in the relative darkness, even if I could see him. I soon became curious and eased up to the curtain between the windows (so the goshawk couldn't see me) but could see no bird, then back into the room and to another window to the right of the main door. Here there was a sun-filter curtain and I could look at a different area, but still no luck – it must be right up against the wall. So I went back to the computer and the goshawk to his vigil.

When I next glanced up the goshawk was gone so I looked out the front door and there to the right, against the wall and behind and protected by a vehicle stand, was an unhappy looking Laughing Dove with a gash across the forehead (now, if this was Australia this wouldn't happen

because doves wouldn't be allowed to fly without crash helmets and goshawks wouldn't be allowed to chase them unless duly attested and licenced!). Well, best to leave it to recover on its own so I went back to the computer, thinking it just as well that the cat was up in the roof... Six minutes after the crash I noticed the silvery dash of the goshawk streaking in for the kill (he must have been sitting in a neighbouring tree all this time) as the dove must have recovered enough to move out of cover. With a frantic flapping of wings the dove escaped, flying along the safety of the wall and away.

**Ian Riddell, Greendale, Harare**

### **Bird Ringing Update 15 July**

Our speaker for July was Dave Dalziel; he gave us a run down of what has been happening regarding ringing in Mashonaland this year. His talk was in 3 parts – The Course, What's Happened Since and The Trip to Seldomseen, Vumba. Special thanks go to Julia Pierini, Erin Murphy and Nick Hart for supplying the photos that were shown.

**The Course** – took place from 6<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> January 2010 with 6 trainers (3 from South Africa) and about 18 trainees. They ringed 460 birds (72 species). The 3 trainers that came from South Africa came to do the training and to help get ringing back on track here in Zimbabwe and to Kobie and Tony Raijmakers and Josef Heymans, we are very grateful. They and other ringers in South Africa have since donated nets, scales, pliers, rulers, etc to assist ringing in Zimbabwe.

**What's Happened Since** – between Dave and Tracey, 27 outings have been done to date. Dave has tried to do a ringing outing every weekend on a Saturday morning in and around Harare. They have done 2 trips to Marondera and 1 to Vumba.

**The Trip to Seldomseen, Vumba** – their trip in mid-June was very cold but very fruitful; they ringed 50 birds (19 species) of which 10 birds were re-traps. Re-traps are interesting as it gives information about the bird, where it was ringed, how old it is approximately and its moult.

Dave has ringed (or should I say the trainees have, supervised by Dave) ±505 birds (±90 species) to date, which includes the 75 birds that were ringed on the course and the 50 from Vumba.

There is a saying “only mad dogs and Englishmen go out in the midday sun”, well I think you have to be a “special kind” of crazy to get up at 3.30 a.m. to go ringing birds, bumbling and crashing around in reeds and mud to put up nets as tempers flare because the nets are not that co-operative about coming out of the bags at that time in the morning, then stay calm to take the birds out of the nets and then be on the ball to put a ring on and take measurements. Well done to our 2 trainers, Dave and Tracey Couto in Christon Bank, and to all the trainees who get up at a ridiculous hour in the morning, so Dave isn't out there on his own. So spare a thought for those out ringing when you get up and have your coffee on a Saturday morning!

**Jane Rautenbach**



## **MATABELELAND**

### **Dassie Survey – 21 to 23 May**

I really cannot give you a logical explanation as to why we do it. Yet for the fourth year the same teams, and some new ones, turned out to take part in the Dassie Survey. And despite the fact that weather conditions were the worst we have experienced to date, everyone had a great time. The Dassie Survey (or more correctly the Hyrax Census) is done in conjunction with the Verreaux's Eagle Survey, as it is believed that fluctuations in the population of dassies

