

BABBLER

The Newsletter of



BirdLife Zimbabwe
The BirdLife International Partner in Zimbabwe

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COMMITTEE	MASHONALAND (Code 04)		MATABELELAND (Code 09)	
Chairperson	Tony Alegria	490375 (h) 0772-438697	Cecilia Hubbard	285666 (h) 0772- 433733
Secretary	Ken Dixon	793063 (h)	Adele Edwards	882242 (h)
Treasurer	Sally Britten	308400 (w)	Jenny Brebner	242634 (h)
Members	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)
Babbler Editor	Julia Pierini	0772-894562	juliapierini@yahoo.com	
Membership Secretary	Carolyn Dennison	747567(h) 0772-210240	rolly@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
website: www.birdlifezimbabwe.co.zw

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

Office hours: Monday to Friday 8.30 – 4.30

We wish to advise all our members that the office will be closed from 22 to 27 December 2010.

Please note that we are open from 28 to 31 December 2010 – 8.30 a.m. to 1 p.m.

We wish you all a merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year!

****SUBSCRIPTION RENEWAL****

Our membership year runs from April to March and **all** 2010/11 subscriptions were therefore due on 1 April 2010. ALL MEMBERS WHO ARE STILL TO RENEW THEIR SUBSCRIPTIONS please make an effort and get your payments in. 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 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.

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

It is very pleasing to report that BLZ is flourishing – the regular publication of Honeyguide and the numerous activities available to BLZ members, which are reported here in *Babbler*, are evidence of this. The Office is achieving good results, with really good teamwork in place.

BLZ Director, Dr Chirara, was part of the BLI team which attended the recent Convention on Biodiversity held in Japan which was influential in ensuring the ratification of resolutions committing governments to protect their biodiversity. This illustrates the vital role that non government and civic society organizations play in advising and supporting governments to take care of their countries biodiversity and ecosystems. RSPB CEO has a hotline to the Prime Minister and has prevented an airport from being built at the mouth of the Thames! Their membership is around 1.2 million! BLSA is very powerful – check its website to see what they are doing!!

BLZ is also influential, with its Office staff working closely with at least 8 different ministries and departments. The larger our membership the more we will be able to support environmental protection through lobbying, with our accumulated birding records and ornithological evidence as justification.

Therefore focus is now on:

Membership drive – if each member finds a new member we will double our membership – this is a start!

Fundraising initiative – a fundraiser is due to be held in February 2011 – details following shortly

Publication of articles in *Honeyguide!* - remember you can now access field cards through the database at BLZ. Please send your field cards to the Office for inclusion onto the database – even if they are 30 years old they are still valuable!

Many members are achieving extraordinary things for BLZ – running surveys, sitting on committees, dedicated editorial and membership teams, however, very special mention goes to Dave Dalziel for leading 45 ringing training sessions this year! Getting up at 3am or thereaboutshis core band of trainees have ringed around 1000 birds of many species with some very interesting results – we have an A grade ringer and 2 B grade ringers lined up for approval before the end of the year! Well done Dave and your core group of trainees (mostly youngsters) for your dedication to ringing in Zimbabwe!

On that happy note, I wish you all a Happy Christmas and wonderful birding in 2011!

Dorothy Wakeling

UPDATE FROM THE DIRECTOR

From December onwards, I will be sending regular e-mail updates to all members about what will be happening in the conservation world in Zimbabwe and beyond. This electronic bulletin is meant to inform members regularly about the activities of the secretariat and other BirdLife partners. Through this, members can directly communicate with the Director on various issues using this e-mail address: bossbirds@zol.co.zw. You can choose to subscribe (or unsubscribe) to this e-bulletin.

Chip Chirara, Director

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 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.

Thursday 16 December – No meeting

Thursday 20 January – Annual General Meeting

All members are invited to attend the AGM which will be kept as concise as possible as afterwards Tony Alegria will be presenting 'The Mozambique Experience' – a talk on the Oct 2010 BLZ trip to Gorongosa National Park and Catapu.

Saturday 18 December – No meeting

Saturday 15 January 7.00 a.m. Greystone Park Nature Preserve

In January we may have got a good chance of seeing Red-throated Twinspot, Tambourine Dove and Black-throated Wattle-eye. Come & join us on this delightful walk! Meet in the car park off Halford Rd.

Sunday 5 December and 2 January 6.30 a.m. Mukuvisi Woodland

Narina Trogon, Grey-headed Kingfisher and European Roller are specials for December, Eurasian Hobby and Amur Falcon for January. 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 12 December and 9 January 6.30 a.m. Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary

Thanks to its woodland and lakeshore habitats the Sanctuary is home to several resident species. In December and January, however, the specials to look out for are the migrant warblers e.g. Willow Warbler, Marsh Warbler and Sedge Warbler. Meet at Marimba Shopping Centre, Samora Machel Avenue West.

Sunday 19 December and 16 January 7.00 a.m. Monavale Vlei

In December and January, the Yellow Bishop, Yellow-mantled & Red-collared Widowbird, and Southern Red Bishop are in their finest breeding plumage. A feast of colour to behold! A special to look out for is also the Dwarf Bittern. Meet on the BS Leon side of Fenella Drive

Sunday 26 December No meeting

Sunday 23 January 6.30 a.m. Afdis This venue is good for waders e.g. Common, Marsh, Wood Sandpiper, Common Greenshank and also Greater Painted-snipe among other birds. Meet at Westgate Mall, car park left of main entrance.

Sunday 30 January 6.30 a.m. Alex Masterson Vlei Walk & Komani Estate Survey

BLZ carries out an annual survey on this property. Meet at the Ashbrittle Service Station on Golden Stairs Rd for this outing.

MATABELELAND BRANCH

Saturday/Sunday 27/28 November. Summer Birding Big Day

Do consider joining in the fun of Birding Big Day. All you have to do is choose a continuous 24 hour period over the weekend, make up a team of 2 to 4 people – of whom at least 2 are members of BLZ – and record all the species of birds you see during this period. There are teams that dash around the countryside trying to pick up the maximum number of species, but others just have morning tea in one team member's garden and afternoon sundowners at another – and are amazed to find out quite how many different types of birds there are around when they started taking notice. You also have the option of finding sponsors but this is not compulsory. Any money you raise will go towards the cost of running local branch projects. For more info or entry forms contact Julia Dupree on 09- 246269 or dalia@netconnect.co.zw

Saturday 4 December. Christmas Bistro

Our final gathering for the year! Enjoy a meal with friends and fellow birders. To be hosted by Cecilia Hubbard at her home at 20 Eglesfield Road, Fortunes Gate. Start time 6:30 p.m. Price \$10. Numbers will be limited so book early to avoid disappointment. For more information ring Cecilia Hubbard on (w) 287692 or 0772433733.

January 2011. Waterfowl Census

As usual we plan to cover Aisleby, SAST, Cowdray Park, Hwange and Matobo National Parks on different weekends throughout January. Details to follow.

Friday 14 January. Presentation on Nightjars

Following the very successful presentation on owls, Cecilia Hubbard will be taking us through Tony Alegria's presentation on nightjars. At The Boma, Hillside Dams, starting 6:30 p.m. For more information ring Cecilia Hubbard on (w) 287692 or 0772433733.

Saturday 19 February 2011. Matabeleland Branch Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting of the Matabeleland Branch of Birdlife Zimbabwe will be held on Saturday 19 February 2011 at 10:30 a.m. at 6 Betsi Gordon Close, Burnside. If you have any nominations for the committee or would like to volunteer to serve on the committee we would be delighted to hear from you! The meeting will be followed by a bring-and-braai lunch. We look forward to seeing many of our members there.

For more information ring Cecilia Hubbard, Bill Lewis (h) 242285 or Adele Edwards (h) 882242 or 0712366917.

