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HONEYGUIDE

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Madagascar Cuckoo *Cuculus rochii*
Photographed on Monavale hill, Harare (see pp. 26-27)
Photo: © Roger MacDonald

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Blue (Mherepere) Swallows

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•

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Contributions can be sent to:

Brian Marshall (Editor) – brian.marshall01@gmail.com

and/or

Ian Riddell (Assistant Editor) – gemsaf@mango.zw

Written communications can be sent to Ian Riddell at 5 Leeds Close, Highlands, Harare, Zimbabwe.

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Honeyguide **67**(1): 1-4, 2021

A Possible Long-legged Buzzard Photographed at Victoria Falls

Charles Brightman & Kit Hustler

The Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus* has been claimed as a rare vagrant to southern Africa, but its presence remains controversial and requires confirmation (Dowsett & Kemp 1988, Mills 2005). All of the many photographs of supposed Long-legged Buzzards from the subregion were judged to be juvenile Jackal Buzzards *B. rufofuscus* (Buij *et al*. 2016), suggesting that there are no reliable records of the species in southern Africa. One record from Botswana (2 February 1995) was accepted by the Botswana rarities committee (Tyler *et al*. 2008), but with no further details. On 24 November 2020, CB encountered six widely spaced buzzards along the Chamabonda vlei in Zambezi National Park (17°58'S, 25°41'E) that appeared to have congregated in the area to feed on termite alates, which were emerging in response to some heavy rains. All but one of them were Common (Steppe) Buzzards *B. buteo vulpinus*, the Palaearctic migrant expected at that time of the year, but one of them was very different.

The exception, which attracted attention, was obviously larger and 'eagle-like' with a very clear yellowish eye and gape that extended to almost below the centre of the eye (Fig 1a). Its head, neck, nape and breast were off white/grey in colour and the back feathers were a rich chestnut colour (Fig. 1a). The bird was quite wet, which might have influenced the amount of white visible on the head, nape and neck. The tail had limited, if any, barring below but was well barred when viewed from above, and was two-toned in colour, with pale or white inner vanes of each tail feather, which had obviously white shafts (Figure 1b). It showed conspicuous white markings at the origins of the innermost primary feathers (Figure 1c). No under-wing photographs were obtained. Its quite large size, in comparison with common buzzard, which were in the vicinity, attracted the attention of CB initially and a closer look was made because of this. On the ground, it appeared more "eagle-like" than the Common (Steppe) Buzzards that were present in the area at the time

Figure 1. (a) The possible Long-legged Buzzard photographed on Chamabonda vlei. Note the pale eye, large gape, bare legs and eagle-like appearance; (b) the pattern of dark and white markings on the upper tail with no sub-terminal bar; (c) the pale inner vanes and white flashes at the primary origins. Photos: © Charles Brightman.

These photographs were sent to KH who suggested that it was possibly a juvenile Long-legged Buzzard, and they were sent to other authorities for their opinions. Nigel Hunter and Brian Finch, in East Africa, agreed that it was probably an immature rufous phase Long-legged Buzzard. However, Dick Forsman concluded that 'The white areas [on the] head and neck are in fact exposed white down, which shows through when the wet contour feathers stick to each other. The pale nape and the pale iris are also both within the normal variation of juveniles of [the] extremely variable Common Buzzard. Some juveniles can be almost identical to young *rufinus*, but this bird is not yet one of them. For instance, the colour and barring of the upper tail is rather brown and dark, typical of young *vulpinus*, and I would have expected to see more white in the primaries on the upper-wing in a young *rufinus'*. In contrast, Guillermo Rodriguez agreed that it looked a lot like a juvenile Long-legged Buzzard; the pale neat head as well as the large bill and low head/body ratio strongly emphasized that impression. He confirmed the size difference between *rufinus* and *vulpinus*, which is what attracted CB's attention, noting that 'the wet plumage made it difficult to assess the real colours and structure, but even with these caveats it looks good for *rufinus*.'

Porter & Kirwan (2010) outlined and illustrated the importance of the amount and colour of the barring of the upper tail in differentiating Mountain *B. oreophilus*, Cape Verde *B. bannermani* and Socotra Buzzards *B. socotraensis*, so some attention was paid to this as it was clearly visible in the photographs. We struggled to find clear photographs of the upper tail barring pattern of a juvenile or immature *rufinus* and were surprised to see that this was not considered as a possible option for differentiating them from other buzzard species. [The pale rufous tail of the adult *rufinus* is diagnostic.] Hadoram & Forsman (1991) present numerous excellent photographs of *buteo*, *vulpinus* and *rufinus* under-wing patterns but their coverage of the upper tail barring pattern is not as complete. The only photograph we could find for comparison was in Rodriguez *et al*. (2013), where a first-year juvenile of nominate *rufinus* was compared with a similarly aged juvenile *vulpinus* from individuals both captured in Eilat, Israel in May on return migration. Nominate *rufinus* migrates into Africa from central Europe and would be the form that could occur in Zimbabwe.

In *vulpinus*, the tail feathers do not have an obvious two-tone colouration between inner and outer vanes and have, on average, 8 dark horizontal bars and no white feather shafts (Figure 2a). In juvenile *rufinus*, the dorsal side of the tail feathers are paler on the inside vane and darker on the outer one; in general, the tail has a 'chequered' appearance with 10 or more thin dark bars (Figure 2b). The feather shafts are also obviously white, extending approximately for ⅔ or ¾ of the total feather length towards the tail tip. The vanes of the central tail feathers are dark on both sides like that of a juvenile *vulpinus*, but the rest of the upper tail barring is quite different. A *rufinus* caught in May at Eilat in Israel has 10 or more dark bars on the tail, and shows substantial tail wear, as expected for a bird returning to Europe. The tail feathers were two-tone in colour, with the inner vane noticeably paler than the outer one and the feather shafts were noticeably white unlike that of *vulpinus*. The bird at Victoria Falls is at least six months younger than this and with plumage in much better shape, and its tail resembles that of the juvenile *rufinus* (Figure 2c). Consequently, we believe the bird photographed at Victoria Falls is a juvenile *rufinus*.

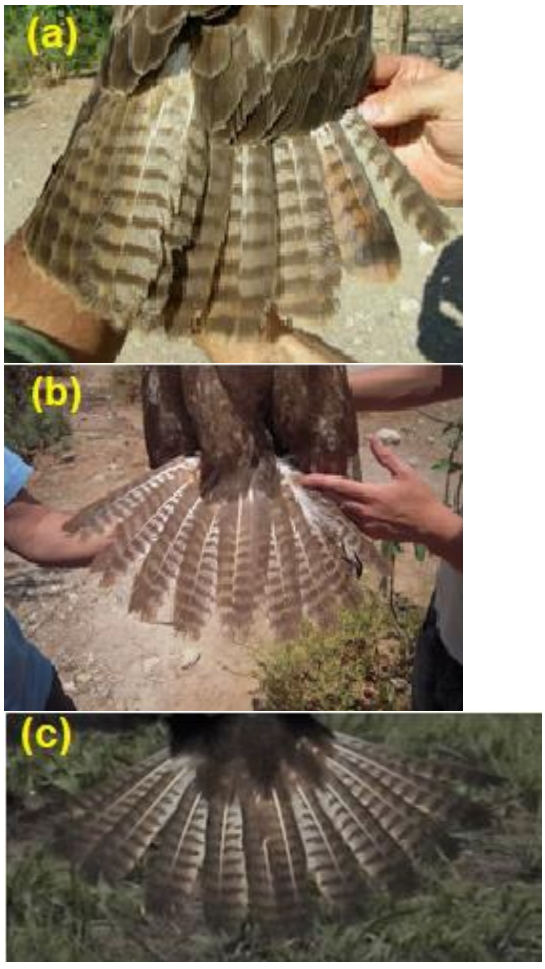

Figure 2. Comparison of upper tail pattern from (a) juvenile *vulpinus* showing fewer bars and lack of white on inner vanes and pale feather shafts (Eilat, Israel; J. Ramerez); (b) nine-month-old *rufinus*, showing number of bars, white inner vanes and feather shafts and uniform central tail feather (Eilat, Israel; S. Christiansen); (c) the Victoria Falls buzzard (cropped from Figure. 1b above).

The white flash in the outer primaries i.e., the bases of P8 and P9, on the upper-wing that occurs in *rufinus*, is useful for ruling out *vulpinus*, which has a more diffuse wing flash (Rodriquez *et al*. 2013); this is visible in Figures 1(b and c). Both subspecies of *rufinus* show an S-shaped trailing edge to the wing, caused by the convex edge of the secondaries and the 'closed' hand, while both *buteo* and *vulpinus* usually show a trailing edge that is parallel to the leading edge but this could not be seen as the bird did not soar.

Buij *et al*. (2016) dismisses all photographs said to be of *rufinus* from South Africa as juvenile Jackal Buzzards *B. rufofuscus*, a rare vagrant to Zimbabwe. The buzzard photographed at Victoria Falls is very different to a juvenile Augur Buzzard *B. augur*, suggested by Trevor Hardaker (pers. comm.) on the basis of its large size), the only large local buzzard species known to breed within 20 km of the Chamabonda vlei. Characters that separate it from a juvenile *augur* include its yellow eye, brown chest and belly, markings on the tail, which has no subterminal bar and thicker and more complete bars when seen from above (Hustler & Hustler 2021). The upper-tail markings and white flashes on the primaries, when viewed from above, are not a feature of immature *augur*.

While seeking opinions on the identity of the Victoria Falls bird, it was pointed out that Rodriguez *et al*. (2013) worked on the smaller Long-legged Buzzard subspecies *cirtensis*, which inhabits North Africa, from Mauritania and Morocco to Egypt (Thiollay 1994). It is regarded as sedentary but dispersive with some individuals reaching Senegal and possibly as far east as southern Israel (Elorriaga & Muñoz 2013) and the bird seen at Victoria Falls was unlikely to have been of this subspecies. The photograph in Figure 2b, from Rodriguez *et al*. (2013), is of a nominate *rufinus* estimated to be 9 months old and caught at Eilat in Israel. This is the form that occurs in East Africa and on the known migration route of *rufinus* back into Eurasia.

Raptors migrating into equatorial Africa have been recorded much further south of their known winter range in recent years. This may reflect the greater number and expertise of observers in the region, but it is also possible that changed movement patterns, perhaps related to climate change, might be involved. Some of these records include:

The Greater Spotted Eagle *Clanga clanga* recorded in Zambia (Meyburg *et al*. 1998), a satellite-tracked individual moving unexpectedly far south, indicates how incomplete our knowledge of the migration of Palaearctic migrant raptors is. There is another possible record of this eagle further south in Botswana (Vallaton 2011).

The Grasshopper Buzzard *Butaster rufipennis* is distributed from Senegambia east to Eritrea and Ethiopia and migrates south in a long belt extending from Sierra Leone east to Somalia, Kenya and Tanzania (Thiollay 1994) extending south to about 4-5°S. One was seen and photographed in Hwange National Park (QDS 1927A) on 7 December 2014 alongside a number of migratory Lesser Spotted Eagles *Clanga pomarina*, Yellow-billed Kites *Milvus aegyptiacus* and Steppe Eagles *Aquila nipalensis*, all taking advantage of termite alates emerging ahead of a large rain front (Riddell 2015). Another individual was seen and photographed in the middle Zambezi valley in Mana Pools (QDS 1629A2) on 2 November 2017 (Riddell 2019). Both of these records, while probably vagrants, are significantly further south of their expected distribution and one of them was associated with a rain front.

Red-necked Buzzards *B. auguralis* were also thought to migrate mostly to the north of the equator, but recent sightings from south of the Zambezi indicate that some individuals also move south (Buji *et al.* 2016).

The impact of low-pressure systems moving rapidly south from the equatorial tropics appear to have brought unexpected birds with them and this could become more prevalent with the current change in climate. For example, the first record of a White-headed Roughwing *Psalidoprocne albiceps* in Zimbabwe was during an intense low-pressure system (Morgan 1984). Likewise, the Zimbabwean records of Sooty Falcons *Falco concolor*, well inland from their expected migration routes, occurred immediately after a large weather system, which moved south very rapidly and probably carried these individuals along with it (Hartley & Hustler 1995). The migration patterns of Red-necked Buzzards have been linked to the movement of the inter-tropical convergence zone across the equator every year (Hustler & Hustler in preparation), so the presence of an unexpected migrant from further north at this time of year is quite likely.

Migrant raptors in mixed feeding flocks, following the rain fronts, present challenging identification problems resulting from the mixture of subspecies, and different age-related plumages, from different regions in the northern hemisphere. Individuals of unexpected species caught up in fast moving weather systems and being 'blown' much further south than usual, add to these difficulties. Other difficulties include moult, feather wear and saturation with water (as in this case) while some of the behaviour that aids identification in their breeding range breaks down while on migration. This can be seen in mixed raptor species flocks feeding on termite alates, while running around on the ground like chickens. Local field guides lack the detail required to properly identify these unusual species and as well as some of the local species.

Some authorities (Dowsett & Kemp 1988; Buji *et al*. 2016, Dick Forsman pers. comm.) think it is highly unlikely that *rufinus* would ever turn up so far south and if it did it would appear almost twice the size of *vulpinus*. The size of this buzzard is indeed what initially attracted attention to it. While it is unlikely that the bird photographed at Victoria Falls is the *cirtensis* race of the Long-legged Buzzard, it is not impossible that it is *rufinus*, given the apparent changes in migration patterns of some regular equatorial African migrants in the past decades. What is the possibility of a *rufinus* being photographed south of the Zambezi River? Almost nil, based on current knowledge, but these would have been the same odds for Grasshopper and Red-necked Buzzards, until relatively recently.

Acknowledgments

Nigel Hunter, Brian Finch, Dick Forsman, Guillermo Rodriguez, Ian Sinclair and Trevor Hardaker examined the photographs and provided inputs into the possible identification of this bird. Juan Ramírez and Simon Christensen allowed the use of their photographs to illustrate the differences in tail pattern of the two buzzard species and how they compared with the bird photographed at Victoria Falls.

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Charles Brightman, *Victoria Falls*. ✉ charles@discovervictoriafalls.co.zw
Kit Hustler, *Invercargill, New Zealand*. ✉ kitvix@orcon.net.nz

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The Breeding Behaviour and Intraspecific Relations of the Black Stork in Zimbabwe

Nick H.H. Jessop, Lovelater Sebele & Peter Mundy

Introduction

The Black Stork *Ciconia nigra* breeds in 44 countries (Hancock *et al*. 1992) and generally nests as solitary pairs. Nesting pairs have occasionally been recorded as sharing nesting cliffs with other bird species (Hancock *et al.* 1992). In the Palaearctic region it usually nests in large trees, secluded in forest areas and at a considerable distance from the next pair. South of the Pyrenees, in Spain, much of the population nests in cliffs (Sackl & Strazds 1997). In Zimbabwe and in southern Africa as a whole, Black Storks always nest in cliffs, and usually solitary. However, groups of nesting Black Storks have been reported at several sites in Zimbabwe (Mundy *et al.* 2003), with each pair nesting only metres away from its nearest neighbour. This situation seems to be unique, both in the southern African and Palaearctic populations (Brown *et al*. 1982; Sackl & Strazds 1997).

Should these groups of breeding Black Storks be seen as "colonies", with characteristics of colonial breeders such as information-sharing (Ward & Zahavi 1973)? Or do the pairs group together simply in response to accidents of geography and local food resources? Food availability, a function of season, is known to be one of the factors triggering the initiation of breeding (Kahl 1964). In Zimbabwe, these birds breed in winter, mainly from May to August (Irwin 1981), when streams and pans shrink to a series of pools. Fish populations become concentrated and are easily preyed upon, leading to a marked increase in food availability (Mundy *et al*. 2003).

The Black Stork is an uncommon resident of Zimbabwe and estimates of its population have increased from 'about 15 pairs' (Siegfried 1967) to 'over one hundred pairs' (Irwin 1981) to '500 or more pairs' (W.R. Thomson, in Lorber 1982; Mundy *et al*. 2003). Zimbabwe contains at least half of southern Africa's Black Stork population, with the rest being distributed from the southwestern Cape in South Africa northwards through to the Tanzania-Zambia border (Mundy *et al.* 2003). The largest 'colony' in Zimbabwe is/was that at Sebakwe Poort, where up to nine pairs nested together on the cliffs either side of the Sebakwe River, although for 'many years' there have been 'no reports' from this site (Rockingham-Gill 2015). The opportunity was therefore taken to make some detailed observations on these birds (Jessop 1998), albeit unfortunately only for a seven-week period in the austral winter.

The approach of this study was behavioural and it attempted to put together a 'typical' breeding plan for the Black Stork and to assess its intraspecific relationships arising from the unusual proximity of the nesting pairs, most notably 'do they constitute a colony?' Up until this study, the only other observations on its breeding in Zimbabwe were those by Cannell (1991), and the three and a half days of observation at a nest on Debshan Ranch (Mundy unpublished observations). Otherwise, the behaviour of the Black Stork in Zimbabwe has gone virtually unrecorded since Siegfried's initial study of breeding distribution in 1967.

The unique feature of this cliff site in Sebakwe Poort is that seven pairs of Black Storks have chosen to nest on it, but the year before (1996) Bernard Beekes and his party saw nine nests there (Beekes 1996). The only other record of two nests in close proximity to each other was recorded in the USSR where two nests were found in the same tree (Hancock *et al*. 1992). Sebakwe Poort is one of the earliest recorded sites of the Black Stork in Zimbabwe, when Hale (1946) observed six birds there in June, although he did not think they were (yet) engaged in breeding. And on a visit in October 1956, Richard Brooke and Carl Vernon saw a 'family party' of Black Storks (Brooke 1956). In August 2001, Kevin Barry (2004) visited the poort to observe Lanner Falcons *Falco biarmicus*, and remarked that they 'never' attacked the storks.

Study area and methods

Sebakwe Poort is a gorge along the Sebakwe River, 13 km northwest of Kwekwe town, at 18°51'S, 29°44'E and it is approximately 300 m in length, with cliffs estimated at up to 100 m in height, facing north and south along both sides of the westward-flowing river. In places the river is 40 m in width, and flows at an altitude of 1150 m with the surrounding hills rising to 1283 m. The cliffs are sheer and made of sandstone of a reddish colour, with many ledges, holes, nooks and crannies. At the end of 1997/early 1998, BirdLife Zimbabwe declared the poort an Important Bird Area (later named Important Bird and Biodiversity Area), on the basis of the numbers of Black Storks there (Childes & Mundy 1998); the site was considered to hold at least 1% of 'a biogeographic population of a congregatory waterbird species' (Barnes 1998).

The poort is downstream of the Lancashire steel factory, and is situated in a gold mining area. At the time of the study (1997), the area belonged to Sebakwe Farms (Pvt) Ltd, 22 900

ha in extent, a subsidiary of Sable Chemical Industries Ltd, given over to cropping land and cattle. The poort itself with a small surrounding area was leased to the National Trust as a nature reserve, and it is a sacred place, with frequent prayer gatherings of followers of the Zimbabwe Apostolic church.

The study period was from mid-July to the end of August 1997. NHHJ sat on top of the north cliff (i.e., south-facing) under the shade of a tree at an appropriate vantage point from which all nests could be seen. Both binoculars and a telescope (x75 magnification) were used for the observations, which were simultaneously recorded on a small hand-held tape recorder, and transcribed later. Every day was spent at the vantage point, from pre-dawn to dusk, from approximately 06h00 to 18h00, with all events being recorded and timed. On occasions the south cliff was climbed in order to look into three nests (1, 4 and 6). The two adult birds on Nest 4 were observed throughout their courtship, and their sexes could be determined by means of the differently shaped areas of scarlet skin around their eyes. The sexes of the other pairs could not be distinguished and so the roles of each could not be determined. There was no interference or manipulation of the birds themselves.

Nests 1 and 3 produced two and three nestlings respectively. The two nests were observed and the frequency of feeding recorded over a period of fifty days. The observations were divided into ten-day intervals for analysis. A chi-squared analysis was carried out to investigate if a difference occurred in the frequency of feeding within a nest over time. A comparison of the feeding frequency between the two nests over the 50-day period (at 10-day intervals) was also carried out.

To see if feeding frequency was a response to time of day, linear regression was used for each 10-day interval, and for each pair to test for changes over time. Attention was also paid to any presence of 'trios', i.e. three adults at a nest, and any interactions between pairs.

Results

Productivity and feeding

There were nine pairs of Black Storks nesting in the gorge in 1996, with eight on the south cliff and one on the north cliff (Beekes 1996). In 1997 only seven pairs nested, all on the south cliff. The number of chicks in each nest ranged from one to three, thus the different nests were observed to see the differences in the frequency of feeding and parental change-overs that might be expected between nests of varying productivity. The chicks on Nest 1 (two chicks present) received 67 feeding visits, an average of 2.33 day^{-1}. Those on Nest 3 (three chicks present) received 89 visits, an average of 3.35 day^{-1}. There was no significant difference in feeding frequency between the two nests ($\chi^2_4 = 2.47$, $p > 0.05$). The frequency of adults bringing food to Nest 1 was slightly lower during the first days of observation (2.2) and slightly higher for the 10 days prior to fledging (2.5). After fledging the incidence of feeding visits dramatically reduced to 1.3 for the first 10 days and finally 0.5 for the final 10 days. In Nest 3, the incidence of feeding visits was fairly consistent for each 10-day period and the gradual increase towards the time the chicks fledged noted on Nest 1 was not evident. There was a significant difference in feeding frequency within each nest at the different ten-day intervals (Nest 1: $\chi^2_4 = 15.70$, $p < 0.01$; Nest 3: $\chi^2_4 = 20.10$, $p < 0.001$). Time of day did not influence time of feeding at seven of the eight nests ($p > 0.05$). Nest 1 was the only one where there was a significant correlation ($r = 0.59$, $p < 0.05$) between time of day and frequency of feeding over a 10-20-day interval, with the highest frequency between 08h00 and 12h00, decreasing as the day went along.

The pairs on Nests 5 and 7 each hatched three chicks but despite the fact that Nest 3 successfully reared three chicks, two of the chicks on each of these nests died. On both occasions, an adult was observed pulling at the dead chicks and shaking them violently in its beak. The surviving chick on Nest 5 was seen to pick at the remains of one dead sibling before a parent picked it up and swallowed it. It is not clear whether or not these deaths were as a result of low food availability, siblicide or infanticide.

Sex roles in parental care

For the sake of clarity, an adult was recorded as being present for the whole hour if it spent over 45 minutes on the nest, for ½ hour if it spent between 15 and 45 minutes and absent if it remained for less than less than 15 minutes. The male was on the nest for 53.5% of the observed time, the female for 62.3%. Both sexes were present together for 15.7% of the time, and during these times it tended to be the female actually standing on the nest (72.5%). Only the male gathered nest material, usually from a grassy ledge on the right of the cliff, less than 150 m away. This would commonly occur during a morning change-over when the relieved male would then make several trips (11 observed on one occasion) over a ½ to 1½ hour period. Upon his return, he placed the materials, usually grass or sticks, in front of the female and departed immediately. The female then arranged the materials into the nest.

The existence of trios on a nest

As observed by Cannell (1991), trios were seen on numerous occasions, most commonly on Nest 4. No direct relationship is believed to exist within the trios as they usually occurred with one adult perched on a ledge in front of the nest while both parents were present. The adult who was not incubating would after approximately five minutes, fly down at the intruder and dislodge it with a beak-snap. This defensive act was often performed by the male and was not observed when the nest had only a lone occupant. In such instances the intruder's presence would be tolerated or ignored until it departed of its own accord or the second parent returned. On two occasions a juvenile was observed immediately next to Nest 7. The lack of reaction by the adults suggests that the juvenile was the result of a breeding attempt completed by another nest before observations commenced, possibly Nest 2. The fact that Black Storks usually make only one attempt to breed per season provides further evidence against the juvenile being related to the Nest 7 pair.