(the main food source of the Verreaux's Eagle) affect the Verreaux's Eagle population. Participation in the survey entails getting up in the dark on a cold winter's morning, making your way to an observation point (frequently requiring a long walk or climb), and for a couple of hours recording details (species – one of two, and age) of all the hyrax seen. On this occasion we had to set out not only in the cold and dark but in the cold, dark and WET as it rained on both mornings. Most of us went off reluctantly, determined to do our duty but not really believing we would see anything. And yet we did; in fact some sites recorded as many dassies as were recorded in years with far better weather conditions. For the most part the rain held off but it was gloomy – yet when the sun came through it was like a spotlight on the dassie activity. The birds too seemed unconcerned. Sitting quietly at your observation point also provided an opportunity for some close up bird watching with the commoner birds, like Dark-capped Bulbuls, often perching in the bush next to you. The raucous call of Natal Spurfowl shattered the morning quiet, and later Black-collared Barbets, and African Grey Hornbills could be heard. Purple-crested Turacos may be common in Harare but are something special in our part of the country, as are Boulder Chats – a Matobo special. Inevitably Verreaux's Eagle were seen, though at our observation point the biggest reaction from the dassies (diving for cover and screeching in alarm) came when an African Hawk-eagle cruised effortlessly along the rock face we were watching.

**Adele Edwards**

### **Winter Birding Big Day – 19/20 June 2010**

Five teams, scattered around the province (Vic Falls, Msuna and, of course, Bulawayo), braved the anticipated inclement elements to compete (loose description) in our first ever Winter Birding Big Day. But the weather turned out to be kind. With the absence of migrants (most of which are diurnal), naturally numbers were down on summer counts, but were nonetheless quite impressive. Bear in mind that the 24 hour stint includes a large percentage of darkness when generally both the observers and birds have a snooze, so most rely on diurnal species to boost their counts. We – teams of the 36-hour category – have the pleasure of counting for 10 hours or so, eating, drinking, sleeping and otherwise making merry for a good 14, and then back to counting for the last 10 or so (I know that doesn't add up but I'm telling it like it is). Anyway we should have topped the scores, right? But we didn't, neither of the 36-hour teams did and what is worse we were trounced by *newcomers*! Gavin and Marjorie were winners of the 24-hour category and overall tops too at their very first attempt! Fantastic! Second were the JoJen and DaMar followed by Helen and her Mum Gwen who did a shortened 24 hour stint. As a matter of interest, John and Jenny, along with some of their friends, have been hugging Avian Bunnies for some years but have yet to produce a type specimen. We are now challenging them to do so. The 36-hour section was won by us – the ChickChats – skilfully led and chauffeured by Chief Chick Cecilia (or Chief Chat, whichever you prefer – both apply); Karen, son Michael and Sue came next – they did well first time around, particularly when you bear in mind that their chosen habitat is not one that carries a large range of species. The next Birding Big Day will be held in November on a date to be announced shortly.

Complete results are:

<b>POSITION</b>	<b>TEAM</b>	<b>MEMBERS</b>	<b>SCORE</b>
<b>36 hour category</b>			
1 <sup>st</sup>	The ChickChats	Cecilia Hubbard Julia Duprée Yvonne Steinbach	124
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Msuna	Karen Learmonth Michael Learmonth Sue Cotterill	67

### 24 hour category

1 <sup>st</sup>	Vic Falls Turaco's	Gavin Blair Marjorie Blair	128
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Avian Bunny Huggers	John Brebner Jenny Brebner Dave Jackson Marina Jackson	91
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Twinspot	Helen Lewis Gwen Attwell	81

**Julia Dupree**

#### **Matland Mist-netting – 3 July**

The much-anticipated first Matabeleland ringing workshop was scheduled for 3<sup>d</sup> July, and everything appeared to be in place – Peter Mundy braved a late-night return from the other side of the Shangani River, and a small group of enthusiastic novices unafraid of the early morning warning in the *Matland Musings* advert checked on arrangements. As it turned out, it wasn't *that* early – a 7 a.m. start was deemed suitable given the morning chill and lazy dawn. Of course, the weather decided to be rather uncooperative, and treated us to overcast skies and a frisky (cold!) wind. Undeterred, we made ourselves comfortable in the Mundys' house and drank tea until conditions had settled down somewhat and we'd exhausted the hot topics of the day (World Cup quarter-finals, the hand-ball episode and the dashed hopes of Africa, of course).