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 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*

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RECENT REPORTS and SIGHTINGS

Global Council

BirdLife International is a Partnership of bird-focussed conservation NGOs in 114 countries around the world. Our headquarters is in the UK (Cambridge). I have been elected to Global Council, which is BirdLife International's governing Council, as one of two members from the

Africa region. In my role as a Global Council member, I must attend two Council meetings a year on behalf of the African Partnership of BirdLife International. This is a very important governance role. On behalf of BLZ and on my own behalf, I thank my colleagues from the African region and beyond for electing me to represent them at this level.
Chip Chirara, Director

Revival of ZimBirdnet

Efforts are being made to revive ZimBirdnet. I am hopeful that it will be up and running by the beginning of 2011.

Chip Chirara, Director

Convention on Biodiversity Meeting, Nagoya, October 2010

I attended the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 10) of the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD) held in Nagoya, Japan, from 18 to 30 October 2010. I was one of five delegates from African BirdLife partners. BirdLife international partners from around the world formed the biggest delegation, with close to 90 participants, from 35 countries. Twelve of the partners were part of their government delegations. The aim of attending this meeting was to advocate for and influence issues that are important for the conservation of the world's birds. Such meetings are also important for making contacts with other conservation practitioners and donors.

The BirdLife International Group was very well-coordinated by Dr. Muhtari Amino-Kanu, Senior Adviser, Policy & Advocacy. Coordination meetings were held as early as 0730 hrs and conference meetings started at 0900hrs. Day meetings would at times go late into the night. BLI has very clear positions on several issues that include Climate Change, Marine and Coastal Biodiversity, Biofuels and Biodiversity, and Access and Benefit Sharing. BLI delegates communicated these positions through several avenues including their national delegations. The Zimbabwe government was represented by the Permanent Secretary, the Deputy Director and the Biodiversity Officer, all in the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources Management. The Minister, Mr Francis Nhema joined the meeting at later stage for the high level ministerial meetings.

The major issues of interest to most third world delegates and other partners were Biofuels, Access and Benefit Sharing and Financing. As reported by BLI, "... deep disagreement on the big issues at COP10 – including the new protocol on Access and Benefit-sharing, and resources to implement the Convention – were dominating the negotiations and threatening to halt all agreements at the meeting. But calls by many parties, including BirdLife International, to adopt a strong, meaningful and fair Nagoya package have been listened to. In particular, the Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilization meets many of the demands of developing countries." "From this COP, one thing is clear: everyone needs to pull together if we are going to save biodiversity," said Dr Muhtari Aminu-Kano. "This includes governments, civil society, local communities and businesses, and both the developed and the developing world. Partnership is the principle that underpins BirdLife and it has to underpin biodiversity conservation too."

There were many side events and I made a presentation on the Wildlife Clubs of Africa Project on behalf of BirdLife Africa Region Secretariat. Zimbabwe is one of 14 countries that received funding from the Jensen Foundation to implement this project. I also made several funding inquiries from donor agencies and attended many of their side events and presentations. Overall, the Nagoya meeting was a success and an eye-opener for me. We need to be involved in the negotiations and setting of targets by our governments if we are to positively influence the conservation of biodiversity in our countries. I thank the BirdLife Africa Secretariat for funding this trip and choosing me as one of the BirdLife delegates from the Africa Region.

Chip Chirara, Director

IBA monitoring project report

The 2009 National IBA Status Report was produced. Copies of the report were distributed to stakeholders and also shared with other BirdLife partners during the CBD conference held in October in Nagoya, Japan. There is a copy for each branch which is available at the office.

The wildlife assessment report for Chirundu (Middle Zambezi Valley IBA) concerning the transportation developments that are taking place was finalized. A copy was submitted to Parks and Wildlife Management Authority for comments before submitting the report to the Provincial Physical Planning Officer in Chinhoyi. Contributors of the report were the Physical Planning Officer (Parks and Wildlife Management Authority), National IBA Project Manager (BirdLife Zimbabwe), Geoff Lowe and Leslee Maasdorp. The document highlights the wildlife sensitive areas that need to be protected in the development of Chirundu. IBA follow ups in Matabeleland Province were conducted in October. IBAs visited were Matobo Hills, Hwange National Park, Batoka Gorge and Chizarira National Park. General assessments of the sites were done and extra information on schools surrounding the IBAs was gathered. The IBA monitoring team of each site submitted monitoring forms for the 2010 monitoring period. Most of the sites monitoring team members are still around, making it easier to obtain quality information. A bird survey and habitat condition assessment was carried out at Chizarira National Park, and a short communication will be produced. IBA follow ups for sites in the Manicaland Province, Masvingo Province and Robert Mcllwaine Recreational Park will be done in November.

Kanisios Mukwashi, National IBA Project Manager

Ramsar CEPA National Focal Point Workshop in Windhoek, Namibia

I had the opportunity to attend the Ramsar Communication, Education, Participation and Awareness (CEPA) National Focal Points (NFPs) Workshop held at Arebbusch Lodge, Windhoek, Namibia from 08-11 November 2010. The workshop was organised by the Ramsar Secretariat in collaboration with the Namibian Administrative Authority in the Ministry of Environment and Tourism. The workshop was attended by 29 participants from ten contracting and three non-contracting parties in Southern Africa. The contracting parties were Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Tanzania and Zambia and the non-contracting parties were Angola, Swaziland and Zimbabwe. The aim of the workshop was to strengthen the capacity of the CEPA National Focal Points to implement the CEPA programme on wetland management. The specific objectives of this workshop were to bring together both Government and NGO CEPA NFPs from contracting parties within the region, improve the planning skills of the NFPs through hands-on activities, improve awareness and practice with the CEPA tools available, and share ideas on CEPA challenges and experiences and encourage good networking between CEPA NFPs at a regional level. The CEPA Programme offers tools to help people understand the value of wetlands so that they are motivated to become advocates for wetland conservation and wise use. The CEPA Programme fosters the production of effective CEPA tools and expertise to engage major stakeholders' participation in the wise use of wetlands and to convey appropriate messages in order to promote the wise use principle throughout society. The Ramsar Convention Secretariat believes that the CEPA should form a central part of implementing the Convention by each Contracting Party. Communication, education, participation and awareness are used effectively at all levels of the Convention to promote the value of wetlands.

Various CEPA tools and case studies were explored during the workshop. The CEPA tools looked at, included situational and stakeholders' analysis tools, visioning tools, and problem analysis and objective development tools. Workshop participants gained hands-on experience on the use of these tools for the development of CEPA Action Planning as part of a bigger wetland management planning process. Other issues discussed during the workshop were World Wetlands Day commemorations and communication strategies. There was a lot information and experience-sharing among participants during the workshop.

From this workshop, I gained more skills on wetland management. Though Zimbabwe is not as yet a signatory to the Convention, the workshop was very beneficial to me and the country since there are several on-going wetland management activities in the country. The CEPA programme is not restricted to Ramsar sites only, but is developed to promote wise use and conservation of all wetlands.

Togarasei Fakarayi, Projects Officer

BAP Schools commemorate World Bird Festival

The BirdLife Zimbabwe (BLZ) Bird Awareness Programme (BAP) for schools held the World Bird Festival at Belvedere Junior School on 8 October 2010. Patience Shito, a NUST student on attachment, assisted the Officer in organising the event. The IBA manager, Kanisios

Mukwashi also attended the event. The main aim of the event was to create a platform for Bird/Environment clubs to exchange information on the conservation of birds and the environment, showing each other the several ways of raising awareness on the subject. The theme of the event was entitled "*Best practices by clubs in the delivery of the Bird Awareness Programme in Schools*". Twenty schools had been invited and only seven attended. These were Belvedere, Southerton, Kumboyedza, Marlborough, Kuwadzana 8, Twinlakes and Hallingbury Primary Schools. Rueben Njolomole gave a brief background of the BAP work in schools after the opening remarks by the host school's head. The School Head emphasized the importance of birds in the conservation of biodiversity. He pledged his support in the Bird Awareness Programme. Two Environmental Management Agency (EMA) officials gave a short presentation on the problems that are being faced by birds and the environment due to human activities and what young people can do to conserve the environment.

