

BABBLER

The Newsletter of



BirdLife Zimbabwe
The BirdLife International Partner in Zimbabwe

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THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE MASHONALAND BRANCH OF BIRDLIFE ZIMBABWE HELD ON THURSDAY 20 JANUARY 2011 AT AVONDALE BOWLING AND TENNIS CLUB.

The Chairman, Tony Alegria, welcomed the 40 members, visitors and new members, who attended the AGM. Apologies were recorded and Confirmation of the Previous Year's Minutes was confirmed and seconded with no amendments.

The Chairman's report recorded the success of the weekly and monthly outings, including the Saturday outings to various venues. The Botanic Gardens continues to be the most popular Saturday venue. It is hoped to include a river or dam venue in the near future.

Another trip to RIFA is scheduled over the Easter weekend.

The Treasurer presented her report.

The Chairman read out Dave Dalziel's report on the Mukuvisi Woodlands. This continues to be a popular venue. Richard Dennison presented his report on Lake Chivero Sanctuary and Dorothy Wakeling on Monavale Vlei.

The incoming Committee for 2011 is as follows:

Chairman	Tony Alegria
Treasurer	Sally Britten
Secretary	Linda Fussell
Members	Dave Rockingham-Gill Nick Hart Celesta von Chamier Julia Pierini
Babbler Editor	Julia Pierini
Membership Secretary	Carolyn Dennison

Outgoing members were Ken Dixon and Ian Riddell. The Chairman thanked them for their dedicated service in past years.

Any Other Business was dealt with speedily so that Tony Alegria could present his Mozambique Experience to the members.

The meeting closed at 6.45 p.m.

Presentation by Tony Alegria on their Mozambique Experience.

Tony kept the audience enthralled by his account of their experiences during their visit to Gorongosa from 23 – 31 October 2010. Planning started in June 2010 and 7 members participated. Special thanks to Celesta von Chamier for 90% of the photographs used for the presentation. Richard Dennison updated bird check lists every day.

The full story was printed in the Dec 2010 – January 2011 *Babbler*.

OBITUARY

Johann Rudolf Sievi, called John by his English speaking and Ruedi by his Swiss friends, was born on 9th November 1921 in Bonaduz, a small mountain village in the Eastern part of Switzerland. From an early age, his obvious interest in nature was nurtured by his father, and John spent much time in the open, exploring the surrounding forests and mountains and observing the wildlife.

After finishing his apprenticeship as a cook, he worked in a number of hotels in Switzerland until the urge to explore got the better of him in 1948, when he set out for Southern Africa, the Carlton Hotel in Johannesburg being his first stop. Not surprisingly however, John did not like the big and noisy city, and soon ventured further north into Southern Rhodesia, initially to Bulawayo, and then to Salisbury, where he worked as 1st chef at Le Coque d'Or Restaurant. He then spent 20 years as chef at the prestigious Windsor-Colony Restaurant, and finally another 14 at The Cellar. John was an inspired and very talented chef who loved his chosen profession, and many who enjoyed his culinary skills changed their eating-out places, following him as he moved from one restaurant to another.

In 1958, some time after marrying his wife Anne (Anni), the couple moved into a house in the newly established residential suburb of Wilmington Park, only a road's width away from the Mukuvisi Woodlands. Now, with this magic piece of unspoilt nature at his doorstep, a new world opened up for John. From the early days when he started to get to know, observe, study

and film the birds, the trees and all the other wonders of the Woodlands, these almost became an obsession later on, as Anne put it. Hardly a day went by without John going for a nature walk. He was interested not only in the birdlife, but in every one of nature's wonders, from bats to butterflies, from tees to toads, and from snakes to scorpions. His wife and four daughters often accompanied him.

After retiring from work in the late eighties, John spent innumerable hours in the Mukuvisi Woodlands, walking there almost daily, often twice a day, and frequently during the hours of darkness. He sometimes walked the area in the company of Anne, often with his near-neighbour Arthur Barrie and invariably with his black Labrador dog. John and Arthur used to be called 'the two woodsmen' by some of us who were aware of their phenomenal knowledge of the Woodlands and its wildlife, which they freely shared with other nature lovers who were considered sufficiently enthusiastic!

The Mukuvisi Woodlands Association had been formed by then, a 33 year lease had been obtained from the City of Harare, and the whole area had been fenced, the game area separately from the public walking area. John was nominated one of the first Hon. Wardens, and was given a set of keys to fit every gate.

Essentially a rather shy and a very modest and unpretentious person, John was eventually persuaded to lead members of the Mashonaland Branch of the OAZ on an annual bird walk at the height of the breeding season in October. His own ramblings through the woodlands having always been unobtrusive and conducted with the utmost consideration for its wild denizens, he was a little concerned about the disturbance a fairly large group of people might cause.

John Sievi's 'nest walks' became one of the best attended activities in the calendar of the MBC, and the number of participants kept growing as the years went by. It was an event not to be missed. John always urged people not to approach nests too closely, or to observe them through their binoculars for any length of time. The nests of any nightjars were given a wide berth, and were often not even mentioned. The wildlife always came first with John and Arthur, and I know that sometimes there were things which they wisely kept to themselves because they knew that man's intrusion into nature can have unintended consequences.

In between his woodland walks, John visited many of the prime wildlife and nature areas of his adopted Country, either with his family or with likeminded friends. Mana Pools National Park including Chitake before too many people knew of its existence, the Umfuruzi Safari Area and Hippo Pools, the Vumba and Inyanga in the Eastern Highlands, and the lowveld come to mind. These experiences enriched his life immensely, although it seemed to me that the presence of a sunbird nest in a Euphorbia right beside the front door of his house gave John as much pleasure as a field trip. He had an eye for beauty, and for the little things which often go unnoticed.

In 2001, John and Anne, the kindest of people who always extended a helping hand to anyone in need regardless of who he was, were brutally attacked, robbed and injured by a bunch of politically inspired thugs whilst walking in the woodlands one morning. John lost the use of an eye through this vicious and unwarranted act of violence. A dream had turned into a nightmare, and the Sievi's left their beloved Zimbabwe a year later to live close to their youngest daughter and her family in the Southern Drakensberg, near Underberg. There the couple led a quiet contented life until John passed away on 21st November 2010 after a brief illness.

BirdLife Zimbabwe, and in particular its Mashonaland Branch, where John had many friends, extend their sincere condolences to Anne and their three surviving daughters. A legend in his lifetime, John will be remembered by many of us for as long as we live. And while walking in a quiet area of the Woodlands one evening, if you should hear a strange rustling in the trees – well, who knows

Rolf Chenaux-Repond

****SUBSCRIPTION RENEWAL****

Our membership year runs from April to March and **all** 2011/12 subscriptions are therefore due on 1 April 2011.

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

Schools (private)	US\$ 50.00
Corporate members	US\$ 50.00
Rest of Africa	US\$ 30.00
Rest of World	US\$ 30.00

Please renew your subscriptions promptly at the office, a branch committee member at an outing or you can deposit it into the BLZ bank account – Barclays Bank NGO Centre, Branch no: 2157; Account no: 6465998. It is very important that with all direct deposits you include your name on the deposit, so that it appears on the bank statement and please also advise the office and Carolyn (rolly@zol.co.zw), either by faxing the copy deposit slip or by e-mail.

FORTHCOMING ACTIVITIES

BirdLife Zimbabwe National Annual General Meeting will be held on June 4th 2011 at 10 a.m. at a very attractive resort on the shores of Lake Manyame (Darwendale) Dam – Hideaway Lodge. There are modern camping facilities (US\$10 per adult, US\$5 per child) and self-catering chalets that sleep 4 or 5 people at US\$100 per night for the chalet. Hideaway Lodge is only 45 minutes from Harare, so a day visit is easily possible. The lake shore, grasslands and nearby woodlands will provide plenty of good birding. Further information will be coming from Mashonaland Branch in the next issue of *Babbler*. Please diarize this event.

