

THE BABBLER

Newsletter of



BirdLife Zimbabwe

The BirdLife International Partner in Zimbabwe

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SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION

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

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 AUGUST 2015

- Saturday 1st August 2015** **Marlborough Vlei Walk** **Meet at 07.00 a.m.**
Meet on the bottom of Princess Margaret Road, off Harare Drive; follow the road round to the left
- Sunday 2nd August 2015** **Mukuvisi Woodlands Walk** **Meet at 07.00 a.m.**
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. Please bring payment for the guard.
- Saturday 8th August 2015** **Ballantyne Park Walk** **Meet at 07.00 a.m.**
Meet at the car park Ballantyne Park, Wellburn Drive. Opposite Ballantyne Shops
- Sunday 16th August 2015** **Monavale Vlei Walk** **Meet at 07.00 a.m.**
Meet on the BS Leon side of Fenella Drive, at the platform.
- Thursday 20th August 2015** **Presentation – The Zambia Shoebill Trip** **7.30 – 6.00 p.m.**
By Tony Alegria
Meet at Avondale Sports Club, Brighton Road, Avondale. There is a cash bar and a car guard. A minimum donation of \$1 per person at the door please.
- Sunday 23rd August 2015** **Outing – McDonald Farm, Ruwa** **Meet at 07.00 a.m.**
Meet at Mukuvisi Woodlands Office carpark at 7 a.m. prompt. Bring chairs and a picnic brunch. Share transport.

BirdLife (BLZ) Zimbabwe Mashonaland Calendar of Events SEPTEMBER 2015

- Saturday 5th September 2015** **Marlborough Vlei Walk** **Meet at 07.00 a.m.**
Meet on the bottom of Princess Margaret Road, off Harare Drive; follow the road round to the left
- Sunday 6th September 2015** **Mukuvisi Woodlands Walk** **Meet at 06.30 a.m.**
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. Please bring payment for the guard.
- Saturday 12th September 2015** **Greystone Park Nature Reserve** **Meet at 07.00 a.m.**
Halford Road off Gaydon Road
- Thursday 17th September 2015** **Presentation – Bird Migration Hazards** **5.30 – 6.00 p.m.**
By Tony Alegria
Meet at Avondale Sports Club, Brighton Road, Avondale. There is a cash bar and a car guard. A minimum donation of \$1 per person at the door please.
- Sunday 20th September 2015** **Monavale Vlei Walk** **Meet at 06.30 a.m.**
Meet on the BS Leon side of Fenella Drive, at the platform.
- Sunday 27th September 2015** **Outing – Domboshawa Hill** **Meet at 06.30 a.m.**
Meet at CABS Northridge Park, Borrowdale at 6.30 a.m. Bring a chair and picnic brunch. Share transport. There is an entry fee at this venue.

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

Saturday 22 August: 3:00 p.m. Adele Edwards will give a talk on bird migration, at her home – 6 Corney Road, Morningside. Tea and coffee will be served. Members are welcome to bring their own refreshments.

Saturday 12 September: Time to be advised. Walk at Garden Park.

Saturday 17 October: Advance notice of a quiz being prepared up by Vernon Tarr, so start swotting now! The quiz will take place at the Tarr's home. Time & directions to follow at a later date.

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

My apologies for the error in the June/July edition of *Babbler* where I put the date of the waterfowl count at Aisleby as 19 June instead of 19 July. The BLZ Matabeleland branch secretary supplied me with the correct date, and the *Babbler* editor printed the information that was supplied to her. The error was mine alone. Again my apologies for any inconvenience caused by this mistake.
Adele Edwards

National Office

2015 BirdLife Zimbabwe Council

President: Clive Stockil

Vice President: Tony Wood

Treasurer: James Ball

Secretary: Linda Fussell

Members:

David Rockingham-Gill

Rob Rees

Russell Clark

Leslee Maasdorp

Tony Alegria (Mashonaland Branch)

Cecilia Hubbard (Matabeleland Branch)

Members holding roles outside of Council and Branch committees:

National Membership: Carolyn Dennison

SABAP2: Ian Riddell

Library & Wetland Conservation: Dorothy Wakeling

Waterbird Count Team: David Rockingham-Gill, Ian Riddell, and Carolyn Dennison

Special Species Survey: Peta Ditchburn

Honeyguide: Julia Duprée (production), Colin Baker, Brain Marshall (Editor), Ken Dixon (Assistant Editor), Michael Irwin (Editor emeritus), Carolyn Dennison (distribution)

Babbler: Fiona Greiffenberg (Editor), Ian Riddell (Assistant Editor), Carolyn Dennison (distribution)

27 JUNE VULTURE AWARENESS DAY IN VICTORIA FALLS

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 Palm-nut) and this group of globally threatened birds has 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 (e.g. 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.

84 participants attended the Vulture Awareness Day at the Elephant Hills Resort. Initially, the event was to have been held at the Victoria Falls Safari Lodge Conference Centre but with a week to go we were advised by the Group Operations Manager, Andy Conn, that they had a visiting film crew that they needed to accommodate in the conference centre and it was no longer available to us. However, Mr Conn did negotiate the Elephant Hills conference room for us on the same terms – grateful thanks for that! Also many thanks to the Elephant Hills Resort for accommodating us for free at such short notice too!

Agenda

8.30 – 9 a.m. Registration

9 – 9.30 a.m. Prof. Peter Mundy, National University of Science and Technology Vultures of Zimbabwe

9.30 – 10 a.m. Dr Chris Foggin, Victoria Falls Wildlife Trust, Malicious Poisoning of Vultures & other Wildlife

10 – 10.30 a.m. Josephine Mundava, National University of Science and Technology, Vultures & Traditional Medicine

10.30 – 11 a.m. Lovelater Sebele, Zimparks Ecologist, Vultures on Small Carcasses

11 a.m. Tea/Coffee Break

11.30 – 12 p.m. Roger Parry, Victoria Falls Wildlife Trust, Proposed Vulture Re-hab., Research and Education initiatives in the Vic Falls Region

12 – 12.30 p.m. Fadzai Matsvimbo, BirdLife Zimbabwe, Action Planning to save Zimbabwe's Vultures

12.30 – 1 p.m. Martin Taylor, BirdLife South Africa, The Importance of Regional Collaboration

Many thanks to: Roger Parry and the Victoria Falls Wildlife Trust for bringing 'Judge' the White-backed Vulture to the event, all the Speakers, Trevor Lane who pinned up posters in key areas around Vic Falls to advertise the event and also liaised with Zimparks, Cathrina Gover who administers the Vic Falls mailing list, Gill Staden who also posted our info on the Vulture Awareness Day in the Livingstone BiWeekly (Zambia), Frances Jackson for advertising our event in the Zambezi Traveller, Mike Garden for posting our flyer in Ndeipi and Bambazonke, Rosie Mitchell for advertising the event in Zimtrader, Darryl Tiran for doing an exceptional job of liaising with Zimparks and Elephant Hills Resort and organising and sponsoring the meal for the whole bus on our arrival at the Falls! Many thanks also to all who took part and helped us create *AWARENESS* of the plight of our Vultures. We wouldn't have done it without you all!

Julia Pierini



27 June 2015 Annual General Meeting in Victoria Falls

When the AGM in the Victoria Falls was first proposed to Council, a few members in Harare said that the Falls were just too far away. (But too far for whom? Not for the Matabeleland members. As it turned out, the members in the Falls were very appreciative of the effort that was made to stage the event in their town). So a bus was organised to facilitate members coming to the AGM. Many thanks to Unifreight for their support! At this point, it was decided that having the AGM in the Falls would also be a good opportunity to brand the bus and create a Vulture Awareness event around the meeting at the Falls too. So who travelled up to Vic Falls on the bus? Thirty-nine passengers in all. The response from the membership was poor and to give impetus to the Vulture Awareness event, we decided to gather not only BLZ staff and the few members who had adhered to the initiative onto the bus but also invite associates and collaborators who work closely with the BirdLife Zimbabwe to join us. On arrival at the Falls at 8.30 p.m. on 26th June, we were accommodated in 9 lodges in the Zambezi National Park. Many thanks go to BLZ member, Darryl Tiran and Trevor Lane for liaising with Zimparks to have the lodges ready on our arrival and for allowing us to enter the Park after hours. Darryl also had dinner prepared for us and personally covered the cost of this food and catering.

