

THE BABBLER

Newsletter of



BirdLife Zimbabwe

The BirdLife International Partner in Zimbabwe

ISSUE # 124 – June/July 2015

Committee	MASHONALAND (Code 04)	MATABELELAND (Code 09)
Chairperson	Tony Alegria 0772-438697 tonyalegria47@gmail.com 490375 (h)	Cecilia Hubbard 0772-433733 ceilhubbard@yoafrica.com 285666
Vice Chairperson	Dave Rockingham-Gill 882412 (h) rgill@zol.co.zw 0774-605314	John Brebner 0782-781108 brebnerj@acolchem.co.zw 242634
Secretary	Linda Fussell 0772-364423 fussell@zol.co.zw 333896 (h)	Marina Jackson 0778-021818 mjackson@gatorzw.com 230264
Treasurer	Debbie Wiggins 0772-252651 wigpd2015@gmail.com 882851 (h)	Christina Gillott 0712-862477 christina.gillott@gmail.com
Members	James Ball 0772-310351 jameszwe@gmail.com 481351 (h) Andy Fussell 333896 (h) fussell@zol.co.zw	Jean Cranston 0733-005574 cranston@gatorzw.com 242921
National Membership Secretary	Carolyn Dennison 0772-210240 747567 (h) CarolynDennison@birdlifezimbabwe.org	
Babbler Editor	Fiona Greiffenberg 0772-224248 fiona6@zol.co.zw 336663 (h)	

National Office

Office hours: Monday to Friday 8.30 – 4.30 **until further notice**
35 Clyde Road, Eastlea, P O Box RVL100, Runiville, Harare, Zimbabwe

Telephone: 04 – 481496

E-mail: birds@zol.co.zw

Website: www.birdlifezimbabwe.org also www.facebook.com/BirdLifeZimbabwe

Chief Executive Officer
Finance/Administration Manager:
Conservation Officer: Special Species
Environmental Education
In charge of IBA/KBA's
Messenger:

Julia Pierini
Sylvia Muzavazi
Fadzai Matsvimbo
Innocent Magunje
Togarasei Fakarayi
Vengai Dengu

Useful Contacts:

Rarities Committee: Ian Riddell gemsaf@mango.zw 0772-117054
Ringing Programme: Julia Pierini JuliaPierini@birdlifezimbabwe.org 0772-894562
BLZ Library: piumosso@zol.co.zw 304298; 481496
Mashonaland South: Margaret Parrock 068-22005 or her daughter Coralee 0772-739370
Eastern Districts: Peter Gwidibira 0773-524844 pgwidibira@gmail.com
Mashonaland East Natural History Society: Chairman Peter Hadingham 04-497035
Secretary Colin de Beer 0279-23931 jcdb1936@gmail.com
Honeyguide production: Julia Duprée daliadupree@gmail.com 09-246269

SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION

****SUBSCRIPTIONS NOW DUE****

Membership subscriptions are now due. Even if you don't attend meetings and outings, your membership is really important and supports our goal to protect biodiversity and conserve birds and their habitats through education, lobbying decision-makers and interaction with international organisations.

In addition, your involvement with data collection through atlassing and submission of records is invaluable. As a member you get the newsletter, *Babbler*, every two months and two issues of *Honeyguide*, our internationally acclaimed journal, every membership year. All for a very reasonable annual fee. Donations towards these or any of our projects are always much appreciated.

Please note: Council agreed not to increase the fees for the 4th year. However a number of our members prefer their newsletter, *Babbler*, in printed form and it was decided those members be requested to pay an extra \$5 per year to assist with the costs of printing and distribution. This publication is now much improved and more interesting with colour pictures.

Individual/Family members (incl. children under 17)	US\$ 25.00
Pensioners (65 & over), Students	15.00
Youth Club	5.00
Schools (high density)	25.00
Schools (private), Educational Institutions	50.00
Rest of Africa	40.00
Rest of World	50.00
Corporate members	*75.00

*Contact Julia Pierini JuliaPierini@birdlifezimbabwe.org for info about inclusion under 'Birding in Zimbabwe' on our website.

Payment can be made direct to the BLZ office at 35 Clyde Road, Eastlea, Harare or by deposit into **BirdLife Zimbabwe** at **NMB Bank, Borrowdale branch, Account No. 260092014** or **BirdLife Zimbabwe Mashonaland, Chisipite branch of CABS, Account No. 1002399955.**

It is VERY IMPORTANT please that you include YOUR name on the deposit slip so it appears on the bank statement AND advise Carolyn Dennison by e-mail or phone, or your payment may not be recorded.

Please contact me, the national membership secretary, for all membership-related issues – new, renewals, payments, change of details, queries

CarolynDennison@birdlifezimbabwe.org

And look on our Facebook page for great pictures and recent bits of birding news -

www.facebook.com/BirdLifeZimbabwe and our informative website www.birdlifezimbabwe.org

Special Notices

BIRDLIFE ZIMBABWE

Notice is hereby given that the Thirty-fourth Annual General Meeting of BirdLife Zimbabwe will be held at Victoria Falls Safari Lodge Conference Centre at 2 p.m. on Saturday 27th June 2015

AGENDA

1. Apologies
2. Confirmation of the Minutes of the AGM held on 31st May 2014
3. Matters arising from the Minutes
4. President's Report
5. Chief Executive Officer's Report
6. Treasurer's Report
7. Research and Conservation Reports
8. Water Bird Counts
9. Education Report
10. Membership Report
11. Publications Reports
12. Branch Reports
 - 12.1 Mashonaland
 - 12.2 Matabeleland
13. Election of Officers

The Office of the President and Vice President will become vacant. Nominations for these positions can be sent to the Secretary.
14. Any Other Business
15. Place and Date of Next Annual General Meeting

Proxy Forms are available from Sylvia Muzavazi sylvia@blz.co.zw at the BLZ Office. These may be handed in at the Office by the 25th June 2015 or given to the Hon. Secretary by a member attending the AGM.

Can you imagine the African skies



devoid of **Vultures?**

Catastrophic poisoning events across Africa are driving local populations of vultures toward extinction. Six species of vulture are found in Zimbabwe (White-backed, Cape, Lappet-faced, Hooded, White-headed and Palmnut) and this group of globally threatened birds have an extremely important ecological niche to fill by removing carcasses, curbing the spread of disease and the proliferation of feral animals. The scourge of poaching affecting Africa is closely linked to the poisoning phenomenon with poachers lacing carcasses to target predators (eg. jackals, lions) which pose a danger to livestock and deliberately poisoning elephants and rhinos for their ivory and horns. Vultures are also sought after in the traditional medicine (muthi) trade and this comprises a further major threat to the species, with birds killed using poisons and other means of hunting to satisfy this demand.

27th June 2015
ALL WELCOME!

**BirdLife Zimbabwe is holding a
Vulture Awareness Day
9am to 1pm at the
Victoria Falls Safari Lodge Conference Centre,
Victoria Falls**

Speakers:
Prof Peter Mundy, N.U.S.T.
Dr Chris Foggin, VF Wildlife Trust
Dr Roger Parry, VF Wildlife Trust
Josephine Mundava, N.U.S.T.
ZPWMA Ecologist
Martin Taylor, Special Projects (BirdLife South Africa)
Entry to this exciting initiative is FREE
Join us and be a part of the solution!

28th June 2015

6.30am

Join the Vulture Awareness Campaign and run the Vic Falls Marathon (or Half Marathon) with BirdLife Zimbabwe Youth or walk the optional 7km

Or if you're not into running/walking

Join BirdLife Zimbabwe members and go birding in and around the Falls! Bring your binos...

27th

3-5pm:

BirdLife Zimbabwe Annual General Meeting
BECOME A MEMBER AND ATTEND!



NB. A private bus has been organized to travel from Harare on 26 June to Vic Falls via Bulawayo for the Vulture Awareness Day and will return on 29 June.
USD50 return trip from Harare, USD25 return trip from Bulawayo.

For more information on this and the Vulture Awareness Day, please email: jullapierini@birdlifetzimbabwe.org

Mr Tony Wood
The President
BirdLife Zimbabwe
35 Clyde Rd
Eastlea

28 April 2015

Dear Tony,

Donation from proceeds of BirdLife 2015 Calendar

It was fantastic to receive the donation of US\$1,627.00 from the sale of the BirdLife calendars.

Thank you to all your members who bought calendars. Please note our special appreciation to Julia Pierini for her huge involvement in the project. There are many of us who now look forward to the publication of each year's calendar.

The donation really helps towards the expenses incurred in our efforts to preserve The Woodlands, not only for the sake of your members monthly walk !, but for the enjoyment and appreciation of all citizens of Harare.

Again, thank you to BirdLife for this support of The Mukuvisi Woodlands.

We look forward to working together even more in the future.