The show on best practices in raising awareness on the conservation of birds and the environment started off with the host school, Belvedere, who recited poems and gave three speeches on individual birds and migration. Kumboyedza Primary School recited three poems followed by Marlborough Primary who had two birds' songs, poems and drawings. Kuwadzana 8 presented two poems whilst TwinLakes had songs, speeches and posters on birds. Hallingbury Primary School presented speeches. Southerton Primary School wrapped up the event with their stunning performances that had dances, songs, speeches and drama. This school had representation from the infant section to grade seven. Southerton Primary School was a cut above the rest in its performance. The Wildlife Clubs Project funds helped in the continual engagement of schools in the Bird Awareness Programme. Without these funds perhaps BirdLife Zimbabwe would have had little influence to these schools.

BirdLife Zimbabwe gave out a few books on birds from donations made by members as tokens of appreciation to schools that attended the event. Mr. Ken Dixon, a BLZ Mashonaland branch committee member handed over these books and other reading material to all the schools present. One well wisher, Mr. Katedza who runs the BAP club at Belvedere Junior School lent his photographic equipment for this function. A DVD for this event will be produced once funds for the production are available. Many thanks to Mr. Katedza for the generous lending of his equipment and staff.

Rueben Njolomole and Patience Shito, Education Department

Field Cards

A batch of 4000 field cards was borrowed from the Natural History Museum in Bulawayo in June this year. The cards were borrowed to computerise them and the field cards were captured onto a Microsoft Access database. The capture of the first batch of cards was completed by the end of October. The capturing of the cards is being funded by the WorldBirds Programme with the collaboration of the Royal Society of Protection of Birds (RSPB). The process of capturing field cards has been very exciting with the cards dating back as far as the 1950s. The oldest card is one by KW Greenhow with his observations at Chipinda Pools in October 1951. The process has also been challenging with the change in birds names that has taken place several times. Another set of field cards, 5800 in total was borrowed from the Museum in October and the process of data capture continues. The aim is to capture all the cards currently housed at the Museum in Bulawayo.

Fadzai Matsvimbo, Conservation Officer

Mashonaland Bird Ringing Group

The Mashonaland bird ringers have completed 45 bird ringing trips so far this year. We have ringed just fewer than 800 birds of 103 species. We will probably have done 50 trips and hopefully, ringed a thousand birds by the end of the year. There have been approximately another 380 birds ringed with rings from other ringers.

I think everybody has learnt an incredible amount over the year. From the fact that aluminium poles are cold in the middle of July, an hour before the sun rises, to identification of non-breeding bishops, widowbirds and whydahs. It has become very obvious to people how birds move, depending on a host of conditions. Burnt areas are suddenly swarming with seedeaters, flowering plants attract sunbirds and a reed bed is suddenly the focus of a breeding colony of Village Weavers or flocks of migrating swallows. Sometimes acres of the dreaded lantana are suddenly the refuge of hundreds of migrating warblers.

We have ringed at a number of different places, from peoples gardens to Mukuvisi, Monavale, Greystone Park Preserve, vleis and farms to Chivero, Marondera and the Vumba. We thank all the people who allowed us to use their properties for ringing. They were often woken up at 4 a.m. to the sound of pegs being hammered into the ground or the rattling of gates by impatient, keen, slightly eccentric folk intent on an early start. People have kindly allowed us to stay in their houses, cooked us breakfasts, brought coffee at more sensible hours than before dawn and generally spoilt us. In this regard the many people we disturbed in Marondera are especially thanked.

The highlights of the year have been the ringing course in January and the trip to Seldomseen in June. Three South African and three Zimbabwean ringers and about 20 trainees attended the course. We all learnt a great deal from the South Africans and we are very grateful to them for their efforts and support which has included equipment, advice and encouragement. On the course over 450 birds were ringed and most people handled birds they had never even seen before. In June we went to Seldomseen and although it was very cold and there were power problems we had the opportunity to look at some very interesting birds. As reported in a previous *Babbler* a number of birds were controlled (previously ringed and recaptured and released). The oldest bird was 17 years old and a number of others were over 10 years old.

Some of the interesting birds we have been privileged to handle are Corn Crake, Common Whitethroat, Thrush Nightingale, Garden Warbler, Square-tailed Nightjar and Natal Spurfowl on the course. We have had Ovambo Sparrowhawk, Tambourine Dove and Miombo Blue-eared Starling at Mukuvisi. Little Sparrowhawk was a recent bird at Monavale. At Seldomseen we were incredibly fortunate to have close looks at Swynnerton's Robin, White-starred Robin, Orange Ground-thrush, Olive Thrush, Olive Bush-shrike and Red-faced Crimsonwing among many others.

In the coming year we hope to have some of the 'trainees' upgraded to 'A' ringers while a couple of others should be 'B' ringers (permitted to ring a particular group of birds e.g. waterfowl) very shortly. We are going to do some evening ringing at the roosts of migrants like Barn Swallows and Yellow Wagtails. We will have a couple of out of town weekend trips, possibly Darwendale and Vumba. We are considering a trip to South Africa to join up with other ringers at the Ringing Workshop in March.

Within a couple of years we hope to have at least three ringing groups in the Harare area, each complimenting the efforts of the other groups. It will be important to have a steady stream of people wishing to learn about bird ringing and what we can learn about birds using bird ringing as a tool to study birds. All are welcome on our ringing outings and if you would like to be included on the ringing email list please let the editor know!

Dave Dalziel

Adapting and spreading species which need careful monitoring

Michael Irwin has compiled the following and requests that members please help by submitting any sightings, with full details to Colin Baker at cbaker@halsteds.co.zw or P O Box BW 168, Borrowdale, Harare so that the information can be added to Field Observations in the *Honeyguide* and states 'that there may well be other species that might have to be added to the list and I would like to open the issue to broader debate. Indeed anything on changes on ranges and what do we have on climatic warming? Also there is an urgent need to visit the Chirinda Forest at Mt Selinda to confirm that upslope range extensions have occurred and to monitor the species involved. Green Malkoha (Yellow-billed Coucal) *Ceuthmochares aereus*, Bronze-naped Pigeon (Delegorgue's) (as above) and Tiny Greenbul (Slender Bulbul) *Phyllastrephus debilis*. And have any others appeared subsequently?' He also asks that if you have a story to tell about the birds(s) that you submit it to Julia Duprée at dalia@netconnect.co.zw for inclusion under Short Communications in *Honeyguide*.

Eastern Bronze-naped Pigeon (Delegorgue's) *Columba delegorguei*
Ref: *Honeyguide*, 2009. 55(2): 99-102.

Purple-crested Turaco (Lourie) *Gallirex porphyreolophus*
Ref: *Honeyguide* (submitted)

Details required as to the Harare population, numbers, where do they nest and food sources.

Grey Go-away Bird (Lourie) *Corythaixoides concolor*

Ref: undocumented

Said to be spreading in Harare area; need to know more and how it and the Purple-crested Turaco react to each other's presence.

Speckled Mousebird *Colius striatus*

Ref: *Honeyguide*, 2001. 47(2): 127-128.

Need to know if and how it is spreading to rural areas. Also Greater Harare status update and relationship with Red-faced Mousebird *Urocolius indicus*

Eastern Saw-wing (Swallow) *Psalidoprocne orientalis*

Ref: *Honeyguide*, 2009. 55(2): 117-121.

Monitor continued spread on Mashonaland plateau.

Black Saw-wing (Swallow) *Psalidoprocne holomelaena*

Ref: *Honeyguide* (submitted)

Need to distinguish these two species and to determine if the black breeds anywhere in Mashonaland in sympathy with Eastern Saw-wing; very easily confused or overlooked so please check identities very carefully. May for instance breed along the Great Dyke.