Interactions between pairs

Interactions between pairs were common occurrences and often took the form of adults from different nests departing or arriving at the same time in/from the same direction. Passive interactions, whereby the aforementioned 'intruders' which perched on or near a nest without inciting a reaction from a single resident, often occurred. The opposite of these, the antagonistic interactions, were the more common of the interactions observed and included:

(1) The repeated displacing of one adult from a favoured perch by another. The adults involved rarely perched on a nest, and therefore determining their relationship was not possible. One possible explanation could be the existence of a hierarchy among males and females with the dominant birds replacing those of lower rank or experience. This

would imply a more complex social structure than usually found in birds and may therefore reflect the stork's inherent instinct to defend a large area surrounding its nest as seen in Palaearctic and territorial southern African pairs.

(2) Aerial conflicts were observed with frequent clashes between adults. One adult in particular, belonging to Nest 1, was repeatedly 'chased' through the gorge by another and forced to alight on its nest. It would then stand making an Up-Down display coupled with a loud, wheezing, bisyllabic whistle. This sometimes continued for several minutes with increasing urgency, despite the fact that chicks were begging for food. During these encounters the long and feathery white undertail coverts, were extended by the pursued adult.

Discussion

The time available for this project was limited and so results for the feeding rates and incubation may well signify trends, but without repetition it is impossible to be certain that these represent a typical example of the Black Stork's breeding cycle. The data presented here may, therefore, be most important as an attempt to stimulate further investigations.

The feeding rates noted in this study seem to indicate that the parents do not adjust their frequency of visits depending on the number of chicks. For example, the parents of Nest 3 had 50% more chicks than Nest 1 but there was no significant difference in their rate of delivery. The deliveries could have thus differed in the amount of energy value. As with all storks, the Black Stork lays and hatches asynchronously and therefore, with the head start afforded to the first to hatch (Hancock *et al*. 1992), it seems unlikely that the food is evenly distributed among the chicks. This may have been the reason behind the death of the chicks on Nests 5 and 7.

The average clutch size of Black Storks in the (former) Transvaal was 3.37 eggs while an average of 2.27 chicks survived to after five weeks of development, which represents a 32.6% mortality probably most frequent amongst late- hatching chicks. There is no evidence of siblicide in either White *C. ciconia* or Black Storks but parental infanticide has been reported in both species (Zieliński 2002). For the White Stork, at least, it was thought to be a means of reducing brood size and therefore the effort needed to rear a large clutch, sometimes up to 7 eggs.

The incidence of copulation observed on Nest 4 provides some evidence for the 'colony theory'. Most territorial species, for example the White-headed Vulture *Trigonoceps occipitalis*, will copulate only once or just a few times, in order to achieve successful fertilisation. However, when birds are nesting in close proximity to other males, and given the high level of parental commitment on the part of the male, it then becomes necessary to guarantee that the offspring produced by your mate does in fact carry your genes. To avoid an occurrence of the 'sperm competition theory' (Birkhead & Møller 1992), the males foraged for nest material close to the nest and copulations would occur within ½ hour of each other and usually within minutes of the partners' arrival at the nest. This could be interpreted as the male proclaiming ownership of his mate to any other males on the cliff. At no time did the male allow the female to remain alone at the nest prior to laying and when she left the nest he would follow immediately after her.

Further evidence of the male's efforts to ensure paternity are the obvious greeting displays between partners that were observed at the nest of a territorial pair at Debshan Ranch by Mundy (unpublished) over three and a half days of observation. This greeting was in the form of a low Up-Down display accompanied by the bisyllabic whistle heard during conflicts, and the white underside tail coverts were usually exposed by one or both adults. These may well have had a signal function in strengthening pair bonds. This adaptation to the presence of the other storks could be construed as proof that the Black Storks at Sebakwe Poort exist as a colony, as opposed to an artefact due to resource availability.

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Nick Jessop, Lovelater Sebele & Peter Mundy, *Bulawayo*. ✉ mundy@gatorzw.com

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Status of the African Reed Warbler and Records of the Eurasian Reed Warbler in Zimbabwe

Kit Hustler & Derek Adams

Information on the status of the African Reed Warbler *A. baeticatus* in southern Africa is reported in many atlas projects and texts but with conflicting conclusions. For example, Dean (2005) states that in southern Africa *baeticatus* is predominantly resident north of 26° S (which includes all of Zimbabwe) but is largely migratory south of this. Kennerley & Pearson (2010) state they are resident or short distance migrants while Irwin (1981) reported its scarcity in the major river valleys of Zimbabwe, but provided some breeding data and outlined that there was a seasonal migration into and out of the country. Comments that it is abundant in southern Africa (Tyler 2004) are not supported by atlas data from Zimbabwe and in Zambia it is considered to be locally common, but sporadic and often absent from otherwise suitable habitat (P. Leonard personal communication).

Acrocephalus baeticatus is considered to be a valid and polytypic species (Fry *et al*. 2000, del Hoyo *et al*. 2006; Kennerly & Pearson 2010) with at least 5 subspecies recognised from different parts of the African continent. Olsson *et al*. (2016) identified a number of different clades in the reed warbler complex and the geographical structure of the mtDNA haplotypes suggests geographical isolation for a lengthy time period between some of them. They maintain that the different major clades in the Eurasian Reed Warbler *A. scirpaceus sensu lato* complex have been evolving as separate lineages for a considerable time and could thus be considered different species based on disjunct distributions, morphological differentiation, divergence and geographical structure in mitochondrial loci. They propose that the names *scirpaceus, fuscus, avicenniae, ambiguus, minor, cinnamomeus, hallae* and *baeticatus* could be used for these lineages.

The taxonomy of these similar forms is convoluted and confusing. The main reason for this is the similarity between *scirpaceus* and the African form, *baeticatus*, which are considered by some to be conspecific (Dowsett-Lemaire & Dowsett 1987) due to their identical song (both species respond strongly to playback of the other's song). The various forms also share similar morphology and habits. *Acrocephalus baeticatus* can be confused with the European Marsh Warbler *A. palustris* away from reedbed habitats depending on geographical location. In Zimbabwe, *baeticatus* breeds in swampy vegetation and is highly territorial and in full song when most Palaearctic austral summer visitors are present and so confusion should not be likely.

The difficulty of separating migratory Eurasian Reed Warblers with the local African Reed Warbler in the austral summer has been the subject of some debate. These debates have been complicated by confusion between the two species in the literature and the lack of local knowledge around the status of *baeticatus* at any given locality. In Botswana up to 53 individuals of *scirpaceus* were netted in the austral summer of 1996/97 and they appeared to be in almost every water body with *Typha* bulrushes that was sampled (Tyler & Tyler 1997). As far as we know, there was no voucher or DNA specimens collected. There is an increasing reluctance to collect voucher specimens, which provide important easily accessible biological information, and particularly genetic data over a long period of time. The importance of specimens is well illustrated in Herremans (1992), who added a record of *scirpaceus* to the Botswana list after examining a specimen held in the Natural History Museum in Bulawayo (NMZB), collected nearly 20 years earlier.

Overseas researchers often overlook the sympatry of northern hemisphere warbler subspecies on their wintering grounds in Africa and this sometimes creates identification issues. For example, recent mtDNA analyses have confirmed that Great Reed Warblers *A. arundinaceus* wintering in east and southern Africa originate from a wide area of Europe and involve a number of subspecies (El-Arabany *et al*. 2015). Misidentifications of warblers in the hand is not uncommon, even by experienced ringers and 6.8% of Eurasian Reed Warblers were misidentified at the species level according to DNA sequences obtained from ringed birds in one study (Arbabi *et al.* 2014).

The morphology of *scirpaceus* varies clinally with birds in eastern Europe (the *fuscus* subspecies which is likely to occur in southern Africa) being more similar to Marsh Warblers *A. palustris* than are populations in Western Europe, from where most existing identification criteria were derived (Wilson *et al*. 2001). In east and southern Africa *A. s. fuscus*, which is larger, paler and less brightly coloured than *baeticatus*, is the form that is likely to be encountered.

The current identification standard relates to the emargination on the inner web of the 9th primary of birds in the hand, as well as ratios of culmen length and gape measurements to prove conclusively that the bird in question is a Eurasian Reed Warbler. This is very difficult if the bird is not in the hand or in full primary moult, and is complicated by changes in wing-length with age (Merom *et al*. 1999), sex (Jakubas & Wojezulanis-Jakubas 2010) and declining wing length from west to east in Europe (Wilson *et al*. 2001).

While observing a singing *scirpaceus* on an island in the Zambezi at Kazungula upstream of Victoria Falls and in close proximity to *Phragmites* and Papyrus reedbeds with the late Bob Stjernstedt in early April 1996, discussions turned to how its presence could be confirmed with confidence, without catching it, given its similarity with *baeticatus* in the field. It was acknowledged that measurement of primary feathers was considered the ultimate confirmation but only for birds in the hand. Collecting a specimen would put the identity beyond

doubt and allow it to be examined years later, should the need arise.

We concluded that it was possible to be confident of identities with reasonable certainty, if all known factors of other confusing species were taken into consideration. Rather than trying to determine which species it was, the first step was to exclude the species that were, based on knowledge of the area, unlikely occupants of different habitats there, the time of year that the bird was seen, its known migration patterns, and so on. Central to this thinking was a reasonable knowledge of the most likely confusing form, *baeticatus*, in the area.

In this paper, we examine the status of *baeticatus* in Zimbabwe, using data from the Zimbabwe bird atlas collected between 1987-1992 as a foundation. The information has been derived from a re-analysis of the data set, initially presented by Harrison (1997). Knowledge of this species in Zimbabwe and neighbouring countries is summarised with a view to trying to untangle the status of these reed warblers and linking that to the likelihood of confidently identifying *scirpaceus* in the field during the austral summer in Zimbabwe.

There are no unequivocal records of *scirpaceus* from Zimbabwe to date, but tantalising evidence indicates that it does occur in spite of the contradictory information in Herremans (2005), where it is stated that there are no records and yet two are plotted on the distribution map given for this species (p.767). We consider some unpublished records of *scirpaceus*, including the unknown warbler photographed on the Marlborough vlei on 7th April 2020.

Methods

Data for *baeticatus*, the Lesser Swamp Warbler *A. gracilirostris* and the Little Rush Warbler *Bradypterus baboecala* were extracted from the 1987-1992 atlas database by season, i.e., cool dry (April-July), hot dry (August-November) and hot wet (December-March), in order to determine the status of these species in Zimbabwe at these times. Monthly distribution data were then extracted for *A. baeticatus* because the number of QDS (quarter degree squares; 15' latitude x 15' longitude) with records in them was unexpectedly low. The proportion of QDS in which the resident warblers, *gracilirostris* and *baboecala*, were recorded was compared with those in which *baeticatus* was recorded. These proportions would give an indication of any change in detectability of the resident warblers in the reedbed habitats visited by observers. All the resident species are more often heard than seen and any significant deviation from the calculated ratio would confirm a change in the seasonal status of the birds.

Atlas card records of *baeticatus* were accepted without question at all times of year. There were five QDS with records of *palustris* between May and October; these could have been *baeticatus* but were not included in this analysis as they had been submitted in good faith and it was not known if there had been any follow up with the observer. Observers were encouraged to 'leave it out, if identity was in doubt' and this created biases in difficult to identify groups in the database as a whole. Cizek (2019) discussed some of the other issues that affected the atlas database, and these were likely to have influenced the records of *baeticatus.*

The presence of *gracilirostris* in these areas was also determined because it is the most widespread, easily identifiable reed warbler in the country. Its abundance index would provide an indication of the number of times reedbeds and wetland habitats were visited by observers and where at least some warblers were recorded. It was assumed that if they had been recorded in a QDS, then suitable habitat had been visited and there was a reasonable chance of encountering any of the African species that might occur there at the time. Data on *baeticatus* collected by Alec Manson (1985) in Mazowe was also used. His work provided reliable information on their monthly presence on the watershed over a number of years and he also recorded the number of adults and juveniles caught each month. This is the best continuous data sets we have available and provide some answers to the question surrounding the status of *baeticatus* in the country. In addition, this information can be used to judge the probability of the more regular occurrence of *scirpaceus* in the country.

Data on the habitat used and start of singing by migrant warblers were included on the basis of field data collected by us and confirmed and amended where necessary from Irwin (1981) and Hockey *et al*. (2005). This made it possible to summarise the habitat preferences and migratory behaviour of, and dispersal data of, reed warblers in southern Africa (Table 1).

Results

The migrant species were, predictably, significantly most numerous, and in more QDS, during the hot wet season, which is the northern winter that they avoid by migrating (Table 2). The small numbers recorded in the cool dry and hot dry seasons may represent late departures and early arrivals, respectively. The resident species were, however, the most frequently recorded reed warblers in wetland habitats. They were present all year round and the data confirm that observers visited reedbeds and similar habitats, regularly during the atlas period. Seasonal differences in the number of QDS in which they were recorded and the number of sightings (Table 2) were not significantly different (Chi square test $p > 0.05$).

The least numerous of the resident reed warblers was *baeticatus* with records from 62 QDS over five years of atlassing. This is almost the same number of QDS in which the similar Palaearctic migrant *palustris* was recorded (Table 2).

There were relatively few sightings of *baeticatus*, only 159 records over five years, which amounts to a little more than 30 per year or less than 3 per month for the whole atlas period. The number of sightings was significantly different in the cool, dry season (Chi square test $p<0.01$), when it was reported in a small number of QDS. This suggests that they were migratory and mostly absent in the cool dry season, or present in very small (possibly undetectable) numbers at this time. This confirms the view that it undertakes considerable but not fully understood seasonal movements (Irwin 1981). It is known to breed during the rains, from November to January, but there are no known recent breeding records, probably reflecting a lack of observers

Table 1. Summary of habitats, departure times and status of warblers present in reedbeds in Zimbabwe. Arr = arrives, Dep = departs. Data from Irwin (1981) and Hockey *et al*. (2005).

Species	Habitat	Status	Migration dates
A. schoenobaenus Sedge warbler	Low emergent aquatic vegetation	Palaearctic migrant, non-breeding	Arr: end November Dep: end March/begin April

A. scirpaceus	*Phragmites*, bulrushes, riparian thickets, tall grass, almost always near water	Palaearctic migrant, non-breeding	Arr: end November Dep: End March/begin April
A. baeticatus	Edge of *Phragmites*, bulrush, sedges, vleis with long grass.	Intra African migrant, some resident? Breeds Jan-March	Arr: Sept/Oct Dep: end March/begin April
A. arundinaceus	*Phragmites*, riparian thickets and other rank vegetation, sometimes away from water	Palaearctic migrant, non-breeding	Arr: end November Dep: end March/begin April
A. rufescens Greater Swamp Warbler	Papyrus	Resident: breeds Dec-May	
A. gracilirostris	*Phragmites* & bulrushes	Resident, breeds Aug-May	
B. baboecala	Papyrus, *Phragmite*s, bulrushes	Resident; breeds Aug-May	

Table 2. The total number of records of migrant and resident * warblers recorded by season, in Zimbabwe, between 1987-1992. The number of QDS in which they were recorded is given brackets. The data from Manson (1985) is for one QDS (1730D2).

		Season			
	Species	Cool dry	Hot dry	Hot wet	QDS
Atlas data	*A. arundinaceus*	14 (14)	27 (17)	330 (95)	101
	A. palustris	16 (14)	9 (9)	108 (55)	63
	A. schoenobaenus	22 (18)	17 (13)	183 (68)	75
	*A. baeticatus**	20 (15)	65 (32)	74 (40)	62
	*A. gracilirostris**	294 (75)	331 (76)	333 (78)	132
	*B. baboecala**	227 (69)	260 (82)	277 (75)	134
Manson's data	*A. baeticatus**	38	61	154	
	*A. gracilirostris**	68	42	82	
	*B. baboecala**	9	26	52	

The frequency of *gracilirostris* and *B. baboecala* was not significantly different between seasons (Chi square $p > 0.05$) indicating that both of these species occurred in approximately the same ratios in reedbed habitats across the country, irrespective of season. Throughout the year these two species were recorded six and five times more frequently in swamp habitats than *baeticatus*. In the cool dry season, however, this proportion increased to nearly 15 and 11 times, confirming that *baeticatus* probably moves out of the country at this time. These species occupy almost identical habitats (Table 1) but *baeticatus* is more frequent low down in these reedbeds when co-existing with *gracilirostris* and *A. rufescens* in Zambia (Benson *et al*. 1971). This niche is occupied by *baboecala* at Kazungula, which might explain the absence of *baeticatus* from these reedbeds. *Acrocephalus baeticatus* is territorial and calls aggressively during the breeding season (Dean 2005), so it should have been detectable by calling and song playbacks at this time.

The number of QDS in which *gracilirostris* and *baboecala* were recorded suggests that during the atlas period observers regularly visited reedbed habitats suitable for *baeticatus* but that they were genuinely rarer or absent from these habitats. Both of these species were recorded in twice as many QDS across the country as *baeticatus*, which appears to be unaccountably rare. This is partly because it is migratory and would have been absent from some of these squares at certain times of year. Even when it was present, it was recorded in half the number of QDS that the two resident species were, suggesting that they are much rarer in these habitats than was originally thought. The number of QDS in which *arundinaceus* was recorded in the hot wet season was double that in which *baeticatus* was recorded. This suggests that observers were aware of migratory warblers in these habitats and were paying attention to them. It is acknowledged that the detectability of these species is different, but *baeticatus* should have been breeding and would have been strongly territorial and singing as a result. They would have been heard and recorded (presumably) but weren't, thus confirming their absence from some otherwise suitable habitats.

What do we know about *Acrocephalus baeticatus* in Zimbabwe?

Three quarters of *baeticatus* records came from parts of the country above 1200 m a.s.l. (Table 3). There is good evidence of movement in the dry season (April/May) away from the country with a return or influx prior to the rains (September/October). They are absent from the major river valleys and were only recorded there rarely when birds were on migration (March/April/May and Sept/Oct/Nov) (all records (middle Zambezi and Limpopo); 75% of all records upper Zambezi). It breeds between October and March (n=26) with a peak between January and March (80%) and most records are from above 1200 m a.s.l. Its occurrence in tall temporary flooded rank grass, such as the temporary watercourses in NW Matabeleland in December fits with this migration pattern as these habitats vary seasonally and are dependent on the rains in November. Irwin (1981) considered them to be common in Mashonaland between October and April and after this most of the population disappears, with some remaining in swampy habitats. This is confirmed by the atlas data.

Data from Mazowe (Table 3) show a similar trend to the atlas data with 61% and 24% of birds captured during the hot wet and hot dry seasons respectively. The numbers caught dropped in April and rose again in November, confirming the

trends in the atlas data. The breeding cycle of *baeticatus* takes just one month (Dean 2005), which means that juveniles captured at Muruwati in November and December may have been reared outside of Zimbabwe, and moved into the country with the rest of the birds. No young birds were caught in January and the young birds caught after that were derived from local breeding attempts in December and later. This suggests the possibility that some of the population are either non-breeding intra-African migrants or that these birds are breeding twice a year.

Table 3. The number of QDS from broad geographical areas in which *A. baeticatus* was recorded by month between 1987-1992. Values of zero are blank, values in bold indicate that juveniles were present. Muruwati data are from Manson (1995).

Location	Jan	Feb	Mar	Aug	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
Mashonaland	6	9	10	3		1	3	2	6	8	6	5	61 (43%)
E. districts	3	5	3	2	2	1	1	1	3	4	2	3	30 (21%)
Lowveld	1	1	1			2	1		3	2	3	2	16 (11%)
Matabeleland	3	5	1	1		1	2		3	2	3	2	23(16%)
Middle Zambezi Valley				2	1				1	1	1	1	7
Upper Zambezi Valley								3				1	4
Limpopo basin			1								1		2
Total	13	20	16	8	3	5	7	6	16	17	16	14	143
Muruwati Mazowe	14	10	9	5	5	3	2	2	1	6	15	27	

Dean (2005) states that in southern Africa *baeticatus* is predominantly resident north of 26° S (which is all of Zimbabwe) but is largely migratory south of this. This is not the case in Zimbabwe where the most birds were recorded between September and April (79% of QDS) above 1200 m a.s.l. (80% of QDS). It is rarely found in the major river valley systems, in spite of the suitable habitats being present on the upper Zambezi in particular and then it seems only on migration. It occurs occasionally between April and August in suitable habitat above 1200 m, mostly in the east of the country (Riddell 2015).

Its apparent absence from the upper Zambezi Valley, which has extensive beds of *Phragmites* and papyrus reedbeds, was unexpected and KH did not record it in these habitats at Kazungula between 1995-1998. There are specimens of *A. baeticatus* from upstream of Victoria Falls in the Natural History Museum, Bulawayo, so it has occurred there in the past but why are there no recent records? It is a migrant and was collected here on passage during a seasonal window when it is moving, but seems to be absent otherwise.

Are habitat changes in the reedbeds responsible for the lack of *baeticatus* records from the upper Zambezi? We watched a lightning strike set a large area of papyrus ablaze, and it burned to the ground in about an hour. In less than 4 weeks, it had been replaced by a stand of *Phragmites.* Some changes have been much more gradual and might have been partly responsible, over the longer term, for the absence of *baeticatus* records. These changes were not obvious between 1995-1998 when KH worked there, but 20 years later in December 2018, reedbeds had been changed significantly, in location and density, when compared to 1998. This was reflected in the wildlife and birds that we saw in association with the floodplain in 2018. The most obvious change was the absence of Sitatunga *Tragelaphus spekii*, a specialist swamp-dwelling antelope in 2018. Between 1995-1998, we saw them every day and there were any number of males, females and young of year in the reedbeds, visible from Imbabala Camp. In 2018, Imbabala staff asked KH to confirm the rumours that Sitatunga had been present on the island in the past. The skull of an adult male was deposited in the mammal collection of the Natural History Museum late in 1998 and is proof of their past existence here as the whereabouts of countless photographs taken of them is currently unknown.

No *baeticatus* were heard or seen in December 2018 during two full days of bird watching on or next to the Zambezi and we were specifically looking for warblers in the reedbeds. We saw and heard *rufescens, gracilirostris* and *baboecala* in the papyrus and *Phragmites* habitats but no Chirping Cisticolas *Cisticola pipiens*, which is a reedbed specialist that should have been calling at this time of year just prior to breeding (Hustler 2000). The places where they had bred in the past were over-grazed and completely transformed into flattened grassland, like everywhere else on the floodplain.

Irwin (1981) suspected that the Greater Swamp Warbler *A. rufescens* occurred in papyrus reedbeds on the Zambezi River between Kazungula and Katombora rapids. This has subsequently confirmed and they are widespread in suitable habitat (Hustler 1995). Was *rufescens* present at Kazungula when *baeticatus* was collected there? Perhaps not, given the comments by Irwin (1981). Have changes to the habitat, which allowed *rufescens* to colonise it from upstream, had a negative effect on *baeticatus*? Is this a function of the dynamic nature of these systems?

Is *baeticatus* outcompeted in the reedbeds by the resident warblers, such as *rufescens* in the papyrus, *gracilirostris* in the *Phragmites*, and *baboecala* in the lower levels of both (Benson *et al*. 1971)? The Chirping *Cisticola pipiens* and Luapula Cisticolas *C. luapula* occur in the reedbed edges and emergent grasses. In addition, *arundinaceus* occurs in the *Phragmites* and edge habitats during the hot wet season, when most *baeticatus* breeding attempts have been recorded elsewhere in Zimbabwe (Irwin 1981).