Yours sincerely

Simon Pitt
Chairman

Branch Activities

Mashonaland Branch

BirdLife Zimbabwe Mashonaland Branch organises regular bird walks for its members and non-members free of charge (however there may be entry fees e.g. National Parks or a tip required depending on the location). For further information please contact Tony Alegria, tonyalegria47@gmail.com, 0772 438697, (h) 490375

BirdLife Zimbabwe (BLZ) Mashonaland Calendar of Events JUNE 2015

Saturday 6 th June 2015	Marlborough Vlei Walk	07.00 a.m.
Sunday 7 th June 2015	Mukuvisi Woodlands Walk	07.00 a.m.
Saturday 13 th June 2015	Botanic Garden, Harare	07.00 a.m.
	Meet at the car park of the Botanic Garden off Fifth Street	
Thursday 18 th June 2015	BirdLife Presentation	17.30 – 18.00 p.m.
	Namibia and Etosha Pan by Eve Roehl	
Sunday 21 st June 2015	Monavale Vlei Walk	07.00 a.m.
Sunday 28 th June 2015	Outing – Ewanrigg Botanic Gardens	07.00 am.
	Meet at CABS car park, Northridge Park, Borrowdale at 07.00 a.m.	

Friday 26th – Monday 29th June 2015 **BLZ AGM TO BE HELD AT VICTORIA FALLS**
For further information please contact Julia Pierini, e-mail: juliapierini@birdlifezimbabwe.org.

BirdLife Zimbabwe (BLZ) Mashonaland Calendar of Events JULY 2015

Saturday 4 th July 2015	Marlborough Vlei Walk	07.00 a.m.
Sunday 5 th July 2015	Mukuvisi Woodlands Walk	07.00 a.m.
Saturday 11 th July 2015	Rainham Dam Meet at the car park at Prince Edward School promptly at 7 a.m.	07.00 a.m.
Sunday 12 th July 2015	Lake Chivero Walk Meet at the car park at Prince Edward School promptly at 7 a.m.	07.00 a.m.
Thursday 16 th July 2015	BirdLife Presentation The Second Great Extinction (in 65 million years) By Carol Thompson Community Technology Development Trust – Zimbabwe Northern Arizona University – USA	17.30 – 18.00 p.m.
Sunday 19 th July 2015	Monavale Vlei Walk Meet on the BS Leon side of Fenella Drive, at the platform.	07.00 a.m.
Sunday 26 th July 2015	Outing – Hideaway, Darwendale Dam Meet at Prince Edward School car park, Josiah Tongagara Avenue, promptly at 07.00. Water bird count. Bring a picnic/braai lunch. \$5 entry fee at the gate.	07.00 a.m.

Evening Meetings are on the 3rd Thursday of each month 5.30 p.m. 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.

Directions to regular venues:

CABS Northridge Park – From town drive along Borrowdale Road, turn right into Whitwell, next right into Ridgeway North, next right into Northend Road and first right into Northridge Close. Drive to the end of the road and go through a security boom into Northridge Park.

Marlborough Vlei – Meet at the bottom of Princess Margaret Road, off Harare Drive and follow the road round to the left. Park on the short road midway along the bottom of Princess Margaret.

Mukuvisi Woodlands – Turn off the Chiremba Road into Ford Road (opposite Queensdale shops) cross over Longford Avenue and bear left down to the T- junction on Blatherwick Road. 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.

Chivero and Rainham Dam – Meet at Prince Edward School car park on Josiah Tongagara Ave.

Monavale Vlei – Meet on the B.S Leon side of Fenella Drive.

Matabeleland Branch

FUTURE ACTIVITIES

- 23 – 25 May: Annual Dassie Survey. Contact the Black Eagle Survey coordinators (John Brebner and Cecilia Hubbard) for more details.
- Sunday 21 June: 4.00 p.m. Martin Taylor, Special Projects Programme Manager for BLSA, would like to meet Matabeleland members and give a short presentation. This will be hosted by Tom and Jean Cranston, 13 Bunting Close, Burnside, Bulawayo. Tea and coffee will be served and members are welcome to bring their own refreshments.
- Sunday 19 June: 10:00 a.m. Waterfowl count at Aisleby Sewage Farm. Participants to bring a picnic basket and their own chairs.
- Saturday 22 August: 3:00 p.m. Adele Edwards will give a talk on birds and their migration, at her home 6 Corney Road, Morningside. Tea and coffee will be served. Members are welcome to bring their own refreshments.

Other Areas

Mashonaland South – Margaret Parrock 068-22005 or 0773-263673

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 0773-524844 or pgwidibira@gmail.com for details.

Lowveld – contact Clive Stockil 0772-219204 or clive@chilogorge.com

National Office

Appointment of Chief Executive Officer

I am delighted to announce the appointment of Julia Pierini as Chief Executive Officer of BirdLife Zimbabwe.

This appointment, effective 1st April 2015, comes as a culmination of three years of extremely hard work and dedicated effort made by Julia in her position as Vice President and I know you will all join me in thanking her profusely for her untiring labours and wish her well for the many challenges that still lie ahead for her and BirdLife.

Tony Wood

President BLZ

Appointment of Peta Ditchburn

In February 2015, BLZ Matabeleland member, Peta Ditchburn was appointed to be the BLZ Special Species Survey Co-ordinator.

Her role will be to:

1. Update special species info to send to members (Mailchimp via Carolyn) and the public and to post on the BLZ website, Facebook site (Julia P), *Babbler* (Fiona G) and *Honeyguide* (Colin Baker).
2. Communicate with members of BLZ and the public to encourage and remind them to participate in the special species survey,
3. Collate special species data and update the BLZ database.
4. Liaise with Fadzai Matsvimbo regarding the current special species database stored at BLZ office.

A new email address has been created for the position: specialspecies@blz.co.zw

Grateful thanks to Peta! Please all members can you support Peta in her work and email her for the special species form and send her your sightings.

RECENT REPORTS AND SIGHTINGS

NATIONAL

Protecting Harare's Wetland Ecosystems for Nature and the City's People

Mid-March to end April 2015

The Goal and Objectives are repeated here to remind readers of the purpose of this Project!

“Lessons learnt from the successful conservation, restoration and wetland awareness work at Monavale Vlei will be applied to halt the degradation of, and to conserve the extensive wetland ecosystem, of Marlborough Vlei to provide services and benefits to the local community and the city of Harare”.

Objective 1: *Consolidate and further enhance conservation and restoration at Monavale Vlei.*

Invasive aliens were removed, paths cut, daily patrolling, monitoring, record keeping of biodiversity, on-going plant surveys and 5 bird ringing sessions undertaken. Research was enhanced with water quality testing, soil sampling, soil, air and water, invertebrate collections and GIS mapping locating sites and showing ten years of remarkable improvement of the vegetation and wetland ecosystem.

Objective 2: *Conserve and rehabilitate Marlborough Vlei through engagement of residents and other stakeholders.* Following the Monavale Model a community organization was formed called Marlborough Environmental Action Group (MEAG) through EMA's Local Environmental Action Planning Workshop (LEAP) and a Vlei Scout was employed forming the baseline for commencing conservation and rehabilitation. Halting cultivation looked promising with livelihood options offered. The onset of the 2014-2015 rains and political influences overrode cultivators' commitments not to cultivate. The threat of building 2000 houses and 2 schools on Marlborough Vlei was stalled following MEAG High Court action after City of Harare Environmental Committee and Full Council ignored their objections. Research and monitoring was undertaken as per Monavale. GIS mapping showed that whilst in 2006 Marlborough Vlei was in good condition; by 2014 much of the 160 ha was disturbed by cultivation. However, it is possible to restore, as shown

by Monavale, should cultivation be halted. ¼ of a 80ha conservation area was restored through removal of invasive alien plants and clean-ups.

Objective 3: *Raise the awareness of the importance of Harare's wetland ecosystems and values to residents of Harare.*

Objective 4: Highly acclaimed brochures were published, 13,000 in all (8,000 originally agreed): Marlborough Vlei; Where Does Harare's Water Come From (wetland ecosystems); The Plants and Animals of Harare's Wetlands (Harare's wetland biodiversity); Community Based Conservation and Management of Harare's Wetlands (Harare's wetland management). A1 and A3 posters were printed for teaching purposes and website poster versions produced for sharing widely. All are posted on BLZ's and COSMO's websites.

World Wetland Day's 2014 on Marlborough Vlei and 2015 on Monavale Vlei attracted over 800 school pupils, teachers and guests with videos produced on both high profile days.

School environmental clubs, youth groups, technical training colleges and universities visited both vleis with numerous students writing project reports on these wetlands. MEAG also initiated youth and school visits and clean ups on the Vlei in the Marlborough Area.

Numerous articles appeared in the media including Ndeipi and Harare News, The Standard, COSMO Calling; COSMO, MEAG, BLZ and Wetland Survival Forum Facebook Pages; broadcasts took place on radio and TV, locally and throughout Africa through German and Chinese broadcasters; National Gallery / Italian Embassy's Disappearing Wetlands Art Competition for Schools and on BLI Africa, Ramsar, BLZ and Monavale websites.

9 community-based organizations from high-density areas visited Monavale Vlei to experience a preserved wetland and are keen to restore their wetlands.

2 very successful wetland ecosystem-training workshops were held with involvement of authorities and residents.

Wetland protection lobbying and advocacy at local and national government levels continued throughout the programme period.

