ISSN 00-18-456-X

HONEYGUIDE

Journal of
Zimbabwean and Regional Ornithology
June 2024, Volume 70, Part 1

Streaky-breasted Flufftail *Sarothrura boehmi*
Photo: © Barry Launder

Member of IUCN The World Conservation Union

BirdLife ZIMBABWE
The BirdLife International Partner in Zimbabwe

ISSN 00-18-456-X

TABLE OF CONTENTS

GUIDELINES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

Honeyguide is an ornithological journal that accepts scientific papers and articles, short notes and observations, as well as contributions of a more general interest. Its primary emphasis is on the birds of Zimbabwe but scientific contributions from other parts of Africa, and general interest contributions from anywhere else will also be accepted. Wherever possible, articles should be submitted electronically, preferably in MS-Word using the language option 'English (Zimbabwe)' or any other variant of British English.

Contributions can be sent to:

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

and/or

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

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

The definitive internationally recognised name for any bird species is its scientific name and this should be included in all contributions except for those of general interest, such as accounts of travel or birdwatching. The scientific name given in *Roberts VII* will generally be followed although contributors should note that many names have been changed since that book was published. The Editor will endeavour to keep up to date with the changes. Common names are more of a problem since there is often more than one name for a species and some variation amongst different authorities. The journal will be flexible as far as common names are concerned and contributors may use the names they are accustomed to or most familiar with.

Contributors are urged to check previous issues of the journal for the format and style of references although the Editor will check and correct any if necessary. The editor will supply authors with PDF copies of their articles on request.

Honeyguide **70(1)**: 1-2, 2024

Notes on the breeding of the African Green Pigeon

A.R. Fynn

Introduction

These notes have their roots in my farming days in the district of Trelawney, Zimbabwe, some twenty years ago, when, in the course of travelling around the farm, I began studying African Green Pigeons and making constant, relevant notes. In particular, I was interested in their diet, what they ate and when was it available, but I also made comprehensive notes on their breeding. In the context of their breeding, it is impossible to separate breeding from their diet, and so these notes should be read in conjunction with my earlier notes on their diet (Fynn 2022).

Study Area

Most of the study was done on the farm Dulwich Estate, which is some 100 km north of Harare. Originally covered in classic *Brachystegia*/Miombo woodland, the farm had been opened up for tobacco production but still retained reasonable areas of woodland. In particular, over the years, my farmhouse garden became a favoured nesting area which made it a lot easier to study the breeding habits.

The garden was sizeable, security fenced and had many mature, indigenous trees of different species. Of relevance here are Msasa *Brachystegia spiciformis*, Mnondo *Julbernardia globiflora*, Mufuti *Brachystegia boehmii*, Pale-fruited monotes *Monotes glaber*, Mobola plum *Parinari curatellifolia* and three fig species, *Ficus thonningii*, *F. sur* and *F. sycomorus*. Also, the exotics planted in the garden, among them the Australian Bottlebrush *Callistemon* sp., Syringa *Melia azedarach* and Jacaranda *Jacaranda mimosifolia*.

Breeding season and stimulus

As noted in my paper on foods and feeding, diet plays a critical part in the life of the African Green Pigeon, and this is very evident in their breeding cycle. Irwin (1981) gives their main breeding months as September (48 records), October (67), November (34), and December (24), with isolated records for January (4), February (1), May (2), July (1) and August (8). Rowan (1983) gives Zimbabwean breeding dates from July to February with 93% of them being from September to December.

I never kept a count of the nests in our garden, but over a ten-year period they would have amounted to more than 60 and the largest number of active nests at a single time was nine. All were within a maximum of 30 m from each other. The combination of suitable trees and the reduced risk from predators around a homestead was probably the reason why there were so many. In addition, the trees provided the next vital factor – suitable food in close proximity.

After some years it became evident that the preceding season played a large part in determining the onset of breeding. This was because an important part of the diet at that stage of the year was suitable green food in the form of new green leaves. In particular, the new fresh Msasa leaves, with their vibrant flush of red in July and August, were a vital part of the diet before the first fruiting of fig and other favoured trees. There were other tree species as well, including fresh *F. thonningii* leaves and buds, and new leaves of *M. glaber*, which were eaten at that time.

This leaf flush almost always preceded any new fruiting in the wild by some two to three weeks. After a previous dry season, the new leaves flush earlier, and after a previous good rainy season the new leaf flush occurs later. This meant that leaf flush and breeding occurred earlier after a previous poor rainy season while, conversely, leaf flush and breeding occurred later after a good rainy season.

Hence, the earliest new leaf flush recorded was April 1982 and the build-up to breeding activity started as early as May 1982, with the first and earliest nest building recorded on 8th July 1982. In August 1996 the Msasa flush was late and no breeding activity started until the new leaves flush started.

Courtship

African Green Pigeon sexes are so similar that it is impossible to separate them visually. I was fortunate in that a pair nested right outside our bedroom for several years, in a *Monotes glaber*, and we were able to distinguish the sexes. The male of this pair had at some stage damaged his right eye, and as they were observed mating on several occasions this distinguishing mark was very helpful.

There is always much noisy hopping around in a flock, but genuine courtship has much to do with the tail which, with its bold markings on the underside, plays an important role in courtship. In the male it is also used to indicate territory. When the female is involved, the male wags his tail both up and down, also occasionally fanning it sideways, and both may give a soft rolling "*r r r r r r - uk*" call. The female may also wag her closed tail but was only seen to move it up and down. The males may also sometimes raise their wings.

As mentioned in a previous paper (Fynn 2022) the tail is also used to break up the bird's outline when a predator is around, with the tail being raised to show its bold underneath colours and the head lowered so that a different profile is shown.

Nest building and egg laying

On 4 October 1989, five pairs started breeding within two days of each other. Only two weeks previously there was absolutely no fruit around, only fresh Msasa leaves.

Site selection is done by both birds, with the female staying at the chosen site while the male brings the twigs. The site varies but is normally more than 6 m up and in the semi-outer branches. If a nest falls down during building, they move to another site close by and carry on. Once chosen and successful, the same site may be used for years.

Isolated trees are often chosen, presumably because this gives the birds a better view of any approaching predators. An exotic Syringa growing in the middle of our lawn was used year after year, the nest being in a hemiparasitic mistletoe (Loranthaceae) and only some 3 m up. In one amazing year a second pair nested within 2 m of this nest, and at the same time a Red-eyed Dove *Streptopelia semitorquata* had a nest one metre away. There was no aggressive interaction between any of the birds at any time.

Twigs for the nest are broken from trees by the male and carried to the female. Most favoured were twigs from kudu berry *Pseudolachnostylis maprouneifolia*, but Mnondo were often

used, as were *Parinari*, and the twigs from the dry berries of the Syringa tree.

Building is nearly always done in the early morning, from just after first light till about 9 a.m., when they leave and go to food sources. Egg laying is always done at some time overnight, as time after time an empty nest would be checked and the next morning the birds would be sitting.

Both birds incubate, with the males sitting during most of the day, and the females sitting during the evening and night. Changeover occurs at about 6 a.m. in the morning when the male takes over, and in the late afternoon between 4 p.m. and 5 p.m. when the female takes over. The male then immediately goes to feed. The female thus has all day to feed. When on the nest the females sit tighter than the males.

Hatching and nestling development

Hatching always occurs overnight as eggshells are often found below the nest site the next morning. This enabled me to accurately confirm published literature on the incubation period of 12 to 14 days (Rowan 1983). Chicks are brooded very closely after this and, as noted in Fynn (2020), they are fed on fresh leaves and green matter in addition to fruit that may be available, particularly figs. This was ascertained on several occasions after examining the crop contents of young chicks that died after high winds blew them out of the nest.

The chicks' growth is rapid and after some 12 days, compared to 11-13 days elsewhere (Rowan 1983), they outgrow the nest and must leave it, even though they are unable to fly and are at most only half the size of their parents. This meant I could determine an accurate 'laying to nest-leaving time' of 24 – 27 days. Once they have left the nest the chicks sit on a nearby branch always with one parent in attendance. They can fly to some extent three days after leaving the nest, but not competently as they are still very heavy-bodied. Of interest is that, unlike many other members of the pigeon family, the nest is never fouled with droppings from the chicks.

Nests can be replaced if there is a tragedy. For example, three weeks after high winds blew their babies out of the nest, the bottlebrush pair laid again in the same nest and successfully raised two chicks.

Some notes on roosting

As previously noted our garden was seen as a refuge and breeding sanctuary and so, for most of the year, we had flocks roosting in the garden. A resident flock of more than 20 birds was often augmented by visitor flocks, but they never roosted together. Roosting is done in the outer branches of chosen trees, towards the top but within the canopy, and on exactly the same branches every night. The birds fly into the roost tree about 15 minutes before last light, and they will fly at night if disturbed.

As the breeding season approaches, pairs begin to roost together and there are many more singles roosting close by, but by themselves. Even the resident flock would sometimes leave when food sources were farther away, but always returned, with much noise as they arrived back. On 5 January 1986 the flock arrived back, having been away for three and a half weeks, their longest time away. These absences almost always occurred in mid-June and late December/early January.

References

Fynn, A.R. 2022. Notes on the African Green Pigeon, with particular reference to food sources, and its seasonal availability. *Honeyguide* **68**: 43-47.

Irwin, M.P.S. 1981. *The birds of Zimbabwe*, Quest Publishing., Harare

Rowan, M.K. 1983. *The doves, parrots, louries and cuckoos of southern Africa*, David Phillips.

A.R. Fynn, *Harare*. ✉ fynn@zol.co.zw

Honeyguide **70**(1): 3-5, 2024

Pools in Tree-holes: A Key Resource for African Savannah Birds?

Anthony Cizek

The natural history and ecology of pools of water stored in holes in large trees – or dendrotelmata – are relatively well-studied with respect to insects with aquatic larvae, but there is much less known about their use by vertebrates. Furthermore, most information about vertebrates in these pools is from amphibians, which have aquatic life-cycle stages. However, recent research employing camera-traps found seventeen bird species (and eleven mammal species) using tree-hole pools in German temperate forests (Kirsch *et al*. 2021), and twenty-one bird (and nine mammal) species doing so in Mexican dry forest (Delgado-Martínez *et al*. 2021. Baker (1983) reported an Eastern Bearded Scrub-robin *Cercotrichas quadrivirgata* bathing in a pool in a large tree-hole, and noted the complete lack of previous records. There seem to have been no subsequent reports, suggesting that – remarkably – this remains the only published record of African birds bathing in or drinking from pools of water stored in tree-holes. Therefore, the intense drinking and bathing activity seen at a pool in a hole in a large tree in the garden of the camp on the Guluji River, Chipinda Pools Headquarters, Gonarezhou National Park, on 29 November 2023 is noteworthy.

Figure 1. (Left) A Meves's Starling pauses to check the surroundings before drinking from a pool in a tree-hole, Chipinda Pools Headquarters, Gonarezhou National Park, Zimbabwe. (Right) A Bearded Woodpecker pauses while drinking from the tree-hole pool; note the moist bill-tip.

The pool formed from the serendipitous placement of a garden spray. It was very hot, with maximum temperatures close to or exceeding 40°C for two weeks culminating with 43°C on 29 November. No rain had fallen for almost a month, and the three sprays used to water the lawn themselves attracted appreciable attention from a large number of species. These included Cardinal *Dendropicos fuscescens* and Bearded woodpeckers *Chloropicus namaquus*, which used a spray when it fell on the bottom of a tree trunk, spending appreciable periods so as to saturate their feathers. At one point, three pairs of White-bellied Sunbirds *Cinnyris talatala* bathed in and drank from leaves dripping with the water originating from just a single spray. Initially, it was thought that birds paying attention to the hole in a large tree in the centre of the lawned area were investigating a possible nest site, but it was soon realised that birds were drinking and bathing in a pool located in the tree-hole. Meves's Starling *Lamprotornis mevesii*, Bearded Woodpecker, Arrow-marked Babbler *Turdoides jardineii*, Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill *Tockus leucomelas*, Crested Barbet *Trachyphonus vaillantii*, Black-headed Oriole *Oriolus larvatus* and Lesser Honeyguide *Indicator minor* were all seen to drink from the pool, and a Crested Barbet bathed in it. The hole was only observed for a short period (10 – 20 mins, a couple of times across a few hours), suggesting more species could have been added to this list with longer observation.

Individuals arrived continuously but there were only brief interactions between them, largely because they were wary when approaching the tree-hole, spending little time drinking or bathing before moving on. However, Arrow-marked Babblers had to wait a while when a small leguaan *Varanus niloticus* dried off adjacent to the hole, having dropped into the pool, probably also to drink. There were many visits by Lesser Honeyguides – the most prominent species at the hole – and, initially, they were thought to searching for broods to parasitise, but individuals were seen to drink. At least two individuals were seen at the hole at the same time, which is interesting given that the Lesser

Honeyguide is believed to have a large territory and individuals to rarely come into contact. Again, there was little interaction between these birds in the short time they were together on the tree, but it is possible that the extreme heat generally wilted aggressive, territorial behaviour.

The intense activity is of particular interest since the perennial pools in the Guluji River were less than 30 m away, and there is no doubt that these birds strongly preferred the water stored in the tree-hole over that available in the adjacent river. Australian research has shown that waterholes can remain potable (for birds) six months or more after the last rain falls (Fisher *et al*. 1972) and it is likely, rather, that there was a lower risk of predation in the garden by small raptors patrolling the well-known river water source.

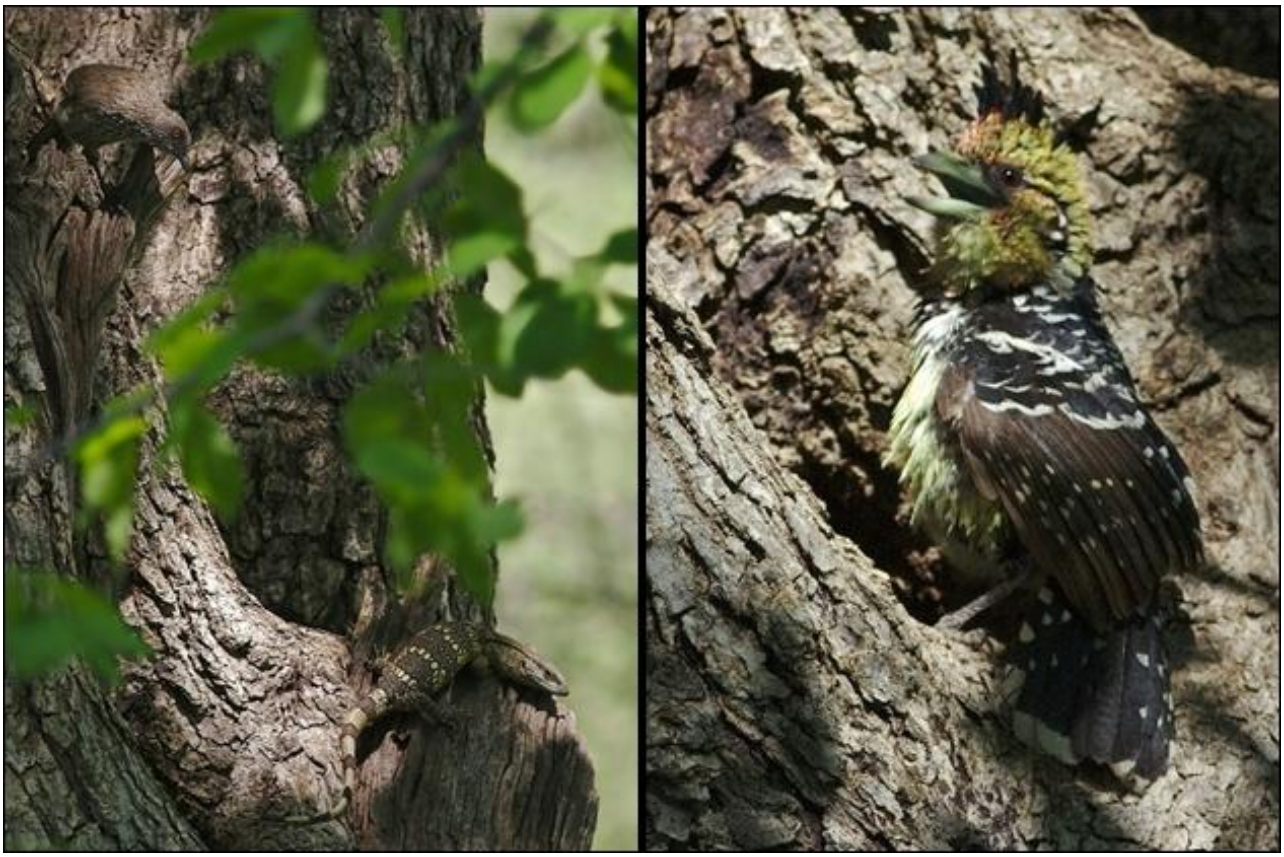

Figure 2. (Left) An Arrow-marked Babbler waits next to the tree-hole pool, likely wanting to drink, while a leguaan that fell into it dries off. (Right) A partially wet Crested Barbet after it bathed in the tree-hole pool.

The structure of the 'container' holding the water is likely important, too, with the vertical trunk below the hole allowing much easier access for short-legged species, notably the woodpeckers, than the downward slope of a streambank (even with a soft decline). In Mexican dry forest, medium-sized bird species used pools in tree-holes more frequently than terrestrial water-holes or rock-pools, and arboreal and scansorial (i.e., with the propensity to climb) also more frequently visited pools in tree-holes (Delgado-Martínez *et al*. 2023). Similarly, no small passerines were seen entering the hole at Guluji camp, possibly because of the physical limitations of the steep sides, or because the tree-hole was too large, and the pool too deep for small birds to reach the water from the lip. However, it wasn't large enough for a Crested Barbet to wet more than its front and upper body.

The drinking action also seems important, as bird species that need to scoop water up before tilting the head back to swallow would need more space around the pool, i.e. a large tree-hole, than those able to syphon water with their heads down. Little is known of the drinking actions of African bird species, so it is interesting that the Southern Yellow-billed Hornbills observed at the Chipinda Pools tree-hole pool seemed able to drink without lifting their heads, in contrast to the drinking action of a Great Hornbill *Buceros bicornis*, which can be seen on YouTube (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=anOjY6Gt9wU).

The water in the Chipinda Pools tree-hole was artificially provided, but the German and Mexican research shows that pools from rainfall are an important resource for birds in both temperate and tropical forests, and, although poorly recognised and documented, this must also be true in African. The rainy season of semi-arid regions like Zimbabwe's southeast lowveld, and the Save-Limpopo Valley, is typified by appreciable dry periods between rain events, suggesting that rainwater stored in the holes of large trees is an important source for drinking and bathing when more exposed sources have dried up. Environmental temperatures are greatest at this time of the year, and water is used to lower body temperature, through evaporative cooling. The extreme heat in November 2023 forced even species which do not normally drink to seek freely available water. Climate change is causing temperatures in southern African savannahs to rise, and we need much better understanding of which bird species need water to survive periods of extreme heat, and where, and how, they obtain it.

Therefore, I would be grateful if *Honeyguide* readers could let me know of any records they have of birds drinking and bathing in pools stored in tree-holes. I can be contacted on anthonycizek@mac.com.

References

Baker 1983. Eastern-bearded scrub robin *Cercotrichas quadrivirgata* bathing in a tree hole. *Scopus* B: 95–96.

Delgado-Martínez, C.M., Cudney-Valenzuela, S.J. & Mendoza, E. 2021. Camera trapping reveals multispecies use of water-filled tree holes by birds and mammals in a neotropical forest. *Biotropica* **54**: 262-267.