The subspecies of *baeticatus* that was collected at Kazungula was *A. b. hallae*, which in Zimbabwe is known only from west of Victoria Falls, where it is does not breed (Irwin 1981). Could this explain the absence of displaying and territorial *baeticatus* at Kazungula during the breeding season? Did Irwin (1981) have an inclination that *baeticatus* was mostly absent from the reedbed habitats at Kazungula? It seems so, and this situation has probably prevailed for some time, but has only been noticed now.

There were *baeticatus* calling vigorously in some of the grassland habitats in the drainage lines of Matetsi (at about 120 km SSE from the reedbeds on the Zambezi) in December (DA personal observations) and perhaps this is where *hallae* breeds? It was thought that they were breeding because of the territorial calling, which identified their presence, but no attempt was

made to find nests. It is uncertain whether this is a regular event or a one off, but is an avenue worth investigating further should the opportunity arise.

What do we know about *A. baeticatus* in neighbouring countries?

In Botswana, they occur and breed in the northern wetlands (Herremans 1992), which makes their absence on the upper Zambezi even more surprising. Away from these wetlands, they are mostly found in isolated water bodies with large stands of bulrushes *Typha capensis* such as man-made impoundments surrounded by dry habitats for kilometres in any direction. At these water bodies, they were twice as abundant as *gracilirostris* and 12 times as abundant as *baboecala* (Tyler 2004). This is very different to the abundance indices calculated for the same species in Zimbabwe and highlights their capacity for movement and colonising new sites.

In southeast Botswana *baeticatus* is found at dams and sewage lagoons, where they breed from November to March. The numbers caught at one impoundment increased between August and October, with most being caught between October and March. Numbers declined in April with few caught being caught from May to August (Tylor 2004). They appeared to occupy the same patches of reeds, with very few recaptures between different ringing locations within the sewage lagoons. The suggestion by Tyler (2004) that birds from southeast Botswana migrate to the Okavango Delta, the Chobe/Zambezi area or Zambia after April is not supported by data from this area from Zimbabwe or Zambia. Evidence for long distance migration in some of these birds is provided by an individual captured in September, which had been ringed some 400 km further south in December a few years before.

This may explain why it is so abundant in the reedbeds in the man-made habitats of the dry interior of Botswana and Namibia. It may be the only African reed warbler that can locate these isolated habitats and use them for breeding (Eising *et al*. 2001). The other resident species are not known to migrate but some probably wander, which accounts for *gracilirostris* reaching isolated man-made reedbeds in Hwange National Park. This explains the large ratios in favour of *baeticatus* when compared to these other two species in Botswana. Tyler (2004) suggested that increased numbers of seasonal numbers of *gracilirostris* caught in southeast Botswana suggest they might be passage migrants there with an increase during the rains, but this is not supported by Zimbabwean or Zambian data.

In Botswana *baeticatus* migrate at the same time of year as those in Zimbabwe, with the heaviest birds being caught between mid-March & mid-April, just prior to migration. Active primary moult occurs between March and June (Tyler 2004) but can be delayed. The subspecies is likely to be *hallae*, based on measurements (Tyler 2004) but unfortunately the table on which these data were presented was not published in the paper and no voucher specimens were collected.

The nature of the warbler habitat in Botswana (northern wetlands excluded) suggests that it would be best utilised by long distance migrants. The low ratio of resident warblers to *baeticatus* supports the view that it is mostly a long-distance intra-African migrant in Botswana, Zimbabwe and probably Namibia (at the same latitude). This is contrary to the opinions of Dean (2005), that they resident north of 26°S, and Kennerley & Pearson (2010) who state they are resident or short distance migrants.

In Zambia, *baeticatus* is widespread but its appearance is sporadic and it is often seemingly absent from suitable habitat. Only a handful of people have ever recorded there and an even smaller handful would have recorded it reliably (P. Leonard pers. comm.). The subspecies *A. b. cinnamomeus* is presumed to be resident in the north and east and it breeds in February (n = 2) and moults between March and July. The nominate *A. b. baeticatus* spends the nonbreeding season in the south of Zambia. They are in fresh plumage in August and September and are thought to be winter visitors from further south (Dowsett-Lemaire & Dowsett 1987). On the Kafue Flats it is a nonbreeding dry season visitor, where it was never considered to be common (P. Leonard pers. comm.). Its abundance appeared to increase towards the end of the dry season when it became increasingly vocal and therefore more detectable, followed by a sudden silence and absence, confirming a migration elsewhere. This behaviour is similar to that shown by Palaearctic species, just before migration (see below).

It is largely absent from the Barotse floodplain and western province (Dowsett *et al*. 2008) and the rather vague picture outlined in Benson *et al*. (1971) is an accurate reflection of current knowledge (P. Leonard pers. comm.). The reported influx at the end of the dry season onto the Kafue Flats is similar to the influx in Zimbabwe at the same time of year and suggests a fairly large-scale movement into the area from elsewhere.

In Malawi, Hanmer (1988) noted that *A. b. cinnamomeus* arrives in April/May, moults and leaves in September and they were not resident in her study area. Some of the birds that she caught were of the race *suahelicus* from the east coast. The increase and decrease of numbers coincide with the same months in Zimbabwe and Zambia at the same times of year.

Which forms of *A. baeticatus* occur?

The distribution map in Kennerley & Pearson (2010) indicates pockets of birds in Botswana and Namibia, confirming that these intra-African migrants can locate and use isolated but suitable habitats. These include permanent waters, such as sewage ponds, as well ephemeral ones caused by localised rainfall, which are not available every year. The long distances between them and temporary nature of some exclude *gracilirostris* and *baboecala*, which are only short-distance wanderers. This map indicates that the Zambezi valley is the boundary between *baeticatu*s in Zimbabwe and *cinnamomeus* in Zambia but does not show the apparent scarcity of any form along the Limpopo River and upper and middle Zambezi valley on the Zimbabwe/Zambia border.

The map presented in Olsson *et al*. (2016) gives an interpretation of the distribution of *baeticatus* based on mtDNA analysis and data from a conglomerate of sources such as BirdLife International. It excludes the possibly subjective interpretations of plumage types of the various forms but is still confusing, owing to a lack of material from crucial areas. Their analysis indicates that *suahelicus* from the east coast is not genetically different to nominate *baeticatus* which also occurs over Botswana and Namibia.

The Cinnamon Reed Warbler *A. cinnamomeus* is sufficiently different to *baeticatus* that it could be considered as a good species as in Irwin (1981) and Clancey (1994). Genetic data do not confirm the distribution data from the centre and west as there were no specimens from Zimbabwe, Botswana or Zambia analysed in Olsson *et al*. (2016). There were not enough samples of the subspecies *hallae* for a statistical comparison on genetic grounds, but the type is sufficiently distinct to potentially warrant it being elevated to a separate

species as well (Olsson *et al*. 2016). There are too few specimens of this form to show its distribution with any certainty. The possible distribution of the different forms of *A. baeticatus* in the southern tropics is shown in Figure 1 and discussed below:

Nominate *A. baeticatus*

In Zimbabwe, nominate *baeticatus* occurs on the central watershed where it occurs as an intra-African migrant and it breeds between January and March (Irwin 1981). It leaves in March/April (after the rains have ended) and returns in September/October (just before the rains start). It breeds mostly on the central watershed but breeding data are limited and it is uncommon, occurring in much lower numbers than the resident warblers in reedbed habitat. It can occur anywhere on migration but is rare or absent in the middle Zambezi and Limpopo river valleys. The presence of young birds in November and December, when they first arrive is interesting and suggests that some of these birds breed to the north of Zimbabwe at another time of year and perhaps in suitable ephemeral habitats caused by local rainfall.

In Zambia, it has been recorded from the Lukanga Swamp (north of Lusaka) and then south and westwards at Namwala, through the Kafue Flats and further south and west to the Zambezi River and the border with Angola (Benson *et al*. 1971; Dowsett *et al*. 2008). It is a nonbreeding visitor present from April to September, when it leaves and breeds elsewhere. There are very few records from the middle Zambezi valley. Dowsett *et al.* (2008) appears to have followed Mackworth-Praed & Grant (1963) in identifying the form that occurs in central and southern Zambia as *cinnamomeus.* This does not conform with the movement of birds into this area from further south, which are believed to be mostly *baeticatus.*

In Botswana it breeds in the northern wetlands (Herremans 1992) but its migratory and subspecific status there is unknown. Further south, it occupies and breeds in isolated patches of suitable habitat where it outnumbers other warbler species by a large margin (Tyler 2004). It is an intra-African migrant present mostly between October and March with a small number of individuals that apparently do not migrate.

Most Namibian material was assigned to *baeticatus* on genetic evidence (Olsson *et al*. 2016), with birds making use of man-made habitats in an otherwise arid landscape.

In summary, it seems that *baeticatus* is a long distance intra-African migrant across most of the southern Afrotropics. It leaves its breeding areas in March/April, when the rains cease, south of approximately 17° south and some of them move into the southern parts of Zambia and perhaps beyond. It returns when it starts raining in November/December and is able to exploit isolated ephemeral habitats in otherwise unsuitable terrain.

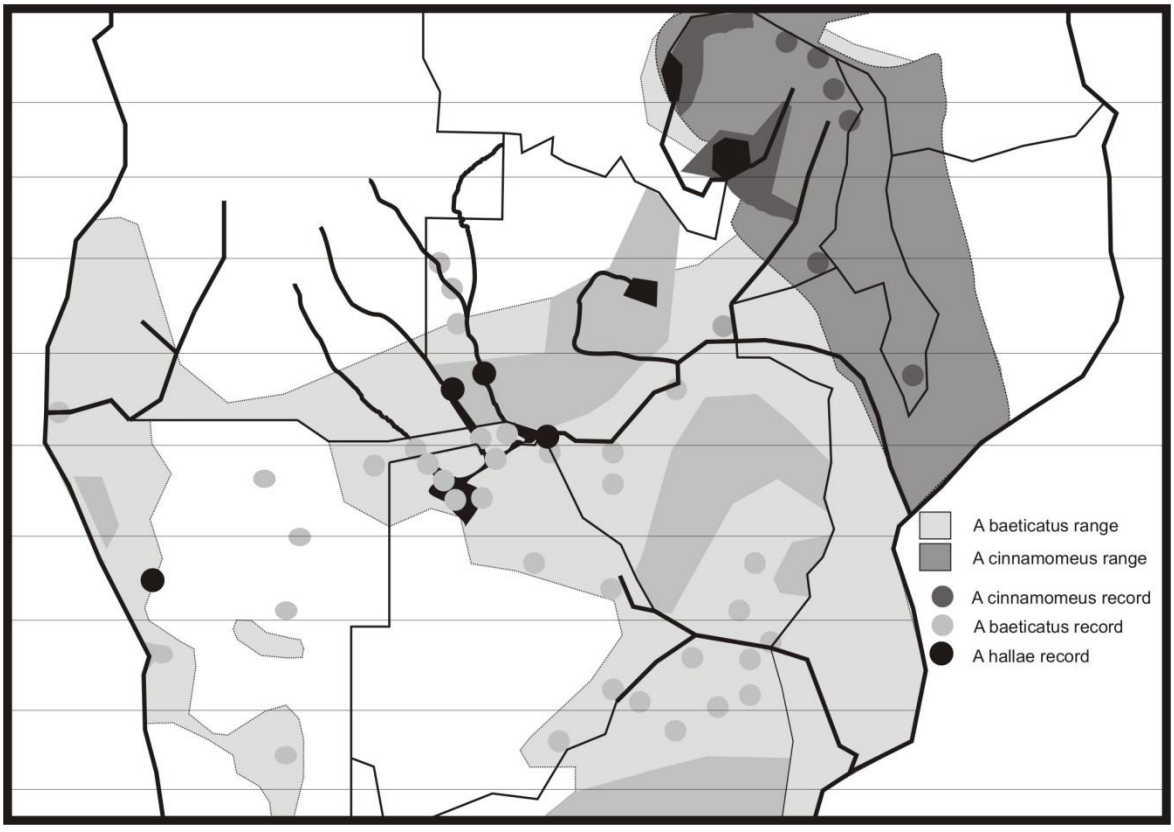

Figure 1. Composite distribution map of *A. baeticatus* in tropical southern Africa compiled from atlas data, Dowsett *et al*. (2008), Kennerley & Pearson (2010) and Olsson *et al*. (2016). Shaded areas and circles are known atlas or specimen (*hallae* only) records. Note the scarcity of records from the middle Zambezi and Limpopo river valleys and Angola.

A. cinnamomeus

This species, previously considered to be a subspecies of *baeticatus,* is associated with the rift valley system of east Africa. In Zambia, Benson *et al*. (1971) recorded it in the eastern, northern and Luapula provinces and parts of the Luangwa valley up to 13^{o} S and this is reflected in map in Olsson *et al*. (2016). In Malawi, it is the most frequently occurring form (Hanmer 1988) with occasional records of *A. b. suahelicus.* It appears to undergo similar seasonal movements as *baeticatus*, based on data in Hanmer (1988) and it might move up and down the rift valley or into Mozambique. Breeding data are limited.

A. hallae

This species, usually treated as a subspecies of *baeticatus*, is poorly known but limited genetic evidence suggests that it is different from both the nominate species and *cinnamomeus* (Olsson *et al.* 2016). The type comes from Brandberg in Namibia and as there are no obvious reedbeds in the vicinity, it is assumed that it was probably on migration when collected.

Limited material from the Western province in Zambia (Nangweshi on the Zambezi River about 40 km upstream of Sioma falls and from the Mashi River, about 100 km SW of this, is tentatively identified as *hallae* (Benson *et al.* 1971) but there are no genetic data to confirm this. The *hallae* specimen from Kazungula (Irwin 1981) was about 250 km downstream from Nangweshi and was of a nonbreeding bird, which could also have been on migration. All three of these localities are on drainages that have a connection to runoff from the Angolan plateau to the northwest. The birds caught by Tyler (2004) could have been *hallae* on measurement, but no specimens were collected and the measurements were never published.

Recent work on *baeticatus* in the extreme south (Paarl: 33° 43'S) speculates that they move due north into a wintering area in central Africa, the southernmost limits of which were stated as 10°S, i.e. northern Angola, the southern parts of the Congo and northern Zambia (Janssen *et al.* 2014). This part of the continent is relatively unexplored and there are no data or specimens from here to confirm this. It does not appear to conform with known movement patterns in either Zimbabwe and Zambia. Most populations move after breeding and it seems that Clancey's (1994) conclusion that the limits of their post-breeding movements south of the Afrotropics remain to be determined, is still the case.

Song times of palaearctic warblers

Towards the end of March and beginning of April, the dawn chorus at Kazungula was dominated by many European Sedge Warblers *A. schoenobaenus*, in full song, just prior to their departure for the northern hemisphere. The presence of Olive-tree Warblers *Hippolais olivetorum* at Kazungula became obvious in mid-January, when they started to call regularly. Their calling increased in length and the responses to taped playbacks of their songs became increasingly positive until their departure in late March/early April. Thrush Nightingale *Luscinia luscinia* song length and response to playbacks showed a similar trend. In Zambia on the Kafue Flats, *palustris* sings from early December to mid-April and *arundinaceus* from late November-mid March (P. Leonard pers. comm.). Away from the river, the length of Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus* song also increased, as did the song of River Warblers *Locustella fluviatilis.* Thus, the duration of the song of these Palaearctic warblers increased, as did the response time of some of the skulking species to taped playbacks of their songs, as their time to migration approached.

Two of the three resident reed warbler species sing throughout the year (data from Kazungula and Kafue), the exception being *baeticatus*. It was not heard at Kazungula at all and their song increased in intensity between August-October on the Kafue and then they went quiet (P. Leonard). They presumably continue territorial singing in their breeding habitat in the months that follow. This behaviour is similar to that of Palaearctic birds before migration and begs the question, where do they go to in late October? Perhaps they moved south as Zimbabwean and Botswana data suggest that there is an influx of birds around this time and that they breed after this.

Presence of *Acrocephalus scirpaceus* in Zimbabwe

The subspecies *A. s. fuscus* has been recorded in Botswana (Herremans 1992) and it is from a different genetic clade, to the nominate *scirpaceus* in Europe (Olsson *et al.* 2016). The former is more similar to *palustris* than are the *scirpaceus* populations in Western Europe, which apparently do not reach southern Africa and from which most existing identification criteria have been derived (Wilson *et al* 2001).

The Eurasian Reed Warbler (*scirpaceus*) has been recorded in N, NE & SE Botswana (Herremans 2005), sometimes in large numbers at isolated but suitable water bodies (Tyler & Tyler 1997). There is no permanent suitable warbler habitat along the western border of Zimbabwe, which is essentially waterless. It might occur in Kazuma National Park and some of the ephemeral habitats in Matetsi and the Robins area of Hwange National Park, provided they contain significant amounts of long rank grass. This will depend on whether these habitats were burned during the dry season before and regrowth will be determined by localised rainfall, which starts in November. Ginn (1976) trapped 'long-winged' *baeticatus* along the Nata and Botletle Rivers, which may have been *scirpaceus*, further suggesting that it probably moves through here on migration. Ringed *scirpaceus* individuals have been controlled in the same locality in consecutive years on the Kafue Flats in Zambia (Dowsett *et al.* 2008) suggesting similar annual migration routes there also.

This species was recorded within 20 km of Kazungula, on Bushbuck drive in Chobe National Park and at Serondela in March 1992 (Herremans 1992). There was no suitable warbler habitat in this area when it was visited by KH in December 2018, probably a result of the large numbers of elephants and the below average rainfall. The reedbeds on the Zambezi River along the Caprivi Strip are continuous with those at Kazungula and further downstream to Katombora rapids, particularly on the Zambian side of the river. They also extend west from the Chobe/Zambezi confluence so there is adequate habitat in this area for reed warblers.

There are sightings from Zambian half-degree squares that are shared with Zimbabwe, including 1725C (Victoria Falls), 1725D (Kazungula), 1726D (Devil's Gorge), 1627D (Chipepo), and 1628B (Chirundu) (D. Aspinwall). At the end of March two birds were collected at Sinjembele on the Mashi River in 1723A (Benson *et al.* 1971), which is some way from Zimbabwe, but on one of the watercourses that leads into the Linyanti Swamp system. It is known to moult between January and March (Dowsett *et al.* 2008) just prior to migration.

At Kazungula, these birds attracted attention, because a singing reed warbler was a rare event indeed. They were heard mostly at the end of March/beginning of April and were located in the riparian thickets and rank vegetation associated with the river and not in the main reedbeds themselves. One seen and recorded on an island on the Zambezi at Kazungula at the beginning of April by Bob Stjernstedt and KH was identified as *scirpaceus* on the basis of the parameters discussed below. Similar birds were seen regularly between 1995-1998, at the same time of year (24 March-10 April) at different places on the same island and were presumably on passage. All were identified as *scirpaceus* because of the known absence of *A. baeticatus* in this habitat, the song (which attracted our attention in the first place because it was unusual), time of year and short time the birds were present, before they moved on. Recorded playbacks of songs were not used as the warblers were easily located and seen without them.

A reed warbler located away from a reedbed, at the end of March/April, and which is singing continuously for an

extended period, points to typical behaviour of a Palaearctic migrant and is probably *scirpaceus* on migration. If it responds to playbacks of its calls, is present for a day or so and then disappears, it was probably that species. Singing reed warblers in the major river valleys (Zambezi, Limpopo) in late March/early April are probably *scirpaceus*.

They have been recorded at Shashe Dam, Botswana (Tyler 2004) about 200 km SW of Bulawayo and reed warblers seen and heard in reedbeds at Aisleby in early April 1999 were probably also *scirpaceus.* Sightings on the Marlborough vlei in late March 2000 were also likely to be this species because they were singing vociferously for extended periods, which was not expected for *baeticatus* at this time of year.

Sighting of possible *A. scirpaceus* at Marlborough Vlei, Harare

A reed warbler was heard calling in a reedbed on the Marlborough Vlei on 7 April 2020. This was an unusual event and the first time one had been heard in this habitat, which had been visited many times before. It was known that *gracilirostris* and *baboecala* were present and had been regularly recorded, but *baeticatus* had not been recorded previously and that is what attracted attention. The song of *baeticatus,* recorded by Gibbon (1991), was played but there was no response. The song of *scirpaceus* was played and there was an immediate response, the bird approached and was well seen and photographed (Figure 2). It was not seen the next day, in spite of playing the same song recordings and the positive response to these the day before, suggesting that it might have moved on. The singing, positive response to the song and not being seen again all suggest a migrating *scirpaceus*. Later examination of the photographs suggested the wing and culmen was longer than in *baeticatus* (Figure 2). An independent evaluation of the photograph by observers familiar with both species in Zambia concurred that the Marlborough bird was probably *scirpaceus*.

The reliance on photographs to confirm the presence or otherwise of these elusive birds is a very poor substitute for a voucher specimen, which can be deposited in a local museum. It can be accessed from all angles and studied many years later, which is often not the case with photographs. The growth of gene sequencing technology allows genetic material to be extracted from specimens, which is not possible from a photograph.

If we are to get any closer to confirming some of the interpretations above and unravelling some of the relationships between these forms, then genetics is likely to be the way forward. This requires biological material in the form of specimens, although collecting blood from captured individuals could be a substitute to collecting the bird for a museum. The blood specimen should always be accompanied by a series of good clear photographs of the bird and its habitat and both should be deposited in a local museum for possible future study. Expeditions and excursions into poorly explored regions should be geared to collect specimens, particularly of confusing forms. Any trip to an unexplored region, without this option, is doing a great disservice to the overall understanding of the biological diversity of the area being explored, particularly if the participants are not familiar with the expected fauna and flora.

Figure 2. Left, African Reed Warbler (Photo © Nika Trollip) and right, the probable Eurasian Reed Warbler photographed on Marlborough Vlei (Photo © Derek Adams). Note the difference in the length of the wing tips in relation to the upper tail coverts and the length of the culmen in both species.

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Wild Horizons generously allowed KH unlimited use of their boats to do bird research at Kazungula, while Kevin Barry and Woody Cotterill assisted with sourcing difficult references. The late Dylan Aspinwall and Bob Stjernstedt provided much insight into the habits and song of *A. scirpaceus* in Zambia; Pete Leonard provided additional insights into *A. baeticatus* there and generously read a final version of this manuscript. Nika Trollip allowed the use of his photograph.

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Kit Hustler, *Invercargill, New Zealand*. ✉ kitvix@orcon.net.nz
Derek Adams, *Harare, Zimbabwe*. ✉ adamsderek10@gmail.com

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Other possible Eurasian Reed Warbler records from Marlborough Vlei

Whilst birding on Marlborough vlei with South African birders, Eurasian Reed Warblers were claimed on two occasions. These were based on the supposedly more mimetic and variable calls. The first was on 31 January 1999, and two were claimed on 13 February 2003. I don't recall if there were satisfactory visual sightings of the birds and my note of the latter says '2 calling' so there probably wasn't a sighting on that occasion.

Eurasian Reed Warblers were ringed by Ferdie and Tracy Couto, some time ago, at Chivero Bird Sanctuary. The results have not been published and measurements and the Walinder Score, if done, might help support the identification.

The African Reed-warbler occurs quite regularly on Marlborough vlei and I had 45 records for the period 2000-2017: Jan (13 records), Feb (6), Mar (9), Apr (1), May (1), Aug (3), Sep (3), Nov (7), Dec (2).

I.C. Riddell, *Harare.* ✉ gemsaf@mango.zw

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An Ornithological Record of 14 years of Canoeing on the Lower Zambezi

John Dawson

Many observations of birds in the Zambezi have been published in *Honeyguide*, either as short notes of field observations, but there are relatively few long-term observations. Smith (1950) spent six months at Chirundu in 1940, but his report is not that useful because he ignored common birds such as drongos, bulbuls and doves. The most valuable is Maasdorp & Cotton (2019) who surveyed birds at the Rifa education Centre, Chirundu.