Impacts and continuity of the Project

Without this Project Marlborough Vlei would have been lost to development. On-going advocacy will be needed to prevent development on all wetlands in Harare. Monavale Vlei research has shown that wetland ecosystems, including their bird species, improve if restored.

The University of Zimbabwe, Department of Biological Sciences, has chosen to continue the research on both Monavale and Marlborough Vleis in a formal on-going wetland programme in on-going collaboration with COSMO and BLZ. A wetland module is being included in the 4th year honours degree using these two vleis for field studies.

Harare's wetlands are now known across society to be important as water sources for the City with residents making the link between their boreholes drying up with wetland loss.

Links were made with other wetland concerned communities and organizations.

The brochures were much appreciated by the Directors and Staff of The Environmental Management Agency.

Today there is a huge outcry as Monavale Vlei is threatened with development of 160 cluster houses on 10ha of its 34ha core protected area, which would destroy the wetland ecosystem. COSMO is coordinating a public petition objecting to a recent Planning Application for a Permit to Develop, which must be submitted by 11th June 2015. For further information contact: cosmo@yoafrica.com

COSMO and BLZ continue to support MEAG in kind, to ensure the survival of Marlborough Vlei. COSMO continues to protect and conserve Monavale Vlei.

The search for funding to take care of these Vleis and spread awareness of their importance is on-going.

Appreciation goes to Aage V Jensen Charity Foundation and BirdLife International for supporting this Project. Many contributed in kind, particularly residents of COSMO and MEAG and BLZ members and staff.

Dorothy Wakeling

Harare Wetland Project Coordinator and Monavale Vlei Programme Manager

The past two months have been very productive with a number of activities reaching completion as the end of the Project draws near on 1st May 2015.

The High Court appeals are still underway for Marlborough, Ashbrittle and Borrowdale Wetlands, two World Wetland Day commemorations took place and a WWF representative arrived on Ramsar

business and this was accompanied by a number of National Wetland Committee Meetings. Wonderful rains were received until 1st February, which was marked by flooding which seriously impacted those living on wetlands in north and western Harare. Breeding conditions were perfect for Streak-breasted Flufftail on Monavale Vlei. Many maize crops on Marlborough Vlei have failed due to the heavy rains received. However, since that first week in February only a few millimetres of rain have been recorded.

Highlights during this period

The World Wetland Day 2015 national event on 2nd February at the Rainbow Towers took the form of a symposium with a number of presentations given by different stakeholders from the constructions industry, town planning, academia and national and local government. It was agreed that wetlands are important for Harare's water provisioning and that they are being impacted. However, no resolution came from the meeting as to what could be done to address the plight of the wetlands.

The World Wetland Day 2015 Schools Event organized by The Conservation Society of Monavale, BirdLife Zimbabwe and Harare Province of EMA with support from EcoSchools of Mukuvisi Woodlands was held on Monavale Vlei on 6th February 2015. The theme for this year, Wetlands for Our Future: Enticing Youth to Experience Wetlands for Themselves, was fitting as nearly 400 school children from 28 schools attended with their teachers. They thoroughly enjoyed splashing about in the pools and learning about the functions and services of Harare's wetlands from COSMO and BLZ staff and members who took them on guided walks on the Vlei. After the walks the crowd gathered on Sherwood Golf Course under a large tent donated by Nyaradzo Funerals for the formal commemoration. Schools made presentations of poems, drama and songs. COSMO Kids Club teacher Linda Bromley donated solar chargers to those children able to answer questions on wetlands posed by Jimmy Muropa, Monavale Vlei Conservation Field Officer. The usual speeches were given, ending with Mrs Auxillia Mhangagwa, Deputy Secretary for Environment and Tourism for Politburo making a good speech in favour of wetland protection. It was another wonderful day for wetland awareness, which was covered by ZBC TV with two airings, and viewers are still reporting they saw the programme. Check the Conservation Society of Monavale Facebook Page for lovely photos of this day and Harare News online for its report.

Visits by Community Based Organizations to Monavale Vlei were organized by Project staff together with Community Water Alliance who brought residents from 7 communities living in or near wetlands: Westlea, Warren Park, Dzivarasekwa, Kambuzuma, Rugare, Budiro, Glen View. Combined Harare Residents Association brought residents from Tafara and Mabvuku. They learnt about Monavale Vlei, a restored and preserved wetland and the importance of Harare's wetlands and their biodiversity. They discussed the state of their wetlands and how they would take what they learnt at Monavale back to their communities. They enjoyed walking on the pristine wetland. CWA has requested COSMO visit these communities to guide them in their restoring their wetlands. Councillors representing these communities plan to visit Monavale as a group next week. Engaging CBOs has been a very rewarding aspect of the Wetland Project.

Further invasive alien plant removal exercises have taken place on both wetlands and another ringing session took place in February. Research took place in February and March. Marlborough Environmental Action Group, BLZ and COSMO organized successful visits to Marlborough Vlei of the environmental clubs of Marlborough Primary and High Schools and Arundel Girls School. Plans are underway for more schools to visit this wetland.

Once again, thanks are extended to BLZ staff and Council, COSMO and MEAG, BirdLife International and AAGE V Jensen Charity Foundation, for supporting the protection of Harare's wetlands. The involvement of EMA and City of Harare is acknowledged and appreciated.

Dorothy Wakeling, Project Coordinator cosmo@yoafrica.com; 0772 376506

BirdLife Zimbabwe Youth Contribution towards Global Birding Day

Venue: Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary. Date: 09 May 2015

Seven BirdLife Zimbabwe Youths drove down to the bird sanctuary as a contribution towards the targeted global total of 4000 bird species on the day. The Bird Sanctuary itself is in a sorry state with the fence almost completely crumbled with nothing better to say about the gate. The chilly morning kept the birds away save for the vocal White-browed Robin-chat that gave us some sense of relevance. The water is very high at the moment and that meant no waders to talk about. There was a however a pair of Hottentot Teals swimming on shallower water with a lone African Jacana

feeding along with them. There were no ducks on the water. Reed Cormorants and White-breasted Cormorants were seen drying themselves from tree branches and rocks respectively.

A look at the Miombo woodlands yielded Black-backed Puffback and White-bellied Sunbirds among other woodland species. A total of 33 bird species were recorded. Abandoned nets are a huge problem, probably much more than we thought. We caught on camera a piece of net dangling on a tree. The youths that came have expressed interest in nature and could benefit from more outings and talks to beat the ignorance out of them. Resources remain a major constraint but BirdLife Zimbabwe has set the stage for a fund-raising opportunity for youths through the Victoria Falls Econet marathon in June. Six youths will run 42km to fund raise for vulture conservation work by young people.

Participants: Rumbidzai Mukumba; Tendai Chinho, Ronald and Martin Chirimuta, Nigel Madziwa, Tatenda Mujeni and Innocent Magunje



July 2015 Waterbird Counts

The July count is nearly upon us and should be done as close to mid-July as possible, but anything from mid-June to mid-August is acceptable. The count form has been redesigned to make it more user-friendly and also easier to complete on computer. Please delete all other forms you have to avoid confusion. A separate form should be filled in for each site visited. A sketch map showing site coverage would be particularly useful, and a GPS location (in Decimal Degrees, please) is very important for new sites.

Forms are available from CarolynDennison@birdlifezimbabwe.org and also on the website http://www.birdlifezimbabwe.org/h_news.html All the forms should be back with us by **1 September 2015**, as we have to submit a report to Wetlands International for their annual all-Africa report.

So start thinking about your sites and encourage others who can identify their birds to get out and enjoy a trip to their favourite wetland.



Special thanks to our regular observers and their friends, without whom this valuable data would not be collected – David & Penny Rockingham-Gill, Colin Baker, Morgan Saineti, Tadius Ndadzira, James Ball, Richard & Carolyn Dennison, Alex Masterson, Patrick Shadwell, Julia Pierini, Carla Pierini, Duncan Kennaird, Tony Alegria, Ken Dixon, Andy Fussell, Tom Dibb, Innes Louw, Rolf Chenaux-Repond, Innocent Magunje, Admire Charewa, Grace Magamura, Maybe Mudzamire, Ronald Mbafana, Ronnie

Chirimuta, Tatenda Toto, Nigel Madziwa, Phyl Banks & MENHS, Dave Dalziel, Paul & Debbie Wiggins, Dave Hasluck, Derek Odendaal, Simba Muyambo, Jimmy Muropa, Dorothy Wakeling, Dianne Skinner, John Vekris, Robin Gilmour, Teig Howson, Tim & Bev Morgan, Margaret Parrock, Ruth Paice, Siggy Stone, Rachel Bain, Natalie & Derek Adamson, Cher McAdam, Bob Collett, Chris & Sandy Payne, Di & Basil Rushforth, Doug Kok, Sean Lenton, Alexander Cooper, Marc Ribeiro, Debbie Ramos, Stephen Schwarer & Triangle participants, Clive Stockil, Brian & Frances Brakspear, Jo Sharp, Cathie Reimer, Gavin & Marjorie Blair, Arnold Tshipa & team, Tawanda Tarakini, Innocent Mabika, Martin Muzamba, Nyasha Dzumamunda, Abraham Mhlanga, Stanislaus Chizipi, Daryl Tiran, Stephen & Susan Long, Sandy MacAdam, Julia Duprée, Laraine King, Gwen & Geoff Calvert, Marina & Deveney Aylward, Gaynor & Elton Lightfoot, Adele Edwards, John & Jenny Brebner, Gordon & Heather MacDonald, Helen Lewis, Peta Ditchburn, Judy Ross, Alan & Christina Gillott, Howard & Cindy Sellick, and other BLZ members.