34 members attended the AGM; the minutes for reports will be sent out separately.

At the end of the meeting, the proposal for next year's AGM is to have it in Kariba on a houseboat. Some of our current members will balk at this idea but I firmly believe that the AGM is an opportunity for BLZ members to come together in different areas of Zimbabwe. Our presence serves to highlight the birding hotspots in our country and supports local members in those areas. The intention is also to create a fun event that all members *want* to attend!

Julia Pierini

Fellow Birders! You are all invited to the most amazing BIRDING CRUISE ever, on the spectacular MSC Sinfonia, at unbelievable pricing for the guaranteed value of the trip in April 2017. **BOOKINGS ARE ABOUT TO CLOSE IN SEPTEMBER 2015.** This is the ultimate way to cruise & tick pelagics in style, avoiding the usual seasickness & rough weather usually encountered on a small boat! Plus a great social & festive scene! The last trip a few years ago was a MEGA! Costs work out to be approx. \$105 per day on the ship including meals. Cheap air flights on FlyAfrica can hopefully be booked by then!

If you ever had a desire to experience Cruise Life luxuries at its finest & do a spot of Birding now & then, plus 100s of other SA & World Birders all at one venue – then this is for you.

Itinerary – depart Cape Town for 4 nights to the southern continental shelf famous for ALL pelagics. Excellent views of species can be seen, dependant on your power of binos & camera! Also whale, dolphin & killer whale are often seen in this area.

A message with full details will be sent out to members and for more info check out <http://www.birdlife.org.za/events/flock/flock-at-sea-again-2017>

Special Species Survey

This survey focuses on a number of selected bird species. We believe that the survey is becoming more important because birds numbers in their areas of distribution have undergone adverse change in recent years. Contributing causes are climatic changes, land use and consequently habitat change, indiscriminate development, destruction through deforestation, agriculture and human population pressure demands.

Some of the birds listed are of interest to researchers and all the information collected, from you the members, will go onto the national database and towards the formulation of conservation strategies. It's birding with a purpose!

This survey should be fun to take part in and produces interesting data that will be included in our publications, *Babbler* and *Honeyguide*.

We would like members to please complete the Special Species Survey (SSS) report form, which is easy to use either on computer or by hand. On the form, we would always appreciate any interesting comments – for example what the birds were eating!

Printed copies of the SSS report form can be obtained from the BLZ office in Harare, or from a committee member of your local branch, or on the website: www.birdlifezimbabwe.org (click on the NEWS page) or by email from Peta Ditchburn at specialspecies@blz.co.zw Please return to Peta Ditchburn with a copy to cbaker@halsteds.co.zw

The Special Species are:

Bateleur	Bee-eater , Southern Carmine	†Bunting , Cape†	Bustard , Denham's
Bustard , Kori	Cormorant , White-breasted	Crane , Grey Crowned	Crane , Wattled
Darter , African	Duck , Maccoa	Duck , Yellow-billed	Eagle , African Crowned
Eagle , Martial	Eagle , Tawny	Eagle , Verreaux's	Harrier , African Marsh-
Hawk , Bat	Hornbill , Silvery-cheeked	Hornbill , Southern Ground-	Kite , Yellow-billed
Lovebird , Lilian's	Myna , Common	Osprey	Ostrich , Common
Oxpecker , Red-billed	*Oxpecker , Yellow-billed*	Parrot , Grey-headed	Pigeon , East. Bronze-naped
Secretarybird	Skimmer , African	Stork , Black	Stork , Marabou
Stork , Saddle-billed	Stork , White	Vulture , Cape	Vulture , Hooded
Vulture , Lappet-faced	Vulture , Palm-nut	Vulture , White-backed	Vulture , White-headed
Warbler , Moustached Grass-	Warbler , Red-winged	(†Matabeleland areas)	(*Outside protected areas)



**BirdLife Zimbabwe branded spare tyre cover
available @ USD32 each**
Email juliapierini@birdlifezimbabwe.org to
place your orders

Contribute to BirdLife Zimbabwe's Vulture Awareness Campaign and buy yourself a Vulture Alert T-shirt or BLZ cap – available from BLZ Office, 35 Clyde Rd, Eastlea, Harare Mon- Fri 8.30 - 4.30 p.m. **T-shirt and cap @ only USD10 each**



Feedback: 9 May Global Big Day

Fantastic NEWS! Zimbabwe rose to the top of the African Global Big Day podium, in both species and checklists for the eBird Global Big day on 9th May 2015.

Very well done to all the teams of birders who participated! eBird increases our understanding of the distribution, richness, and uniqueness of the biodiversity of our planet. Do your bit towards contributing critical data to science and make sure – if you haven't participated this year – that you do so in the 2016 eBird Global Big Day! Start practicing now!

For more info: <http://blog.allaboutbirds.org/2015/05/11/global-big-day-the-world-goes-birding/>

RECENT REPORTS AND SIGHTINGS

NATIONAL

Common Myna – Report Presented to the BLZ AGM, June 2015

The first known report¹ of Indian (Common) Mynas in Zimbabwe was received from a ranch north of Chiredzi in the lowveld on 20th November 2001. Peter Mundy has submitted this report to *Honeyguide* for publication. Since then in the last 14 years, mynas have spread rapidly through the country.

This report deals with the distribution and breeding behaviour which I have managed to gather largely through the contributions of members of BLZ and the public.

KNOWN DISTRIBUTION

It remains difficult to accurately know the current distribution of Common Mynas in Zimbabwe, as the number of observers who identify and report these birds is small and the observers themselves have a restricted distribution! I wish to thank those who continue to send in reports of sightings of mynas. The range expansion of the Common Myna is a historical event currently unfolding across Southern Africa. In the 1960s the House Sparrow arrived in this country and spread across the country and further northwards. Common Mynas are doing the same now so we should try to record the event as accurately as possible! It is my intention to write up this event in *Honeyguide* but your continued support is needed in order to document it as accurately as possible!

To date it appears that mynas may currently be expected anywhere south of the central watershed from Harare to Bulawayo and then in the west as far north as the Victoria Falls area. They have not however yet been recorded in Victoria Falls town itself (D. Tiran personal communication). The Zambian Ornithological Society was informed of the arrival of mynas in the Victoria Falls area. I have to date only received one unconfirmed record from north of Harare from Barwick. In the Midlands they are known to occur in Gweru. They also occur at some ranch homesteads in the lowveld and at various small urban centres in Matabeleland. There are however

¹ Post records of: 1957-1960 (Harare), 1980-82 (Bulawayo escapees & feral breeding), 1983 (Zvishavane)

some surprising gaps in this known distribution and the birds may have reached many more places than are reported here. Thus far I have no information on their occurrence in Chipinge, Chegutu, Kadoma, Kwekwe, Norton, Nyazura, Headlands. There are also unconfirmed reports from Hwange Town, Rusape and Chivhu. During the past 12 months, since the last AGM, new arrival dates were received for Marondera, (January 2015 from Mrs P. Banks); Victoria Falls Airport (July 2014 from Celesta von Chamier). I suspect that the Victoria Falls birds had however arrived some time earlier as dispersion occurs mainly in the summer months! These records are for birds which are established.

In Harare numbers of mynas continue to increase – however the birds are still easily overlooked. They may be most common in the city centre primarily along Samora Machel Avenue with 2 concentrations near the Harare Show Grounds and near the GMB offices (formerly Park Lane Hotel) and near the Celebration Centre along Borrowdale Road and in Chisipite and even Glen Lorne! They do not at present appear to have moved into the suburbs to any extent. I believe they are now quite widespread in Bulawayo from the city centre into the suburbs and the same applies to Masvingo. Numbers continue to increase in Mutare as well.

Whilst mynas are known to be commensal with humans and thus occur mostly near human settlement they have also been reported from wildlife areas but usually near human settlement. In the National Parks estate they have been reported in recent years from Gonarezhou, Hwange and they have also been seen within the Save Conservancy, but do not appear to have become settled and the birds may have only been on passage. Mynas appear to be seasonal visitors to Hwange National Park during the breeding season from October to January, when they have been reported from safari camps. They are however actively breeding in small centres on the boundaries of the park including Dete and Tsholotsho; and in Botswana they occur as far north as Kasane.