Delgado-Martínez, C.M., Kolb, M., Pascual-Ramirez, F & Mendoza, E. 2023. Differential utilization of surface and arboreal water bodies by birds and mammals in a seasonally dry Neotropical forest in southern Mexico. *Ecology and Evolution* **13**: e10781.

Fisher, C.D., Lindgren, E. & Dawson, W.R. 1972. Drinking patterns and behavior of Australian desert birds in relation to their ecology and abundance. *The Condor* **74**: 111-136.

Kirsch, J.-J., Sermon, J., Jonker, M., Asbeck, T., Gossneer, M.M., Petermann, J.S., & Basileet, M. 2021. The use of water-filled tree holes by vertebrates in temperate forests. *Wildlife Biology*, 2021: wlb.00786.

Anthony Cizek. ✉ anthonycizek@mac.com

Figure 3. A pair of Southern Yellow-billed Hornbills drink from the tree-hole pool. All photos © Anthony Cizek

Honeyguide **70**(1): 6-7, 2024

A count of African Fish-eagles between Kariba and Mana Pools in 1989

Ian Riddell

In April 1989 African Fish-eagles *Haliaeetus vocifer* were counted during two canoe trips on the Zambezi River between Kariba and Nyamepi Camp in Mana Pools National Park. The Zambian bank was under-recorded where the river was wide and some birds may have been missed if they were not conspicuously perched or calling. Birds quietly perched on inland channels and pans might also have been missed.

The first trip over 4-9 April was from the launch site in Kariba Gorge to Nyamepi Camp, whilst the second, over 11-13 April, started from Chirundu, thus Kariba-Chirundu was covered once and Chirundu-Nyamepi twice.

Table 1. Sightings of African Fish-eagles between Kariba and Nyamepi Camp, Mana Pools National Park, in April 1989.

Date	Locality	River length (km)	Number of birds		Total
			Adults	Non-adults	
4 April	Kariba Gorge	18	4	1 Sub-Ad.	5[a]
5 April	A Camp – Twin Logs	30	16	1 Juv.	17[b]
6 April	Twin Logs – Kakomomarara	30	10	-	10[c]
7 April	Kakomomarara-Ruckomechi	25	15	-	15[d]
8 April	Ruckomechi-Nyamepi	27	12	1 Juv., 1 Imm.	14[e]
9 Apr	Zambia	-	2	-	2[f]
Total		130	59	4 (6.8%)	**63**
11 April	Chirundu- Kakomomarara	18	4	-	4
12 April	Kakomomarara-Ruckomechi	25	19	1 Imm., 1 Imm./Juv.	20[g]
13 April	Ruckomechi-Nyamepi	27	11	1 Juv., 1 Imm.	13[h]
Total		**70**	34	4 (11.8%)	**38**

Notes:

[a] 3 singles + 1 pair; -16.436335, 28.81918, adult & sub-adult nest building, carrying branches into a tree *c*.100m up slope.

[b] 5 singles + 6 pairs. Section of *c*.3 km from Sharu River was not covered and the section of *c*.4 km from B Camp was poorly covered. The last pair was at a nest site *c*.470 m inland in mixed floodplain woodland.

[c] 2 singles + 4 pairs.

[d] 4 singles, 4 pairs + 3.

[e] 8 singles + 3 pairs. The two on Survival Island, Vundu, were an adult and a juvenile.

[f] 2 opposite Nyamepi camp on bushy Zambian bank.

[g] 4 singles, 7 pairs +3. Includes 2-4 birds around Ruckomechi not marked. The group of 3 included an immature, while. 2 upstream of Ruckomechi comprised an adult and a juv./imm.

[h] 5 singles + 4 pairs. The two on Survival Island, Vundu, were an adult and a juvenile.

Kariba to Chirundu

In Kariba Gorge the spacing between birds was 6, 1 and 2.7 km, the second lone adult being 1 km from the breeding pair. On the 5th, consecutive birds were fairly evenly spaced at an average of 2.77 km (range 1.4 – 3.9 km), the closest being a single adult perched 1.4 km from a flying pair displaying over the river. On the 6th the average distance between birds was 3.97 km (range 2.6 – 7.95 km). A pair flying *c*.2 km inland may possibly have been the same pair seen later 2.6 km away on Chirundu Hill.

Chirundu to Nyamepi Camp

On the 6th birds were 2.7 and 3.9 km apart (average 3.3 km). Four single birds on 11 April were an average of 3.7 km apart (range 1.2 – 4.9 km). One was 1 km from a regular site on Kanyemba's Island and was possibly one of the pair seen on the island on the 6th. Two on the old sugar estates correspond closely to two birds on the 6th, one being inland at the same spot and the other 1.2 km away.

On the 7th the average distance between birds was 2.67 km (range .9 – 6.14 km) and on the 12th were an average of 2.4 km apart (range 1.3 – 5.4 km). One was across from Kakomomarara Island on the 7th but a pair was in the same area on the 12th. A pair downstream of Kakomomarara on the Zambian bank was a possible breeding pair at their regular site and were in the same spot on the 12th. One was on Kabwadu Island on both dates and on the 7th was *c*.900 m from a pair circling over the river. On the 12th the single on the island was 1.4 km upstream of a group of 3 birds perched on the mainland (2 adults and an immature) and *c*.1.3 km further down was another pair. Six adult birds were in this 6.8 km section on the 7th and 5 adults and an immature on the 12th.

On the 7th a single on the island at D Camp was thought to be independent of the pair on the mainland 1.5 km further on. On the 12th a single on the island was 1.9 km from a pair at a regular

site between D Camp and Nyakasanga River mouth; this corresponds with 3 birds seen in this area on the 7th.

Between Nyakasanga River mouth and Ruckomechi there was only a group of 3 adults in a *Trichilia emetica* stand (where birds are often seen) on the 7th, but birds are thought to have been missed in this section. An adult and an immature/juvenile were there on the 12th and 2-4 were in the camp area but not recorded, as well as 2 singles upstream, one close to Zambia.

The average distance between birds on the 8th was 2.3 km (range .48 – 5.76 km) and on the 13th was 3.2 km (range 1.84 – 5.1 km). The floodplain is wide on this section and birds can be missed. On the 8th two singles were between Ruckomechi and Vundu and on the 12th a pair and a single were seen. On Survival Island near Vundu an adult and a juvenile were present on both dates. Two pairs were on islands between Vundu and Mcheni camps on the 8th, whilst an immature and a pair were inland on the 12th. On the 8th two single adults *c*.860 m apart on the mainland may have comprised a pair, with an immature on Trichilia Island being *c*.480 m from the closest adult. On the 12th a single adult was 1.5 km across from this area in Zambia. Further downstream on the 8th an adult pair on the Zambian bank was 1.2 km from a single on islands on the Zimbabwe side and another single was near the Mana lodges; this same configuration was found on the 12th.

On the morning of the 9th an adult pair was on the Zambian bank 3.3 km downstream from the pair the previous afternoon.

Rockingham-Gill (1984) counted African Fish-eagles on a canoe trip from 24-26 September 1983. Six were seen in the gorge and eight more from its mouth to Chirundu. The latter was a low count compared to the 23 counted in April 1989. Ewbank (1991) counted 34 for the whole section in August 1989, comparable with the 28 on this trip where two sections were poorly covered (Table 1). Francis, *et al*. (1992) counted 21 in October 1989 and 42 in October 1991, where the data is tabulated by QDS and includes a river length of 5 km downstream of Chirundu.

Thirty-six were counted between Chirundu and Nyamepi on the first trip and 34-38 on the second. Ewbank (*Idib*.) counted 26 in September 1989. Francis *et al*. (*Idib*.) is not directly comparable as data covers some 15 km more river in QDS 1529C2, but numbers of 45 and 59 are given for October 1989 and 1991, respectively.

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

References

Ewbank, D.A. 1991. Numbers of waterbirds over a section of the Zambezi River, Zimbabwe. *Honeyguide* **37**: 160-164.

Francis, J.T., Mundy, P.J. & Feather, P.J. 1992. The status and distribution of Fish Eagles along the Middle Zambezi. *Honeyguide* **38**: 182-184.

Rockingham-Gill, D.V. 1984. Cruising down the river: Kariba to Chirundu. *Honeyguide* **30**: 142-146.

Editor's note: These values give an average density of 0.45 and 0.48 birds per kilometre. For interest, two studies on Lake Kariba found that their mean densities were 0.15 and 0.19 birds per kilometre of shoreline (Hustler & Marshall. 1996. *Ostrich* **67**: 23-32; Eriksson & Skarpe 1989. *Honeyguide* **35**: 54-62).

Honeyguide **70**(1): 8-14, 2024.

A Provisional Red List for the Birds of Zimbabwe

Ken Wilson

Editor's note: Some years ago BirdLife Zimbabwe set up a committee, chaired by the late Ken Wilson, that met over a period of 18 months in an effort to produce a "Red List" of the birds of Zimbabwe and their report was presented in 2010 and emailed but was never published in *Honeyguide*. What follows is an edited version of that list with some changes having been made so that tables could be fitted into the *Honeyguide* format but the original Red List classifications have not been changed. The tables have been simplified by omitting the South African classifications (which may have changed) but modified by the inclusion of the global IUCN classifications, which sometimes differ from the local Zimbabwean ones. Some editorial changes, and additional comments that may reflect the changes that have taken place since this report was written, have been included. The status of the species concerned remain as they were in the original report, even though some may have changed.

The attached Red Data List is a provisional one, for members of BirdLife Zimbabwe to comment on over the next two months, and then a final approved list will be published in the *Honeyguide*. The Red Data Committee would particularly value your comments on birds that appear on the list, and any other breeding birds you think have been omitted, but you think worthy of inclusion. The Committee only assessed the threats to species that breed in Zimbabwe, and therefore did not consider any migrants as candidates for the Red Data List.

The **Red Data List** classified species into four categories based on the severity of threats that face them. The list includes 29 species that the committee agreed were the most endangered in Zimbabwe. Only the first five species are thought to be in any real danger of a population crash, with the Taita Falcon being the only one thought to be *Critically Endangered.* This assessment was reached using the criteria and scoring system set out in the *South African Red Data Book – Birds*, (Brooke, 1984), modified slightly to suit current Zimbabwe conditions.

There are three other lists which emphasise the importance of keeping a careful review of birds living in fragile environments, namely the disappearing *miombo* woodland on the Mashonaland plateau, and the birds living in the specialised habitats of the Eastern Highlands. The third list includes some species that may be widely distributed elsewhere but only occur marginally in Zimbabwe, where they be threatened because of their limited distribution.

The **Miombo Endemics** are a group of 13 species that are generally confined to miombo woodlands on the Mashonaland plateau. These woodlands are now under severe pressure because of commercial logging to provide heat for cooking and warmth, especially around urban areas where power cuts and fuel shortages have driven the demand. The tobacco industry is also a major driver of this woodland destruction. The speed at which this woodland is disappearing is of extreme concern to all and if the current rate of forest destruction continues, the specialised avifauna in this habitat will also disappear.

The **Eastern District Special Species** includes 41 generally restricted the Eastern highlands of Zimbabwe, and four of them are also on the Red Data List. The Eastern Highlands is a mosaic of evergreen upland and lowland forests, montane grasslands and patches of briar-bracken scrub and possesses its own unique avifauna.

Most of the species in the various Eastern Highlands habitats are currently not regarded as threatened as long as the forest and grassland habitats survive. Their populations will always be small and finite as they are constrained by the parameters of their special environment. As long as the forests and grasslands are protected, they and their specialised avifauna will also survive and only a dramatic climatic change to greater aridity would result in the loss of the forests and their specialised avifauna.

The list of **Marginal Species** includes 25 species, none of which are included in the Red Data List even though one is categorised as Endangered, two as Vulnerable and five as Near-threatened. These are species with a wide range outside Zimbabwe, which supports only a small fraction of their populations. They include species that enter the southeast corner of Zimbabwe from Mozambique, species that come down the Zambezi valley in the extreme northwest of the country and a small number of xerophilous species that enter the country from the dry deserts of Botswana. No conservation measures initiated by Zimbabwe would have any effect on saving a diminishing population in its main habitat.

The Scoring System

This was based on the criteria in Brooke (1984) supplemented by information in Irwin (1981), Harrison *et al*. (1997) and Hockey *et al*. (2005). The South African scores for criteria 1 to 3, included in the original report, have been deleted. The six criteria, with scores, were as follows:

1. **Spatial distribution** (breeding distribution when accurately known):

0. More than 301 QDS;
1. 31 to 300 QDS;
2. 4 to 30 QDS;
3. 0 to 3 QDS.

2. **Numerical Abundance**:

0. More than 2001 adults;
1. 201 to 2000 adults;
2. 31 to 200 adults;
3. 0 to 30 adults.

3. **Regional uniqueness** (species or sub-species/population endemic to Zimbabwe):

0. Widespread in Africa;
1. Significant part of the population in Zimbabwe;
2. Most of the population in Zimbabwe;
3. All of the population in Zimbabwe.

4. **Intrinsic Rate of Increase** (size of successful clutches):

0. 6 or more eggs laid per season by females which start breeding before the age of 1;
1. 1 to 5 eggs laid per season by females which start breeding at or before age 1;
2. More than 1 egg laid per season by females which start to breed after age 1;

3. 1 egg or only 1 youngster reared per season by females which start to breed after age 1.

5. **Degree of Stress** (adverse factors due to human activities):
0. No stress known;
1. 1 factor causing stress;
2. 2 factors causing stress;
3. 3 or more factors causing stress.

6. **Decrease in Numbers**:
0. Zimbabwe populations down by less than 25% since 1890;
1. Populations down by 25 to 50%;
2. Populations down by 50 to 75%;
3. Populations down by more than 75%.

The scores were then added up and the higher the score, the more endangered the species. The status of each species was then expressed as **EX** = Extinct, **EXW** = Extinct in the wild, **CR =** Critical (facing an extremely high risk of extinction in the wild), **EN** = Endangered (facing a very high risk of extinction in the wild , **VU** = Vulnerable, (facing a high risk of extinction in the wild, **NT** = Near Threatened, (close to qualifying for Vulnerable), **LC** = Least Concerned (not qualifying for the other categories, including widespread and abundant species), **NE** = Not Evaluated, and **DD** = Data Deficient.

The Provisional Red Data list

This list (Table 1) includes only one species thought to Critically Endangered in Zimbabwe, the Taita Falcon. This species is sparse in Zimbabwe and most of its population seems to be located in the gorges below Victoria Falls. The proposed construction of dams in these gorges is a therefore a major threat to this species. Egg-collecting and the smuggling of chicks for the Middle East falcon trade is another threat; there is evidence that some of this may have already occurred (K. Hustler, personal communication). Another four species were classified as Endangered.

The Cape Vulture should probably be reclassified as Critically Endangered because the only known breeding colony in Zimbabwe (Wabai Hill, Shangani) appears to have been abandoned because of human disturbance (Simmons & Jenkins, 2007).

The remaining three species in this category are threatened by habitat changes. The African Skimmer population in Zimbabwe is largely restricted to the Zambezi River below Lake Kariba and there are concerns that the regulated river flow will enable vegetation to encroach the sandbanks on which these birds breed (Maasdorp & Cotton 2019). The other two species are mostly restricted to the central plateau and both have been affected by habitat degradation, wetlands in the case of the African Marsh-harrier and grassland for the Melodious Lark.

The Vulnerable category includes two vulture species; the Lappet-faced is regarded by IUCN as Endangered while the White-headed is Critically Endangered. It is well known that vultures are declining globally and the Zimbabwean status of these two species should probably be revised. The same applies to the Hooded Vulture, which has declined catastrophically in West Africa and is now considered to be Critically Endangered by IUCN. It was once said to be 'fairly common' around Harare (Marshall, 1900) but this later changed to a 'scarce irregular visitor' (Brooke, 1963) and, like the other vultures, it is probably now largely restricted the larger National Parks. The final species in this category is the Grey-headed Parrot, which is relatively scarce in Zimbabwe and is threatened by deforestation and, possibly, the cage bird trade.

It is interesting to compare the status of some of the remaining Near Threatened Zimbabwe species with their global IUCN status. The distribution map of the Ostrich in Irwin (1981) suggests that this species is widely distributed in Zimbabwe but it is probably now mostly restricted to larger National Parks (although not in the Zambezi Valley) with some introduced populations elsewhere. Ostrich farming became an important industry in the 1980s when there were said to 30 000 domesticated birds, but the industry collapsed after 2000. It is possible that some feral birds may exist somewhere in the country.

Another notable difference concerns the Bateleur, regarded by IUCN as Endangered. This once widespread and fairly common species is now mostly restricted to the larger National Parks, both in Zimbabwe and elsewhere in Africa. Its Zimbabwean status should probably be downgraded to Endangered. Similarly, the Martial Eagle is considered to be Endangered by IUCN and this probably applies to Zimbabwe as well.

The Ground-hornbill is considered to be Vulnerable by IUCN and although BLZ has a programme aimed at the conservation of this species, it faces a number of threats. These include the loss of large hollow trees (for nesting), eating poison bait, snaring and negative folklore (Chiweshe, 2007). Its Zimbabwean status should probably be downgraded from Near Threatened to Vulnerable.

The Cape Eagle-owl and the Bokmakierie are both considered to be of Least Concern owing to their wide distribution elsewhere. The status of the Zimbabwean population of Cape Eagle-owls (subspecies *mackinderi*) is uncertain although Irwin (1981) stated that it was likely to occur across the granite shield and in the eastern highlands. The population of the Zimbabwean subspecies of the Bokmakierie is thought to consist of only a few pairs, with most of the others being in Mozambique, and its Zimbabwean status should probably be downgraded to Vulnerable.

Finally, the status of the South African Cliff-swallow should also be downgraded because it appears that the main breeding population has collapsed (Riddell, 2023) and it may now be only a passage migrant.

Table 1. The Zimbabwean Red List showing species considered to be Critically Endangered, Endangered, Vulnerable or Near-threatened. The symbol * indicates that there is no separate IUCN status for the Zimbabwean subspecies.