Waterbird Count Report

Waterbirds in the Mukuvisi Woodland – Harare 17°50'S 31°05'E – December 2013-14

During the year I made 10 visits to the Mukuvisi Woodlands, looking for birds. Most visits were of 3 hours duration from 0700-1000, along the Chiraura Stream. The counts for January and July in every year have for many years formed a small part of the African Waterbird Counts in Zimbabwe, which go through to Wetlands International. Some 23 species of waterbird were recorded. The most waterbird species seen on one day was 13, on 5 January 2014.

Not seen during the year were Squacco Heron, Egyptian Goose, Malachite and Giant Kingfishers.

Reed Cormorant – seen 5 times, not in July or August, at the viewing platform.

Grey Heron – seen 4 times at the viewing platform.

Black-headed Heron – seen 3 times.

Purple Heron – seen twice January and December 2014.

Cattle Egret – seen 8 times. Some ride on Zebra, once seen on an Impala.

Green-backed Heron – seen once in a watery gravel pit on 14 December 2014.

Little Bittern – seen once 5/1/2014 at the Bird Hide. It should be looked for and so should the Squacco Heron.

Hamerkop – seen 8 times. They breed here in the nest above the crocodile pen.

Abdim's Stork – seen twice. In December of both years. Once flying overhead.

African Sacred Ibis – seen 4 times, sometimes flying overhead. They like to feed in the in the viewing platform dam spillway.

White-faced Duck – seen 5 times, once with 6 ducklings.

African Black Duck – seen 4 times. They had ducklings in December 2013. Mostly on the Mukuvisi River. Discovered here in 1890, they still persist, here and in other places close to Harare. In those far off days, before dam building, they were the commonest duck in the country.

Red-billed Teal – seen once 5/1/2014.

African Fish-eagle – heard once 20/7/2014. A long way off.

Black Crake – seen 8 times. They breed here.

Red-chested Flufftail – heard once on 3/11/ 2013.
Common Moorhen – seen 6 times, once with 3 chicks.
African Jacana – seen once on 2/3/2014.
African Wattled Lapwing – seen 8 times. Usually a pair, but 4 on 1/12/2013.
Pied Kingfisher – seen once on 4/5/2014.
Lesser Swamp-warbler – recorded only once on 7/2014.
Levaillant's Cisticola – seen once July 2014.
Yellow-throated Longclaw – recorded 4 times.
D.V. Rockingham-Gill rgill@zol.co.zw

Mashonaland

Baobabs and Birds by Clare Douie – Thursday 19 March 2015

Baobabs (*Adansonia digitata*) are one of the most easily recognisable and well-loved trees of Zimbabwe. In fact there's always a certain excitement whenever we enter baobab country! At our March monthly meeting we were treated to an absorbing talk by Clare Douie, a highly qualified botanist and extremely talented artist, on these fascinating trees. Her talk was followed by a short roundup by Dave Rockingham-Gill of birds that use baobabs for breeding.

The fruit of the baobab has been classed as a super fruit and is in demand as an ingredient for foodstuffs such as smoothies and health drinks as well as for cosmetics. It was by a company involved in procuring the fruit that Clare was asked to carry out a census of all baobabs in Zimbabwe – a monumental task! We heard all about how the survey was undertaken and interestingly one of the most effective methods of counting the trees was aerially as they are even very distinctive from above.

Apart from the counting, Clare has done extensive research on Baobabs and she shared some interesting facts with us. Baobabs always look so imposing and mighty standing out in the bush, but how many of us knew that it takes over 100 years for them to mature and produce fruit? Or that they can live to thousands of years! It was once said "the problem with the baobab is that it doesn't get handsome until it's about 800 years old"! An interesting revelation was that there are actually 2 species in Zimbabwe, one with a narrower trunk than the other. As this makes aging by trunk diameter difficult and with no meaningful rings to count, carbon dating has been found to be the best method for aging baobabs. It isn't always easy

to identify baobab saplings in the bush, as they haven't yet developed the characteristics, which we associate with these trees.

Clare explained how baobabs are considered by the local people to be a valuable asset and are used for food, clothing, rope and even shelter with whole rooms being carved out of their massive trunks. Unfortunately an environmental impact study which she once did showed how the trees can be overharvested for their unique bark which takes about 7 years to regenerate.

Baobabs are an important source of food for many animals and birds but of specific interest to bird enthusiasts is the use of them by so many birds for nesting. Dave Rockingham-Gill concluded the evening with a very interesting short talk on this subject. Some of the birds known to nest in baobabs vary from White-backed Vultures and Tawny Eagles nesting on the tops of trees to Mosque Swallows and Böhm's Spinetail which nest in hollows in the trees. There is a pair of Pel's Fishing-owls whose nest in the Big Tree has been monitored at Hippo Pools for some time. Hamerkop may nest in baobabs and Dickinson's Kestrels in turn may use the Hamerkop nests. White-browed Sparrow-weavers commonly nest in colonies in baobabs, as do Red-headed Weavers and Red-billed Buffalo-weavers. Grey-headed and Meyer's Parrot nests have also been seen in Baobabs.

There is something about the 'Tree of Life' as the baobab is sometimes known which makes them very special and we are indeed grateful to Clare Douie for talking to us and bringing us so many new insights into these captivating trees.

Debbie Wiggins

BLZ Mashonaland Branch Monavale Vlei Visit Sunday 19th April 2015

Remember all that unseasonal rain in mid-April, just when we thought the wading season was over and our wellies could be packed away? Well, Monavale was once again a wetland for our monthly walk, which we

managed to squeeze in between the downpours. I say we: there were only 7 of us including our guide, Jimmy Muropa.

Thankfully the COSMO group had cut the paths prior to the visit so we were able to see

the many areas of flooding if not avoid them. The birding was quite good despite the heavy cloud cover and we raised a total of 51 Barn Swallows were still around as was a Red-backed Shrike. The usual Black-shouldered Kite and 3 Gabar Goshawks were the only raptors and bishops and widows still clung to some of their breeding plumage, especially one Yellow Bishop. Along the streams we identified Lesser Swamp-warbler and Little Rush-warbler and Black Crake. Cisticolas were Red-faced, Rattling and Zitting. A Copper Sunbird gave us a pleasant surprise, as did a Cuckoo Finch. Flocks of Orange-breasted Waxbill, Red-billed Quelea and Thick-billed Weaver appeared from

time to time. No Marsh Owl as they are breeding.

Away from birds, our attention was frequently diverted to the many crabs along the path and, thanks to our knowledgeable guide, the droppings of the Clawless Otter, which consisted almost entirely of the remains of hapless crabs.

As usual, we were very aware of this wonderful wetland and its biodiversity but also of the pressure from development on all sides. May the Vlei ever remain a haven for all species? A *lutta continuum!* Long Live COSMO!

Ken Dixon

BLZ Mashonaland Branch Visit To Monavale Vlei Sunday 16th May 2015

Our small group of 5 enjoyed an interesting walk on this lovely vlei now, once again, under threat from greedy developers who can see only \$\$\$\$\$\$ where we see birds, mammals, grasses, flowers, insects and our water source. Early on the grass was very wet, temperature low and birds scarce but improvement was rapid and soon we were rewarded by sightings of all the usual species. Mind you, identification of the widows and bishops has become a matter for the experts now those colourful breeding plumages have disappeared.

We saw the Black-shouldered Kite with its young at the nest in a small acacia and nesting Red-billed Quelea in the reeds, Copper Sunbird feeding on the Leonotis, Whyte's Barbet and Violet-backed Starling in the gums and a Dark-capped Yellow Warbler sang volubly as we passed. A varied selection for a May morning, in all 43 species. Long may the vlei remain protected by its dedicated volunteers in COSMO.

Ken Dixon

Monavale Vlei Report

February March 2015

Migrants continued to be seen and enjoyed throughout this summer season and special mention of an African Marsh-harrier seen on 28 January, two Greater Painted-snipes and Booted Eagle seen on 12 February. A Streaky-breasted Flufftails nest with 3 eggs in it was found sometime in February and further disturbance was avoided subsequently. Our bird list continues to grow with an additional Long-tailed paradise-whydah seen on the 3rd Sunday bird walk of February.

The research project with University of Zimbabwe Biological Sciences Department is progressing well. Monavale Vlei has seen several students from Universities dotted across the country doing their various research projects.

Lately we have engaged Community Based Organizations CBO's, visiting the vlei to learn more on these unique and precious ecosystems. COSMO and BLZ have also visited schools for wetland and bird identification talks with some visiting both Monavale and Marlborough Vleis. And lastly COSMO Kids Club members visited Twala animal sanctuary

on the 21st of March for an educational tour and what an amazing experience!