The Zimbabwe National Parks and Wildlife Management Authority was informed as far back as 2012 and is aware of their occurrence in Hwange National Park. Control measures have been undertaken since the problem emerged and these appear to be effective within the national park but will need to be on-going. The number of birds may be small and their distribution is tied to waterholes, so control appears to be effective. Fortunately there is no indication of a wild population becoming established and the birds appear to be absent from Hwange during the winter months.

I wish to thank the various people who have provided information for Hwange and surrounds.

BREEDING BEHAVIOUR

Mynas have thus far been reported taking over the nests of Crested Barbets, House Sparrows and Red-billed Buffalo-weavers. Mynas will also build their own nests in trees or man-made structures. In Harare a favoured nest site is amongst the fronds of palm trees. Perhaps in 10 or 20 years we will know what impact the arrival of mynas has had on our city birds. The Harare Garden Bird Survey may provide some useful baseline information.

Alarming a few reports of mynas breeding in Red-billed Buffalo-weaver's nests have been received from within Hwange National Park. This is during the summer months from the end of October to February, which is the time when the mynas breed. There is also a confirmed sighting of mynas removing buffalo-weavers chicks from their nest in Hwange National Park. A report has been submitted for publication in *Honeyguide*. I think there is a study opportunity here for natural history students in Zimbabwe?

The range expansion of the myna within Zimbabwe and the impact the myna will have on our birds is being monitored but your assistance is needed! Please could you send any reports of sightings of mynas including the following information if possible?

- the number of birds seen
- where seen – locality, the date and time; when first seen,
- Their behaviour, especially interactions with other birds, breeding, resident?

Information could be sent to me, Geoff Lowe, at wildfire@mweb.co.zw or telephone/ fax 04-332087.

Geoff Lowe

Vulture Awareness at the Trade Fair

Fadzai Matsvimbo attended the Zimbabwe International Trade Fair at the end of April to raise awareness on the situation with the vultures. The Trade Fair is one of the biggest events in Zimbabwe and year after year it draws large numbers of people, including business people, politicians, school children and ordinary Zimbabweans.

This year BirdLife Zimbabwe was hosted at The Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority Stand. Fadzai teamed up with Merlyn Nkomo, Nobuhle Mabhikwa and Josephine Mundava during the Fair. It was a busy time as the Parks Stand attracts a lot of people, both young and old. In the end I lost count of the number of people we talked to.

It was an eye opening experience in the sense that when we hold seminars/ workshops most of the times we are speaking to people who know about bird conservation issues, hence it is quite easy to relate to them and vice versa. At the Trade Fair, there was a mix of people from all walks of life, some are aware of the importance of vultures and others are not interested.

There is a big challenge ahead of us in terms of raising awareness. Some of the people I talked to admitted that they do believe that vultures have special powers; others even said they had witnessed the use of these parts first hand.

Unfortunately I could not pursue one particular individual who said he knew about use of vulture parts. A few blatantly said vultures are ugly birds that they do not care about. In this manner it was eye opening to get views of ordinary Zimbabwean on vultures.



Many thanks go to the ZPWMA staff who accommodated us at the stand and made us part of their team.

Fadzai Matsvimbo

Wetland Management continues on Monavale and Marlborough Vleis following on from the Jensen Harare Wetland Project

Research activities on both wetlands continue with COSMO and BLZ working in collaboration with the University of Zimbabwe Biological Sciences Department. School visits continue and so does daily monitoring of birds and animals. The outcome of the Application for a Permit to Build on Monavale Vlei is awaited from the Director of Works.

Zimbabwe reconfirmed its commitment to protecting wetlands at the Ramsar Conference of Parties 2015 in Uruguay in June as well as its obligations to the existing 7 Ramsar Sites, which includes Monavale Vlei. This is very good news for the wetlands of Zimbabwe. To support EMA implement its objectives, lobbying and advocacy for wetland preservation is ongoing. The legal action against the approval of the Marlborough Local Plan Amendment 1 continues, as does the search for funding to support these activities. BirdLife International reported it was pleased with the final Jensen Report and congratulated the Harare Team on its hard work during the Project period.

Dorothy Wakeling

Conservation Society of Monavale, Monavale Vlei Programme Manager
cosmo@yoafrica.com

Mashonaland

Mashonaland Branch Visit To Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary, Sunday 12th July 2015

There was ground frost in Borrowdale when I left home on Sunday but it soon warmed up and 10 members enjoyed a pleasant morning's birding in seamless sunshine. July being Waterbird Count month we intended to concentrate on the 'lake' but as the water level is very high and the reeds along the shore so tall there was only a limited view of the shore and water and no habitat for waders.

From the vantage point of the hillock we could see the breeding White-breasted Cormorants on rocky islands and watch a large number of Reed Cormorants flying backwards and forwards to and from their colony just inland carrying nesting material. Later we were able to observe their nests, some with young, from much closer. Also to be seen were Grey-headed Gulls, 4 Little Grebes, Egyptian Goose and African Fish-eagle. From the reeds came

the call of the Little Rush-warbler, whilst 2 Hottentot Teals, a Common Moorhen family and African Jacana were on the Hide pool. 2 Hamerkops and 9 Glossy Ibis flew over.

A brightly singing African Stonechat was the only bird obvious on the grassland until we put up a coucal which we all thought was a Black Coucal but, as that species should not have been present in July, it was not claimed. Nearer the Harare Safari Lodge boundary we came across 2 gill nets hanging in a tree, one containing the remains of what might have been a Grey Hornbill, the other a large Barbel head. It was conjectured an African Fish-eagle or some other raptor might have carried them there to eat the contents. Some Blacksmith Lapwings

Avenues Clinic Birding Report

At the beginning of the year my husband and I were blessed with a beautiful baby boy. All was well except that my husband was getting very restless carrying out his supportive husbandly duties and sitting for hours on end in the Maternity Ward of Harare's Avenues Clinic.

Whilst sitting on the bench by the window staring out at the goings on below, he began to notice a few different birds enjoying some urban airtime. The next day he arrived at the clinic armed with a pair of binos. Here is our list from the 29th and 30th January 2015 from the window of Avenues Clinic 3rd Floor North:

Black-collared Barbet, Dark-capped Bulbul, Pied Crow, Red-eyed Dove, Rock Dove, Cattle

BIRDING IN ZIMBABWE'S NATIONAL BOTANIC GARDEN

Admittedly, the Bot Gardens aren't what they were in the 80s and 90s, the lake is empty, there are no cascading streams in the rainforest and blackjacks rule in the more remote areas but there are lots of positive features relatively little-known to most residents of the city. Much of the area within the 'tarmacked' road is well-maintained and the lawns mown, one can now walk or run on clearly marked paths from the car park to the Nat Parks HQ and further east towards Borrowdale Road before climbing over the hill behind St. George's College and wandering down to the restaurant for a cup of tea and a snack. Very recently, many of the trees have received smart new name labels thanks to the Tree Society, which adds interest for many of us.

The motivation for our (5 members of BirdLife Zimbabwe) 7 a.m. visit on Sat 13th June was however principally birds for which the Gardens have been well known for many years. In fact, AJ Beasley published a book entitled *Birds of the Botanic Garden* in 1995, recording his observations from 1976-1986 with a list of 196

called noisily and a Giant Kingfisher sat unperturbed nearby. The woodland was eerily quiet but we picked up Little Bee-eaters, White-browed Robin-chat, Crested Barbet, African Grey Hornbill, Black-headed Oriole and a Dark-capped Yellow Warbler in the area.

The main woodland, as is so often true these days, seemed to be devoid of birds and did not detain us long.

At the count we managed 61 species and then added a Little Egret and a Red-billed Quelea when we went to visit the Reed Cormorant colony afterwards. Disappointing waterbird count but rewarding mornings walk.

Ken Dixon

Egret, African Paradise-flycatcher, Hamerkop, Bronze Mannikin, White-browed Robin-chat, Streaky-headed Seedeater, Southern Grey-headed Sparrow, Black Sparrowhawk, Greater Blue-eared Starling, Red-winged Starling, Abdim's Stork, Miombo Double-collared Sunbird, Variable Sunbird, Wire-tailed Swallow, African Palm-swift, Little Swift, Purple-crested Turaco and African Yellow White-eye.

Twenty-three species in total, which we thought, was a great number for a built up area. So for all those breeders-come-birders, please add to the Avenues bird list while your little cherub sleeps "peacefully" beside you!!!

