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Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chiro, K.K. The current status of breeding pairs of Black Storks at Sebakwe Poort IBA, Kwekwe, Zimbabwe	41-42
Calvert, G & Calvert, G. Observations on a pair of Yellow-billed Kites	43
Riddell, I.C. International Waterbird Census, Zimbabwe – 2023	44-49
Riddell, I.C. Ninth report of the BirdLife Zimbabwe Rarities Committee	50-53
Brebner, J. Report of the Black Eagle Survey 2023	54
van Zyl, G. Pink-throated Twinspot: A New Species for Zimbabwe	55
Blake, J.-M. Another record of Pink-throated Twinspot	55
Short Communications	
K. Dixon. White-backed Night-heron: An exciting twelve hours at Hippo Pools	56
I.C. Riddell. On the distribution of the Pennant-winged Nightjar in southern Botswana	57
I.C. Riddell. White-browed Robin-chat in Reverse	57
I.C. Riddell. Wood Pipit in unexpected habitat	57-58
J.-M. Blake. A Scarce Woodward's Batis Record	59
Baker, C.T. Field Observations: December 2022 to May 2023	60-68
Travel	
B. Marshall. Birding at Mwanza, Tanzania	69-70



GUIDELINES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

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The current status of breeding pairs of Black Storks at Sebakwe Poort IBA, Kwekwe, Zimbabwe

Kumbirai Karen Chiro

Introduction

The Black Stork *Ciconia nigra* has a wide distribution across southern Eurasia from Portugal to northern China, migrating south into Africa, India and southern China, the largest breeding range of any species of stork (Hancock *et al.* 1992). There is an isolated non-migratory breeding population in southern Africa, estimated to consist of 1 000 breeding pairs, with 100-500 pairs in Zimbabwe, at least 200 in South Africa, c.10 in Eswatini (Swaziland) and 10-50 in Lesotho (Anderson 2005). Thus, 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; Jessop *et al.* 2021). They are considered to be uncommon residents; sightings of this species are few and there is a need for their population size to be determined.

Black Storks are habitat specialists, not very adaptable to habitat changes and very sensitive to any form of disturbance, so this investigation assessed the impact of land use change on a population of Black Storks. The project initially intended to encompass the Kwekwe area, including the Midlands Black Rhino Conservancy, but the high incidence of mining and human disturbance in the area meant that no Black Storks were present. The project therefore focused on the population and viability of Black Storks at Sebakwe Poort only.

Study Area

Sebakwe Poort, a 262 ha area of land, is a natural landform where the Sebakwe River cuts through a sandstone hill, forming a gorge. It is approximately 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. The two cliffs overlook the Sebakwe River, which it flows through from east to west. The sandstone in the cliffs has been eroded to form many ledges, holes, and nooks and crannies. The area was declared to be an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA) on the basis of seven breeding pairs of Black Storks on the cliffs (Childes & Mundy 1998).

Nine and seven breeding pairs of Black Storks were found in Sebakwe Poort in 1996 and 1997 respectively. However, since the area was designated as an IBA there has not been any monitoring and the status of the nesting Black Storks was unknown. Over the years, mining activities along the Sebakwe River have increased, since Kwekwe is a mining town, and this has led to pollution of the river and compromising biodiversity within the area.

Methods

To establish whether Black Storks are still nesting at Sebakwe Poort, members of the team climbed both the north- and south-facing cliffs and searched for active nests and sightings of storks using binoculars and a telescope. Potentially active nests were identified and photographed, and when Black Storks were sighted the method used by Jessop *et al.* (2021) was used to record their activities. The study was carried out three times, in March, May and October 2022.

Members of the team sat on top of the south-facing cliff under the shade of a tree at an appropriate vantage point where the activities and behaviours of the Black Stork pair could be recorded. The south-facing cliff was climbed every morning at dawn and recording was conducted from 0600 to 1700 hours so as to maximise the data collection period. The times when the Black Stork pair flew in and the courtship behaviour of the pair were observed and recorded and the sexes determined using differently shaped areas of scarlet skin around their eyes. Other team members occasionally climbed the north-facing cliff in order to check if there were any storks present on the other side. All the observations were noted down on a recording sheet.

Results

Only a single pair of Black Storks was observed at Sebakwe Poort, a drastic decline from the seven pairs that were recorded in 1997. This pair always flew in and perched on the south-facing cliff around midday on all the days that data were collected (Fig. 1). A total of five Black Stork nests were recorded but only one of them was freshly made, and the pair spent most of the day perched on an old nest situated under a small tree.

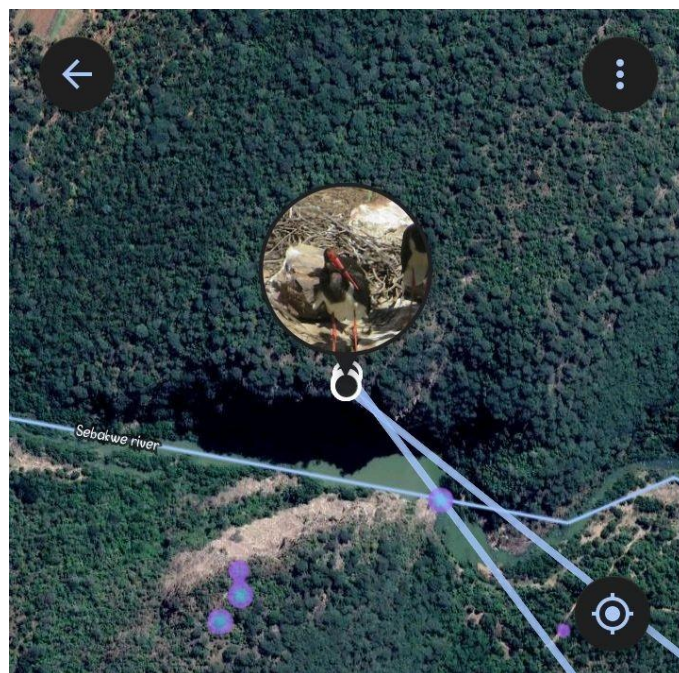


Fig.1. Location of the Black Stork nest on the south-facing cliff at Sebakwe Poort

The pair mostly stood still on the south facing cliff but during the observations in March, which was probably the beginning of the breeding season, [Irwin (1981) lists most breeding records in May-June], the male displayed courtship behaviour. This included bill-clattering where the male danced around the female whilst also bobbing his head up and down. Copulation occurred at five-second intervals and was coupled with the

courtship behaviour. Regrettably, there was no evidence that the birds were able to lay eggs or raise chicks.

Other activities also included preening and the pair always flew together from one point to the next on the cliff. On one occasion a stork was harassed by a Lanner Falcon *Falco biarmicus*, which also used the cliffs for breeding purposes; a pair of these falcons was recorded with two juveniles.

Discussion

The drastic decline in the number of Black Storks nesting on the Sebakwe Poort is almost certainly a result of the increased levels of small-scale gold mining along the Sebakwe and other rivers in the area. This has compromised the integrity of the river and the biodiversity found in the ecosystem. Siltation from small-scale gold mining has had a major impact on fish populations elsewhere (Alhassan *et al.* 2002; Mol & Ouboter 2004) and fish populations have probably decreased in the rivers around Kwekwe to the point that they cannot support many Black Storks. According to Muringanzira *et al.* (2022), illegal gold panning has emerged as one of the major concerns for water quality in Zimbabwe, despite its potential contribution in terms of economic gains. There is an urgent need for investigations into the water quality of the Sebakwe River and the impact of gold mining on aquatic biota and fish that is the source of food for the Black Storks. Further work on the storks is also needed to determine whether or not the pair that was seen was the only one breeding in the area. Other pairs might have been late breeders or early breeders.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to African Bird Club for giving me the opportunity to pursue my passion of being a researcher and a conservationist, and special thanks to BirdLife Zimbabwe for allowing me to use their resources and making it possible for me to attend the Pan-African Ornithological Congress.

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Observations on a pair of Yellow-billed Kites

Gwen and Geoff Calvert

While making observations for the Garden Bird Survey in 2021 we were able to make continuous observations of a pair of breeding Yellow-billed Kites *Milvus aegyptius*. These included mating, perching, feeding, flying patterns and nesting habits. We first became aware of their presence when we heard the unmistakable, high pitched call, coming from a high branch of a dead eucalyptus tree next door on Kent Lane, in Esigodini. This was a perfect viewpoint for us as we could observe them from our front lawn. We felt sure it was the same pair as that from the previous season that had built, or refurbished, a nest in a large chir pine *Pinus roxburghii* tree about 100 m down the Kent Lane road from the perching tree.

It was fortunate that the pair chose that particular eucalyptus tree, which made it easy for me to follow their movements. They also, fortuitously, chose the ZESA pole outside our front gate as a feeding perch. We were able to observe the types of food they had caught and watched the feeding procedure – gripping the catch in one talon and tearing off the flesh. We were able to observe many matings, which occurred before they took up residence in their nest. I also observed flights with nesting materials being carried in their beaks. During this process they were badly harassed by Pied Crows *Corvus albus* that happened to have a colony of nests in a nearby eucalyptus tree. I watched the aerial battles of the ‘dive bombing’ crows but eventually the kites were able to get the message through to the pestiferous crows that they were ‘top birds.’

Each evening as we went for our customary walk along Kent Lane, we were able to observe the kites on their nest during the ‘sitting process’ and observe the comings and goings of each mate with food. The first sighting occurred on 26 August 2021 at 12h30 when the pair flew over from the southwest. The next sighting was of two birds circling over King Haven Complex on the morning of 3 September, and then on the afternoon of the 8th. Whilst the kites were investigating the nesting site on the morning of the 4th, at 07h00, they were harassed by many crows. They flew over again on the morning of 5 September and on the morning of the 13th they were harassed by smaller birds and

crows, and again on the 14th when more than 20 were diving at them.

We were fortunate in being able to observe the various matings of the pair, as they chose their favourite perch high up in the dead eucalyptus tree, in full view from our lawn. We knew when this was happening by the particularly high pitched call of the female each time the male mounted her. We heard this call a number of times, as follows:

Date	Time	Frequency
7 September	morning	twice
8 September	morning	twice
13 September	morning	twice
21 September	afternoon	once
22 September	afternoon	once
28 September	afternoon	once
30 September	morning	once
2 October	morning	once

On 27 September at midday, a commotion in the dead eucalyptus tree revealed an intruding kite perched on a lower branch being ‘dive bombed’ by the resident pair, with much noisy calling and diving. Eventually the 2-m long dead branch broke, having been knocked down by the continual impact of the ‘dive bombing.’ The intruder was eventually driven away.

A bird was observed on the nest on the afternoon of 8 October. One of the kites was circling on the afternoon of 4 November and on the morning of the 9th one was harassed by a Fork-tailed Drongo *Dicrurus adsimilis*. The kites were last seen in this vicinity on 13 November and we suspect that crows drove them from their nest.

Two birds, (one large and one smaller (a juvenile?)) circled over the nest area and then flew east on 2 January 2022. We think they were memorising the nest site for next season? A single bird perched on the favourite tree on the 11th and 14th and on the 23rd one was heard calling in the vicinity of the nest.

Gwen & Geoff Calvert, *Esigodini*.

(Published posthumously.)

Editor’s note: This report draws attention to the possible impacts of Pied Crows on the breeding of raptors in suburban areas, small towns and rural settlements. Could harassment by crows be a significant factor in the decline of large raptors in these areas?

International Waterbird Census, Zimbabwe – 2023

Ian Riddell

A total of 31 sites were counted on Zimbabwe's International Waterbird Census in 2023 (Appendix A), 28 in summer and 20 in winter. Summer counts were conducted in January, February, April, September, October and November, and winter counts in May, July and August. The status of the water at sites is shown in the appendix with four sites being over-flooded in summer and one in winter. Two sites were dry in summer. Rainfall was patchy, some areas being flooded whilst others were below average. The only Ramsar site covered was Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary.

Participants are encouraged to count any sudden and significant influx that occurs at any time of the year. Coverage of our wetland sites relies on the voluntary services of our members and their often-limited resources so grateful thanks are due to the 59 participants, including those simply listed as BLZ members. Special thanks are due to those individuals who undertook extensive coverage in Hwange and other sites.

Results

A total of 12 447 birds of 150 species was recorded, including one unidentified raptor, three unidentified waders and six unidentified widowbirds. Vultures are also included in this report. The results from counts made at more than one site are listed below; the values at the end of each represent the number of birds and the number of sites at which they were recorded, i.e., (8/2) means that 8 birds were counted at 2 sites.

Phasianidae

Natal Spurfowl *Pternistis natalensis*: Summer: 1 each at Kent Estate dams and Mbonisa weir (2/2).

Anatidae

White-faced Duck *Dendrocygna viduata*: Summer: ranged from 1-60 (average 17.1) at 16 sites (308/16). Kent Estate had 35 in January and 18 in February. Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary had 14 in February and 41 in November (308/16). Winter: 1-15 (average 7.3) from 6 sites, then 160 at Kent Estate dams and 268 at Biri Dam (472/8).

White-backed Duck *Thalassornis leuconotus*: Summer: 2 at Ngamo Pans, 3 at Madingazulu Dam and 8 at Sandy Spruit dam (13/3).

Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiaca*: Summer: ranged from 1-292 birds (average 45.7), with higher counts of 65 at Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary in November (5 there in February) and 90 at Ngamo Pans. Kent Estate had 23 in January and 3 in February, and Mandavu Dam had 46 (Jan), 30 (Apr.), 71 (Sep.), 123 (Oct.) and 292 (Nov.) (960/15).

Winter: higher numbers occurred with 1-615 (average 50.6). Mandavu Dam had 57 (May), 78 (July), 38 (Aug.), 71 (Sep.) and 123 (Oct.). Victoria Falls sewage ponds was counted twice in July and had 2 on the 7th and 14 on the 17th (920/17).

Spur-winged Goose *Plectropterus gambensis*: Summer: found in small numbers from 1-7 (36/10).

Winter: higher numbers occurred with 8-109 (average 53.8) with 40 at Kent Estate, 94 at Big Shumba Pan and 109 at Reedbuck Vlei (269/5)

Comb Duck *Sarkidiornis melanotus*: Summer: from 1-6 at 10 sites, followed by 15 at Suni Pan (45/11).

Winter: a wide range of numbers with 1 at Suni Pan, 35 at Fort Rixon Dam and 80 at Kent Estate dams (116/3)

African Pygmy-goose *Nettapus auritus*: Summer: 2 each at Kent Estate and Ngamo Pans, and 3 at Chinga Pan (7/3).

Southern Pochard *Netta erythrophthalma*: Summer: 3 at Marlborough Vlei and 26 at Kent Estate (29/2).

Winter: 19 Kent Estate dams (19/1).

Hottentot Teal *Spatula hottentota*: Summer: 1-6 with 4 at Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary in November and 6 at Marlborough Vlei (19/6).

Winter: 3 at Khami Dam (3/1)

African Black Duck *Anas sparsa*: Summer: 2 at Pongo Dam (2/1).

Winter: 1 at Khami Dam (1/1).

Red-billed Teal *Anas erythrorhyncha*: Summer: 1-350 (average 48.2) from 10 sites, plus 350 at Kent Estate in January, the February figure being 26. Mandavu had 19 (Jan.) and 34 (Nov.) (544/10).

Winter: 3-10 from 4 sites, plus 28 at Khami dam and 270 at Kent Estate (323/6).

Podicipedidae

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*: Summer: single figures of 1-5 at 10 sites, then 10 at Camp Hwange and 63 at Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary in November (99/12).

Winter: low numbers of 1-9 (20/6).

Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis*: 2 at Victoria Falls Sewage Ponds on 7 July was an interesting record as they had occurred at Livingstone sewage ponds in January.

Phoenicopteridae

Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus*: 1 at Mandavu Dam in October and November probably refers to the same bird (2/1).

Cuculidae

Senegal Coucal *Centropus senegalensis*: Summer: 1-2 (4/3).

Winter: 2 at Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary (2/1).

Black Coucal *Centropus grillii*: Summer: 2 at Marlborough Vlei (2/1).

Diderick Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx caprius*: Summer: 3 at Marlborough Vlei (3/1).

Heliornithidae

African Finfoot *Podica senegalensis*: 2 at Big Shumba Pan and 2 at Hippo Pools camp (4/2).

Rallidae

Red-chested Flufftail *Sarothrura rufa*: Summer: 1 at Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary in February and 2 at Marlborough Vlei (3/2).

African Rail *Rallus caerulescens*: Summer: 1 at Marlborough Vlei (1/1).

African Crane *Crexopsis egregia*: Summer: 1 at Marlborough Vlei, 4 at Big Shumba Pan and 10 at Kent Estate in February (15/3).

Spotted Crane *Porzana porzana*: Summer: 1 at Marlborough Vlei (1/1).

Black Crane *Zapornia flavirostra*: Summer: from 1-8 (average 4.9) (39/7).

Winter: 1-6 (average 2.5) (20/8).

Striped Crane *Aenigmatolimnas marginalis*: 10 at Kent Estate in February (10/1).

African Purple Swamphen *Porphyrio madagascariensis*: Summer: 1 each at Kent Estate in February and Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary in November and 5 at Marlborough Vlei (7/3).

Allen's Gallinule *Porphyrio alleni*: Summer: 1 at Chinga Pan and 2 at Marlborough Vlei (3/2).