April May 2015

As expected this time around migrants have since left. The local resident birds have shed off their breeding dress. Some birders wouldn't care to notice the details of these non-descript birds only remarking: "Oh, those are LBJ's". Yet this is an opportunity for some to distinguish a Red-collared Widowbird from a Southern Red Bishop in non-breeding plumage. Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters will surely mark their presence.

Lately at Monavale Vlei an African Harrier-hawk was seen, so too were African Black Duck, Lizard Buzzard, a pair of melanistic Gabar Goshawks, Lilac-breasted Roller, Little Bee-eaters, and Yellow-fronted Canary amongst others. A breeding Black-shouldered Kite was recently seen nesting in an Acacia Karoo tree just about 3m off the ground. Two chicks were visibly noticed and pictures taken. Winter might not have many species as one would want but there is always that odd and special bird to be seen by you! So get out there and enjoy your birds not forgetting your warm jerseys of course!

Jimmy Muropa, Monavale Vlei Scout

0772 772 771

BLZ Mashonaland Branch Visit to Val d'Or, Goromonzi. Sunday 24th May 2015

Being an ex-French teacher, I was intrigued by the idea of spending a morning in the exotic Valley of Gold or Golden Valley. Imagine my disappointment when I asked the owner whether there had ever been gold on the property to hear the rather mundane origin of the name: the first owner's wife was Valerie and their daughter Dorothy, hence VALDOR which only later was made more romantic by the addition of the apostrophe. I digress; back to the birds.

Val d'Or is in fact a beautiful 64 acre 'plot' situated between Goromonzi and Ruwa, consisting of a beautiful garden, miombo woodland, grassland and large, water-lily covered ponds.

On arrival the dozen or so members split into two groups, one led by Bill Clarke the owner and the other by Fiona his wife. We spent a pleasant couple of hours wandering along the paths through the various habitats in search of bird parties. An early sighting was a Barn Owl gliding slowly through the trees. Then in the Mobola Plums we came across Amethyst

Sunbird, Grey Penduline-tit, Grey-headed Bush-shrike, Red-headed Weaver and plenty of doves. For the most part though the pretty woodland was very quiet. The only species on the tranquil dam were Malachite Kingfisher, Reed Cormorant and Red-billed Teal but we did meet the small herd of friendly Zebra.

Soon we were back in the garden where we found, among others, White-crested Helmet-shrike, Miombo, Variable and many Amethyst Sunbirds, Whyte's Barbet, Speckled Mousebird, Lizard Buzzard, Red-billed Quelea, Tropical Boubou, Southern Black Flycatcher and Cardinal Woodpecker. Then a Black-chested Snake-eagle flew over.

When we finally settled comfortably to chat and have a drink we were pleasantly surprised to reach a total of 60 species. And an African Fish-eagle called as we prepared to leave.

Many thanks to our hosts for inviting us to visit their lovely property.

Ken Dixon

Matabeleland

MATABELELAND GARDEN BIRD SURVEY 2014

January-December

Survey area

QDS 2028 B1 = 6 gardens

QDS 2028 B2 = 1 garden

QDS 2028 B4 = 2 gardens

QDS 1725 D3 = 1 garden

Total gardens monitored = 10

Total species recorded = 234

OVERVIEW

This Survey has just completed its fourth year in Matabeleland – a good one in which 10 gardens produced 234 species, 46 more species than last year in 8 gardens, and 44 more than the year before in 14. The gardens are located in a variety of areas: 6 in Bulawayo QDS 2028 B1, 1 in Ntabazinduna QDS 2028 B2, 2 in Esigodini QDS 2028 B4 and 1 in Victoria Falls QDS 1725 D3. Four of you sent in records every month, January-December; two for 9 months; one for each of 8, 7 & 6 months; and one for only one month. Reports came in regularly after the end of each month, generally speaking, and many of you took the time and trouble to add additional comments, some of which are included here. We appreciate your efforts and hope you enjoyed yourselves.

During the year updated checklists were distributed, which included several extra species recorded by you. Now another version has been produced for use during 2015, which features 234 species seen and/or heard.

In order to keep this short, below are summaries of who saw what when.

This survey is fun to take part in and produces interesting information some of which is included in *Babbler* and *Honeyguide* and all of which goes to the national database.

We look forward with the hope that more of you will join us this year – though Peta and Laraine may have to be censured for continuing to entertain Common Mynas in their birdbaths.

Observers & number of species recorded per garden

Name	Location	No. Months	No. Species
Shirley Tarr	Ntabazinduna	9	136
Judy Ross	Ntaba Moyo	12	126
Laraine King	Esigodini	12	113
Gwen Calvert	Esigodini	7	105
Jenny Brebner	Burnside	9	101
Sandy McAdam	Hillside	12	97
Marjorie & Gavin Blair	Victoria Falls	6	83
Peta Ditchburn	Morningside	12	79
Jean & Tom Cranston	Burnside	9	66
Cecilia Hubbard	Matsheumhlope	1	52

Species most reported

In 10 gardens

Red-eyed Dove	Pied Crow
Laughing Dove	Dark-capped Bulbul
Grey Go-away-bird	Yellow-bellied Greenbul
Red-faced Mousebird	Kurrichane Thrush
African Hoopoe	Tropical Boubou
Green Wood-hoopoe	Black-backed Puffback
Black-collared Barbet	Scarlet-chested Sunbird
Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird	Blue Waxbill
Black-headed Oriole	Bronze Mannikin

In 9 gardens

Red-chested Cuckoo	White-browed Robin-chat
Barn Owl	Long-billed Crombec
Brown-hooded Kingfisher	Tawny-flanked Prinia
European Bee-eater	African Paradise-flycatcher
Crested Barbet	Red-winged Starling
Fork-tailed Drongo	White-bellied Sunbird

In 8 gardens

Hamerkop	White-throated Robin-chat
Shikra	Chin-spot Batis
Levaillant's Cuckoo	Grey-headed Bush-shrike
Diderick Cuckoo	Marico Sunbird
Spotted Eagle-owl	African Yellow White-eye
Golden-tailed Woodpecker	House Sparrow
Arrow-marked Babbler	Streaky-headed Canary

Raptors reported = 32

Species	Reported by
Hooded Vulture	Marjorie & Gavin
Cape Vulture	Sandy
White-backed Vulture	Marjorie & Gavin, Gwen, Sandy, Shirley
Yellow-billed Kite	Marjorie & Gavin, Gwen, Jean & Tom, Laraine, Sandy, Shirley
Black Kite	Jenny
Black-shouldered Kite	Jenny, Gwen, Laraine, Judy, Shirley
Tawny Eagle	Laraine
Steppe Eagle	Laraine
Wahlberg's Eagle	Jenny, Gwen, Laraine, Judy, Shirley
African Hawk-eagle	Laraine, Judy
Black-chested Snake-eagle	Jenny, Gwen, Laraine, Judy, Shirley
Bateleur	Gwen
African Fish-eagle	Marjorie & Gavin, Jenny, Jean & Tom, Cecilia, Laraine, Judy
Steppe Buzzard	Marjorie & Gavin, Jenny, Shirley
Lizard Buzzard	Marjorie & Gavin, Sandy

Little Sparrowhawk	Gwen, Peta, Sandy, Shirley
Shikra	Marjorie & Gavin, Jenny, Gwen, Peta, Laraine, Sandy, Judy, Shirley
African Goshawk	Jenny, Peta, Judy
Gabar Goshawk	Gwen, Jean & Tom, Sandy, Shirley
African Harrier-hawk	Jenny, Gwen, Sandy, Judy, Shirley
Peregrine Falcon	Sandy
Lanner Falcon	Laraine
Amur Falcon	Judy, Shirley
Rock Kestrel	Gwen
Barn Owl	Marjorie & Gavin, Jenny, Gwen, Jean & Tom, Peta, Hubbard, Sandy, Judy, Shirley
African Wood-owl	Marjorie & Gavin
African Scops-owl	Laraine, Shirley
Southern White-faced Scops-owl	Judy, Shirley
Pearl-spotted Owlet	Gwen, Jean & Tom, Laraine, Judy, Shirley
Spotted Eagle-owl	Marjorie & Gavin, Jean & Tom, Peta, Cecilia, Laraine, Sandy, Judy, Shirley
Verreaux's Eagle-owl	Shirley

Uncommon species

Species	When	Reported by
Rosy-faced Lovebird	January	Marjorie & Gavin
Schalow's Turaco	October, November, December	Marjorie & Gavin
Broad-billed Roller	January, February, November	Marjorie & Gavin, Sandy
Red-billed Spurfowl	November	Gwen
Common Myna (2 each)	May, September, October, November	Peta, Laraine
African Emerald Cuckoo	January, February, December	Marjorie & Gavin
Verreaux's Eagle-owl	March	Shirley
African Red-eyed Bulbul	March	Gwen
Levaillant's Cisticola	March	Gwen
Marsh Warbler	February	Peta
Black-eared Seedeater	May	Laraine

Julia Duprée Co-ordinator

AFRICAN WATERBIRD CENSUS (AWC) 2014

Matland AGM Report – February 2015

As reported at the last AGM in February 2014, following a meeting with Wetlands International, a new system came into being for the census this year.