Jen Francis

species. In midwinter it is not really necessary to start out early as birds share our love of the sun and don't move until they have warmed up. So for the first hour or so we saw very little except Blue Waxbill, Dark-capped Bulbul, Fork-tailed Drongo and the ubiquitous Kurrichane Thrush and Red-eyed Dove. Even the White-browed Robin-chat remained silent. It wasn't until we came down from the top of the hill into the miombo woodland that birds at last appeared. In a tall Msasa near Acacia Corner we spied a flock of Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters hawking flying insects from their perch. This attractive species is a winter bird of passage in Harare while the more common Little Bee-eater is resident. Also very active were many Amethyst Sunbirds, one of six sunbird species noted; Variable, White-bellied, Scarlet-chested, Copper and Miombo Double-collared being the others. A female Cardinal Woodpecker was also present and African Palm-swift, Grey-rumped Swallow and Eastern Saw-wings zoomed overhead.

As we moved gradually south we spotted or identified by call Chin-spot Batis, Bar-throated Apalis, Black-backed Puffback, Whyte's Barbet, Crested Barbet and Black-collared Barbet and a Brimstone Canary.

Eventually we reached the restaurant just as the first tables were being brought out. Where better to pause, have a drink and make a list of

the species seen for the BirdLife office where all data is collected and archived? Our count was a rather paltry 40 species but about average for the time of the year. However, the effort of getting out of bed on a cold winter morning had been well worthwhile we all agreed.

Ken Dixon

MONA VALE VLEI JUNE/JULY 2015

Monavale Vlei and its surrounds had some of the following bird species seen this winter: Black Storks, Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters, African Stonechats and African Wattled Lapwings. We experienced early burns with most of the Vlei now burnt on Monday 20th and Friday 24th July.

The burns provided ideal habitat for 2 Capped Wheatears and 2 African Pipits. The fires also brought in 2 Yellow-billed Kites, 20 Marabou Storks, 8 White Storks, 15 Greater Striped Swallows, 8 Marsh Owls, and plenty of Black-headed Herons. A Giant Bullfrog was seen this winter.

Three classes from Twinrivers School visited Monavale Vlei on 3 different days recently. They were thrilled to be here and loved learning about wetlands. Total number of bird species recorded over past few months: 127 during April, 104 during May and 101 during June.

Jimmy Muropa

Monavale Vlei Scout. 0772 772 771

African Harrier-hawk

Remember the sorry tale of the shooting of an African Harrier-hawk with a pellet gun in a garden of the suburb of Mandara, Harare in May? You know that the bird survived but we would like to let you all know that it will be able to fly again and will be freed (hopefully in a couple of months) once the feathers on its wing coverts have grown out. Last week the bird was moved to Twala Trust to a large enclosure and is flying strongly and building up its strength. Grateful thanks to Leslie De Beer who has been responsible for the rehabilitation of the bird and to Sarah Carter of Twala Trust for giving the hawk a home during the final stages of its recovery. On that note, I'd like to emphasize how expensive, time & energy consuming it is to rehabilitate an injured animal. The rehab of the African harrier-hawk has cost over \$350 in vet bills, etc. Our wildlife is very precious. Let us respect and protect it. Preventing cases like this is better than trying to cure!

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Matabeleland

HWANGE NATIONAL PARK MAIN CAMP – 30TH JUNE TO 4TH JULY 2015

Having committed ourselves to attending the national AGM of BirdLife Zimbabwe up at Victoria Falls at the end of June, we decided to take the opportunity to do the July African Waterbird Count in the Main Camp area on our way back. Although John is no longer involved in the WEZ water project in the park, he is still assisting Dave Dell and Friends of Hwange in

this regard so this trip also gave us the chance to see how the water situation is faring – or not, as the case may be!

Once we had settled ourselves in one of National Parks' Zambezi River lodges, we took a drive to Chamabonda vlei where Trevor Lane and Mbejane Trust have been doing a lot of work and have now installed three solar units as

well as working hard on improving the roads within this little gem. Right down at the end of the vlei is a delightful hide and camping area which looks extremely inviting and definitely worth a stay at some stage. Work was being carried out cutting and baling the grass in parts of the huge vlei and already large numbers of zebra were gathering to graze on the short cut grass. Part of the vlei had been burnt and we enjoyed watching two fluffy spotted hyena pups lying outside their den, soaking up the late afternoon sun while blinking myopically at us. We saw a couple of giraffe and warthog were very much in evidence and on our way back we came across two large herds of buffalo. If folks are ever up that way, Chamabonda is certainly well worth a visit.

The Zambezi River lodges have been revamped but sadly, due to poor workmanship some of the lovely floor tiles were badly cracked, threatening the unwary of a trip up if not careful. We had a very comfortable stay, but a good watch out had to be kept to keep the pesky Vervet monkeys and baboons at bay. The first evening, while sitting round the braai fire, a young elephant gave us a fright, bellowing in the bush near our lodge and then dashing out and off down the cleared frontage of our lodge, fortunately towards the river! Hyenas were around the lodges both nights, keeping up a protracted conversation of giggles and whoops. The birds were very vocal early in the early morning and a young bushbuck ram was seen tiptoeing through a thicket near the main gate. Warthog scratched around outside several of the lodges.

Having attended the vulture talks and the AGM on the Saturday, we packed up on Sunday and drove through to Olive Beadle, stopping off first at Gorges Lodge for a quick look and watched the rafters paddling by. We then took the dirt road through to the main Msuna road from Hwange. We had two nights at Olive Beadle where we conducted a waterfowl count, firstly a static one at the house we were staying in and then boating the requisite five-kilometre stretch of shoreline, marking down bird numbers. It was fantastic out on the water, as we chugged slowly down to Msuna and back. We were rather taken aback at the large numbers of HUGE crocs lying about and even more appalled at the river bank cultivation that is taking place from Olive Beadle all the way through to Msuna. The Zambian side too is built up with shacks and very populated. Delights were a Rufous-bellied Heron slinking around in the reeds near our lodge and two African skimmers seen at Msuna.

We moved out on Tuesday and after a brief stop in Hwange town for fuel, we travelled through the park from Sinamatella to Main Camp. Once again, we were totally appalled and sickened at the coal mining that is going on along the Msuna road near Hwange and on the Sinamatella road. The destruction of the veld is indescribable and the poor trees and shrubs along the blackened roads are covered in heavy black soot just gasping for breath. Horrid!

We stopped off for lunch at Mandavu, which is still full, enjoying the birds and animals we could see. We also had a brief stop at Masuma to speak to Stephen Long and see how his work was coming on with repairing the trough. Unfortunately, as the Makoma mine has hit hard times, they have not been keeping up with their diesel donation for the pumping of Masuma so funds and donations are being sought to try and keep the dam there topped up. Shumba now boasts a windmill and a solar unit so the pan is (we have been reliably informed) 110% full! It is lovely. There is still good water at Dwarf Goose Pan where we counted 59 Spur-winged Geese along with a couple of Marabou Stork and several bathing vultures. Roan is fast drying up but two old stately elephant bulls were having a good muddy slosh. Danga was next and holds fair water and Shapi is as usual excellent with the windmill doing a great job there. The Guvalala solar unit is up and helping to contribute but while we were there, the diesel engine was going. Some of the natural pans along the roadsides still hold a bit of water but the park is fast drying up. There were several areas where frost has obviously hit, shrivelling up the leaves, turning them brown and dry. All along the way there were gorgeous patches of colour as the trees and shrubs take on their winter mantle of burnished copper, polished brass and rust amongst the dark green.

Staying in our usual chalets up in the campsite, we experienced the usual frustrations of no hot water and because of a protracted power cut, no water at all! The Main Camp water woes continue! Over the next few days, waterbird counts were done at least twenty-six pans. We took on the count along the White Hills road, stopping in at the two Ingwenya's, Tshebe Tshebe, Tshabema, Kaoshe Garakamwe, Mabuya Mabena, Bembi and White Hills. Water all along the way is fair for this time of the year and Mabuya Mabena now has a solar unit, which is keeping the pan topped up. There was obviously a shy hippo in the pan because after an initial pop-up of his enormous head, he would only stick out his two hairy nostrils for air while we were there! Another day we took the road through

Caterpillar and Dopi, on down to Jambile and through the Mangas. Unfortunately, although the borehole at Manga One was cleared out, pumping is not going on there at the moment. Manga Three, which is being pumped by Somalisa, held good water and two giraffes were coming down to drink. We were, however, appalled at the damage being done to the road through there with thirty ton rigs driving supplies through to Somalisa for their new camp. The huge, heavy trucks are breaking through the surface causing untold damage, which will never be repaired. We certainly felt that some sort of warning should be given to unwary travellers as vehicles could easily get stuck down there in the long patches of dug out, heavy sand. The two solar units at Ngweshla are doing a good job and the pan near the picnic site is full. Sadly, Kennedy Two is in a dire state with the elephants having dug right back towards the solar unit and no water appears to be getting into the pan at all which is dry. As there is a problem with the engine mount on the diesel unit, that isn't being used either. Solar units at Kennedy One, Sinanga and Makwa are holding their own for now, but the diesel units may have to be put into use later. Some of the new solar units are doing a great job in the park but unfortunately, places where the diesel pumping should be going on is not being done as Parks has had no fuel. However, some did arrive while we were there so hopefully the engines will be kept running now that things are drying off. WEZ and Friends of Hwange have both donated money to procure diesel for pumping.