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

MASHONALAND BRANCH

Evening Meetings are on the 3rd Thursday of each month at 5.30 for 6.00 p.m. The venue is the Avondale Sports Club on Brighton Road between Sam Nujoma Street Extension and Upper East Road. There is a cash bar and a security guard.

Thursday 17 February: *Cisticolas & LBJs* Talk by Alex Masterson

Thursday 17 March: *Birds of Kariba* Talk by Ian Riddell

Saturday 12 February 3.30a.m. Sondemara Game Park, Headlands (courtesy of Dup & Hannelie Muller). All interested in coming to this outing please rsvp juliapierini@yahoo.com. Details to follow.

Saturday 19 February 7.00 a.m. Domboshawa

Always an interesting venue: Lazy Cisticola, Striped Pipit, Augur Buzzard, Cinnamon-breasted Bunting to name a few species you can expect to see. Meet in the car park of CABS Head Office, Northridge rd where cars can be left and transport shared. Bring chairs & refreshments.

Saturday 12 March 7.00 a.m. Rainham Dam

Some of us went to check out this venue which used to be very popular and saw White-backed Duck, Purple Heron, Yellow-throated Longclaw, African Rail, Red-chested Flufftail and many more. This venue will be visited every 2nd Saturday of the month. Meeting place to be advised.

Saturday 19 March 7.00 a.m. Harare Botanical Gardens

There's often a surprise bird special to be seen here so don't miss it! Often seen are Golden-tailed Woodpecker, Black Cuckooshrike, Whyte's Barbet, Green-winged Pytilia, Spotted & Ashy Flycatchers etc. Meet in the car park.

Sunday 6 February and 6 March 6.30 a.m. Mukuvisi Woodland

The Mukuvisi River should be quite full again this year. Expect to see Abdim's Stork, White-faced Duck, Hamerkop, Squacco Heron and with some luck the African Black Duck and in the woodland, Wahlberg's Eagle, Black Sparrowhawk, Greater Honeyguide and many more!

Turn off the Chiremba Road into Ford Road (opposite Queensdale shops) and continue down to Blatherwick Road (T-junction). Turn right and the gate is about 150 metres on the left.

Bring a reasonable tip for the guard, taking into account the value of your vehicle! Don't forget refreshments for after the walk when we record the number of species.

Sunday 13 February and 13 March 6.30 a.m. Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary

Reed and White-breasted Cormorants, African Purple Swamphens, Little Bitterns, Water Thick-knees. Come out & see them for yourselves!

Meet at Marimba Shopping Centre, Samora Machel Avenue West.

Sunday 20 February and 20 March 7.00 a.m. Monavale Vlei

The Striped Crake has been spotted here recently, there are 5 Black Coucals currently breeding on the vlei and the Red-chested Flufftail is now regularly heard. And if you're particularly lucky you may even see the Black-rumped Buttonquail. Meet on the BS Leon side of Fenella Drive. Remember your gumboots!

Sunday 27 February 6.30 a.m. Bally Vaughn Game Farm

This promises to be a good venue! Miombo woodlands with patches of Acacia guarantee diverse species. We'll also be looking out for the Cabanis's Bunting and the recently reported Hadedda Ibis! Meet at CABS Head office, Northridge Rd.

Sunday 27 March 6.30 a.m. Southern Cross Farm, Chegutu (courtesy of Susan Cottrell)

The farm is on the Mupfure River with a seasonal stream running on the west boundary and the river on the north boundary. There are old river pools just south of the farm near the main road with mixed woodland with Mopane trees, fallow pasture and a large lush garden (ZESA permitting)...so plenty of different habitat and therefore interesting birds! Meeting place to be advised.

(NB. Any members who have suitable birding venues within 100km of Harare and don't mind hosting us please write to the Editor)

During the course of the year, Birdlife Zimbabwe Mashonaland Branch will also be organizing outings away to which all BLZ members are invited. If at any venue only limited numbers can be accommodated, it will be a case of first come first serve – paying the required deposit asap will secure a place! The birding holidays are booked by placing a USD50 deposit per person. For further information & to book contact: Tony Alegria: talegria@zol.co.zw or 04-490375. Bookings will also be taken at the meeting at the Avondale Club on Thurs 17 February.

Outing 1: **22 April – 25 April 2010** (i.e. the Easter Weekend) **Rifa, Chirundu** (Distance from Harare 355 km). The venue is a Hunter's Association Camp by the Zambezi River. The destination is generally self-catering. Lots of specials to look out for: Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters, Spotted & Striped Crake etc.

MATABELELAND BRANCH

Saturday 12 February Walk on NUST Campus

The NUST campus covers an area of 160 hectares and Professor Peter Mundy and his students have already started to compile a bird list. On Saturday 12 February, BLZ will do a walk through some of the area to try and add to this list. There will probably be lots of long, wet grass and ticks, so come prepared – though we will try to avoid the worst of these areas; even if we stick to the road verges there should be some interesting birding; there is also a track to an old quarry which is currently flooded and should produce some water birds. Anyone wanting to join in the walk should be on Cecil Avenue outside the main NUST entrance at 6:45 (yes, quarter to seven!). We will then drive onto campus as a group. (NB: this outing has been delayed by one week from the original advertised date at the request of Prof Mundy as there is a new ornithology course starting on 7 February and it is hoped some of the students from this course will join us on our walk). As you will see under Reports, two of our January activities had to be postponed due to the rainy weather; the walk at NUST will also only take place if the current rains have eased up.

For more information phone Cecilia Hubbard on (w) 287692 or 0772433733

Saturday 19 February 2011 Matabeleland Branch Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting of the Matabeleland Branch of Birdlife Zimbabwe will be held on Saturday 19 February 2011 at 10:30 a.m. at 6 Betsi Gordon Close, Burnside. If you have any nominations for the committee or would like to volunteer to serve on the committee we would

be delighted to hear from you! The meeting will be followed by a bring-and-braai lunch. We look forward to seeing many of our members there.

For more information phone Cecilia Hubbard or Bill Lewis (h) 242285

Saturday 12 March Verreux's Eagle Survey – start of season briefing

The briefing for the 2011 season will take place at Inungu Guest House at 10:30 on Saturday 12 March. Teams who would like to begin checking their nests are invited to stay at Inungu for the weekend. Anyone interested in joining the survey teams should contact Cecilia before the briefing.

For more information phone Cecilia Hubbard on (w) 287692 or 0772433733

Sunday 27 March Peri Urban Potter

This is a bit of a mystery event! Judy Ross & Julia Dupree have identified some unusual and unlikely venues for birding within the city centre and surrounding suburbs. Participants should meet at 9 a.m. outside Ilanda Gardens, Catherine Berry Drive, Ilanda, where they will be divided into groups and assigned at least 2 destinations to visit. Everyone will meet back at a common venue for a bring-your-own picnic lunch.

For more information phone Judy Ross on (w) 67085 (mornings only), (h) 242943 or (m) 0712419335 or Julia Dupree 246269

COUNTRY DISTRICTS

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

Eastern Districts – Monthly outings are on the last Sunday of the month and depart at 7.30 a.m. from the Mutare Museum. Spare binoculars and field guides are available. Members with a vehicle are encouraged to attend and fuel can be provided. Contact Peter Gwidibira 0913-524844 or pggroup.gwidibira38@gmail.com for details.

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

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RECENT REPORTS and SIGHTINGS

IBA monitoring project report

The National Project Manager (NPM) has submitted the IBA narrative and financial reports for Zimbabwe to the BirdLife Africa Partnership Secretariat. Meanwhile the NPM is making preparations to attend the 4th Annual Planning and Review Meeting (APRM), scheduled to take place from the 2nd to the 4th of March 2011 in Bujumbura, Burundi. The objectives of these annual meetings are to review project progress, to give an overview of project finances, to identify key problems and make recommendations to improve the delivery of project results and to develop plans for the forthcoming period. The NPM has also developed an IBA concept note to submit to potential donors and the aim is to complement the current IBA monitoring project, which is officially ending in October 2011 in terms of funding.