Keen to ensure that we achieved something worthwhile Peter gave us the task of setting up the net, which we managed in record time (and not in a good way). It all goes to show that no amount of good advice can compensate for experience! Gusting wind, a barbed-wire fence, grass and bougainvillea plants were nuisances we'd have liked to avoid, but we eventually managed to get everything set up, and stood admiring the net billowing like a sail in the wind... After providing the bait (water in the bird bath), we once again retired to the house for tea and nibbles. Peter showed us all the tools of the trade, gave advice on how to remove birds from the nets and told us about the ringing procedure. Intermittent checks of the net were made, primarily to remove leaves, but it was all very quiet apart from the Grey Go-away-birds stationed on the fence pulling faces at us.

Unfortunately, a couple of us (including me) had to leave at around 10, at which time all birds were still strenuously avoiding the frigid bird-bath and the net. However, when the sun came out and the wind dropped a bit later, the stalwart net-watchers had a bit of success, including successfully catching one of the taunting Go-away-birds!

Despite the suboptimal weather conditions, we had a good time, and are all probably practising tying knots in anticipation of the next demo at the end of the month.

**Nicky Lunt**

#### **Letters to the Editor**

*From the ex-Editor* With reference to the letter to the Editor in June/July 2010 issue, regarding updating the *Birds of Zimbabwe*, I have been told that Tony Harris, of shrike book fame and ex of the Transvaal Museum, was killed in a car accident in August 2006. Tony will be remembered for, among other things, introducing young birders to the fun of ringing.

**Carolyn**

\*\*\*\*\*

#### **TAIL FEATHERS**

#### **Interesting birds at Crake Cottage, Monavale:**

26<sup>th</sup> March 2010 – Bronze-winged Courser – this species has been seen over the years at this time of year and also in November – same place on the drive way.



13<sup>th</sup> May 2010 – a Speckled Pigeon arrived exhausted on our veranda. It pecked at crumbs, quenched its thirst and slept, unconcerned by all activity in its midst. It flew off strongly 3 hours later. A new bird for our 15 year list!

23<sup>rd</sup> May – African Wood-owl calling – new for our list. It has been seen by Roger Castelin on the neighbouring property. We have had frequent visits from the Spotted Eagle-owl over the past few months – it roosts in our woodland and for a few days in June called at 5 p.m. in daylight and throughout the night. The Southern White-faced Scops-owl is commonly seen and heard during the year.

End May early June 2010 Striped Crake seen from vehicle on 4 occasions in grassy verges of driveway skulking timidly between our little dam and the inundated adjacent property – very late rains this year kept the area wet longer than usual.

July 2010 – Senegal Coucal calling frequently – usually calls later in the year.

#### **D Wakeling**

#### **Monavale Vlei**

Jimmy Muropa reported 24<sup>th</sup> May and 15<sup>th</sup> July 2010 Black Stork checking out the Vlei. This species reappears year after year at this time.

#### **D Wakeling**

#### **Greengrove Nature Park**

Two 'new' species sightings for this locality in June 2010 (i.e. never before seen over past years): a pair of Southern Pochards (16/6/2010) and a pair of Glossy Ibises (21/6/2010). Currently the island is used as a roost in the evening by well over 140 Cattle Egrets, 50-60 African Sacred Ibises and about 6 Reed Cormorants are breeding. As the water level recedes so does the number of birds that seek refuge overnight. Other water fowl that can be regarded as *resident* are Red-knobbed Coots with juvenile, Common Moorhens, African Jacanas, Black Crake, Red-billed Teal, Hottentot Teal, Little Grebes, White-faced Duck, whilst African Purple Swamphens frequent as well. Waders are more scarce in their visits with Three-banded Plovers being the most common but much later in the season.

#### **Innes Louw**

\*\*\*\*\*