Birding generally was good and we saw eight Kori Bustards in the Ngweshla vlei. All the animals we saw were in good condition. We came across several large breeding herds of elephant and twice going past the Kennedy Two solar unit, a crowd of large elephant bulls had gathered to sup up what clean water they could get at. One evening at Nyamandhlovu, several small herds of elephant came down to drink, some of them galloping in as they were obviously so thirsty. We saw all the usual plains game including a very pregnant looking Roan female near the mineral licks at Ngweshla and an extremely handsome, proud Sable bull near Balla Balla one evening. The warthog have obviously bred well again this season and sounders with several juvenile warthogs could be seen fossicking around in the old, dried up muddy patches. A lion pride was feeding on an elephant carcass along the Balla Balla loop road so were seen on a daily basis. It is heartening to hear that so many people are seeing cheetah out and about in the park so their numbers seem to be improving too.

One member of our party unfortunately became fairly seriously ill with a gastro bug and we were all SO impressed with the service she received from the clinic in Main Camp which is a fantastic facility and the care that was given by the stand in male nurse there, who administered drugs and an injection as well as visiting several times a day. The tourist office staff was also very helpful in making a cottage with bathroom en suite available for the patient. Well done, Main Camp.

John and Jenny Brebner

VERREAUX'S EAGLE BREEDING SURVEY 2015

In March 2015, 10 teams were allocated 98 nest sites for the season. Unfortunately, 1 team has had to leave the Survey, leaving 9 participating teams.

The Breeding Survey is broken into three reporting periods – 31st May, 31st July and end of October.

As at the end of the first reporting period the teams had checked 78 nest sites. 26 territories are confirmed as occupied by pairs of eagles. Of these 26 pairs of eagles seen, 14 had made a nest rebuild, and 11 of these 14 were confirmed as incubating.

The number of confirmed incubations is within what can be considered the norm for the end of the first reporting period. The number of pairs of eagles seen however, is comparable to the 2014 season, but is considerably lower for the nest sites allocated, than those recorded in previous years.



comparable to the 2014 season, but is considerably lower for the nest sites allocated, than those recorded in previous years.

Our teams are thanked for their continued participation in this survey, and their dedication to it. The number of report forms submitted to the end of May was 163 and our teams are thanked for their huge effort during this first reporting period.

Cecilia Hubbard & John Brebner
Black Eagle Breeding Survey Co-ordinators

ANNUAL DASSIE (HYRAX) POPULATION CENSUS

The Dassie (Hyrax) has been confirmed as the main prey base for the Verreaux's Eagle, and Matabeleland Branch has conducted an annual Verreaux's Eagle Breeding Survey for over 50 years. Continuing our efforts in trying to establish the stability of this prey base is now an integral part of the Verreaux's Eagle Breeding Survey, and an exercise that not only produces meaningful data, but one which promotes great 'fellowship' amongst our members.

The 2105 Dassie (Hyrax) Population Census took place over the last weekend in May. Overall, this was the 23rd Population Census, and the 9th undertaken by our Branch.

By the evening of Friday 22nd May, 1 visitor and 22 Branch members had gathered at the campsite of Rowallan Park. A briefing was held and teams were handed the site maps and recording sheets for 20 census sites.

On this chilly evening, members who have not previously participated in this event, were given a 'warm' welcome, and were partnered with experienced teams.

All teams were up and off in time to make it to their observation points before sunrise on all three mornings. To those who have not experienced a sunrise in the Matopos, it is one of the other reasons we return year after year.

All 20 sites were counted, and because of baboon disturbance at 1 site the previous morning, 1 site was re-counted.



The overall census results are as follows:

Counts of *Heterohyrax brucei* and *Procapra capensis* by age category

LAND USE	SPECIES	ADULT	SUB AD	JUV	PUP	TOTAL
National Park &	Hb	237	29	58	40	364
1 Comm. Farm	Pc	176	30	29	30	265
Totals	(Hb and Pc)	413	59	87	70	629

Hb - *Heterohyrax brucei* (Yellow-spotted or Bush Dassie)

Pc - *Procapra capensis* (Rock Dassie)

ADULT - Adult = 3+ years

SUB AD - Sub-adult = 2 years

JUV - Juvenile = 1 year (born the previous year)

PUP - Pup = <3 months

The weather conditions on all three mornings were ideal for counting, and the overall result is the highest total of animals seen by our members since taking over this survey.

Most teams recorded vegetation as abundant at their sites, and as it is 23 years later, tree growth is hampering total visibility of some sites. Overall, the number of animals counted is comparable to those recorded in the earlier years of the Census.

A fun weekend was had, and great fellowship enjoyed. All teams are sincerely thanked for their participation.

Cecilia Hubbard

Dassie Population Census Co-Ordinator

Mashonaland South

CHARAMA LODGE, KADOMA: 18°15'S 30°00'E – 23 to 25/5/15

Charama Lodge is 16.5km from Kadoma off the Mhondoro road and overlooks a farm dam nestled between two hills. Ruth Paice of Kadoma is passionate about the place as her parents used to farm in the area and she knows the variety of animals and plants that used to be found there. She and Siggy Stone are members of BLZ and go there a lot and know the countryside well. They are keen to get as much support as possible from conservationists such as the members of BLZ, so they did a lot of work for us both before and during our stay – cleaned up the rubbish and the chalets, provided braai packs and accompaniments and generally contributed to making our stay as comfortable as possible, for which we are very grateful. Unfortunately Farai, the farm and lodge owner, who is also a member of BLZ, has not been able to run the lodge at a profit over recent years so it lacks maintenance and the staff need some training. Ruth and Siggy also acted as our guides when they could join our walks.

The view from the lodge is very appealing as the dam has dead trees for birds to perch on and plenty of water lilies at the top end and the woodlands, grasslands and vleis are only used for cattle grazing. Some communal cattle stray onto a section of the property and are used as a cover for poachers and their dogs, so this is an issue that has to be constantly attended to. The woodland is middleveld mixed broadleaf and acacia, which is one of my favourite birding environments. The dams and the pans were quite full and the vegetation was green after 300mm of rain that fell in April. In my opinion two days was not enough time to explore the farm and a week would have been ideal.

There were 9 of us on this trip, as 2 dropped out close to the date of our arrival. Each chalet had en suite ablutions but a couple of chalets did not have hot water because of plumbing faults and we had to share showers. We also had access to the kitchen with its gas cookers, freezers, crockery and cutlery and we had braais and a communal fire pit at night. The lodge is well treed and Yellow-bellied Greenbul, Yellow-breasted Apalis, Grey-headed Bush-shrike, Black-headed Oriole, Striped Kingfisher,

Southern Black Tit and Barn and Southern White-faced Scops-owl were some of the birds identified around it.

On Saturday afternoon we went for walks around the dam where the highlights included Yellow-billed Egret, Comb Duck, Giant Kingfisher and Yellow-throated Longclaw. That night some of us opted to take advantage of the very reasonably priced meal offered by Siggy that consisted of sadza, bread rolls, salad and a braai pack consisting of locally produced rump steak and the most delicious boerewors that Carolyn and I had ever tasted.

On Sunday morning we walked on the road that passes below the dam wall in an easterly direction and turned off the Shozolozza Road onto Impala Drive. About a kilometre from the lodge we heard but could not see Chestnut-vented Tit-babbler and then saw some Speckled Mousebirds that had not been recorded by Ruth before. We went through the fence of Impala Drive and cut through the bush to a pan to the northwest. Here we encountered several species of swallow including White-throated, Pearl-breasted, Lesser Striped and Grey-rumped, and near the pan we found Namaqua Dove, Red-headed Weaver, Steel-blue Widowfinch and Purple Widowfinch. We wanted to go further west but had to take a short cut back to the lodge because we had arranged to meet local people by 10.30 a.m.