This article records the bird watching activities of a group of friends who have been canoeing the Zambezi River for many years (starting in 1981) and I have completed some 30 trips over a period of 28 years. We began keeping a bird list in 1996 and, except for 1999, did so every year up to 2010, which is the last year covered by this article. The primary purpose of the trips has been to relax in the Zambezi Valley and as we were keen but not highly proficient birders, we have been helped considerably by the high calibre guides that have accompanied us.

Our route has generally been from Vundu to Acacia Camp below Chikwenya, with night stops at Chessa Camp, Nyamatusi Camp and Ilala Camp (3 or 4 nights). Trips have been of six night's duration and much of our best birding has been done from Ilala Camp as it included walking the Sapi forest, walking on Chikwenya Island and canoeing the Chikwenya Channel that bisects the lower end of Chikwenya Island.

Our self-imposed ground rules dictated that at least two people must have positively identified a bird before it was recorded on the list. Calls were allowed, again if two positive identifications were made, but as relatively amateur birders our knowledge of calls was limited and we did not record species if only the guide could identify the call. Accordingly, birds identified by call were generally the obvious ones such as Purple-crested Turacos, White-browed Robin-chats, some of the owls, and so on.

The timing of the trips ranged from late September to early November and higher species counts were generally recorded in the later trips owing to the build-up of summer migrants. The number of species recorded on each trip ranged from 133 in 1997 to 181 in both 2007 and 2009, with an average of 160. In contrast, 351 species, plus 50 unconfirmed ones, were recorded at the Rifa Education Centre Chirundu (Maasdorp & Cotton 2019). However, they had many more observers, who were there for longer periods of time over 27 years and so they were able to record a large number of vagrants that were unlikely to be detected during brief visits such as these canoe trips.

Two families that might be expected were not recorded on our trips. The first is the Acrocephalidae with two species, the Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus* and Marsh Warbler *A. palustris*, being described as 'locally common' at Chirundu (Maasdorp & Cotton 2019). These species are Palaearctic migrants present from December to March and had probably not arrived when our trips were made. The other family was the Viduidae (whydahs and widowfinches) which are unobtrusive birds when not in breeding plumage, and our trips were probably too early for this. We did, however, spot six species that were not reported at Rifa, the Yellow-throated Sandgrouse, Barred Long-tailed Cuckoo, African Dusky Flycatcher and Grey Tit-flycatcher. A special was the White-throated Bee-eater, the first and so far, only, record of this species from Zimbabwe.

Canoeing the lower Zambezi has to be one of the best ways to enjoy birds and other wildlife in spectacularly beautiful surroundings.

The species seen on these trips, and some comments, follow in the text.

Family Phalacrocoracidae

Two cormorant species were recorded, the **White-breasted Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax lucidus* was scarce, being recorded only once (2004), but the **Reed Cormorant** *Microcarbo africanus* was regular and seen every year.

Family Anhingidae

The **African Darter** *Anhinga rufa* was generally uncommon although recorded in 11 years.

Family Ardeidae

Several heron species were recorded every year, including **Grey Heron** *Ardea cinerea,* **Goliath Heron** *A. goliath,* **Great Egret** *A. alba,* **Little Egret** *Egretta garzetta,* **Cattle Egret**

Bubulcus ibis, **Green-backed Heron** *Butorides striata*, **Rufous-bellied Heron** *Ardeola rufiventris* and **Squacco Heron** *A. ralloides.* Other herons that were recorded regularly include **Black-headed Heron** *A. melanocephala*, usually seen away from water (9 years), **Yellow-billed Egret** *E. intermedia* (10 years) and **Black-crowned Night-heron** *Nycticorax nycticorax* (12 years). Two species were only recorded in the later years of our trips. The **Purple Heron** *A. purpurea* was recorded only in five years, 2004 and 2006-2010; it was said to be 'fairly common on reedy islands' in 1940 (Smith 1950) and an 'uncommon breeding resident' in 1987-2014 (Maasdorp & Cotton 2017). The **Black Heron** *E. ardesiaca* was seen in seven years, six of them after 2004. This species was described as a 'sparse intra-African migrant' by Maasdorp & Cotton (2017). The possibility that the more frequent occurrence of these two species after 2004 reflects some ecological change along the river needs to be examined.

Family Scopidae

The **Hamerkop** *Scopus umbretta* was recorded every year.

Family Ciconiidae

The migrant **White** *Ciconia ciconia* and **Abdim's Storks** *C. abdimii* were recorded in only five and four years respectively, and these birds were probably on passage. The **Black Stork** *C. nigra* was only seen twice (2002 and 2004) while the **Woolly-necked Stork** *C. episcopus* was only seen once (2001). Other storks were more regular with the **African Openbill** *Anastomus lamelligerus,* **Saddle-billed Stork** *Ephippiorhynchus senegalensis* and **Yellow-billed Stork** *Mycteria ibis* being recorded every year, and the **Marabou Stork** *Leptoptilos crumenifer* in every year except 1996. My observations suggest that large flocks of African Openbill were more common in the earlier years covered by this article, while Maasdorp & Cotton (2017) thought that their numbers fluctuated with the rains and depended on how much water was retained in the inland pans. These support populations of the large snails such as *Lanistes* and *Pila* spp., which would be an important food source for these birds (Brian Marshall, pers. comm.).

Family Threskiornithidae

Three **Ibis** species, **African Sacred** *Threskiornis aethiopicus*, **Glossy** *Plegadis falcinellus* and **Hadeda** *Bostrychia hagedash* were recorded every year, while the **African Spoonbill** *Platalea alba* was recorded in 12 years (not in 1998 and 2001).

Family Anatidae

The only ducks recorded in every year were **Egyptian** *Alopochen aegyptiacus* **Spur-winged Geese** *Plectropterus gambensis.* The **White-faced Duck** *Dendrocygna viduata* was recorded in 11 years (not in 2002, 2004 and 2008-2010), **Red-billed Teal** *Anas erythrorhynchus* in eight years, including the five from 2006-2010, and **Knob-billed Duck** *Sarkidiornis melanotos, r*ecorded in seven years. The **Hottentot Teal** *Anas hottentota* was recorded only once (1998).

Family Accipitridae

The **White-backed Vulture** *Gyps africanus* was the only vulture to be recorded every year, while 1997 was the only year in which the **Hooded Vulture** *Necrosyrtes monachus* was not recorded. The less common **Lappet-Faced Vulture** *Torgos tracheliotos* was recorded in eight years (but not from 2008-2010) and **White-headed Vulture** *Trigonoceps occipitalis* in every year except 1996 and 2007. These were usually seen on their own, unlike the other three species that congregated together at carcasses, with the White-backed being the most common, followed by Hooded and just the occasional Lappet-faced.

Black Kites *Milvus migrans* were recorded only once (2001) but **Yellow-billed Kites** *M. aegyptiacus* were recorded every year. The **Black-shouldered Kite** *Elanus caeruleus* was recorded twice (2001 and 2003) as was the **Bat Hawk** *Macheiramphus alcinus* in 2006 and 2010.

The most frequently observed large eagles were the **Bateleur** *Terathopius ecaudatus* and **African Fish Eagle** *Haliaeetus vocifer*, which were recorded on every visit. **Tawny Eagles** *Aquila rapax* were recorded 12 times (not in 2008 and 2010) and the **African Hawk Eagle** *A. spilogaster* in only nine years. **Martial Eagles** *Polemaetus bellicosus* were recorded in seven years. Two migratory eagles were recorded only once, the **Steppe Eagle** *A. nipalensis* in 2002 and the **Lesser Spotted Eagle** *Clanga pomarina* in 2008. **Wahlberg's** *Hieraaetus wahlbergi* and **Ayres's Hawk Eagles** *H. ayresii* were recorded eight and nine times respectively, while an unusual record was the **Booted Eagle** *H. pennatus*, recorded twice (2009-2010).

Brown *Circaetus cinereus* and **Western Banded Snake-eagles** *C. cinerascens* were both recorded in nine years but the **Black-chested Snake-eagle** *C. pectoralis* was seen only once (2007). The **Steppe Buzzard** *Buteo buteo* was recorded nine times and the **Lizard Buzzard** *Kaupifalco monogrammicus* three times. The **African Harrier-hawk** *Polyboroides typus* was observed in nine years.

The most frequent small hawk was the **Gabar Goshawk** *Micronisus gabar*, with nine records, followed by the **Little Sparrowhawk** *Accipiter minullus* with eight. Other species were less frequent, the **African Goshawk** *A. tachiro* (4 records), **Shikra** *A. badius*, (2 records, 2000 and 2007) and the **Ovambo Sparrowhawk** *Accipiter ovampensis*, recorded once (2003).

Family Pandionidae

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* were recorded three times (2003, 2008, and 2009).

Family Falconidae

There were only two records of the **Peregrine Falcon** *Falco peregrinus* (1998, 2000) but eight of the **Red-necked Falcon** *F. ruficollis.* The latter were almost always seen in an open, palm fringed area near the Sapi River.

Family Phasianidae

The most frequent francolin was **Swainson's Spurfowl** *Pternistis swainsonii*, recorded every year, followed by the **Natal Spurfowl** *P. natalensis* with six records. The **Crested Francolin** *Dendroperdix sephaena* was recorded only twice (2001, 2007).

Family Numididae

Helmeted Guineafowl *Numida meleagris* were recorded each year but the **Crested Guineafowl** *Guttera edouardi* was recorded on only six visits, always in the jesse bush away from the river.

Family Rallidae

Black Crake *Amaurornis flavirostra,* recorded every year except for 2003.

Family Jacanidae

African Jacana *Actophilornis africana,* seen every year.

Family Rostratulidae

Greater Painted Snipe *Rostratula benghalensis*, recorded eight times.

Family Charadriidae

Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*, a Palaearctic migrant was recorded twice (2009, 2010) but the resident species were more frequent; the **White-fronted Plover** *C. marginatus* with 12 records, **Kittlitz's Plover** *C. pecuarius*, 11 records, and **Three-banded Plover** *C. tricollaris*, recorded every year. Another Palaearctic migrant, the **Grey Plover** *Pluvialis squatarola* was recorded only once (2003).

The larger plovers were well-represented, with the **Crowned Lapwing** *Vanellus coronatus* being recorded 11 times, and the **Blacksmith** *V. armatus*, **White-crowned** *V. albiceps* and **Long-toed Lapwing** *V. crassirostris* being recorded every year. The **Spur-winged Lapwing** *V. spinosus* was recorded once in 2004. An interesting observation made over the fourteen-year period was the varying status of the Long-toed Lapwing. Although the bird was seen on every trip, when we started keeping records it was a relatively rare find and has become progressively more abundant to the point that it could now be said to be common.

Family Scolopacidae

Nearly all members of this family are non-breeding Palaearctic migrants, present only during the northern winter. The **Ruddy Turnstone** *Arenaria interpres*, a rare vagrant usually occurring on the coast, was recoded only once in 2005. Other rare vagrants included the **Green Sandpiper** *Tringa ochropus*, recorded once (2003) and the **Black-tailed Godwit** *Limosa limosa*, also recorded once (2005). There are several records of this godwit from the Zambezi in October 2005 (Maasdorp & Cotton 2019) and there may have been a small influx of this species at that time.

The commonest species, recorded on every visit, were the **Wood Sandpiper** *T. glareola*, **Common Greenshank** *T. nebularia*, **Common Sandpiper** *Actitis hypoleucos* and **Ruff** *Philomachus pugnax*, while the **Marsh Sandpiper** *T. stagnatilis* was seen 10 times, the **Curlew Sandpiper** *Calidris ferruginea* and **Little Stint** *C. minuta* with seven records each. The **African Snipe** *Gallinago nigripennis*, a probably resident and breeding species in Mana Pools, was recorded three times (1998, 2005, and 2006).

Family Recurvirostridae

The **Pied Avocet** *Recurvirostra avosetta* was only recorded once (1998) but the **Black-winged Stilt** *Himantopus himantopus* was seen on every visit.

Family Burhinidae

Water Thick-knees *Burhinus vermiculatus* were regular and recorded every year.

Family Glareolidae

The **Three-banded Courser** *Rhinoptilus cinctus* was the only courser, with 7 records, but **Collared Pratincoles** *Glareola pratincola* were recorded every year.

Family Laridae

Grey-headed Gulls *Chroicephalus cirrocephalus* were recorded 11 times, with all of these records being from 2000 onwards. **White-winged Terns** *Chlidonias leucoptera* were recorded on 10 occasions, all of them from 2001 onwards. This may reflect a relatively recent increase in the numbers of these two species on lakes Kariba and Cahora Bassa (Maasdorp & Cotton 2019).

African Skimmer *Rynchops flavirostris*, recorded every year.

Family Pteroclidae

The **Double-banded Sandgrouse** *Pterocles bicinctus*, the commonest Zambezi Valley species, was recorded nine times, but the **Yellow-throated Sandgrouse** *P. gutteralis* was recorded twice, in 2005 and 2006, on an island in the river. It was associating with the commonly seen Double-banded Sandgrouse and we saw a lone bird for two years running. This species was said to have been recorded in the Zambezi Valley in August (Cooper 1972) and on a mud bank in the river at Mana Pools in July 1989 (Tree 1989).

Family Columbidae

Doves were, as always, ubiquitous and the **Emerald-spotted Wood Dove** *Turtur chalcospilos*, **Laughing Dove** *Stigmatopelia senegalensis*, **Red-eyed Dove** *Streptopelia semitorquata* and **Cape Turtle Dove** *S. capicola* were recorded on every trip. The **African Mourning Dove** *S. decipiens* was recorded nine times, including every year from 2005-2010.

Namaqua Doves *Oena capensis* were recorded on seven visits, normally in the mopane veld; Irwin (1981) reported that there was a marked influx of this species into the Zambezi Valley in the dry season and its numbers may therefore vary according to climatic conditions elsewhere. The **African Green Pigeon** *Treron calvus* was only recorded twice (2001, 2006).

Family Psittacidae

The most frequently observed parrot species were **Lilian's Lovebird** *Agapornis lilianae*, recorded every year, and **Meyer's Parrot** *Poicephalus meyeri*, every year except 1997. The **Grey-headed Parrot** *Poicephalus fuscicollis*, was seen only once (1996); Maasdorp & Cotton (2019) considered it to be a 'fairly common resident or nomadic visitor.'

Family Musophagidae

The two commonest Zimbabwean turacos, the **Purple-crested Turaco** *Gallirex porphyreolophus* and the **Grey Go-away-bird** *Corythaixoides concolor* were recorded on every visit. At Chirundu both species were recorded in the riverine fringe but the Go-away-bird also occurred in the mopane woodland (Maasdorp & Cotton 2019).

Family Cuculidae

Most cuckoos occurring in Zimbabwe are intra-African migrants (Irwin 1981) and all of them, whether migrant or resident, tend to be secretive and seldom observed except when they are calling during the rainy season. This may explain why they were encountered on relatively few occasions during these canoe trips on the Zambezi. The **African Cuckoo** *Cuculus gularis* was recorded four times (2000, 2002, 2007, 2009), the **Red-chested Cuckoo** *C. solitarius* three times (2002, 2008, 2009), **Black Cuckoo** *C. clamosus* once (2009), **Great Spotted Cuckoo** *Clamator glandarius* once (2006), **Jacobin Cuckoo** *C. jacobinus* once (1997), **Thick-billed Cuckoo** *Pachycoccyx audeberti* twice (2001, 2009) and **Diderick Cuckoo** *Chrysococcyx caprius* twice (2001, 2004). The **Barred Long-tailed Cuckoo** *Cercococcyx montanus* was recorded once, in 2001; not recorded at Chirundu (Maasdorp & Cotton 2017) it has been recorded at Mana Pools (Hustler 1985).

In contrast, coucals are resident and generally more conspicuous than cuckoos and both Zambezi valley species were seen regularly; the **Senegal Coucal** *Centropus senegalensis* 10 times and the **White-browed Coucal** *C. superciliosus* every year except 2008.

Family Strigidae

Owls are also difficult to locate if they are not calling and, like the cuckoos, reports may not reflect their real abundance. Two species, the **African Wood Owl** *Strix woodfordi* and **Verreaux's Eagle Owl** *Bubo lacteus* were the only ones recorded on every visit. **Pearl-spotted** *Glaucidium perlatum* and **African Barred Owlets** *G. capense* were relatively common, being recorded nine and seven times, respectively. The **African Scops Owl** *Otus senegalensis* was recorded five times, but this species is likely to be more common away from the river in mopane woodland. **Pel's Fishing-owl** *Scotopelia peli* was also recorded five times but it is a secretive and rather scarce species, and easily overlooked.

Less common species include the **Marsh Owl** *Asio capensis* (two records in 2007 and 2009), **Southern White-faced Owl** *Ptilopsis granti* (one record, 2006) and **Spotted Eagle Owl** *B. africanus* (one record, 2002).

Family Caprimulgidae

Nightjars are also difficult to identify unless calling and the **Mozambique Nightjar** *Caprimulgus fossii*, with seven records was the most frequently recorded species. The **Pennant-winged Nightjar** *Macrodipteryx vexillaria* was recorded once (2001) and was probably on passage as it is more frequent on the highveld.

Family Apodidae

The **African Palm Swift** *Cypsiurus parvus* was recorded every year, except for 2006, while **Böhm's Spinetail** *Neafrapus boehmi* was common and recorded 12 times (not in 1996 or 2006). Other swifts were less frequent with the **White-rumped** *Apus caffer* and **Little Swifts** *A. affinis* being recorded only once, in 2002 and 1998, respectively. **Mottled Spinetails** *Telacanthura ussheri* were counted four times (2000, 2003, 2006, 2007).

Family Coliidae

Red-faced Mousebird *Urocolius indicus*, recorded every year except 2008.

Family Trogonidae

Narina Trogon *Apaloderma narina*, an unobtrusive bird with only three records on Chikwenya Island and Chikwenya forest (2001, 2004, 2010).

Family Alcedinidae

The fish-eating kingfishers were seen regularly, with the **Pied** *Ceryle rudis* and **Malachite Kingfishers** *Corythornis cristata* being recorded every year, and the **Giant Kingfisher** *Megaceryle maxima* in every year except 2001.

The commonest woodland kingfisher was the **Brown-hooded Kingfisher** *H. albiventris*, recorded every year, while the **Woodland Kingfisher** *Halcyon senegalensis* was recorded only once (2001) and the **Grey-headed Kingfisher** *H. leucocephala* twice (2007, 2009). Both of these species are intra-African migrants and might be encountered more frequently later in the year. There were only three records of the **Striped Kingfisher** *H. chelicuti* (1996, 1998, 2008) although it was said to be 'fairly common' at Chirundu (Maasdorp & Cotton 2017).

Family Meropidae

Bee-eaters are generally conspicuous and easily identified and the four commonest species were seen on every visit, except for the **European Bee-eater** *Merops apiaster*, not seen in 1996. The other three were the **Southern Carmine Bee-eater** *M. nubicoides*, **White-fronted Bee-eater** *M. bullockoides* and **Little Bee-eater** *M. pusillus.* The **Swallow-tailed Bee-eater** *M. hirindineus*, an uncommon visitor, was only recorded once (2006), but a notable record was the **White-throated Bee-eater** *M. albicollis*, recorded in 2001; this is the first and only record of this species in Zimbabwe. An intra-African migrant, this is normally a gregarious species seen in small flocks, but in this case only a single bird was seen, perched on a dead tree near the river upstream of Chikwenya. It was presumably a vagrant that had drifted off course, perhaps after a storm.

Figure 1. The White-throated Bee-eater painted by J.G. Keulemans, one of the best-known bird artists of the late 19th century. This illustration is from Dresser's *Monograph of the Meropidae*, published from 1884-86.

Family Coraciidae

The **Lilac-breasted Roller** *Coracias caudatus* was recorded every year, followed by the **Broad-billed Roller** *Eurystomus glaucurus*, recorded every year except 1996, and the **Racquet-tailed Roller** *C. spatulatus* seen on eight occasions. The **Purple Roller** *C. naevius* was recorded only once, in 1996, and it is evidently scarce in the Zambezi Valley as it was not listed at Chirundu (Maasdorp & Cotton 2019). Cooper (1972) noted that it had been collected in the Zambezi Valley (exact locality not stated) in July and observed in August, suggesting that it was a winter migrant from Mozambique.

Family Upupidae

African Hoopoe *Upupa africana*, recorded every year.

Family Phoeniculidae

Green Wood-hoopoe *Phoeniculus purpureus*, recorded every year, and **Common Scimitarbill** *Rhinopomastus cyanomelas*, recorded every year except for 2001 and 2009.

Family Bucerotidae

Hornbills that were seen on every visit were the **Trumpeter** *Bycanistes buccinator*, **African Grey** *Lophoceros nasutus* (not in 1997), **Crowned** *L. alboterminatus* and **Southern Red-billed Hornbills** *Tockus rufirostris.* We did not see any

Yellow-billed Hornbills *T. leucomelas*, although they were said to occur in this part of the Zambezi Valley (Cooper 1972).

Family Bucorvidae

Southern Ground Hornbills *Bucorvus leadbeateri* were recorded every year.

Family Lybiidae

The **Crested Barbet** *Trachyphonus vaillantii* was recorded only in nine years, despite being 'very common' at Chirundu (Maasdorp & Cotton). The other barbets were less common with the **Black-collared Barbet** *Lybius torquatus* being reported six times and the **Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird** *Pogoniulus chrysoconus* four times.

Family Indicatoridae

The **Greater Honeyguide** *Indicator indicator* was seen regularly, with 11 records, but the **Lesser Honeyguide** *I. minor* was recorded only once (2000).

Family Picidae

Four woodpecker species were frequently recorded, namely **Bennett's** *Campethera bennetti* (11 records), **Golden-tailed** *C. abingoni* (10 records), **Cardinal** *Dendropicos fuscescens* (12 records) and **Bearded** *D. namaquus* (12 records).

Family Alaudidae

There were only three records of the **Chestnut-backed Sparrowlark** *Eremopterix leucotis* (2003, 2006, 2009) but it may be more common if the right habitat is visited (Maasdorp & Cotton 2019).

Family Hirundinidae

The most frequent species were the **Barn Swallow** *Hirundo rustica*, with 11 records (not recorded in 1996-1998, **Wire-tailed Swallow** *H. smithii* recorded every year and **Brown-throated Martin** *Riparia paludicola* with 12 records (not recorded in 2000 or 2007). Less frequently observed species were the **Mosque** *Cecropis senegalensis* (five records), **Lesser Striped** *C. abyssinica* (twice, 1998, 2001) and **Grey-rumped Swallows** *Pseudhirundo griseopygia* (seven records).

Family Campephagidae

The **Black Cuckooshrike** *Campephaga flava* is an intra-African migrant whose movements are poorly understood, but it was recorded nine times. The **White-breasted Cuckooshrike** *Coracina pectoralis* was only recorded twice (2003, 2010); this species is typically found in miombo woodland although there are sporadic records from the Zambezi Valley (Irwin 1981; Maasdorp & Cotton 2019).

Family Dicruridae

Fork-tailed Drongo *Dicrurus adsimilis*; common and recorded every year.

Family Oriolidae

The **Eurasian Golden Oriole** *Oriolus oriolus* is a Palaearctic migrant recorded only twice (2001, 2004), probably on passage, but the **Black-headed Oriole** *O. larvatus* is resident and was recorded 12 times.

Family Paridae

Rather surprisingly, the **Southern Black Tit** *Melaniparus niger* was recorded only once (2003). It was described as an 'uncommon to common' resident at Chirundu, mostly found in well-developed mopane or mixed woodland (Maasdorp & Cotton 2019) and may therefore have been habitat-limited along the river.