Kanisios Mukwashi, National IBA Project Manager

Waterbird Counts

Waterfowl counts were carried out at Greengrove Dam, Crowborough Sewage Ponds, Nyamagaya Pan and Imbwa Ponds between the 14th and 21st of January by members of staff. Greengrove was visited on a Friday afternoon after a rainy morning. It was very quiet when we arrived but found that most birds were hiding in the water weeds except for the Cattle Egrets, which were mostly on the roost site in the middle of the small dam. A total of 128 birds of 16 species were recorded. An interesting sight was that of three Black-crowned Night-herons that were sitting in the reeds about 5m apart in a straight line. We could not figure out why the birds were in such a position. Crowborough Ponds had more birds than the other places. A total of

1515 birds of 19 species were recorded. The most numerous species were the Cattle Egrets which came to a total of 788 birds. A pair of Cape Teal was a pleasant surprise at the ponds. A dead cow was close to the ponds and a group of about 80 White-backed Vultures was feasting on the carcass. At Nyamagaya Pan, birds were not as numerous as last year's count. A pair of Cape Shovelers was the highlight of the count at that pan. The villagers informed us that the pan was dry until about a week ago, when heavy rains poured and the pan filled up. After that birds started to trickle in. Imbwa Ponds were the most disappointing of the lot as they were not many birds present. The ponds had hardly any water and most of them were overgrown with weeds.

Fadzai Matsvimbo, Conservation Officer

Long-toed Lapwings at Lake Manyame 1730D3: 22 January 2011

Tony Alegria, Ian Riddell and I, went African Waterbird counting at the top end of Lake Manyame, formerly Lake Robertson & Darwendale Dam. The slipway is near the old Paper Mill at Norton, where the Manyame River enters the dam, we surveyed about 8 km of shoreline and islands of floating weed in the vicinity. We came across 4 Long-toed Lapwings. They were very close to a family of Blacksmith Lapwing, standing on thick water lily pads, and close to some tall grass, in which there was an African Purple Swamphen.

When the Lapwings arrived we don't know, but it seems logical that they have moved from the Zambezi River, which is running very full, and has washed away the floating aquatic vegetation along the river front there (one of the gates at Kariba was due to open on the same day – Sat. 22/1/2011). Long-toed Lapwings have been reported on this dam once before, from July to December 1992, and then later in the year they were reported from Lake Chivero in December 1992. As we only sampled a small portion of the dam's edge, it is possible there are more families of Long-toed Lapwings on Lake Manyame and on Lake Chivero.

Marshall, B. 1993. Long-toed Plovers at Lake Chivero. *Honeyguide* 39/2 pp 90-91.

Tree, A. J. 1992. Long-toed Plovers at Lake Manyame. *Honeyguide* 38/3 pp121-122.

Tree, A. J. 1993. Recent Reports. *Honeyguide* 39/2 pp 96-103

Tree, A. J. 1993. Recent Reports. *Honeyguide* 39/3 pp 152-164

D.V. Rockingham-Gill rgill@zol.co.zw

Big Birding Day, Summer 2010

Not many of us this year set off on our travels to count as many species as possible in a limited time. Well, you can't really say that either 24 or 36 hours is limited – it's much longer than we usually have for bird-watching.

Anyway, speaking personally, some of us spent the first 12 hours heading to all places west – yes, within our 50 km radius, in case you were wondering – and had a super time all day. We also tasted for the first time, Anne and Colin Randell's 'cold coffee', which is just that – except that it is *absolutely delicious* (secret recipe, I'm afraid). There we sat in their glorious garden, overlooking the river and under-looking an African Grey Hornbill nipping to and fro feeding someone (maybe the wife or maybe the kids) right above our heads. A charming sight and another species for our list. We then retired to our respective homes to look and listen for owls, nightjars and anything else we could dream up as an excuse for having a wine on the verandah. We saw and heard none.

Next morning, up and gone south, hither, thither and every wither, up a couple of hills and down a couple of dales where we picked up some good sightings – Augur Buzzard, Montagu's Harrier and an immature, golden-crowned Verreaux's Eagle!

Anyway, excuse me for rambling on about ourselves, but it's the only team I know the goings-on of in detail.

Gavin and Marjorie Blair, the other team in the 36 hour slot, combed Vic Falls for their specials – and found Hooded Vulture and White-backed Vulture, Rock Pratincole, African Skimmer – not rare but always special – as well as Taita Falcon, very special! They saw all the kingfishers except two and reported five owls so must have been in the right place at the right time. And they would have won this section had they not been diverted by "... a snake having just caught a frog, that the snake took nearly an hour to subdue and finally swallow, and the arrival of 13 elephants at the Victoria Falls Safari Lodge waterhole ..."

Well, the *Mashonaland Glossy Trotters* in the form of Tony Alegria, Ian Riddell, Dorothy Wakeling and Ken Dixon beat Matland into a cocked hat – and in fact you have to take this very cocked hat off to them because they got the highest count in the shortest time. For starters they saw all the glamorous herons, nine of them in all sizes and lovely colours, a Long-crested Eagle, Steppe Buzzard (as did everyone else except us), African Cuckoo (ditto – perhaps we don't hear the right language), and a whole stack of LBJs which they're good at up there.

The confidently named *We'll See It Again* team, comprising David Dalziel, Jane Rautenbach, Duncan Kennaird & Julia Pierini, were second in the 24 hour slot and would have been second overall if we had such a title. (In fact, they are lucky to be here at all as their paperwork, dispatched in December, never arrived, and it was not until they failed to see their names in the first write-up did they realise this!). This team appeared to have a particular talent – where everyone else saw 1 or 2 of something, they saw more. Take, for instance, sunbirds – they saw 5, no-one else saw more than 3 (except us who saw 4 – but then we're the organisers). They topped the raptor sightings with 13 and swallows (8) but were bottom with owls (1) and nightjars (0).

New kids on the block as far as this event is concerned are the *Marondera Wanderers*, Peter Jackson, Kay Macdonald and Penny Raynor, third in the 24 hour category, and it was good to have them. They were one of only two to get a nightjar, logged more flycatchers than anyone else – seven to be precise – and the only team to report an African Darter. Thank you to you three for making such an effort to get your results sheet to me, which caused you a considerable amount of hassle.

Last but by no means least was the team consisting of Joy Kets, Sharon Peters and Margaret Frame. They didn't have a great amount of time available, but still managed to log 56 species by popping here and there into a variety of Bulawayo venues. They found something which no-one else found, and which isn't even on the list – Rosy-faced Lovebirds which, along with Lilian's Lovebird, have been seen quite frequently at Garden Park.

Thank you for participating – hope you will do so again in Birding Big Day Winter 2011.

Julia Duprée

BIRDING BIG DAY – SUMMER 2010 – RESULTS

Team	Branch	Total species
36 hours		
S McAdam & J Duprée	Matabeleland	155
G & M Blair	Matabeleland	153
24 hours		
T Alegria, I Riddell, K Dixon & D Wakeling	Mashonaland	182
D Dalziel, J Rautenbach, D Kennaird & J Pierini	Mashonaland	173
P Jackson, K Macdonald & P Raynor	Marondera	128
J Kets, S Peters & M Frame	Matabeleland	56

MASHONALAND

Domboshawa October 2010

Our outing to Domboshawa in October was a great morning out to a striking location. The granite hills are a stark contrast to other birding locations around Harare. This historical place provides an interesting habitat for birds, in addition to local folk lore and rock paintings dating back thousands of years. We were a small group of around 10, and we split up into two groups. One circled around from above and the others came up from below to meet near the cave with the rock painting. The walk is not difficult and is easily done with casual footwear. In addition to a nesting Fiery-necked Nightjar, we saw the Freckled Nightjar, both the Brown-crowned Tchagra and the Black-crowned Tchagra. The Black Stork and the Lanner Falcon were spotted overhead, and a local Rock Dove (but not granite) was about as well. The list was well-rounded with the Cape Bunting, Lazy Cisticola and the Rock Martin as well. All in all this is a place not to be missed and will certainly prove to be an interesting place in the wet season as well.