Back at the lodge we met the headmaster of Bryden School near Chegutu and his family and discovered that our great-grandfathers had been together at Kurriman when it was besieged during the Boer War! That afternoon we set out on a drive to Shozolozza Lodge in the east. Along the way we stopped off at Bushbuck Pan where we saw Swallow-tailed Bee-eater and various other birds. We then moved on to Tsholotsho Pan and the abandoned and derelict Shozolozza Lodge where Meyer's Parrot and Chin-spot Batis were seen. We then walked through the bush to Champagne Dam and the old homestead and encountered Red-billed Teal, Common Scimitarbill, Yellow-bellied Eremomela and Green-winged Pytilia.



On our last morning we decided to head out to the southwest along the short cut to the pans we had visited the previous morning, with the intention of reaching a river line in Mopane woodland where Ruth had seen Violet-eared Waxbill in the past. This proved to be our best walk yet as we added several species to our bird count and the further we went the more interesting it became. Flappet Larks were in the grasslands and Red-faced Mousebird was

feeding on dry Woolly Caper Bush fruits. In some Mopane scrub some of us were lucky enough to get good views of Grey Tit-flycatcher. Then as we reached the pools in the river line Red-throated Twinspot were seen. At this point we had to head back as we needed to prepare for our departure, which was sad, as things were just getting really interesting. Meanwhile Carolyn had stayed close to the lodge and had managed to

pick up a Marico Sunbird.

Our final bird count was a respectable 94 species but only 2 raptors were identified. These were the African Fish-eagle and the Lizard Buzzard and there was also a putative African Goshawk seen in the far distance. This lack of raptors was just the luck of the draw as 12 species are on the local list.

Richard Dennison

Other Areas

VUMBA BIRDING

Our group of 7 members participated in a forest bird walk on 8th June at Leopard Rock Hotel with Mr Ryan Truscott who was also among our group. The day was cool and overcast and the clouds soon broke up by mid-morning, which gave us some excellent bird sightings of Chirinda Apalis, White-tailed Crested Flycatcher, Stripe-cheeked Greenbul, Silvery-cheeked Hornbill and Red-faced Crimsonwing. All these species were lifers to some of our members. The path behind the hotel led us straight to the Castle and produce excellent sightings of the Yellow-streaked Greenbul, Roberts's Warbler, Black-fronted Bush-shrike and we came across a dead Orange Ground-thrush on the ground, the cause of the death unknown. The final total of all

birds, which we saw, was 50 species in a period of 2hrs only.

Back at the car park we saw Red-backed Mannikin and the African Golden Oriole which were also lifers to some of our members. I'm appealing for second-hand binoculars for our members who have shown interest in bird watching in our district and those who could provide with transport.

Our next bird outing is going to take place in the Miombo woodland where we are expecting excellent sightings of Miombo species. We thank once again to Mr Ryan Truscott who helped us with his transport and we look forward meeting him in the next birding outing and other future birding events in Mutare.

Peter Magosvongwe +263779749336.

A VISIT TO CHIPINDA POOLS AND SURROUNDS, CHIREZI DISTRICT, 26-29 JUNE 2015

Chipinda Pools 21°15'S, 31°50'E

African Darter numbers were down from 20 in 2013 to 12 in 2015. Brown-headed Parrots numbers were down from 10 in 2013 to 4 in 2015. We didn't hear the Sombre Greenbul but we did find the Red-crested Korhaan. No African Jacanas were noted at all water sources visited. In 2013 we visited in mid-July.

Massasanya Dam 21°15'S, 31°55'E

Much lower water level this year than in 2013. This time there were no Reed Cormorants, African Darters or Black Crakes, but Black-winged Stilts, 3 African Spoonbills and 2 Crowned Lapwings. A pod of hippo had a Grey Heron and a Hamerkop sitting on them. Of the first 30 birds on my pentad form, only 12 were in common with our 2013 visit.

Chilojo Cliffs 21°25'S, 32°05'E

We saw a Black Stork and a White-throated Robin-chat amongst others. At 3 different places we found Saddle-billed Stork (the other two were at Fishans Causeway and Benji Weir). This year we were on the Chiredzi side of the river at midday the red reflections in the river were stunning.

Benji Weir, Benji River 21°25'S, 31°55'E

A very silted weir, covering not more than an acre (in a week it will be dry – the croc couldn't submerge) with very muddy water.

It was fascinating for the concentration of birds coming in to drink: 100 Emerald-spotted Wood-doves, 60 Brown-headed Parrots, 40 Meves's Starlings, 60 Red-winged Starlings and 150 Southern Grey-headed Sparrows. Among the raptors were 1 Tawny Eagle, 1 African Fish-eagle, 3 African Hawk-eagles and a Dickinson's Kestrel.

We bought a Gonarezhou map, listed were numbers of animals for the area. I was concerned about the Common Ostrich. Lower estimate 3, Estimate 13 and Upper estimate 35. What do you think?

On the BLZ Gonarezhou checklist which is on the web I failed to find African Finfoot, White-rumped Swift, Lesser Honeyguide, Little Rush-warbler, Tinkling Cisticola, Red-winged Starling, Southern Red Bishop, Pin-tailed Whydah, Steel-blue Widowfinch and Lark-like Bunting.

In the campsite we found 6 trees, some alive and some dead, with aluminium name tags, one was labelled *Kirkia acuminata* Marula – of course it isn't, it is the White Syringa. But it is nice to have trees labelled for our visitors, and even locals who don't know every tree. A nice touch was surrounding baobabs with stones, to discourage elephants from destroying them. Our visitors were the Kelman's from Canberra. (Carla is my sister). We had a wonderful holiday in the tented camp, but drove alone through the park. I recommend two cars go together, in case one gets into trouble.

See [Babbler 114](#) for two reports, one at Chipinda and another at Chilo, by Alex Masterson

David and Penny Rockingham-Gill rgill@zol.co.zw

TRIP TO KASANKA NATIONAL PARK, NORTHERN ZAMBIA – JULY 2015

Bev Morgan

Kasanka National Park is best known for the Straw-coloured Bat migration, approximately ten million of which migrate there during the fig fruiting season. However, this was not the reason we visited the remote but beautiful, untouched National Park. Kasanka National Park consists of swamp forests called "mushitu" which means 'forest' in Bemba, and are located predominantly in the higher rainfall areas of Zambia. The forests in Kasanka are divided into two mushitu sub-types – seepage mushitu has ground water all year round or at the water table, and seasonally flooded mushitu, which is only wet during the rainy season. Waterberry, Marsh fig, and Red Mahogany trees, to name a few, cover large areas of the seepage mushitu. In the seasonally flooded areas one can find East African Mahogany or Winged Bersama, *Bersama abyssinica*, and Jackalberry Tree. This is the perfect environment for many Zambian specials and hard-core birders can find a multitude of these in both the forest and miombo woodland.

Having arrived at Wasa Lodge in the early afternoon, we settled into our lodgings, and freshened up after a short but uncomfortable trip from Shoebill Island. Immediately on arrival we were greeted by the nervous chattering of a troop of Vervet monkeys, busy feeding within the tree canopy, as well as several Puku* grazing on the opposite bank of the Wasa Lake.

Residents include African Pygmy-goose, Coppery-tailed Coucal and at least eight pairs of Spur-winged Goose. We set off for a late afternoon drive as we were eager to get some birding under our belts before the cool of the



The lookout platform nearby in the Fibwe forest at Kasanka National Park.

evening set in. Having decided to take a drive along the Kasanka River frontage in the miombo woodland, it wasn't long before we spotted Trumpeter Hornbills, Brimstone Canaries, Little and White-fronted Bee-eaters and numerous African Hoopoe, along with Orange-breasted Bush-shrike, Miombo Blue-eared and Greater Blue-eared Starlings. On our return we stopped off at the camp site located on the Musola River's edge within Fibwe forest, to see whether the rest of our party had checked in yet. Indeed they had, and were busy putting up tents and setting up camp for the next two nights. Geoff Lowe and Carl Beel, also camping nearby, reported hearing the prrrrrrrp rattle of the African Broadbill, and one could hear the cacophony of singing birds high up in the red mahogany trees. The shy Sitatunga* crept out of the reeds to drink and feed as the sun was going down, and a Rufous-bellied Heron skulked through the sedge.