Gorongosa Double-collared Sunbird *Cinnyris amicornum*

Ref: *Honeyguide* (submitted)

Does this species perhaps occur along our eastern border, even as an uncommon vagrant? We have records of 'mystery' sunbirds, so all double-collared (particularly in montane areas) should be checked carefully to assure identity. There is some evidence that it or something like it could occur, if only seasonally. It is a bigger bird with a heavier bill, a broader red chest band and the female is greener. Perhaps the call is also different.

Variable Sunbird (Yellow-bellied) *Cinnyris venustus*

Ref: *Honeyguide*, 2010. 56(1): 31-35

Need to follow up spread in rural areas in particular and how it is adapting.

Thick-billed Weaver *Amblyospiza albifrons*

Ref: *Honeyguide*, 2010. 56(1): 36-40

Monitor continuing spread and specifically outside Greater Harare; also in SE Lowveld and elsewhere. How is it adapting ecologically seasonally with attention to habitat choice.

(Black-faced) Swee Waxbill *Coccygia melanotis*

Ref: *Honeyguide*, 2010. 56(1): 11-15

Need to monitor the situation very carefully; does it still occur at Great Zimbabwe and what is its status at Nyanga and ecological relationship to the Yellow-bellied Waxbill (East African Swee) *C. quartina*? And does it occur on Mt Wedza? This is a very tricky but fascinating one that requires solving.

M.P.S. Irwin 30, Dandaro Village, Borrowdale. Harare hilarym@yoafrica.com

MASHONALAND

Is the Masked 'House Sparrow' Weaver the new kid on the block?

When the House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* first arrived in Zimbabwe in the early 1960s, its spread was rapid in towns and villages so that within a decade or so it had occupied most urban areas and even further afield, and in places became common. The situation however in greater Harare was always a bit less certain and perhaps more tenuous and the last few decades have witnessed a slow but steady decline in urban areas and markedly so in the more leafy northern suburbs, where it has almost disappeared. There it at best can be described as being either rare or simply not featuring at all. In the case of Dandaro where I have lived for most of the last ten years, it became extremely common in the earlier stages of construction and occupation and it became one of the few places where one could be guaranteed a sighting!

But as I have remarked elsewhere, once an area develops where the shrubs and trees grow and the lawns are regularly watered and the grass cut, then the sparrows seem to disappear. And after that if you want to see the bird, the prime habitat would seem to be in the central business district where there is concrete, bricks and tarmac and a good deal of uncollected rubbish as well. And that is where the House Sparrow, against whatever other odds, seems to be maintaining its status of doing well if not quite respectable or even worthy of note. But there nevertheless it survives opportunistically in surroundings that can sustain little else but can still be regarded as a success within such surroundings. If there is a competitor perhaps it is the Pied Crow *Corvus albus*, which are equally capable of looking after themselves without troubling about other small fry such as mere sparrows.

But what is it then about suburbia where most of us reside and what really has gone wrong there so far as sparrows are concerned? Well, as already stressed, once one's plot or whatever becomes respectable and the shrubs take over and the tress canopy and the lawn is forever green and freshly cut, it is then for some unknown reason that the sparrows opt out and disappear completely – but why really, especially if food is provided and much else seems to be available as well? Yet a sparrow is nowhere to be seen! Well, like you probably, I do feed the birds at Dandaro with stale (and not so stale) bread more or less generously and just to see what might come along anyway. And while certainly in years gone by the sparrows took advantage of such generosity and were among the first to arrive and sample such offerings, there has indeed been a change. For a number of years now I have come to notice that it is not so much the sparrows that are first to arrive but rather the Southern Masked-weavers *Ploceus velatus*. Dark-capped Bulbuls *Pycnonotus tricolor* are of course soon on the scene as well, but being larger birds can well look after their own interests without being interfered with. But certainly now it is the Masked-weavers that have been the first to appear and become increasingly dominant and as much a commensal as any sparrow which first did the same thing several thousand years ago when mankind decided to settle down and grow things. But with the situation that exists now, it seems to be the more aggressive weaver and not the sparrow that has the advantage and comes out tops. It should also be remarked that in every garden bird survey that it is the weaver that is amongst the top four species, whereas originally it must have been much less common and confined to streamside cover and the like before we decided to change everything and much less common than today, where it is literally everywhere that it can weave its nest. I strongly believe therefore that it is the weaver that has gained the upper hand and become the sparrow in ecological terms. It follows therefore that the weaver as an opportunist needs a new identity and that it might well be renamed the Masked 'House Sparrow' Weaver in acknowledging that it has completely supplanted its competitor, now forced to retire to the concrete jungle where no self respecting weaver would be expected to occur. This story therefore becomes a tale of adaptation to a new and wholly anthropogenic situation and where as everywhere, there are winners and losers. But what I would like to know now, do you agree with the story so far or is there some other alternative? And of course there is the problem elsewhere in the world where the House Sparrow may be in decline but for probably different reasons as our own habitats have changed and the world with it. But the situation here I am sure is rather simple and I would very much appreciate ideas and feedback from others who have witnessed changes over the years. I can't really say that I am much of an ecologist but like to look at what seems to be going on and to arrive at some reasonable conclusion that appears logical. So let us put the question to a wider public in the hope that there will be feedback, of course, so that then I can perhaps take the issue a bit further and write up the situation in our journal that will be acceptable to a wider audience and particularly within the more critical scientific community at large. And it must be treated as a fun situation and a challenge that can be enjoyed with a sense of satisfaction too. And that is why I asked from the very beginning – has the Masked 'House Sparrow' Weaver now very much become the new kid on the block?!

M.P.S. Irwin 30 Dandaro Village, Borrowdale. Harare hilarym@yoafrica.com

Visit to Chikupo Caves on Sunday 26 September 2010 QDS 1731A4

For about half the party of 15 this was their first visit to the famous caves; a long but fascinating drive out into the communal lands so close to the capital but so remote and rural. Late September does cover the land with a dry, dusty veil but the new growth on the trees promises a change of season with accompanying plants and returning migrants. Our sandy roads led us

out through Chinamora and Masembura Lands, in the general direction of Bindura. Throughout we were surrounded by kopjes of all shapes and sizes, the highest being 1,500m.

Finally, we saw signs for Chikupo and after a minor deviation reached the spot where the village headman, warned by Rueben from the office of our visit, awaited us with a few local children keen to guide us to the caves. There are two principal caves similar to that at Ngomakurira containing prehistoric rock paintings of animals of the area at that time. Of greater interest to the birders was a young Lanner Falcon going through its flying lessons watched by parents and two siblings from their nest on a high ledge above the caves. Also present were 20-30 Mottled Swift flying at great speed from their nests in the rock wall out over the fields far below and the more leisurely Rock Martin.

From our vantage point we drifted down into the *Uapaca kirikiana* woodland, muzhanjes a gogo, so many in fact that nothing and no one seemed to be interested in them. Pink Jacarandas and Cassias and Sennas added a delightful dash of colour to the woods. A pair of Boulder Chats was spotted and miombo regulars like Brubru, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird, Cardinal Woodpecker and Golden-tailed Woodpecker, a female Black Cuckooshrike, Green-capped Eremomela and Grey-backed Camaroptera. Birds were few and far between in the woodland and perversely started calling after nearly everyone had left. We heard tit parties but failed to find more than a lone Miombo Tit. Black-headed Oriole called continuously along with Black-backed Puffback, and both Orange-breasted Bush-shrike and Grey-headed Bush-shrike. No sign of owls or raptors other than a possible Wahlberg's Eagle high above. Even doves were scarce apart from the Emerald-spotted Wood-dove and the hoped-for Speckled Pigeon let us down. One unmistakable sound of summer was a Klaas's Cuckoo but that may well have been a resident rather than a new arrival. No one felt energetic enough to follow the example of the pair of klipspringers and climb to the top of the granite dome, where the Cape Buntings are usually encountered.

By 1130 we were all hot and tired but had enjoyed the experience. Our final list reached only 40 species but we did see Blue Waxbills and Rattling Cisticola as we drove away.