Celesta Von Chamier

Nyakasanga December 2010

Nine of us went to the Zimbabwe Hunters Association camp at Nyakasanga, on the Zambezi (between Chirundu and Mana Pools National Park) for the weekend Friday 3 to Monday 6 December 2010. The Nyakasanga was dry, but the Zambezi was flowing fast and wide, with steep, very eroded sides and no mud banks. There had been some rain and the countryside was greening up.

One African Darter was seen, (what has happened to this bird – because it seems to have disappeared from our haunts?). Three Woolly-necked Storks were flying east (should this be one of our near threatened birds (NT), on our Red data list?). We came across 100 roosting African Openbills, in Mopane woodland near the Zambezi, and one could see the difference in bill size openings between males and females. (I think pairs were sitting together in the trees). Only one Hadedda Ibis was seen, and 30 African Spoonbill flying in formation. I was expecting more morning and evening traffic from birds flying to feeding grounds, and to roost along the Zambezi, but there was little of that.

Few ducks were seen but 4 Spur-winged Goose hung around E camp, about a kilometre upstream from us and easily visible with telescope. A Bateleur (NT), maybe a 4 year-old male, a Eurasian Hobby and two White-backed Vultures were recorded. Helmeted Guinea fowl were breaking up into pairs and squabbling amongst themselves, but on the trip home from Chirundu to Harare we saw none (90% of that trip is in farming land). A Common Sandpiper was the only one seen. Two Meyer's Parrots were in Acacia albida trees at E camp, which we visited twice (no Lilian's Lovebirds or Grey-headed Parrots were seen. The latter I haven't seen in the Valley for 10 years at least). Seven cuckoo species were heard and only two seen, the African Emerald Cuckoo and the Red-chested Cuckoo. The African Emerald Cuckoo was fairly common with 3 males calling around camp one afternoon.

Three Woodland Kingfishers were seen – so there must have been many more. 10 Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters were near a colony of 200 Southern Carmine Bee-eaters, and we were told there were three more colonies of this size between us and the Ruckomechi Camp downstream. **Visitors to the Zambezi should also look for the Northern Carmine Bee-eater which has a wholly black face (not just black above the top mandible). I am told this bird has been seen at the Luangwa junction with the Zambezi, therefore not far away. A few Broad-billed Rollers were seen but the Lilac-breasted Roller was commoner. Trumpeter Hornbills were in pairs in riverine bush and we must have seen at least 12 and some were lucky to see two Southern Ground-hornbills, (also NT) in the Nyakasanga riverbed. The Greater Honeyguide was the only honeyguide seen. He was very persistent in getting us to follow him, but it was late and we wanted breakfast. The reason for going was to look for the African Pitta, and it was neither seen nor heard, but found in the area before (next time we must take a tape to try and call it up).

A few pairs of Mosque Swallow were around, and only about 100 Barn Swallow, as opposed to maybe a 1000 last year. The Sombre Greenbul was heard, and about 4 Eastern Nicator were seen. A Collared Palm-thrush was at D camp, which has a lot of Northern Ilala Palms (*Hyphaene petersiana*) in the vicinity. The Bearded Scrub-robin was in good numbers but not seen very often. The Grey-backed Camaroptera was everywhere. It was the first bird heard when we took chairs to sit in the forest to look for the elusive pitta. Black-throated Wattle-eye and 2 Livingstone's Flycatchers were seen instead. The Black-backed Puffback was the commonest shrike by far. Only one male Violet-backed Starling was seen and a single Red-billed Oxpecker; I expected more with about 60 Hippopotamus within a km of camp, in both directions. One hippo (at least) was shot by some Zambians, and washed up near our camp, to make a feast for all the nearby crocs*. Other animals seen or heard were Buffalo, Impala, Bushbuck, Waterbuck, Vervet Monkeys, Chacma Baboon, Spotted Hyaena, Elephant and Slender Mongoose, with a quill of a Porcupine found on a path.

The Purple-banded Sunbird and the Collared Sunbird were seen in equal numbers (say 20 of each) and the White-bellied Sunbird and Scarlet-chested Sunbird less so (say 2 of each). Lesser Masked-weavers were breeding in the river, a colony of 55 nests was in an *A. albida* that had recently fallen into the river and two other colonies were in small grassy islands, one of about 30 nests and another of about 15 nests. Firefinches were few and far between and the Red-billed Firefinch the only one recorded.

Nothing unexpected was found. Some things we looked for were not seen like Western Banded Snake-eagle, Crested Guinea-fowl, Double-banded Sandgrouse, Crested Barbet and Black-collared Barbet, Bohm's Spinetails, Red-capped Robin-chat, helmet-shrikes, Shelley's Sunbird and Red-throated Twinspot.

A good time was had by all. Our birding was done within one kilometre of camp in thick scrub, in Mopane woodland and along nearby roads and the riverbanks. We saw about 133 species. On the way out we got stuck in some heavy mud. Thank God for elephants because in a short time we managed to fill the ruts with broken mopane wood and with the aid of 4 wheel drive gear boxes, all three cars got out without a winch. Thanks go to Geoff Lowe for organizing the event, the Zimbabwe Hunters Association for letting us use their camp, and Peter Banks for bringing his rifle for our protection.

D.V. Rockingham-Gill rgill@zol.co.zw

* We were visited by three members of the Ruckomechi Camp, who were concerned about the 20 shots and hippo shooting, so near to their camp. Clearly there needs to be some transfrontier agreements to obviate shooting in an area of high paying tourists.

** One of the guys from Ruckomechi told me of a Southern Carmine Bee-eater colony near their camp, where the nest holes were well in from the overhanging top soil. A hippo walking over the top had caused a huge slump and exposed many eggs, nestlings and birds, which were destroyed.

References R Dennison (2010) Searching for African Pittas: 11-14 December 2009. *Babbler* No 92 pp 8-9.

A Trip to Zimbabwe December 2010

The trip was led by the incomparable Gary Douglas and Jono Francis of DF Safaris. These two men are superb bird guides who also have an encyclopaedic knowledge of all things animal, mineral and vegetable (in order categorical, as the old song goes). And the food that they prepared was superb!

We saw 344 bird species over the eight days across a number of different habitats. All of us on the trip saw more lifers than we had anticipated. Two of the guests got to see their 800th birds on the trip.