Once back at the lodge and after a welcome hot bucket-shower, we assembled at the main lodge, where the day's stories and sightings were recorded over a few beers and a glass or two of wine. After a hearty supper, most retired for an early night to the sounds of the hippos laughing in the lake nearby.

The next morning some of the party ordered packed breakfasts and set out by 6.45 a.m. to find the forest specials. They were well rewarded, having found Purple-throated Cuckooshrike, Ross's Turaco, Red-throated Twinspot, Cabanis's Greenbul and White-winged Black Tit. The remaining party took a leisurely drive after breakfast, and after some difficult birding, finally happened upon a beautiful pair of Black-backed Barbets on the miombo fringes of the forest, sunning themselves after feasting on the many and varied fruiting trees. This followed with a bird party of Böhm's Bee-eater, Black-backed Puffback, Yellow-breasted Apalis as well as Olive, Scarlet-chested, Variable and White-bellied Sunbirds feeding off the flowering Loranthaceae.

THE SHOEBILL TRIP

Babbler readers are about to be swamped by notes on a BLZ trip to Zambia's Bangweulu swamps. My brief is to deal with the swamps themselves and their adjoining floodplain. Our trip simply took us to a very small part of the eastern edge of the water as it was in July 2015. Situated in the north-central of that country they are tucked in behind the Congo Pedicle and maps suggest that they could be more extensive than the better known Okavango Swamps. A major feature of what we saw is that they cover

In the afternoon, Carl and Geoff took us on a walk within the miombo, away from the wetlands and mainly made up Brachystegia trees. This was very challenging but rewarded us with Yellow-bellied Hyliota, Wood Pipit, and White-



breasted Cuckooshrike, amongst the smaller eremomelas and apalis's. At one point we startled a flock of Red-necked Spurfowl and a pair of Böhm's Flycatchers was spotted as we decided to call it a day.

Sadly our trip had almost come to an end, and all that remained was for us to pack up and head home early the following day. Tony Alegria was reluctant to leave and decided to take one more drive before breakfast. They managed to briefly spot the Yellow Leaflove [=Yellow-throated Greenbul?] flitting amongst the forest fringe. Kasanka is a relatively unknown gem and I hope to return one day, perhaps in the summer time.

*The **Puku** (*Kobus vardonii*) is a medium-sized antelope found in wet grasslands in southern Democratic Republic of Congo, Namibia, Tanzania, and Zambia.

The **Sitatunga is Africa's only true amphibious antelope. It is distinguished by its long, splayed hooves.

a vast area of very flat land and that the size of the inundated area is subject to huge seasonal variation. The water's edge in February/March can be 12 kilometres and more from where it is in October before the rains return. Furthermore the depth of water in February/March at the point of the October water's edge may have been no more than half a metre.

The approach is along an awful apology for a road running through miles of woodland that eventually turns into a sort of parkland with the

trees clumped into clusters of trees and bush evenly scattered over grassland that is about a metre high. The tree clusters quickly become sparser and then there is a great open flat plain stretching to the water. The closer one gets to the water the shorter the grass until it is virtually a lawn. Long dark lines across the plane are either roadways built up into causeways for when the water is up or potential dams to trap fish, particularly barbel, as they retreat with the water after the floods.

The lawn effect is created by huge herds of lechwe, the abundant swamp antelope through much of central Africa. Here they are the so-called Black Lechwe though hardly any one animal is all black. The black is more dominant in the males and seems to spread up the body from the belly and flanks but never really covering the top of the neck and the back of the hind quarters. These animals number thousands and they occur in loose herds that stretch in loose lines about 20-30 deep for three or four kilometres at a time. It can take ten minutes to drive past one flock. There must have been some 8 000± animals in the vicinity of our destination and base "Shoebill Island" some 10 kilometres in from the edge of plain.

Birds on these plains were essentially restricted to larks and pipits. The larks we recognized were all Red-capped and the pipits were the common African species. There could have been others, particularly Plain-backed. We never caught up with Fülleborn's Longclaw and the few wagtails to be seen on the plains and near water were Cape Wagtails. African Pied Wagtails were absent. But the plain also provided some magnificent big birds. There was a party of seven Southern Ground-hornbills and a flock of Wattled Crane that stood in a long line on open dry ground. Pat Saunders counted 96 and I counted 102 – probably somewhere in between. They must have been grounded for the previous night because we saw them fairly early in the morning before the thermals had started to develop. They were not feeding but where did they come from and where were they going? Pride of place in my mind went to the Denham's Bustards. We saw a group of three birds in the gloaming as we came in on the first evening and then on the last evening we saw a group of six. Another party saw seven together. We were lucky to have Carl Beel, Zambia's super-guru birder, with us. He believed that these bustards keep to the parkland and longer grass fringes of the plain by day and only come out into the short grass lechwe-mowed lawns in the early morning and late afternoon. We owed our sighting of the six to the sharp eyes of Bev Morgan who must have spied them at a range of

over two kilometres. "No" I said "They are just jackals", but Bev was determined and we caught up with them as the last five minutes of sunlight caught them in the open. The light seemed to accentuate the various colours in their plumage. Spectacle No. 1 for my trip.

Shoebill Island is about 30 hectares in extent. It stands less than one meter above top flood level but the water retreats quickly enough to have a few groves of Waterberry and similar trees. Here there are toppies and babblers – Hartlaub's with white rumps and high pitched voices. The tree growth also supports a healthy population of very vocal "Glossy Darlings". But which one? Greater Blue-eared? – they never said "Oh Heck". Miombo Blue-eared? – they were never in close knit flocks and did not say "Wiri-gwiri". Sharp-tailed???? Not even Carl Beel could really tell us. And there were some greenbuls, which we could not identify.

The island takes us to the water's edge and the swamps. The resort had a couple of "Banana boats" – large fibre glass canoes taking four passengers, each in comfort (if you took a cushion). They were propelled by two punters – one front and one back. These boats undertook morning and evening trips on the water beginning with a couple of larger (400 x 1000 m) stretches of open water carrying thousands of White-faced Duck and a smattering of other species including Yellow-billed Ducks, Fulvous Ducks, Comb Ducks and Hottentot Teals. Egyptian Geese were conspicuously scarce. Whether these ducks were standing about on shore or on the water they would all take off as you got to within the range of a 12 bore shot gun. There were also a couple of Grey-headed Gulls but waders were few and far between both because many must have migrated north and because there were limited areas of bare muddy shores. Only the Black-winged Stilts coped with the conditions and once we were across the big open stretches we found a group of 15 African Skimmers. A couple of Spur-winged Lapwings were about, new to most of us but already recorded at Hwange, Mana Pools and Rifa in Zimbabwe.

We were not taken any distance into the swamps where large barriers of a tall spiky reed and patches of papyrus broke up the open water into smaller stretches but were kept closer to the shores where there was a greater number and variety of birds. New to most of us was the dull brown Swamp Flycatcher.

These small stretches of water had plenty of scattered patches of floating lilies and water weeds but very few jacanas. Instead there was a constant presence of unidentifiable "winter weavers" that flew up from or down to the

floating vegetation from which they feed freely. These were said to be the Katanga Masked-weaver, recently separated from other masked-weavers. We also came across a middle-sized Little Bee-eater with white cheeks and appropriately so named. A walk on shore put up a couple of dozen nightjars all hiding under well bushed cover on scattered anthills. It was eventually decided that they had so much white on wing and tail that they were mostly Square-tailed Nightjars. In another area however at least one bird was recognized as a Swamp Nightjar because it had no white at all in the wing – a feature of the female of this species.



But no Shoebill and no Saddle-billed Stork and no Goliath Heron. The return journey produced little new either. Back at camp it was explained that you really have to travel by car to see the Shoebill. So the next morning we jumped into the three-benched back of a Land Cruiser and up across the plane to another stretch of shoreline. The staff seemed to know that there were Shoebills to be seen regularly in this area. Stop and talk to a couple of groups of locals and then stop, get out and walk down to the water. Here there was a narrow 10-15m stretch of open water backed by a stretch of floating waterweed and then a bank of tall spiky reed, but no Shoebill. Nevertheless we walked on and then there it was, in the shadow of the

tall reeds but only about 80m away. Slowly we went on and it did not seem bothered at all and what a bird! It really looked enormous with a huge head and a small tuft sticking out as a crest half way down the back of the head. For a lot of the time it just stood still. Then it would stroll slowly down the edge of the floating weed and into that mat of low vegetation. And then suddenly it had a fish: a barbel some 20cm long. I had missed the catch but it swallowed the fish whole with a minimum of fuss. Others were lucky to see two different birds on their drive and saw one bird take to flight but our bird was content to walk away and look for some other more productive spot.