Ken Dixon

Birding in my Garden – October 2010

I experienced a great birding spectacle recently. I had made a mug of tea as it all began to happen. It was the best entertainment, sitting on a kitchen chair, drinking tea on the back veranda and watching the show! There had been a bit of rain about the previous evening – Sunday 24th. But that day was hot and steamy again with no significant cloud build-up. At about 4 p.m., I became aware of a lot of bird activity in my back garden, and to my surprise, saw swarms of flying ants [alate termites] invading the air. In minutes, there were birds flitting from tree to tree, hawking as they flew. I could hear their beaks clicking. There were legions of Dark-capped Bulbuls, two White-browed Robin-chats and two Kurrichane Thrushes. There is a youngish Natal Mahogany tree at the back and having lost its leaves, the new are just breaking out. It was fizzing with birds, which caused the third Kurrichane Thrush, brooding on a very comfortable nest in the cup of the tree's main branches, a great deal of anxiety. She stood up, calling anxiously to her mate eating ants on the ground. It is the second time this season that they have nested there. Sometime ago, I saw a Kurrichane Thrush chasing off a Little Sparrowhawk which I think had robbed the nest. The Kurrichane Thrushes did not return to the nest after that and it had been about a week since I noticed her back on the nest. There were Southern Masked-weavers and Golden Weavers. Two Golden Weaver males had a real bout of fisticuffs on the brick path. They fought for nearly a minute with their claws entangled, flapping, pecking, and rolling about. They disengaged and one chased the other off with great determination. I saw a male African Paradise-flycatcher in full plumage. He was a joy to watch flirting with his log tail as he swooped about. By this time, the dragon flies had arrived too. I could see them actually catching ants in the air. A Crested Barbet appeared. They are wandering minstrels of rags and patches, I always think. Then several Greater Blue-eared Starlings, a pair of Variable Sunbirds and an Amethyst Sunbird joined the party. I have been seeing and hearing Whyte's Barbets around for the first time in years. They did not join the feast, nor did the doves, who sat in a big Spathodea tree in the neighbouring garden, seemingly uninterested. When it is really damp and the flying ants swarm like smoke in the late afternoon and early evening, the doves generally come in flocks onto the front lawn and my

geriatric toads trundle out and stuff themselves till they can hardly crawl! As it gets darker, the birds leave and the bats come knifing in. A single Red-winged Starling arrived that afternoon. I don't often see them in this hoekie of Avondale. But he was too late! The action was over! The whole interlude lasted only about 30 minutes!

Aileen Robinson

Southern Cross Farm. October 2010

For the last three years since we first spotted them, we have eagerly awaited the warmer weather and the return of a pair of Red-throated Twinspots. At first they were shy and reclusive and were only spotted occasionally gathering nesting material in the garden.

Last year they were bolder and hopped onto the verandah early in the morning checking for crumbs. This year, however, has been very exciting as we have seen three males and two females eating together in the bird feeder, hopping about in the vegetable garden under the spray and eating the chicken meal. We have not been able to find their nest. Since the rains this week they have disappeared, as they usually do...

The garden is alive at this time of year with a multitude of birds coming to the birdbath. Among those seen are Greater Honeyguide, Southern Masked-weavers, Kurrichane Thrush, White-browed Robin-chat, Jameson's Firefinch, African Yellow White-eyes, Blue Waxbills and infrequently, Red-billed Firefinches. We have the African Golden Oriole, Black-headed Oriole, Orange-breasted Bush-shrike, Grey-headed Bush-shrike, Bar-throated Apalis, Yellow-breasted Apalis, Crested Barbet, Black-collared Barbet, White-crested Helmet-shrikes and Retz's Helmet-shrikes, Grey-backed Camaroptera, sunbirds, African Hoopoe and many more.

Heard singing but not seen are the Bearded Scrub-robin and the White-browed Scrub-robin.

To our surprise last season we were twice visited by Thick-billed Weavers who feasted on the fruits of the white stinkwood for a couple of days then vanished. Klaas's Cuckoo hangs around the garden all day calling and fluttering in the new leaves looking for insects. Calling regularly are the Black Cuckoo, African Emerald Cuckoo and Red-chested Cuckoos. We have a resident Brown-hooded Kingfisher and the Striped Kingfishers can be heard singing duets most mornings along with the less attractive shrieks of the Natal Spurfowls who have become very bold and strut on to the verandah when they think no one is about. Several African Pygmy-kingfishers have stunned themselves on the windows – sadly resulting in a couple of fatalities.

There is a pair of nesting African Fish-eagles with a juvenile along the river, which call at dawn and fly onto the sandbank to drink. Also on the river we have an African Finfoot. I have seen him regularly but only ever one, over the last four years. On the sandbank and in the shallows we see Black-winged Stilts, once a Black Heron, Water Thick-knee, Common Greenshank, Three-banded Plovers, African Wattled Lapwings, Common Sandpiper and two years ago one hundred and twenty Egyptian Goose visited for a few days.

Cattle Egrets follow the sheep. In the fields we have small groups of Abdim's Storks after the rains begin as well as visiting European Bee-eaters.

We have counted over 120 bird species over the four years we have been on the farm and that does not include swallows or swifts or those we missed!!

Susan Cottrell

Central Mozambique Expedition – 23-31 October 2010

This is a shortened version of the full report that will be submitted to *Honeyguide*.

Central Mozambique was hot in terms of both temperature and birding. On most days the maximum temperature was around 43°C and the number of lifers obtained by the seven of us who went on the this trip, ranged from 5 to about 30. Ken Dixon has birded in African countries to the north of us and spent a lot of time birding in the eastern districts of Zimbabwe, so probably had the least number of lifers. The other members of our party were Tony Alegria, Celesta and Joerg von Chamier, Teig Howson, Bazil Brent and I.

We left Harare after 7 a.m. on 23 October in 3 vehicles, as Celesta needed a vehicle to enable her to stay on for an extra week at Catapu. Our passage through the border took about an hour each way with an extra ½ hour for a visa on the outward journey, and reached the dirt road turnoff leading to Gorongosa Game Park from the N2 highway at about 4 p.m. From here Nhambita Camp, where we were booked in for the next 4 nights, was 8km away but after about 1km of bad corrugations the vehicle that Celesta was driving suffered from a failed left front shock absorber. So we drove on slowly and our host Pete van Zyl at Nhambita told us that he

could get a replacement shock installed. After we had settled into our tents under thatch we went for a short walk along the Gorongosa road. At this time of the year the surrounding forest and most of the forest that we travelled through in Mozambique consists of mixed lowland savannah woodland in late spring foliage. Here we picked up our first group lifer in the form of the Short-winged Cisticola and another lifer for some of us was the Brown-headed Parrot. That night we enjoyed our first taste of Mrs van Zyl's excellent cooking that would sustain us as packed lunches and camp suppers for the rest of our stay.

Day 2 was spent in Gorongosa Game Park which is 3km away. We arrived at the gate before 6 a.m. and spent the next 10 minutes rousing the guard and birding. We were issued with passes that we had to hand in at the reception at Chitengo Camp, 18km away, where we paid \$142 at an exchange rate of 35mts/\$ for 2 vehicles and 7 people to self-drive through the park. At Chitengo we spent a fruitless hour looking for the Black-and-white Flycatcher before exploring the park. Apart from lowland woodland this park has very attractive areas of extensive Ilala Palm forest and open grass and seasonally flooded plains with scattered pans. Oribi, reedbuck, waterbuck, bushbuck and warthog were very common and we also saw several Lichtenstein's hartebeest, a herd of about 60 elephant with many calves, kudu and a lone sable bull. According to Celesta and Joerg, game numbers appear to have increased significantly in the past year. We were struck by the large numbers of water birds at the drying pans where the highlights included Great White Pelican, Saddle-billed Stork and Spur-winged Goose. Highlights away from the pans included Black-bellied Korhaan, White-headed Vulture, Martial Eagle, several Bateleur, Senegal Lapwing, Collared Palm-thrush and Fan-tailed Widowbird.