Family Leiothrichidae

Arrow-marked Babbler *Turdoides jardineii*, recorded every year.

Family Pycnonotidae

The **Dark-capped Bulbul** *Pycnonotus tricolor* was widespread and recorded every year. The other two species are more habitat-restricted but the **Terrestrial Brownbul** *Phyllastrephus terrestris* was also recoded every year and the **Yellow-bellied Greenbul** *Chlorocichla flaviventris* every year, except 1997.

Family Nicatoridae

Eastern Nicator *Nicator gularis*, a secretive species when not calling but was recorded eight times.

Family Turdidae

Said to be an uncommon and localised resident at Chirundu (Maasdorp & Cotton 2019) the **Kurrichane Thrush** *Turdus libonyana* was nevertheless recorded in 10 years.

Family Muscicapidae

Arnot's Chat *Myrmecocichla arnoti*, described as a 'flagship species' by Maasdorp & Cotton 2019) was recorded in only five years, usually in mopane woodland. **The White-browed Robin-chat** *Cossypha heuglini* was recorded every year, but the **Red-capped Robin-chat** *C. natalensis* was recorded only twice (2009, 2010). **Collared Palm Thrushes** *Cichladusa arquata* were recorded every year except 1996, while the **Bearded Scrub Robin** *Cercotrichas quadrivirgata* was recorded only three times (2003, 2006, 2009).

The **Spotted Flycatcher** *Muscicapa striata*, a Palaearctic migrant was recorded four times, possibly on passage. Cooper (1972) noted that the **African Dusky Flycatcher** *M. adusta* had been collected in October and Irwin (1981) suggested it may move into the Zambezi Valley in winter, and was shown to do so in Mana Pools (Riddell 1991). We recorded it only once, in 2007. The resident **Ashy Flycatcher** *M. caerulescens* was recorded 10 times, and the **Southern Black Flycatcher** *Melaenornis pammelaina* seven times. The **Grey Tit-flycatcher** *Myioparus plumbeus* was recorded four times; it was not recorded at Chirundu by Maasdorp & Cotton (2017) while Cooper (1972) claimed that it had been collected in July and September (he used an incorrect scientific name, so there is some doubt about these records).

Family Phylloscopidae

Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*, a Palaearctic migrant, was recorded nine times.

Family Macrosphenidae

Long-billed Crombec *Sylvietta rufescens*, seven records.

Family Cisticolidae

The **Yellow-breasted Apalis** *Apalis flavida* was recorded every year, while the **Grey-backed Camaroptera** *Camaroptera brevicaudata* was recorded every year except 1997. **Burnt-necked Eremomelas** *Eremomela usticollis* were recorded five times, always on the downstream end of Chikwenya Island.

The most frequent cisticola was the **Rattling Cisticola** *C. chiniana*, recorded every year except 2008, there was only one record of the **Zitting Cisticola** *Cisticola juncidis* (1997). **Tawny-flanked Prinias** *Prinia subflava* were recorded 10 times.

Family Erythrocercidae

Livingstone's Flycatcher *Erythrocercus livingstonei* was recorded five times.

Family Platysteiridae

The **Chin-spot Batis** *Batis molitor*, a common resident, was recorded every year, but the **Black-throated Wattle-eye** *Platysteira peltata* was encountered only once (1996).

Family Monarchidae

African Paradise Flycatchers *Terpsiphone viridis* were recorded every year.

Family Motacillidae

African Pied Wagtail *Motacilla aguimp*; this common waterside bird was seen on every trip. The **African Pipit** *Anthus cinnamomeus*, a grassland species, was recorded 12 times.

Family Laniidae

Two Palaearctic migrants were occasionally recorded, probably on passage; the **Lesser Grey Shrike** *Lanius minor* once (2007) and the **Red-backed Shrike** *L. collurio* twice (2001, 2004).

Family Malaconotidae

The **Tropical Boubou** *Laniarius major* and **Black-backed Puffback** *Dryoscopus cubla* were recorded every year, while the **Brubru** *Nilaus afer* was seen 11 times. The **Brown-crowned Tchagra** *Tchagra australis*, was recorded only once (2002); this was rather surprising since Maasdorp & Cotton (2019) state that it was a 'common resident' at Chirundu.

The **Orange-breasted Bush Shrike** *Chlorophoneus sulfureopectus* was recorded every year except 1997, as was the **Grey-headed Bush Shrike** *Malaconotus blanchoti* (except 2005).

Family Prionopidae

Both the **White-crested** *Prionops plumatus* and **Retz's Helmet-shrikes** *Prionops retzii* were recorded every year.

Family Sturnidae

The commonest starling was **Meves's Starling** *Lamprotornis mevesii*, recorded every year, followed by the **Red-winged Starling** *Onychognathus morio* (12 records) and **Wattled Starling** *Creatophora cinerea* (7 records).

Family Buphagidae

Red-billed Oxpeckers *Buphagus erythrorhynchus*, the only species in the Zambezi valley, were recorded every year, usually on the backs of buffalo or eland. These birds probably dislike canoeists as their Hippo hosts generally submerge, forcing them to return to land whenever a canoe flotilla approaches!

Family Nectariniidae

The commonest sunbirds were the **White-bellied** *Cinnyris talatala* and **Scarlet-chested Sunbirds** *Chalcomitra senegalensis*, both recorded every year, and the **Collared Sunbird** *Hedydipna collaris* (10 records). The **Amethyst Sunbird** *Chalcomitra amethystina* was recorded only once (2000).

Family Zosteropidae

Southern Yellow White-eyes *Zosterops anderssoni* were recorded seven times.

Family Passeridae

The **Southern Grey-headed Sparrow** *Passer diffusus* was common and recorded every year.

Family Ploceidae

White-browed Sparrow-weavers *Plocepasser mahali* were amongst the most conspicuous birds in the valley and were recorded every year.

Weavers and bishops can often be difficult to identify in non-breeding plumage, which may explain why some were not recorded as frequently as they might have been. The **Lesser Masked Weaver** *Ploceus intermedius* was the only one recorded every year, while the **Spectacled Weaver** *Ploceus ocularis* was recorded four times, the **Village Weaver** *P. cucullatus* only once (1998), and the **Southern Masked Weaver** *P. velatus* twice (2000, 2002).

Red-headed Weavers *Anaplectes rubriceps* were recorded 12 times, the **Red-billed Quelea** *Quelea quelea* nine times and the **Southern Red Bishop** *Euplectes orix* five times.

Family Estrildidae

The commonest waxbills were the **Blue Waxbill** *Uraeginthus angolensis* and **Red-billed Firefinch** *Lagonosticta senegala*, both recorded every year, followed by the **Red-throated Twinspot** *Hypargos niveoguttatus* with 10 records, and the **Green-winged Pytilia** *Pytilia melba* (six records). Other species were scarce, with **Jameson's Firefinch** *L. rhodoparaia* being recorded three times (2005, 2007, 2008) and one record only for **Cut-throat Finches** *Amadina fasciata* (1998) and **Bronze Mannikins** *Spermestes cucullata* (2010).

Family Fringillidae

Canaries were scarce, with only two records of the **Yellow-fronted Canary** *Crithagra mozambica* (2004, 2006) and one of the **Brimstone Canary** *C. sulphurata* (1998).

Family Emberizidae

Golden-breasted Bunting *Emberiza flaviventris*, a vagrant recorded only once (2006).

Acknowledgements

Many good birders have guided us on these trips. Special thanks to James Varden of Natureways, who has been our guide on a significant majority of them and whose expertise has played a large part in accumulating the species list.

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John Dawson, *Harare* ✉ john@dawsonhindmarsh.co.zw

Honeyguide **67**(1): 22, 2021

White-winged Apalis Nesting in a Modified Spectacled Weaver Nest

John Wilson

In November, 2000, at 05h30 Francoise Dowsett-Lemaire saw a female White-winged Apalis *Apalis chariessa* in the canopy of a very large Mexican Pine *Pinus patula* in my garden, in Zomba, Malawi, with nesting material in her beak. The female apalis and her mate attempted to build a nest in the long, drooping pine needles, but it was hopeless; the nesting material simply dropped off. This futile activity was repeated in the same tree over the next two years.

In January, 2002 I noticed a male White-winged Apalis with nesting material in its beak. I saw it fly behind the house, where I found it on the nest of a Spectacled Weaver *Ploceus ocularis* suspended about 4 m above the ground at the end of a Wild Date Palm *Phoenix reclinata* frond.

The long entrance tunnel of the weaver nest had been cut off almost completely, leaving it suspended at an angle from one side by a pedicle that appeared to have been reinforced. The bottom end of the entrance tunnel had been closed using long fibres. The apalis's nest was then attached to the bottom (see Figure 1). I assumed the inside of the tube had been lined with similar material used in normal apalis nests, including white silken seed pappi, probably *Asclepias* seed fibres. The White-winged Apalis was nesting in a modified Spectacled Weaver nest and while the female was incubating, her very long tail stuck up out of the hole at the severed end of the entrance tunnel.

I have been unable to find an example of a bird modifying another bird's nest to use as a nest itself, with the exception of the Mocking Chat *Thamnolaea cinnamomeiventris*, which takes over the mud nests of swallows, usually the Lesser Striped Swallow *Cecropis abyssinica*. It simply breaks down the entrance tunnel to the swallow's nest, leaving the cup. This modification of the Spectacled Weaver nest was very much more elaborate. A number of other birds also utilise swallow nests, but without any modification. A number of bird species breed in empty weaver bird nests, without modifying them in any way. Many hole-nesting species occupy old woodpecker holes while others occupy the stick nests of other birds, or occupy or nest on top of Hamerkop *Scopus umbretta* nests.

Bertram's Weaver *Ploceus bertrandi* also occurs on the outer slope of Zomba Mountain, and their nests are identical to Spectacled Weaver nests, and often suspended from the fronds of *Phoenix reclinata* palms. It is possible that the White-winged Apalis may also modify the nests of this species, but the extent to which they modify weaver nests is unknown. Unfortunately, I never again observed these apalises nesting in a Spectacled Weaver nest.

Figure 1. The male White-winged Apalis at its nest attached to the modified entrance tunnel of the spectacled Weaver's nest. Photo © John Wilson

John Wilson, *Tsuyazaki, Fukutsu City, Japan.* ✉ johnwilson26313@gmail.com

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Observations on Birds Eating Emerging Termite Alates in Malawi

John Wilson

It is well known that many bird species are attracted to emerging winged termites. As an indication of the attractiveness of termite alates, flocks of up to 600 Steppe Eagles have in the past been observed congregating at termite emergences. Articles and notes on birds eating termites are regularly published in ornithological journals, including

Honeyguide (Bass 1960; Brooke 1970; Cooper 1970; Harwin 1970; Hobbs 1970; Newman 1970; Parnell 1970; Bruss 1971; Bing 1993; Chenaux-Repond 2016; Ewbank 2020). Most of these tend to be occasional observations and there are few long-term observations of which birds eat termites. I therefore recorded the birds taking termites emerging from the lawn of my garden in Zomba, Malawi, on 32 occasions, in the months of December (1 record), January (2), February (13), March (4), April (5), June (5), August (1) and September (1) between 2000 and 2012.

During this period a total of 67 species were observed feeding on termite alates (Table 1). The ten most frequently observed species that fed on these insects were, as might be expected, common garden birds, such as Olive Sunbird (36 records), Black-eyed Bulbul (35), Collared Sunbird (34), Heuglin's Robin (25), Stripe-cheeked Bulbul (22), Golden-rumped Tinkerbird (21), Little Greenbul (19), Southern Puffback (13), Red-throated Twinspot (12) and Cabanis' (Placid) Bulbul (11).

A number of normally frugivorous species also fed on termites, notably Livingstone's Turaco (11 records), White-eared Barbet (10), Red-eyed Dove (3), Blue-spotted Wood-dove (5) and Tambourine Dove (5). While the Olive Sunbird was the species most often observed taking termites, and the Eastern Double-Collared Sunbird also took them frequently (8 records), the Variable Sunbird did not take them consistently but instead seemed to get caught up in the general excitement, being very active but only occasionally taking an insect. Some normally seed-eating species such as the Green Twinspot, African Citril and Yellow-fronted Canary were also seen taking termites.

Some raptors also took termites with the African Goshawk and Shikra, probably resident in the garden, each being recorded feeding on termites three times. An unusual record was of an Augur Buzzard, not a regular garden species but a visitor attracted by the termites. Security lights attracted termites at night and Wood Owls *Strix woodfordi* were observed taking them on the wing; it is possible that other owls, and nightjars, may also have fed on them but were unobserved. The two omnivorous local crow species, the Pied Crow and White-necked Ravens, were also attracted to the termite emergences, with the former being recorded most frequently as it is generally a more common garden species.

The greatest number of species taking termites was observed in February (43) and March (43), which were also the months of the most termite emergences (16) and (8) respectively. However, 41 species were also recorded in April, although only 7 termite emergences were observed. Starred Robins, altitudinal migrants that breed on the Zomba plateau above 1370 m were observed in the "winter and spring" months of April, June, August and September, but also in February and March, during the rains, presumably after breeding. Another altitudinal migrant, the Eastern Double-collared Sunbirds was only seen in February, March and April. Two intra-African migrants were recorded feeding on these termites, the African Golden Oriole in February and June, and the Pygmy Kingfisher in April.

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John Wilson, *Tsuyazaki, Fukutsu City, Japan.* ✉ johnwilson26313@gmail.com

Table 1. The number of termite emergences per month and the number of times each species was seen feeding on them, Zomba, Malawi.

Species	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	Jun	Aug	Sep	Total
Number of emergences	2	2	16	8	7	5	1	1	42
Little Sparrowhawk *Accipiter minullus*					1				1
African Goshawk *Accipiter tachiro*			1	2					3
Shikra *Accipiter badius*				1		2			3
Augur Buzzard *Buteo augur*				1					1
Lizard Buzzard *Kaupifalco monogrammicus*						2			2
Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo*					1				1
Red-eyed Dove *Streptopelia semitorquata*			1	1	1				3
Blue-spotted Wood-dove *Turtur afer*			3						3
Tambourine Dove *Turtur tympanistria*			3	2					5
Livingstone's Turaco *Tauraco livingstoni*			4	1	2	3		1	11
Emerald Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx caprius*					1				1
(?) Scarce Swift *Schoutedenapus myoptilus*			1						1
Palm Swift *Cypsiurus parvus*		1							1
Eurasian Swift *Apus apus*		1		1	1				3
Little Swift *Apus affinis*	1	1	4	2	1				9

Species	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	Jun	Aug	Sep	Total
Pygmy Kingfisher *Ispidina picta*					1				1
Brown-hooded Kingfisher *Halcyon albiventris*		1	1						2
European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*				1					1
Crowned Hornbill *Tockus albonotatus*		2	2	2	1	2			9
White-eared Barbet *Stactolaema leucotus*			4	1	1			1	10
Golden-rumped Tinkerbird *Pogoniulus bilineatus*		2	8	2	3	4	1	1	21
Scaly-throated Honeyguide *Indicator variegatus*		1			2				3
Lesser Honeyguide *Indicator minor*	1		2		2				5
Pallid Honeyguide *Indicator meliphilus*				1	1				2
Cardinal Woodpecker *Dendropicos fuscesens*				1					1
Black Saw-wing *Psalidoprocne holomelas*		1		1	1	2			5
(?) Wire-tailed Swallow *Hirundo smithii*								1	1
Long-tailed Wagtail *Motacilla clara*				1					1
Black Cuckooshrike *Campephaga flava*			1	1	1				3
Stripe-cheeked Bulbul *Arizelocichla milanjensis*		1	8	3	6	4			22
Little Greenbul *Eurillas virens*		1	11	2	4			1	19
Cabanis' (Placid) Greenbul *Phyllastrephus cabanisi*		1	7	1	1	2			12
Grey-olive Greenbul *Phyllastrephus cerviniventris*			2			2			4
Black-eyed Bulbul *Pycnonotus tricolor*	2	2	13	7	6	5	1	1	37
Starred Robin *Pogonocichla stellata*			2	1	2	2	1	1	9
Heuglin's Robin *Cossypha heuglini*	1	2	9	2	4	5	1	1	25
Red-capped Robin *Cossypha natalensis*					1				1
Yellow-breasted Apalis *Apalis falvida*			1			2			3
White-winged Apalis *Apalis chariessa*			2		1				3
Black-headed Apalis *Apalis melanocephala*				2					2
Bleating Bush Warbler *Camaroptera brachyura*			3	1		2			6
Pallid Flycatcher *Bradornis pallidus*			2		1				3
Ashy Flycatcher *Muscicapa caerulescens*		1	2			2			5
African Dusky Flycatcher *Muscicapa adusta*						2			2
Black-throated Wattle-eye *Platysteira peltata*			3			2			5
White-tailed Crested Flycatcher *Elminia albonotata*			1	1					2
Collared Sunbird *Hedydipna collaris*	1	2	14	5	6	5		1	34
Olive Sunbird *Cyanomitra olivacea*	2	1	16	7	5	4		1	36
Variable Sunbird *Cinnyris venustus*		1	1	1	4	4			11
Eastern Double-collared Sunbird *Cinnyris mediocris*			3	2	3				8
S. Yellow White-eye *Zosterops anderssoni*			4	1	2	2			9
African Golden Oriole *Oriolus auratus*			1			2			3
Southern Puffback *Dryoscopus cubla*	1		5	3	2	2			13
Tropical Boubou *Laniarius major*			2	1	2	2			7
Square-tailed Drongo *Dicrurus ludwigii*			2	2	1	2		1	8
Pied Crow *Corvus albus*		1	1	1	1	2			6
White-necked Raven *Corvus albicollis*						2			2
Red-winged Starling *Onychognathus morio*		1							1
Spectacled Weaver *Ploceus ocularis*		1	5	1	2	1			10
Dark-backed Weaver *Ploceus bicolor*			4	3	3	1			11
Red-throated Twinspot *Hypargos niveoguttatus*		1	5	2	2	2			12
Green Twinspot *Mandingoa nitidula*		1							1
Red-billed Firefinch *Lagonosticta senegala*					1				1
Blue Waxbill *Uraeginthus angolensis*	1				2				3
Bronze Mannikin *Lonchura cucullata*			2	1					3
East African Citril *Crithagra hyposticta*		2	2	1	2	1		1	9
Yellow-eyed Canary *Crithagra mozambica*	1		3	1	2			1	8
Total	9	23	43	43	41	31	4	13	

SHORT COMMUNICATIONS

The First Breeding record of the Pink-backed Pelican in Zimbabwe

A flock of **Pink-backed Pelicans** *P. rufescens* was seen by a number of observers upstream of Victoria Falls (1725 D4†) from mid-August, presumably having moved in from the Chobe River, Botswana. They were monitored by Charles Brightman who photographed an adult feeding a chick in the nest on 28 October 2019. There can be little doubt this is the first, and long awaited, Zimbabwe breeding record and it was nesting together with Marabou Storks. As noted in 'Field observations' (*this issue*) they were breeding again in October 2020 and it will be interesting to see if this becomes a permanent feature. The picture below shows a pelican on the nest with its chicks.

Colin Baker, *Victoria Falls.* ✉ pratincole306@hotmail.com

Figure 1. A Pink-backed Pelican at its nest with chicks, near Victoria Falls. This is the first breeding record of this species in Zimbabwe. Photo: © Charles Brightman

Doves Drinking from Grass

At about 06h40 on 3rd January 2021, I was watching some birds eating seeds outside my front door. Apart from them, and on the lawn just off the concrete verandah, a Red-eyed Dove *Streptopelia semitorquata* appeared to be eating in the grass. However, it was not pecking down to ground level and I suspected that it must be drinking. Whilst doing this it was joined by a Laughing Dove *Spilopelia senegalensis* that behaved in the same way. The Laughing Dove stopped drinking after less than a minute and walked back to the verandah and I went to get my binoculars. The Red-eyed Dove was still casually walking about the lawn and through the binoculars I confirmed that it was indeed drinking, sucking water droplets off the tops and ends of the grass. There was a birdbath about 8 m away but the fresh dewdrops were evidently more attractive. Red-billed Firefinches *Lagonosticta senegala* have been seen behaving in the same fashion but sipping water from leaves is a recorded activity in that species.

I.C. Riddell, *Harare.* ✉ gemsaf@mango.zw

The Madagascar Cuckoo in Zimbabwe
See page 27

Photos (left) © Roger MacDonald
Below © Barry Launder

First Confirmed Record of the Madagascar Cuckoo in Zimbabwe

The Madagascar Cuckoo *Cuculus rochii* is a rare vagrant to southern Africa. It breeds in Madagascar in August-April, with most of the population migrating to east and central Africa, mainly in April-September. There is a previous record from the Vumba (Ginn, 1999. *Honeyguide* **45**: 22-23), where a bird was heard but not seen. Though this record may well have been accurate, a first record for a country cannot be accepted solely on a call and this was rejected in the eight report of the Rarities Committee (Riddell, 2004. *Honeyguide* **50**: 230-232).

Up to a week before it was identified on 13 January 2021, a cuckoo was heard in a Monavale garden, Harare, by B. Vitoria. A sound recording was made and identified it as a Madagascar Cuckoo. Many local birdwatchers visited this very vocal bird and the numerous photographs that were taken confirmed its identification as it flew around gardens on the hill. It appeared to prefer natural woodland, particularly msasa *Brachystegia spiciformis*, and sometimes crossed Monavale vlei to Meyrick Park hill where these trees also grow. Towards the end of its stay on 15 February, when it was last heard, it also commuted to msasa stands on Sentosa hill, 2 km to the north.

The Madagascar Cuckoo is formerly added to the Zimbabwean bird list.

I.C. Riddell, *Harare. Zimbabwe Rarities, Harare* ✉ gemsaf@mango.zw

Ross's Turaco in Chizarira National Park

On 11 May 2020, we sighted two Ross's Turaco *Musophaga rossae* in Chizarira National Park. This makes it the first recorded sighting in the area and the first away from the Victoria Falls area. The birds were spotted one afternoon at 14h00 perching on a tall *Brachystegia boehmii* tree of approximately 15m in height, at an altitude of about 956 m at a locality recorded as 17.66°S, 27.85°E. The habitat here is moist mixed riparian woodland, on the northern side of the Chizarira escarpment. They flew into our view (two ALERT researchers) and perched on the tree. Their distinct purple sheen and red crest immediately caught our attention and warranted a clear view with binoculars to identify them. Unfortunately, the birds hastily flew out of sight before photographs could be taken. The identity of the birds was confirmed using Sasol and Newman's bird field guides immediately after the encounter. On the following day one of the researchers, accompanied by a ZimParks ranger, spotted another one in the vicinity of the first sighting but during mid-morning this time (11h00). The bird was on a tall *Trichilia emetica* tree of similar height to the former on the previous day, with two Crowned Hornbills *Lophoceros alboterminatus* in the vicinity. On close inspection with binoculars the identity was confirmed.

We thank P.J. Mundy for help with this note.

I. Mudimba & M. Dlodlo, *African Lion & Environmental Research Trust, Victoria Falls.* ✉isaacmudimba97@gmail.com

Ross's Turaco at Victoria Falls

On the morning of 25 February, 2021, two South African visitors, Andrew and Serena Salmon, were birding on Zambezi Drive, Victoria Falls (1725 D4). Near the Falls fenced enclosure they saw what they believed to be a Ross's Turaco *Musophaga rossae*. Not having a camera with them, the bird was not photographed.