In the end, however, we did have magnificent views of a Shoebill. We did cheat a bit. There is an airstrip near Shoebill Island where 'Morgan' and Kasanka Park employees have a virtually full-grown bird, which has been reared since it was a chick after "poachers" had killed its mother. The bird is said to be a "she" and about 9 months old. She does not like standing in the cold wind so seeks shelter behind the buildings and she sleeps by settling down on the edge of a clump of round-leaved sedge. She also responds to the tinkle of a bunch of keys that are shaken when "Grub is up" and gazes at a bucket which she knows to be where her fish come from. A 20cm barbel is thrown towards her. In a flash she has grabbed it. Nothing like the smart stab of a Goliath Heron or Saddle-bill Stork. She lunges forward on bending knees, half-spreads both wings and virtually collapses onto the fish with chest and wrists on the ground or grass in front of her. The fish is grabbed and swallowed. She looks about. Where is the next one? Walk too close to her and she gives a warning growl like a dog. Her keepers say that she has begun to try to fly. They intend to let her take her own freedom but her future must be insecure. It is estimated that there are about 300 of these birds in the Bangweulu Swamp. But, as roads are made, more people come closer.

Was all the bone shattering drive to see this bird worth it? Most definitely. Thank you Tony Alegria and Andrew Fussell for organizing the whole trip so well.

Alex Masterson

Tail Feathers

Magpie Mannikins

On 11 July I saw 2 Magpie Mannikins in my garden at Wavell Road, Highlands, Harare. This is my first record of this species in the garden, and as I have been living at this address for 35 years and have spent a lot of time looking at garden birds, it is safe to say that this species is a rare vagrant to my garden.

Rhett Butler

Basra Reed-warbler

After reading with great interest Alex Masterson's note about a Basra Reed-warbler at Komani Estate in January, (Tail Feathers, *Babbler* #124), which I wish could have been presented more prominently, I feel almost insolent to be nit-picking: I'm sure the visit to Komani was on Sunday, 25th January, not the 31st of that month. I only wish I was nearer Alex when he heard said warbler!

John Vekris

Chapman Golf-Club African Fish-eagle

I belong to Chapman Golf Club and a few months ago whilst playing I heard an African Fish-eagle calling. It sounded strange and I thought it might be a cell phone ringing tone. But I had my doubts.

Then two weeks later there he/she was perched in a tree overlooking one of the ponds (for those who know Chapman at 14th hole on the second nine). It is the first time I've seen an African Fish-eagle at Chapman but others may have seen them before.

Jean Metelerkamp

Do you have or know anyone who has a photograph of the Eastern Zimbabwe subspecies of Olive Thrush, ssp. *swynnertoni*, which apparently has an orange bill (not yellow like the yellow billed southern race)? Hugh Chittenden is looking for the photo. If so, please email juliapierini@birdlifezimbabwe.org Many thanks!



☪ African vultures declining at a critical rate ☪

<http://m.phys.org/news/2015-06-african-vultures-declining-critical.html>

An international team of researchers, including leading scientists from the University of St Andrews, the Hawk Conservancy Trust and the University of York, say African vultures are likely to qualify as 'Critically Endangered' under the International Union for Conservation of Nature's global threat criteria.

In a report published today (18 June 2015) in the scientific journal *Conservation Letters*, scientists from across Europe, Africa and North America have published the first continent-wide estimates of decline rates in African vultures: and find that many national parks and game reserves appear to offer vulture species in Africa little effective protection.

Scavengers such as vultures are essential to a healthy ecosystem; without them carcasses are largely consumed by mammalian scavengers such as dogs and jackals and this can increase levels of disease transmission, with possibly dire

consequences for human health.

Being long-lived, slow breeders, vultures take several years to reach maturity, and typically fledge only a single offspring every 1-2 years. Yet the study indicates that Africa's vultures are declining at rates of between 70% and 97% over three generations; a time interval used by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) when assessing a species' threat status. Since six of the eight species are largely or wholly confined to Africa, and are projected to decline by at least 80% over three generations, the study suggests that they are likely to qualify as 'Critically Endangered' under the IUCN's global threat criteria.

Dr Darcy Ogada of The Peregrine Fund and lead author of the study, said: "Large declines of Africa's vultures should ring alarm bells due to their immense ecological importance. Vultures are a vital component of a healthy environment, especially in Africa, where 'free' ecosystem services such as disposal of carcasses and other waste products remain the norm. If we don't take urgent steps to save these birds, and in particular to curtail wildlife poisoning, we should expect long-term consequences for the environment, as well as for humans in Africa."

"What makes our results so concerning is that national parks and game reserves appear to offer these birds very little effective protection. Because vultures are so mobile and can easily travel hundreds or thousands of kilometres, decline rates were worryingly high even within protected areas."

Continent-wide declines in vulture species have already been reported in four Asian vulture species. However the study's authors highlight two important distinctions between the Asian vulture crisis and that in Africa. First, to date, the rates of decline evident in Africa have been substantially lower than in Asia, affording African governments a window of opportunity in which to head off the environmental consequences of a collapse in this functionally important group.

Second, while Asian vultures have declined largely as a result of a single factor (ingestion of the anti-inflammatory drug Diclofenac), African vultures face multiple threats. They include incidental and deliberate poisoning, the illegal trade in vulture body parts for traditional medicine, killing for bushmeat, mortality caused by power lines and wind turbines, and a reduction in habitat and the availability of food from wild game populations.

The study suggests that the greatest quantifiable threat to Africa's vultures is poisoning, which accounted for 61% of all reported deaths. African vultures are often the unintended victims of poisoning incidents, in which carcasses are baited with highly toxic agricultural pesticides to kill livestock predators. However the study also shows that the recent rapid increase in elephant and rhino poaching throughout Africa has led to a surge in the number of vulture deaths recorded, as carcasses have been poisoned specifically to eliminate vultures, whose overhead circling might otherwise reveal the poachers' illicit activities.

Dr Ogada added: "The situation requires the resolution of a number of environmental and cultural issues. We propose a range of measures, including more effective regulation of the import and sale of agricultural and other chemicals commonly used as poisons. This would benefit not just vultures, but all species widely targeted by pastoralists and poachers in Africa."

Dr Phil Shaw of the University of St Andrews' School of Biology said, "Vultures are charismatic, iconic species, but they are also functionally important, playing a vital role in clearing up carcasses of wild animals and livestock, and incidentally helping to suppress disease transmission. Our study demonstrates that declines are occurring throughout Africa and – because vultures live long and breed slowly – the severity of these declines is greater than had been appreciated. It's rare for an entire functional group to come under threat, in this case with potentially major ecological impacts – as well as implications for human health."

Dr Campbell Murn, Head of Conservation and Research at the Hawk Conservancy Trust, said: "Vultures are integral to Africa's ecological and cultural landscapes, and it is change in cultural practices at multiple levels that is required to reverse this disastrous situation. Without such changes, and the reversal of these declines, the full consequences of Africa's vultures disappearing cannot be predicted.

"We operate research and conservation programmes for four vulture species at multiple sites in southern Africa, in both protected and non-protected areas. Four of the eight African vulture species assessed in the study can be seen at the Hawk Conservancy Trust, near Andover in Hampshire."

Dr Colin Beale of the University of York's Department of Biology said: "At my field sites in Tanzania we have noted declines in vulture species over many years, but only when putting together the full continental picture did we realise how critically threatened these birds have become. Because these birds forage over such large areas, effortlessly crossing international borders, we're concerned that even the largest protected areas of the Serengeti and Ruaha ecosystems are inadequate to protect them for the future."

More information: "Another Continental Vulture Crisis: Africa's Vultures Collapsing toward Extinction." *Conservation Letters*. doi: 10.1111/conl.12182

Contributions for *The Babbler* 126 October 2015/ November 2015 may be sent to the editor anytime between now and 14th September 2015.