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*: Summer: ranged from 1-4 (average 2) at 4 sites, then 17 at Marlborough Vlei and 20 at Kent Estate in February (47/6).

Winter: 1-4 (11/4).

Lesser Moorhen *Paragallinula angulata*: Summer: 1-5 at 5 sites then 80 at Kent Estate in February. This has been a good season for this species (91/6).

Winter: 1 at Biri Dam Fishing Site and 2 at Kent Estate (3/2).

Red-knobbed Coot *Fulica cristata*: Summer: 3 and 4 in Hwange (7/2).

Winter: 14 at Khami Dam (14/1).

Gruidae

Grey Crowned Crane *Balearica regulorum*: Summer: 2 at Big Shumba Pan, 2 at Camp Hwange, 3 at Mandavu Dam (Jan.), 4 at Ngamo Pans and 2 at Shumba pumped pan (13/5).

Winter: 2 at Reedbuck Vlei (2/1).

Ciconiidae

Marabou Stork *Leptoptilos crumenifer*: Summer: 1-5 at 5 sites, then 10 at Mandavu Dam in November (there were 5 in January) and 66 at Victoria Falls Sewage Ponds (91/6).

Winter: 1 at Mandavu Dam in July and 38 at Victoria Falls Sewage Ponds on 7 July, with 31 there on 17 July involving a likely recount (70/2).

Yellow-billed Stork *Mycteria ibis*: Summer: 1 at Ngamo Pans, plus Mandavu Dam counts of 11 (Jan.), 7 (Apr.), 10 (Sep.), 17 (Oct.) and 13 (Nov.) (59/2).

Winter: 1-11 at 4 sites with Mandavu Dam counts of 10 (May), 8 (July) and 11 (Aug.) (45/4).

African Openbill *Anastomus lamelligerus*: Summer: 4 at Kent Estate (Jan.), 10 at Suni Pan and 23 at Chinga Pan (37/3).

Winter: 1 at Kent Estate dams and 8 at Suni Pan (9/2).

Abdim's Stork *Ciconia abdimii*: Summer: very low numbers of 5 at Marlborough Vlei and 12 at Ngamo Pans (17/2).

Winter: 3 at Pongo Dam is an unusual winter record (3/1).

Woolly-necked Stork *Ciconia episcopus*: Summer: 3 at Reedbuck Vlei, 11 at Shumba pumped pan and 17 at Ngamo Pans (31/3).

White Stork *Ciconia ciconia*: Summer: 2 each at Reedbuck Vlei and Shumba pumped pan, and 28 at Ngamo Pans (32/3).

Saddle-billed Stork *Ephippiorhynchus senegalensis*: Summer: Kent Estate had 4 in January, Ngamo Pans had 3, and Mandavu Dam had 2 (Apr.), 1 (Sep.), 2 (Oct.) and 3 (Nov.) (15/3).

Winter: 1 at Kent Estate dams (1/1).

Threskiornithidae

African Spoonbill *Platalea alba*: Summer: 2-11 (average 5.3). 4 were at Ngamo Pans, 6 at Kent Estate in January and 11 at Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary in November. Mandavu Dam had 2 (Jan.), 6 (Apr.), 3 (Sep.) 5 (Oct.) and 12 (Nov.) (49/4).

Winter: 1-14 (average 7.8) involving 1 at Chinga Pan, 7 at Khami Dam and 13 at Kent Estate. Mandavu counts were 14 (May), 7 (July) and 5 (Aug.) (47/4).

African Sacred Ibis *Threskiornis aethiopicus*: Summer: numbers ranged from 3-50 (average 14.4). Mandavu Dam recorded 5 (Apr.), 7 (Sep.), 6 (Oct.) and 8 (Nov.) (158/8).

Winter: 4-14 (average 6.7). Mandavu had 7 in May, 4 in July and 5 in August. Victoria Falls Sewage Ponds had 8 & 5 in two July counts (67/7).

Hadeda Ibis *Bostrychia hagedash*: Summer: 3 at Fort Rixon Dam (3/1).

Winter: 2 at Suni Pan, 6 at Fort Rixon Dam and 7 at Khami Dam (15/3).

Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus*: Summer: 1-26 (average 9.1). Mandavu Dam had 4 (Jan.), 13 (Apr.), 10 (Sep.), 4 (Oct.) and 26 (Nov.) (73/4).

Winter: 1-16 (average 5.5), the 16 at Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary in July. Mandavu counts were 3 (May), 1 (July) and 2 (Aug.) (33/4).

Ardeidae

Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*: Summer: 3 at Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary in February (3/1).

Dwarf Bittern *Ixobrychus sturmii*: Summer: 1 at Kent Estate in February (1/1).

Green-backed Heron *Butorides striata*: Summer: 1-4 birds at 5 sites, then 9 at Suni Pan (19/6).

Winter: 1 at Kent Estate (1/1).

Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides*: Summer: 1 each at Chinga Pan and Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary (Nov.) (2/2).

Winter: 1 each at Kent Estate and Biri Dam Fishing Site and 10 at Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary (12/3).

Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*: Summer: 1-79 (average 23.1) at 10 sites, followed by 721 at Chinga Pan. Kent Estate produced 50 (Jan.) and 55 (Feb.), whilst Mandavu Dam had 79 (Apr.), 10 (Oct.) and 13 (Nov.) (1021/11).

Winter: 1-9 (average 3.6), then 42. Victoria Falls Sewage Ponds had 42 on 7 July and 1 on the 17th (78/10).

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*: Summer: from 1-25 (average 7.3), Kent Estate with 3 (Jan.) and 1 (Feb.), Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary with 5 (Feb.) and 25 (Nov.) and Mandavu with 11 (Jan.), 12 (Apr.), 16 (Sep.), 22 (Oct.) and 14 (Nov.) (132/12).

Winter: 1-8 (average 4) at 7 sites, Victoria Falls Sewage Ponds with 1 & 4 on two July counts. Mandavu had higher numbers of 20 (May), 19 (July) and 16 (Aug.) (87/8).

Black-headed Heron *Ardea melanocephala*: Summer: 1-4 (13/6).

Winter: 1-2 (6/5).

Goliath Heron *Ardea goliath*: Summer: 1 at Chinga Pan, then Mandavu with 1 each in April, September, October and November. Although the total is 5, Mandavu birds could be recounts (5/2).

Winter: 1 at Mandavu in August (1/1).

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*: Summer: singles Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary (Feb.), Marlborough Vlei and Suni Pan (3/3).

Winter: singles Kent Estate dams and Biri Dam (2/2).

Great Egret *Ardea alba*: Summer: 1-5 at 7 sites, then 13 at Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary (Nov.). Mandavu had 2 (Jan.), 5 (Apr.), 1 (Oct.) & 2 (Nov.) (37/8).

Winter: 1-5 at 2 sites, then 10 at Kent Estate. Mandavu had 5 (May), 2 (July) & 1 (Aug.) (20/3).

Yellow-billed Egret *Ardea intermedia*: Summer: 2 each Kent Estate dams and Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary, then 13 at Suni Pan (17/3).

Winter: 1-5 at 3 sites (7/3).

Black Heron *Egretta ardesiaca*: Winter: 1 at Biri Dam (1/1).

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*: Summer: from 1-15 (average 4.4). Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary had 2 (Feb.) & 12 (Nov.), Mandavu had 15 (Jan), 7 (Apr.), 1 (Oct.) & 1 (Nov.) (48/7).

Winter: 1 at Khami Dam and 2 at Mandavu (May) (3/2).

Scopidae

Hamerkop *Scopus umbretta*: Summer: ranged from 1-2 at 5 sites, Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary with 2 each in February and November (9/5).

Winter: 1-6 (17/8).

Phalacrocoracidae

Reed Cormorant *Microcarbo africanus*: Summer: 8 sites had a range of 1-7 birds (average 2.1), with higher counts of 20 from Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary in February and 30 in November (67/9).

Winter: 1-6 (average 2.5) from 4 sites plus 17 at Khami Dam (27/5).

White-breasted Cormorant *Phalacrocorax lucidus*: Summer: low numbers of 1-9 (average 3.5) at 5 sites, Mandavu with 5 (Jan.) and 1 (Apr.), then c.320 at Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary in February and c.278 in November (619/6).

Winter: 9-30 (average 17.3) at 3 sites, Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary with the 30 birds (52/3).

Anhingidae

African Darter *Anhinga rufa*: 1-4 at 3 sites, Mandavu with 2 (Jan.), 1 (Apr.), 4 (Sep.), 4 (Oct.) & 4 (Nov.). Chinga Pan produced 11 (29/4).

Winter: 1 at Kent Estate and 2 at Mandavu Dam (July) & 1 (Aug.) (4/2).

Burhinidae

Water Thick-knee *Burhinus vermiculatus*: Summer: 2-8 from 4 sites, Mandavu with 2 (Jan.), 6 (Apr.), 4 (Sep.), 2 (Oct.) & 8 (Nov.). Masuma Pan/Dam had 12 (37/5).

Winter: 2-9 at 4 sites, plus 15 at Chinga Pan (35/5).

Spotted Thick-knee *Burhinus capensis*: 1 at Mandavu Dam in January (1/1).

Recurvirostridae

Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*: 4 at Kent Estate (Jan.) and 89 at Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary (Nov.) (93/2).

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*: Summer: 2-118 (average 40), with Mandavu Dam producing 54 (Jan.), 90 (Apr.), 51 (Sep.), 45 (Oct.) & 118 (Nov.) (480/8).

Winter: 1-95 (average 24.1), Mandavu with 95 (May), 43 (July) & 37 (Aug.), and Victoria Falls Sewage Ponds with 28 & 26 in two July counts (241/7).

Charadriidae

Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*: 14 at Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary in November (14/1).

Kittlitz's Plover *Charadrius pecuarius*: Summer: 1-6 at 4 sites, Mandavu with 4 (Apr.), 1 (Sep.), 1 (Oct.) & 1 (Nov.). Kent Estate had 25 (Jan.) and Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary had 27 (Nov.) (69/6).

Winter: only at Mandavu with 5 (May), 10 (July) & 3 (Aug.) (18/1).

Three-banded Plover *Charadrius tricollaris*: Summer: 1-8, Mandavu having 1 (Jan.), 5 (Apr.), 8 (Sep.), 3 (Oct.) & 8 (Nov.) (59/10).

Winter: 1-10, Mandavu with 6 (May), 10 (July) & 8 (Aug.), and Victoria Falls Sewage Ponds with 3 & 7 in two July counts (48/8).

White-fronted Plover *Charadrius marginatus*: Summer: 1 at Highacres Dam (1/1).

Blacksmith Lapwing *Vanellus armatus*: Summer: 1-95 (average 20.4), Mandavu with 17 (Jan.), 23 (Apr.), 47 (Sep.), 61 (Oct.) & 95 (Nov.) and Kent Estate with 35 (Jan.) & 9 (Feb.) (368/13).

Winter: 2-36 (average 9.4), Mandavu 16 (May), 36 (July) & 23 (Aug.), and Victoria Falls Sewage Ponds with 14 & 6 in two July counts (188/17).

Crowned Lapwing *Vanellus coronatus*: Summer: 135 at Ngamo Pans (135/1).

Winter: 2 & 3 (5/2).

African Wattled Lapwing: Summer: 3-7 at 3 sites, with Kent Estate dams also having 27 (Jan.) dropping to 4 (Feb.) (46/4).

Winter: 1-4 at 4 sites, plus 12 at Kent Estate dams (21/5).

Rostratulidae

Greater Painted-snipe *Rostratula benghalensis*: Summer: 1 at Ngamo Pans (1/1).

Jacanidae

African Jacana *Actophilornis africanus*: Summer: widespread with numbers ranging from 1-22 (average 6.5), Mandavu having 2 (Jan.), 2 (Apr.), 4 (Sep.), 5 (Oct.) & 3 (Nov.), Kent Estate with 14 (Jan.) & 11 (Feb.), Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary with 12 (Feb.) & 21 (Nov.) (155/18).

Winter: 1-32 (average 8.4) with Suni Pan having 32. Mandavu had 1 (May), 2 (July) & 4 (Aug.), and Victoria Falls Sewage Ponds had 3 on two July counts (117/11).

Lesser Jacana *Microparra capensis*: Winter: 1 at Biri Dam Fishing Site (1/1).

Scolopacidae

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*: Summer: 2-20 at 3 sites (average 9.9) then 96 at Mandavu and 192 at Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary (Nov.). Mandavu Dam had 2 (Jan.), 14 (Apr.), 20 (Sep.), 18 (Oct.) & 96 (Nov.) (351/4).

Winter: 6 at Mandavu Dam in August (6/1).

Little Stint *Calidris minuta*: 1-6 at Mandavu and Ngamo Pans, followed by 61 at Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary (Nov.). Mandavu had 3 (Sep.), 3 (Oct.) & 6 (Nov.) (74/3).

African Snipe *Gallinago nigripennis*: Winter: 1 at Kent Estate (1/1).

Common Sandpiper: Summer: low numbers with 1-4 at 4 sites, then 17 at Fort Rixon Dam. Mandavu had 2 (Apr.), 4 (Sep.), 1 (Oct.) & 3 (Nov.) (32/5).

Winter: Mandavu Dam had 1 (July) & 2 (Aug.) (3/1).

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*: Summer: only 1-4 with Mandavu having 1 (Apr.), 1 (Sep.), 2 (Oct.) & 3 (Nov.) (17/6).

Winter: 2 at Kent Estate dams in July (2/1).

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*: Summer: 1-32 (average 7.8) at 9 sites, plus 300 at Ngamo Pans. Mandavu had 1 (Jan.), 1 (Apr.), 2 (Sep.), 2 (Oct.) & 4 (Nov.) (402/10).

Winter: 1 at Chinga Pan and 1 at Mandavu Dam (Aug.) (2/2).

Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis*: Summer: Mandavu Dam had 6 (Oct.) & 9 (Nov.) (15/1).

Glareolidae

Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola*: Summer: 6-42, Fort Rixon Dam with the high count (71/4).

Winter: 5 at Mandavu Dam in August (5/1).

Black-winged Pratincole *Glareola nordmanni*: Summer: 6 at Reedbuck Vlei (6/1).

Laridae

African Skimmer *Rynchops flavirostris*: Summer: 6-9 at Mandavu Dam in September, October and November, recounts in both seasons is possible (23/1).

Winter: Mandavu had 9-14 in May, July and August (34/1).

Grey-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus cirrocephalus*: Summer: only at Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary with 12 (Feb.) & 197 (Nov.) (209/1).

Winter: 5 at Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary in July (5/1).

Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia*: Summer: 2 at Mandavu Dam in January and 1 in November (3/1).

Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybrida*: Summer: 1-3 at 5 Hwange sites, Mandavu having 3 each in January and November (10/5).

White-winged Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*: Summer: 6 at Mandavu in January and 2 at Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary in November (8/2).

Strigidae

Marsh Owl *Asio capensis*: Summer: 3 at Kent Estate and 5 at Marlborough Vlei, both in January (8/2).

Pel's Fishing-owl *Scotopelia peli*: Summer: 2 at Suni Pan (2/1).

Accipitridae

Black-shouldered Kite *Elanus caeruleus*: Summer: 1-3 at Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary (Nov.), Kent Estate dams (Jan.) and Marlborough Vlei (6/3).

Winter: 1 at Kent Estate dams (1/1).

Black-chested Snake-eagle *Circaetus pectoralis*: Winter: 2 at Khami Dam (2/1).

White-backed Vulture *Gyps africanus*: 25 at Kent Estate dams (25/1).

Winter: 1 at Khami Dam (1/1).

Lappet-faced Vulture *Aegypius tracheliotos*: Summer: 1 at Kent Estate (Feb.) (1/1).

Long-crested Eagle *Lophaelus occipitalis*: Summer: 1 at Kent Estate (Jan.) (1/1).

Gabar Goshawk *Micronisus gabar*: Summer: 1 at Kent Estate dams (Jan.) (1/1).

African Marsh-harrier *Circus ranivorus*: Summer: 1 at Marlborough Vlei (1/1).

Winter: 1 at Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary (1/1).

African Fish-eagle *Haliaeetus vocifer*: Summer: 1-8, the 8 at Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary (Feb.), with 5 there in November. Kent Estate had 3 (Jan.) & 1 (Feb.). Mandavu had 1 (Jan.), 2 (Apr.) and 2 (Sep., Oct. & Nov.) (37/9).

Winter: 1-6, Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary with the 6. Mandavu had 2 (May, July & Aug.) (21/8).

Yellow-billed Kite *Milvus aegyptius*: Summer: 1-3 at Big Shumba Pan (1), Mandavu (2 in Oct. & Nov.), Reedbuck Vlei (2), Shumba pumped pan (2) and Ngamo Pans (3) (12/5).

Meropidae

White-fronted Bee-eater *Merops bullockoides*: Summer: 1 at Suni Pan and 6 each at Chinga Pan and Mbonisa Weir (13/3). Winter: 3 at Highacres Dam (3/1).

Southern Carmine Bee-eater *Merops nubicoides*: Summer: 5 and 7 at Camp Hwange and Reedbuck Vlei, and 70 at Ngamo Pans (82/3).

European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*: Summer: 2-40 (average 15), the 40 at Kent Estate (Feb.) (60/4).

Little Bee-eater *Merops pusillus*: Summer: 1-2 at 4 sites (7/4). Winter: 1-8 (average 4), the 8 from Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary (12/3).