	Status (Zimbabwe)	Spatial Distribution	Numerical abundance	Regional uniqueness	Intrinsic rate of increase	Stresses	Decrease in numbers	Score	Global status (IUCN)
Taita Falcon *Falco fasciinucha*	CR	2	3	2	2	3	3	15	VU
Cape Vulture *Gyps coprotheres*	EN	3	3	0	3	3	1	13	VU
African Skimmer *Rynchops flavirostris*	EN	2	2	0	2	2	3	12	LC
African Marsh-harrier *Circus ranivorus*	EN	1	2	0	2	3	3	11	LC
Melodious Lark *Mirafra cheniana*	EN	3	2	0	1	3	3	11	LC
Lappet-faced Vulture *Torgos tracheliotus*	VU	1	2	0	3	3	1	10	EN
White-headed Vulture *Trigonoceps occipitalis*	VU	2	2	0	1	3	2	10	CR
Wattled Crane *Bugeranus carunculatus*	VU	2	2	0	3	3	0	10	VU
White-fronted Plover *Charadrius marginatus*	VU	2	2	0	1	3	2	10	LC
Grey-headed Parrot *Poicephalus fuscicollis*	VU	1	1	0	2	3	3	10	LC
Common Ostrich *Struthio camelus*	NT	2	1	0	2	3	1	9	LC
Hooded Vulture *Necrosyrtes monachus*	NT	1	1	0	3	3	1	9	CR
Southern Banded Snake-eagle *Circaetus fasciolatus*	NT	2	3	0	3	1	0	9	NT
Bateleur *Terathopius ecaudatus*	NT	1	1	0	3	2	2	9	EN
Rufous-chested Sparrowhawk *Accipiter rufiventris*	NT	2	2	0	2	2	1	9	LC
Rock Pratincole *Glareola nuchalis*	NT	2	1	0	1	3	2	9	LC
Lilian's Lovebird *Agapornis lilianae*	NT	2	1	1	1	2	2	9	NT
Cape Eagle-owl *Bubo capensis mackinderi*	NT	2	2	1	2	2	0	9	*
Southern Ground-hornbill *Bucorvus leadbeateri*	NT	2	1	0	3	3	1	9	VU
Bokmakierie *Telophorus zeylonus restrictus*	NT	1	3	1	2	0	0	9	*
Swee Waxbill *Coccopygia melanotis*	NT	3	2	0	1	1	2	9	LC
Verreaux's Eagle *Aquila verreauxii*	NT	1	1	0	3	2	1	8	LC
Martial Eagle *Polemaetus bellicosus*	NT	1	1	0	3	2	1	8	EN
Striped Flufftail *Sarothrura affinis*	NT	3	2	0	1	2	0	8	LC
Kori Bustard *Ardeotis kori*	NT	2	1	0	2	2	1	8	NT
African Grass-owl *Tyto capensis*	NT	1	1	0	1	1	1	8	LC
Madagascar Bee-eater *Merops superciliousus*	NT	2	2	0	1	1	2	8	LC
South African Cliff-swallow *Petrochelidon spilodera*	NT	2	2	0	1	1	1	8	LC
Swynnerton's Robin *Swynnertonia swynnertoni*	NT	2	2	2	1	1	1	8	VU

Marginal species

These are a group of 25 species that have a wider distribution outside Zimbabwe but their range just extends into the country, where they occur in fewer than 10 QDSs, with most being found in fewer than three QDSs. Four of them are largely restricted to the Haroni-Rusitu area, the only place in Zimbabwe with lowland evergreen forest. They include the Chestnut-fronted Helmet-shrike (although recently reported from Aberfoyle and at Chilo in the south-eastern lowveld: Baker, 2017, 2018) which is considered to be Endangered, while the Black-headed Apalis and Woodwards' Batis are considered to be Vulnerable. The fourth species, the Black-and-white Flycatcher was thought to be an occasional visitor (Irwin 1981) and is listed as Near Threatened in Zimbabwe. There appears to have been extensive deforestation in the Haroni-Rusitu area and the status of all four of these species may need to be revised. The other species considered to be Near Threatened in Zimbabwe, the Palm-nut Vulture, Anchieta's Tchagra and Black-bellied Starling have a wide distribution outside Zimbabwe and are classified as Least concern by IUCN. The range of the Anchieta's Tchagra in Zimbabwe has probably been reduced by the construction of a dam on one of the tea estates in the Honde Valley.

Table 2. The marginal species which are widely distributed but whose ranges just reach Zimbabwe. The symbol * indicates that there is no separate IUCN status for the Zimbabwean subspecies.

	Status	Spatial Distribution	Numerical abundance	Regional Uniqueness	Intrinsic rate of increase	Stresses	Decrease in numbers	Total	Global IUCN status
Chestnut-fronted Helmet-shrike *Prionops scopifrons*	EN	3	3	0	2	1	2	11	LC
Black-headed Apalis *Apalis melanocephala*	VU	3	3	0	1	1	2	10	LC
Woodwards' Batis *Batis fratrum*	VU	3	3	0	1	1	2	10	LC
Coppery-tailed Coucal *Centropus cupreicaudus*	NT	3	3	0	2	2	0	10	LC
Palm-nut Vulture *Gypohierax angolensis*	NT	3	3	0	3	0	0	9	LC
Black-and-white Flycatcher *Bias musicus*	NT	3	3	0	1	1	1	9	LC
Anchieta's Tchagra *Bocagia minuta*	NT	3	3	0	1	2	0	9	LC
Black-bellied Starling *Lamprotornis corruscus*	NT	3	2	0	2	1	1	9	LC
Slaty Egret *Egretta vinaceigula*	LC	2	3	0	2	0	0	7	VU
Double-banded Courser *Rhinoptilus africanus*	LC	3	3	0	1	0	0	7	LC
Green Malkoha *Ceuthmochares aereus*	LC	2	2	0	2	1	0	7	LC
Swamp Nightjar *Caprimulgus natalensis*	LC	3	3	0	1	0	0	7	LC
Namaqua Sandgrouse *Pterocles namaqua*	LC	3	2	0	1	0	0	7	LC
Olive Woodpecker *Dendropicos griseocephalus*	LC	3	3	0	1	0	0	7	LC
Pale Batis *Batis soror*	LC	2	2	0	1	1	1	7	LC
Cape Bunting *Emberiza capensis smithersii*	LC	3	2	1	1	0	0	7	*
Pallid Honeyguide *Indicator meliphilus*	LC	3	2	0	0	1	0	6	LC
Chirping Cisticola *Cisticola pipiens*	LC	3	3	0	0	0	0	6	LC
Hartlaub's Babbler *Turdoides hartlaubii*	LC	3	2	0	0	0	0	5	LC
Greater Swamp-warbler *Acrocephalus rufescens*	LC	3	2	0	0	0	0	5	LC
Luapula Cisticola *Cisticola luapula*	LC	3	2	0	0	0	0	5	LC
Swamp Boubou *Laniarius bicolor*	LC	3	2	0	0	0	0	5	LC
Fan-tailed Widowbird *Euplectes axillaris*	LC	3	2	0	0	0	0	5	LC
Shelley's Sunbird *Cinnyris shelleyi*	LC	2	2	0	0	0	0	4	LC
Brown Firefinch *Lagonosticta nitidula*	LC	3	1	0	0	0	0	4	LC

Eastern specials

This is a group of 41 species that in Zimbabwe have a limited distribution in the eastern highlands (Table 3). They include species that are primarily found in forest or grassland, as well as in the lowlands in between. The main threats to these species include deforestation, i.e. the clearing of indigenous forests, and afforestation., i.e. the planting of exotic tree species in grassland or cleared areas formerly covered by indigenous trees. The spread of exotic vegetation, such as wilding pines, eucalyptus and wattle is also a threat. A recent investigation found that of the 57 forest-dwelling species in South Africa, 28 were declining while 22 were either increasing or stable (Cooper *et al*. 2017). It is likely that the species in Zimbabwe are exhibiting similar trends.

This group includes four species that were considered to be Near Threatened. Three of them, the Rufous-chested Sparrowhawk, Striped Flufftail and Bokmakierie are considered to be of Least Concern by IUCN, while Swynnerton's Robin is considered to be Vulnerable. This species has a very limited distribution and could be severely affected by even a limited amount of forest clearance.

Two of these species, listed as Least Concern in Zimbabwe, are classified as Vulnerable by IUCN. The Blue Swallow is known to have declined across its breeding range in southern Africa and in Zimbabwe the decline (or even extinction) of Aardvarks is a major threat, since these birds nest in their burrows. The Chirinda Apalis is endemic to the Eastern highlands of Zimbabwe and adjacent areas of Mozambique and is vulnerable to deforestation in both countries.

Finally, Gurney's Sugarbird was ranked as Least Concern in Zimbabwe but is considered to be Near Threatened in its wider South African range. However, it may have benefitted from protea farming in the eastern highlands of Zimbabwe, though this industry appears to have now collapsed.

Table 3. The Eastern Specials and their status in Zimbabwe and elsewhere in their range. The symbol * indicates that there is no separate IUCN status for the Zimbabwean subspecies.

	Status	Spatial Distribution	Numerical abundance	Regional Uniqueness	Intrinsic rate of increase	Stresses	Decrease in numbers	Total	Global IUCN status
Rufous-chested Sparrowhawk *Accipiter rufiventris*	NT	2	2	0	2	2	1	9	LC
Bokmakierie *Telophorus zeylonus restrictus*	NT	3	3	1	2	0	0	9	*
Striped Flufftail *Sarothrura affinis*	NT	3	2	0	1	2	0	8	LC
Swynnerton's Robin *Swynnertonia swynnertoni*	NT	2	1	2	1	1	1	8	VU
Blue Swallow *Hirundo atrocaerulea*	LC	2	1	0	1	2	1	7	VU
Chirinda Apalis *Apalis chirindensis*	LC	2	1	2	1	1	0	7	VU
Roberts's Warbler *Oreophilais robertsi*	LC	2	1	2	1	1	0	7	LC
Black-fronted Bush-shrike *Chlorophoneus nigrifrons*	LC	2	1	1	1	1	1	7	LC
Lesser Seedcracker *Pyrenestes minor*	LC	2	2	0	1	2	0	7	LC
Cape Bunting *Emberiza capensis smithersii*	LC	3	2	1	1	0	0	7	*
Eastern Bronze-naped Pigeon *Columba delegorguei*	LC	2	2	0	1	1	0	6	LC
Tiny Greenbul *Phyllastrephus debilis*	LC	3	2	0	0	1	0	6	LC
Gorgeous Bush-shrike *Telophorus viridis*	LC	2	1	0	1	1	1	6	LC
African Olive-pigeon *Columba arquatrix*	LC	2	1	0	1	1	0	5	LC
Blue-spotted Wood-dove *Turtur afer*	LC	2	1	0	1	1	0	5	LC
Cinnamon Dove *Aplopelia larvata*	LC	2	1	0	1	1	0	5	LC
Scarce Swift *Schoutedenapus myoptilus*	LC	2	2	0	1	0	0	5	LC
Scaly-throated Honeyguide *Indicator variegatus*	LC	2	1	0	0	1	1	5	LC
Green-backed Woodpecker *Campethera cailliautii*	LC	3	1	0	0	1	0	5	LC
Grey Cuckooshrike *Coracina caesia*	LC	2	1	0	1	1	0	5	LC
Square-tailed Drongo *Dicrurus ludwigii*	LC	2	1	0	0	1	1	5	LC
Yellow-streaked Greenbul *Phyllastrephus flavostriatus*	LC	2	1	0	0	1	1	5	LC
Stripe-cheeked Greenbul *Andropadus milanjensis*	LC	2	1	0	0	1	1	5	NT
Orange Ground-thrush *Geokichla gurneyi*	LC	2	1	0	0	1	1	5	LC
White-starred Robin *Pogonocichla stellata*	LC	2	1	0	0	1	1	5	LC
Barratt's Warbler *Bradypterus barratti*	LC	2	1	1	1	0	0	5	LC
Yellow-throated Woodland-warbler *Phylloscopus ruficapilla*	LC	2	1	0	0	1	1	5	LC
Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher *Trochocercus cyanomelas*	LC	2	1	0	0	1	1	5	LC
Olive Bush-shrike *Telophorus olivaceus*	LC	2	1	0	1	0	1	5	LC
Green Twinspot *Mandingoa nitidula*	LC	2	1	0	1	0	1	5	LC
Red-faced Crimsonwing *Cryptospiza reichenovii*	LC	2	1	0	0	2	0	5	LC
Barred Long-tailed Cuckoo *Cercococcyx montanus*	LC	2	2	0	0	0	0	4	LC
Olive Thrush *Turdus olivaceus*	LC	2	1	0	0	1	0	4	LC
Gurney's Sugarbird *Promerops gurneyi*	LC	2	1	0	1	0	0	4	NT
Wailing Cisticola *Cisticola lais*	LC	2	1	0	0	0	0	4	LC
Short-winged Cisticola *Cisticola brachypterus*	LC	2	1	0	0	0	0	3	LC
African Dusky Flycatcher *Muscicapa adusta*	LC	2	1	0	0	0	0	3	LC
Grey Waxbill *Estrilda perreini*	LC	2	1	0	0	0	0	3	LC
Yellow-bellied Waxbill *Coccopygia quartinia*	LC	2	1	0	0	0	0	3	LC
Green Widowfinch *Vidua codringtoni*	LC	2	1	0	0	0	0	3	LC
Cape Canary *Serinus canicollis*	LC	2	1	0	0	0	0	3	LC

Miombo Specials

Miombo woodlands, dominated by *Brachystegia* spp. often in association with *Julbernardia* and *Isoberlinia* spp. cover an area of around 2.7 million km^2 across seven southern African countries and they are an important resource for people living in them (Gumbo *et al*. 2018). They are threatened by the demand for charcoal, by clearance for agriculture and climatic factors such as drought. In Zimbabwe, miombo woodlands occur mainly on the Mashonaland plateau and there are 13 species that are generally confined to them (Table 4). While these were all classified as Least Concern it is likely that they are becoming restricted by ever-diminishing island of miombo, which may eventually become too small to support them.

Table 4. The Zimbabwean Miombo Specials with their current status and global IUCN classification.

	Status	Spatial distribution	Numerical abundance	Regional uniqueness	Intrinsic rate of increase	Stresses	Decrease in numbers	Total	IUCN status
Southern Hyliota *Hyliota australis*	LC	1	1	2	0	1	1	6	LC
Racquet-tailed Roller *Coracias spatulatus*	LC	1	1	1	0	1	1	5	LC
Cinnamon-breasted Tit *Melaniparus pallidiventris*	LC	1	1	1	0	1	1	5	LC
Whyte's Barbet *Stactolaema whytii*	LC	1	1	1	0	1	0	4	LC
Miombo Tit *Melaniparus griseiventris*	LC	1	1	0	0	1	1	4	LC
African Spotted Creeper *Salpornis salvadori*	LC	1	1	0	0	1	1	4	LC
Miombo Rock-thrush *Monticola angolensis*	LC	1	1	0	0	1	1	4	LC
Western Violet-backed Sunbird *Anthreptes longuemarei*	LC	1	1	0	0	1	1	4	LC
Black-eared Seedeater *Crithagra mennelli*	LC	1	1	0	0	1	1	4	LC
Striped Pipit *Anthus lineiventris*	LC	1	1	0	0	1	0	3	LC
Miombo Blue-eared Starling *Lamprotornis elisabeth*	LC	1	0	0	0	1	0	2	LC
Eastern Miombo Sunbird *Cinnyris manoensis*	LC	1	0	0	0	1	0	2	LC
Cabanis's Bunting *Emberiza cabanisi*	LC	1	0	0	0	1	0	2	LC

Discussion

In Ken Wilson's original report, the Red List committee urged members of BLZ to submit comments on birds that appear on the list, and any other breeding birds that might have been omitted, but might be worthy of inclusion. Although some comments were received it is important that this list is updated as appropriate and in accordance with the current IUCN criteria.

There will undoubtedly be other species that may now have to be included on a Zimbabwean Red List. For example, Chiro (2023) reported that Black Storks *Ciconia nigra* in the Sebakwe Poort IBA failed to rear any chicks, which points to the possible degradation of river systems resulting from gold panning, soil erosion or pollution. Other species associated with rivers, such as the African Black Duck *Anas sparsa*, Water Thick-knee *Burhinus vermiculatus* and African Finfoot *Podica senegalensis* may also need to be reassessed.

Similarly, most large raptor species appear to have declined, as they have elsewhere in Africa, and some may now be mainly confined to the larger National Parks. Many hole-nesting species, such as hornbills, barbets and woodpeckers may also be at risk from the loss of larger trees and their replacement by shrubs in communal lands and agricultural areas (Zinyowera *et al*., 2011) and by elephants and fire in some National Parks (Mapaure & Moe 2009).

References

Baker, C. 2017. Field observations. *Honeyguide* **63**: 93.

Baker, C. 2018. Field observations. *Honeyguide* **64**: 36.

Brooke, R.K. 1963. *Birds round Salisbury, then and now*. South African Avifauna Series No. 9: 67 pp.

Brooke, R.K. 1984. *South African red data book – Birds*. Foundation for Research Development: CSIR, Pretoria.

Chiro, K.K. The current status of breeding pairs of Black Storks at Sebakwe Poort IBA, Kwekwe, Zimbabwe. *Honeyguide* **69**: 41-42.

Chiweshe, N. 2007. The current conservation status of the Southern Ground Hornbill *Bucorvus leadbeateri* in Zimbabwe. *In*: Kemp, A. C. & Kemp, M. I. (eds.). *The Active Management of Hornbills. and their Habitats for Conservation*, pp. 252-266. CD-ROM Proceedings of the 4th International Hornbill Conference, Mabula Game Lodge, Bela-Bela, South Africa. Pretoria, Naturalists & Nomads,

Cooper, T., Wannenburgh, A. & Cherry, M. 2012. Atlas data indicate forest dependent bird species declines in South Africa. *Bird Conservation International* **27**: 1-18.

Gumbo, D.J., Dumas-Johansen, M., Muir, G., Boerstler, F. & Xia, Z. 2018. *Sustainable management of miombo woodlands – food security, nutrition and wood energy*. Rome, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

Harrison J.A., Allan D.G., Underhill L.G., Herremans M., Tree, A.J., Parker V. & Brown C.J. (eds.) 1997. *The Atlas of Southern African Birds, vol. 1. Non-passerines & vol. 2. Passerines*. Johannesburg, BirdLife South Africa.

Hockey, P.A.R., Dean, W.R.J., & Ryan, P. (eds.). 2005. *Roberts' Birds of Southern Africa*, 7th *edition*. Cape Town, John Voelcker Book Fund.

Irwin, M.P.S. 1981. *The birds of Zimbabwe*. Harare, Quest Publishing.
Maasdorp, L. & Cotton, A. 2019. The Birds of Rifa Camp, Chirundu, Zimbabwe, 1987 – 2014. *Honeyguide* **65**: 3-79.
Mapaure, I. & Moe, S.R. 2009. Changes in the structure and composition of miombo woodlands mediated by elephants (*Loxodonta africana*) and fire over a 26-year period in north-western Zimbabwe. *African Journal of Ecology* **47**: 175-183.
Marshall, G.A.K. 1900. Notes on Mashonaland birds. *Ibis*, 7th series, **6**: 221-270.
Riddell, I.C. 2023. On the history and current status of the South African Cliff Swallow in Zimbabwe. *Honeyguide* **69**: 12-14.
Simmons, R.E. & Jenkins, A.R. 2007. Is climate change influencing the decline of Cape and Bearded Vultures in southern Africa? *Vulture News* **56**: 41-51.
Zinyowera, N.I., Ndagurwa, H.G.T. & Muvengwi, J. 2021. Changes in miombo woody assemblage along a disturbance gradient in a smallholder tobacco production communal land, northeast Zimbabwe. *Forest Ecology and Management* **502**: 119718.