After the sighting was posted on social media Charles Brightman drove around the area for an hour or so without locating the bird. He noticed a lot of feeding activity in one particular fig tree, possibly a *Ficus natalensis*, at the Victoria Falls VIP car park and waited there. Among the birds taking fruit were African Green Pigeons *Treron calva*, Trumpeter Hornbills *Bycanistes bucinator* and Red-winged Starlings *Onychognathus morio*. While watching the tree a large bird flew in. From its uniform dark blue colouring, red crest and yellow bill and facial skin, there was no doubt it was a Ross's Turaco. It fed for a while and left, returning again after 10 minutes or so to feed again. After this second visit of a few minutes, it flew off. Charles managed to take photographs of the bird during its visits to the tree.

The area was watched by a number of people, myself included, for the remainder of the day but the turaco did not return. There was almost continuous hornbill and starling activity, however, to and from the tree. Fruiting trees along Zambezi Drive were also checked but without success.

Cold, cloudy and windy weather persisted for four days from Friday the 26th making birding conditions far from ideal. At about 7.00 a.m. on Sunday, 28 February, however, a team searching the river islands by boat found a Ross's on Kalunda Island, about 5 km upstream of the Falls. Whether this was the same bird or another is not known, but it did confirm that one bird at least was still in the area. Although Kalunda is just a short distance off the mainland it is in Zambian territory. The bird was found on the north-eastern (Zambian) side of the island.

Later the same morning while Darryl Tiran was watching Kalunda from the mainland the bird showed itself again, having moved across the narrow island to the south-western side. This was the last occasion on which the species was recorded in the area despite a number of birders continuing the search for several days both on the river and on land.

There is only one published reference in *Honeyguide* regarding Ross's Turaco in Zimbabwe. Kit Hustler saw one near the Katombora Rapids in September 1995 and two in the

same area close to Imbabala Camp, Kazungula (1725 C4), on 1 February 1996. Five were seen by Tim Ellement at Sizinda Camp, downstream of Victoria Falls (1826 A1), in February 1995 (Hustler, 1996. *Honeyguide* **42**:104-106). None of these records were submitted to the Rarities Committee and this latest record, supported by Charles Brightman's photograph, is therefore of major significance. This was the first time a Ross's Turaco has been photographed on Zimbabwean soil.

The Ross's Turaco is resident over much of Zambia with wanderers occasionally found in the south of the country. This Victoria Falls bird was no doubt one such individual that also chose to feed on the Zambezi islands and on the southern mainland.

Colin Baker, *Victoria Falls*. ✉ pratincole306@hotmail.com

Figure 1. The Ross's Turaco photographed at Victoria Falls. Photo © Charles Brightman.

Scaly-throated Honeyguide seen at Victoria Falls

On 9 October 2005, while birding in front of Victoria Falls Hotel, along the gorge, a juvenile honeyguide was seen at very close quarters, in the presence of a pair of Black-collared Barbets *Lybius torquatus* that were feeding on a fruiting fig. Good close views of the assumed juvenile Scaly-throated Honeyguide *Indicator variegatus* were obtained, the breast being slightly mottled, very short stubby bill, with a greenish wash over the back. The calling of the bird, is what drew the attention to it, not the usual sustained ascending TRRRRRrrrrrrrrr, but a rapid excitable "chittering".

Two weeks later, the garden fig started to ripen, attracting many assorted species including Yellow-bellied Greenbul *Chlorocichla flaviventris*, African Red-eyed Bulbul *Pycnonotus nigricans*, Dark-capped Bulbul *Pycnonotus tricolor*, Grey Go-away-bird *Corythaixoides concolor*, Black-collared Barbet, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird *Pogoniulus chrysoconus*, Red-winged Starling *Onychognathus morio*, Violet-backed Starling *Cinnyricinclus leucogaster*, Northern Grey-headed Sparrow *Passer griseus* and Arrow-marked Babbler *Turdoides jardineii*. Every morning during the week of feeding from the fig, a single adult Scaly-throated Honeyguide was present, persistently harassing and chasing at very close range the Yellow-bellied Greenbul. The bird was very vocal, with mainly excitable "chitterings", and every now and then the usual ascending TRRRRRrrrrrrrrr, heard during the morning only.

Common factors at both sightings were the fruiting fig attracting many fruit-loving birds, and the presence of Black-collared Barbets. There were a few more figs with fruits at various stages of ripening. The sighting of both adult and juvenile therefore confirms the presence of Scaly-throated Honeyguide as a breeding resident at Victoria Falls and it appears to be the first reported sighting of this species there since the sight record west of Victoria Falls cited in Irwin (1981). Over the years we have had occasional sightings of the Scaly-throated Honeyguide around the many wild bee hives on our property in the Victoria Falls suburbia. Greater *I. indicator* and Lesser Honeyguides *I. minor* have frequently been recorded.

I would also like to mention that we have also heard the call on a few occasions around our beehives in Highlands, Harare, during the rainy season. The Scaly-throated Honeyguide is extremely elusive and I have never been able to get a photograph of it.

Darryl Tiran, *Victoria Falls*. ✉ ecolynx@zol.co.zw

The White-browed Robin-chat, an Unusual Seed Eater

The White-browed Robin-chat *Cossypha heuglini* is not considered a seed eater, and *Roberts' Birds* 7th Edition says it is primarily insectivorous, with some fruit (25%) in stomach contents. A robin-chat was seen close to my front door in Harare on a number of occasions around the end of August 2020, where a small open verandah is bordered by a clump of *Dianella* sp. plants, providing some good cover. On the 30th I noticed it venturing from this mini-thicket to eat bird seed that is scattered there for various seedeaters and doves. It had, perhaps, been attracted to this food source over this period and may have taken seeds on other occasions. I do not recall what bird seed was down at that time, millet being primarily supplied, but according to availability mixed grains, with larger seeds including sorghum, is sometimes provided.

I.C. Riddell, *Harare*. ✉ gemsaf@mango.zw

Editor's note: Cooper (1972. *Honeyguide* No. 58: 37) reported a Fiscal Shrike *Lanius collaris* feeding on birdseed at a feeding table, even though it is not normally a seed-eater. It may be that the sight of birds feeding stimulates them to 'get in on the act' and feed on whatever the other birds are eating. It would be interesting to know how many other species might do this and people who put out seed for birds should keep a lookout for unusual species at their feeding tables.

Cinnamon-breasted Tit Feeding on Mistletoe Fruit

On the morning of 21 November, 2020, I was on a bird walk at Cecil Kop, Mutare (QDS 1832 D3), led by Buluwesi Murambiwa. We were in miombo woodland and at about 10h00 we came across a bird party. Southern Hyliotas *Hyliota australis* and Green-capped Eremomelas *Eremomela scotops* were particularly noticeable, and we were delighted to find one of the Kop's most sought-after species, a Cinnamon-breasted Tit *Melaniparus pallidiventris.* While watching, we noticed the tit carrying the small red fruit of mistletoe *Viscum* spp. in its bill. It moved around within the foliage continually so viewing was difficult. From photographs I took, the fruit in its bill appeared perfectly round in some shots and squashed in others. It seems certain, therefore, that we saw the bird holding more than one fruit item during the period of this observation and so conclude it ate one fruit before picking another.

Only later did I learn the significance of this sighting, as Hockey *et al*. 2005. *Roberts' birds of southern Africa*, VIIth ed., p. 740 gives the diet of this Tit as 'virtually unknown'.

My thanks go to my guide, Buluwesi Murambiwa, who identified the food item; to Anthony Cizek for initially pointing out the importance of this record; and to Colin Baker for providing the *Roberts* reference and for his assistance in preparing this note.

Patience Simuzosha, *Bulawayo*. ✉ musiwaro15@gmail.com

Figure 1. The Cinnamon-breasted Tit with a mistletoe berry in its beak. Photo: © Patience Simuzosha

Records of Yellow-billed Kites: August to November 2020

C.T. Baker

Yellow-billed Kite *Milvus aegyptius* records submitted for inclusion in Field Observations and sightings drawn from elsewhere are shown separately here. No **Black Kites** *Milvus migrans* were reported.

The first six Yellow-billed sightings were all made on 4 August, although the Victoria Falls pair at a nest site would have arrived earlier than that. By comparison, the first arrival in 2019 was noted on 14 July. Thereafter numbers were slow to build up and the main arrival was protracted and erratic. Most notably the first bird arriving at Main Camp, Hwange NP, this year was seen on the late date of 4 September compared to 1 August last year (TA). No large flocks were reported during the period.

Daily counts in and around Victoria Falls were made by C&JB. Birds were slow to arrive and just 13 were noted during August. Thereafter the average numbers of birds seen per day were (2019 in brackets): September 1.9 (2.2), October 2.7 (3.1) and November 1.6 (2.4). It was readily apparent that fewer birds were in the area in those three months compared to 2019.

The sightings shown below are of single birds except when noted otherwise.

Yellow-billed Kite *Milvus aegyptius*

4 August; a pair at an established nest site, Victoria Falls suburbs (1725 D4) DT
About 10 km upstream of the Deka-Zambezi confluence (1826 B1) JBk
Marondera North (1831 B1) AD
Charara, Lake Kariba (1628 D2) CN
20 km Makuti-Karoi road (1629 A4) CN
Two at Kapirinengu, Chewore (1529 D2) DS
5 August; Ilala Lodge, Victoria Falls JB CB
6 August; Save-Runde junction CC
7 August; Tambahata Pan, Gonarezhou (2132 A4) TM
8 August; two on separate road kills near Gwebi River bridge, Little England Farm (1730 D1) KW
9 August; two in the Macheke area GT
10 August; Kapirinengu, Chewore (1529 D2) DS
12 August; three on Monavale vlei, Harare (1731 C3) JM
13 August; Hwange Safari Lodge (1826 C4) JV
14 August; Charara, Lake Kariba CN
28 August; Burnside, Bulawayo (2028 B1) HL
29 August; Hatfield, Harare (1731 C3) PT
Chipinda Pools, Gonarezhou (2131 B4) EvdW
4 September; 23 km Victoria Falls-Kazungula road (1725 D3) CB
Main Camp, Hwange NP (1826 D2) TA
5 September; Epworth, Harare (1731 C3) JM
8 September; Big Toms, Hwange NP (1825 D2) CB
9 September; Robins Camp, Hwange NP (1825 D2) CB
Two at Kapirinengu, Chewore DS
9-14 September; two at Nyamepi (1529 C2) JF
10 September; Shashe Village, Driefontein grasslands (1930 B4) JP
11 September; four over the Victoria Falls (1725 D4) CB
Ten or more over Main Camp, Hwange NP (1826 D2) JV
30 September; Senuko, Gonarezhou (2031 D2) GS
5-10 October; four at the Save-Runde junction (2132 A4) CS
7 October; eight hawking termite alates at 06h00 at Victoria Falls after heavy rain CB
13 October; Chilo Sand Forest, Gonarezhou (2132 A2) TM
23-29 October; Chamaluvati Camp area, Gonarezhou (2132 A4) GT
27 October; two at No. 3 Pan, Chamabonda vlei, Victoria Falls (1725 D3) CB
30 October; between Nyazura and Odzi (1832 C4) IL
6-7 November; several seen continually in the Nehimba Camp area (1826 C4) DS
21 November; many at Caterpillar Pan, Hwange NP (1826 D4) JV
23 November; seven on Chamabonda vlei, Victoria Falls CB

Observers

Terry Anders (TA), Colin Baker (CB), Jonathan Baker (JBk), Julia Baker (JB), Courtney Connear (CC), Asher Dare (AD), Jessica Folkertsen (JF), Helen Lewis (HL), Innes Louw (IL), Jimmy Muropa (JM), Thomas Mutombeni (TM), Carl Nicholson (CN), Julia Pierini (JP), Clive Stockil (CS), Glenn Stockil (GS), Debbie Swales (DS), Pete Taylor (PT), Gillian Thornycroft (GT), Darryl Tiran (DT), James Varden (JV), Elsabe van der Westhuizen (EvdW), Karl Wright (KW).

Colin Baker, *Victoria Falls.* ✉ pratincole306@hotmail.com

Field Observations: June to November 2020

C.T. Baker

Isolated heavy showers fell from as early as the beginning of September. Good rainfall swept across the country from mid-November with long-range forecasts anticipating an above-average season.

Worth highlighting are two unusual behavioural observations not mentioned in (Hockey *et al*. 2005. *Roberts' birds of southern Africa*, VIIth ed., pages 342 and 973) respectively. At Nehimba Camp Pan, Hwange NP (1826 C4), in November a female **Burchell's Sandgrouse** *Pterocles burchellii* gathered water in her belly feathers (DS). Only the male is recorded as doing so previously. In October at Victoria Falls (1725 D4) a **Yellow-billed Oxpecker** *Buphagus africanus* used elephant dung to line its nest (CBr). Hockey *et al*. list only grass and hair plucked from host animals as nest lining.

It wasn't too long ago that the **European Honey Buzzard** *Pernis apivorus* was on the Zimbabwe Rarities list but from 2016 its occurrence here during the summer months has increased markedly. It is not clear why this should be. According to Trevor Hardaker (pers. comm.) a similar surge in numbers of this Palearctic migrant has also occurred in South Africa. Furthermore, an unprecedented number of birds remained south of the Limpopo during the 2020 winter. He commented that some juveniles do not travel all the way to their breeding grounds during our winter, perhaps only moving marginally northwards within Africa. But interestingly many of the South African 2020 winter records were of adult birds. Things are certainly happening with this buzzard in southern Africa and its increased occurrence here, summer and winter, must be a strong possibility.

Where mention is made in the text to the Atlas it refers to Harrison *et al*. 1997. *The atlas of southern African birds* and not to the current SABAP2 exercise. Records submitted by Ian Riddell from input to SABAP2 are identified with the observers' initials. Reports have also been obtained from BLZ's Special Species site on WhatsApp and other social media. The symbol † indicates a Quarter Degree Square in which the relevant species was not recorded in the Atlas or subsequently in Recent Reports and Field Observations.

Rarities

In Hwange NP a juvenile **Egyptian Vulture** *Neophron percnopterus* near Main Camp (1826 D2†) on 4 October (PW per IL) and another, described as a sub-adult, at Magisihole on the 30th (Rob Rees) may have been the same individual. An adult was on Zebra vlei, Mana Pools (1529 C4), on 15 October (NH). A **Red-necked Falcon** *Falco ruficollis* perched on an Ilala palm in a Victoria Falls garden (1725 D4) on 27 August (DT). Following the first Katiyo Estate (1833 A3) records in the previous period, one was noted again on 9 September (MS). Little is heard of the southeast lowveld population these days so one at the Save-Runde confluence, Gonarezhou (2132 A4†), in October (KB) is an important record. Another individual was at Kanga Pan, Mana Pools (1529 C4), on 17 November (SCh).

Two **Spur-winged Lapwings** *Vanellus spinosus* at Lake Chivero (1730 D4) on 22 November were near the spot where they were recorded the previous year (J-MB). A **Terek Sandpiper** *Xenus cinereus* was photographed at the Gache Gache-Sunde confluence, Lake Kariba (1628 D4†), on 24 June (MR). A **Common Whimbrel** *Numenius phaeopus* was standing in the road in heavy mist about 45 km north of Triangle junction on the Zaka road (2031 C2†) on 1 September. 30mm of rain had fallen on the southeast lowveld the previous day and this bird had obviously become disoriented in these wet, low-visibility conditions (JoF).

A **Swamp Boubou** *Laniarius bicolor* in a Victoria Falls garden (1725 D4) on 2 July had possibly paired with a **Tropical Boubou** *L. major* and so abandoned its riverside habitat (DT).

Ostrich

An **Ostrich** *Struthio camelus* was seen in QDS 2132 A3 in the Chilo Gorge area during July (CS) and a pair with up to 15 chicks was at Chimuwani Pan on the flatlands above Chilojo Cliffs on 24 October (TM). This bird is considered scarce in Gonarezhou. It has been many years since they were reported from a new area so a record from near the Umguza River, north of Nyamandhlovu (1928 C2†), in November (VB) is exceptional.

Waterbirds and allied species

Various observers reported from one to five **Great White Pelicans** *Pelecanus onocrotalus* at Muchaniwa (aka Machanu) Pan, Gonarezhou (2132 A4), from June to October. At Embakwe Dam, Mangwe South (2027 D4), an individual was present on 9 October and eight on 4 November (CJ). After breeding in Zimbabwe for the first time in October 2019, **Pink-backed Pelicans** *P. rufescens* were nesting again on the Zambezi near Victoria Falls on 11 October this year (CBr). On Muchaniwa Pan small numbers were seen throughout the period (CS) and four were seen daily from 23 to 29 October (GT).

A **Yellow-billed Egret** *Egretta intermedia* was on a dam on the Masuwe River south of Victoria Falls (1825 B2†) on 13 October (CB). A number of observers reported a **Slaty Egret** *E. vinaceigula* on the Gwebi River at Lake Manyame (1730 D3) on 31 October. The 1990s produced several records of individuals on the lake but this egret has been little mentioned from there subsequently. A large conifer in a Greendale, Harare garden (1731 C3) provides a roost to over 250 **Cattle Egrets** *Bubulcus ibis* and about 125 **African Sacred Ibis** *Threskiornis aethiopicus* (IL).

A **Squacco Heron** *Ardeola ralloides* at Udu Dam (1832 B3) on 26 October (RC, IR) is a scarce Nyanga record. Two separate adult **Rufous-bellied Herons** *A. rufiventris* at Msuna (1826 B2) on 11 and 12 July (CB) indicate they have consolidated their expansion of range downstream of Victoria Falls since the Atlas years. Two **Little Bitterns** *Ixobrychus minutus* were at Kazungula (1725 C4) on 11 June (SC) and one was in the Nehimba area of Hwange NP (1826 C4) on 8 November (DS).

About 50 **White Storks** *Ciconia ciconia* over Borrowdale, Harare (1731 C1), on 28 June (LM per IR) was an unusually large winter flock. A concentration of about 300 arrived in southeast Hwange NP on 30 November where 53mm rain fell in two days (CBr). **Black Storks** *C. nigra* found in less usual areas were two over Chisipite, Harare (1731 C3), on 27 June (JeF), five at Borrowdale Brooke, Harare (1731 C1), on 12 August (DMacD), six feeding in the shallows at Lake Chivero Game Park on 23 August (IL, IR) and two in the Sebakwe area

(1830 C3†) on 20 September (AK). There were good numbers at the Salt Pan, Hwange NP (1826 C1), in September with nine on the 4th (CdC) and 12 on the 8th (CB). Two wintering **Abdim's Storks** *C. abdimii* flew over Chisipite on 16 August (TW).

In Gonarezhou 70 or more **African Openbills** *Anastomus lamelligerus* roosted below Chilo Gorge Safari Lodge (2132 A2) during June and July (CS) and up to eight **Saddle-billed Storks** *Ephippiorhynchus senegalensis* were in the Save-Runde confluence area (2132 A4) from 23 to 29 October (GT). About eight **Marabou Storks** *Leptoptilos crumenifer* near the bottom of the Troutbeck road (1832 B4†) in the last week of October (RC *et al*.) could well be the first Nyanga record. With the exception of the extreme southeast, this stork has only been thinly recorded in the eastern third of the country.

A **Yellow-billed Stork** *Mycteria ibis* flew near a dam on the Masuwe River (1825 B2†) on 13 October (CB). Three **Hadeda Ibis** *Bostrychia hagedash* were just south of Birchenough Bridge on the Save River (2032 A2) on 18 July (KW). Unusual at the Salt Pan (1826 C1) were two **African Spoonbills** *Platalea alba* on 4 September (CdC) and a juvenile **Greater Flamingo** *Phoenicopterus roseus* seen between 17 August and 9 September by several observers.

The highest **White-faced Duck** *Dendrocygna viduata* numbers were reported in October with 220 or more at Suri Suri Dam between Chegutu and Chakari (1829 A2) on the 10th, and an estimated 1500 at Lanark Farm, Harare South (1830 B2), on the 25th (*The Babbler*) when over 200 were noted at Bumi Hills, Lake Kariba (1628 C4) (TT). Six at Hippo Pools (1731 B2) on 28 November was IL's first record from there on about 30 visits since 2001. An **Egyptian Goose** *Alopochen aegyptiaca* record from Troutbeck (1832 B2) in October (IR) was the first report from that QDS since the Atlas years.

Yellow-billed Ducks *Anas undulata* were last reported from the Eastern Highlands in 1999 so one at Nyamazi Falls Dam, Juliasdale (1832 B3), on 20 September (MA) was long overdue. Five **Cape Teal** *A. capensis* at Massasanya Dam (2131 B4†) on 16 July (AMacD) is probably the first Gonarezhou record. Being so far out of range their provenance might never be determined. In Hwange NP, 11 were at Guvalala Pan (1826 D3) on 24 July (CBr) with some still there on 14 August (PD), and the largest group yet reported from the Salt Pan comprised 24 on 8 and 9 September (CB).

Pairs of **Hottentot Teal** *A. hottentota* were on an Imire Game Park dam (1831 B3) for about three weeks in June (JT) and at Borrowdale Brooke on 2 July (DMacD). One at Kariba Bream Farm (1628 D2) on 23 October (CN) was a scarce Lake Kariba record and a loner was at Guvalala Pan between 5-9 November (DS). About 150 **Red-billed Teal** *A. erythrorhyncha* were at the Lake Chivero Game Park on 23 August (IL). Over 100 at Bumi Hills on 25 October (TT) is an unprecedented count as they are only scarcely found on Lake Kariba in low numbers. 116 **Knob-billed Ducks** *Sarkidiornis melanotos* were at Suri Suri Dam on 10 October (*The Babbler*).

Raptors

Two **Secretarybirds** *Sagittarius serpentarius* were on Mazuri Ranch, Kwekwe (1830 C4), on 4 September and 26 November (UL).

No fewer than 16 **Cape Vultures** *Gyps coprotheres* near Fishans Causeway, Gonarezhou (2132 A3), on 14 July were perhaps South African wanderers from Magaliesberg or Soutpansberg (GD). This is the largest number reported since the 1990s when the Wabai Hill roost was in its prime. On 28 September one was with **White-backed Vultures** *G. africanus* at Victoria Falls (CBr) where probably not recorded since the Atlas years.

Among 112 **White-backeds** at Shakwanki, Hwange NP (1926 A1) on 20 July, was one wearing W448 wing tags (JSS). It was tagged as a fledgling at Kimberley on 14 October 2017. In less usual localities, five were in the Sebakwe area (1830 C3†) on 20 September (AK) and *c.* 4 soared over the Aberfoyle-Gleneagles road (1832 B4) on 31 October (IR). An exceptional vulture flock numbering over 300, most of which were **White-backed**, was on an unidentified kill near Guvalala (1826 D3) in early November. This vast gathering was some distance from the road so an accurate count and identification of individual birds was not possible (DS).

A **Lappet-faced Vulture** *Torgos tracheliotos* bearing an F268 tag was at Ngweshla, Hwange NP (1927 A1), on 6 October. After being tagged in Namibia in October 2019 it was reported a number of times within that country before moving into Zimbabwe (PD).

An **African Cuckoo Hawk** *Aviceda cuculoides* at Musango (1628 C4) on 28 August (SE) was an unusual Lake Kariba record. A **Bat Hawk** *Macheiramphus alcinus* was seen on the edge of a nest in the Gulati Communal Lands south of Bulawayo (2028 B3) on 1 November (DK). The first and only **European Honey Buzzard** *Pernis apivorus* of the season so far arrived at Mazvikadei Dam, Banket (1730 A2), on 16 October (BM).

A pair of **Verreaux's Eagles** *Aquila verreauxii* in Mupata Gorge, Kanyemba (1530 C1), on 24 July (TC) would be expected but are included as this remote area is under-reported these days. Early-arriving **Lesser Spotted Eagles** *Clanga pomarina* in new areas were on irrigated land at Marondera North (1831 B1†) on 30 October (AD) and at Victoria Falls (1725 D4†) in the first week of November (WvS). In Hwange NP many were at Caterpillar Pan (1826 D4) on 21 November (JV) and at least 200 were in the southeast of the park in wet weather on the 30th (CBr).