Alcedinidae

Malachite Kingfisher *Corythornis cristata*: Summer: 1 at Chinga Pan (1/1).

Winter: singles at 4 sites (4/4).

Giant Kingfisher *Megaceryle maxima*: Summer: 1-2, Kent Estate with 2 (Jan.) & 1 (Feb.) (5/3).

Winter: 2 each at Kent Estate and Khami Dam (4/2).

Pied Kingfisher *Ceryle rudis*: Summer: 1-6 birds (average 2.6), Kent Estate with 3 (Jan.) & 2 (Feb.), Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary with 1 (Feb.) & 3 (Nov.), Mandavu with 2 (Jan.), 3 (Apr.), 6 (Sep.), 4 (Oct.) & 1 (Nov.) (41/10).

Winter: 1-8 (average 3.2), the 8 at Suni Pan. Mandavu had 5 (May), 4 (July) & 2 (Aug.) (45/12).

Brown-hooded Kingfisher *Halcyon albiventris*: Winter: 1 at Khami Dam (1/1).

Woodland Kingfisher *Halcyon senegalensis*: Winter: 1 at Khami Dam is unusual for this date (1/1).

Falconidae

Amur Falcon *Falco amurensis*: 2 & 1 at Kent Estate (Jan. & Feb.) (3/1).

Alaudidae

Rufous-naped Lark *Mirafra africana*: Summer: 4 at Kent Estate dams (Feb.) (4/1).

Cisticolidae

Red-faced Cisticola *Cisticola erythropus*: Summer: 1-8, Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary with 1 (Feb.) & 8 (Nov.) (17/2).

Winter: 4 at Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary (4/1).

Rattling Cisticola *Cisticola chiniana*: Summer: 4 each at 2 sites (8/2).

Winter: 3 each at 3 sites (9/3).

Levaillant's Cisticola *Cisticola tinniens*: Summer: 7 at Marlborough Vlei (7/1).

Croaking Cisticola *Cisticola natalensis*: Summer: 2-4 at 2 sites, Kent Estate having 2 (Jan.) & 4 (Feb.) (8/2).

Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis*: Summer: 1-6 at 3 sites (9/3).

Winter: 1 at Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary (1/1).

Tawny-flanked Prinia *Prinia subflava*: Summer: 1-6 (11/3). Winter: 4 at Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary (4/1).

Acrocephalidae

Dark-capped Yellow Warbler *Iduna natalensis*: Summer: 2 at Marlborough Vlei (2/1).

Winter: 1 at Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary (1/1).

African Reed-warbler *Acrocephalus baeticatus*: Summer: 5 at Marlborough Vlei (5/1).

Lesser Swamp-warbler *Acrocephalus gracilirostris*: Summer: 5 (Feb.) & 10 (Nov.) at Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary and 8 at Marlborough Vlei (23/2).

Winter: 5 at Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary (5/1).

Great Reed-warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus*: Summer: 1-2 at 3 sites (4/3).

Locustellidae

Little Rush-warbler *Bradypterus baboecala*: Summer: 1 (Feb.) & 4 (Nov.) Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary and 15 at Marlborough Vlei (20/2).
Winter: 2-4 at 2 sites, plus 14 at Mvurachena Dam (20/3).

Hirundinidae

Grey-rumped Swallow *Pseudhirundo griseopyga*: Summer: 8 at Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary (8/1).
Eastern Saw-wing *Psalidoprocne orientalis*: 3 at Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary (Nov.) (3/1).
Common House-martin *Delichon urbicum*: 15 at Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary (Nov.) (15/1).
Lesser Striped Swallow *Cecropis abyssinica*: Winter: 1 at Victoria Falls Sewage Ponds (1/1).
White-throated Swallow *Hirundo albigularis*: 1 at Marlborough Vlei (1/1).
Wire-tailed Swallow *Hirundo smithii*: Summer: 2 at Victoria Falls Sewage Ponds and 5 at Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary (Nov.) (7/2).
Winter: 4 & 11 at Victoria Falls Sewage Ponds over two July counts (15/1).
Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*: Summer: 24 at Ngamo Pans and 40 at Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary (Nov.) (64/2).
Banded Martin *Riparia cincta*: Summer: 40 at Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary (Nov.) (40/1).
Brown-throated Martin *Riparia paludicola*: Winter: 5 at Victoria Falls Sewage Ponds (5/1).
Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*: Summer: 40 at Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary (Nov.) (40/1).

Muscicapidae

African Stonechat *Saxicola torquata*: Summer: 1 at Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary (Feb.) (1/1).
Winter: 2 at Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary (2/1).

Ploceidae

Red-billed Quelea *Quelea quelea*: Summer: 30 at Mandavu Dam (Nov.) and 180 at Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary (Nov.) (210/90).

Note: Counting *Euplectes* spp. is difficult because breeding males are conspicuous but the females are not, and so their numbers are almost certainly underestimated and they may be altogether overlooked in winter.

Yellow-crowned Bishop *Euplectes afer*: Summer: 2 at Ngamo Pans and 5 at Big Shumba Pan (7/2).
Southern Red Bishop *Euplectes orix*: Summer: only 1 recorded at Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary (Feb.) and 39 at Marlborough Vlei (40/2).
Yellow-mantled Widowbird *Euplectes macrourus*: Summer: only 4 from Kent Estate dams and 27 from Marlborough Vlei (31/2).
Spectacled Weaver *Ploceus ocularis*: Summer: 1 from Kent Estate (Jan.) and 2 in February (3/1).

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Southern Masked Weaver *Ploceus velatus*: Summer: 18 at Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary (Nov.) (18/1).
Winter: 10 at Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary (10/1).

Estrildidae

Common Waxbill *Estrilda astrild*: Summer: 18 from Marlborough Vlei (18/1).
Winter: 6 from Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary (6/1).
African Quailfinch *Ortygospiza atricollis*: Summer: 6 at Kent Estate (Jan.) and 11 at Reedbuck Vlei (17/2).
Orange-breasted Waxbill *Amandava subflava*: Summer: 7 each at Kent Estate dams and Marlborough Vlei, and 24 at Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary (Nov.) (38/3).
Bronze Mannikin *Spermestes cucullata*: Summer: 12 at Kent Estate dams and 16 at Marlborough Vlei (28/2).

Viduidae

Pin-tailed Whydah *Vidua macroura*: Summer: 1-3 (8/3).
Cuckoo Finch *Anomalospiza imberbis*: Summer: 1 at Marlborough Vlei (1/1).

Motacillidae

African Pipit *Anthus cinnamomeus*: Winter: 1 each at 3 sites (3/3).
Yellow-throated Longclaw *Macronyx croceus*: Summer: 1-9. Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary had 1 (Feb.) & 2 (Nov.), Kent Estate had 5 (Jan.) & 9 (Feb.) (19/3).
Winter: 3 from Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary and 6 from Kent Estate (9/2).
Cape Wagtail *Motacilla capensis*: Winter: 1 at Victoria Falls Sewage Ponds (1/1).
African Pied Wagtail *Motacilla aguimp*: Summer: 1-7. Mandavu had 3 (Jan.), 6 (Apr.), 4 (Sep.), 7 (Oct.) & 5 (Nov.) (32/5).

Fringillidae

Black-throated Canary *Crithagra atrogularis*: Summer: 5 at Marlborough Vlei (5/1).
Brimstone Canary *Crithagra sulphuratus*: Summer: 1 at Marlborough Vlei (1/1).

Participants

K Ayibu, C Baker, J Banda, J Blake, J & J Brebner, M Chandafira, S Chibike, R Chirimuta, J Cosmo, R Dennison, K Dixon, R Dube, B Giddey, T Howson, D Jackson, M Jackson, A Karimanzira, D Kennaird, L King, O Kunene, N Long, S & S Long, G Macdonald, H Macdonald, P Makhusa, P Makumbe, N Maqeda, P Masamba, P Mataranyika, T Matengo, I Matereke, E Mgone, B Miles, R Mudongi, J Muropa, M Musarira, N Ngwenya, A Nkiwani, H Nleya, N Ntuli, J Pierini, A Remwa, T Remwa, D Rockingham-Gill, I Riddell, S Ross, R Shumba, P Smets, M Stone, M Tagwira, T Tarakini, C Tawonezvi, G Thornycroft, R Thornycroft, P van Leenhoff, S Wood, other BLZ members.

Appendix A

Sites covered in 2023 showing Month (1 = January, 2 = February, 4 = April, 5 = May, 7 = July, 8 = August, 9 = September, 10 = October, 11 = November). The letter ^o indicates the site was over-flooded in the month indicated, while the letter ^d indicates a dry site. Ramsar sites are highlighted in bold font.

Name	District	Months
Biri Dam	Makonde	7
Biri Dam Fishing Site	Makonde	7
Big Shumba Pan	Hwange	1, 7
Camp Hwange	Hwange	1, 7
Chinga Pan	Bikita	1, 7
Chitampa Dam	Matopos	1
Dwarf Goose Pan	Hwange	1, 7
Fort Rixon Dam	Insiza	1, 7
Highacres Dam	Esigodini	1 ^d , 7
Hippo Pools	Shamva	2 ^o
Kent Estate dams	Norton	1 ^d , 2 ^o , 7
Khami Dam	Bulawayo	8
Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary	Zvimba	2, 7 ^o , 11
Madingazulu Dam	Matopos	1
Mahwe Homestead Dam	Insiza	1, 7
Maleme Dam	Matobo	1
Mandavu Dam	Hwange	1, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11
Marlborough Vlei	Harare	1 ^o
Masuma Pan and Dam	Hwange	1, 7
Mbonisa Weir, Falcon College	Esigodini	2
Mesilume Dam	Matopos	1
Mpopoma Dam	Matopos	1
Ngamo Pans	Hwange	1
Pongo Dam	Insiza	1, 7
Reedbuck Vlei	Hwange	1 ^o , 7
Sandy Spruit Dam	Matopos	1
Shumba Pans	Hwange	1, 7
Shumba pumped Pan	Hwange	1, 7
Suni Pan	Bikita	2, 7
Victoria Falls Sewage Ponds	Hwange	1, 7
Whitewaters Dam	Matopos	1

Ninth report of the BirdLife Zimbabwe Rarities Committee

I.C. Riddell

The eighth report of the Rarities Committee was published in 2004 (Riddell, 2004). In the interim we lost members of the local committee and later records were circulated with appropriate experts and the committees of other countries for vetting and decisions.

A few rarities were submitted on the appropriate form but many others simply appeared on social media in the form of photographs, in SABAP2, South African Rare Bird Network (SARBN), Field Observations and notes in *Honeyguide*. These are summarised here.

Black-necked Grebe, Striped Crake, Streaky-breasted Flufftail and Booted Eagle are removed from the rarities list.

Accepted Records

Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis*

Two, a pair, at Victoria Falls sewage ponds (Pentad 1755_2545) 30 May 2023; C. Baker (SABAP2).

Lesser Cuckoo *Cuculus poliocephalus*

One hepatic bird photographed at Aberfoyle (1832B4) on 8 March 2022; P. Zwanikken. (SA Rare Bird News Report – 14 March 2022).

One photographed at Aberfoyle (1832B4) on 26 February 2023; G. Douglas (SA Rare Bird News Report – 27 February 2023).

Madagascar Cuckoo *Cuculus rochii*

One seen and photographed by numerous observers on Monavale Hill, Harare (1731C3) from 13 January – 15 February 2021. (Riddell 2021a).

Slaty Egret *Egretta vinaceigula*

One at top end of Chikwenya Island, Mana Pools National Park (1529D1) on 30 April 2005; J. Varden.

One at Mazvikadei dam (1730A2) on 28 January 2018; I. Louw, I. Riddell; Louw 2018.

One photographed at Kent Estate dam (1730D3) on 11 July 2021; G. Thornycroft.

Lesser Frigatebird *Fregata ariel*

One in Highlands, Harare (1731C3), on 5 October 2022; P. Zwanikken. Spent the night roosting in a eucalyptus tree. (Hardaker 2022).

Spur-winged Lapwing *Vanellus spinosus*

One photographed Ngamo Pan Hwange National Park (1927A2) from 14 March – 17 April 2004; C. Johnson (2004). Two at Salt Pan, Hwange National Park (1826C1) on 8 October 2014; P.J. Mundy.

One photographed at Ruckomechi Camp, Mana Pools National Park (1529C3) on 14 September 2018: A. Tshipa.

An adult plus a breeding pair with four chicks at Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary (1730D4) from 10 November – 10 December 2019; R. Chirimuta, I. Riddell, numerous observers.

One at Imire, Hwedza (1831B3) on 27 December 2019; Hardaker: Southern African Rare Bird News Report issued at 20h00 on Monday, 30 December 2019.

Two adults and two chicks at Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary (1730D4) from 22-25 November 2020; Hardaker: Southern African Rare Bird News Report issued on Monday, 23 November 2020; Hardaker: SA Rare Bird News Report – 26 November 2020; Riddell 2021b.

At least one photographed at Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary (1730D4) on 4 September 2021; J-M. Blake, Hardaker: SA Rare Bird News Report – 6 September 2021 Two photographed at Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary (1730D4) on 26 September 2021; P. Zwanikken, Hardaker: SA Rare Bird News Report – 29 Nov 2021.

Common Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*

One photographed at Bumi Hills, Kariba (1628C4) on 12 March 2012; C. von Chamier and I. Riddell.

Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*

One photographed at Kemurara Bay, Matusadona NP, Lake Kariba, (1628D1) on 12 January 2021; D & P Dell.



Eurasian Curlew photo © D. Dell

Great Snipe *Gallinago media*

Two or three at Haka Park, Harare (1731C3) on 15 January-11 February 2017; A.J. Wood, P. Rosewarne and many other observers.

Red Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicarius*

One photographed at Dopu pan, Hwange National Park (1826D4) on 27 February 2018; Alison Duncan.

One on Shumba pumped pan, Hwange National Park (1826C4) on 20-23 January 2020; Jean-Michel Blake.

Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus*

One photographed at Mana Pools National Park (1529C4) on 7 August 2013; I. Riddell, C. von Chamier.

One photographed at Mana Pools National Park (1540_2920) on 31 October 2016; J-M. Blake.

One photographed at Mukadzapela river mouth, Matusadona (1628D3) on 2 October 2023; R. MacDonald (Hardaker 2023).

Common Redshank *Tringa tetanus*

One on Dete Vlei, Hwange (1827C1) on 27 July 2011; B. Stapelkamp.

Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica*

One photographed at Beatrice (1830B4) on 16 October 2017; A.J. Wood, R MacDonald, J. Ball.

One photographed on the Runde River, Gonarezhou (2131B4) on 30 September 2023; D. MacDonald (Hardaker 2023).

Palm-nut Vulture *Gypohierax angolensis*

One photographed near Ruckomechi Camp, Mana Pools National Park (1529C3) on 2 May 2009; K. Van Breeda (Riddell 2010).

One photographed near Long Pool, Mana Pools National Park (1529C) on 9 May 2009; K. Jenkins (Riddell 2010).

One seen and photographed near the Save-Runde junction, Gonarezhou National Park (2132A4) on 17 September, 2 October and 15 October 2015; C. Stockil (Stockil & Walton 2016).

One photographed in Mana Pools National Park on 27 September 2023; S. Bolnick (Hardaker 2023).

A juvenile photographed near Mashombo Pan, Sinamatella, Hwange (-18.55, 26.32, 1826C2) on 1 November 2023; D. Adams (WhatsApp).

One photographed in the Chewore Safari Area (1529D2) on 11 November 2023; B. Launder (SARBN 13 November 2023).

Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus*

One photographed at Antelope Park, Gweru (1929 B3) on 15 December 2002 and 4 January 2003; P.J. Feather (2003).

One adult at Haroni-Rusitu (2032B2) on 21 September 2003; I.C Riddell (Rarities Report).

One photographed at Kanga Camp, Mana Pools National Park (1529C4) on 22 October 2016; C. Magondo, N. Polenakis (Riddell 2017).

One photographed at Shumba Pam, Hwange National Park (1826C4) on 13 November 2016; S. Long (2017).

Immature photographed at Chitake Spring, Mana Pools National Park (1629A2) on 18 November 2016; J. Francis (SARBN email).

One photographed at Shumba Pam, Hwange National Park (1826C4) on 26 December 2016; D. Rimmer, D. Carson, J. Brookstein and A. Jones.

One photographed at Kavinga Safari Camp, Mana Pools (1629A2) on 28-30 October 2018; L. McDonald, R. Janish and S. Gardner.

One photographed at Rifa, Chirundu (1628B2) on 13 November 1918; D. Winhall (Facebook, Baillie & Maasdorp 2018).

One photographed at Big Toms, Hwange National Park (1825D2) on 19 November 2018; Sean Ross (Social media).

One photographed at Jabulani Safaris, Shangani (1929C4) on 30 November 2022; C. Hannweg (SA Rare Bird Alert).

Cape Vulture *Gyps coprotheres*

One tagged bird at Rifa, Chirundu (1628B2) on 16 May 2009 (Maasdorp 2016).

One photographed at Kaoshe pan, Hwange National Park (1826D1), on 23 August 2011; B. Stapelkamp (2011).

One poisoned with other vultures near Fort Rixon (1929C3) in August 2014 (Mabhikwa *et al.* 2014).