Edited by Brian Marshall, *Auckland, New Zealand*. ✉ brian.marshall01@gmail.com

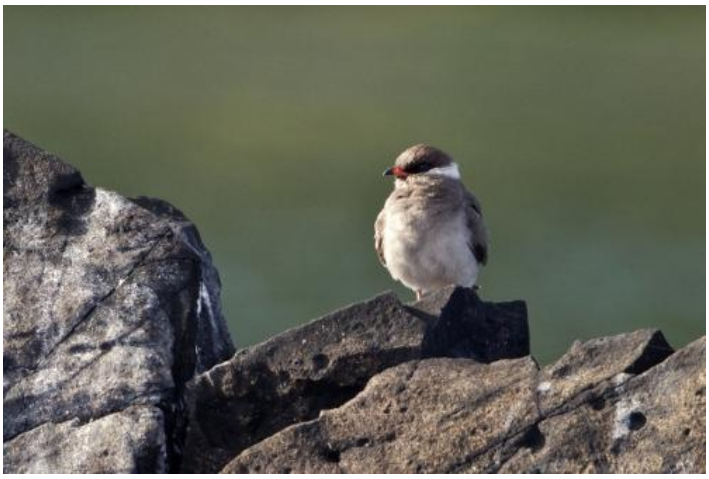
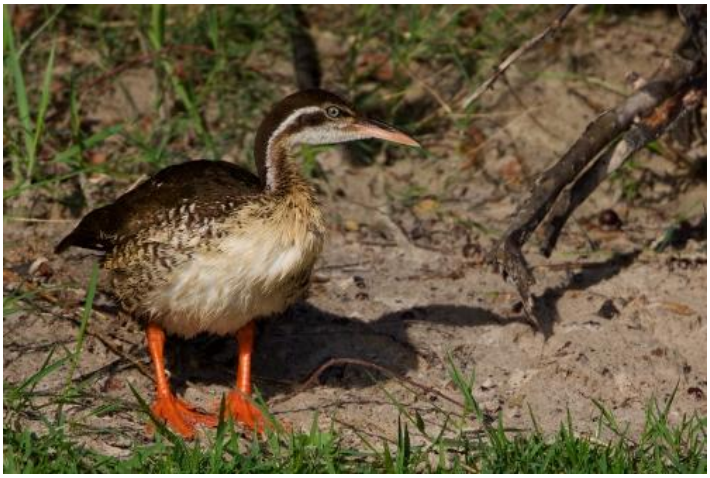

Figure 1. Rock Pratincole and African Finfoot © Roger MacDonald

Honeyguide **70**(1): 15-17, 2024

Monavale Vlei: A Model for Wetland Biodiversity Restoration, Protection, Research and Management

Dorothy Wakeling

The wetlands of Harare are extremely important since they form a natural reservoir for water, control flooding and soil erosion, support biodiversity and are crucial for climate change adaptation. The Monavale Vlei represents an intact area of the overall headwater wetland ecosystem of Harare, which is located on the watershed between several main rivers. These open grassland wetlands create the headwater streams that support a rich biodiversity, including birds. The Striped Crake breeds in this wetland and it was this bird that alerted residents of the need to preserve Monavale Vlei and, indeed, all of Harare's wetlands. When the area became threatened by development, BirdLife Zimbabwe and the Monavale community took protective action which ultimately contributed to Zimbabwe acceding to the Ramsar Convention and Monavale Vlei being declared Monavale Wetland Ramsar Site 2107, a Wetland of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention.

The Conservation Society of Monavale (COSMO) continues to research, document, protect and manage Monavale Vlei, thus providing a model for restoration of other headwater wetlands in Harare and elsewhere in Zimbabwe. The late Alex Masterson was crucial to the formation of COSMO as his intimate knowledge of the birds of Monavale Vlei led to it becoming an internationally recognized birding site. When the Vlei was threatened by development the Monavale community rapidly took action to protect the area. Alex and fellow birders observed crakes, rails and flufftails, cisticolas and warblers on this and other vleis from the 1950s onwards. From them we learnt about the birds and their breeding habitat, including the crucial "squelch" zone, where the grasses have long thin leaves, which direct rainwater down into the clumpy roots and the peaty soils where water is stored year-round. We also learnt that there are spaces between the grasses for these birds and other creatures to move around hidden from sight.

Figure 1. Alex Masterson searching for Striped Crakes

The vlei is an important breeding and foraging site for rails, flufftails and crakes (Rallidae) and birders have been recording these species for more than 70 years on Monavale Vlei and in the western suburbs of Harare. Notable species include breeding intra-African migrants such as the Striped Crake *Amaurornis marginalis* and the Streaky-breasted Flufftail *Sarothrura boehmi.* Non-breeding migrants include the Corn Crake *Crex crex,* quails *Coturnix* spp., harriers *Circus* spp., bishops and widowbirds *Euplectes* spp., whydahs and longclaws, as well as the Black Coucal *Centropus grillii*, Marsh Owl *Asio capensis* and African Grass-owl *Tyto capensis,* formerly a common resident but last recorded on 11 March 2013 (by Ian Riddell). So far, 256 bird species have been recorded on the vlei and margins over the decades.

Other species that occur in the wetland include the Giant Bullfrog *Pyxicephalus adspersus*, now endangered throughout southern Africa because of habitat loss. Some fish species also migrate into the wetland to spawn; they include the African catfish (barbel) *Clarias gariepinus*, as well as the straight-fin barb *Enteromius paludinosus*, the line-spotted barb *E. lineomaculatus*, and the banded tilapia *Tilapia sparrmanii* (Gratwicke & Marshall, 2005. *African Journal of Aquatic Science* **30**:107-18).

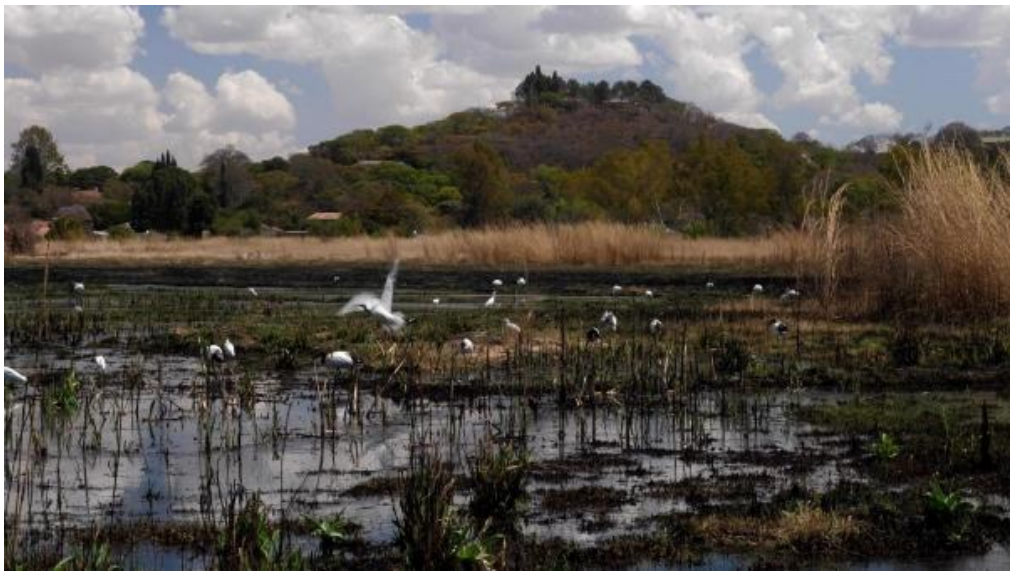

Figure 2. A burst municipal pipe discharging water into the vlei, attracting many African Sacred Ibises *Threskiornis aethiopicus*, a species that has increased in numbers in Harare.

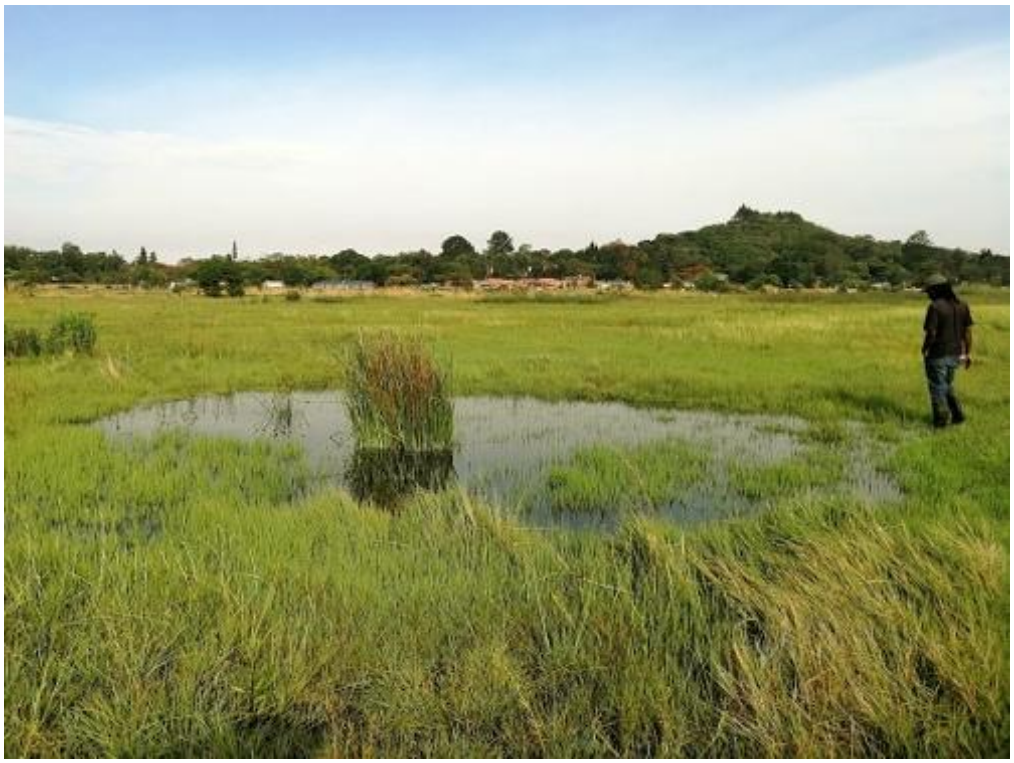

Figure 3. A more typical view of the vlei, with Jimmy Muropa, the Vlei-Scout/Teacher on the right.

Daily bird records collected since 2005 (19 years) provide a long-term database that is available for analysis. These are currently on paper but are being digitized to make them more readily accessible. They will be crucially important as an indicator of the health of the wetland and for monitoring long-term changes that might be occurring.

COSMO has also been active in research and education, with the Vlei Scout making daily bird counts and biodiversity records, while he and the Vlei Manager take wetland awareness walks with school children, university students, researchers and the general public. Some of the research work includes bird ringing, with data being sent to SAFRING in Cape Town, and geological and ecological surveys being carried out in conjunction with the University of Zimbabwe. These include surveys of fish and vegetation and some students have carried out research projects as part of their MSc programmes, e.g. F. Mutyavaviri (2006) *Impact of cultivation on soils and species composition of the Monavale Vlei, Harare*., and I. Shoshore (2015) *An assessment of a vlei restoration process: Monavale Vlei, Harare*. These projects showed that wetlands can be restored after being damaged by cultivation. A comparative study of water quality found that the Monavale Vlei was superior to that in the cultivated Marlborough Vlei, thus highlighting the role of wetlands in controlling pollution and maintaining water quality. COSMO has also promoted activities such as vermiculture and composting so that local residents can improve the productivity of their gardens without resorting to vlei cultivation

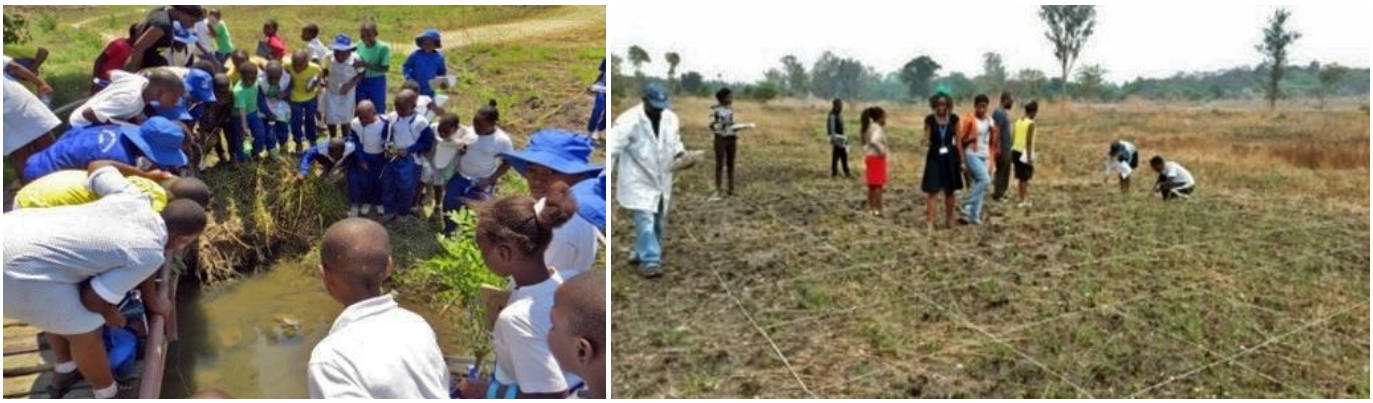

Figure 4. Some of the educational activities at Monavale Vlei. Left: A few of the thousands of schoolchildren who have visited the vlei. Right: Students from the University of Zimbabwe being taught about vegetation surveys.

Some significant milestones

1950s. Alex Masterson began monitoring Striped Crakes on the Monavale Vlei.

1960s. Rhodesian Ornithological Society (now BirdLife Zimbabwe) began annual bird walks in the 1960s with monthly walks beginning from 2005 onwards.

2001. Residents halted rose-growing on "Meadows of Monavale" (16.2 ha) because of the threat to Striped Crakes and agreed to sell to BirdLife Zimbabwe, with funds become available in 2001. These funds had not been taken up by 2013 and the threat of development led to litigation which began in 2015 and is ongoing.

2004-05. Restoration work begins with halting of cultivation.

2005. Saving the Wetlands Task Force set up to promote protection and conservation of wetland areas in Harare, with Monavale being the model. Vlei Ranger appointed. COSMO formed, and at all times has engaged with national and local governments.

2006. Monavale Case Study report prepared by legal, biodiversity and wetlands experts.

2006. Monavale Restoration and Management Model shared widely with residents of other areas.

2007. Monavale Vlei Management Plan prepared.

2009. Removal of alien plants begins.

2013. **Monavale Vlei became a Ramsar Site with 2 Ramsar Secretary Generals visiting the Vlei in 2013 and 2024**.

COSMO sits on National Wetland Committee of Zimbabwe.

2016. Harare Wetlands Trust established.

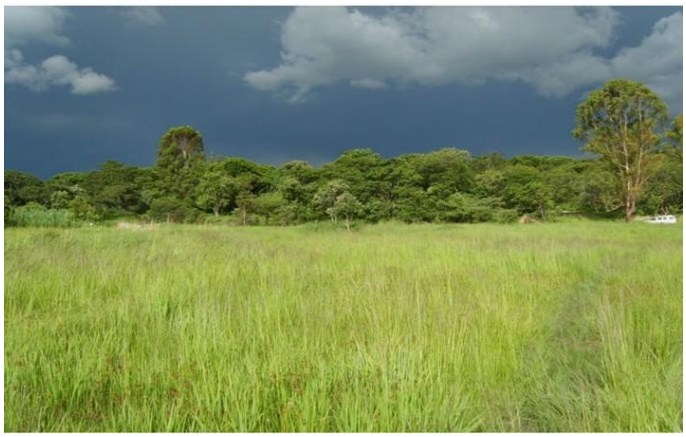

Figure 5. Monavale Vlei in the rainy season, with a healthy grass cover in which a wide variety of species make their home.

Conclusion

COSMO has always been opposed to building construction, cropping and habitat alteration in Harare's wetland areas as these activities degrade and destroy sensitive headwater ecosystems leading to the loss of the primary water source of Harare, which is dependent upon the ecological integrity of the wetlands to keep the streams feeding water year-round into the city's supply dam, Lake Chivero, which lies downstream of the city. Building in wetlands leads to flooding, reduced ground water storage, the loss of all the wetlands functions and services and is not a good investment. Healthy wetland biodiversity is key to the provisioning of water to Harare, including during the seven dry months and droughts. Healthy wetlands mitigate the effects of climate change. They also store more carbon than forests.

Birds are visible indicators of the health of these wetlands and alerted us of the need to protect Monavale Vlei. To date 261 bird species have been recorded on and around Monavale Vlei.

Dorothy Wakeling, *Harare*. ✉ cosmo@yoafrica.com

Honeyguide **70**(1): 18-20, 2024

Red-headed Weaver nest sites and colony sizes in Zimbabwe

H. Dieter Oschadleus

Introduction

The Red-headed Weaver *Anaplectes rubiceps* is a common to uncommon weaver found in a variety of woodland and savannah types in sub-Saharan Africa. This species is mostly insectivorous and is usually found solitarily or in pairs, and also joins mixed bird parties. Breeding is usually in pairs or in small colonies, but may sometimes be found in large colonies. It may nest near nests of large raptors, or near human buildings. Nest sites are usually in large trees, and in southern Africa it regularly nests on man-made sites, including telephone wires, edges of thatched roofs of buildings, inside buildings, and windmill vanes (Priest, 1936; Irwin, 1981; Fry & Keith, 2004; del Hoyo *et al*. 2010). However, no man-made sites have been recorded in West Africa, and there is only one published record in East Africa (Oschadleus, 2021). This suggests regional variation in the extent of using man-made nest sites. This paper investigates the extent of man-made sites used in Zimbabwe. In addition, tree species, heights of nests, and colony sizes for this species in Zimbabwe are summarised.

Methods

Records of Red-headed Weaver in Zimbabwe were obtained from three sources: (1) the southern African Nest Record Cards (NRC) held at the University of Cape Town, (2) the PHOWN (PHOtos of Weaver Nests, http://weavers.adu.org.za/phown.php) database, a citizen science project curated at the University of Cape Town, and (3) original published references, in particular those in *Honeyguide* and *Babbler* (Zimbabwe). Information on nest site, nest height (converted from feet to metres by multiplying by 0.3048), and colony size was summarised from these records.

Results

Man-made nest sites

There are 160 NRCs cards for the Red-headed Weaver in Zimbabwe. Most nests sites were in trees (n=121, 75.6%), and 10 records (6.3%) were on man-made sites, one record (0.6%) on bamboos, and 28 records (17.5%) did not specify nest site. There are 10 PHOWN records for the Red-headed Weaver from Zimbabwe. Nine records were in trees and one (10%) from a man-made site, i.e. 4 nests on a powerline (PHOWN 26658). Thirteen published records of nest sites on man-made structures were found. Combining the records from the three sources gave the following specific man-made nest sites. Eleven records (4 published, 7 NRCs) were nests hanging on the edge of roofs, often thatched roofs (Wheeler 1969; Anon. 1977; English 2005; Siemers 2013; Dixon 2017). Fourteen records (9 published, 4 NRCs, 1 PHOWN) were nests suspended on wires (Anon. 1976; Bellingan 1984; Hanmer 2001; Marriott 2002; Anon. 2017, Maasdorp & Cotton 2019; Parrock 2019; Parrock 2022; Parrock 2023), particularly telephone or power lines, but once on the "stay wires of a TV pole" (NRC 793-120).

Tree nest sites

The most commonly listed tree species (Table 1) were *Brachystegia*, in particular *Brachystegia spiciformis* (n=30), Baobabs *Adansonia digitata* (n=7), gum trees *Eucalyptus* (n=7), mopane *Colophospermum mopane* (n=9), and *Commiphora* spp. (n=6).

There were two interesting PHOWN records. One was of two nests in a tree overhanging a swimming pool in Kariba (PHOWN 7249). The other was in a fig tree growing on the side of a rock face of a granite kopje near Harare (PHOWN 3862 photographed in 2012 and PHOWN 27414 being the same site still present in 2018).

Nest height

According to the Nest Record Cards the average nest height was 4.4 m (range = 1.5 – 12m, n=118). Fewer than 10 records of nest height were reported in the Zimbabwean literature, all within this range, and none were listed in the PHOWN records for Zimbabwe.

Colony sizes

Most NRCs for this species in Zimbabwe describe a single nest with contents (sometimes two nests from different sites on one card), giving a mean of 2.0 (range = 1- 60, n=122). The largest colony was 60 nests in a baobab tree recorded by D.C.H. Plowes in 1965 at the Sabi/Lundi (now Save/Runde) Junction (card 793-158). The next largest colony contained 25 nests on a telegraph wire along the Beitbridge to Bulawayo road, recorded by C.J. Vernon in 1966 (card 793-092). All Zimbabwean PHOWN records listed colony sizes, giving a mean of 4.6 (range = 1 – 16, n=10).

The Zimbabwean literature describes this species generally as a solitary nester, or having 3-4 nests (Priest 1936; Irwin 1953; Ginn 1999). For example, four nests were attended by a male and female over several days in Bulawayo (Attwell 2012). However, there are several records of unusually large colonies in Zimbabwe. Irwin (1953) found a colony of at least 40 nests at Gatooma (Kadoma), in central Zimbabwe, the nests being around a raptor nest. Ginn (1999) noted that there were often baobabs with 30-40 nests in a single tree in southeast Zimbabwe. He also described a colony of 19 nests and at least 4 males in the Gonarezhou National Park.