The earliest **Wahlberg's Eagles** *Hieraaetus wahlbergi* this season were a pair at Hippo Pools on 29 July (TN). They were nest-building in August at the Mukuvisi Woodlands, Harare (1731 C3), on the 21st (KW) and at Umguza Irrigation Scheme (1928 D3) on the 26th (JV). On the Rhodes Dam entry road, Nyanga (1832 B3†), on 2 October a seldom-reported **Booted Eagle** *H. pennatus* was a nice sighting (IR). A pair of **Ayres's Hawk-eagles** *H. ayresii* nesting on a power pylon in the Nyaodza River area, Lake Kariba (1629 C1†), on 15 July (MR) is highly significant as only a few verified breeding records have been obtained in this country (ND).

An adult **Martial Eagle** *Polemaetus bellicosus* was atop pine trees at the Mare Dam, Nyanga (1832 B4), on 28 and 29 October (IR) and a wandering immature was pursued by a **Lanner Falcon** *Falco biarmicus* at Nyamuswa Ranch, 20 km southwest of Lion's Den (1729 B4†), on 20 September (BM). **African Crowned Eagles** *Stephanoaetus coronatus* were nesting on a baobab in the Nyaodza River area (1629 C1†) on 15 July (MR). An adult with a juvenile took a baby baboon in Matopos NP on 30 September (SN). One sat on eggs at Hippo Pools on 5 October and a very young chick was seen on the 17th (TN). Individuals were over Gleneagles (1832 B2) on 31 October (IR) and Gosho Park, Marondera (1831 B1†), on 29 November (AD).

Single **Western Banded Snake-eagles** *Circaetus cinerascens* were at Hippo Pools on 25 July (TN) and in the Masoka area of the Zambezi Valley (1630 A1) on 17 August

and 23 November (MZ). Two were at Kanga Pan (1529 C4) on 10 August (CM) and a wandering juvenile appeared in an Emerald Hill, Harare garden (1730 D4) on 24 November (LS).

Adult female **Bateleurs** *Terathopius ecaudatus* were seen 59 km along the Hwange-Victoria Falls road (1826 A1) on 13 July and over Timot's Pan, Chamabonda vlei (1725 D3), ten days later (CB). In Hwange NP a male was in the Nehimba Lodge (1826 C4) area at the end of August (PW) and a sub-adult male flew near Big Toms (1825 D2) on 8 September (CB). In Gonarezhou a juvenile female was at the Chilojo Cliffs on 1 August (DS) and five, including juveniles, were in the Chamaluvati Camp area (2132 A4) from 23 to 29 October (GT). A pair was at Kariba Crocodile Farm (1628 D2) on 21 August (JW), and at Mcheni Camp, Rukomechi (1529 C4), on 26 September one fed on an infant baboon abandoned by its mother (KvL).

A **Palm-nut Vulture** *Gypohierax angolensis* was standing on a large nest in a gumtree on the Aberfoyle Tea Estates Golf Course (1832 B4) on 30 October. An immature **Black Sparrowhawk** *Accipiter melanoleucus* caught a **Grey Go-away-bird** *Corythaixoides concolor* in a Newlands, Harare (1731 C3) garden on 26 June and possibly the same youngster was seen again on 11 July (IR). A July record from the Mutoko area (1732 A3†) (AK) was some distance to the east of its known range in the northeast. A pair of **African Goshawks** *Accipiter tachiro* in the Embakwe Dam area (2027 D4†) on 1 October (CJ) denotes range expansion along the Botswana border.

Single **African Marsh Harriers** *Circus ranivorus* were at Kazungula on 10 June (SC) and on a wetland near Rugare, Harare (1730 D4), on 5 November (JM). A **Pallid Harrier** *C. macrourus* was at Lilfordia School (1730 D4) on 17 August (AS), an extraordinary date for a species not known to overwinter. A male on Chamabonda vlei on 20 October had arrived earlier than normal (CB) and a pair at Kazuma Pan (1825 B3) was seen on the more usual date of 14 November (BN).

Wintering **Ospreys** *Pandion haliaetus* were on Thetford Dam, Glen Forest (1731 C1), on 12 June (DMacD), Mazvikadei on 20 July (BM), Rukuru Camp downstream of Chirundu (1528 D4) on 26 July (two) (GT) and at Malilangwe, southeast lowveld (2131 B2), on 21 July (GD). Singles were at Mazvikadei on 4 September (BM, J-MB) and 24 October, the latter bird wearing a red ring on its left leg and a yellow ring on the right (DSm). On Lake Kariba two were at Musango on 12 and 17 September and one on 30 October (SE), one was at Elephant Point (1628 C4) on 28 September (TH) and two at Palm Bay (1628 D3) on 15 October (KvL). Singles were in Zambezi NP, Victoria Falls (1725 D4), on 11 October and 1 November (CB).

In Harare a **Peregrine Falcon** *Falco peregrinus* sped through a Newlands garden on 1 October and another was at Chisipite on the 17th (IR). **Eurasian Hobbies** *Falco subbuteo* arriving earlier than normal on the upper Zambezi were at Matetsi Lodge (1725 D3) on 7 October (JV) and Victoria Falls on the 8th (DP). A pair of **Dickinson's Kestrels** *F. dickinsoni* was at Mopane Pan, Chirundu (1628 B2), on 14 September (KD).

Gamebirds, Rails and Cranes

Shelley's Francolin *Scleroptila shelleyi* keep to cover and are seldom seen, so one flushed at Connemara, Troutbeck (1832 B2), on 2 October (IR) is worth recording. Ten **Crested Guineafowl** *Guttera pucherani* in mountain acacia forest in the Guluweni Chefu area, Gonarezhou (2131 D2†), in July (KvL) were slightly south of their known range. Following the May 2020 **Kurrichane Buttonquail** *Turnix sylvaticus* record from near Wingate Golf Club, Harare (1731 C1), one seen there on 26 July was closely followed by another nearby at Pomona Quarry. One was at Monavale vlei, Harare (1731 C3), on 8 November (IR).

A **Wattled Crane** *Grus carunculatus* was photographed on the Zambezi about 4 km downstream of Chikwenya, Mana Pools (1529 D1†), on 7 November (ST). There were records from Ruckomechi in 1992 and 1995, otherwise this crane is apparently unknown along the Middle Zambezi. [**Editor's note**: Rockingham-Gill (2012. *Honeyguide* **58**: 66-67) recorded 13 Wattled Cranes flying over Kariba in May-June 1977.] This individual may have wandered from either side of the river. On the Driefontein grasslands, Gutu (1930 B4), on 10 September, nine plus a breeding pair with an egg, were in the Shashe Village area where 23 **Grey Crowned Cranes** *Balearica regulorum* were also present. A further 21 **Grey Crowned** were at Chinyaure Village (JP).

On 6 November, a **Buff-spotted Flufftail** *Sarothrura elegans* was spotted over the border in Mozambique from the Dande Safari Area in QDS 1530 D2 (BE per GC). It is included for interest's sake as Zambezi Valley records within Zimbabwe are rare, the last coming from Kavinga (1629 A2) in December 2017. A **Striped Flufftail** *S. affinis* was on the Mare-Pungwe hills, Nyanga (1832 B4), on 25 October (IR). This under-reported bird is known only from the eastern border area. An **Allen's Gallinule** *Porphyrio alleni* was at Mazvikadei on 10 July (DKk).

A flock of five **Kori Bustards** *Ardeotis kori* was at the Salt Pan on 9 September (CB), and singles were at the Chivhu turn-off onto the Gutu road (1930 B2) on 10 September (JP) and in the Sebakwe area (1830 C3†) on 20 September (AK). No less than 15, including two displaying males, were on Chamabonda vlei, Victoria Falls (1725 D3), on 27 October (CB). Single **Black-bellied Bustards** *Lissotis melanogaster* in less usual areas were flying over Chisipite on 28 August (BL) and at Banket (1730 A4†) on 20 November (DSm).

Waders, Gulls and Terns

A **Lesser Jacana** *Microparra capensis* was at Mazvikadei from 29 August to 4 September (BM, J-MB). A male **Painted Snipe** *Rostratula benghalensis* in the Umguza farming area (1928 D3) on 27 June was followed by two on 19 October (JV); a male was at the Victoria Falls Crocodile Farm drainage ponds (1725 D4) on 28 August and 17 October and a pair on 15 November (CB, JB).

In October individual **Common Ringed Plovers** *Charadrius hiaticula* were at Massasanya Dam (2131 B4) on the 15th (DMacD) and Mazvikadei (1730 A2†) three days later (BM). Between 10 October and 4 November, they were noted at Victoria Falls (WvS), although the number involved is unknown. **White-fronted Plovers** *C. marginatus* are unusual in Hwange NP but one was at Nehimba Lodge (1826 C4†) at the end of August (PW). A south-bound **Grey Plover** *Pluvialis squatarola* was near Matetsi Lodge (1725 D3) on 28 November (per CBr).

Crowned Lapwings *Vanellus coronatus* moving at night to or from Country Club Golf Course were heard over Newlands on 4 and 28 July (IR). A **Long-toed Lapwing** *V. crassirostris* was at Kazungula on 14 June (SC) and there were four at Lake Manyame on 18 July (DKk). **Common Greenshanks** *Tringa nebularia* overwintered in the Chilo Gorge area during June

and July (CS). Two **Little Stints** *Calidris minuta* were on a dam on the Masuwe River, Victoria Falls (1825 B2†), on 14 October (CB).

A **Pied Avocet** *Recurvirostra avosetta* was noted by various observers at Guvalala Pan from 24 July to early November. At Lake Chivero about 45 were on the upper reaches on 15 August (IL), 80 were feeding opposite Kuimba Shiri two days later (TC) and *c*. 40 were at the Bird Sanctuary on 22 November (*The Babbler*).

Three **Spotted Thick-knees** *Burhinus capensis* were at Suri Suri Dam on 10 October (*The Babbler*) and a pair of **Bronze-winged Coursers** *Rhinoptilus chalcopterus* was in Mopane scrub southwest of Victoria Falls (1825 B1) on 13 October (CB).

A **Black-winged Pratincole** *Glareola nordmanni* on southward migration at Musango (1628 C4†) on 30 October (SE) is a scarce Lake Kariba record. A **Whiskered Tern** *Chlidonias hybrida* at Mazvikadei (1730 A2†) on 27 September (BM) seems to be the first record from this dam. The earliest **African Skimmer** *Rynchops flavirostris* of the season was at Kazungula on 5 June (SC) followed by four opposite A'Zambezi Lodge, Victoria Falls, on 1 August (DT) and five at Chilo crossing on the Save River, Gonarezhou, in the first week of August (DS, TM).

Other non-Passerines

A male **Yellow-throated Sandgrouse** *Pterocles gutturalis* drank briefly at Pan 1, Chamabonda vlei (1725 D3), on 23 July (CB).

Speckled Pigeons *Columba guinea* continue to be found in new areas. Two were at Ilala Lodge, Victoria Falls (1725 D4†), in July (DS), some were at Mazvikadei Dam wall (1730 A2†) on 3 October (IR) and four in the Nehimba Seeps area, Hwange NP (1826 C4†), on 6-7 November (DS). **Eastern Bronze-naped Pigeons** *C. delegorguei* still persist on the Aberfoyle-Gleneagles road where they were seen at the end of October and an **African Green Pigeon** *Treron calvus* was heard in the early morning of 3 October at Newlands (IR).

African Mourning Doves *Streptopelia decipiens* were in good numbers at Msuna on 12-13 July (CB) and one returned to Umguza on 19 October (JV) for the third consecutive year. A **Tambourine Dove** *Turtur tympanistria* appeared on Redhills Farm, about 10 km north of Banket (1730 A4†), on 12 August and five were there for a few days in mid-November (DSm). Another was nearby at the Mazvikadei Crocodile Farm (1730 A2†) on 24 August (BM). Movement into both squares emanated from the Chinhoyi area. In September they visited Harare again with one in Greystone Preserve (1731 C1) on the 2nd (KD) and a pair over Borrowdale Brooke on the 28th (DMacD).

On the Zambezi, eight **Grey-headed Parrots** *Poicephalus fuscicollis* were at Rukuru Camp on 26 July, 12 and 14 were downstream at Mongwe Camp (1528 D4) on the 28th and 29th respectively (GT) and 20 or more were seen daily at Nyakasanga (1529 C3) on 7-9 August (RMacD). In Gonarezhou six were at Chilo Lodge on 27 July (TM) and up to ten drank each morning from 23 to 29 October in the Chamaluvati Camp area (2132 A4) (GT). **Brown-headed Parrots** *P. cryptoxanthus* north of Checheche near the Save River (2032 C1†) in June (RB) represent a northward extension of their southeast lowveld range. Flocks of up to 12 are seen regularly at Senuko, Save Valley Conservancy (2031 D2), and a number of nests, mainly in baobabs, have been found (CS). The **Meyer's Parrot** *P. meyeri* influx into Newlands during the last period continued until 2 July. Calls were heard on 14 September and they were noted six times between 7 and 20 November. There appears to be a stable population in the Chisipite-Greendale area where they are regularly found (IR).

During the second week of September *c*.12 **Lilian's Lovebirds** *Agapornis lilianae* were at Kapirinengu, Chewore (1529 D2) (DS) and a flock of about ten was between Mana Pools and Nyamepi (1529 C2) (JF). Over 100 were at a pan near Rifa Camp, Chirundu (1628 B2), on 16 October (DKk). From 15 November an eight-day BLZ survey in Mana Pools NP obtained 20 sightings at roosts and foraging areas. Flocks averaged 30 birds with the largest flock comprising about 300. The team raised concerns about the wild bird trade, habitat loss, flooding of breeding areas, and poisoning of waterholes through poaching and illegal pest control (*The Babbler*).

An **African Cuckoo** *Cuculus gularis* was heard in Victoria Falls suburbs towards the end of June (DT) and a **Black Cuckoo** *C. clamosus* was at Seldomseen, Vumba (1932 B2), on 11 August. These cuckoos seldom overwinter. **African Emerald Cuckoos** *Chrysococcyx cupreus* are more likely to do so in the Eastern Districts and were noted on the Vumba in August at Seldomseen on the 10th (KW) and Tom Hulley Road on the 25th (PM).

A **Thick-billed Cuckoo** *Pachycoccyx audeberti* was reported from Hippo Pools on 28 November (IL). West of its known range, a **Klaas's Cuckoo** *C. klaas* was in the Sebakwe area (1830 C3†) on 20 September (AK). A **Green Malkoha** *Ceuthmochares australis* on a reed island at Little Ruckomechi (1529 C3) on 10 August (NH) follows two 2019 records from the Rukomechi River and provides further evidence of a continued presence in the Zambezi Valley.

A **Barn Owl** *Tyto alba* record from Kanyemba (1530 C2†) in July (TC) marks an extension of range downstream on the Zambezi. **African Wood Owls** *Strix woodfordii* were heard in a Newlands garden on 3 June, twice in October and three times in November (IR). A record from the Umguza area (1928 C2†) in November (VB) is so far removed from this owl's ranges to the northwest and the south its provenance is a mystery. Two **Marsh Owls** *Asio capensis* were still on Marlborough vlei, Harare (1730 D2), on 5 September despite the whole area, including the stream banks, now being put under cultivation (JP).

The earliest **Common Swift** *Apus apus* was at Lanark Farm, Harare South (1830 B2†), on 25 October (*The Babbler*) and hundreds converging on Chamabonda vlei on 25 November coincided with the arrival of heavy rainfall (CBr). In early October about six **Mottled Spinetails** *Telacanthura ussheri* were at Tambahata Pan, Gonarezhou (2132 A4), where known to breed (CS). About 20 **Böhm's Spinetails** *Neafrapus boehmi* were at Kapirinengu, Chewore (1529 D2), on 10 August (DS).

Narina Trogons *Apaloderma narina* wandering into north Harare gardens (1731 C1) were a male in Philadelphia on 23 June (AM per KvL) and a female at Kambanji in July, with possibly the same bird being seen there three times from the last week of October to 10 November (PH).

Single **Half-collared Kingfishers** *Alcedo semitorquata* were at Thetford Estate on 19 July (DMacD), Seldomseen Dam (1932 B2†) on 10 August (KW) and on the Zambezi near Tsowa Island (1725 D3) on 4 September (CB). Early in November, **Woodland Kingfishers** *Halcyon senegalensis* arrived at Gonarezhou (EvdW), Mana Pools (CMy) and somewhat unusually at Amby, Harare (1731 C3) (IL). They do not necessarily begin calling as soon as they arrive, and the first

one heard at Rifa Camp was on 16 November (EB). Thereafter arrival was noted in November on the 18th at Kariba town (1628 D2) (MR), 19th in Bubye Valley Conservancy (KvL) and Chilo Gorge (TM), 20th at Nyakasanga (LMcD) and 24th at Chiredzi (NM). The first **Grey-headed Kingfisher** *H. leucocephala* of the season flew into a window at Kuimba Shiri, Lake Chivero (1730 D4), on 27 September but recovered (TC).

In Harare (1731 C3) a flock of about 100 **European Bee-eaters** *Merops apiaster* heading east over Hatfield on 3 September (PT) and six over Mandara the following day (JBa) were probably South African birds. Arrival dates of Palearctic birds are shown below. **Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters** *M. persicus* were in the Hwange Main Camp area on 21 November (JV).

Southern Carmine Bee-eaters *M. nubicoides* at Charara, Lake Kariba (1628 D2), on 21 July (CN) were early. Ten were in the Mongwe Camp-Nyakasanga area on 20 August (LMcD), and the following day they were heard over Kariba Crocodile Farm (JW) and arrived at Rifa on 28 August (EB). Three over Umguza (1928 D3) on 29 August built up to 80 by 28 September, perhaps indicating they were nesting on the Umguza River for the first time for several years (JV, AR). Five flew east over Iganyana Tented Camp, Dete vlei (1826 D2), on 11 September (JV) and over 100 were at the Chewore south colony on 3 October (NH).

White-fronted Bee-eaters *M. bullockoides* were scarce in the Rhodes Nyanga Hotel area in October although nest holes were dotted along a cutting on the main road near the Inyangombe bridge. Some were eventually found south of the National Parks office (IR). A large flock of at least ten **Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters** *M. hirundineus* was in a Mandara garden on 24 July (with five **Little Bee-eaters** *M. pusillus*) and on 18 August (JBa).

An extraordinary gathering of about 50 **Silvery-cheeked Hornbills** *Bycanistes brevis* was at the Eden Valley turn-off, Vumba (1932 B1), on 20 June where fig trees were fruiting (GD). In a remote corner of Gonarezhou in July **Southern Red-billed Hornbills** *Tockus rufirostris* were near the Mozambique border in QDS 2131 D4† (RB), probably having been overlooked previously. Three **Southern Ground Hornbills** *Bucorvus leadbeateri* were on the Marondera-Imire road (1831 A4) on 10 July (HM).

A **Scaly-throated Honeyguide** *Indicator variegatus* was heard at its regular Rhodes Hotel site on 26 October and others were near Aberfoyle on the 31st (IR). **Brown-backed Honeybirds** *Prodotiscus regulus* were reported only from IR's Newlands garden in August, September and November. Two **Green-backed Honeybirds** *P. zambesiae* were at Mukuvisi Woodlands on 6 September (IR) and one on Zambezi Drive, Victoria Falls (1725 D4†), on 29 November (CB) represents movement downstream from the Matetsi area.

Passerines

African Broadbills *Smithornis capensis* are sparse on the Eastern Highlands so of interest was one at Mtarazi Falls, Nyanga (1832 B4), on 13 August (DSi) while in the valley below two pairs were close to Aberfoyle Lodge on the 21st (MS). An early **African Pitta** *Pitta angolensis* was in the Mazowe River bridge area north of Nyamapanda (1632 D1†) on 16 October (TD). They normally appear with the main onset of the rains in November so this mid-October record is exceptional. At Masoka they were first noted on 23 November (MZ).

A small influx of **Chestnut-backed Sparrowlarks** *Eremopterix leucotis* occurred at Victoria Falls in September with some on the Lookout Café road (1725 D4) on the 11th and at Timot's Pan, Chamabonda vlei, a week later (CB).

At least two wintering **Barn Swallows** *Hirundo rustica* hawked insects with **Grey-rumped Swallows** *Pseudhirundo griseopyga* near Gateway School, Harare (1730 D2), on 17 June (TS). Hundreds fed over newly irrigated land at Marondera North (1831 B1) on 30 October (AD). A male **Blue Swallow** *H. atrocaerulea* in the Honde Valley near Aberfoyle Lodge on 5 September (MS) was probably moving upwards onto the Nyanga grasslands for the summer. From 25-31 October at least 54 were counted in the Nyanga area from Connemara southwards to Erin Forest and Pungwe Drift in the 1832 B2, B3 and B4 squares. The largest concentrations were 17 on the Mare-Pungwe-Nyangani circular drive on the 25th and *c*. 11 in the Inyangombe-Chawomera-Udu area the following day (IR).

A **Greater Striped Swallow** *Cecropis cucullata* was over-wintering near Osborne Dam, Mutare area (1832 C4), on 11 June (GD). At least three **Sand Martins** *Riparia riparia* were at burrows in a vertical sand bank in Zambezi NP (1725 D4) on the early date of 10 August. One overwintered at this site in June the previous year (CB). Many newly-arrived **Banded Martins** *R. cincta* were over the Umguza fields (1928 D3) on 19 October (JV).

A **Eurasian Golden Oriole** *Oriolus oriolus* was at Mandara on the very early date of 7 September (JBa). In June **African Golden Orioles** *O. auratus* were wintering at Victoria Falls on the 11th (ARb) and 19th (JW) and Mutare on the 22nd (GD); another was in Zambezi NP on 10 August (CB).

A pair of **White-necked Ravens** *Corvus albicollis* in the National Botanic Gardens, Harare (1731 C3), on 30 November (TW) was a highly unusual record. In July a pair of **Grey Penduline-tits** *Anthoscopus caroli* was at Hippo Pools Camp (TN) where infrequently seen, and some were well out of range at Kanyemba (1530 C2†) (TC) possibly having moved across the valley floor from the south.

African Red-eyed Bulbuls *Pycnonotus nigricans* are scarce vagrants to the extreme northwest and one was found at Victoria Falls Safari Lodge (1725 D4†) on 19 October (CB). Out of range **Eastern Nicators** *Nicator gularis* were further downstream than normal at Kanyemba (1530 C2†) in July (TC) and were seen frequently at Iganyana Tented Camp (1826 D2†) in November (DSi, JV). A **Miombo Rock-thrush** *Monticola angolensis* was at Lomagundi College, Chinhoyi (1730 A3), on 4 October (JMk). South of Rhodes Nyanga Hotel (1832 B3†) on 29 October a pair was in seemingly unsuitable habitat of dense wattle, then moving onto open ground with isolated *Cussonia* clumps. The male carried insects from the wattle so chicks were probably nearby (IR).

A **White-throated Robin-chat** *Cossypha humeralis* was in the National Botanic Gardens on 31 August (KD). Unusual at high altitude in mid-winter was a **White-starred Robin** *Pogonocichla stellata* at Leopard Rock Hotel, Vumba (1932 B2), on 20 June (GD). A couple on the road south of Gleneagles (1832 B2) on 31 October opportunistically stole a meal of insects caught by swarms of red driver ants (IR). A **Bearded Scrub-robin** *Erythropygia quadrivirgata* was out of range at Ewanrigg Botanical Gardens (1731 C2†) on 16 July (DDe).