One tagged bird at Ngamo, Hwange National Park (1927A2) on 23 June and 1 July 2015; B. Stapelkamp (2015).

Two at Sango Ranch (2032A1) on 20-21 May 2022; J-M. Blake (Baker 2022).

Grasshopper Buzzard *Butastur rufipennis*

One adult photographed at Ngamo Pans, Hwange National Park (1927A2) on 7 December 2014; B. Ryan (Riddell 2015). One immature photographed at Kavinga Safari Camp, southern Mana Pools National Park (1629A2) on 2 November 2017; S. Gardner (Riddell 2019).

Red-necked Buzzard *Buteo auguralis*

Photographed at Chamabonda vlei, Victoria Falls (1725D3-4) between 28 December 2019 and 16 January 2020; C. Brightman, T. Lane and G. Douglas (Hustler & Hustler 2021).

Red-necked Falcon *Falco chicquera*

One photographed at Marlborough, Harare (1730D2) on 2 February 2020; D. Adams, R. MacDonald.

One at Umguza (1928D3) on 3 April 2020; J. Varden.

One photographed at Katiyo, Honde Valley (1833A3) on 30 May 2020; P. Simuzosha (Facebook).

One photographed at Fothergill, Kariba (1628D1) on 1 May 2022; B. Launder (Social media).

One photographed at Katiyo, Honde Valley (1833A3) on c.31 October 2022; P. Zwanikken (Facebook).

One photographed at Katiyo, Honde Valley (1833A3) on c.26 November 2022; P. Zwanikken (Facebook).

Two photographed at Katiyo, Honde Valley (1833A3) on c.27 February 2023; P. Zwanikken (Facebook).

One photographed at Fothergill, Kariba (1628D1) on 14 March 2023; B. Launder (Facebook).



Red-necked Falcon photo © B. Launder

African Hobby *Falco cuvierii*

One adult over the Zambezi River, Zambezi National Park (1725D3) on 17 December 2018; Marc Cronje.

One photographed near Vundu, Mana Pools National Park (1529C3) on 9 April 2023; D. Adams (Facebook).

Taita Falcon *Falco fasciinucha*

One at Chimanimani (1932D4) on 27 April 2014; I. Riddell, J. & C. von Chamier (Riddell 2014).

Melodious Lark *Mirafra cheniana*

Displaying birds photographed at Widgeon Pan (1930B4) on 21 November 2022; J-M. Blake (Baker 2023).

Stark's Lark *Spizocorys starki*

An influx of two flocks of c.300 and one of 40 birds into Tuli Circle (2229A1) on 29 June 2003; C.A. Brewster (2003 and Rarities Report).

Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica*

One at Stapleford, Mutare (1832D2) on 30 January 2020; J. Francis (Hardaker 27 February 2020).

Burchell's Starling *Lamprotornis australis*

One at Kasetsheti Camp, Kazuma National Park (1825B3) on 25 & 26 June 2015; A.J. Wood.

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*

One photographed at Trader Horn Boat Club, Lake Chivero (1730D4) on 12 December 2010; A.J. Wood, D. Dalziel, J. Pierini and others.

One photographed at Westwood Vlei, Matetsi (1725C4) on 3 November 2016; D. Dell (Facebook, SA Rare Bird News Report – 07 November 2016).



Northern Wheatear photo © I.C. Riddell

Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka*

One photographed at Victoria Falls airport (1825B2) on 23-25 February 2017; G. Ford & D. Carson (Wood 2017).

Collared Flycatcher *Ficedula albicollis*

One at Thomson's Vlei, Mutare (1832D3) on 19 February 1994; A.B. Curtis.

One to two birds at Cecil Kop, Mutare (1832D3) on 20 March 1999; J. Clegg and others.

Great Sparrow *Passer motitensis*

One photographed at Tuli Circle (2155_2900) on 17 September 2017; D. Kok (SABAP).

Brown Firefinch *Lagonosticta nitidula*

Four at Victoria Falls 1755_2550 (1725D4) on 29 May 2018; M. Cronje.

Pink-throated Twinspot *Hypargos margaritatus*

Three photographed at Swimuwini Camp, Gonarezhou National Park (2131C4) on 3-4 July 2023 (van Zyl *Honeyguide*, this issue),

At least one pair at Swimuwini Camp, Gonarezhou National Park (2131C4) on 15 August 2023; G. Trethowan (SARBN 10 August 2023 and 17 August 2023).

A pair at Swimuwini Camp, Gonarezhou National Park (2131C4) on 9 October 2023 (Blake *Honeyguide*, this issue).

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*

One at Hornbill House, Aberfoyle, Honde Valley (1832B4) on 30 November 2022; I. Riddell, I. Maggini.

Rejected Records**Barred Long-tailed Cuckoo** *Cercococcyx montanus*

One in the Umfurudzi (1731B2) on 21 November 2015, no description; D.V. Rockingham-Gill.

Pygmy Falcon *Polihierax semitorquatus*

One at Mana Pools National Park (1529C3) on 18 September 2003; G. Locherer.

Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra*

Previously accepted in the Fourth report of the OAZ Rarities Committee. **38**: 113-118; see discussion.

Unconfirmed Records**Black-rumped Buttonquail** *Turnix nanus*

Call at Chengeta Safari/Game Park, Selous (1830A2) on 18 November 2016; F.M. Couto, T. Couto and Helen Cazelett.

Lesser Cuckoo *Cuculus poliocephalus*

One photographed in the Zambezi National Park (1750_2545) on 27 March 2016; D. Rimmer.

Eleonora's Falcon *Falco eleonora*

One at Katiyo, Honde Valley (1833A3) on 7 January 2016; P. Rosewarne, T. Wood, M. Saineti and J. Cragg.

One at La Rochelle, Mutare (1832D3) on 31 January 2016; G. & M. Blair.

Four at Stapleford Estate, Penhalonga (1832D2) on 11 February 2020; A.J. Wood, R. Crawshaw, M. Saineti.

Plain-backed Sunbird *Anthreptes reichenowi*

Pair at Hippo Pools, Umfurudzi (1731B2) on 17 September 2003; A.J. Wood.

Additions to the National List

Lesser Frigatebird, Madagascar Cuckoo, Spur-winged Lapwing, Grasshopper Buzzard, Red-necked Buzzard, Pied Wheatear, Pink-throated Twinspot.

Discussion

The Lesser Frigatebird appeared in Harare for less than a day and had left the next morning. It was, presumably, pushed inland by weather. First record for the country.

The Whinchat, previously approved in Hustler *et al.* (1992) was overturned in vetting for this report. It was reported to have had a white rump and would thus appear to have been an African Stonechat *Saxicola torquata*.

The record of Pink-throated Twinspots is not far north of their distribution in Mozambique and northern Kruger on the Limpopo River.

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Report of the Black Eagle Survey 2023

Matabeleland Branch, BirdLife Zimbabwe



Verreaux's Eagle Photo © Roger MacDonald

The 2023 season marked the 60th consecutive year of formal reporting on the breeding of the Verreaux's Eagle (Black Eagle) *Aquila verreauxii* in the Matobo National Park. To mark this auspicious occasion, a successful celebratory weekend took place in mid-July, drawing participants from near and far. Participants were treated to various informative presentations as well as having an enjoyable day out in the field, observing some

of the active nests and getting to see some of these awesome avians as well as a growing chick or two.

One of the nest sites that has been logged as positive breeding and is a very deep nest, began very early in the season. Although a chick was never actually seen, all signs at the nest i.e., heavy muting, fresh leaves, shading parent and the subsequent behaviour of both adults in close proximity of the nest in the latter stages of the season, indicated a successful outcome. Unfortunately, at another site where positive incubation had been observed, Lanner Falcons *Falco biarmicus* had chased off the eagles, although the falcons did not appear to be using the nest themselves. One of the last nests to be observed as having had a sitting hen quite late in the season, turned out to have failed with both eggs being compromised.

Getting around the park is becoming more and more difficult as the roads become ever more eroded with little or no maintenance being carried out. This not only adds much extra time to the visits but also causes damage to vehicles. It is hoped that during the "off season" some of the territories that continue to be unoccupied, but where adult birds have been reported as being present, can be investigated further.

The table below gives the breeding statistics for the last five years, following the last reports published in *Honeyguide* 65(2): 125-128.

The Branch should like to thank Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority for all assistance, in particularly the Matobo National Parks staff, BirdLife Zimbabwe National Office for their continued support and to all those who took part in any way to make the 60th celebrations so enjoyable. Finally, this survey could not continue without the valuable help of the citizen scientists who turn up year after year. I should like to extend grateful thanks from the branch to J. and C. Dicey, E. and L. Lightfoot, L. Lawrie, N. Monks, K. and R. Wilson, A. Herscowitz, K. Smit, A. Mkwanzani, P. Makhusa, D. Reis, K. Ayibu, C. Poorey, M. Ndlela and J. Sullivan.

John Brebner, Coordinator Black Eagle Survey ✉ brebnerj@acolchem.co.zw

Table 1. Verreaux's Eagle breeding statistics, 2019-2013.

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
No. of nest sites allocated	107	93	115	118	82
No. of nests monitored	52	86	59	52	67
No. of nest sites occupied	41 (79%)	18 (21%)	13 (22%)	19 (37%)	16 (24%)
No. of nests rebuilt	41 (79%)	16 (88%)	59 (22%)	19 (37%)	16 (24%)
No. of breeding attempts	20 (49%)	16 (88%)	8 (1%)	11(58%)	14 (21%)
No. of failures	11 (27%)	5 (28%)	4 (31%)	3 (16%)	5 (31%)
No. raised to fledging	9 (22%)	10 (56%)	21 (5%)	9 (47%)	9 (56%)
Reproductive rate (no/pair)	0.22	0.56	0.15	0.47	0.56
Average rainfall (mm)	317.1	403.0	907.0	570.0	731.0

Pink-throated Twinspot: A New Species for Zimbabwe

First record

We stayed at Acacia cottage in Swimuwini camp (2131 C4), near Mabalauta in the southern Gonarezhou National Park on 3 and 4 July 2023. Each morning, we saw a group of five or six Pink-throated Twinspots *Hypargos margaritatus* at the birdbath in the camp. We went back to Acacia on 14 July on our return

trip through the park and they were still there so I assumed they were resident and not transitory. They looked like a family group with male, females and immatures so is it possible they were breeding there?

I believe someone else has subsequently seen them at Acacia, which suggests they are residents there.

Gigi van Zyl, *Maremani Nature Reserve, South Africa*. ✉ gvz@iafrica.com

Another record of Pink-throated Twinspot

Having heard about Gigi van Zyl's July record of Pink-throated Twinspots, on 9 October 2023 while Teresa Olbert and I were on a field trip in the same area, we searched for a couple of hours at the Camp without success. The next morning at around 07:30 I heard the distinctive contact call of a Twinspot. Very excited, I began to scan the nearby shrubs and spotted the

female. After continued searching, we managed to locate the male. I collected my camera from my vehicle and was able to photograph both birds.

This species of Twinspot inhabits much of the northern part of KwaZulu-Natal and its occurrence across the border in Gonarezhou has long been considered a possibility.

Jean-Michel Blake, *Sango Ranch, Save Valley Conservancy*. ✉ frenchyjb@gmail.com



Figure 1. Pink-throated Twinspots at Swimuwini Camp, Gonarezhou National Park, male (left), female (right). Photo © Jean-Michel Blake.

White-backed Night-heron: An exciting twelve hours at Hippo Pools

My wife and I recently spent two nights at Tamarind, the middle lodge at Hippo Pools in the Umfurudzi Park. At about 18.30 on 26 September 2023 we were sitting with sundowners on the bank of the Mazowe River, hoping the White-backed Night-heron *Gorsachius leuconotus* would make its customary brief appearance in the dense vegetation overhanging the water on the opposite bank. Sadly, that was not to be, but a strange, high-pitched call from just above us drew my attention to a dark bird with a broad tail perched on a short, dead branch. The bird then flew out over the river, looped and returned to its perch. It repeated this manoeuvre twice more until my wife, excited by my claim that it was a Bat Hawk *Macheiramphus alcinus*, relayed the information loudly to our friends in the lodge. Too loudly I'm afraid for the bird did not return. However, I remain convinced that was what it was. The species had occasionally been observed at the location but not for a few years and there are certainly many old and new mine workings and shafts in the area providing sites for bats.

The next morning, the 27th, at about 6.30 we were sitting with our two friends in the same spot discussing plans for the day when we heard a rumbling sound. Duncan joked that it was someone's stomach. Then we saw a bird flying upstream. We assumed it was a Green-backed Heron *Butorides striata* as they were constantly crossing and recrossing the river. But no, it was the White-backed Night-heron. Another then joined it and turned its back to us to display the beautiful large white feathers on its back. For the next 10 minutes or so both remained visible low in the overhanging bush on the opposite bank and the grumbling, rumbling continued. The pair then moved more deeply into the vegetation, out of sight, and the grumbling sound continued. Then it stopped and the one bird flew about 200 m downstream to settle in the low vegetation. The other then flew across to a nearby island and disappeared in the tall reeds. Are they breeding again?

Lynn and I had on a few occasions seen the regular evening appearances of the parent birds, once with a juvenile, near the same spot but never in the morning.

Ken Dixon, Harare. ✉ lynnken@mango.zw



White-backed Night-herons displaying and calling, photo © F. Nyandeni

On the distribution of the Pennant-winged Nightjar in southern Botswana

According to Hockey *et al.* (*Roberts birds of southern Africa*, 7th edition) the Pennant-winged Nightjar *Caprimulgus vexillarius* is mainly restricted to northern Botswana, where it is said to be uncommon, though it may extend its range to the west, central and east of the country in some years. In South Africa it occurs in the northeast down to Swaziland.

In the evening of 23 December 2014, whilst travelling south on the A20 from Sekoma, we came to a section of road through open and gently undulating country where up to ten roadkill nightjars were encountered over a stretch of perhaps four

kilometres. This was a distressing sight and it was obvious that the area was popular with displaying males, or perhaps they were attracted to the warm road surface. However, since this carnage occurred in a limited area it is likely that it was a display area at that time. There was no mistaking identification as the pennants of the males were obvious.

Unfortunately, I cannot give the exact locality but it was centred around QDS 2423 C3 and well south of documented records in the south of the country some 260 km west of Gaborone.

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White-browed Robin-chat in Reverse

It is said that the White-browed Robin-chat *Cossypha heuglini* only rarely indulges in mimicry. For example, *Birds of the World* states that 'Mimicry [is] much more frequent in subsong and calls; in alarm, the "tsreck-tsreck-tsreck" rattle can be supplemented with alarm or mobbing calls of other birds, e.g. 'tru-wick' of [the] Common Bulbul (*Pycnonotus barbatus*). Hockey *et al.* (2005, *Roberts' Birds of southern Africa*, 7th edition.) suggests that it 'Does not usually include mimicry of other bird species in song, but does incorporate alarm calls of other birds, including [the] Dark-capped Bulbul, into its own ratchet-like *tserrrck-tserrrck* alarm call, given when dependent young are threatened.'

A bird in our garden in Newlands, Harare, frequently mimics the reverse beeper of a RAV4 when he or she is in the back

garden in the vicinity of the car. It does this perfectly and with the same pitch, loudness and time interval as the beeper. When the call is in unison with the beeper they cannot be easily differentiated and the calls adds quality, like two identical instruments playing the same notes together. When the robin-chats calls are antiphonal the time interval is still maintained and may start a few notes after the beeper and continue briefly after the beeper has stopped.

Reference:

<https://birdsoftheworld.org/bow/species/wbrcha2/cur/introduction#sounds>

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Wood Pipit in unexpected habitat

Over the week starting on 16 October 2023 we conducted a bird survey on the Umvukwe Range of the Great Dyke, the section from Mpinge Pass to the Suoguru fault gap (also called Gurungwe Gap). We had two fixed survey points, one high up in stunted miombo woodland on pyroxenite in the north and the other on a serpentine hill in the south. Walking transects were also conducted in both habitats.

The soils derived from the pyroxenite basic rocks are not toxic and support woodland or open degraded woodland, usually dominated by *Brachystegia spiciformis* or *B. boehmii* and *Julbernardia globiflora*, with *B. glaucescens* in rocky areas. These miombo woodlands are somewhat different from those in the immediately surrounding areas on granite or gneiss (Timberlake 2013, revised notes). These woodlands are stunted because the overlying soils are very shallow. They do, however, support an impressively heavy orchid load, testament to the moisture-laden winds and low clouds that the dyke catches. The ground is very rocky and supports medium height grasses.

The serpentine-dunite areas are largely open wooded grasslands on slopes and hills, usually with fewer trees on the east-facing windward side. Our small serpentine hill in the south was steep-sided and rocky (Fig. 1). The windward side had a

few medium-sized trees lower down on rocks, otherwise it grew a few stunted bushes including a Velvet-leaf *Tapiphyllum velutinum*, some Cluster-head *Protea protea welwitschii*, whilst Wild Rubber trees *Diplorhynchus condylocarpon* grew on the leeward side. Amongst the rocks were many succulents including endemic Dyke Aloes *Aloe ortholopha*, the cushion-forming *Euphorbia acervata* and *Euphorbia memorialis*, all Vulnerable on the Red Data list.