Day 3 was the trip up Gorongosa Mountain so we had to be ready to leave by 4 a.m. Nhambita Camp specializes in these excursions as they have an arrangement with the local people to drive to within half an hour's walk of the patch of forest where the Green-headed Oriole is regularly seen. They provided us with 2 bird guides, who also acted as porters to carry our packed brunches and drinks. The journey took half an hour on good road to the turnoff onto a rough dirt road just beyond Gorongosa village. It then took 1½ hours to travel 15km on this dirt road where a 4x4 vehicle with good clearance is needed. The walk to the forest then took about an hour as we had frequent birding stops. On the walk, Bazil and I were very fortunate to see 2 of the very rare Lesser Seedcracker, which I initially mistook for African Firefinch, but which were later identified by their totally deep red heads and tails and brown backs. Slash and burn fields led right up to the edge of the forest and we only had to walk another 300m into the forest to reach our destination. By this time it was about 7 a.m. and we soon started to hear and get glimpses of the Green-headed Oriole. After about 3 hours of neck-craning and moving from one position to another we all managed to see the oriole clearly as it paused for several minutes at a time in a couple of places during its circular route through the middle canopy. Other highlights included Eastern Bronze-naped Pigeon that were seen very clearly, Tambourine Dove, Livingstone's Turaco and a Pallid Honeyguide, that was heard but only occasionally glimpsed.

We left the forest about 11 a.m. and most of us saw a pair of Anchieta's Tchagra about 5m away – another Pallid Honeyguide was detected high up in a tree a few minutes later and then shortly after that we heard an unusual and attractive call. This call emanated from another Lesser Seedcracker and we were able to confirm the call from ipods that some of us had. Those who had still not seen this lifer then spent many fruitless minutes trying to find it as it continued to call from dense foliage as it moved up a tree. On the drive out we stopped to walk about 800m to a spectacular waterfall where we saw a pair of Mountain Wagtail. A total of 44 species were identified on the mountain. That afternoon we drove to a scenic bluff overlooking the Pungwe River for sundowners.

Day 4 saw us return to the game park early and those that had still not seen the Black-and-white Flycatcher were very determined to do so and another fruitless hour or so was spent looking for it. We then took a 3km walk out of the camp and the park to the Pungwe River. We saw some interesting birds at the Pungwe but nothing unusual. Three people then made a second incursion into the park, where they revisited the Rio Mussicadzi pools with their large numbers of herons, egrets and storks and drove past the Lion House and on through the fertile plains to the Miradouro do Sungwe, a series of shallow pans on the Sungwe River. Although they would have benefited from the use of a telescope, they were able to see hundreds of ducks, geese and waders. On the muddy margins and in the grass were found Greater Painted-snipe, Long-toed Lapwing and Grey Crowned Crane, but the star of the show however, was an

African Marsh-harrier quartering the longer grass to the west. The total bird count for the park was 160 species. The rest of us drove slowly back to Nhambita where we visited the local hot springs in the afternoon, although cloudy weather had moved in – the highlight was a Southern Banded Snake-eagle. The total cost per person at Nhambita Camp came to \$167 and included a \$20 per night donation for accommodation, the cost of food, drinks, tips and the trip up the mountain.

On Day 5 we departed for our next destination at Catapu – 220km to the north along the N2 highway. We decided to take a packed lunch and visit a place called ‘the quarry’ on the dirt road out and then the hot springs before we set off. Unfortunately the weather was overcast with occasional drizzle which reduced visibility, so we failed to get a clear view of a Yellow-bellied Hyliota that was claimed to have been identified in the company of some Southern Hyliota at the quarry by our guide. However we did pick up Eurasian Golden Oriole, Thick-billed Cuckoo and Western Violet-backed Sunbird. At the hot springs, we again saw the Southern Banded Snake-eagle and we all heard the Eastern Nicator. The total bird count for Nhambita was 102 species. We had lunch at the quarry and set off for Catapu.

We got to M'phingwe Lodge at Catapu, which is run by Ant and Pat White, at about 3.30 p.m., settled in, had a beer and went for a 4km walk along some of the paths through the local forest. These paths have trees labelled with numbers by Meg Coates-Palgrave and can be identified by referring to the Catapu tree list. The forest around the camp consists of mixed low-land trees and is not tall evergreen forest – the nearest evergreen forest is about 80km away by road. The highlights of this walk were the panga panga tree, red duiker, suni and Green Malkoha.

At the start of Day 6 we drove to Coutada 12, a hunting concession, and the patch of evergreen forest. We had been told by Ant White that Coutada 12 has an 800m stretch of forest about 60km drive away where the White-chested Alethe had been seen regularly. At Coutada 12 the birding was really exciting, as we first came across Woodward's Batis followed shortly by the Plain-backed Sunbird. I was struck by the impression of the blue throat of this sunbird as it looked like a navy blue stain on pale yellow paper. Other highlights included African Crowned Eagle, Crested Guinea fowl and Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher. From Coutada 12 we travelled another 20km to the 10km stretch of tall evergreen forest where we added Livingstone's Flycatcher and several other forest species to our bird count. We continued on the circular route to Caia on the Zambezi River for fuel and then back to Catapu on the N2 – a total distance of about 120km. That afternoon we drove to some pans about 3km away from M'phingwe where the highlight was a pair of Green Sandpiper.

On Day 7 we returned to Coutada 12, where we managed to sneak up very slowly and quietly on an East Coast Akalat (Gunning's Robin) which Celesta managed to photograph well. We then stopped several times in the evergreen forest where we had some great birding. Here we added Speckle-throated Woodpecker, African Broadbill, 2 female Black-and-white Flycatcher (at last!) and Chestnut-fronted Helmet-shrike. That afternoon we crossed the Zambezi at Caia to visit a lodge with a good view of some pans from the top of a hill, but did not see any interesting birds.

Ant gave us directions to some significant patches of tall miombo woodland on Catapu that we visited on Day 8 and which we followed up with a return to Coutada 12. In the miombo we added various species to our list but we failed to find the Alethe at Coutada 12, which was very quiet compared to our previous visits. During our stay at M'phingwe we had good sightings of birds and mammals that visited the two large ground-level bird baths that were conveniently placed a few metres from easy chairs at the restaurant. Here we saw red duiker, African Goshawk, Tambourine Dove, Scaly-throated Honeyguide, Black-bellied Starling and Red-backed Mannikin drinking. Nyala were also seen on a couple of occasions during our drives, the weird cries of tree hyrax were heard every night and I saw African Crowned Eagle three times on day 7. We also noted that the Yellow-throated Petronia that we saw in Mozambique had significant patches of yellow on their throats. That afternoon 6 of us were taken by the Whites on a very interesting tour of their sustainable logging operation and sawmill, while I deserted the group to identify some trees. As I walked along the Suni Path to the pans I heard a Red-capped Robin-chat calling.

Because we needed to travel about 700km back to Harare on Day 9 we left after an early breakfast. The total bird count at Catapu was 119 – one bird was seen along the road that was

not seen elsewhere. We got back to Harare late that afternoon. Our total Mozambique count was 233 species.

For me this trip was the fulfilment of my greatest ambition and probably cost me not more than \$400. My gratitude goes to everyone for a great team effort, to those who provided their vehicles and had a long way to drive and especially to Tony for organising it.

Richard Dennison

A visit to Chishakwe, Save Valley. November 2010

Between 12 and 15 November 2010 a small party was invited to “check out the birds” on this section of the Save Valley Conservancy which includes the headquarters of what was Devuli Ranch some 40kms west of Birchenough Bridge. The party was made up mostly of oldies who had done time in the service of BLZ. It was HOT and it was DRY. The country was not at its best and yet we put together a list of almost 180 birds. Once the rains come it should be possible to add another 50 species over the same period. The invitation was from Lisa Jane Campbell and we were most hospitably cared for by Duke Cloete and Nicky – now hopefully all new recruits for BLZ.