The aim of the trip, at this time of the year, was to find the African Pitta. We were aware that a trip in a few weeks time, after more rain had fallen, would yield more rallids and warblers. Our first good birds were seen in the garden of Flufftail Cottage in Marlborough, Harare – Whyte's Barbet and Variable Sunbird. We then spent the rest of the afternoon birding in denuded Miombo woodland in Christon Bank in the Mazowe area about 20km north of Harare. We saw Miombo Blue-eared Starling, Southern Hyliota, Red-faced Crombec, Miombo Double-collared Sunbird, Wood Pipit, Spotted Creeper, Miombo Tit, Eastern Saw-wing, Eurasian Hobby, Brimstone Canary and Willow Warbler. We sat on a rocky outcrop at sunset watching a number of falcons flying overhead. A Freckled Nightjar showed itself a short while later. The next day was spent driving to the eastern side of the Zambezi Valley in the Masoka area. We stopped frequently to bird en route and had sightings of Yellow-mantled Widowbird, Croaking Cisticola, Red-breasted Swallow, Pied Mannikin, Copper Sunbird, Striped Pipit and Orange-breasted Waxbill. While wading towards a small dambo, our wader-clad guides flushed three African Grass-owls. Northern Grey-headed Sparrow was seen in Mushumbi Pools village in the middle of the day. It was a surreal experience to be staring up into a tree at a small bird, all the while dripping sweat, surrounded by bemused villagers while music blared out from a speaker that was struggling to cope with the volume requested of it. A short while later, just as we stopped for a road-side lunch, we saw a displaying African Broadbill. Our accommodation for the next four days was in a comfortable hunting lodge. This is one of the wildest and most remote areas that I have ever been to. There was evidence of large game everywhere but we only saw impala, bushbuck, kudu and elephant, with the elephant only at a considerable distance. Shortly after arriving at the camp, a Pitta was heard calling from a nearby thicket. Jono and Gary had us there in a flash. Moments of great anxiety, and some other well-known emotions experienced by all birders at some stage, occurred when one of us (which happened to be me!) had had great views of the Pitta in two separate areas before the rest of the group got their sightings. All of us subsequently saw the breeding pair of Pittas that afternoon and

again in the same area over the next four days. It is a much bigger bird than what one expects it to be. It is as spectacularly coloured as the books show and is quite magnificent. It is even more amazing how a bird with such spectacular plumage can blend so well into the leaf-litter at the bases of trees and thickets. On only one occasion did we see the Pitta high up in a tree. On all the other occasions, they were seen on the ground. Shortly after our first Pitta sighting, while rehydrating in an appropriate manner, we saw the first of many Pennant-winged Nightjars. Our birding in the Zambezi valley followed a similar pattern on most days with birding in the mornings, a break over the hottest part of the day (often spent taking photos of birds in the camp – Red-throated Twinspot, Orange-winged Pytilia, Ashy Flycatcher – or sleeping, and then more birding in the late afternoons. We always had sundowners in places with great views. Birds seen in the evenings include Square-tailed Nightjar and Pennant-winged Nightjar, Double-banded Sandgrouse, Three-banded Courser, African Marsh-harrier and a female Montagu's Harrier. On our drives and walks we saw a number of raptors including Hooded Vulture, European Honey-buzzard (at least three times), African Cuckoo Hawk, Eurasian Hobby, Brown Snake-eagle and Wahlberg's Eagle. Other good birds seen include Narina Trogon, Collared Palm-thrush, Black Cuckoo, Thick-billed Cuckoo, African Cuckoo, melanistic Jacobin's Cuckoo, Racquet-tailed Roller, Broad-billed Roller, Arnot's Chat, Mottled Spinetail, Bohm's Spinetail, Saddle-billed Stork, Livingstone's Flycatcher, Broad-tailed Paradise-whydah, Grey-headed Kingfisher, Mosque Swallow, Southern Ground-hornbill and a displaying Flappet Lark. We also saw many widowfinches (Indigobirds) (in transitional plumage) on the runway near the camp. The majority of these had the white bills and pink legs of the Zimbabwean form of Purple Widowfinch. A much smaller number had white bills and distinctly orange legs i.e. Green Widowfinch (Zambezi Indigobird).

On our return to Harare, while still in the Zambezi Valley, the occupants of our vehicle were very fortunate to have great views of a pair of Lilian's Lovebirds. The guys in the other vehicle were not particularly successful at hiding their disappointment at missing these stunning birds. All of us had sightings of Mottled Swifts.

After a night at Flufftail Cottage in Harare, we headed out towards Nyanga. We first stopped to bird the Marlborough Vlei. While there is a lot of development on the edges of the vlei, there were still good numbers of exciting birds including Cuckoo Finch, Black Coucal and Common Waxbill. A couple of the guys also saw Black-rumped Buttonquail. We also flushed more than ten Marsh Owls.

Our next stop was in the beautiful Goshu Park near Marondera. This is an area of Miombo woodland and spectacular rock formations. We saw Lizard Buzzard, Spotted Eagle-owl, Coqui Francolin, Red-faced Crombec, Southern Hyliota, Spotted Creeper, Tree Pipit and Miombo Rock-thrush. We did not manage to find Cabanis's Bunting, possibly because we got caught in a massive thunder storm.

We stopped again in the Headlands area with hopes of finding Locustfinch but the grass was still too dry. We did however see Rosy-throated Longclaw and Cape Longclaw, *Northern Black Korhaan* [I am sure the author means Black-bellied Bustard!] and Broad-tailed Warbler. Closer to Nyanga we saw a Pallid Harrier, Bronzy Sunbird, Malachite Sunbird, Augur Buzzard and Singing and Wailing Cisticolas.

We stayed one night at Far and Wide which is very close to the Mtarazi Falls. The views from here were either of thick mist or spectacular vistas as far as the eye could see. We saw Orange Ground-thrush, Lemon Dove, Cape Batis, Yellow-bellied Waxbill, Yellow-throated Woodland-warbler, White-tailed Crested Flycatcher, Striped-cheek Greenbul, Chirinda Apalis, Western Olive Sunbird, Roberts's Warbler and a colony of Scarce Swifts. Barratt's Warbler and Olive Bush-shrike were everywhere and we all had good sightings of these often elusive birds. A few of us also had glimpses of a Garden Warbler. We were not able to find Red-faced Crimson-wing. Our guides also showed us three Marshall's Dwarf Chameleons.

Our return journey to Harare will never be forgotten. We saw a number of Blue Swallows (adult and younger birds) and Steppe Buzzards. We then stopped to photograph a large buzzard sitting at the top of a tree. Its large size had initially suggested that it was an Augur Buzzard but good views through binoculars by all of us, while it was perched and later as it flew off, showed that it was a Long-legged Buzzard. It is likely that this sighting will be disputed by some birders. Our guides, however, are familiar with this very rare Southern African bird from their trips throughout Africa [*it would be greatly appreciated, nay essential, if the Zimbabwe Rarities Committee had sight of these photographs!*]. Also, photographs taken as it flew off were

identical to the pictures in our guide books, so there is no doubt in our minds that we had a great sighting of a great bird.

In conclusion, birding in Zimbabwe is diverse, exciting and spectacular. I certainly plan to return one day.

Don MacGillivray, Mhlanga, RSA

Kariba December 2010

We were lucky to spend Christmas on a houseboat on Kariba. We were one whole day at a tie-up near Tashinga (24th), and a whole day at a tie up near Jenje River Mouth (26th), Matusadona National Park. There was little to choose between the two places ornithologically (both had 28 species) but Tashinga had far better fishing with much cleaner water, while Jenje River mouth was more exposed to the open water of Kariba. I suppose at both places we surveyed about 5 km of shoreline, by boat, with binos and telescope. So 10 km in all, and Kariba has a shoreline of 2164 km to explore. The grass came to the water's edge in both places so small waders, like Common Sandpiper, were very difficult to see.

African Darter were building nests and incubating eggs at both places. Jenje River had 10 Great Egrets while Tashinga only had 4. African Openbills were at both places, hunting and well spread out. Glossy Ibis were in good numbers, 7 in the Jenje River area. African Sacred Ibis a pair in both places. One Saddle-billed Stork was at each place. A group of 14 Black-winged Stilts, and a restless 80 Collared Pratincoles were at Tashinga. White-crowned Lapwings were at both places but at Jenje River, one pair had a young chick, very hard to see in the grassland. I noticed this little thing never ventured near the waterline, keeping at least 5 m from it. The mother kept an eye on it all the time, from a distance of say 10 m, while it fed itself. 10 Ruff were in a muddy place near Tashinga and 25 White-winged Terns came flying around the dead trees at Jenje in the evening. At both places I counted 4 African Fish-eagles, and at Jenje River Mouth we were lucky to see an Osprey. Probably one of only 50 in the country at any one time at this time of the year.