On the 17th at 14:38 we were on the serpentine hill when a Wood Pipit *Anthus nyassae* landed 6 m from us on the rocks of the bare, windward side. It had come from the slopes of the hill to our north, also serpentine, though with more Rubber trees. This was surprising but it was confidently identified. After watching us for a few moments it hopped and walked through the rocks looking for insects, then flew 30 m away to the peak of the hill where it continued hunting. It must be added that the hills were even more bare than usual as a fire had swept through earlier, which made it easier to watch the bird.

On the 18th at 15:34 what was probably the same bird repeated this behaviour, initially landing on a low bush some 10 m in front of us where we had very good views of it (Fig. 2). After

hunting through the rocks it appeared to fly on to the serpentine ridge to our southwest.

On the morning of the 18th on a walking transect Wood Pipits were seen in the miombo woodland on the main pyroxenite crest with a large number of other species, feeding on a termite emergence. Other documented sightings included a bird or birds on the 19th singing from a small tree 400m northeast of our south fixed point (this was lower down the east face of the dyke and much more vegetated) and on the same day in miombo near our northern fixed point. These records were for SABAP2 atlassing

so only the first sighting for a pentad was recorded but they occurred widely in the miombo.

Roberts 7th edition is somewhat misleading in saying this species is only occasionally associated with rocky areas. At Gosho Park, Marondera, one of the most reliable spots to find it is on and around Flat Rock, an area of c.3.4 ha of domed granite and it occurs in granite-boulder miombo in the area. At Christon Bank, north of Harare, it is found in hilly, boulder-strewn granite habitat. However, finding it on the open rocky serpentine hills of the Great Dyke was certainly unexpected.

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Figure 1

The exposed serpentine hill, usually covered by grasses but recently burnt.

The fixed observation point was on the flatter ground on the skyline about a third of the way in from the right side of the photograph.

Figure 2

Open rocky habitat on serpentine hill on east side of the Great Dyke, looking northeast over granite country. The grasses have been burnt by a recent fire, exposing endemic Great Dyke succulents.

The pipit landed on the small *Protea* bush in the centre of the photograph.

Photos © I.C. Riddell



A Scarce Woodward's Batis Record

I was aware of only a few records of the scarce Woodward's Batis *Batis fratrum* from the Mahenya Sand Forest, Gonarezhou (2132 A4), and in October 2023 Teresa Olbert and I had the opportunity to search for them. After arriving at Chilo Gorge Safari Lodge we met Clive Stockil who gave us more information on the search area.

Parking at the Primary School in Mahenya village, we took a path from the back of the school into the Sand Forest. After searching and listening for a couple of hours I heard an odd call,

which I decided was likely to be the batis. It was calling from a thicket and Teresa and I spent a couple of minutes trying to locate the bird without disturbing it. Crouching down to look up into the shrubs I spotted the bird. It was a female Woodward's. A few minutes later we realised a male was there as well. He also called, and we had great sightings of the pair as they called and moved around in the shrubs.

This note was prepared because of the scarcity of this batis and its occurrence at just a few eastern border sites.

Jean-Michel Blake, Sango Ranch, Save Valley Conservancy. ✉ frenchyjb@gmail.com



Figure 1. Woodward's Batis; Male (left) and female (right). Photo © Jean-Michel Blake.

Editor's note: The only other Zimbabwean locality where this species has been recorded is the Haroni-Lusitu valley (Irwin, 1981. *The birds of Zimbabwe*, p. 326; Vernon *et al.*, 1990. *Honeyguide* **36**: 14-35; Masterson, 1992. *Honeyguide* **38**: 102-107).

December 2022 to May 2023

C.T. Baker

The 2022-23 rainfall season was average at best and came to an early close in most areas. Good rain fell in the first half of the season however, and Lake Chivero was 98.1% full on 22 January.

Red-necked Falcon *Falco ruficollis* records have increased markedly in the past five years or so, both in number and locality, to the extent it has now been removed from the Zimbabwe Rarities list. Up to the early 1990s, records were mainly confined to the northern border along the Zambezi in Mana Pools NP and at Zambezi NP upstream of Victoria Falls, with a few isolated reports from widespread localities elsewhere. Since 2020 they have been reported from new areas countywide, as at Kanyemba (1530 C2) in the north; at Katiyo Estate (1833 A3), where they almost certainly bred in 2021, on the eastern border; on Umguza Farms, north of Bulawayo (1928 D3) in the west; and at the Save-Runde confluence (2132 A4) in the extreme southeast. It seems almost certain this falcon will continue to increase in number within its recognised areas as well as appearing at new localities countrywide.

IR has raised concerns on the decline of the **Spotted Creeper** *Salpornis salvadori* at Harare's Mukuvisi Woodlands where once it was frequently found. None were reported during the current period and it now seems possible they will disappear from there completely, if they have not already done so. Not far away is Haka Park, which could well witness a similar exodus. Clearly records of all sightings in and around Harare are required.

But to revert to this Creeper's status at the Mukuvisi, the following report in Field Observations in *Honeyguide* 68(1) is pertinent: 'Two nesting attempts at Mukuvisi Woodlands in November 2021 failed, probably from too much human (birdwatchers) interference.' If not the cause of their decline there, it was certainly a contributing factor that must serve as a reminder to respect all wildlife, particularly while breeding.

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 WhatsApp sites and other social media.

The symbol † denotes a Quarter Degree Square in which the relevant species was not recorded in the Atlas nor subsequently in *Honeyguide*.

New Zimbabwean Record

A **West African Crested Tern** *Thalasseus albidorsalis* was photographed on the Zambezi a few kilometres above Victoria Falls (1725 D4†) on 17 December (BMa). This bird was on the Zimbabwe side of the border with Zambia and constitutes the first confirmed record for the southern African sub-region. It was seen again by the same observer near Kandahar Island in the same QDS on 22 January. Until 2020 this tern was considered a subspecies of **Royal Tern** *T. maximus* and this current record brought to light a possible Royal Tern at Starvation Island, Lake Kariba (1628 C4), on 26 December 2012

(SE *et al.*). It was reported in South Africa by a visitor from there but was apparently not logged in Zimbabwe. (**Editor's note:** This species breeds along the West African coast from Mauretania to Guinea, and winters as far south as Namibia).



Figure 1. West African Crested Tern. Photo © Bekezela Masuku

Rarities

An adult **Palm-nut Vulture** *Gypohierax angolensis* on Sango Ranch, Save Valley Conservancy (2032 A2†), on 13 January (BC) follows the November 2022 record in the last period of a sub-adult on the same ranch in the adjacent 2032 A4 square. One was at Tambahata Pan, Gonarezhou (2132 A4), on 5 and 7 May (CS, TM) and possibly the same bird was high above the pan on 11 May (JK).

A **Lesser Cuckoo** *Cuculus poliocephalus* at Aberfoyle Tea Estates (1832 B4) on 26 February (GD) remained for a couple of weeks and was well watched by several observers. A possible **Barred Long-tailed Cuckoo** *Cercococcyx montanus* seen at the Msaise River system on Sango Ranch (2032 A4†) on 18 April (BC) could not be positively confirmed.

A record of **South African Cliff Swallows** *Petrochelidon spilodera* at the Vungu River bridge near Gweru (1929 D1†) on 19 January (RD) brought to light a previously unreported sighting of two there in November 2022 (RC). A probable female **Northern Wheatear** *Oenanthe oenanthe* was observed at close range between Hwange Safari Lodge and Main Camp, Hwange NP (1826 D2†), on 18 December (JV). Unfortunately, the observer was leading a horse safari and could only study the bird briefly before moving on. Another unconfirmed individual was at Masoka, near the Mkanga-Angwa confluence (1630 A1†), on 11 January (MZ).

A **Grey Wagtail** *Motacilla cinerea* in the Mtarazi Falls area of Nyanga (1832 B4) on 3 February (CC) follows an April 2022 sighting from there.

Waterbirds and allied species

A pair of **Black-necked Grebes** *Podiceps nigricollis* at Victoria Falls sewage ponds on 30 May was the first record from there since 2018, and a **Pink-backed Pelican** *Pelecanus rufescens* was seen there on 4 January (CB). An **African Darter** *Anhinga rufa* was at Kent Estate near Selous (1830 B1) on 26 February (IR), and given their scarcity these days, a group of ten was a nice sighting on northern Chinga Pan, Sango (2032 A2), on 29 January. Also present were an estimated 700 **Cattle Egrets** *Bubulcus ibis* and a **Squacco Heron** *Ardeola ralloides* that proved to be a new record for the QDS (J-MB).

A female **Little Bittern** *Ixobrychus minutus* was active at the Victoria Falls Crocodile Farm drainage ponds on 18 December (CB), one was on Marlborough vlei, Harare (1730 D4), on 29 December (RC) and a juvenile was at Redhill Farm north of Banket (1730 A4) on 25 February (DSm).

It was an excellent season for **Dwarf Bitterns** *I. sturmi*. Around Harare in QDS 1731 C3, one at Monavale vlei on 10 and 19 December (PZ, *The Babbler*) was frequently seen during January (DW); from one to two were at Blair Dam between 3 February and 4 April (AMacD) with another nearby at Ballantyne Park on 8 March; a single was at Greengrove Dam on 6 February (PZ). At Victoria Falls individuals were at a flooded gravel pit near the Masuwe River on 10 December, on a swamp area below the Water Treatment Plant on the 26th (CB) and on Chamabonda vlei (1725 D3) on 23 January (CBr). Singles were at Chirundu Safari Lodge (1628 B2), on 28 December, 21 January and 20 February and then two on 30 March (TN); one was near Charara, Lake Kariba (1628 D2), on 21 January (GP). A single at Kent Estates on 26 February (IR) was the last record until a very late juvenile was seen at Old Mutare (1832 D3) on 17 May (GD).

White Stork *Ciconia ciconia* flocks in their hundreds seem to be a thing of the past. The most reported this season were 70 or more at Phole Phole Farm, Umuza (1928 D3), on 10 January (AR) and from 60 to 80 on the Pomona Rubbish Dump, Harare (1731 C1), between 11 February and 20 March (DS, KD, IR). Single **Black Storks** *C. nigra* were at Chipinda Pools, Gonarezhou (2131 B4), on 2 January (GD), at the Deka-Zambezi confluence (1826 B1) on 9 February (JBk), Shangani Ranch (1929 C2) on 8 April (LMcD) and at Redhill Farm, Banket, on 19 May (DSm). An unfortunate **Abdim's Stork** *C. abdimii* with a broken wing on Royal Harare Golf Course (1731 C3) on 6 May (BL) was unable to migrate.

24 **Woolly-necked Storks** *C. episcopus* and three **Saddle-billed Storks** *Ephippiorhynchus senegalensis* were on the saturated Ngamo Plains, Hwange NP (1927 A2), on 27-28 January (CB). Around Harare, an **African Openbill** *Anastomus lamelligerus* flew over Pomona on 5 January (DH), one at Marlborough Ponds on 22 January (RC) was followed by five on 6 February and nine flew onto the Arundel School dam (1730 D4) on 15 February (BL). 87 **Marabou Storks** *Leptoptilos crumenifer* were over Pomona Rubbish Dump on 1 December (DS). About 95 were at Victoria Falls Ponds on 4 January and 107 on 19 February (CB). Many **Yellow-billed Storks** *Mycteria ibis* were on farmlands surrounding Mazvikadei Dam, Banket (1730 A2), on 15 December following 55 mm of rain the previous night (BM).

African Sacred Ibis *Threskiornis aethiopicus* were reported at Rusape (1832 C1†) at the end of January (AC); there are few

records east of 32°E in the northern half of the country. Five **African Spoonbill** *Platalea alba* were on Ngamo Plains on 28 January (CB). A flock of about 30 **Greater Flamingos** *Phoenicopterus roseus* flew over Lilfordia (1730 D4) towards Lake Manyame on the evening of 17 December. Although the observer camped at the dam overnight they were not located (JWh).

On 6 February a pair of **White-faced Ducks** *Dendrocygna viduata* with four tiny ducklings in tow weaved their way through moving vehicles in the Arundel Village car park, Harare, ably assisted by security guards (TC). Over 100 on Greystone Park Preserve dam, Harare (1731 C1), on 6 May (NF) were the most ever seen there. Many at Kent Estate on 29 May were accompanied by five **Fulvous Ducks** *D. bicolor* (PvL). Two **White-backed Ducks** *Thalassornis leuconotus* on Ngamo Plains (1927 A2) on 28 January were unusual there (CB). Over 800 **Egyptian Geese** *Alopochen aegyptiaca* at Corner Pan, Kazuma NP (1825 B3), in March (*The Babbler*) is about the number expected these days.

Since 2018, **Yellow-billed Ducks** *Anas undulata* have popped up occasionally on dams in Harare's northern suburbs. A pair seen at Greystone Park Preserve (1731 C1†) on 19 December (NF) was the first record from there, while at Ballantyne Park one was seen on 7 March and a pair on 16 March and 21 April (AMacD, LC). At Kadoma Textiles Dye Ponds (1829 B4) on 11 February, three **Cape Teal** *A. capensis* and two **Hottentot Teal** *A. hottentota* pairs were reported (*The Babbler*). **Hottentots** seen elsewhere comprised two at Gletwyn Dam, Mandara (1731 C3), on 1 December (JBa), three on Ngamo Pans and two nearby at Makololo Camp (1927 A1) on 28 January; and two at Victoria Falls Ponds on 31 January were unusual, the last record from there being in 2005 (CB). Two **Red-billed Teal** *A. erythrorhyncha* were active around Monavale vlei on 12 January, it being likely they were breeding in the flooded area (IR).

Two **Southern Pochard** *Netta erythrophthalma* were on Gletwyn Dam on 2 March (JBa), and at Ballantyne Park two were present on the 7th and then a female with four young on 21 April (AMacD). Seven were at Guvalala Pan, Hwange NP (1826 D3), on 31 March (SN). Groups of three **African Pygmy-geese** *Nettapus auritus* were on Ngamo Plains on 28 January (CB) and at southern Chinga Pan, Sango (2032 A2), the following day (J-MB). Two were seen at Kent Estates on 26 February (IR) but by mid-May at least 27 had moved in (RC), probably from smaller dams that were already drying out.

At least 300 **Comb Ducks** *Sarkidiornis melanotos* in strung-out flocks of varying sizes flew downstream in Zambezi NP (1725 D3) on the morning of 4 December (CB). A **Spur-winged Goose** *Plectropterus gambensis* record from the Maura River area, south of Masoka (1630 A1†), in December (JC), was an expansion of range.

A female **American Wood Duck** *Aix sponsa* on a Christon Bank dam (1731 C1) on 2 April completed a few circuits before flying towards Thetford Estate. This record follows individuals reported in January 2022 at Borrowdale Brooke and Mazowe, all of which were clearly escapees from a collection. A single **Muscovy Duck** *Cairina moschata* on upper Mukuvisi Woodlands dam, Harare (1731 C3), for about five days around 7 May was another wandering escapee although they used to be a feature of many farmyards in days gone by (IR).

Raptors

A **Cape Vulture** *Gyps coprotheres* fed at a lion kill at Mbiza Pan, Hwange NP (1827 C3†), on 27 January (SA) and as many

as six juveniles with an adult at Jabulani Safaris, Shangani (1929 C4), on 29 April (LT) is an encouraging record. A **White-backed Vulture** *G. africanus* over the Juliusdale/Mutare road junction (1832 D3) on 21 March was unusual there (GD) as were seven at Mtarazi Falls, Nyanga, on 18 April (CC). One at Jabulani Safaris, Shangani, on 21 April wore wing tag K566 (LT). A massive group of 250-300 was on a giraffe carcass at Cawston Block Wildlife Ranch (1928 C2) on 26 April (SN) and one wandered into Harare at the Mukvisi Woodlands on 7 May (KD). 56 were at a Rifa Camp, Chirundu (1628 B2) vulture watch on 16 May as were two **Lappet-faced Vultures** *Torgos tracheliotos* (NG). Elsewhere a **Lappet-faced** was at Kent Estate on 26 February (IR) and two were at a nest on Cawston Block Ranch on 16 April (SN).

A female **White-headed Vulture** *Trigonoceps occipitalis* was on an impala carcass at Fothergill Island, Lake Kariba (1628 D1), on 9 December (AJ). Singles were on Ngamo Plains on 27 and 28 January (CB) and at Chizarira NP (1727 D2) between 7 and 10 April (GT). Two wanderers at Shangani Ranch (1929 C2†) on 8 May (LMcD) and another near Shangani village (1929 C4†) later in the month (VBo) were well out of range.

Following heavy rain on 19 December hundreds of **Yellow-billed Kites** *Milvus aegyptius* fed on termites in the Kennedy Pans area of Hwange NP (1827 C3) a couple of days later (JV). 60 or more hawked termites near Makololo Camp on 28 January (CB) and a similar number rode a thermal over Fothergill Island on 23 February (AJ). One in Chisipite, Harare (1731 C3), on 15 March (FL per IR) was unusual for the city these days but being the last one reported was no doubt in transit.

An **African Cuckoo Hawk** *Aviceda cuculoides* was on Sable Park Farm, Chegutu (1830 A1), on 9 February (DK); and posting a slight expansion of range, a pair was at Mahenya, Gonarezhou (2132 A4†), in mid-May (GD). **Bat Hawks** *Macheiramphus alcinus* in less usual areas were an immature at Romsey Farm, Lion's Den (1729 B4), on 4 March (JP) and an individual on Nyanga Downs (1832 B2†) on 26 March (GT). Single **European Honey-buzzards** *Pernis apivorus* were in Victoria Falls suburbia on 29 December (DT) and 24 January (CB), at Mazvikadei on 14 January (BM), in the Headlands area (1832 A3) at the end of January (AC), at Sango Ranch Headquarters (2032 A2†) on 23 March (J-MB), near the Nyakupinga River, Juliusdale (1832 B3), on 8 April (GD) and at Christon Bank on 16 April (LC).