Discussion

Red-headed Weavers regularly use man-made sites in southern Africa, but this has never been recorded in West Africa and only once in East Africa (Oschadleus 2021). This study gave an estimate for man-made sites in Zimbabwe as 6.3% (NRCs) and 10% (PHOWN, but low sample). The ratio of man-made sites used in South Africa is probably much higher than in Zimbabwe. In this study 14 records were of nests suspended on wires, particularly telephone or power lines, and eleven records were nests hanging on the edge of roofs, often thatched roofs. Little is known about the use by birds of man-made structures for nesting (e.g. list of sites, frequency used, nesting success, etc.) and as natural habitats decrease, man-made sites may provide additional nest sites for birds (Mainwaring 2015). Thus the use of man-made sites may increase in the future. Using man-made sites does not prevent brood parasitism (Hanmer 2001) nor predation, at least for avian predators (Marriott 2002), although it may prevent or reduce mammalian predation. Other bird species have been recorded using Red-headed Weaver nests

for breeding, both when the weaver nest is in trees, e.g. Southern Black Flycatcher *Melaenornis pammelaina* (Beasley 1985) or on man-made sites, e.g. Cut-throat Finches *Amadina fasciata* (Wheeler 1969; Anon. 1977; Maasdorp & Cotton 2019).

The most commonly listed tree were indigenous species including *Brachystegia*, baobabs, mopane and *Commiphora* spp. Exotic *Eucalyptus* trees were also often used. This suggests that the Red-headed Weaver prefers indigenous tree species, but is adaptable and can switch to exotic trees (and man-made sites) if the number of natural sites decrease.

The height of nests of this species in Zimbabwe is similar to that throughout its range which is given as 1.5-15 m above ground (del Hoyo *et al*. 2010). Nothing is known of the costs and benefits of nesting at different heights in the Red-headed Weaver. However, Red-billed Buffalo-weaver *Bubalornis niger* nested at a lower height when nests were near human settlements, presumably since predation risk, especially from snakes, was lower at these sites (Vernon 1997). In this study there was not enough information on distance of nests to human buildings to determine whether or not this was also the case for the Red-headed Weaver.

Most nest sites in Zimbabwe have a single male with 1-4 nests (NRCs 1-2 nests, literature 3-4 nests). Occasionally there are large colonies of 25 or 60 nests (NRCs), or 40 nests, 30–40 nests or 19 nests (literature). Throughout its African range, colonies are usually small, but are occasionally large or very large, with the largest known colony having 211 nests (Oschadleus & van Stuyvenberg 2011). According to PHOWN records the average colony size throughout its range was 7.9 nests (range = 1-211, sd = 23.9, n=369) (Oschadleus 2020). Presumably there are occasionally nest sites with a higher abundance of food, nesting materials, or protection from predators, thus attracting birds from the surrounding area to congregate in a single large colony. It would be worthwhile documenting as many details as possible in Red-headed Weaver sites with more than a handful of nests.

References

Anon. 1976. October 10th – Mazoe Dam. *Sunbird* 73: 2.

Anon. 1977. Outing to Miss Tredgold's property "Chizororo" – November 20th 1976. *Sunbird* 74: 3.

Anon. 2017. BLZ Mashonaland Branch visit to Prince Edward and Henry Hallam (Seke and Harava) Dams, Sunday 23 October 2016. *The Babbler (Zimbabwe)* 133: 8.

Attwell, G. 2012. Nest building in the Red-headed Weaver. *Honeyguide* **58**:76, 58.

Barry, K. 2003. More on birds breeding in exotic gum plantations in Zimbabwe. *Honeyguide* **49**: 151-155.

Beasley, A.J. 1985. Black Flycatcher nesting in Red-headed Weaver's nest. *Honeyguide* **31**:175-177.

Beasley, A.J. 1995. Birds of the Botanic Garden, Harare, Zimbabwe. *Southern Birds* 17: 1-56.

Bellingan, P. 1984. Horner in Harare. *Bokmakierie* **36**: 109.

Carlisle, J.S. 1923. Rare South African birds eggs. *South African Journal of Natural History* **4**: 115-126.

del Hoyo, J., Elliott, A. & Christie, D.A. (eds.). 2010. *Handbook of the birds of the world*. Volume 15. Barcelona: Lynx Edicions.

Dixon, K. 2017. Mashonaland Branch visit to Tsindi Ruins, Marondera District, Sunday 24th September 2017. *The Babbler (Zimbabwe)* 138: 4-5.

Duckering, R. 1993. My garden birds. *Blue Swallow* **6**(4): [5-6].

English, J. 2005. Nests at Manager's House, Ostrich Farm, Central Estates, Mvuma. *Honeyguide* **51**: 32, pl ii.

Farrant, J. 1956. Birds attacking a dead snake. *Rhodesian Ornithological Society Bulletin* 20: 4.

Fry, C.H. & Keith, S. (eds.). 2004. *Birds of Africa*. Volume 7. Christopher Helm, London.

Ginn, P. 1999. Nesting concentrations of Red-headed Weavers. *Honeyguide* **45**: 27–28.

Hamling, H.H. 1944. A field naturalist's peregrinations. Bird notes from a northern sector of southern Rhodesia – Part III. *Ostrich* **15**: 30-43, 238.

Hanmer, D.B. 2001. An unhappy Diederik Cuckoo. *Honeyguide* **47**: 181.

Ingle, -. 1961. Untitled. Rhodesian Ornithological Society Bulletin 35: 2.

Irwin, M.P.S. 1953. Notes on some birds of Mashonaland, southern Rhodesia. *Ostrich* **24**: 37–49.

Irwin, M.P.S. 1981. *The birds of Zimbabwe*. Harare, Quest Publishing.

Jackson, H.D. 2016. Bird notes from Retreat farm, Harare, 1950-1970. Part 2: passerines. *Honeyguide* **62**: 50-85.

Maasdorp, L. & Cotton, A. 2019. The Birds of Rifa Camp, Chirundu, Zimbabwe, 1987 – 2014. *Honeyguide* **65**: 3-79.

Mainwaring, M.C. 2015. The use of man-made structures as nesting sites by birds: A review of the costs and benefits. *Journal for Nature Conservation* **25**: 17–22.

Marriott M.G. 2002. Nest predation and destruction by Grey Hornbills. *Honeyguide* **48**: 85.

Masterson, H.B. 1953. Klaas' Cuckoo (*Chrysococcyx klaas*) parasitizing Red-headed Weavers (*Anaplectes rubriceps*). *Ostrich* **24**: 51.

Mouritz, L.B .1915. Notes on the ornithology of the Matopo District, Southern Rhodesia. Part II. *Ibis* **57**: 534-571.

Oschadleus, H.D. 2020. Variation in colony sizes of weavers from a citizen science project. *Ostrich* **91**:174-178.

Oschadleus, H.D. 2021. Nest sites of Northern Red-headed Weaver *Anaplectes leuconotus* in West Africa, and lack of records on man-made sites. *Malimbus* **43**: 69-72.

Oschadleus, H.D. & van Stuyvenberg, D. 2011. Largest-ever Red-headed Weaver *Anaplectes rubriceps* colony. *Bulletin of the African Bird Club* **18**: 203-206.

Parnell, G.W. 1972. The birds of Kashwuyo with notes on the surrounding district. *South African Avifauna Series* 87: 1-32.

Parrock, M. 2019. Mashonaland West – Kadoma report. *The Babbler (Zimbabwe)* 147: 14.

Parrock, M. 2022. Mashonaland West. Kadoma News. *The Babbler (Zimbabwe)* 168:24-25.

Parrock, M. 2023. Mashonaland West. Kadoma News. *The Babbler (Zimbabwe)* 171: 20-23.

Priest, C.D. 1936. *The birds of Southern Rhodesia*. Volume 4. London: William Clowes & Sons.

Riddell, I. 2013. Red-headed Weavers. *The Babbler (Zimbabwe)* 109: [20].

Rockingham-Gill, D. 2017. Hippo Pools, Shamva, between the weir and the Umfurudzi junction. 7-10 October 2016, Pentad 1700_3150. *The Babbler (Zimbabwe)* 133: 8-9.

Saunders, C. 1974. Lowveld Notes. *Wild Rhodesia* 5: 11-12.

Siemers, A. 2013. Red-headed Weaver (*Anaplectes rubriceps*). *The Babbler (Zimbabwe)* 109: [19-20].

Steyn, P. 1973. *Eagle days. A study of African eagles at the nest*. Purnell & Sons, Cape Town.

Steyn, P. 1975. Observations on the African Hawk-Eagle. *Ostrich* **46**: 87-105.

Vernon, C.J. 1972. Tshibidzini Expedition 1972. [42 pp] Ornithology report. *Rhodesian Schools Exploration Society Report* 22: 29-39.
Vernon, C.J. 1997. Of buffalo weavers, Red-headed Weavers, snakes and man. *Honeyguide* **43**: 113-115.
Vincent, A.W. 1949. On the breeding habits of some African birds. *Ibis* **91**: 483-507.
Webster, L.C. 1955. Letter to the editor. Rhodesian Ornithological Society Bulletin 17: 3.
Wheeler, D. 1969. A week at Nantwich. *Honeyguide* **57**: 7-9.
Wiggins, D. 2015. Baobabs and Birds by Clare Douie – Thursday 19 March 2015. *The Babbler (Zimbabwe)* 124: [12].
.

H. Dieter Oschadleus, *University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa*. ✉ doschadleus@gmail.com

Table 1. Tree species recorded as nest sites of the Red-headed Weaver in Zimbabwe, * denotes an exotic species.

Tree species	NRCs	PHOWN	Published	Total	Published references
Brachystegia spp.	1			1	
Brachystegia spiciformis (Msasa)	28	1	1	30	Jackson (2016)
Brachystegia tamarindoides (mountain acacia)	2		1	3	Irwin (1953)
Adansonia digitata (baobab)	7		6	13	Vernon (1972), Saunders (1974), Ginn (1999), Wiggins (2015), Rockingham-Gill (2017), Maasdorp & Cotton (2019)
Eucalyptus (gum trees)*	7		5	12	Masterson (1953), Farrant (1956), Parnell (1972), Duckering (1993), Barry (2003)
Colophospermum mopane (mopane)	9		2	11	Carlisle (1923), Masterson 1953
Commiphora (paper-bark tree)	7			7	
Pericopsis angolensis (Muwanga)	3		1	4	Hamling (1944)
"Acacia" spp.	3			3	
Faidherbia albida (apple-ring acacia)			2	2	Steyn (1973, 1975)
Senegalia polyacantha (white thorn)			1	1	Attwell (2012)
Vachellia sieberiana (paperbark acacia)			1	1	Mouritz (1915)
Passiflora edulis (granadilla)*	2			2	
Grewia monticola (donkey berry)			1	1	Beasley (1985)
Jacaranda mimosifolia (jacaranda)*	2			2	
Sclerocarya birrea (marula)	2			2	
Melia azedarach (Syringa)*	3			3	
Terminalia randii (spiny clusterleaf)	1			1	
Ensete ventricosum (wild banana)	2		1	3	Beasley (1995)
Parinari curatellifolia (Mobola plum)	1			1	
Julbernardia globiflora (Munondo)	1		1	2	Webster (1955)
Nicotiana glauca (tree tobacco)			1	1	Ingle (1961)
Ziziphus mucronata (buffalo thorn)	3			3	
Bougainvillea (bougainvillea)*	1			1	
Unidentified climbing plant			1	1	Vincent (1949
Combretum sp.	1			1	
Diplorhynchus condylocarpon (wild rubber)	1			1	
Ficus sp.	1	1		2	
Kirkia acuminate	1			1	
Palm tree	1		1	2	Riddell (2013)
Morus sp. (mulberry)*	1			1	
Salix sp. (willow)	1			1	
Podranea brycei (Zimbabwe creeper)	1			1	

An unusual Black-headed Heron colour morph

An unusual, partially dark morph Black-headed Heron *Ardea melanocephala* was part of a group of seven birds on the Borrowdale race course, Harare, on 2 March 2024 (Figure 1). From a distance it appeared black but closer views showed the black colour was mainly confined to the head, neck and back.

The narrow white band above and behind the eye was a dirty yellow-grey and the bill black above and dirty yellow below. The yellow eyes contrasted strongly with the dark face and head. Oddly, the feet were dull orange, contrasting with the greyish legs with black marks on the posterior femur. Although the literature usually describes the legs as black I find that there is variation in leg colour (pers. obs.). The chin, upper throat and neck was dark grey and the lower neck, mantle and back was black, with grey-and-white plumes. The back contrasted with the slate-grey wings and paler lower breast, belly and flanks. The bird was not made to fly so the wing pattern was not seen.

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

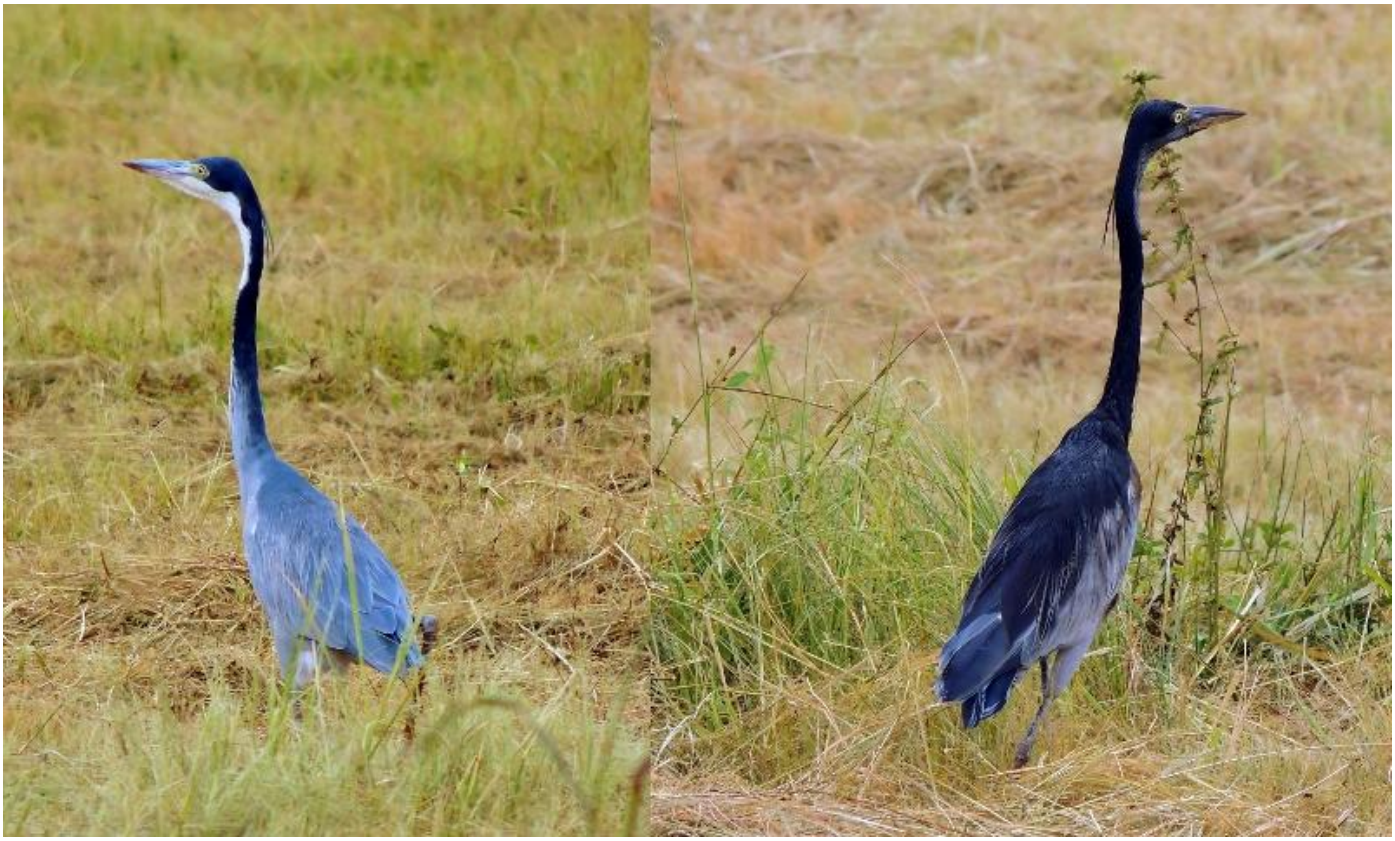

Figure 1. Typical Black-headed Heron (left) and dark form seen on 2 March 2024 (right). Photo © Ian Riddell.

Editor's note: A photograph, on Facebook, of this unusually-coloured heron, was taken at Dandaro Village, Borrowdale, also in March 2024. Readers in Harare should keep a look out for it.

Calls and displays of a pair of Ovambo Sparrowhawks

These birds were first noted on 31 May 2004 when I was attracted by the high-pitched calls of a pair of raptors, circling near the stand of large eucalypts at the Avondale flea market, Harare. Whilst one circled the other landed in the trees, the roost of a large numbers of Pied Crows *Corvus albus*. Though a few crows flew passed there was no interaction between them and the raptor left the perch after about a minute and joined the other, both continued circling and calling. The calls were similar to that of the Little Sparrowhawk *Accipiter minullus* but these birds were too big and could only have been Ovambo Sparrowhawks *Accipiter ovampensis*.

On 10 June 2004 at 0900 I was attracted by the same call at the flats where I was living at the time, which was close to the earlier sighting. To the east, a single (male?) bird was calling whilst performing an undulating display in a half circle, much like a Greater Honeyguide *Indicator indicator*, closing the wings and dipping, then rising up again. It was flying towards me then turned north and was obscured by a line of trees, and shortly after a bird, what was perhaps the same one, was seen

further away to the north chasing a Pied Crow. Steyn, 1982 (*Birds of prey of southern Africa*, David Philip, Cape Town) says the undulating flight performed by a male was probably part of a nuptial display and the high-pitched *ki-ki-ki-ki-ki* calls are made when driving intruders off the nest.

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

A Sooty Falcon in Harare

The plan on Saturday 24 February 2024 was an early morning walk in Haka Game Park, Harare, with the hope of seeing a Striped Crake *Aenigmatolimnas marginalis* and the Broad-tailed Warbler *Schoenicola brevirostris*. What transpired was a lot more exciting than that.

Gary Brent and myself set out fairly early on a walk up through the marshy area following the river that flows into Cleveland Dam. We got lucky quite quickly with a Marsh Owl *Asio capensis* flying out of the grass just in front of us. We then stumbled upon the special Broad-tailed Warbler, who was calling away on a perch in the rank grass. A few other nice finds were the Rosy-throated Longclaw *Macronyx ameliae* and Orange-breasted Waxbill *Sporaeginthus subflavus*. After watching and photographing the warbler we decided to loop around to the road and walk back down to the vehicle. About 100 metres away we saw a slender-looking falcon fly into a tree. Our immediate reaction was that it must be an Amur Falcon *Falco amurensis*; in any case we decided to go and check it out as something seemed off. Upon getting closer to the tree and putting binoculars up to the bird, I knew that we had stumbled upon a Sooty Falcon *Falco concolor*. The excitement and disbelief were quite something as this is a bird that I had been searching for in the Eastern Highlands for a while now, especially since Gary Douglas found one in 2021 near Far and Wide. The beautiful adult specimen was extremely relaxed and seems to be just wanting a rest in the tree for the day.

I then made the report to the BirdLife Zimbabwe social media platforms so that others could connect with the bird. It seemed to hang around for most of the day and then fly off that evening, likely continuing its migration. A very, very special birding moment for Gary and myself.