Birds only seen at Tashinga (protected bays)

1 Black Heron
2 Squacco Heron
2 Green-backed Heron
2 White-faced Duck
2 Three-banded Plover
10 Ruff
2 White-headed Vultures (Vulnerable)
1 male Bateleur (Near Threatened)

Jenje River Mouth (open to the lake)

5 White-breasted Cormorant
4 Grey Heron
2 Woolly-necked Stork
2 Common Sandpiper
1 Grey-headed Gull
1 Osprey

Surprising was not seeing a Hamerkop at either place. Of other birds seen a Pied Kingfisher was using a grazing Hippo as a perch. In the area of Jenje River mouth where there were more trees, there were about 20 Mosque Swallows, mostly perched on dead Mopane trees over water. Red-billed Oxpeckers were in small numbers, and one was on a hippo, and another on an Impala ram.

Thanks go to Mike Finnegan and the crew of Gold Class and all our fisherman friends who asked us to share a great holiday with them.

Kariba awaits some tough explorers to really find out how many water birds are on its shoreline.

David & Penny Rockingham-Gill

An Amateur at Aberfoyle January 2011

It was with some trepidation in New Year's week that we headed out for our favourite family holiday destination, Aberfoyle Lodge, in the verdant Honde Valley of the Eastern Highlands, about four-and-a half hours drive from Harare. Trepidation because previously we virtually had the run of the place under the casual management of the Tea Estate, but with the Estate no longer in a financial position to subsidise the lodge, it has now sensibly been under the commercial management of Wild Savanna Africa since July 2010. Aberfoyle Lodge is a little known, soul-restoring haven, previously the Tea Estate Club under more auspicious times, now a Country Lodge with activities ranging from golf, swimming, squash, tennis, snooker, canoeing, horse-riding, hiking and of course ... some of the finest birding one could wish for.

Our trepidation was entirely misplaced as we found the Lodge well along the path of transition from the fading grandeur of a sleepy clubhouse towards a well-run, family-friendly Country Lodge.

I have been an opportunist birder for some time, but it is only over the last year, since Carolyn collared me to sign up as a BLZ member, that my levels of interest, enthusiasm and knowledge have grown, mostly by osmosis through association with some of the many Gurus of the club, all so willing to share their considerable experience with clumsy amateurs like myself. Armed with this new-found enthusiasm, I read up Derek Solomon's account of the area in my 2004 version of Roberts CD and listed the "specials" to be found in this unique low-lying (850m) montane forest habitat in close proximity to Mozambique.

My first unguided foray upon arrival yielded the sentry of the forest – the ubiquitous and noisy Square-tailed Drongo, which, I noticed throughout the duration of my trip, never seemed to be far away from the company of the Dark-backed Weaver (why did they change the name from Forest Weaver?) with its' monotonously cheerful four note whistling call, with underlying typical weaver "sizzle" when heard from close enough. If a guide had been with me, he would have been bemused by my insistent study of the African Firefinch (Blue-billed Firefinch), which is so common to the area, as I stared intently through my binoculars trying to imprint the features (grey crown and nape and dark brown back) that distinguish it from its similar cousins, the Red-billed and Jameson's Firefinches. And a fat lot of good, I thought, that the bill is described as blue-black ... I defy anyone to confirm that in the field! In the vicinity of my case-study, I saw Red-throated Twinspots aplenty, although the Green Twinspot eluded me on this trip. I was treated to accommodating views of the White-eared Barbet in a dead tree just by the entrance to the Lodge, and was interested to read up later, after I saw a pair of "White-ears" disappear at dusk into a tree-hole, that they roost communally at night in nest-holes. By the ponds, as I wandered back, I thought I had identified a new species and was just about to name my ornithological discovery the "short-tailed wag bum" when I realised that it was a Mountain Wagtail (Long-tailed Wagtail) that had lost its tail, I guess either through a close-call with a predator or a particularly fierce mating dispute. My final sighting of the day, from the comfort of my chair and with a gin and tonic in hand, was a pair of Palm-nut Vultures, which have been resident in the area for a number of years.

Early the next morning (being a family holiday, I had to get my birding in before the teenagers stumbled through to the breakfast table, rubbing sleep out of their eyes) I went out with local guide, Wisdom. My mission of the day was to spend time familiarising myself with the various bulbuls not seen in most of the rest of Zimbabwe. It was reassuring to see the familiar Dark-capped Bulbul (aka "Toppie" to most of us) and to hear the bad-tempered churring-grumble of the drab-brown Terrestrial Brownbul as we walked out of the Lodge area. On our walk from the local school to the overgrown Spice Garden, we saw the Yellow-streaked Greenbul (Yellow-streaked Bulbul), distinguished more by its penetrating nasal call than by the alleged yellow streaks, certainly invisible through my binoculars. Along the same walk, I was fortunate to also see the Stripe-cheeked Greenbul (Stripe-cheeked Bulbul) in support of my theme of the day. With its dark grey cap, olive green back and greenish yellow under-parts, it was relatively easy to distinguish from the Yellow-streaked Greenbul, and its call reminded me faintly of a Natal Francolin call before it reaches its crescendo. But again, what planet are the guide-book writers on? Apart from bird-ringers, who gets close enough to see the white stripes on the cheek? On a subsequent walk, I also saw the plain, olive-green Sombre Greenbul (Sombre Bulbul) with its diagnostic white eye and with a call that the guide unashamedly verbalised as "Willie", which as a result is well imprinted. To complete my bulbul set of the area we also saw the Yellow-bellied Greenbul (Yellow-bellied Bulbul) with its olive brown back, yellow under-parts, reddish eyes and an amusing call which sounds like a cross between a toy yapping dog and a learner juvenile crow.

Walking through the forest on the "Bulbul" day, Wisdom taunted the cocky Red-capped Robin-chat (the long-winded new name for the Natal Robin) through a series of whistling challenges, to show itself. I learnt to recognise its distinctive descending and rather boring two-syllable frog-like call echoing through the forest and its cheeky human-like cheerful whistling song never failed to bring a smile to my face. I could swear when the guide whistle-called the little beggar that he imitated the call in return. But, as persistent as we were, the little guy (who I'm convinced must be the inspiration of the late Wrex Tarr's "Cocky Lobin" song) never showed

himself. Wisdom tells me that this fella imitates the calls of 30 other species, including the Fish-eagle, which I found hard to believe. I could, however, detect the notes of the Fiery-necked Nightjar in some of his song. We had fleeting glimpses of the Eastern Bronze-naped Pigeon (Delegorgue's Pigeon), which is listed as "Vulnerable" in my version of Roberts and which I had seen clearly on a previous visit, conveniently on a dead tree in the tea by the golf course close to the Lodge. We clearly heard the call of the Black-fronted Bush-shrike, but it did not co-operate too well in terms of giving me an unimpeded view and I was not fortunate enough to see the aptly named Gorgeous Bush-shrike.

On the same walk, we heard the haunting resonance of the tuning-fork like call of the Buff-spotted Flufftail (Dorothy will have to tell me what note it is). Wisdom's face was a picture when I suggested we should hack our way through the dense undergrowth of the forest to flush it out. Similarly taunting was the plaintive two-pitch rolling call of the African Broadbill which we could swear was only 10 metres away, low down in the dense vegetation but remained as just as elusive as our friend "Cocky Lobin". To complete my bird-call education of the walk, I spent some time familiarising myself with what Tony calls the "Camera-Operator", the Grey-backed Camaroptera (Bleating Warbler) which has a plaintive little alarm call like a tiny bleating lamb and an incessant 9-12 note call which sounds from the distance like two stones being knocked persistently together by a bored school boy, but with the end-of-impact zing of those kinetic ball-bearing stress toys so loved by senior executives.