A **Common Whitethroat** *Sylvia communis* singing on Monavale vlei on 18 October (KD) is quite possibly the first October record for this country. **Yellow-breasted Apalis**

Apalis flavida were first noted in the Lake Chivero area in the late 1990s and have been reported only spasmodically since; one was at Kuimba Shiri on 30 November (TC). **Burnt-necked Eremomelas** *Eremomela usticollis* at Kazungula (1725 C4†) on 10 June (SC) were unusual although reported from the neighbouring 1725 D3 square in May 2015.

Since **Wing-snapping Cisticolas** *Cisticola ayresii* are scarce now in the Harare area, it was good to find them southeast of Purdon Dam on the open hill-slopes of the Pungwe (1832 B4) on 25 October (IR).

Grey Tit Flycatchers *Myioparus plumbeus* were recorded at Bally Vaughan Game Park (1731 C2) early in June (GP) and at Victoria Falls in July (WvS). A **Pale Batis** *Batis soror* pair in the canopy of an *Acacia abyssinica* at Leopard Rock (1932 B2†) on 20 June (GD) is an exciting new bird for our side of the Vumba. Eggs were found on the Mozambique side many years ago (Harwin *et al*. 1994. *Honeyguide* **40**, Supplement 1, page 35). Another record comes from the Aberfoyle Golf Course on 12 September, a part of these extensive tea estates where not noted previously (MS).

Black-throated Wattle-eyes *Platysteira peltata* were slightly out of range at Ewanrigg (1731 C2†) on 19 July (IR) and Banket (1730 A4†) on 21 October (DSm). **African Paradise Flycatchers** *Terpsiphone viridis* of the subspecies *granti* were in good numbers in Gonarezhou in June and July, with the males displaying full length tails (GD, CS); one at Muchaniwa Pan on 1 August (DS) was probably also of that race.

Rosy-throated Longclaws *Macronyx ameliae* are actively extending their range in Lomagundi with the latest record coming from Banket (1730 A4†) on 13 November (DSm). Following their arrival in the Victoria Falls area on 20 October many **Lesser Grey Shrikes** *Lanius minor* were on Chamabonda vlei on 23 November and four in Zambezi NP on the 27th. **Red-backed Shrikes** *L. collurio* were also in good numbers on Chamabonda vlei on the 23rd (CB). A **Crimson-breasted Shrike** *Laniarius atrococcineus* on Zambezi Drive on 2 July was DT's closest record to Victoria Falls town in over 20 years of residence; another, or the same, was also seen there on 14 September (CB).

Retz's Helmet-shrikes *Prionops retzii* were found at Lake Chivero on 23 August (IR) and one in a Mount Hampden garden (1730 D3) on 15 November seemed to be associating with **Green Wood-hoopoes** *Phoeniculus purpureus* (ND). **Common Myna** *Acridotheres tristis* records from Mana Pools NP on 18 October comprised three at Ingwe Pan (formerly Skull Pan) (1529 C4†) (J-MB) and one at Kavinga (1629 A2†) (SH); three were at Bumi Hills (1628 C4†) on the same date (TT). One was a new bird in IR's Newlands garden on 8 September.

At least 40 **Yellow-billed Oxpeckers** *Buphagus africanus* were on buffalo at Senuko (2031 D2) on 20 September (CS). First reported from Imire in November and December 2019, **Red-billed Oxpeckers** *B. erythrorynchus* were noted again in the second week of June (RT). Nine were on Chinyika Ranch, east of Kwekwe (1830 C3†), on 24 August with subsequent sightings on game and cattle (UL). This is particularly interesting as the Atlas shows an isolated population in the neighbouring 1829 D2 Battlefields QDS, and Irwin (1981, *Birds of Zimbabwe*, p. 364) commented, 'A relict population may still exist near [Kwekwe] that survived into the 1940s and mid-1950s, but its range has continued to contract.' To muddy the waters a little, UL stated about 20 were released onto the ranch in 1991. There were no natural oxpeckers there at the time, although it has been confirmed a population still existed about 20 km to the west (i.e. nearer Kwekwe) on Mopani Park Farm. So it seems these latest sightings could be from the original population, the introduced birds or a mixture of both. Whatever their origins their Midlands territory now extends eastwards beyond 30°E.

In the 1832 B2 Troutbeck square, two **Gurney's Sugarbirds** *Promerops gurneyi* were in the upper Inyangombe River catchment on 27 October and four were on proteas at World's View on the 28th (IR). This under-reported bird is well worth monitoring.

Several **Marico Sunbirds** *Cinnyris mariquensis* at Lilfordia School (1730 D4) on 17 August (AS) were on the northern edge of their range. A male **Purple-banded Sunbird** *C. bifasciatus* spent all winter in the Borrowdale Race Course stables area feeding on the yellow flowers of the Mauritius Thorn. It was still present on 3 September but disappeared once the flowers had finished (IR). A November record from the Chilo Gorge area (2132 A2†) (GS) adds another square to this sunbird's fragmented Gonarezhou distribution. **Variable Sunbirds** *C. venustus* were recorded at Mutoko (1732 A3†) in July (AK). This is an under-reported area and it is not known when they first reached there, having presumably come from the south.

A male **Collared Sunbird** *Hedydipna collaris* at Mzari on the northern edge of Chinhoyi (1730 A3†) on 13 October (JMk) was a little south of its known range. A pair of **Western Violet-backed Sunbirds** *Anthreptes longuemarei* made the most of Ewanrigg's mid-winter flowering aloes and was still present on 19 July (IR).

House Sparrows *Passer domesticus* are in decline in many areas but large numbers were in Nyanga village (1832 B1) on 27 October (IR). **Scaly-feathered Finches** *Sporopipes squamifrons* near Mahenya (2132 A4†) in August (J-MB) follow the first southeast lowveld record at Fishans (2132 A3) in 2015. This finch could well be resident there now, far removed to the east and south of its traditional range.

The **Thick-billed Weaver's** *Amblyospiza albifrons* true status at Lake Mutirikwe has been a matter of conjecture for some while so of significance were *c*.30 photographed at Norma Jean's Lodge (2031 A3†) on 6 July (PS). Early nest-building by **Village Weavers** *Ploceus cucullatus* was noted again this year with males in full breeding plumage starting their work on 11 July in Chisipite (TW). **Red-headed Weavers** *Anaplectes rubriceps* at Kanyemba (1530 C2†) in July (TC) were further downstream than noted previously.

About four **Orange-winged Pytilias** *Pytilia afra* were at Timot's Pan, Chamabonda vlei (1725 C3†), on 26 August and one of the sparse northeast population of **Violet-eared Waxbills** *Uraeginthus granatina* was on the same vlei on 23 November (CB). **Red-throated Twinspots** *Hypargos niveoguttatus* are noted occasionally at Ewanrigg and such was the case on 19 July (IR).

A **Grey Waxbill** *Estrilda perreini* on Odzi Farm (1832 C4†) on 18 July was well out of range, although one in thick riverine bush a month previously that was not positively identified (MB) may indicate a resident population has established there. A pair was at the more likely venue of Wamba Dam, Aberfoyle (1832 B4), on 31 October. A large flock of *c*.120 **Yellow-bellied Waxbills** *Coccopygia quartinia*, some of which carried nesting material, was near the Pungwe Drift cottages (1832 B4) on 29 October (IR).

A lone **Magpie Mannikin** *Lonchura fringilloides* was at Ewanrigg on 19 July (PD per IR). **Lemon-breasted Canaries**

Crithagra citrinipectus are seldom reported these days but were found in the Chilo Sand Forest (2132 A2) on 13 October (TM). Six **Black-eared Seedeaters** *Crithagra mennelli* were noted at Mazuri Ranch, Kwekwe (1830 C4†), on 12 August (DKk).

Arrivals

Abdim's Stork 24 October Harare (DS, KvL), 1 November Gosho Park (AD), 8 November Chinhoyi (JMk), 9 November Lilfordia (1730 D4) (AS), 12 November Masoka (MZ), 13 November Umguza (1928 D3); **Steppe Eagle** *Aquila nipalensis* 14 November Umguza (JV), 17 November Kanga Pan (SCh), 20 November Kennedy 1 Pan (1827 C3) (SH); **Steppe Buzzard** *Buteo buteo* 6 October Hippo Pools (JWd), 9 October Matetsi (1725 C4), 12 October Iganyana (1826 D2) (JV), 14 October Marondera North (AD); **Amur Falcon** *F. amurensis* 5 November Harare (JM).

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* 5 August Thetford Estate (DMacD), 10 August Marondera North (AD), 14 August Guvalala Pan (PD), 16 August Mazvikadei (BM) and Mazuri Ranch (UL), 17 August Deka River, Hwange NP (CBr) and Mongwe Camp (LMcD); **Wood Sandpiper** *Tringa glareola* 24 July Umguza (1928 D3) (KW), 8 August Victoria Falls (CB), 10 August Harare (DMacD) and Marondera North (AD), 14 August Guvalala Pan (PD), 16 August Mazuri Ranch (UL) 17 August Deka River, Hwange NP (CBr) and Mongwe Camp (LMcD); **Common Greenshank** 1 August Musango (SE), 16 August Mazuri Ranch (1830 C4†) (UL), 18 August Mongwe Camp, 23 August Lake Chivero (IL); **Curlew Sandpiper** *Calidris ferruginea* 30 August Mazvikadei (1730 A2†) (BM); **Little Stint** 10 August Marondera North (AD), 25 August Victoria Falls (CB); **Ruff** *Philomachus pugnax* 14 August Guvalala Pan (PD), 30 August Mazvikadei (BM); **Rock Pratincole** *Glareola nuchalis* 3 August Zambezi NP (CBr).

African Cuckoo 10 October Crowborough Ponds (IL); **Red-chested Cuckoo** *Cuculus solitarius* 20 September Juliasdale (MA), 24 September near Marondera (SC), 29 September Harare (IR), 1 October Embakwe Dam (2027 D4) (CJ), 6 October Vumba (PM) and Imire (JT), 9 October Hippo Pools (TN), 10 October Masoka (MZ) and Mazuri Ranch (UL), 15 October Chinhoyi (JMk), 16 October Gonarezhou (CS); **Black Cuckoo** 26 October Dete vlei (1826 D2) (JV), 6 November Chisasiko, Mana Pools (1529 C2) (NH), 12 November Masoka (MZ), 17 November Victoria Falls (DT); **Levaillant's Cuckoo** *Clamator levaillantii* 11 October Harare (AB) and Zambezi NP (CB); **Jacobin Cuckoo** *C. jacobinus* 24 October Harare (DS), 12 November Masoka (MZ), 13 November Victoria Falls (CB); **African Emerald Cuckoo** 11 October Penhalonga (1832 D3) (PM), 13 October Chilo Sand Forest (TM), 24 October Chinhoyi (JMk), 26 October Hippo Pools (TN); **Klaas's Cuckoo** 6 August Masoka (MZ), 28 August Umguza (AR), Mazvikadei (DKk), Harare (MH) and Marondera (AD), 3 September Zambezi NP (1725 D3) (JV), 5 September Hippo Pools (IL); **Diderick Cuckoo** *Chrysococcyx caprius* 22 October Harare (BL) and Chegutu (DKw), 25 October Bumi Hills (TT), 6 November Nyamhunga, Kariba (CM); **Black Coucal** *Centropus grillii* 25 November Banket (1730 A4) (DSm).

Pennant-winged Nightjar *Macrodipteryx vexillarius* 30 September Imire (JT); **African Pygmy Kingfisher** *Ispidina picta* 11 October Harare (DS), 23 October Aberfoyle (MS); **Grey-headed Kingfisher** 27 September Kuimba Shiri (TC), 5 October Chinhoyi (JMk), 11 October Zambezi NP (CB), 13 October Mazuri Ranch (UL); **European Bee-eater** 16 September Harare (IR), 20 September Sebakwe area (AK), 24 September Hwange Airport (1826 C4) (JV) and Chinhoyi (JMk), 28 September Victoria Falls (DT), 29 September Mongwe (LMcD) and Mutare (JC); **European Roller** *Coracias garrulus* 21 November Hwange Main Camp (JV), 25 November Victoria Falls (CBr), 28 November Chilo Gorge area (GS); **Broad-billed Roller** *Eurystomus glaucurus* 27 September Sinanga Pan, Hwange NP (1827 C3) (PD), 29 September Victoria Falls (DT), 4 October Chinhoyi (JMk) and Malilangwe (EvdW), 5 October Harare (LMcD) and Hippo Pools (TN), 6 October Matetsi (1725 C4) (JV), 7 October Gonarezhou (CS), 10 October Kanga Pan (CM), 11 October Rifa (EB), 12 October Mazuri Ranch (UL) and Vumba (PM).

Barn Swallow 2 October Marondera (1831 B1) (AD), 3 October Harare (RC), 7 October Victoria Falls (CB); **White-throated Swallow** *Hirundo albigularis* 25 August Harare (JBa); **Red-breasted Swallow** *Cecropis semirufa* 24 July Guvalala Pan (CBr); **House Martin** *Delichon urbicum* 7 October Victoria Falls (CB), 20 October Umguza (JV); **African Golden Oriole** 18 September Mazvikadei (BM); **Garden Warbler** *Sylvia borin* 25 October Harare South (*The Babbler*); **Willow Warbler** *Phylloscopus trochilus* 6 October Matetsi (1725 D3) (JV), 8 October Mazvikadei (BM), 10 October Victoria Falls (CB), 14 October Marondera North (AD); **Spotted Flycatcher** *Muscicapa striata* 3 October Victoria Falls (CB), 6 November Harare (JM) and Hwange NP (DS), 14 November Umguza (JV); **African Paradise Flycatcher** 19 September Harare (JBw), 20 September Sebakwe area (AK) and Mazvikadei (BM), 23 September Mwenezi Conservation Area (2130 D2) (GT), Hippo Pools (MBe) and Chinhoyi (JMk), 24 September Victoria Falls (DT), 26 September Musango (SE); **Tree Pipit** *Anthus trivialis* 1 November Gosho Park (AD); **Lesser Grey Shrike** 20 October Chamabonda vlei (CB), 6 November Hwange NP (DS); **Red-backed Shrike** 5 November Harare (J-MB), 14 November Zambezi NP (PD); **Violet-backed Starling** *Cinnyricinclus leucogaster* 15 August Victoria Falls (CB).

Departures

Capped Wheatear *Oenanthe pileata* 23 November Chamabonda vlei (CB).

Observers

Matt Austen (MA), Elspeth Baillie (EB), Rachel Bain (RB), Colin Baker (CB), Julia Baker (JB), James Ball (JBa), Miriam Bell (MBe), Jamin Bews (JBw), Jean-Michel Blake (J-MB), Vernon Booth (VB), Mark Brewer (MB), Charles Brightman (CBr), Allie Butchart (AB), Ken Butchart (KB), Chris du Cane (CdC), Steve Chinhoi SCh), Ronnie Chirimuta (RC), Stan Chizipi (SC), Jane Clegg (JC), Graham Cochrane (GC), Tracey Couto (TC), Asher Dare (AD), Neil Deacon (ND), Dave Dell (DDe), Paula Dell (PD), Tom Dibb (TD), Ken Dixon (KD), Gary Douglas (GD), Steve Edwards (SE), Brian Ellement (BE), Jessica Folkertsen (JF), Jen Francis (JeF), Jonathan Francis (JoF), Mark Hadingham (MH), Phillippa Hair (PH), Sean Hind (SH), Nkululeko Hlongwane (NH), Teig Howson (TH), Courtney Johnson (CJ), Abigail Karimanzira (AK), Dean Kendall (DK), Doug Kok (DKk), Karl van Laeren (KvL), Barry Launder (BL), Innes Louw (IL), Ursula Lowe (UL), Jim Mackie (JMk), Ali MacDonald AMacD), Doug MacDonald (DMacD), Roger MacDonald (RMacD), Luke McDonald (LMcD), Leslee Maasdorp (LM), Peter Magosvongwe (PM), Annelie Martens (AM), Howard Matthews (HM), Norman Mellett (NM), Cliffy Mhandu (CM), Bev Morgan (BM), Jimmy Muropa (JM), Thomas Mutombeni (TM), Chris Myers

(CMy), Bhekizulu Ncube (BN), Tadious Ndadzira (TN). Carl Nicholson (CN), Sean Nicolle (SN), Dan Peel (DP), Julia Pierini (JP), Gordon Putterill (GP), Ali Randell (AR), Rob Rees (RR), Ian Riddell (IR), Mitchell Riley (MR), Allen Roberts (ARb), Morgan Saineti (MS), Dane Simmonds (DSi), Patience Simuzosha (PS), Doug Smith (DSm), Justin Seymour-Smith (JSS), Wouter van Spijker (WvS), Atherton Squire (AS), Clive Stockil (CS), Glenn Stockil (GS), Lowden Stoole (LS), Trevor Stoole (TS), Debbie Swales (DS), Tat Taingarufu (TT), Pete Taylor (PT), Gilly Thornycroft (GT), Darryl Tiran (DT), Sean Torr (ST), Judy Travers (JT), Reilly Travers (RT), James Varden (JV), Peter Ward (PW), Elsabe van der Westhuizen (EvdW), Johnny Whitfield (JW), Jan Wood (JWd), Tony Wood (TW), Ken Worsley (KW), MacKenzie Zirota (MZ). *The Babbler* – Newsletter of BirdLife Zimbabwe.

COLIN BAKER, *Victoria Falls. Email*: pratincole306@hotmail.com

BIRDLIFE ZIMBABWE COUNCIL 2020-2021

President	Neil Deacon	neilrobindeacon@gmail.com	0772-363369
Vice-President	Ken Worsley	worsley.ken@gmail.com	0773-777142
Hon. Treasurer	David Scott	dashcott@gmail.com	0772 -572966
Acting Hon. Secretary	Paula Dell	paula.dell@strachansphoto.com	0712-610746
Councillor	James Ball	jameszwe@gmail.com	024-2494409
			0772-310351
Councillor	Dave Dell	david.dell@strachansphoto.com	0712-630152
Councillor	Richard Hoare	rhwildlife@gmail.com	0771-052888
Councillor, Mashonaland	Innes Louw	hararebirdwalks@gmail.com	0776-190795
Councillor, Matabeleland	John Brebner	brebnerj@acolchem.co.zw	029-2242634
			0782-781108
Councillor, Education	Leslee Maasdorp	dorothywakeling@gmail.com	024-2883316

BLZ Member Consultants

Library & Wetlands	Dorothy Wakeling	dorothywakeling@gmail.com	024-2304298
			0772-376506
National Membership	Paula Dell	paula.dell@strachansphoto.com	0712-610746
Waterbirds, SABAP 2	Ian Riddell	gemsaf@mango.zw	0772-117054
Special Species Survey	Peta Ditchburn	specialspecies@blz.co.zw	029-244596
			0775-940714

Publications

Editor, *Honeyguide*	Brian Marshall	brian.marshall01@gmail.com	
***Honeyguide* Design & Production**	Vacant		
Editor, *The Babbler*	Ian Riddell	gemsaf@mango.zw	0772-117054

BLZ NATIONAL OFFICE

Chief Executive Officer	Julia Pierini	juliapierini@birdlifezimbabwe.org	0772-894562
Finance & Administration	Sylvia Muzavazi	sylvia@blz.co.zw	024-2481496
Conservation Officer, Special Species	Fadzai Matsvimbo	fadzai@blz.co.zw	024-2481496
Research Projects	Togarasei Fakarayi	toga@blz.co.zw	024-2481496
Messenger/Caretaker	Vengai Dengu		024-2481496

35 Clyde Road, Eastlea, Harare – PO Box RVL 100, Runiville, Harare
Telephones: +263 (024) 2481496 – E-mail: birds@zol.co.zw
Web: www.birdlifezimbabwe.org – Facebook: www.Facebook.com/BirdLifeZimbabwe

THREATENED

Lilian's Lovebirds

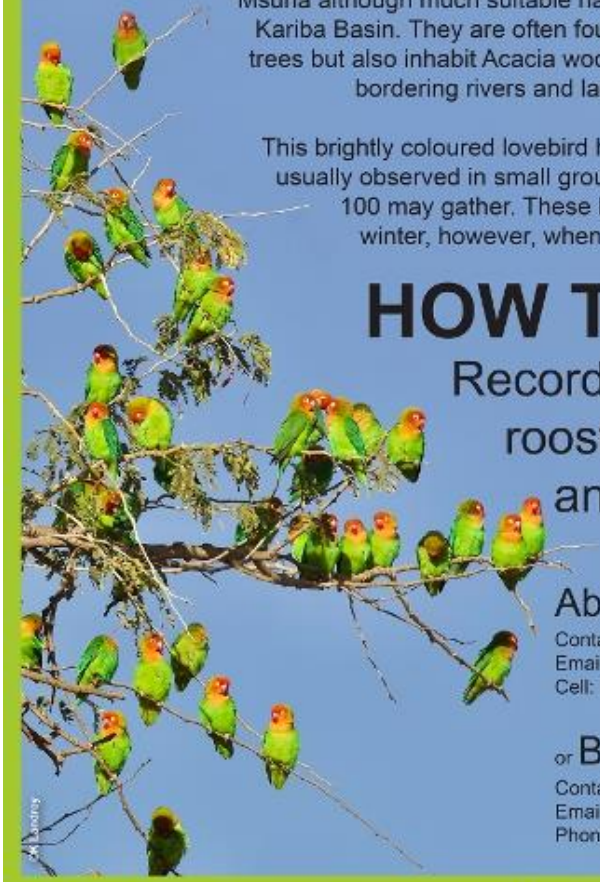
MAJOR THREATS:

- **HABITAT LOSS - Deforestation for agriculture**
- **EXPLOITATION - nest destruction for live bird trade**
- **DAMMING OF ZAMBEZI - flooding of feeding grounds**
- **POISONING OF WATERHOLES - Illegal pest control and poaching**

Lovebirds get their name from the strong bond which forms between a male and female. Pairs of lovebirds spend much of their time close together, regularly preening each other`s feathers. They are in fact monogamous (they have only one mate during a breeding season, or throughout the breeding life of a pair).

In Zimbabwe, Lilian's lovebirds occur in the Middle Zambezi below the escarpment from the Angwa and Hunyani Rivers westwards to Binga and Msuna although much suitable habitat has been lost within the Kariba Basin. They are often found in woodlands of mopane trees but also inhabit Acacia woodlands on flood plains, forest bordering rivers and lakes, and in fig trees.

This brightly coloured lovebird has a gregarious nature and is usually observed in small groups, although sometimes up to 100 may gather. These large flocks only occur during winter, however, when the birds are not breeding.



Endemic Distribution

Classified as Near Threatened (NT) on the IUCN Red List, and listed on Appendix II of CITES, the total population of Lilian`s Lovebirds has been significantly reduced by habitat loss and exploitation. Like many other lovebirds, this stunning bird is captured for the local and international cage-bird trade. In addition, the cereal-eating lovebird is considered a pest by farmers, and is persecuted as a result. (Lilian's lovebirds feed primarily on grass seed, particularly millet and sorghum seeds, which is picked off the ground, or plucked from the ripening heads of plants).

HOW TO HELP:

Record sightings, roost and nest sites and report to:

Abigail Karimanzira
Contact details:
Email: karimanziraabigail@gmail.com
Cell: +263 771 868 706

or **BirdLife Zimbabwe**
Contact details:
Email: birds@zol.co.zw
Phone: +263 24 248148

BirdLife Zimbabwe promotes the survival of wild birds and biodiversity in Zimbabwe and elsewhere for both their intrinsic value and for the enjoyment of future generations. This is achieved through programmes to increase awareness of biodiversity and the need to protect their habitats through policy, advocacy, education and training. Biodiversity, ecosystems and ecosystem services – our natural capital – must be preserved as the foundations for a sustainable future for us all.

To learn more about BirdLife Zimbabwe`s Nature conservation programmes and to support them:

www.birdlifezimbabwe.org or email: birds@zol.co.zw