The main change is that BLZ now reports direct to Wetlands International, rather than to the erstwhile African Waterfowl Census centre, initially in Dakar and subsequently Kenya, where in theory the completed forms were processed for inclusion in the international yearbook. Our results were published in an international yearbook, one paper submitted by Dave Rockingham-Gill and the second by myself. This manual was discontinued a while back and superseded by an electronic system.

So the plan now is that our surveyors send their completed forms direct to Harare where the information is processed and the results sent electronically to Wetlands in Amsterdam. This is eminently sensible as it saves the erstwhile

triple handling – i.e. from our surveyor, to the Matland co-ordinator and then to Harare.

In January and July we organised our waterbird counts as we have for the last 8 years with our dedicated teams and one or two welcome newcomers, not to mention the addition of several new water bodies in Esigodini and Hwange, and all went smoothly with the results going to Harare in one form or another. In January this year, however, things changed. We were in the process of doing our usual thing, and briefing our new co-ordinator, when we became aware that Harare had taken over the organisation of our survey. So that is where we are. If the truth were known, it's probably quite a good thing, as what is usually a small little Matland Committee can be pretty overwhelmed by lots of work and only a few people in a position to help.

So I'm not able to give you the results of our 2014 counts, but in *Babbler* No. 121 (December 2014/January 2015) there is an excellent, very interesting and well-informed overview by David Rockingham-Gill, Chairman of the Waterbird Census for Zimbabwe.

Meanwhile, back at the ranch, our Matland waterbird educational campaign began in December and has got off to a good start to what will undoubtedly be a slow long-term project. You may recall that at the last AGM I reported that we, (and the other provinces in Zimbabwe), are required to expand our coverage of water bodies, by encouraging the participation of schools and local communities, particularly those located in rural areas near pans and dams. In Matland, unlike Mashonaland and some other areas, we don't employ staff who can do this job. Nevertheless we have to date covered 29 schools. This has been achieved partly with the support of dedicated and like-minded individuals, and also kind assistance from other organisations already running conservation projects in some of the schools.

And we have produced our so-called "simple identification booklet", which has metamorphosed into the first field guide for Zimbabwe, entitled *Roberts Waterbirds of*

Zimbabwe. 2000 copies have been printed. Whilst a national project, it is proudly a wholly Bulawayo production from concept, content, design, layout and printing, and as such attracted generous Bulawayo sponsorship of USD500 from PPC Zimbabwe and the Matobo Conservation Society to whom we are indebted.

At this point we offer warm thanks to Hugh Chittenden, Chairman of the Trustees of the John Voelcker Bird Book Fund, for the lovely species illustrations, and for personally preparing the artwork to produce them; and to Richard Peek for allowing us unconditionally to publish his wonderful photographs. And my own grateful thanks to our kind advisers and contributors, Hugh Chittenden, Peter Mundy, Brian Marshall, Richard Peek, Dorothy Wakeling, David Rockingham-Gill and Ian Riddell, without whom I would never have gone beyond step one.

At this stage the booklet is not for sale in Zimbabwe as it was produced by and is reserved for the BLZ waterbird education campaign. But – who knows? If we can raise further funds we may achieve an updated reprint and obtain approval to making it generally available. I'm chewing the matter over so – let's see!

Julia Duprée Matabeleland Co-ordinator

Birding At 46 Qalisa & Part of Bulawayo Golf Club Course

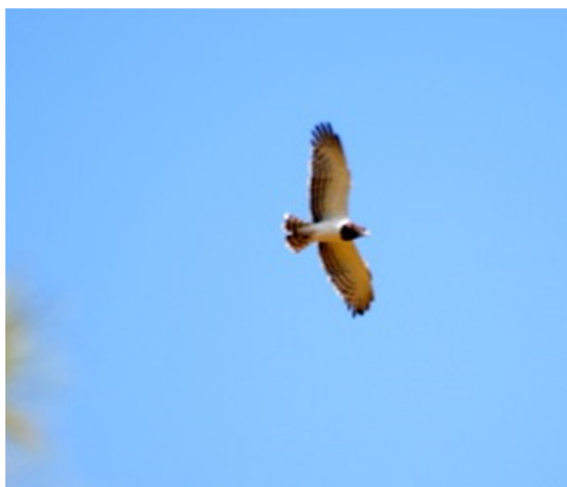
15th March 2015

It was eight o'clock and already beginning to heat up as eleven BirdLife members gathered at the Qalisa gazebo to go off on a bird walk. One of the members (no names mentioned) arrived without her binoculars, which wasn't a very good start but a spare pair was soon found and so we could begin. On the advice of a regular birder, it was decided to bird on the golf course across the road from Qalisa. The dirt road coming off Winnie's Way into the complex is a great birding spot of its own, with many little LBJs flitting around in the thorn scrub and so our list began.

Blue Waxbills, Rattling Cisticolas, Laughing Doves, White-winged Widowbirds, Dark-capped Bulbuls and White-browed Sparrow-weavers were quickly noted down while a murder of crows raucously took off from the gum trees closer to the golf club house and a lone Little Swift flew out from a palm tree. A tiny Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird was showing off as a Chestnut-vented Tit-babbler was skulking deep in a thorn bush and a Grey Go-away-bird looked down from its lofty perch, entreating us to "Go away" before taking off itself.

Just before leaving the dirt road to see what could be found around one of the reservoirs, a Black-chested Snake-eagle in the company of a juvenile was hunting overhead. We later had a magnificent sighting of the adult bird as it dropped down onto the golf course and picked up what looked like a lizard, before taking to the air again and eating its catch on the wing. A truly stunning bird. Crossing over the road, several minutes were spent trying to identify a whole group of seed eating birds scattered over the

road and onto one of the greens, coming away with quite a list including Village Indigobird, Bronze Mannikins, Scaly-feathered and Cut-throat Finches, House Sparrows, a Purple Indigobird, Black-throated Canaries and Long-tailed Paradise-whydahs. A Spotted Flycatcher was hawking insects from one of the T box signs, European Bee-eaters were calling as was a White-browed Robin-chat,





while Barn Swallows swooped low over the course and African Palm-swifts flitted overhead. The thorn scrub along the fringes of the course was alive with birds and as we crossed a rather smelly trench (sewerage filtering through from Ilanda!) we were at first confused as to what was calling so close to us. Fortunately, one of the keener eyed members of the group, found the White-throated Robin-chat virtually sitting right in front of us, singing its heart out! A Hamerkop also took off having been disturbed in its fossicking along the stream. Back out on the course and keeping a wary eye open for

golfers, a Senegal Coucal was out in the open on one of the T boxes, a Fork-tailed Drongo was hawking from the branch of a fir tree, a couple of African Hoopoes were pegging away with their incredible bills and while admiring several Southern Red Bishops noisily fussing about in a bunch of reeds, we could hear the grinding croak of a Great Reed-warbler. Walking back to the road, a bright yellow Brimstone Canary didn't wait around to be admired, three Burnt-necked Eremomelas took a while to identify while the Scarlet-chested Sunbird and his female chattered nearby and a Little Bee-eater was perched on its hawking spot low down in a thorn tree.

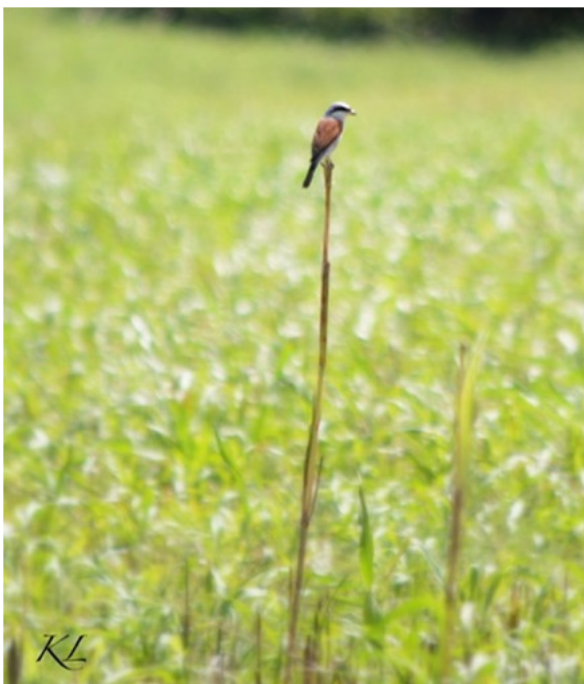
We then wandered back through the back gate of the course adding Arrow-marked Babblers and a Marico Flycatcher as we went through the Qalisa boom. The morning was finished off at the Jacksons home at 46 Qalisa over a very welcome cup of tea and some sumptuous eats, out on their verandah where we could continue our birding. While there, the Long-billed Crombec, Red-billed Firefinches and the Black-backed Puffback came calling and we all enjoyed watching the comings and goings at the bird feeder and birds bath. All in all, a delightful morning and a total of 60 species seen. Grateful thanks to the Jacksons for hosting this event.

John and Jenny Brebner
Photos: Karen Learmonth

BLZ Matabeleland Outing To Phole Phole Farm, Umguza

11th April 2015

On a bright and sunny Saturday morning, eight BirdLife members met on the corner of Irrigation Road in the Umguza area, some 22km out of Bulawayo. Those that got there earlier than the stragglers already had quite a list of birds seen on the go!