A pair of **Verreaux's Eagles** *Aquila verreauxii* flying over Christon Bank on 6 December (CvdR) were the first reported from there since October 2017. Vast numbers of **Lesser Spotted Eagles** *Clanga pomarina* were at the afore-mentioned termite emergence in the Kennedy Pans area on 21 December. Pale phase **Booted Eagles** *Hieraaetus pennatus* in unusual areas were near Kennedy 2 Pan, Hwange NP (1827 C3†) on 23 December (JV) and at Redhill Farm, Banket (1730 A4†), on 6 April (DSm). Another individual was at Sohwe Falls, Mavuradonha Wilderness, on 20 February (*The Babbler*). Single **Ayres's Hawk-eagles** *H. ayresii* seen in flight were over Chisipite on 15 January (BL), Bulawayo (2028 B1) on 22 and 23 February (TF) and Victoria Falls on 23 February (CBr). A **Martial Eagle** *Polemaetus bellicosus* was in the Shangani area at the 40 km peg Bulawayo-Gweru road (1929 C4) on 23 February (SGH Task Force) and another was at a nest on Cawston Block Ranch on 16 April (SN).

Two pairs of **African Crowned Eagles** *Stephanoaetus coronatus*, one flying high and the other displaying at lower altitude, were over Leopard Rock, Vumba (1932 B2), on 17 December (J-MB). For the past ten years a pair has nested in a

large tree about 5 metres from a Rusape farmhouse (1832 C1) and three chicks have been raised in the last six years (RD). They are occasionally reported from Kent Estate, the latest record being of two on 29 May (PvL). Close to Harare on 2 April one was at Christon Bank as was a **Brown Snake-eagle** *Circaetus cinereus* (IR). A **Western Banded Snake-eagle** *C. cinerascens* was watched on 20 December from the Mtarazi Falls as it glided over Hauna (1832 B4) in the Honde Valley below (J-MB). Of interest was one just outside Harare at Mount Hampden (1730 D2†) in January (AC), and one was at Sian Simba Camp, Zambezi NP (1725 D3), on 28 May (JBk).

An excellent record from the under-reported Chimanimani Mountains was a **Bateleur** *Terathopius ecaudatus* over Bailey's Folly near the Mozambique border (1933 C3†), on 22 May (TO per J-MB). There was localised movement of **African Fish-eagles** *Haliaeetus vocifer* over Newlands, Harare (1731 C3), in April with records on the 5th, 6th and 24th (IR).

The **Lizard Buzzard** *Kaupifalco monogrammicus* has become nearly as common as the **Gabar Goshawk** *Melierax gabar* in Harare gardens over the past few years but they unexpectedly disappeared in mid-January and were entirely absent from the city for the remainder of the period. **Black Sparrowhawks** *Accipiter melanoleucus* were in a Newlands garden on 7 and 23 February, and the now uncommon **African Goshawk** *A. tachiro* was only seen on 5 December (IR).

In Harare, single **African Marsh Harriers** *Circus ranivorus* were on Marlborough vlei on 29 December and 18 January (RC) and Mount Pleasant vlei (1730 D4) on 7 February (BL). Migrating **Montagu's Harriers** *C. pygargus* seen in March were at Redhill Farm, Banket, on the 21st (DSm) and on Kazuma Pans (1825 B3†) towards the end of the month (*The Babbler*). A **Pallid Harrier** *C. macrourus* on a vlei on Stapleford Farm, Mount Hampden (1730 D2), on 25 December was in the same area as one seen the previous year (JWh). A juvenile preyed on insects over maize fields at Banket (1730 A4) on 3 January (DSm).

An **Osprey** *Pandion haliaetus* in Zambezi NP in mid-December wore ring number ET4118 (AF-W). Information obtained by CBr indicates this bird was ringed as a nestling in Latvia (due north of Victoria Falls) in 2013. This record follows another Latvian individual in the same Park in January 2021. One on Wamba Dam, Aberfoyle (1832 B4), on 26 December (KW) could be the first record from the Honde Valley. There were several reports from known areas and the last ones noted were one in Zambezi NP (1725 D3) on 22 May (CB) and two at Mazvikadei Dam on the 27th (LG).

Single **Peregrine Falcons** *Falco peregrinus* seen in Harare were at Emerald Hill (1730 D4) on 27 March (LS) and over Monavale vlei on 3 April (IR). Three separate pairs were at Nyanga on 8 April (GD). A December **Lanner Falcon** *F. biarmicus* record from the Maura River area, south of Masoka (1630 A1†) (PS), was further north than usually recorded in the Dande area. A flock of five **Eurasian Hobby** *F. subbuteo* at Borrowdale Race Course on 11 January was unusual as flocks of any size seem to be a thing of the past (IR). Around Victoria Falls, a **Red-necked Falcon** *F. ruficollis* was near the Crocodile Farm drainage ponds on 18 December (CB) and two and one were in Zambezi NP on 15 March and 18 May respectively (CBr, BN). One on Fothergill Island on 20 February (BL) was the fourth Lake Kariba record and two were at Chirundu (1628 B2) on 29 May (TOv per J-MB).

Thousands of **Amur Falcons** *F. amurensis* on powerlines near Mabvuku, Harare (1731 C3), on 8 December (DD) indicate the Tafara roost still supports large numbers. About 1000 were

heading west over Mount Pleasant on 10 December (PvD) and about 250 were on a sand spit at Chipinda Pools on 3 January (GD). 30 or more on Chikurubi vlei, Harare (1731 C3), on 31 March (PZ) were the last reported. Six **Lesser Kestrels** *F. naumanni* were at Mbiza Pan (1827 C3) on 2 December (SA) and some were at the Kazuma Depression (1825 B3†) towards the end of March (*The Babbler*). One was at Dana B Savannah Camp, Melfort (1731 C4), on 20-22 December when a **Dickinson's Kestrel** *F. dickinsoni* was also seen (RC).

Gamebirds, Rails and Cranes

Wanderers into a Newlands garden included a **Natal Spurfowl** *Pternistis natalensis* on 12 and 13 May and a **Helmeted Guinea-fowl** *Numida meleagris* on the 13th (IR). **Crested Guinea-fowl** *Guttera pucherani* at Intundhla Siding, Ngamo Forest (1827 D4†), on 4 January (SA) were southeast of their normal range. Two with chicks were about 14 km from Victoria Falls on the Kazungula road (1725 D3) on 30 January (JBk) and about 15 were in Zambezi NP on 5 April (KB). Single **Kurrichane Buttonquail** *Turnix sylvaticus* were near Far and Wide, Nyanga (1832 B4), on 19 December (CC) and just outside Hwange NP near Back Pan (1927 A2) on 28 January (CB).

A lone **Wattled Crane** *Grus carunculatus* was on Ngamo Plains on 1 March (AMacD) where two **Grey Crowned Crane** *Balearica regulorum* pairs were seen on 28 January. Pairs of the latter were at Makwa Pan (1827 C3) and nesting at Davison's Camp (1927 A2) on 27-28 January and three were at Nyamandhlovu Pan (1826 D4) on the 29th (CB). In QDS 1826 D2, 20 and 21 were at Hwange Safari Lodge on 23 February and 31 March respectively (JV, DS) with 17 nearby on Dete vlei on 31 March (BW).

The first **Corn Crane** *Crex crex* of the season was reported at Barket (1730 A4) on 20 December with another sighting on 21 February (DSm). One was at Dana B Savannah Camp, Melfort (1731 C4†), between 20-22 December (RC), and at Monavale vlei, where found annually, there was one on 10 January (JM) and three on 2 March (PZ). Up to ten **African Crakes** *Crecopsis egregia* were at Kent Estate on 26 February (IR) and a late individual was on Redhill Farm on 16 May (DSm). A nice record of the scarce **Spotted Crane** *Porzana porzana* was one on Marlborough vlei on 18 January (RC). A **Striped Crane** *Aenigmatolimnas marginalis* was at Monavale on 10 January (JM) but on 2 March as many as five were found (PZ). They were also plentiful on Kent Estate on 26 February (IR).

Red-chested Flufftails *Sarothrura rufa* were active on Lion's Den vlei (1729 B4) on 24 March (DSm). In the Troutbeck area a **Buff-spotted Flufftail** *S. elegans* was seen and heard on Church Road extension before the descent to the Gairezi River (1832 B2) on 4-5 January (JT). The first **Streaky-breasted Flufftail** *S. boehmi* reported was on Monavale vlei on 23 December (IR, JM). Although about five were there on 12 January and two on 19 February, there were probably fewer this season and they became hard to find later (IR).

African Purple Swamphens *Porphyrio madagascariensis* may have been overlooked in the Melfort/Bromley area (1831 A2†) in the Atlas years but were recorded in March (LC). Around Harare two **Allen's Gallinule** *P. alleni* were on Marlborough vlei on 18 January (RC) and there were singles at Bally Vaughan Game Park (1731 C2) on 10 February (GP) and Lake Chivero (1730 D4) on 19 March and 17 April (PM). In the southeast one was on northern Chinga Pan, Sango Ranch (2032 A2), on 29 January (J-MB) with others noted at Tambahata Pans in January and February (EvdW).

A **Common Moorhen** *Gallinula chloropus* record from the Mahenya area (2132 A4†) in April (HH) was southeast of previous Gonarezhou records. **Lesser Moorhens** *G. angulata* had an excellent season and were reported from five different Harare sites. Notable records from elsewhere included at least five on flooded grassland at Magwe Pan, Sango (2032 A1†), for several days from 10 January, four nearby on northern Chinga Pan (2032 A2) on 29 January (J-MB) and one at Davison's Camp (1927 A2) on 28 January (CB). An unprecedented gathering of c. 80 packed the Kent Estate dams on 26 February (IR) and a pair bred late at Makwa Pan, Hwange NP, where an adult tended a chick on 8 April (*The Babbler*). An **African Finfoot** *Podica senegalensis* at Romelda, Lake Mutirikwe (2031 A1), on 30 January (BL) is of interest as the last recorded sighting from the lake goes back as far as August 1981. The Hippo Pools (1731 B2) birds were seen with two chicks on 20 February (SCh) and two separate sightings were obtained on the Angwa River, west of Lion's Den (1729 B4†), in March (LC, JMk).

A group of five **Kori Bustards** *Ardeotis kori* was just north of the Main Camp intersection on the Bulawayo-Victoria Falls road (1827 C1) on 19 February (BW) and a **Denham's Bustard** *Neotis denhami* nearby in the Sikumi Forest (1827 C1†) on 23 December (SA) was north of the nearest known population.

Waders, Gulls and Terns

A **Lesser Jacana** *Microparra capensis* was at a small pan near Tambahata Pans on 11 May (JK). On Ngamo Plains in January, a **Common Ringed Plover** *Charadrius hiaticula* was recorded on the 17th (SA) and a **Greater Painted-snipe** *Rostratula benghalensis* on the 28th popped out of cover for just long enough to be identified (CB). Four of these **Snipe** were at Nyamandhlovu Pan (1826 D4) on 5 February (RW) and at Victoria Falls one was on Chamabonda vlei on 7 February (SC) and a female at a flooded gravel pit on 30 March (CB).

About 150 **Crowned Lapwings** *Vanellus coronatus* on Ngamo Plains on 27-28 January was a surprising number given the saturated nature of the terrain (CB). An exceptional **White-crowned Lapwing** *V. albiceps* vagrancy record from mid-way between Insiza and Inyati (1929 C2†), northwest of Bulawayo, in May (VBo) was far removed from this species' northern and south-eastern territories. A pair of **Long-toed Lapwings** *V. crassirostris* at Dopi Pan, Hwange NP (1827 C3†), on 2 March (JTe) was probably the first record from the Main Camp area and only the second from the Park as a whole. The first was an individual near Sinamatella (1826 C2) in January 2016 (SABAP2). At Victoria Falls one was in Zambezi NP on 12 December (BMA) and two were the sewage ponds on 27 March (CB). Another pair was near Croton Camp, Mana Pools (1529 C2), between 8-10 April (JWh).

The only **Green Sandpiper** *Tringa ochropus* reported was at the Gache Gache River, Lake Kariba (1628 D2), on 11 December (PM). At least 300 **Wood Sandpipers** *T. glareola* were on Ngamo Plains on 27-28 January but the only **Common Sandpiper** *Actitis hypoleucos* seen in the area was at Makololo Pan (CB). A departing **Common Greenshank** *T. nebularia* was reported from Chirundu on 18 May (TN). One in Hwange NP in the fourth week of May was more likely over-wintering as were a **Marsh Sandpiper** *T. stagnatilis* and **Little Stint** *Calidris minuta* (GD).

13 **Pied Avocets** *Recurvirostra avosetta* were on Homestead Dam, Rocky Glen Ranch, West Nicholson (2129 B3), on 27 December (PD). **Black-winged Stilts** *Himantopus himantopus* recorded near Mushumbi Pools (1630 B1†) in December (JC)

represent an eastward extension of range. Three **Spotted Thick-knee** *Burhinus capensis* were at Haka Park, Harare (1731 C3), on 6 December (IR) and one was near Davison's Camp on 27 January (CB). A **Bronze-winged Courser** *Rhinoptilus chalcopterus* was near Mesilume Dam, Matopos (2028 B3), in January (*The Babbler*) and at least eight were at Mahenya (2132 A4†) in mid-May (GD).

After breeding on Kent Estate's bottom dam, about 50 **Collared Pratincole** *Glareola pratincola* adults and many young were still around on 1 December (GT). Hundreds in the Musango area (1628 C4) between 13 February and 15 April comprised a pre-migratory build-up there for the fifth year in a row (SE). In Hwange NP a **Black-winged Pratincole** *G. nordmanni* was at Ngweshla Pans (1927 A1) on 29 January (BN) when one was also at Nyamandhlovu Pan (CB) and again on 5 February (RW). An estimated 550 were at Corner Pan, Kazuma NP, on 25 March (*The Babbler*). A pre-migratory flock of about 400 **Rock Pratincoles** *G. nuchalis* assembled in Zambezi NP on 21 February (CB) with just one being seen two days later (JB).

Small flocks of **Grey-headed Gulls** *Chroicocephalus cirrocephalus* were on the Connemara Lakes, Troutbeck (1832 B2) (JBe) and in new territory at Wamba Dam (1832 B4†) (MS) in January. They normally pass through poor feeding areas in the eastern districts without staying for long, presumably heading for Lake Urema in Gorongosa NP, Mozambique (GD). A **Caspian Tern** *Hydroprogne caspia* was a few kilometres upstream of Victoria Falls (1725 D4) on 8 December and two were in the same area on 5 February (BMA). Two breeding **Whiskered Tern** *Chlidonias hybrida* were at Chipinda Pools on 2 January (GD) and two, one of which was in breeding dress, were on Ngamo Plains on 27-28 January (CB).

17 **African Skimmers** *Rynchops flavirostris* at the Chipinda crossing on 12 November went unreported in the last period (DS) and nine were at Chipinda Pools on 2 January (GD). Two arrived back in Zambezi NP on 27 May (BN) despite there being few suitably exposed sand bars.

Other non-Passerines

Four **Yellow-throated Sandgrouse** *Pterocles gutturalis* flew onto the surrounds of Timot's Pan (1725 D3) on 13 May. They are infrequent visitors to Chamabonda vlei (CB). Four **Speckled Pigeons** *Columba guinea* were at Hwange NP Airport (1827 C1†) on 2 February (RW) and are now widespread in the Detemain Camp area. In April and May, a **Tambourine Dove** *Turtur tympanistria* was in Greystone Park Preserve, Harare (NF), where only a couple have been recorded previously. An **African Green Pigeon** *Treron calvus* in a Newlands garden on the morning of 29 January had possibly roosted overnight (IR).

Four **Grey-headed Parrots** *Poicephalus fuscicollis* were seen three times at Hippo Pools between 6 December and 8 January (SCh). One and four flew over Mount Pleasant on 7 and 13 December respectively (DS, ACI) and one at Musango on 9 January was the Camp's first record (SE). **Meyer's Parrots** *P. meyeri* continue to be found in the Highlands, Newlands and Gun Hill areas of Harare (1731 C3) with from one to four reported in December, January and March (IR).

A **Red-chested Cuckoo** *Cuculus solitarius* at Sanyati West, Lake Kariba (1628 D1), was reported on the late date of 28 May (KF). These late-departing birds are unusual and most, if not all, of the few records that exist have been of youngsters. Single **Thick-billed Cuckoos** *Pachycoccyx audeberti* at Masoka on 4 February and 3 April were followed by two on 25 April (MZ). Individuals were in the Lake Mutirikwe RP in well-developed

Miombo woodland on 12 February (PM) and on the Save River upstream of Mahenya (2132 A2) on 25 May (TM).