The habitat was essentially broad-leafed woodland, mostly mopane with belts of acacia, some rocky kopjes (should they have Panga-panga trees on them?) and a couple of sandy river beds including that of the Masaizi which runs eastwards from the Bikita hills towards the west bank of the Save. This has a large dam and downstream, it had the odd pool and stretches of well developed riverine woodland with much bigger trees and underlying, but still leafless, patches of thicket. Virtually no open area except along the airstrip on which we saw nothing: so no larks, no pipits and only one cisticola – the Rattling Cisticola. The area was well stocked with game and the lodge area alongside the river where they cater primarily for photographic safaris was beautifully appointed.

There were lots of big raptors but not many little ones. Nothing unexpected but Bat Hawk is always nice and the in-between plumages of adolescents always give troubles so there may have been more than we recorded. The in-between African Fish-eagles even had in-between voices. Verreaux’s Eagle-owl is always a special – “Just look for the silhouette against the evening sky” said Duke and *Bingo!* there was a pair. Water birds included four Woolly-necked Storks from the South East Lowveld population that Angus Anthony wrote up in Honeyguide some years ago. Three Hadeda Ibis were recorded: why in that dry habitat when they have still done nothing to take over Harare.

I was most impressed by the number of Yellow-billed Oxpeckers and Tony Alegria – who must again be thanked and complimented for putting the whole trip together – and a couple of others got a single¹ Red-billed Oxpecker. Eurasian Golden Oriole rather than African was different and we all heard and saw African Cuckoo. The coucals all called in double time making them Burchell’s Coucal. We did not get African Mourning Doves. Little Swifts were nesting even under the thatched roof of a lean-to verandah attached to a shed and those big lazy Mosque Swallows are always welcome for those of us from the Highveld. White-breasted Cuckoo-shrikes showed that they are not dependant on miombo/msasa woodland and Boulder Chats and Bearded Scrub-robins are good on any list. As the supposed LBJ expert my only contribution was Burnt-necked Eremomela in a couple of *Acacia_tortilis* trees near the biggest baobab in Zimbabwe. The only warbling warblers that had arrived from Europe were a few Willow Warblers.

The six-hour trip down from Harare and back again was punctuated by brief stops at Widgeon Pan [Wigeon] near the 32km [38km] peg on the Chivhu/Gutu-Mupandawana road but my hopes of getting to Old Denga from near Silveira Mission to find eastern district specials west of the Save near Bikita were once again dashed. Widgeon was burned nothingness without a drop of water but the green grass was coming through. Great conditions for actually seeing African Quailfinch: they really are pretty little birds whose red bill, big white eye stripes top and bottom, black chest and barred and tan bellies are never seen as they get up at your feet, ‘clink-clink’, and fly away from you. A Greater Kestrel nearby was the last tick for the trip.

Alex Masterson

Contact particulars for others who are interested. management@chishakwe.com

¹ More than one present

Binocular Talk by Mike Begbie 18 November 2010

The most common binocular design used to day is the Keplerian design. This configuration has the disadvantage that the image is inverted. There are different ways of correcting this: Porro prism binoculars and Roof prism binoculars. Both designs have their own way of correcting the image inversion, the main difference between the two being the configuration. Roof prism binoculars have objective lenses approximately in line with the eyepieces, whilst Porro prism binoculars are z-shaped, with the objective lenses offset from the eyepieces.

Both designs will occasionally need the prisms re-aligned – Roof prisms much less often, but when they do it is more difficult and expensive than Porro prism designs.

Main things to consider:

Magnification: A magnification of factor 7 produces an image as if one were 7 times closer to the object. A larger magnification leads to a smaller field of view.

Objective diameter: The diameter of the objective lens determines how much light can be gathered to form an image. The larger the second binocular number, the brighter the image as well as the sharper the image. An 8x40, then, will produce a brighter and sharper image than an 8x25. It is customary to categorize binoculars by the magnification x the objective diameter; e.g. 7x50.

If you wear glasses another thing to consider is eye relief. The eye of an eyeglass wearer is typically further from the eye piece which necessitates a longer eye relief in order to still see the entire field of view.

Some binoculars have adjustable magnification – Zoom binoculars. They are very fragile and hard to repair, you should avoid these.

Since a typical binocular has 6 to 10 optical elements with special characteristics and up to 16 air-to-glass surfaces, binocular manufacturers use different types of optical coatings for technical reasons and to improve the image they produce. The presence of any coatings is typically denoted on binoculars by the following terms (in order of lowest to highest quality):

Coated optics, Fully coated, Multi-coated, Fully multi-coated.

Avoid any 'ruby-coated' optics.

Testing Your Binoculars:

Pick up the instrument and compare its overall workmanship with other brands; some will seem better made than others. Hold the two barrels and try to twist them slightly. If there is any play in the joints or anything rattles, reject the pair. Move the barrels together and apart; the hinges should work smoothly, with steady resistance. So should the focusing motions for both eyepieces.

Next, look into the large objective lenses (the wrong end of the binoculars) with a light shining over your shoulder so the inside of the barrel is illuminated. Reject the pair if a film of dirt is visible on any glass surface (dust on the outside is not a problem). Look at the two reflections of the light from the front and back of the objective lens, which will appear to float a little above and behind it.

If the lens is antireflection coated – as it should be – both reflections will have a blue, purple, amber, or greenish cast, instead of white. Move the binoculars around until you see a third reflection deep inside, from the first surface of the prisms. This too should be coloured. Then, still looking in the wrong end, aim the eyepiece at a nearby light bulb and move the glasses around to view a row of internal reflections. The ratio of coloured to white images suggests the percentage of coated to uncoated surfaces.

Don't take vague advertising terms such as "fully coated" too literally; this could mean one lens is "fully" coated and the rest are not.

Turn the binoculars around and repeat your examination of lenses and coatings from the eye end.

Then, holding the glasses a foot or so in front of you, aim them at the sky or a bright wall. Look at the little disks of light seen floating in the eyepieces. These are the exit pupils. If they have four shadowy edges, rendering them squarish instead of round, the prisms are not the best and are cutting off some light. In good binoculars, the exit pupils are uniformly bright to their round edges.

Finally, look through the binoculars and focus each side separately. A noticeably filmy or grey image indicates an unacceptable contrast problem. If you have to wear glasses, make sure you can get your eyes close enough to view the full field with the glasses on. If your glasses do not correct for astigmatism, you can take them off.

Each barrel should point in the same direction! If you see a double image or feel eyestrain, you have a reject. The eyestrain would soon become a real headache.

A star at night is the most stringent test of optical quality, so try the binoculars on real stars if you get a chance. Centre it in the field of view. Looking with one eye at a time, can you bring it to a perfect point focus? Or, as you turn the knob, do tiny rays start growing in one direction before they have shrunk all the way in the direction at right angles?

After running through these tests with several binoculars, you will have an excellent idea of their relative value!

A big thank you to Mike Begbie for giving us so much new insight on binos!

Nick Hart

MATABELELAND

Cawston Block. 29 to 31 October

At the invitation of Peter Johnstone, owner of Rosslyn Safaris, 14 members of Matabeleland Branch made their way out to Cawston Block on Friday 29 October 2010. We were to spend the weekend compiling a list of species seen, to update the Species List compiled by our Branch in recent years.

Friday evening saw the arrival of not only members from Bulawayo and Victoria Falls but also the most welcome, much needed, first rains of the season.

As the amount of rain that had fallen and the condition of the roads across the ranch was unknown, it was decided that Saturday morning would be spent walking in the area surrounding the camp itself, or along the main road leading to the homestead. Members scurried off in all directions, returning for a brunch. Excitement was in the air, as some photographs of special sightings had been taken. The spotting of Bradfield's Hornbills came as a welcome surprise. The Manager of Cawston, Brian Deacon returned with the news that driving to more distant areas would be possible. We all climbed into vehicles after our brunch, and ventured into the area along the Umgusa River. Even though the afternoon was incredibly hot, some wonderful sightings were made. The Little Bee-eaters flitting around catching their prey in mid-air, whilst the other members of their family – the European Bee-eaters made their audible flight overhead. A pair of Black-chested Snake-eagles showed us where they were nesting. An interesting afternoon culminating in a lovely tea served back at the Camp.