Chris M. Cragg, *Harare.* ✉ info@farandwide.co.zw

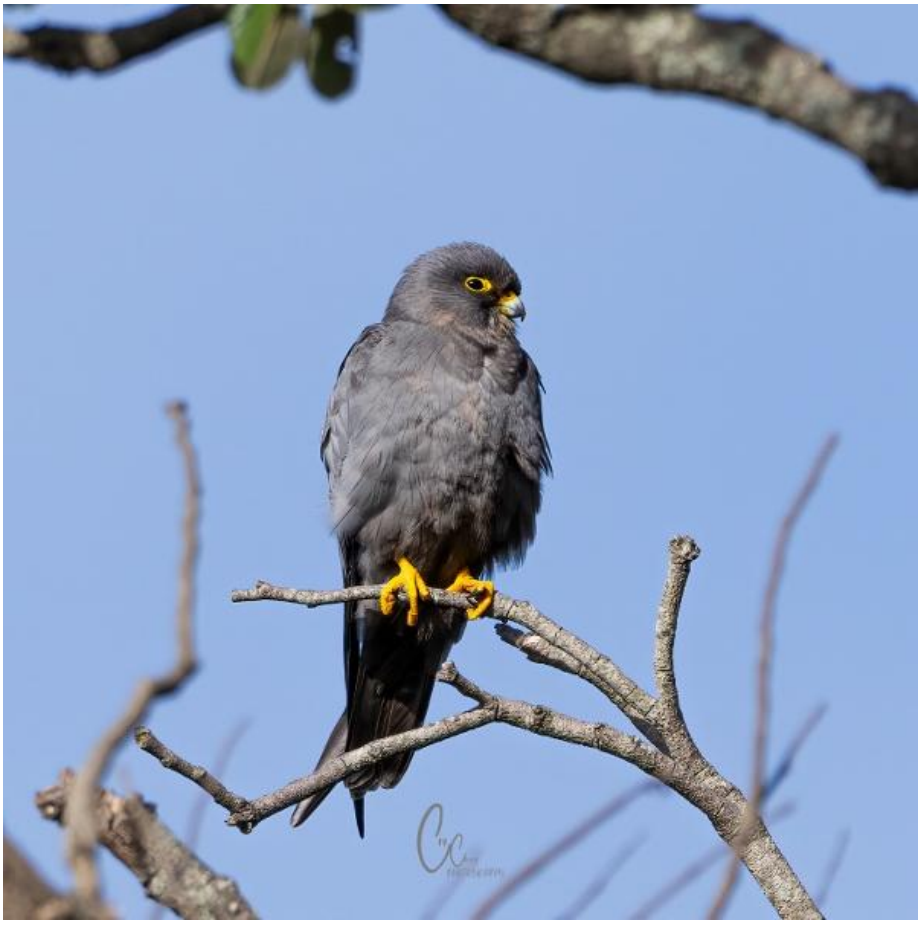

Figure 1. Sooty Falcon at Haka Park, Harare.

A Common Whimbrel at Bumi Hills

On the evening of 12 March 2012 we were surveying shorebirds along the Lake Kariba foreshore in front of Bumi Hills Safari Lodge when at 6.00 p.m. we saw and flushed a Common Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*. The bird was very shy and would not allow a close approach; once flushed it walked rapidly along the water's edge, looking back over its shoulder, but a number of 'voucher' photographs were obtained by Celesta von Chamier of the bird in flight.

The long bill, decurved over the distal two thirds, was shorter than the bill of the Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*, and the bird was smaller than this species. It showed a distinct head pattern with a pale supercilium separating a darker eye stripe and dark side of the crown. In flight it showed a white back and upper rump with a brown barred tail. Both CVC and I agreed on the identification, being familiar with the bird from the Mozambique coast.

Mid-March is a late date for return migration in Zimbabwe, previous records being 5 March (David Whitehead ponds) and 4 May (Kariba) (Tree, A.J. 1999. An analysis of the occurrence of some rare or scarce Palaearctic waders in Zimbabwe. *Honeyguide* **45**: 120-126).

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

More on White-browed Robin-chat mimicry

After my note on White-browed Robin-chat *Cossypha heuglini* mimicking the reverse beeper of a vehicle was published (Riddell, *Honeyguide* **69**: 57), I came across an old note on this topic (Anon. 1962. Bird and human mimics. *Honeyguide* No. 37: 2). The author wrote: "I had two rather amusing experiences recently, while staying at [Great] Zimbabwe. The mimicking abilities of Heuglin's Robin are well enough known of course; on the other hand, it is surprising that many birds will allow themselves to be taken in by human beings imitating their calls, even when this is done rather badly. [The next paragraph in this note relates to Black-collared Barbets.]

However, nothing daunted, I next tried out my talents on a Heuglin's Robin. The song of Heuglin's Robin was beyond me, and I soon found myself giving it a variety of the more easily imitated bird calls to think about, among them that of Shelley's Francolin. This must have intrigued the robin, because, after a few tries, I heard issuing from the bush, a Heuglin's Robin imitation of a human imitation of the call of Shelley's Francolin!"

The degree of mimicry of the robin-chat is mentioned in my previous note but it is interesting that the above author says "The mimicking abilities of Heuglin's Robin are well enough known of course…", which implies that it mimics more than is said in the literature. Perhaps this is the author's personal experience or the behaviour is taken for granted without being published as mimicry isn't mentioned in the 1960s editions of *Roberts*. A White-browed Robin-chat mimicking an Orange-breasted Bush-shrike in a Harare garden is mentioned in the *Babbler* newsletter (No. 63, November/December 2004), but that is the only mention in this medium that I can find.

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

Aggression of an African Paradise Flycatcher towards a Levaillant's Cuckoo

A pair of African Paradise Flycatchers *Terpsiphone viridis* nested in our Victoria Falls garden in January 2021 and in October of the same year. In the following two seasons, 2022-23 and 2023-24, they nested on our neighbour's property and were seen and heard by my wife and I daily.

At about 6.45 a.m. on 26 February 2024 I was on the veranda of our house and noticed a female Paradise Flycatcher actively collecting insects in the garden. Just after she moved off a Levaillant's Cuckoo *Clamator levaillantii* flew into a Knob Thorn tree *Senegalia nigrescens* just a few metres from me. It landed on an outer branch and its striped breast was clearly visible. Almost immediately a male Paradise Flycatcher flew into the tree and made several swoops and dives towards the cuckoo's head, aggressively calling as it did so. The cuckoo seemed unperturbed and after a few seconds it moved further into the foliage and disappeared from view. It must have moved off shortly thereafter as nothing more was heard from the flycatcher.

According to Hockey *et al*. 2005. *Roberts' birds of southern Africa*, VIIth ed., p. 687, African Paradise Flycatchers are known to display aggressive behaviour towards a number of bird species. The only Cuckoo mentioned, however, is the Diderick *Chrysococcyx caprius* and gives one record of Diderick parasitising these flycatchers. In southern Africa the Levaillant's is a brood parasite of Babbler species and not Paradise Flycatchers.

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

A male Variable Sunbird at Victoria Falls

My wife and I visit the Victoria Falls Rain Forest (1725 D4) each month for a birding walk and were there on 4 February 2024. At about 07.40 we came upon an open area of small trees and bushes where Blue Waxbills *Uraeginthus angolensis*, Southern Yellow-White-eyes *Zosterops senegalensis* and a Golden Weaver *Ploceus xanthops* were active. While watching this party, my wife drew my attention to a yellow bird in a nearby tree. It was leaf-gleaning on the inner branches of a small tree about five metres away. The bird moved around rapidly but I noticed immediately it was a male sunbird from its size, dark iridescent back and decurved bill. There were gaps in the tree's leaf cover and the bird was seen sufficiently well to make out its rich yellow belly and blue upper parts.

After a minute or so it left the tree and alighted on a nearby broad-leafed bush and began leaf-washing. Its deep blue-green upper parts and head were now well seen and gave us the first indication it was a Variable Sunbird. I could see it well enough to determine that only the belly and vent were yellow with breast to head being a darker colour. These sunbirds were the commonest in our garden for 20 years or more when we lived in Harare so we are more than familiar with the distinctive colour and tone of the male's deep blue upper parts and yellow belly.

I cannot say with any certainly that the breast was purple as at no time did the bird settle in clear view for long enough to study it more closely. While on the bush it would disappear into the foliage while vigorously wing-flapping and then reappear a few seconds later. After about a minute it flew off and was not seen again. We both agreed it was a Variable Sunbird *Cinnyris venustus* based on its size, rich yellow belly and metallic blue-green back and head. We did not hear the bird call.

This bird was observed in dappled sunlight on a clear morning and was in a dry area of the Rain Forest near the entrance gate. I could not get a photograph because of its rapid movements both within the tree and on the bush. I was also more intent on watching through binoculars to make sure of its identity.

The only sunbird found at the Falls that superficially resembles the bird described above is the male Collared Sunbird *Hedydipna collaris*. It is the commonest sunbird in the Rain Forest but is a smaller bird with a short bill and its head and upper parts are pure bright emerald green with no hint of blue.

There are two Variable Sunbird populations in Zimbabwe. They are found in the middle Zambezi Valley below Lake Kariba and in the eastern part of the country, having expanded their range from the eastern border areas, currently as far west as Karoi in the north and Kadoma in the Midlands. These territories are far removed from Victoria Falls. There is also what appears to be a vagrancy record from the Gachegache area of Lake Kariba, pentad 1645_2850, in October 2023 (SABAP2). There is a population in southwest Zambia but it is not clear how close to the Zambezi it occurs. The provenance of this Victoria Falls bird is therefore unknown.

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

An unusual Blue Waxbill nest

On 19 January 2024 I visited a friend at her house in Victoria Falls (1725 D4). While sitting on the veranda she drew my attention to a light fitting in the ceiling. It was in the form of two concentric wrought iron rings, one on top of the other, a few centimetres apart. On one side of the fitting and sitting on the light bulb, was an untidy bunch of grasses. This, she said, was the nest of a pair of Blue Waxbills *Uraeginthus angolensis*. On one side of the nest was some plastic adhesive tape that my friend had applied as the nest was precarious and in danger of falling. On the opposite side of the light fitting were adhesive tape and the scant remains of their nest from the previous year. While we were still on the veranda the pair of Waxbills came to the light fitting and remained at the nest for a while. They were totally unconcerned about us.

Hockey *et al*. 2005. *Roberts' birds of southern Africa*, VIIth ed., p. 1054 mentions only moderately to well-foliaged bushes and trees as nest sites. Despite the unusual and exposed positioning of the nest, as well as my friend's renovations to it, the pair successfully raised a brood. They were also successful the previous year.

Figure 1. The unusual Blue Waxbill nest at Victoria Falls. Photo © Julia Baker

Julia Baker, *Victoria Falls*. ✉ juliabaker309@gmail.com

The Yellow Canary confirmed for Zimbabwe

There is now a definite record of the Yellow Canary *Crithagra flaviventris* from Zimbabwe, with a bird being photographed by Peter Solomon at a birdbath at Dolilo, Hwange National Park (18°42'S, 26°04'E, pentad 1840_2600) on 21 November 2023 (Figure 1). It was seen often, but always on its own (C. Williamson, pers. com.).

The Yellow Canary has long been considered a possible species for Zimbabwe. Irwin (1981) mentions "an old material record for Matetsi which has not generally been accepted", and he suggested it should be looked for elsewhere in the northwest if only as an irregular vagrant (from Botswana). At the time there were no records of this species from northwest Zimbabwe but there were scattered records from northern Botswana. The record plotted somewhere south of Victoria Falls on the distribution map in Skead (1960) is probably the rejected Matetsi record. There are no breeding records and the one in Nyandoro (1988) is most likely extralimital but has not been seen.

There is a record for the Kazungula QDS in the SABAP1 atlas but Hustler (1998) states "There are no Zimbabwean records of the Yellow Canary for 1725 C and yet it is inexplicably recorded on the map and confusion with the Cuckoo Finch here is a distinct possibility?"

Records in SABAP2 data show it occurs very close to Kazungula, in the Kasane and Lesoma areas of Botswana (1745_2505, 1750_2505, 1750_2510 and 1755_2510.) There is also an unverified record from Zambia about 17 km northwest of Livingstone, across the river from the Zambezi National Park in Zimbabwe (1745_2540) so it might occur in that area. Further south, it was recorded on 25 February 2012, on a card that included the Tuli Safari Area (2155_2900), but it is most likely that the actual sighting was across the border in Botswana. A little further south it has been recorded in South Africa in the Mapungubwe National Park, in an area where Botswana, South Africa and Zimbabwe adjoin each other at the Limpopo-Shashi junction (2210_2910, 2210_2915, 2210_2920, 2210_2925, 2210_2930). All these records suggest this canary could occur in Zimbabwe, though only one pentad 2205_2925, with a single card, has been atlassed on our side of the Limpopo. The low reporting rate in South Africa indicates that it is not a common bird in this area.

Editor's note: Readers might be amused to learn that Priest (1936) claimed that Swynnerton (1907) had recorded this species at Mount Selinda, an extremely unlikely record. In fact, Swynnerton used the common name "Eastern Yellow Canary" (common names had not then been standardised) with the scientific name *Serinus icterus*, now a synonym for the Yellow-fronted Canary *Crithagra mozambica*, a species that was numerous in that area. It is highly unlikely that he would have confused the two species.

References

Hustler, K. 1998. Special Review: *The Atlas of southern African birds*. *Honeyguide* **44**: 169-180.

Irwin, M.P.S. 1981. *The birds of Zimbabwe*. Quest Publishing, Harare.

Nyandoro, R. 1988. Nest Record Card report for 1987. *Honeyguide* **34**: 140-141.

Priest, C.D. 1936. *The birds of Southern Rhodesia*. Volume 4. William Clowes and Son, London.

Skead, C.J. 1960. *The canaries, seedeaters and buntings of southern Africa*. South African Bird Book Fund, Johannesburg.

Swynnerton, C.F.M. 1907. On the birds of Gazaland, Southern Rhodesia. *Ibis*, series 9, Volume 1: 30-74.

Ian Riddell, *Harare* ✉ gemsaf@mango.zw

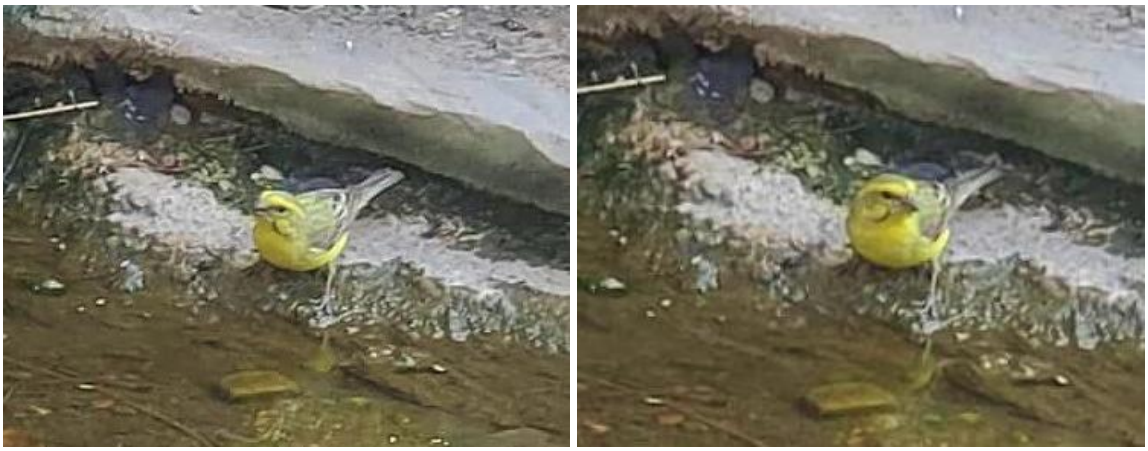

Figure 1. Yellow Canary at Hwange. Photo © P Solomon

June to November 2023

C.T. Baker

Early rainfall occurred on the night of 17 October when up to 55 mm fell across Harare and well over 100 mm with hail drenched Kwekwe. It was generally dry, however, through to the end of November with high temperatures prevailing in most areas from September onwards. A sudden cold snap hit the extreme southeast on the night of 30 October and a number of **Common House Martins** *Delichon urbicum* were found dead at Pamushana Lodge, Malilangwe (2131 B2), the following morning. Some also perished in Gonarezhou NP along with **Barn Swallows** *Hirundo rustica*. These newly-arrived migrants had little or no fat reserves to protect themselves.

The Umvukwe Range of the Great Dyke between Mpinge Pass and the Suoguru Gap (1630 D4) was surveyed by IR on 11-14 July and from 16-20 October. Apart from the threat of development, the fragile habitat at the crest of the Dyke consists of sensitive and narrow dwarf miombo on shallow soils. A number of miombo specials were recorded however, some of which are included in the text below.

Where mention is made in the text to the Atlas it refers to Harrison *et al*. (1997. *The atlas of southern African bird's* 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 Records

Details of sightings of **Pink-throated Twinspots** *Hypargos margaritatus* in July and October at Swimuwini Camp (2131 C4†), Gonarezhou NP, were included in *Honeyguide* **69**: 55.

A male **Yellow Canary** *Crithagra flaviventris* was photographed at Hwange Bush Camp, Dolilo (1826 C1†), where seen on several occasions in mid-November (SWm). This may well become the first fully substantiated Zimbabwe record if accepted by the Rarities Committee. Irwin mentions an old record from Matetsi that was not generally accepted (1981. *The Birds of Zimbabwe*, page 422). See also *Honeyguide*, this issue, (p. 25).

Rarities

Single adult and sub-adult **Palm-nut Vultures** *Gypohierax angolensis* were at the Save-Runde confluence, Gonarezhou (2132 A4), on 17 August (CS). A significant record concerns a pair at Enhoek Estate, Chipinge (2032 B2†), on 25 August. The farm's owners have apparently recorded them there for a number of years (GG). Individuals at Mana Pools (1529 C4) on 27 September (SB) and in the Vundu Camp area (1529 C3) on 26 October (BB) were the first records from the Park since May 2009. One was seen around Mwanja Camp, Chewore Safari Area (1529 D2†), from 11 to 19 November (BL, RW). An immature in the Sinamatella area (1826 C2†) on 1 November was only the second Hwange NP record, the first being from Dopi Pan (1827 C3) in 1977 (DA).

A **Terek Sandpiper** *Xenus cinereus* at Elephant Point, Matusadona NP (1628 C4), on 2 October (A&RMacD) is only the fourteenth Zimbabwe record. Their main migration route bypasses us hence their scarcity in this country.

A **Gull-billed Tern** *Gelochelidon nilotica* was found on the Runde River upstream of Chipinda Pools (2131 B4†) on 1 October (DMacD).

In the second week of August a **Burchell's Starling** *Lamprotornis australis* was photographed at Kazuma Pan (1825 B3) (JMa per JWh) where the species has been recorded previously on rare occasions.

Ostrich, Waterbirds and allied species

During the Hwange NP Game Count from 27-30 September, ten **Common Ostrich** *Struthio camelus* sightings were reported compared to 13 the previous year. At Mbiza Pan (1827 C3) a pair with 12 chicks and then a male with at least ten mature chicks were seen (PD).

Two **Black-necked Grebe** *Podiceps nigricollis* were at Victoria Falls sewage ponds (1725 D4) on 7 July, 26 August and 25 October, and four were there on 22 September. Nearby a male was at a pan on Chamabonda vlei (1725 D3) on 12 October (CB).