We continued a few kilometres to Phole Phole Farm where we met with the family. We immediately started on a walk in the direction of fields that has natural bush on one side and crops on the other side. This stretch took us a couple of hours to get through, and we had the delight of seeing a Grey Crowned Crane fly overhead in amongst the assortment of both bush and water birds.

After returning to the homestead where we stopped for tea in the beautiful garden, we were spotting different birds continuously. We started to wander off to different parts of the garden and were justly rewarded with lovely sightings.

With tea over we got into some vehicles and head to the nearby Umguza River. The day had warmed up considerably, but we first started out amongst the shade of some huge acacia trees in a low-lying area on the side of the river. From there we moved to other spots on the high riverbank and added more

species to our checklist.

Lunchtime arrived and we had to drag our host back home - she was having as much fun as us and seemed to be able to summons the birds with just a mention! Back home we ate our picnic lunches and still managed to add a few more birds to the list, so that by the time we packed up, we had a total of 86 bird species seen, about which we were pretty pleased! See full list below.

Karen Learmonth

Cape Glossy Starling	Tropical Boubou	Red-billed Buffalo-weaver
White-browed Sparrow-weaver	Abdim's Stork	Red-backed Shrike
Laughing Dove	White Stork	Long-tailed Paradise-whydah
Marico Flycatcher	Willow Warbler	Red-billed Quelea
Blue Waxbill	Jameson's Firefinch	Village Indigobird
Barn Swallow	Swainson's Spurfowl	Helmeted Guineafowl
Black-throated Canary	Southern Grey-headed Sparrow	Black-backed Puffback
Grey Go-away-bird	Meyer's Parrot	Common Waxbill
Senegal Coucal	Hamerkop	Red-billed Firefinch
Crested Barbet	Pied Kingfisher	Jacobin Cuckoo (JB sighting -1st)
Red faced Mousebird	White-fronted Bee-eater	Golden Weaver
Lilac-breasted Roller	Black-headed Oriole	Common Scimitarbill
Grey Heron	Bronze Mannikin	Bearded Woodpecker
Magpie Shrike	African Palm-swift	Golden-tailed Woodpecker
Lesser Grey Shrike	Kurrichane Thrush	White-throated Robin-chat
Red-eyed Dove	African Paradise-flycatcher	Orange-breasted Bush-shrike
Cattle Egret	Yellow-bellied Greenbul	White-bellied Sunbird
European Bee-eater	Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird	White-rumped Swift
Brown-hooded Kingfisher	Arrow-marked Babbler	Southern White-crowned Shrike
Southern Black Tit	Red-billed Hornbill	Meves's Starling
Grey Crowned Crane	Scarlet-chested Sunbird	White-browed Robin-chat
Blacksmith Lapwing	Burnt-necked Eremomela	Brubru
African Sacred Ibis	Long-billed Crombec	Cape Turtle-dove
Black-capped Bulbul	Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill	Neddicky
Namaqua Dove	Pied Crow	Hadedda Ibis
Tawny-flanked Prinia	White-throated Swallow	House Sparrow
Fork-tailed Drongo	Little Swift	
RAPTORS	WATERFOWL	
Black-shouldered Kite x 3	Red-billed Teal x 2	
African Fish-eagle x 2	Wood Sandpiper x 1	
Verreaux's Eagle x 1	Black Crake	

Matobo Verreaux's Eagle Survey: A Trek into the Back Of Beyond

Easter 2015

With John having become co-coordinator of the interesting exercise entering the more recent Verreaux's Eagle survey, it has been an years of the survey onto a database while

scanning all the original reports. Reading the reports of nests and the relevant activity over a particular season, especially the ones we are familiar with, has been fascinating. As well as trying to get the previous years' records stored electronically, we are also gradually trying to learn where all the recorded nests sites are and re-photographing each site. Some of the original photographs of the various sites are very dated and unclear and it has come to our notice that perhaps some of them may have been printed the wrong way round, having been printed from a slide.

We spent Good Friday checking on our particular set of nests to see if there was any interest being shown in starting up the season before joining Cecilia and Tony for the day on Saturday, driving out along the Khumalo West and Ravenswood roads checking and re-recording several of the now derelict nest sites that had been so active years ago. It was an extremely interesting and fascinating day's outing as the roads were actually much better than we'd anticipated and some of the scenery along the way is simply stunning with an amazing number of huge and beautiful trees still surviving. All along the way, we were greeted by smiling faces, cheerful shouts, open-handed waves and several offerings of tins piled high with guavas which were in season with some of

the guava trees in the dusty home kraals still laden with ripe fruit. Sadly, with the dassie population having been decimated to extinction in the communal areas, none of the territories we checked are active any longer and we saw no large birds of prey and in fact very few birds of any sort, except, of course, plenty of large bald necked chickens! As we turned back for the return journey, watching the grey clouds lower to shroud the dwalas and kopjes in heavy mist and the drizzle starting to bother the windscreen wipers, the lowering skies rather matched our mood as we gloomily reflected on how much more our Verreaux's Eagle population could be squeezed out. The survey reached its peak in 1976 when 55 pairs were counted in the survey, and it has dwindled down to 26 pairs being seen in the 2014 season.

There are so many wonderful and varied places to visit in the Matobo and one need not necessarily be confined to the national park. We took the opportunity to stay on an extra night at the Maleme Rest Camp and both nights spent there were very comfortable with many visitors staying. We were delighted to see the on-going renovations being made to the lodges and ablution blocks with the staff obviously showing much more interest and pride in their camp.

John and Jenny Brebner

BLZ Matabeleland Field Trip to Longueville Ranch

1st – 3rd May 2015

Our long weekend at Longueville Ranch near Gwanda combined all the best elements: interesting birding, delightful surroundings, good food and good company, and welcome relaxation. Camping at Stan's Dam was a pleasure: well-appointed showers with lots of hot and cold water, a fridge and freezer in the kitchen section to keep all our food and drink cold, a lovely lapa surrounded by emerald green grass, and a fire pit to sit around at night while we admired the sparkling stars and full moon. The dam also provided an endless source of entertainment for those times we were in camp. Resident birds included Goliath Heron, Green-backed Heron, Cattle and Great Egret, Blacksmith Lapwing, African Pied Wagtail, Reed Cormorant and White-breasted Cormorant, Pied and Giant Kingfisher, Grey Crowned Crane, Black Crake, African Jacana, Egyptian Goose, Red-billed Teal, African Fish-eagle, Lilac-breasted Roller and Fork-tailed Drongo. Occasional visitors were Malachite Kingfishers,

Hadeda Ibis, African Openbill, Hamerkop, Three-banded Plover, Comb Duck, White-faced Duck and African Black Ducks – who drew attention to themselves by standing on the dam wall displaying their bright orange, glow-in-the-dark legs. The Hadeda and African Fish-eagle were surprisingly, and disappointingly quiet, calling on only a few occasions; in their stead we frequently heard the plaintive cry of the Grey Crowned Crane. Frogs and toads provided a steady background chorus, night and day. Barbel and bream broke the mirror-like surface of the water, causing perfect reflections to ripple and sway. A small 30cm long leguaan swam between our bank and the four giant Leadwood skeletons lined up just off shore. Three klipspringers appeared regularly on the lower slope of the kopje on the opposite side of the dam to where we sat – so well camouflaged and hard to see when they stood still, despite being in clear view. While higher up, in a jumble of rocks, dassies sunned themselves.

Twice a day we dragged ourselves away from the comforts of our camp for a walk or drive. Our drives took us to various sections of the ranch, mostly through thorn scrub, where in addition to a good selection of birds we also saw zebra, impala, sable, warthog and bush-buck. The ranch is situated on an isolated outburst of granite kopjes, well south of the Matobo Hills. One of our



most exciting sightings was of a pair of Boulder Chats. Amongst the many other birds seen were Hornbills – Southern Yellow-billed, Red-billed and African Grey – Black-crowned Tchagra, Meves's, Red-winged and Greater Blue-eared Starlings, Magpie and Southern White-crowned Shrikes, and Marico and Scarlet-chested Sunbirds. Raptors provided a constant challenge, particularly the immature Martial Eagle. The African Hawk-eagle, Rock Kestrel and Black-shouldered Kite were easier to identify. The resident pair of Verreaux's Eagle provided their own challenge: for 80 years they were known to use only two nest sites, but neither of these has been used for the last five years. We believe we found his or her new nest site but not everyone was convinced. The nest is in a hollow with a narrow opening, high up on a sheer granite rock face, with perch points and muting nearby. Some felt the nest was not big enough but it was not possible to gauge how far

back the hollow extended. The site will be monitored during the forthcoming breeding season and hopefully confirmed. For me the best sighting of the weekend was of a Gabar Goshawk, which we saw while walking below the dam wall. Not only did he linger for more than 20 minutes, he flew between low and high perches giving us ample opportunity to view him from all angles and then came down to bathe in one of the many rock pools. Our walks gave us the chance to observe close-up pipits in the ploughed lands, and several LBJs hopping in amongst the tomato crop and in reeds along the water's edge – only a few of which we identified with any degree of confidence!