My second guided walk was in the Wamba Dam area by the Tea Factory with the other local guide, Morgan. The attraction of this location is the famous Anchieta's Tchagra (March Tchagra), which is an important draw-card, attracting South African birders to the location. The guides are actively involved in preserving the specialised marsh habitat of the Anchieta's, which are successfully breeding at the Wamba Dam site. During our four-day stay, there were two groups of SA birders with their three-bird shopping lists, both of which achieved good sightings and photos of their wish-list, so will hopefully spread the word when they get home. I'm ashamed to say that, having seen the treasured Anchieta's on a previous visit, my patience was limited and although Morgan had a good sighting, I went away empty-handed this time.

Annoyingly for Morgan, I was much more interested in looking for features that distinguished the Burchell's Coucal, in clear view, from the Senegal Coucal which I am more familiar with. I failed in the field and the only distinguishing feature I could determine was later when I compared the two calls on my Roberts CD, with the Burchell's call being a more rapid version of the water-from-a-bottle bubbling that is one of my favourites of bird calls. I had good sightings of the Dark-capped Yellow Warbler (Yellow Warbler), the Yellow-breasted Apalis and I have to take Morgan's word on the apparently distinctive call of the Singing Cisticola.

On our return drive to the Lodge, despite running close to my designated family breakfast time, I closely studied the Blue-spotted Wood-dove, accommodately on the road, with the intention of distinguishing it from its Emerald-spotted cousin. Unless you're lucky enough for the light to be just right for you to determine the colour of the wing-spots, it 'aint easy! Morgan gave a good tip (pun intended) that the Blue-spotted has a yellow tip to the bill, which I convinced myself after staring intently through my binos that I could see.

Further unguided walks consolidated much of what I had seen and learned before, but I decided to have a last-day guided walk with Morgan before the reality check of heading back home. In the space of an hour and within the confines of the Lodge perimeter, we saw 16 interesting species, including a snuggling pair of Grey Waxbills, a pair of Broad-billed Rollers, a fly-past of the Silvery-cheeked Hornbill, a Green-backed Woodpecker (Little Spotted Woodpecker), the Western Olive Sunbird, an excellent sighting of the shy Black-throated Wattle-eye (Wattle-eyed Flycatcher) and a long-distance view of the Pallid Honeyguide (Eastern Honeyguide). Positive identification of the Pallid Honeyguide was well outside my skills range, but the SA birders later scoped the bird to confirm the identification for their shopping list. I was convinced on this leg that I had spotted my second new species of the trip, the White-fronted Kingfisher, but disappointingly it turned out to be a colour variation of the familiar Brown-hooded Kingfisher. To which Morgan related an amusing anecdote about an SA client who insisted it was what he unwittingly kept referring to as the "Mango-Groove" (Mangrove) Kingfisher.

A further hour and a half over the golf course and through the forest yielded a further 18 species including the raucous Livingstone's Turaco (Livingstone's Lourie), a Tambourine Dove, with its hesitant hooting call-notes speeding up towards the end, and a good enough sighting of

the African Golden Oriole to clearly see the black stripe through the eye. Throughout the trip, I was hugely impressed by the guides' apparent ability to call out usually elusive birds. No more so than when Morgan had the Grey Cuckooshrike appear as if on-demand within seconds of his call, high in the tree canopy. It takes some loss of inhibition to stand at the forest-edge "phishing" the birds while bemused golfers walk by, shaking their heads in amusement. In response to his ragged single note hoot-call through thumbs into cupped hands, we did hear the Narina Trogon, but it was not as well-trained as the Grey Cuckooshrike and remained well concealed in the depths of the forest.

All in all, I managed to sneak in many rewarding hours of birding into an active family holiday, the highlight of which was sliding down the daredevil waterfall slide of Nyawomba Falls, enhanced by the unsettling experience of having a one metre (according to the kids!) eel tapping on the goggles in investigation of the alien invaders to its territory in the pool below. We missed out on the planned family canoe expedition on Wamba Dam as the canoes were under repair and I abandoned my horse trail as the skinny Thoroughbred (designed for the flat!) that I was riding was mincing on tender feet and stumbling in exhaustion on its third outing of the day. The Lodge was generally well run under the enthusiastic management of Lee and Lee-Anne Bromley (who had brought their two toddlers out for an idyllic school holiday) and the Front-of-House manager, Sande is a gem that would be the envy of many an hospitality outfit. The Barman, Evans knew his job, once you got through his deep under-cover sense of humour and the accommodation and food were basic but fine, despite a two-day power cut. The guides, Wisdom and Morgan are both knowledgeable and attentive to the skills level and needs of their client. I am in awe of their local birding knowledge. I was also privileged to meet the legendary local guide, Abasi Jana, who was home from his bird guiding job based in Malawi and who is attributed with the first sighting in the area of the Anchieta's Tchagra (which made me all the more ashamed of my impatience at the marsh) as well as sightings of other rarities in the area.

Of the 25 listed "specials", I managed to see 14, which, in the spirit of good-birding, was just enough to ensure that I enjoyed myself, but not so much that I don't have to go back to find the rest. It is the through the good example set through the boundless energy of our Editor who epitomises the selfless effort that is required to keep any voluntary organisation running, that I felt inspired to write up my amateur Aberfoyle experience. I'm sure my inexperience will show up through some technical errors in this write up, but I hope my enthusiasm will make up for that.

Malcolm Vowles

Mashonaland Branch Visit to AFDIS Wetland Area, Stapleford, 1730D2, 23 JAN 2011

What fuel shortage? There were more vehicles parked on Westgate Car Park early Sunday morning than there are at peak shopping hours, these days. Perhaps everyone thought it was a distillery visit. But no, it was just another popular, well-attended Branch outing organised by one of our members. The Afdis operation and the workers' village produce huge quantities of effluent and sewage which are gradually rendered harmless by passing through a series of shallow ponds in the wetland area adjacent to the bottling plant. This habitat is attractive to large numbers of waders and other waterbirds which thrive in the lush vegetation of the area. A total of 102 species was listed this sunny Sunday morning.

As we entered the pond area we came across Lizard Buzzard, Groundscraper Thrush, Magpie Shrike and the first of three Long-crested Eagles in tall gums. The first ponds had many Three-banded Plover, 2 Common Sandpipers and 2 Green Sandpipers scurrying around the concrete retaining walls watched by a group of Red-billed Teal. A Common Moorhen appeared from the reeds and disappeared again. A fair-sized, noisy colony of Village Weaver explained the presence of the constantly calling Diderick Cuckoo. In the lush grass and vegetation we found Blue Waxbill and Common Waxbill, Bronze Mannikin, Dark-capped Yellow Warbler and could hear Lesser Swamp-warbler, African Reed-warbler, Great Reed-warbler and Little Rush-warbler.

Around the next section of ponds there were many Wood Sandpipers with groups continually flying in and out and a lone Egyptian Goose. Turning our backs on the ponds we scanned the reeds and grass finding Southern Red Bishop, Yellow-mantled Widowbird and Red-collared Widowbird plus in one spot a number of White-winged Widowbirds, a species less often seen near Harare. Some deeper ponds in the reedbed had no mud for waders but we could identify

the calls of the Marsh Warbler and hidden at the back was a Green-backed Heron and a Black-crowned Night-heron.

Above the grassland was a complex of power cables which attracted a Levillant's Cuckoo, European Bee-eater, Red-eyed Dove and Laughing Dove and various others. A Black-shouldered Kite and a few Amur Falcon sat further away. There were only a few swallows, an Eastern Saw-wing, Barn, one White-throated Swallow and White-rumped Swift and African Palm-swift.