Sundowners on the camp deck overlooking a waterhole where game were quenching their thirst, watching the sun go down was the perfect end to a perfect 'birding' day.

Dinner was not only scrumptious, it was also an extremely happy affair with everyone enjoying the 'fellowship' that comes with these outings. After dinner, Rod Tourle gave us a presentation of his recent trip to South Africa where he had been 'volunteered' to be the climber to the nests of White-backed Vultures and White-headed Vultures. The EWT needed assistance in getting to the nests in order to tag the chicks for research purposes. Rod certainly seems to have had the most thrilling experiences, and in so doing has himself volunteered his services for next year.

Sunday dawned and there was a small group of extremely 'early birders'. After early morning tea, to safeguard against the still damp roads, it was decided as few vehicles as possible would be used. The Blairs filled their safari vehicle to capacity, and the overflow followed in another. A Booted Eagle was kind enough to show himself. The waterhole we reached was alive with the sounds and flight of many species. A small raptor miraculously spotted sitting in a tree whose branches constantly blew in the breeze, added lively debate to our outing. The birding was once more excellent, as well as the game viewing, with a herd of tsessebe being the highlight.

After another fantastic brunch, sadly it was time to depart from this little piece of Paradise.

A preliminary update of the species list indicates that whilst we all had the most marvellous time, we fulfilled our ambition and added 31 species to the existing list of species seen on previous visits.

We thank Peter Johnstone and Lyn, Brian and Eileen Deacon and their staff for their tremendous hospitality at Cawston Block, and for affording our members the opportunity to take a breakaway.

Our thanks also go to Julia Dupree and Jean Cranston for organising the outing. Their menus were a delight, and their organisation from start to finish, ensuring all were well fed is greatly admired, as well as totally appreciated.

Cecilia Hubbard

Owls. 12 November

Some time back Mashonaland members had the pleasure of hearing Tony Alegria give his 3-part presentation on 'Birds of the Night', including owls, nightjars and others. On Friday 12 November, 25 Matabeleland members and friends gathered at The Boma at Hillside Dams to watch Cecilia Hubbard project a modified version of Tony's presentation on owls. When we selected the venue we thought it was very appropriate and hoped that during the course of the evening we might hear the resident Spotted Eagle-owl. But ZESA had other ideas – though we did try to convince ourselves that the background thrumming was a persistent nightjar and not a generator! Despite this hitch the bar and restaurant staff gave excellent service and it was a very pleasant evening. Cecilia/Tony's presentation was interesting and well illustrated, covering everything about owls from their classification, morphology, feeding and breeding to myths. We have such a wonderful selection of animals in Zimbabwe that we tend to forget about the wider world, so it was interesting to learn that there are over 200 species of owls in the order Strigiformes, ranging from the tiny Elf Owl, which weighs a mere 31g and is 13.5cm long, to the very large Eurasian Eagle-owl, weighing 4.5kg and varying in length from 60 – 71cm. We also learnt that owls are divided into 2 families – typical owls and Barn owls; they are raptors; are mostly solitary and nocturnal but there are exceptions. For example the Burrowing Owl is unusual as it may be active during the day and also nest underground in abandoned burrows. And did you know that the group noun for owls is a parliament? Altogether a fascinating feast of facts! We look forward to the follow-up presentation on nightjars.

Adele Edwards

TAIL FEATHERS

Hadedda sighting at Mwanga Lodge / Bally Vaughn Game Farm 23km Peg Shamva Rd

On Friday the 22nd October at 0600hrs I was sitting in our garden at Mwanga Lodge in Bally Vaughan Game Farm, when I heard an odd-sounding Trumpeter Hornbill in the distance, and thought, that it must be a young bird, because it sounds like a Hadedda. The bird flew closer and I was amazed to find that it was a lone Hadedda Ibis flying down the Dumvurugwe stream (a tributary of the Mubvinsi River) between Mermaid's Pool and Bally Vaughan Bird and Game Sanctuary.

The bird was flying fairly high along the river, calling repeatedly, as if looking for company. It flew backwards and forwards along this stretch of the river for the next hour (4 times), before disappearing upstream past Mermaids, heading west. It has not been back since. This is our first record of Hadedda in the area. I am not aware of other Hadedda sightings around Harare, have there been any?

Gordon Putterill putterill@mango.zw

... Hadedda Ibis around Harare and the highveld

Unlike the situation in South Africa the Hadedda Ibis has (as yet) failed to expand its range onto the plateau. But there are some records in Recent Reports in *Honeyguide*.

The first is of birds at Kutsaga and nearby Godavery Farm on 2 and 7 October 1988 when two were heard and one seen; as Tony Tree wrote, 'the provenance of these birds must remain a mystery unless they were escapes from a wildfowl collection.' This was followed by one at Stratford Estate near Chivero on 1 & 2 February 1991 and on 7 May 1992 a bird passed eastwards over Borrowdale.

Down in Bulawayo a bird was found at Hillside Dams on 20 August 1989 and was possibly a wanderer from the lowveld where they had been extending their range at that time. Two were found at Aisleby on 25/30 June and 14 August 1994, where they remained until the dry

conditions of October forced them to move on. Birds reappeared there in July 1996 and again in September and October and sporadically in subsequent years.

But back in the Harare area none have been reported since the 1992 record and it remains a vagrant; even in Bulawayo, though more regular, there hasn't been any consolidation or increase in the population and it appears to simply visit and then disappear.

Ian Riddell

Crested Barbet

At the beginning of the rains in October, a pair of Crested Barbets, *Trachyphonus vaillantii*, was nesting in a hollow in an exotic Syringa tree at the BLZ premises. The nest contained three nestlings which were still very young. On a number of occasions I observed the birds flying to and fro quite busily finding food for their young in the garden. On my arrival at work on 1st November, I was saddened to see that the branch in which the Barbets had their nest had collapsed, killing all the nestlings. I have not seen the Barbets in the garden since that incident.

Patience Shito Education Department Student

NOTICEBOARD

BLZ Library

The Library has moved into its new premises! Researchers, bring along your laptops! We welcome NUST Library Student Allen Gandiwa to BLZ for his field work year.

Dorothy Wakeling, Librarian

Southern African Internet Birding Links

Those of you subscribing to SABirdnet will have seen this new ejournal. For everyone else here is the link:

OO [=Ornithological Observations, the new ejournal which is a joint initiative of BirdLife South Africa and the ADU] --- see the website <http://oo.adu.org.za> ---

Also, this is another e-zine link, for your interest:

"The Birder Online"

Our e-zine has a strong conservation angle and we run articles mainly about conserving wild birds as well as conservation projects run by various NGOs, threats to birds, etc.

Bronwyn Howard

Editor - The Birder

E-mail: editor@thebirderonline.com

Web site: www.thebirderonline.com

Garden Bird Survey

There have been a few queries about filling in of the Garden Bird Survey form. Members are unsure what to put if they see a bird more than once a week but less than every day. I have asked the scrutineer and he advises that if it is seen regularly then it should be recorded as 1D. So come on members, please participate in this survey – it really makes one notice what is in the garden and there are quite a few surprises! If you would like these forms I can send them by e-mail or ask the office to post them if you let me know.

Carolyn rolly@zol.co.zw

For Sale at the BLZ office:

We have beautiful T-Shirts and Caps on Sale at the office. We are offering all sizes of T- Shirts from size 12 for the children, to XXX-large.

Sylvia Muzavazi – Finance and Admin. Manager

Monavale Calendar – US\$2.00 or 6 for US\$10.00

This stunning calendar is available from BLZ Office, WEZ Shop, COSMO 04-304298 or 308382