African Emerald Cuckoos *Chrysococcyx cupreus* now regularly over-winter on the Vumba and one was heard at Seldomseen (1932 B2) on 18 May (BMB). A vocal **Klaas's Cuckoo** *C. klaas* at Mazvikadei on 30 May (BM) would be a winter visitor from South Africa. A **Diderick Cuckoo** *C. caprius* at Far and Wide, Nyanga (1832 B4), on 2 January (CC) was probably unusual at that altitude on the eastern escarpment.

An **African Wood-owl** *Strix woodfordii* was heard in a Newlands garden on 1 and 17 April (IR). Two **Marsh Owls** *Asio capensis* were on Kennedy vlei, Hwange NP (1827 C3†), on 28 January (JV) and a scarce Lake Kariba record was one that was photographed on Tsetse Island (1628 D2†) on 5 February (RDy). A **Pel's Fishing-owl** *Scotopelia peli* at Mavuradonha Wilderness (1631 A3†) between 8-12 April (RC) was west of the main Zambezi Valley range.



Figure 2. A Marsh Owl on grassland at Lake Kariba. Photo © Robert Davy.

In Newlands, **Southern White-faced Scops-owls** *Ptilopsis granti* were noted a few times between 20 December and 20 March; a pair of **Spotted Eagle-owls** *Bubo africanus* were heard just once, on 4 January; and **Fiery-necked Nightjars** *Caprimulgus pectoralis* returned again on 25 February having been absent since 30 August the previous year (IR). There is a post breeding exodus of most of these nightjars during the rains (Irwin 1981. *The Birds of Zimbabwe*, page 177). Following the June 2022 records at Haka Park, **Square-tailed Nightjars** *C. fossii* had returned again by 24 April (PZ). A female **Pennant-winged Nightjar** *Macrodipteryx vexillarius* at Monavale vlei on 19 February was a nice record of a bird that is no longer common in Harare (IR). This date would indicate she was probably moving out of the country, while a displaying male on Kennedy vlei on 4 January (SA) was surely too late in the season to be successful.

A visit to Lasting Impressions Camp, Kadoma (1829 B4†), on 14 January verified previously unconfirmed **Narina Trogon** *Apaloderma narina* sightings. At least two males and a female have now been recorded there in the Muszvezve riverine (*The Babbler*). One was heard at Mavuradonha Wilderness (1631 A3†) on 22 February where apparently seen by rangers on previous occasions (*The Babbler*) and another on Hwedza

Mountain (1831 D1) on 21 May (JT) follows an earlier record from there in 2012. A **Half-collared Kingfisher** *Alcedo semitorquata* at La Rochelle, Penhalonga (1832 D3), on 8 April (PM) was unusual there as was a **Grey-headed Kingfisher** *Halcyon leucocephala* at Far and Wide, Nyanga (1832 B4), on 2 January (CC). Irwin (1981. *The Birds of Zimbabwe*, page 193) described the Grey-headed as unknown on the moist seaward-facing slopes of the mountains.

Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters *Merops persicus* were recorded near Mushumbi Pools (1630 B1†) in December (JC). Small numbers of **Southern Carmine Bee-eaters** *M. nubicoides* cross the central watershed in mid-summer. The only ones reported this season were four flying east over Highlands, Harare, on 16 December (DT), and six on Imire Game Park, Marondera (1831 B3), later the same afternoon (JT).

Interesting **Roller** sightings in Harare were a **European Roller** *Coracias garrulus* at Mukuvisi Woodlands on 6 December (IR), three **Broad-billed Rollers** *Eurystomus glaucurus* there on 1 January (RD), and a **Lilac-breasted Roller** *C. caudatus* in the ZimPhos area south of Cleveland Dam (1731 C3) on 17 January (IR). 14 **Trumpeter Hornbills** *Bycanistes bucinator* on Redhill Farm, Banket (1730 A4†) on 25 April (DSm) were slightly southeast of known range. The only **Brown-backed Honeybird** *Prodotiscus regulus* record from outside Harare was one in the Victoria Falls Rain Forest on 7 May (CB). **Green-backed Honeybirds** *P. zambesiae* were fairly common at Gosho Park, Marondera (1831 B1), on 3 December (PZ) and were also seen at Pindi Park Farm, Mazvikadei (1730 A4), on 26 March (IR).

Passerines

An **African Broadbill** *Smithornis capensis* displaying in riverine woodland below Kariba dam wall (1628 D2†) early in December (NH-P per J-MB) is the first record since the Atlas years from along the middle Zambezi downstream of Victoria Falls. One fed two chicks at Hippo Pools Camp on 22 March (SCh).

Movement of south-bound **Dusky Larks** *Pinarocorys nigricans* was noted in the second week of December south of Masoka (1630 A1†) (JC) and at Gache Gache, Lake Kariba (PM). Returning north were five at Victoria Falls on 13 April (CB), two at Musango on 29 April (SE) and seven at a bush fire on Redhill Farm on 25 May (DSm). About 20 **Chestnut-backed Sparrowlarks** *Eremopterix leucotis* were on Kent Estate on 12-14 May (RC). An exceptional record that came to light after the close of the last period was a **Grey-backed Sparrowlark** *E. verticalis* near Dolilo Pan, Robins Camp area, Hwange NP (1826 C1†), on 30 November 2022 (J-MB *et al.*). They rarely move eastwards into Zimbabwe and a good many years have gone by since they were last reported.

About 30 **Blue Swallows** *Hirundo atrocaerulea* in the Juliasdale area (1832 B3) on 8 April were no doubt massing for onward migration (GD) and a male and female were at Cloudlands, Vumba (1932 B1), two days later (BMb). Two **Mosque Swallows** *Cecropis senegalensis* were slightly out of range at Hwange NP Airport (1827 C1) on 4 February (RW). **Greater Striped Swallows** *C. cucullata* are uncommon in Harare but were seen on Monavale vleij on 23 December and 12 January (IR). **Common House Martins** *Delichon urbicum* seemed to depart Victoria Falls on about 4 April but at least four stragglers were at the sewage ponds on 18 May together with late-departing **Barn Swallows** *H. rustica* (CB). **Banded Martins** *Riparia cincta* a few kilometres south of the

Mutirikwe-Chiredzi confluence (2131 B4†) in December (JBo) provided a sparse southeast lowveld record.

A **Grey Cuckooshrike** *Coracina caesia* was at Far and Wide on the Nyanga escarpment (1832 B4) on 16 December (J-MB) where they have apparently been noted for a year or two (CC). They were known in this QDS previously from the Honde Valley below. On the Vumba, a **Square-tailed Drongo** *Dicrurus ludwigii* at White Horse Inn (1932 B1†) on 19 March was at lower altitude than expected and slightly north of known range; a **Cinnamon-breasted Tit** *Melaniparus pallidiventris* on Tom Hulley Road (1932 B1) on 22 February (PM) was the first record from there since 2018, and two **Spotted Creepers** *Salpornis salvadori* were at the Burma Valley turn-off (1932 B1) on 3 December (IR).

A pair of **African Red-eyed Bulbuls** *Pycnonotus nigricans* and a possible juvenile were at Hwange Bush Camp (1826 C1) towards the end of May (GD) and one with **Dark-capped Bulbuls** *P. tricolor* was in Victoria Falls Rain Forest on the 31st (DCh). Single **Sombre Greenbuls** *Andropadus importunus* were reported in December from Marondera North (1831 B1) and Headlands (1832 A3†) (AD). As reported in the previous period they were first seen at Bemba Farm, Marondera, in October 2022 and were heard around Headlands from the beginning of November. It remains to be seen if relatively high altitude and good rainfall along this stretch of the watershed will encourage them to settle. One at 1690m asl on the Seldomseen access road (1932 B1) on 1 January (KW) established a new Vumba altitudinal record which topped the 1400m obtained at Madrugada in 2015.

An **Eastern Nicator** *Nicator gularis* at Chewore Campsite (1529 D2†) on 4 May (NN) denotes movement downstream. Parent **Miombo Rock-thrushes** *Monticola angolensis* fed a fledgling on the thatched roof of Halfway House, Headlands (1832 A3†), on 4 January (DD). A female at the Mukuvisi Woodlands platform on 1 April (IR) was the first seen there since September 2022.

An extraordinary **Capped Wheatear** *Oenanthe pileata* record was one at the Gairezi River, Troutbeck (1832 B2), on the exceptionally early date of 6 April (VBo per NN). Our birds are considered to arrive from the southwest (Irwin, 1981. *The Birds of Zimbabwe*, page 266) so this individual's provenance, so far to the east and several weeks ahead of a normal arrival date, is open to question. **Familiar Chats** *O. familiaris* continue to inhabit new areas in Harare, being found at Greendale on 7 and 14 February (JBa) and Chisipite on the 9th (TAr). Up to three at a time were seen at known sites in the city throughout the period (IR).

A slight easterly extension of range of the Chinhoyi **Red-capped Robin-chat** *Cossypha natalensis* population was one at Pindi Park Farm (1730 A4†) on 26 March (IR). A **Collared Palm-thrush** *Cichladusa arquata* at Hippo Pools on 15 December (SCh) was the third record from there in recent years. One was at Chirundu on 17 January (TN) where only infrequently recorded. A juvenile **White-starred Robin** *Pogonochila stellata* at Connemara Lakes on 25 February (NMa) seems to be the first record from the Troutbeck area since 2002. One in a Mutare garden (1932 B1) on 23 April and 8 May (JCg) was unusual.

Six **Thrush Nightingales** *Luscinia luscinia* moved through the Masoka Camp area on 3 January (MZ). Singles were reported from Banket on 21 January (DSm) and Victoria Falls on 15 January, 16 February and 4 March (CB). One at Africa University, Mutare (1832 D4†), on 4 March (PM) was unusual that far east. Around Harare **Common Whitethroats** *Sylvia*

communis were on Monavale vlel on 9 December (J-MB), Haka Park on 29 March and 2 April (PZ), and on Chikurubi vlel (1731 C3) on 31 March (PZ). One was at Aberfoyle on 13 February (MS) and the last one reported was at Mutare on 16 April (GD), a month that has seen an increase in records in the last fifteen years or so.

A **Great Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus arundinaceus* on northern Chinga Pan, Sango (2032 A2†) on 29 January (J-MB) was slightly out of range. Pre-migratory **Marsh Warblers** *A. palustris* that visit a Newlands garden annually stayed longer this year, being noted spasmodically between 10 January and 23 March (IR). Arrival of **Broad-tailed Warblers** *Schoenicola brevirostris* this season apparently went unnoticed and two at Cloudlands, Vumba (1932 B1), on 17 December (J-MB) was the season's only record. Similarly, **Willow Warblers** *Phylloscopus trochilus* departed quietly with one on 26 March at Pindi Park Farm (IR) being more a late season record than a final departure date.

Bar-throated Apalises *Apalis thoracica* south of Shangani (1929 C4†) in December were slightly out of range (SS), and **Chirinda Apalises** *A. chirindensis* were on the lower Vumba at White Horse Inn (1932 B1) on 19 March (PM). A record of **Yellow-breasted Apalises** *A. flavida* at Binga (1727 C2†) in December (WG) is of interest as they are of fragmented occurrence on the upper reaches of Lake Kariba.

An unexpected record was a **Red-faced Crombec** *Sylvietta whytii* at the Mukuvisi Woodlands on 6 December. They have been locally extinct around Harare for some while so this bird was perhaps just moving through (IR). They have not been reported from the Vumba for several years but one was found on Tom Hulley Road (1932 B1) on 22 February (PM). A **Grey-backed Camaroptera** *Camaroptera brevicaudata* record from south of Melfort in December (JM) represents localised movement into the Bromley 1831 A2† square. The **Neddicky** *Cisticola fulvicapilla* has also disappeared from the Mukuvisi Woodlands but a few kilometres east some were at ZimPhos on 17 January (IR).

An **African Dusky Flycatcher** *Muscicapa adusta* in the Ruwa area (1731 C3) in January (AC) was the closest record to Harare for many years. Keeping the Mukuvisi Woodlands in the news, a **Collared Flycatcher** *Ficedula albicollis* on 26 February (PZ) would seem to be the first one reported from there since 2014. A landmark record was an over-wintering male at Mabale village slightly east of the Main Camp turnoff from the Bulawayo-Victoria Falls road (1827 C1†) on 30 May. It had been seen in the area for about a week prior to being photographed (BS). This is the country's first record in the four-month period, April to July, and is also a rare sighting this far west.

A leucistic **Southern Black Flycatcher** *Melaenornis pammelaina* was at Jabulani Safaris, Shangani, on 14 January (LT). **Black-throated Wattle-eyes** *Platysteira peltata* fed a very active fledgling at Mukuvisi Woodlands on 16 December (DT). **Blue-mantled Crested Flycatchers** *Trochocercus cyanomelas* are sparse residents along the eastern highlands border area and one at White Horse Inn on 19 March (PM) was the first Vumba record for nearly ten years.

A **Striped Pipit** *Anthus lineiventris* was slightly out of range on Kent Estate (1830 B1†) on 12-14 May (RC). The last **Tree Pipit** *A. trivialis* recorded was at Seldomseen on 13 April (BMB) prior to which up to four could be found on a walk (KW). **Wood Pipits** *A. nyassae* were found in QDS 1730 A4† at Banket on 27 January (DSM) and Pindi Park Farm on 26 March (IR). **Yellow-throated Longclaws** *Macronyx croceus* are uncommon on the

Vumba but one was at Seldomseen (1932 B2) on 17 December (BMB).

Anchieta's Tchagras *Bocagia minuta* are sparse within their restricted range on the eastern border so a report that numbers are increasing on vleis on Katiyo Estate (1833 A3) (MS) is good news indeed. Similarly confined to a very small border area, a **Bokmakierie** *Telophorus zeylonus* was at Bailey's Folly, Chimanmani Mountains (1933 C3), on 22 May (TO per J-MB). A highveld **Retz's Helmet-shrike** *Prionops retzii* record came from Lake Chivero on 17 April (PM).



Figure 3. The Collared Flycatcher recorded at Mabale Village, near Hwange main Camp. Photo © P. Zwanikken

Common Mynas *Acridotheres tristis* were reported from Binga (1727 C2†) (WG) and Deka Safari Area (1826 B3†) (SL) in December, and from the Zambezi Escarpment near Kamuchikundu (1630 B3†) (AC) in January. A lone female **Wattled Starling** *Creatophora cinerea* was on cattle near Far and Wide, Nyanga (1832 B4), on 19 December (CC). This is another bird more likely found in the Honde Valley than on the escarpment. Also on cattle was a **Red-billed Oxpecker** *Buphagus erythrorhynchus* at the Matopos (2028 D1) on 28 March (DS).

Copper Sunbirds *Cinnyris cupreus* are uncommon at Victoria Falls but were noted twice on 2 March with a male on the Lookout Café road and a pair a kilometre upstream of the Falls (CB). A large group of 30 or more was on Chikurubi vlel on 31 March (PZ). The Zambezi Valley **Variable Sunbird** *C. venustus* population is seldom mentioned so one at Chirundu on 17 January (TN) is worth noting. **Western Violet-backed Sunbirds** *Anthreptes longuemarei* were on mistletoes at Christon Bank on 2 April (IR) and a **Yellow-throated Petronia** *Gymnoris superciliaris* was an unexpected visitor to Newlands on 20 December and was IR's first garden record.

Many **Thick-billed Weavers** *Amblyospiza albifrons* at Jabulani Safaris, Shangani (1929 C4†), on 5 January (LT) indicate their expansion of range in southern Matabeleland continues. A male nest-building at Lomagundi Lakeside (1628 D2) in January (NH-P) follows Lake Kariba's first breeding records in 2018 and 2019 at Kariba Bream Farm. Some were at Binga (1727 C2†) in December, and **Spectacled Weavers** *Ploceus ocularis* were also on new territory there on the same occasion (WG).

It was a poor season for **Cuckoo Finches** *Anomalospiza imberbis* with individuals at Victoria Falls on 21 January (CB) and Monavale vlei on 13 March (IR) the only records. A January **Yellow-mantled Widowbird** *Euplectes macrourus* record from near Kwekwe (1829 D4†) (LTs) extends their range west of 30°E in the Midlands. At Victoria Falls in December, pairs of **Orange-winged Pytilias** *Pytilia afra* were in Zambezi NP (1725 D3) on the 4th (JB) and in the suburbs on the 28th (CB). Others were south of Macheke (1831 B2†) in January (AC), at Juliasdale (1832 B3) in February (AD) and at Pindi Park Farm on 26 March (IR).

Green Twinspots *Mandingoa nitidula* seen on a couple days in mid-May at Mahenya (2132 A4†) (GD) were well south of normal range. Some were at La Rochelle, Penhalonga (1832 D3), on 7 April along with **Red-throated Twinspots** *Hypargos niveoguttatus* (PM). Other **Red-throated** records were a male in Victoria Falls Rain Forest on 11 December and 2 April (CB), at White Horse Inn, Vumba (1932 B1), on 19 March (PM) and one at Mavuradonha Wilderness (1631 A3) between 8-12 April (RC). A **Grey Waxbill** *Estrilda perreini* at Far and Wide on 23 January (CC) is another bird more suited to the Honde Valley floor than the escarpment. **Magpie Mannikins** *Lonchura fringilloides* were reported in December from Art Farm, Teviotdale, Harare (1731 C1) (DS) and Melfort (1731 C4†) (JM).