Our final list of 109 species was very satisfying. Our sincere thanks to Val, Stan and Sean Nicholle for inviting us to visit and to Cecilia and Tony for the wonderful catering and all they did to make our stay so enjoyable.

Adele Edwards

Mashonaland South

Kadoma golf course 20th April 2015.

This morning was cool, damp and miserable.

The Mashumavale River had been in full flow after the heavy, unexpected rains of early April. As a result the Thick-billed Weaver nests were flattened and in disarray. There was no noise or activity of birds, so the end of the breeding season of the first-time visitors to the Kadoma area is unknown. Hopefully, they will return next season for observation.

That same morning, one Hamerkop was on a fairway, calling loudly. Ten African Wattled Lapwings were noisy around the river edge at their favourite and usual No. 7 golf green area.

The two colonies of Southern Masked-weavers nest building in the bamboo plantations have become quiet and abandoned, and as expected no sign of any birds.

Margaret Parrock.

Charama Safari Lodge 9th May 2015

On Saturday, 9th May, Ruth Paice and Sigrid Stone went out to Charama Safari Lodge at Kadoma, arriving before 7 a.m. to take part in the **Global Bird Count**. Sadly the other birders in

Kadoma were unable to participate as they had prior commitments. I know we would have seen and identified a lot more birds if our numbers had been greater, but the 2 of us covered as much ground as possible and had a wonderful day, spending 12 hours, walking, driving, photographing and recording bird calls.

As we drove into Charama the mist was rising off the water in the dam, which is covered in water lilies. The African Fish-eagle was calling and the birds were celebrating the dawn of a new day. It was as if an avian orchestra was playing to welcome us. We managed to positively identify 72 different birds which was a little disappointing, as on our Charama bird list we have 161 different birds. We stayed until 7 p.m. driving around in the dark, stopping and listening, but only saw a Spotted Eagle-owl which flew up in front of us. There was a function on at Charama that night, and the birds may have retreated into the deep bush to escape the traffic.

S. Stone

Other areas

Chimanimani

Our group of 11 birders departed Harare at 8.20 a.m. on Friday, 24th April and arrived at Outward Bound, Chimanimani at 3.20 p.m. A welcome tea with homemade goodies awaited us, and we relaxed under the shady trees. Our hosts, Dave and Irene Meikle were there to greet us with a warm welcome. On a nearby flowering cherry tree, the sunbirds were active and happy.

Outward Bound at 1,129 m above sea level, is surrounded by steep rocky mountains, dense forests, lush vegetation and clear running water in the rivers. A short walk to Tessa's Pool, after tea, completed the day. The Mountain Wagtail was happy around the rocks and water. A flock of low flying Eastern Saw-wings was busy in the vleis nearby.

The Saturday a.m. walk was split into 2 groups, moving in opposite directions. Our 4-hour walk through forests and riverine vegetation with 5 river crossings was disappointing for birds. The 3 p.m. afternoon walk along the road from the 2.5 km peg was more rewarding as Rock Martin, Blue-spotted Wood-dove, Speckled Mousebird, and African Stonechat were notables.

Sunday a.m. Some of us seniors were feeling the effects of ambitious climbing the previous day, so we used the road for the morning walk. Beginning at the 5 km peg, near a bridge over the Haroni River, by a vlei, we began our walk from Charleswood Farm. The Wire-tailed Swallows were active and darting under the bridge, so must be nesting there. Yellow Bishop, Common Fiscal, Common and Yellow-bellied Waxbill, Red-backed Mannikin,

Brimstone Canary, Spotted Flycatcher, Lazy Cisticola and Terrestrial Brownbul were all worthy sightings during our 3 hour 20 min walk. At 1.00 p.m., and sitting in the garden, a flock of c.200 Red-winged Starlings flew overhead towards the east.

After afternoon tea at 3.00 p.m. with delicious chocolate éclairs, our leisurely group walked the 3 km from National Parks Chimanimani road, returning to camp by 5.30 p.m. Chin-spot Batis, 1 pair Yellow-fronted Canary, Black-crowned Tchagra and Cape Robin-chat were of note.

The two flowering cherry trees, either side of the dining hall at camp was always alive with sunbirds. Miombo Double-collared, Variable, Amethyst, Collared, and Western Violet-backed were seen. The Olive Sunbirds liked the Tessa's Pool (forest) area. At camp, a pair of Miombo Rock-thrushes was a treat to behold hiding in the mango tree. This first ever visit for me to Chimanimani area was truly invigorating and refreshing with unpolluted mountain air, clear drinkable river water, lush green and thick vegetation of forests and grasses. Few people reside up there, so the noise, litter, human disturbance is minimal. Our hosts provided a lovely, relaxed surrounding, and the chef, with his three woman assistants presented us with tasty, hearty meals. The trip covered nine hundred kilometres with four tolls each way and very many police roadblocks, but fortunately not disturbing our travel.

As always a lovely group of birding friends. Many thanks to all.

Margaret Parrock.

Some birds recorded at Outward Bound and not seen before by A.J. Beasley

(1995) Birds of the Chimanimani Mountains, (Outward Bound and Tessa's Pool are on his map): *Honeyguide* Volume 1, Supplement 1. And Ian Riddell (6/2013) Chimanimani Checklist on the BLZ website: Pentad 1945_3255. (Relative abundance is from 1-4, 4 being seen every day we were there.)

Amur Falcon 2, Red-eyed Dove 4, Barn Owl 2, Wire-tailed Swallow 2, Pied Crow 2, Terrestrial

Brownbul 3, Zitting Cisticola 2, Spotted Flycatcher 2, Southern Grey-headed Sparrow 2

and Bronze Mannikin 3 which had nests in the garden.

Some Eastern District birds seen or heard, 24-27 April 2015 in the Outward Bound School area were: Red-necked Spurfowl 2, Blue-spotted Wood-dove 3, Livingstone's Turaco 3, African Cuckoo 2, Burchell's Coucal 2, Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird 3, Square-tailed Drongo 2, White-necked Raven 3, Stripe-cheeked Greenbul 4, Miombo-Rock-thrush 2, Red-capped Robin-chat

4, Wailing Cisticola 4, Spotted Flycatcher 2, African Dusky Flycatcher 2, Cape Batis 3, White-tailed Crested Flycatcher 2, Mountain Wagtail 3, Gorgeous Bush-shrike 2, Olive Bush-shrike 2, Olive Sunbird 2, Dark-backed Weaver 2, African Firefinch 3, Yellow-bellied Waxbill 3, Red-backed Mannikin 3 and Cape Canary 2.

David Rockingham-Gill

PS Big Thanks to Tony Alegria for organizing the expedition.

Tail Feathers

Basra Reed-warbler at Komani

The Mashonaland Bird Club List for the outing to Komani farm some 12 km outside Harare on 31st January clocked up just over 100 species. But it omitted the Basra Reed-warbler *Acrocephalus griseldis*. I have decided that this was definitely the bird that I was chicken to claim because I could not see it and have never seen it. It was in the fenced off area around the overflowing windmill up on the ridge at the far end of all the sheds and hangars for the microlights.

The Komani vlel has its own features. The water line at the bottom has no tall growth above waist high: no spikey reeds, no bulrushes, no Little Rush-warblers, no reed-warblers or sedge-warblers. But up on the ridge there is this fenced off block about a hectare in extent of wet ground that seems to be associated with an ever-turning windmill working a borehole pump.

In here there were dozens of Southern Red Bishops and Little Rush-warblers. There had to be Red-chested Flufftail and Black Crake and Great Reed-warbler – still not ticked for the day and maybe an African Grass-owl on the fringes? Got the Black Crake but not the others because the Great Reed-warbler was not a Great Reed-warbler.

This other bird was calling away at about head high in the 3-4-metre high *Phragmites* reeds, willow herbs and long grass. But it kept just out of sight. The call was of the same pattern with the same long phrases as that of a Great Reed-warbler but distinctly softer – not so brash – though much louder than the other warbling warblers like African Reed-warbler and Sedge Warbler. Later discussions with Jono Francis and listening to the Roberts recording and Jono's own recordings from Zambia leave me in no doubt as to what it was.

These birds periodically come south of the Zambezi but records are few. This is an unusually wet year so we should be getting more unusual birds.

Alex Masterson

[**Comment:** *The Basra Reed-warbler is a rarity that has been reported a few times from the Zambezi, sometimes anecdotally. The few rarities reports that have been submitted have been rejected and it does not appear on our National List for want of full and sufficient documentation. ICR*]

NEST RECORDS – ZIMBABWE NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM

Kudzanai Sandra Dhliwayo is based in the Ornithology Department of the Zimbabwe Natural History Museum in Bulawayo. She would like to revive and add to the Nest Record Card collection maintained there. Blank cards may be collected from her at the Museum or from the BirdLife Office. If you are unable to complete a card, she welcomes information via email and will complete a card on your behalf. Her email address is kudzanaid@gmail.com.

Contributions for *The Babbler* 125 August 2015/ September 2015 may be sent to the editor anytime between now and 14th July 2015.