Other common birds in various places were Variable Sunbird, Scarlet-chested Sunbird and Copper Sunbirds, Willow Warbler, Spotted Flycatcher, Zitting Cisticola, Rattling Cisticola and Croaking Cisticola, Yellow-throated Longclaw and Rufous-naped Lark. One rarity spotted by one member was a Black-rumped Buttonquail. A most enjoyable morning; sincere thanks to Ken Jarvis and Afdis.

Ken Dixon

MATABELELAND

African Waterfowl Census 2010 in Matabeleland

Last year we were able to cover all six of our main census areas, three around Bulawayo and the other three in Hwange.

We are grateful to all those who assisted with our counts – they appeared to enjoy their participation in what we consider to be an important project.

Once again there was a lack of funding from the national office but this did not constrain us, partly thanks to the generosity of our observers. The one unpleasant incident was the theft of belongings from our vehicles in Cowdray Park, up to now considered a secure venue as it is fenced (albeit there are gaping holes on one side) and Municipal staff are always present. Happily we retrieved everything which had been hidden in long grass – with the exception of a sim card and a set of car keys. We were subsequently advised by the Supervisor that in the last few months they have experienced theft from their buildings on this property. Fore-warned is fore-armed and we have made a plan for this coming year! Tables below give results and comparative figures.

SUMMARY JANUARY AND JULY 2010 - BY SITE

SITE	January 2010		July 2010	
	Total Birds	Total Species	Total Birds	Total Species
Aisleby	3038	35	1375	28
SAST	231	20	428	21
Cowdray Park	797	30	426	20
Hwange White Hills	483	34	191	16
Hwange Ngweshla	262	30	91	5
Hwange Sinamatella	921	44	266	18
TOTAL	5732		2776	

SUMMARY 4 YEARS 2007-2010 – ALL SITES

	2007			2008			2009			2010		
	Jan.	July	Total	Jan.	July	Total	Jan.	July	Total	Jan.	July	Total
Total sites	5	6		6	5		5	5		2	6	8
Total birds	5229	3153	8382	4239	1919	6158	2694	3073	5767	573	277	850
Total species	69	51		77	54		66	52		78	46	

TOP EIGHT SPECIES BY COUNT – JANUARY AND JULY 2010

Species	January 2010	Species	July 2010
Red-billed Teal	877	Red-billed Teal	557
Cattle Egret	536	Little Grebe	418
Little Grebe	666	African Sacred Ibis	278
White-faced Duck	469	Southern Pochard	231
Blacksmith Lapwing	413	Red-knobbed Coot	196
Southern Pochard	394	White-faced Duck	160
African Sacred Ibis	216	Blacksmith Lapwing	146
Cape Teal	187	Egyptian Goose	137

Total census figures have improved on those in the previous three years. Up to now our best years for the total number of birds was 2007 and highest number of species was January 2008. This year we have exceeded both figures and there is little immediate indication that overall numbers have taken a dip in Matabeleland as feared in Mashonaland.

Aisleby as always led the field by a long way at both counts, followed in January by Sinamatella – which count includes all the main dams and pans at that end of Hwange. Sinamatella led the field with the highest number of species. This year conditions at Aisleby were greatly improved by the new manager and good rains turned the pastures green and lush enabling the number of cattle to be considerably increased. Unfortunately, although two of the sewage works are up and running, they are receiving no input due to broken pipes and blockages around the city, so irrigation is still a problem. One of the major improvements from all points of view, especially waterfowl, was the dredging and filling of the so-called ‘Muddy Puddle’ (erstwhile Bird Dam). This attracted large numbers of water birds, including up to 15 African Openbills, many Hottentot Teals, Red-billed Teal and several Cape Teal, unusual for our area.

As is common with bird-watching, the species you would really like to include in the count are not present on the day! For instance, last week we recorded only the second ever Purple Heron at the Muddy Puddle, we’ve had a Greater Flamingo on Umgusa Dam on every visit through the year, and a Lesser Flamingo more than once!

Spur-winged Goose and African Darters were nowhere to be seen at Aisleby whereas the number of Little Grebe throughout the region has jumped to 1246 from 915 in 2009.

Expanded schedules have been submitted to the national office for counts by species for January and July 2010 and the four-year 2007 – 2010 comparison. These are for onward transmission to Wetlands International for the African Waterfowl Census. Copies are available from me at dalia@netconnect.co.zw telephone 09-246269.

Julia Duprée

Christmas Bistro 4 December 2010

Nineteen members gathered for our end of year function. Once again our Chairman, Cecilia, surpassed herself in providing a delicious meal. Back-chat, banter, birding tall tales, reminiscences and fun – all the things that have become the trade mark of so many of our activities – flowed freely throughout the evening marking a grand end to 2010 and a welcome to the new year. We wish our members all the best for 2011 and hope you enjoy many hours of happy and satisfying birding during the year ahead!

Adele Edwards

Nightjars 14 January 2011

A great start to the New Year! Friday evening saw over 40 members gather at The Boma, at Hillside Dams to hear Cecilia Hubbard’s presentation on nightjars. While this presentation was based on the one prepared by Mashonaland Branch Chairman, Tony Alegria, it had been modified to suit local audiences, but was still packed full of fascinating facts and information. The Order Caprimulgiformes is made up of 5 families of which only one – the nightjars Caprimulgidae – occurs in Africa. We had the opportunity to learn something about birds from other parts of the world and Cecilia introduced us to the other 4 families:

- The oilbirds, which occur only in South America and eat only fruit. The chicks are raised on a diet of fruits from palm trees, which are high in fats, and in days gone by the baby birds were harvested and boiled to extract the oil which was used for lighting, etc.!
- The frogmouths, identified with Australia but also occurring in other areas, which have huge gapes, and are so well camouflaged when they perch in trees, with the heads pointed skywards, looking just like another broken branch.
- The potoos = isn't that a great name?
- The owlet-nightjars
- The nightjars, of which there are about 70 species, 7 of which occur in Southern Africa and 6 in Zimbabwe. Unfortunately while the presentation was very informative it did not solve the riddle of how to identify a nightjar – as even if you have the misfortune to kill a nightjar while driving on the road, and have a specimen in your hand, it is very difficult to tell them apart. Call is probably the most reliable way of identifying these birds – and we had to opportunity to listen to some both as part of the presentation and calling in the background at Hillside Dams – but made us wonder how one would ever know if a European Nightjar were present as they are usually silent when in Africa! If ever you are lucky enough to see a nightjar then the habitat may help you identify the bird: European Nightjars are the only ones that regularly roost in trees, while Freckled Nightjars are the ones most likely to be found in rocky areas.

Adele Edwards

Waterfowl Count January 2011

Regrettably, the planned waterfowl counts at SAST and Cowdray Park, on 8 January, and at Aisleby, on 16 January had to be postponed due to the weather – while it might have been lovely weather for ducks it was way too wet for humans and several locations were inaccessible due to mud and flooded culverts.

TAIL FEATHERS

More Info on Gordon Putterill's Hadedda Ibis (Babbler no.97 Dec 2010/Jan 2011)

I find that Sarah Carter at the Bally Vaughan Annual Sanctuary (Tel 0733 436 239) a few kilometres upstream from Mwanga Lodge (Tel 0772 242 792) run by the Putterills has more info on the Hadedda mentioned at the end of the last Babbler. She reports that a flock of ten Hadedda Ibis arrived at the Sanctuary early in August 2010. Most departed the next day but two birds stayed behind and established a base in a small patch of riverine thicket/forest at the bottom of their dam. They seemed to be settling down nicely but after about a month one of the pair (?) disappeared. The other bird continues to live at the Sanctuary and can be seen there regularly at both places as it moves up and down the Dumvurugwe/Mermaids Pool perennial /stream. Both places are well worth a visit.

What are the chances of one or more new Hadeddas joining this one and when? And there is another question where did the birds come from originally? Did they come up the Mazowe river system, the Hunyani/Manyame system or the Sabi/Save system? Watch this space.

Alex Masterson