A **Great White Pelican** *Pelecanus onocrotalus* flew over Corner Pan, Kazuma NP (1825 B3†), in the second week of August (JWh), and they were in new territory on the Runde River in the Chilojo Cliffs area (2132 A3†) on about 22 August (RB). A **Pink-backed Pelican** *P. rufescens* appeared at Victoria Falls Safari Lodge pan on 16 June (CBr) with four seen there two days later (CB, JB). In the adjacent Zambezi NP (1725 D4), breeding was confirmed again this year in October (VS). Twelve were in Chawara Harbour, Lake Kariba (1628 D2), on 14 August (FM).

Just one **Goliath Heron** *Ardea goliath* was seen during the September Hwange Game Count, that being at Mandavu Dam (1826 C2) (PD). **Purple Herons** *A. purpurea* found in less usual places were near Chisumbanje (2032 C3†) in July (CCr) and at the Katsetsheti River on the northern boundary of Kazuma NP (1825 B3†) in mid-August (JWh). A **Little Egret** *Egretta garzetta* appeared at Mutare sewage works (1932 B1†) on 30 October (GD) and a **Black Heron** *E. ardesiaca* was reported near Mbalabala (2029 A3†) in October (JBo).

White Storks *Ciconia ciconia* were slow to arrive with singles noted on Art Farm, Harare (1731 C1), on 12 October (CW per JP), at Kavinga Safari Camp, Mana Pools (1629 A2), on 22 November (DB) and on Ruwa Golf Course (1731 C4) on the 27th (IR). The only flock reported comprised about 20 circling near Watershed College, Marondera (1831 B1), on 21 October (BMcK). A **Black Stork** *C. nigra* flew over the Great Dyke (1630 D4) on 14 July and another was over Ewanrigg Botanical Gardens (1731 C2) on the 20th (IR). Some in new or unusual areas were an adult on Sable Park Farm, Chegutu (1830 A1†) on 15 July followed by a juvenile on 23 October (DK), and two near Zimunya sewage works, Mutare (1932 B1†), on 24 July (GD). Out of range **Woolly-necked Storks** *C. episcopus* were two midway between Hauna and the Pungwe bridge, Honde Valley

(1832 B4†), on 30 July (SW) and one at Redhill Farm, north of Banket (1730 A4), on 10 November (DSm).

Only a single male **Saddle-billed Stork** *Ephippiorhynchus senegalensis* was seen in the Kanyemba area (1530 C2) over 2-6 November (IR). Sightings of these and **Marabou Storks** *Leptoptilos crumenifer* during the September Hwange Game Count were double last year's counts (PD). Over 100 **Marabous** circled over Art Farm on 20 July (JWh). Dry season flocks of such numbers have been recorded in the area since June 2002. About 110 were at Victoria Falls sewage ponds on 25 October (CB). 32 wintering **Yellow-billed Storks** *Mycteria ibis* were at Victoria Falls Safari Lodge pan on 18 June (CB, JB) and 70 or more were on Kent Estate, near Norton (1830 B1), on 29 October (GT).

An **African Sacred Ibis** *Threskiornis aethiopicus* record from the Masau Camp area (1530 C2†) in the Dande Safari Area (IR) extends its range east of 30°E on the northern border. Nearly 30 years ago a new **Hadeda Ibis** *Bostrychia hagedash* breeding site was found on Leicester Farm, Old Mutare (1832 D3) (Tree, 1994. *Honeyguide* **40**:189). It is therefore interesting that GD commented recently that a small population has grown slowly in areas around Mutare with sporadic reports from within the city itself from about 2021. During September there were records from a couple of suburbs with up to five at a time being noted.

Five **Greater Flamingos** *Phoenicopterus roseus* headed west over Mana Mouth, Mana Pools NP (1529 C4), at sunrise on 28 June (MH). On Lake Kariba one flew past Redcliff Island (1628 D2) on 19 September (FM) and some were between the Gachegache and Sanyati Gorge (1826 D4) at the end of October (PvH). Thirteen were on Gwebi College dam, Nyabira (1730 D2), on 25 November (JWh), 11 **Lesser Flamingos** *Phoeniconaias minor* were in the Ruckomechi Camp area on 5 June (FZ) and there were 5 at the Salt Pan, Hwange NP (1826 C1), on 9 July (CBr).

Over 300 **White-faced Duck** *Dendrocygna viduata* were at Suri Suri Dam, west of Chegutu (1829 B2), on 24 June (*The Babbler*). About 600 **Egyptian Geese** *Alopochen aegyptiaca* at Corner Pan, Kazuma NP, on 11 June (CB) were eclipsed by at least 1100 on 27 September (DS), probably the most reported from there.

An **African Black Duck** *Anas sparsa* at Tessa's Pool, Chimanimani Mountains (1932 D4), on 24 October (TG-F) appears to be the first record from there since the Atlas years. In Hwange NP in September small numbers of **Cape Teal** *A. capensis* were at Guvalala Pan (1826 D3) on the 3rd, in the Robins Camp area (1825 D2) a day later (RC) and at Deteema Dam (1826 C1) on the 27th (JBk). Two were at Kadoma Textiles Dye Ponds (1829 B4) on 23 September (*The Babbler*). **Hottentot Teal** *A. hottentota* near Chisumbanje (2032 C3†) in July (CCr) were unusual in the southeast lowveld. Two were at Victoria Falls Crocodile Farm drainage ponds on 4 November (CB) and at least two were at Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary (1730 D4) on 12 November (IR). **Red-billed Teal** *A. erythrorhyncha* were reported in their thousands on Kent Estate on 22 October (*The Babbler*).

Four male and two female **Southern Pochard** *Netta erythrophthalma* at Malilangwe (2131 B2†) on 5 November (BF) was the observer's first record in 17 year's residence. This is not a bird of the southeast lowveld, and what was possibly the first record for the area was one at Chitove Causeway in 2015. **African Pygmy Geese** *Nettapus auritus* were on Tokwe-Mukosi Dam (2030 D2†) in the second week in August (JBo) and 50 or more were at Lake Manyame (1730 D3) on 26 August (BL). Following the report in the last period of a **Muscovy Duck** *Cairina moschata* at Mukuvisi Woodlands, Harare (1731 C3), in May, one appeared again for a few days around 6 June. Its provenance is unknown (IR).

Raptors

Single **Secretarybirds** *Sagittarius serpentarius* were on the Great Dyke on 14 July (IR) and in the Trelawney area (1730 C2) on 14 September (AD) where no doubt uncommon these days. One was on a rank grass patch in Victoria Falls suburbs on 13 August (GC). It did not appear to be injured so why this skittish species should be found in a residential area is puzzling. As many as 13 were together on an irrigated field on Sentinel Ranch, Beitbridge (2229 A2), on about 8 November (VB).

The largest vulture gathering reported comprised 98 **White-backed** *Gyps africanus*, three **Hooded** *Necrosyrtes monachus* and single **Lappet-faced** *Torgos tracheliotos* and **White-headed** *Trigonoceps occipitalis* at a Rifa Camp, Chirundu (1628 B2), vulture watch on 17 July (NG). Single adult **Cape Vultures** *G. coprotheres* were at Jabulani Safaris, Shangani (1929 C4), on 6 July and 12 October, and a juvenile on 21 September (LT). A **White-headed Vulture** was at Trichilia Point, Mana Pools NP (1529 C4), on 1 September (MH) and two adults were at the scant remains of a baby elephant carcass on Chamabonda vlei on 18 November (CB).

Nesting **Lappet-faced Vultures** were in the Mazunga area, Bubye Valley Conservancy (2129 D2), on 21 June (MBr) and on Cawston Block Wildlife Ranch, Umguza (1928 C2), on 6 July (SN). Four were at a hippo kill at Mana West Airstrip on 6 July (MH) and up to six were seen daily in the Chinguli area, Runde River (2132 A3), between 9-13 September (AF). Two were on Kent Estate on 12 November (GT).

Yellow-billed Kites *Milvus aegyptius* were nest-building at Victoria Falls on 24 August (DT) and at Nyamepi, Mana Pools (1529 C2), on the 28th (AF). An **African Cuckoo Hawk** *Aviceda cuculoides* was east of Chitake in the Mangaingai area (1629 B1†) in November (DV). Single **Bat Hawks** *Macheiramphus alcinus* were in the Devil's Gorge area (1726 D4†) at the end of June (RC) and on Redhill Farm, Banket, on 22 July (DSm).

Verreaux's Eagles *Aquila verreauxii* in less usual places were at Mangaingai (1629 B1†) in September (JMk) and around Binga (1727 C2†) on 15 November (TF). Single **Booted Eagles** *Hieraaetus pennatus* were at Chitake, Mana Pools NP (1629 A2), on 31 July (DS) and at Mangaingai (1629 B1†) in October (JMk). A pair of **African Hawk-eagles** *A. spilogaster* stood in water for a prolonged period at a pan on Chamabonda vlei on 9 September (CB). Singles were seen during the July and October Great Dyke surveys (IR).

Juvenile or immature **Martial Eagles** *Polemaetus bellicosus* were at the Nyanga NP entrance (1832 B3) on 17 August (AF), on Kent Estate on 21 August (PvL), near Sian Simba Camp, Zambezi NP (1725 D3), on 2 September (CB), at Malilangwe on 9 September (AH) and on the Great Dyke (1630 D4) in October (IR). **African Crowned Eagles** *Stephanoaetus coronatus* reported at three different pans during the September Hwange Game Count were the first records since the 2019 count (PD). An immature **Western Banded Snake-eagle** *Circaetus cinerascens* was at Mongwe, downstream of Chirundu (1528 D4†), on 27 June (GH). A three-quarter grown **Bateleur** *Terathopius ecaudatus* chick was in a nest at Cawston Block on 1 June (SN).

Augur Buzzards *Buteo augur* were seen daily on the July and October Great Dyke trips and a lone **African Goshawk**

Accipiter tachiro was noted on 14 July. This goshawk is now uncommon in the Newlands area of Harare (1731 C3) where a single bird was recorded twice in both July and October (IR). An **African Goshawk** on the Binga-Magunje road east of the Ume River (1728 B1†) in September (RB) reflects a slight expansion of range from the west. A **Black Sparrowhawk** *A. melanoleucus* near Manjolo (1727 C4†) on the Binga-Milibizi road in early November (PvH) was well out of range. Another wanderer was a **Southern Pale Chanting Goshawk** *Melierax canorus* north of Nyamandhlovu (1928 C4†) at the end of September (VBo).

A **Western Marsh-harrier** *Circus aeruginosus* at Kazuma Pan NP on 12 October (UL) was an early arrival. A juvenile **African Marsh-harrier** *C. ranivorus* was seen at Lake Chivero on 23 July (RD) and one and two were at Lake Manyame on 29 August (BL) and 5 November (PZ) respectively. Wintering **Ospreys** *Pandion haliaetus* were at Mazvikadei Dam, Banket (1730 A2), on 8-9 July (LF) and in Zambezi NP on the 8th (DS) while two, one of which was displaying, were at Mazvikadei on 23 August (AMacD). During the September Hwange Game Count, one seen at Major Pan, Ngamo (1927 A2), was the first one recorded during this event since 2019 (PD).

A **Peregrine Falcon** *Falco peregrinus* was seen at Tokwe-Mukosi Dam (2030 D4†) on 3 September (BL). A **Lanner Falcon** *F. biarmicus* was near Milibizi (1727 C3†) towards the end of June (RC) and during the Great Dyke (1630 C4†) surveys, they were seen twice in July and on most days in October (IR). **Amur Falcons** *F. amurensis* moved through the Mangaingai area (1629 B1†) in the last week of November (JMk). A **Rock Kestrel** *F. rupicolus* on Mount Inyangani (1832 B4) on 21 October (RS) is worth noting as records of the species and locality are scarce these days. A **Greater Kestrel** *F. rupicoloides* on Redhill Farm (1730 A4†) on 29 June (DSm) was further west than recorded in the Atlas. Four **Dickinson's Kestrels** *F. dickinsoni* were at Senuko, Save Valley Conservancy (2031 D2), on 30 June (GS).

Gamebirds, Rails and Cranes

An exceptional **Blue Quail** *Excalfactoria adansonii* wintering record was one on Wamba Dam marsh, Aberfoyle (1832 B4), on 16 July (MS). Some were at Old Mutare (1832 D3) on 22-23 October where recorded annually (GD). In June, **Crested Guineafowl** *Guttera pucherani* in the Kavira Forest Lands (1826 B2†) (RC *et al*.) and another nearby in the Devil's Gorge area (1726 D4†) (RC) were upstream of the Lake Kariba headwaters population. Forty-three at the Sikumi Lodge turn-off on the Bulawayo-Victoria Falls road (1827 C1) on 28 August (SWm) were part of the apparently isolated Sikumi Forest population.

In September, two **Wattled Cranes** *Grus carunculatus* were at Dandanda Pan, north of Lupane (1827 B4) (RDu per SW) where first recorded in 1992 but little heard of since then.

An **African Rail** *Rallus caerulescens* calling on Borrowdale vlei on 14 August (IR) is included mainly as the future of the vlei's resident waterbirds is under threat from heavy development. **African Purple Swamphens** *Porphyrio madagascariensis* and **Common Moorhens** *Gallinula chloropus* are scarce in the southeast but both species were reported near Chisumbanje (2032 C3†) in July (CCr). Two **African Finfoot** *Podica senegalensis* were on the Angwa River at Lion's Den (1729 B2†) on 6 August (DSm). **Black-bellied Bustards** *Lissotis melanogaster* in unusual areas were on Hillside Golf Course, Mutare (1932 B1†), on 11 June (JR) and near Masau Camp, Dande Safari Area (1530 C2†), on 6 November (KvL).

Waders, Gulls and Terns

Two male **Greater Painted-snipe** *Rostratula benghalensis* were at Victoria Falls Crocodile Farm drainage ponds on 24 September (CB) and one was on Chamabonda vlei on 6 November (SC). The earliest **Common Ringed Plovers** *Charadrius hiaticula* of the season were two at Victoria Falls Crocodile Farm ponds on 14 September (CB) followed by singles at Kazuma Pan on the 27th (DS) and Elephant Point on 1 October (AMacD). Individuals were at Guluweni on the Mwenezi River (2131 C4†) on 29 October (DS) and at Mutare sewage works (1932 B1†) a day later (GD). About 14 were at Lake Chivero Sanctuary on 12 November (IR). The only **White-fronted Plover** *C. marginatus* noted was at the Save-Runde junction (2132 A4) on 25 August (DS). A **Chestnut-banded Plover** *C. pallidus* appeared at Massasanya Dam, Gonarezhou (2131 B4), on 27 September (DMacD) where previously recorded in 2019.

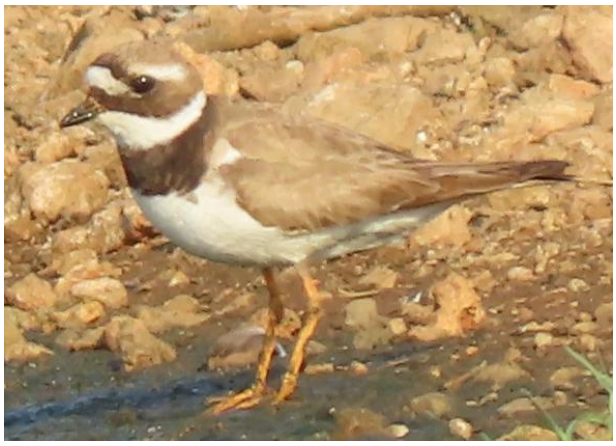

Figure 1. Common Ringed Plover, Victoria Falls. Photo © Colin Baker

Three **Senegal Lapwings** *Vanellus lugubris* were at Mahove, Gonarezhou (2132 A4), on 27 August (DS). Single **Long-toed Lapwings** *V. crassirostris* were in Zambezi NP on 9 July (BMa) and 4 September (RC) and at Lake Manyame on 29 November (DB-J).

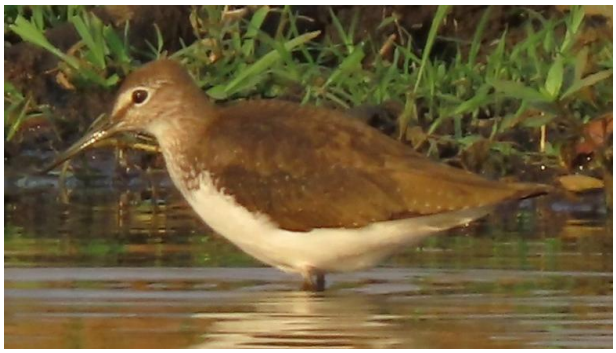

Figure 2. Green Sandpiper, Victoria Falls. Photo © Colin Baker.

Green Sandpipers *Tringa ochropus* at Victoria Falls were on the Masuwe River on 5 September (LC) and at the Crocodile Farm ponds on 3 October (CB); one was on the Save River on Sango's northern boundary (2032A2†) on 25 October (J-MB). An over-wintering **Wood Sandpiper** *T. glareola* was at Nyamandhlovu Pan, Hwange NP (1826 D4), on 12 June, as was a **Curlew Sandpiper** *Calidris ferruginea* (AJ). **Common**

Greenshanks *T. nebularia* wintering in June were three at Musango, Bumi area (1628 C4), on the 11th (SE), one at Rhino Safari Camp, Matusadona (1628 C4), on the 15th (PTe), one on a Chivhu farm dam (1830 D2) on the 18th (MC-R) and three separate individuals at the Save-Runde junction area the same day (GD). About 60 **Little Stint** *Calidris minuta* were at Lake Chivero Sanctuary on 12 November (IR).

Three **Pied Avocet** *Recurvirostra avosetta* pairs were on a farm dam near Chakari (1830 A2†) on 23 July (DK) and five individuals were at Musango on 17 September (GE). Estimates of 90 and 50 were noted in November at Lake Chivero Sanctuary (IR) and on Gwebi Agricultural College dam (1730 D2) (JWh) respectively. Twenty-two at Kadoma Textiles Dye Ponds on 24 June were alongside 80 **Black-winged Stilts** *Himantopus himantopus* (*The Babbler*). In the southeast, **Stilts** were in the Checheche area (2032 C3†) in July, September and November, and were also found southeast of Chisumbanje (2032 C4†) in July (CCr). Two were on Gletwyn Dam, Mandara (1731 C3), on 16 November where last recorded in 2017 (JBa).

A pair of **Bronze-winged Coursers** *Rhinoptilus chalcopterus* was near the escarpment in Chewore South (1629 B2†) on 16 June (NN). About 100 **Collared Pratincoles** *Glareola pratincola* were over the Victoria Falls on 17 September (DS) and some near Mbalabala (2029 A3†) in October were well out of range (JBo).

Four **Grey-headed Gulls** *Chroicocephalus cirrocephalus* were at Chundu Island, Zambezi NP (1725 D3), on 3 September (CB). Single **Caspian Terns** *Hydroprogne caspia* were at Bumi Hills, Lake Kariba (1628 C4), on 18-19 June (DvZ) and Lake Manyame on 26 August (BL). A **Whiskered Tern** *Chlidonias hybrida* in breeding plumage on Redhill Farm dam (1730 A4†) on 8 October (DSm) was probably a wanderer from Mazvikadei.

Nine **African Skimmers** *Rynchops flavirostris* had arrived back at Chipinda Pools causeway by 4 June (NM) and eight were nearby on the Runde River on the 19th (SW). Several juveniles seen with these adults towards the end of November confirm breeding had taken place (AC). Five were at the Chessa Channel, Mana Pools (1529 C2), on 26 June (SH) and two were near Kalunda Island, Zambezi NP, on 11 July (DS).

Other non-Passerines

About 150 **Yellow-throated Sandgrouse** *Pterocles gutturalis* were at Corner Pan, Kazuma NP, on 12 June (CB) and by the second week of August they were found in their hundreds in the Park (JWh). Four were at Pan 1, Chamabonda vlei, on 18 November (CB).