Broad-tailed Paradise-whydahs *Vidua obtusa* are of fragmented occurrence in the southeast and were noted in the Runde River crossing area (2131 B4†) in mid-April (HH). The **Purple Widowfinch** *V. purpurascens* is uncommon at Mukuvisi Woodlands but a couple were seen on 3 April (IR). Two male **Steel-blue Widowfinches** *V. chalybeata* at Victoria Falls on 20 December were coming into breeding plumage and were the first of the season. A fully-plumaged individual was seen four days later (CB).

A large flock of **Lemon-breasted Canaries** *Crithagra citrinipectus* was seen at Mahenya in mid-May (GD). **Black-eared Seedeaters** *C. mennelli* were found in well-developed Miombo woodland in the Lake Mutirikwe RP on 12 February (PM). Three **Lark-like Buntings** *Emberiza impetuani* were at Victoria Falls on 2 May (CB) and one, possibly more, was at the Matopos on 13 May (DSi).

Arrivals

White Stork 5 December Kent Estate (AvL), 7 December Harare (KD), 10 December Bindura (JP); **African Crake** 12 December Harare (JM), 19 December Nyanga (CC), 20 December Banket (DSm) and near Kavinga (JeF); **Swallow-tailed Bee-eater** *Merops hirundineus* 9 April Hwange NP (*The Babbler*), 15 April Chamabonda vlei (CBr), 17 April Banket (DSm), 23 April Mazowe (*The Babbler*), 25 April Harare (JBa); **Red-capped Lark** *Calandrella cinerea* 29 April Musango (SE); **Great Reed Warbler** 19 December Harare (*The Babbler*).

Departures

White Stork 2 April Aisleby (HL), 19 May Harare (KD); **Abdim's Stork** 17 March Bulawayo (TF), 7 April Tafika Camp, Sapi Safari Area (1529 D1) (TAr) and Kazungula (TF), 15 April Harare (DS); **Yellow-billed Kite** 6 March Bulawayo (JV), 11 March Kenmaur (1927 B2) (AR) and Victoria Falls (KB), 15 March Harare (FL per IR); **Wahlberg's Eagle** *Hieraetus wahlbergi* 2 April Bulawayo (*The Babbler*), 6 April Kazungula (TF), 20 April Harare (DD); **Steppe Buzzard** *Buteo buteo* 23 February Fothergill (about 30 on a thermal) (AJ), 11 March Harare (IR); **African Crake** 30 March Chirundu (TN), 31 March Harare (PZ), 16 May Banket (DSm); **Wood Sandpiper** 12 April Victoria Falls; **Ruff** *Philomachus pugnax* 6 April Victoria Falls (CB).

Red-chested Cuckoo 2 March Harare (RD), 4 March Victoria Falls (CB), 28 May Sanyati West (KF); **Black Cuckoo** *Cuculus clamosus* 8-12 April Mavuradonha Wilderness (RC); **Levaillant's Cuckoo** *Clamator levaillantii* 1 April Umguza (AR), 2 April Nuanetsi Ranch (CCn), 19 April Cawston Block (SN), 20 April Malilangwe (AH), 27 April Berea Farm, Mazowe West (1730 D2) (JWh), 7 May Harare (KD, IR), 13 May Save-Runde Junction (GD), 14 May Shumba Pan (DC), 22 May Banket (DSm); **Jacobin Cuckoo** *C. jacobinus* 10 April Mana Pools (JWh), 14 April Harare (JBa), 25 April Masoka (MZ), 7 May Tambahata Pan (TM); **Klaas's Cuckoo** 7 April Banket (DSm), 25 April Masoka (MZ); **Diderick Cuckoo** 25 March Lilfordia (JWh), 1 April Chegutu (*The Babbler*), 3 April Harare (IR); **Black Coucal** 25 March Lilfordia (JWh), 26 March Banket (DSm), 31 March Harare (PZ); **Pennant-winged Nightjar** 19 February Harare (JM, IR); **White-rumped Swift** *Apus caffer* 1 April Harare (IR), 4 April Victoria Falls (CB); **Woodland Kingfisher** *Halcyon senegalensis* 3 April Harare (IR), 23 April Tashinga (MP), 24 April Gonarezhou (KvL), 28 April Mana Pools (MA), 29 April Musango (SE), 3 May below Deteema Dam (SWm), 13 May Chirundu (TN); **Grey-headed Kingfisher** 24 March Mukuvisi (juvenile) (LC); **European Bee-eater** *Merops apiaster* 2 April Chirundu (TN), Bulawayo (HL, JV) and Goromonzi (PT), 3 April Gonarezhou (EvdW), 4 April Hwedza (JT) and Victoria Falls (CB), 10 April Connemara Lakes (PSm) and Mana Pools (JWh), 14 April Musango (SE), 17 April Lake Chivero (PM), 18 April Harare (IR, GL); **Southern Carmine Bee-eater** 22 March Chirundu (EB); **European Roller** 17 March Victoria Falls (CBr).

Barn Swallow 1 April Hwange NP (DS), 7 April Kazungula (TF), 18 May Victoria Falls (CB); **White-throated Swallow** *Hirundo albigularis* 6 May Harare (JP); **Common House Martin** 18 May Victoria Falls (CB); **Banded Martin** 21 April Banket (DSm), 6 May Victoria Falls (CB), 14 May Dete vlei (JV); **African Golden Oriole** *Oriolus auratus* 4 May Victoria Falls (CB); **Capped Wheatear** 20 December Ngamo Plains (ARb); **Marsh Warbler** 23 March Harare (IR); **African Paradise-flycatcher** *Terpsiphone viridis* 16 April Victoria Falls (CB), 20 April Angwa Bridge (1630 A2) (MZ), 7 May Gwaai River (TF), 14 May Harare (MH), 22 May Fothergill (DC), Rhino Safari Camp (PTE), Musango (SE), Little Rukomechi and Kavinga (BHo), 24 May Chirundu (TN); **Lesser Grey Shrike** *Lanius minor* 25 March Musango (SE), 1 April Banket (DSm), Upper Vumba (KW) and Hwange NP (DS), 3 April Harare (IR), 8 April Nyanga (GD), 12 April Kazungula (JK), 15 April Victoria Falls (CB), 20 April Gonarezhou (HH); **Red-backed Shrike** *L. collurio* 27 March Upper Vumba (KW), 30 March Chirundu (TN), 3 April Masoka (MZ), 12 April Kazungula (JK), 14 April Harare (JM) and Cawston Block (SN), 15 April Victoria Falls (CB), 18 April Nyanga (CC), 23 April

Gonarezhou (KvL); **Violet-backed Starling** *Cinnyricinclus leucogaster* 22 April Chengeta Lodge, Selous (DS), 29 April Victoria Falls (CB), 19 May Harare (JBa), 23 May Kenmaur (1927 B2) (TF).

Observers

Steve Alexander (SA), Tessa Arkwright (TAr), Matt Austen (MA), Elspeth Baillie (EB), Colin Baker (CB), Jonathan Baker (JBk), Julia Baker (JB), James Ball (JBa), Jamin Bews (JBe), Khumbulani Bhebhe (KB), Jean-Michel Blake (J-MB), Jenna Booth (JBo), Vernon Booth (VBo), Charles Brightman (CBr), David Charlton (DCh), Liam Charlton (LC), Simba Chibike (SCh), Ronnie Chirimuta (RC), Stan Chizipi (SC), Dave Christensen (DC), Japie Claasen (JC), Ant Clarke (ACl), Jane Clegg (JCg), Bryce Clemence (BC), Alan Collett (AC), Courtney Connear (CCn), Tracey Couto (TC), Chris Cragg (CC), Asher Dare (AD), David Dalziel (DD), Robert Davy (RDy), Richard Dennison (RD), Peta Ditchburn (PD), Ken Dixon (KD), Peter van Dommelen (PvD), Gary Douglas (GD), Steve Edwards (SE), Neil Fairlie (NF), Kevin Fallon (KF), Terry Fenn (TF), Annelies Finaughty-Weller (AF-W), Jen Francis (JeF), Nyasha Gomwe (NG), Lyle Green (LG), Wesley Gush (WG), Mark Hadingham (MH), Hugo Haussmann (HH), Derek Hinde (DH), Bridget Holland (BHo), April Hundermark (AH), Adam Jones (AJ), Doug Kew (DK), Jodie Kuipers (JK), Barry

Launder (BL), Alex van Leenhoff (AvL), Pam van Leenhoff (PvL), Helen Lewis (HL), Stephen Long (SL), Frances Lovemore (FL), Geoff Lowe (GL), Jim Mackie (JMk), Ali MacDonald (AMacD), Luke McDonald (LMcD), Peter Magosvongwe (PM), Nyaradzai Mapara (NMa), Bekezela Masuku (BMa), Bev Morgan (BM), Buluwesi Murambiwa (BMb), Jimmy Muropa (JM), Thomas Mutombeni (TM), Neil Nativel (NN), Bhekizulu Ncube (BN), Tadius Ndadziira (TN), Sean Nicolle (SN), Teresa Olbert (TO), Thys Olivier (TOv), Nikki Hayden-Payne (NH-P), Michael Pelham (MP), Julia Pierini (JP), Gordon Putterill (GP), Ali Randell (AR), Carl van der Reit (CvdR), Ian Riddell (IR), Allen Roberts (ARb), Morgan Saineti (MS), Shingirai Sakarombe (SS), Pieter Scholtz (PS), Dane Simmonds (DSi), Peter Simon (PSm), Doug Smith (DSm), Brent Stapelkamp (BS), Clive Stockil (CS), Lowden Stoole (LS), Debbie Swales (DS), Pete Taylor (PT), Jan Teede (JTe), Luke Terblanche (LT), Peter Tetlow (PTe), Gilly Thornycroft (GT), Darryl Tiran (DT), Judy Travers (JT), Leon Tshuma (LTs), James Varden (JV), Dorothy Wakeling (DW), Elsabe van der Westhuizen (EvdW), Johnny Whitfield (JWh), Spike Williamson (SWm), Barry Wolhuter (BW), Rogan Wolhuter (RW), Ken Worsley (KW), MacKenzie Zirota (MZ), Piet Zwanikken (PZ).

The Babbler – Newsletter of BirdLife Zimbabwe
SABAP2 – Contributor unidentified

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Birding at Mwanza, Tanzania

When I was working in Uganda, I travelled quite often to Mwanza in Tanzania, on the southern shore of Lake Victoria. The journey there was somewhat depressing, since the whole eastern shore of the lake is densely populated, there is little remaining natural vegetation and I seldom saw any birds along the road. An exception was when the road briefly ran along the border of Serengeti National Park, with a stark contrast between the densely cultivated land on its western side and lovely grassland on the eastern. I once spotted a couple of zebra there and saw weaver nests in trees alongside the road, but that was all.

On one trip, we spent a night at a lodge on Speke Gulf, a large bay northeast of Mwanza. This had some big trees in which both Fish Eagles and Hamerkops had nests, while Angola Swallows perched on the window sills of our chalet. The next morning, taking a walk in a small area of natural vegetation surrounding the lodge I saw my first Tanzanian endemic, the Grey-breasted Spurfowl. It was quite tame so I got a good look at it, and couldn't help wondering how any francolins could survive in such a densely populated area – I later read that they were quite common in Serengeti. I was also delighted to be subjected to a full threat display from a Spotted Thick-knee, which stood its ground, glaring at me with outspread wings. I assumed it had eggs or chicks nearby so I moved off and left it in peace.

The first site in Mwanza where I was able to do some birding was a rather eccentric hotel on the northern edge of the city. A pair of Red-necked Falcons lived in a large palm tree at the turn-off to this hotel and I once watched one go after a dove – it missed but veered off out of sight and soon returned with a small bird, possibly a swallow, in its talons.

The hotel itself had a nice garden which included a large acacia tree that supported a huge colony of Village Weavers. Sadly, this tree might have died in 2020 as a result of the exceptionally high water levels of the lake. Notably, it was the only place where I have ever seen both White-browed (Heuglin's) and Red-capped (Natal) Robin-chats, although the former was more frequent. The stars of the garden, however, were Spotted Palm Thrushes, which were remarkably tame and approachable.

Other species at this hotel included the Red-chested Sunbird, the commonest sunbird around the lake, White-bellied Canaries and Reichenow's Seedeater. I also came across sparrows, which the field guides assured me were Swahili Sparrows, although I doubt that I could have separated them from Northern Grey-headed Sparrows.

I recorded some cisticolas (but couldn't identify them) in some open ground behind the hotel but I did spot a small group of Buff-bellied Warblers. These were small, unobtrusive birds, rather like a Willow Warbler but with white outer tail feathers.

A pair of Fish Eagles lived on a small rocky outcrop just outside the hotel grounds, but a nice sighting here was of Blue-capped Cordon-bleus. The male has an entirely blue head and both sexes have rather heavier and somewhat plastic-looking pinkish bills, at least compared to the other two species. I later encountered Red-cheeked Cordon-bleus, widespread in East Africa, but the Tanzanian Bird Atlas records our Blue Waxbill (Southern Cordon-bleu) at Mwanza and it would have been nice to have seen all three species there.

There was a rather dilapidated concrete jetty not far from the hotel and it was obvious that Angola Swallows were nesting

underneath it. We were taken out on the lake on one of my trips and while waiting for the boat I saw the heads of three otters, one with a fish in its mouth, suddenly appear out of the water. I also saw otters in Jinja and it was good to know that at least some wildlife had survived on the lake as I only saw one hippo and never any crocodiles. Sitatungas were apparently formerly common in the fringing wetlands around the lake but I never saw any and there are probably very few left nowadays.

Once out on the lake, we encountered an enormous number of terns with those in breeding plumage all being Whiskered Terns, but I was reasonably sure that I had spotted a Gull-billed Tern and, possibly, a Black Tern.

My next birding locality was the Tanzanian Fisheries Research Institute located on the southern edge of the city. There wasn't much to be seen on the way, apart from Marabou Storks on an open and evidently rather wet, area and in the evenings there seemed to be a considerable number of Yellow-billed Kites all flying in the same direction, presumably to a communal roost. But if Mwanza decided to adopt a 'city bird' then it would surely be the Pied Kingfisher since there were large numbers of them everywhere near the lakeshore.

The fisheries institute was located in an entirely different habitat from the hotel amongst rocky, granite hills much like the Matobo hills in Zimbabwe. The institute building was situated on a flat surface that had been cut out of the side of a hill, and there was a vertical bank at the back with a large colony of Pied Kingfishers. I was able to entertain myself by watching them during meetings! There were also some dry earthen fishponds lower down nearer the lake and they too supported kingfisher colonies, as did a gravel pit along the road. This reflected the extraordinary productivity of Lake Victoria, something that is seldom the case in southern Africa. In the 1970s Pied Kingfishers fed mostly on the endemic haplochromine cichlids, of which there were as many as 500 species. After Nile perch extirpated most of them, they now feed on a small kapenta-like fish known locally as 'dagaa.' These fish are heavily infested with tapeworms, with the Pied Kingfisher being the primary host.

It was here that I saw three more endemic Tanzanian species. One of them was not a bird, but a lizard – the Mwanza rock agama. A very handsome beast with an orange head and red and purple body, they were quite numerous around the fishery institute buildings. The first endemic bird species was the Usambiro Barbet which, although in the same genus as the Crested Barbet, seemed very different from it. The ones that I saw were in a small party of five or six birds and their call was a rather odd, squeaky and repetitive noise. The third endemic bird species was the Yellow-collared Lovebird of which I saw only a single bird, but no doubt there were others around.

In some respects, the birds at the fisheries centre had a slightly 'southern' feel, owing to the presence of Mocking Chats, Southern Puffbacks and Rattling Cisticolas (at last – a cisticola I could positively identify!). Once, while walking in the grounds of the fisheries centre, I heard a loud click at my feet. It turned out to be a Little Bee-eater catching an insect that I had flushed up and this was the only time I saw this species anywhere in East Africa. I also saw a Golden-breasted Bunting, the only bunting I ever saw in East Africa, which was yet another reminder of Zimbabwe.

The vegetation on the rocky hills around the institute was quite badly cut about, and there was some lantana, but it wasn't as severely damaged as some of the vegetation along the road, especially in Kenya. This meant that there were at least some birds and I had some nice sightings. A memorable one was of two Slate-coloured Boubous duetting while perched on a small wood-pile. A stunning performance, far better than anything I ever heard from a southern African boubou.

Another distinctive species, not uncommon, was the White-headed Barbet. This is a rather variable species but easily distinguished by its white head and black bill. I saw them quite often in the larger trees along the lakeshore.

Some of my visits were in the breeding season and there were two bishops that bred in the herbaceous vegetation just inland from the lake. These were the Black and Black-winged Bishops and I had to look at them carefully because the breeding males were rather similar with black wings and a black tail. The Black Bishops were especially confusing because the ones I had seen

in Uganda and Kenya really did look like black birds with a red collar. But the Tanzanian subspecies has a red back and so looks very like a Black-winged Bishop. I eventually figured it out because the Black-winged Bishop has a red forehead (hence the alternative name: Fire-crowned Bishop) and reddish under-tail coverts, while the Black Bishop has a black forehead and obvious white under-tail coverts, which contrast markedly with its black tail.

I always regretted that I only ever visited Mwanza on working trips because I would like to have visited some areas that might have been very rewarding. One of them, obviously, was the Serengeti National Park, but this seemed very expensive compared to Uganda's parks, so we never went there. I also discovered – later – there is a small national park on an island just offshore from the city. That would have been more accessible and might have yielded a few more interesting species.

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