A **Speckled Pigeon** *Columba guinea* appeared at Kennedy 2 Pan (1827 C3†) on 3 June (AJ) and about 12 at Corner Pan (1825 B3†) on 12 June were new to the area and no doubt attracted by the newly built platform (CB). One at Lion's Den (1730 A3) on 19 July (JMk) was on the western edge of its Makonde range. **African Mourning Doves** *Streptopelia decipiens* were in the Masau Camp area (1530 C2) early in November (IR). A wayward **Namaqua Dove** *Oena capensis* on the upper Vumba (1932 B2†) on 22 July (KW) was almost certainly the first Vumba record, and a **Lemon Dove** *Columba larvata* wandered in the opposite direction to be found in a Mutare suburb (1932 B1) on 29 November (JC).

In the Zambezi Valley, two **Grey-headed Parrots** *Poicephalus fuscicollis* flew over Chirundu Safari Lodge (1628 B2) on 29 June (TN), three were at Chitake on 31 July (DS) and five at Mhara River Bush Camp, Chitake-Mhara confluence (1629 B1) on 7 August (DH). Two flew back and forth along the Gwebi River, Darwendale, on 26 August (BL) and up to six flew regularly over Kent Estate between 7 September and 12 November (GT). One was in the Victoria Falls Rain Forest on 17 September (DS). **Meyer's Parrots** *P. meyeri* seemed more prevalent than usual in Newlands from September to November, although only one to three birds were involved (IR). Flocks at Victoria Falls comprised nine at Timot's Pan, Chamabonda vlei (1725 D3), on 9 August and about 15 at the Zambezi NP entrance on 24 October (CB). A rare melanistic individual was seen at Unit 2 Campsite, Matetsi 2 (1825 B3), on 15 September (CJ).

A **Rosy-faced Lovebird** *Agapornis roseicollis* appeared in a Newlands garden on 25 November, with about three there the next day. Apparently six had been seen nearby in Eastlea earlier in the month (IR). This is reminiscent of the escaped birds reported in Harare's northern suburbs from 1996 to 2005. 31 **Lilian's Lovebirds** *A. lilianae* at Chirundu Safari Lodge on 29 June built up to over 100 by 11 July (TN). They were found in their hundreds at Kapirinengu, Chewore (1529 D2), on 19 August (DS).

Black *Cuculus clamosus* and **African Emerald Cuckoos** *Chrysococcyx cupreus* in the Masau Camp area (1530 C2†) in November (IR) indicate localised movement from the south. A juvenile **Levaillant's Cuckoo** *Clamator levaillantii* with its **Arrow-marked Babbler** *Turdoides jardineii* hosts was still around on 3 June on Kennedy vlei (AJ). A **Thick-billed Cuckoo** *Pachycoccyx audeberti* at Jabulani Safaris, Shangani (1929 C4†), on 16 November (LT) was well out of range. Over-wintering **African Emerald Cuckoos** were at Seldomseen, Vumba (1932 B2), on 22 August (KW) and 11 September (PM). A male was unusual at Monavale vlei on 29 November (BR). **Klaas's Cuckoos** *C. klaas* of the South African population wintering here were one on Bemba Farm, Marondera (1831 B1), on 21 June (AD), two at Victoria Falls on 7 July (DT), and singles at a spring on the Great Dyke (1630 D4) on 13 July (IR), Haka Park, Harare (1731 C3), on 29 July and Ruzawi School, Marondera, the following day (DD).

In Lomagundi an **African Grass-owl** *Tyto capensis* was on Redhill Farm, Banket, in the first week of October and two were at Pondoro Farm, Lion's Den (1729 B4), on the 10th (JMk). Twelve or more **Marsh Owls** *Asio capensis* were at a Kent Estate dam (1830 B1†) on 18 August (PvL) and about 10 were flushed on 500 metres of grassy shoreline at Biri Dam (1730 A3) on 31 August (NN). Some in the Nyadiri area west of Mutoko (1732 A3†) in November (PvH) where well to the east of known range. An **African Barred Owlet** *Glaucidium capense* was heard at Kent Estate on the hot afternoon of 22 October (*The Babbler*). A **Verreaux's Eagle-owl** *Bubo lacteus* was on a nest on Chamabonda vlei on 9 September (CB). A pair of **Pel's Fishing-owls** *Scotopelia peli* were heard at Masau Camp on 4 and 6 November (IR).

A **Rufous-cheeked Nightjar** *Caprimulgus rufigena* at Jabulani Safaris, Shangani (1929 C4†) on 11 Septembers (LT) was out of range but being the first of the season it may well have been in transit. **African Black Swifts** *Apus barbatus* near Devil's Gorge (1826 B2†) in June (AK) were well out of range. An **Alpine Swift** *Tachymarptis melba* flew over the unexpected locality of Matsheumhlope, Bulawayo (2028 B1†), on 16 October (JV). These scarce visitors are more likely to be seen in the northern part of the country.

A **Speckled Mousebird** *Colius striatus* on Redhill Farm, Banket (1730 A4), on 7 October (DSm) is interesting as the Atlas contains an isolated record from this QDS. To the north and far out of range was a flock at a dam in the Suoguru Gap, Guruve (1630 D4†), on 19 October (IR). A **Narina Trogon**

Apaloderma narina was at Chirundu Safari Lodge on 14 and 23 November (TN). Very few records have come from the Chirundu area in the last ten years or so. Some calling in the Shagashi River Gorge, Lake Mutirikwe (2030 B2†), on 25-26 November (BL) were well north of their southern range. The only other record from this area since the 1970s was at the Ancient City, Great Zimbabwe (2031 A1), in 2012.

A **Half-collared Kingfisher** *Alcedo semitorquata* at Tessa's Pool, Chimanimani (1932 D4†), on 24 October (TG-F) was further north than expected. Over-wintering records of **African Pygmy Kingfishers** *Ispidina picta* are scarce but it seems they do so regularly at Aberfoyle (MS). An early individual at Mutare on 9 September (GD) could be the earliest arrival yet. One was found at Cawston Block Camp (1928 C2†) on 18 November (SN). An unusual **Woodland Kingfisher** *Halcyon senegalensis* over-wintering record was one at Sian Simba Camp, Zambezi NP, on 13 August (CB). A pair that breeds annually in the same Park arrived late this year only to find a pair of **Broad-billed Rollers** *Eurystomus glaucurus* occupying their tree. The two pairs fought daily until the Rollers were finally evicted (BMa). Three separate **Grey-headed Kingfishers** *H. leucocephala* sightings at Malilangwe on 17-18 August (BF) may represent early arriving birds.

Single **Madagascar [Olive] Bee-eaters** *Merops superciliosus* were at Sidinda Camp, approximately 80 km downstream of Victoria Falls (1726 C3†) on 30 October (DN) and on Long Island, Lake Kariba (1628 D1†), on 19 November (AJ). Over-wintering **Southern Carmine Bee-eaters** *M. nubicoides* seen between 20-25 July were at Vundu Camp (1529 C3) (SP), Victoria Falls (CWn), Kavinga (DB) and E Camp, Chirundu (1628 B2) (FZ). **White-fronted Bee-eaters** *M. bullockoides* were seen several times on and around Marshbrook Farm, Featherstone (1831 C1†), early in September (CWd). On 13 June a **Purple Roller** *Coracias naevius* on the Musango shoreline was considered unusual there during the winter (SE).

Trumpeter Hornbills *Bycanistes bucinator* on Sable Park Farm, Chegutu (1830 A1), on 28 November (DK) were on the south-eastern edge of their range. A nice Mutare record was 14 **Silvery-cheeked Hornbills** *B. brevis* on Hillside Golf Course on 22 August (BHo). **Southern Red-billed Hornbills** *Tockus rufirostris* were at Tokwe-Mukosi Dam (2030 D2†) in August (JBo) and some near Manjolo, Binga-Milibizi road (1727 C4†), in early November (PvH) were within range but in a QDS were unrecorded during the Atlas years. In south Matabeleland, three **Southern Ground-hornbills** *Bucorvus leadbeateri* chased chickens in the Mapolisa Community south of Plumtree (2027 D2†) on 7 July one of which caught a chick (CJ) and five were in Communal Lands on the old Gwanda road (2028 B3) on 16 November (DS). Four adults were at a baobab nest site in Dande Safari Area (1530 C4) on 3 November (IR). The September Hwange Game Count Report indicates their numbers have increased steadily since 2021 (PD).

A wandering **Black-collared Barbet** *Lybius torquatus* was at Seldomseen (1932 B2) on 16 June (BMb). They are not mentioned in *The Birds of the Bvumba Highlands* (Harwin *et al*. 1994. *Honeyguide* **40**, Supplement 1) although there is a 1997 record from the Botanical Gardens. An **Acacia Pied Barbet** *Tricholaema leucomelas* record from near Milibizi (1727 C3†) at the end of June (AK) was further into Kariba's upper reaches than noted previously. An infrequent Victoria Falls **Scaly-throated Honeyguide** *Indicator variegatus* record was one seen and heard on Elephant Hills Golf Course on 7 July (DT). A **Green-backed Honeybird** *Prodotiscus zambesiae* was at Sian Simba Camp, Zambezi NP (1725 D3), on 2 September (CB).

Passerines

Three or more **African Broadbills** *Smithornis capensis* were displaying at Aberfoyle Tea Estates (1832 B4) on the early date of 25 July (KW); there were two July records from there the previous year which were the first in that month for 30 years at least. They were found in new areas at Kautsiga Camp, upper Ume River (1728 A4†), on 22 September (MZ) and in the Mangaingai area east of Chitake (1629 B1†) during September (JMk). The first **African Pittas** *Pitta angolensis* arrived before the start of the rains at Kavinga (DB) and Masoka (MZ) on 9 November and at Mhara Bush Camp on the 17th (DH).

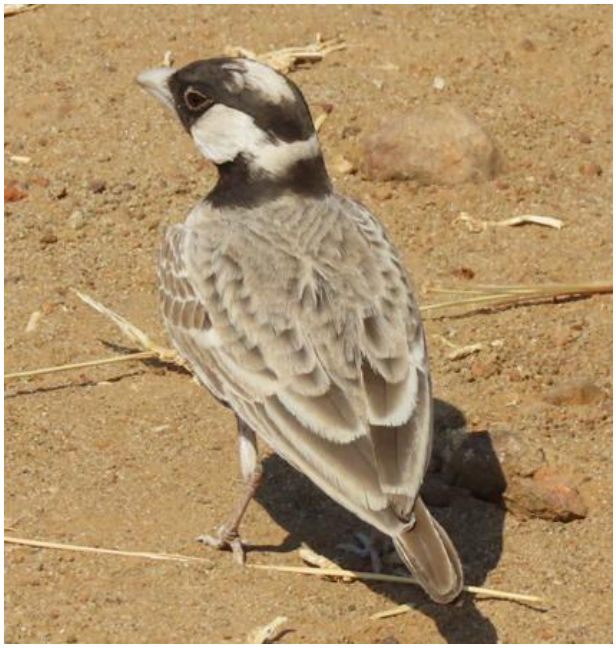

Figure 3. Grey-backed Sparrowlark, Kazuma Pan. Photo © Colin Baker.

Grey-backed Sparrowlarks *Eremopterix verticalis* flooded into South Africa during the winter with a major influx also occurring here from June onwards. Records were more numerous and widespread than ever before. The first noted were *c*.200 on Chamabonda vlei (1725 D3†) on 11 June (CBr) and about 15 near Corner Pan, Kazuma NP (1825 B3†) the same day (CB). Numbers built up at Kazuma thereafter reaching a peak of several hundred in the second week of August (JWh) with many still there on 27 September (DS). Two were south of Bulawayo in the Mazunga area (2129 D2†) on 19 June (MBr). Over 40 were near Timot's Pan, Chamabonda vlei, on 2 July (RC, AK) and 15 were seen there on 9 September (CB). Some were on Sentinel Ranch, Beitbridge (2229 A2†), in July (VB), about 25 in the Robins Camp area on 4 September (RC) and flocks on Lake Kariba at Fothergill Island (1628 D1†) and Gordon's Bay (1628 D3†) on 18 November (AJ).

Up to three **Barn Swallows** *Hirundo rustica* were at Victoria Falls sewage ponds on 10 June (CB) and one in pristine plumage was at Tambahata Pan, Gonarezhou (2132 A4), on the 16th (GD). Four **Blue Swallows** *H. atrocaerulea* arrived at Gulliver Dam, Nyanga (1832 B4), on 5 September (KW) with others noted at the Connemara Lakes, Troutbeck (1832 B2), on the 9th (NMa) and Far and Wide, near Mtarazi Falls (1832 B4), on the 10th (CC), An early **Red-breasted Swallow** *Cecropis semirufa* was on Kennedy vlei on 3 July followed by pairs there and at Mbiza Pan on the 6th (AJ). None were reported then until a pair was at a nest site in Zambezi NP on 29 July (CB). **Mosque Swallows** *C. senegalensis* were seen at Msuna (1826 B2) on 28

June (RC) where first recorded in 2019. Some on new territory were in Kazuma Pan NP (1825 B3†) in June (AK) and September (SL) and near Jambile Pan, Hwange NP (1826 D4†), early in July (RC).

Little is heard of the southeast lowveld **Pearl-breasted Swallow** *Hirundo dimidiata* population these days so a pair at Malilangwe (2131 B2) on 25 July (GD) is a welcome record. The same might be said of **Grey-rumped Swallows** *Pseudhirundo griseopyga* of which seven were at Mahove, Gonarezhou (2132 A4), on 27 August (DS). **Sand** *Riparia riparia* and **Banded Martins** *R. cincta* were at Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary on 12 November, both species numbering about 40 each (IR). In the Checheche area (2032 C3†) in November **Brown-throated** *R. paludicola* and **Banded Martins** were both well out of range (CCr). Two **Eastern Saw-wings** *Psalidoprocne orientalis* were at Masau Camp (1530 C2†) on 3 November (IR).

A **Eurasian Golden Oriole** *Oriolus oriolus* was in the Mangaingai area east of Chitake (1629 B1†) in November (DV). Wintering **African Golden Orioles** *O. auratus* were at Binga on 24-26 June (RC) and on Elephant Hills Golf Course on 7 July (DT). An exciting **Miombo Tit** *Melaniparus griseiventris* record far to the west of normal range came from Victoria Falls (1725 D4†) early in September (AK). Irwin (1981. *The Birds of Zimbabwe*, page 251) mentions Victoria Falls although nothing has been heard from there for 40 years or more. **Grey Penduline-tits** *Anthoscopus caroli* were recorded during the Great Dyke surveys (1630 D4†) as were **Spotted Creepers** *Salpornis salvadori* (IR).

An **African Red-eyed Bulbul** *Pycnonotus nigricans* at Silwane Camp just outside Hwange NP (1827 C3†) on 21 October (WvdB) was further east than expected. For the second time within a year, a **Yellow-bellied Greenbul** *Chlorocichla flaviventris* was found on the Mukuvisi Woodlands stream on 9 September (IR). Another was unusual in atypical montane habitat at Seldomseen on 23 July and 13 August, as was a **Miombo Rock-thrush** *Monticola angolensis* on the latter date (BMb, KW). This **Rock-thrush** was also noted during the Great Dyke (1630 D4†) surveys (IR). **Eastern Nicators** *Nicator gularis* in unusual places were at Msuna (1826 B2†) on 28 June (RC), Kapirinengu, Chewore (1529 D2†), on 19 August (DS) where further downstream than previously recorded, and at Hippo Pools (1731 B2†) on 16 October (KvL) where it has been a scarce (and apparently unreported) visitor for many years (SCh).

Collared Palm-thrushes *Cichladusa arquata* also appeared in unexpected areas, as at Matetsi Unit 2 Safari Area (1825 B3†) in June (CJ), on the Chenje River, Chewore South (1630 A1†), in September (a pair) (NN) and at Masau Camp (1530 C2†) where they joined the dawn chorus in November (IR). In Hwange NP, they were reported from near Makololo Pan (1927 A1†) on 18 August (SWm), Linkwasha Camp (1927 A2†) on the 23rd (MBr) and at Mbiza Pan (1827 C3†) on 15 September (BN). This bird has not been included in any of the Hwange NP checklists in *Honeyguide*.

A **Swynnerton's Robin** *Swynnertonia swynnertoni* on Tom Hulley Road (1932 B1) on 30 October (PM) appears to be a new Vumba locality. **Boulder Chats** *Pinarornis plumosus* in the gorge at Kanyemba (1530 C2†) on 30 September (GD) are exceptional as they were hitherto unknown along the middle Zambezi River frontage. Sightings in October and November in the Mangaingai area (1629 B1†) (JMk, DV) place this bird further west in the northern half of the country than expected. A **Bearded Scrub-robin** *Erythropygia quadrivirgata* at Ewanrigg on 18 July (PZ) follows the first record from there in July 2020. Another at Greystone Preserve, Harare (1731 C1), on 14 October (*The Babbler*) was the first record from there, if not from Harare as a whole.

Chestnut-vented Tit-babblers *Sylvia subcaerulea* seen near Malapati (2231 A2†) in August and in the Malapati Safari Area (2131 C4†) on 1 October (EvdW) are only the third and fourth southeast lowveld records and the furthest south thus far. One found on the edge of jesse bush at Rhino Safari Camp, Matusadona NP (1628 C4†), on 2 June (PTe), and a sighting in the same general area about three weeks later (RC), are exceptional records. There are no records for Kariba as a whole in the Atlas although there was a sighting at Charara (1628 D2) in 1997. **Southern Hyliota** *Hyliota australis* and **Red-faced Crombec** *Sylvietta whytii* were among the miombo specials recorded during the Great Dyke (1630 D4†) surveys (IR). **Dark-capped Yellow Warblers** *Iduna natalensis* were unknown west of 28°E until found in June at Msuna on the Zambezi (1826 B2†) (RC) and near Milibizi, Lake Kariba (1727 C3†) (AK, DCh). Three over-wintering **Willow Warblers** *Phylloscopus trochilus* were at Christon Bank, Harare (1731 C1), on 29 July (IR).

In September a **Bar-throated Apalis** *Apalis thoracica* record from close to the southern border near Malapati (2231 A2) (EvdW) involved birds more closely aligned to the South African population than our own. A **Yellow-breasted Apalis** *A. flavida* at Lasting Impressions Camp, Kadoma (1829 B4†), in July (RP per JP) denotes movement southwards in the Midlands onto the central watershed. One at Christon Bank on 24 September (*The Babbler*) was the first record from there for ten years. **Green-capped Eremomelas** *Eremomela scotops* are scarce vagrants to Victoria Falls so a pair at Timot's Pan, Chamabonda vlei, on 9 September is of interest (CB). A **Grey-backed Camaroptera** *Camaroptera brevicaudata* record from the Binga-Milibizi road near Manjolo (1727 C4†) in early November (PvH) came from a QDS where possibly overlooked previously.

The only **Pale-crowned Cisticola** *Cisticola cinnamomeus* reported was on Monavale vlei on 15 October (*The Babbler*). A **Tinkling Cisticola** *C. rufilatus* at Beatrice (1830 D2†) on 23 October (TC) probably indicates movement from the south.

An **African Dusky Flycatcher** *Muscicapa adusta* was unexpected during the July Great Dyke (1630 D4†) survey (IR). A single **Collared Flycatcher** *Ficedula albicollis* was at Juliasdale (1832 B3) on 15 November (PZ) and three were seen at Gosho Park, Marondera (1831 B1), on the 29th (IR). **Grey Tit-flycatchers** *Myioparus plumbeus* in less usual places were one at Lasting Impressions Camp, Kadoma, on 8 July (*The Babbler*) and Masau Camp, Dande Safari Area, where quite common in early November (IR). Most unusual on a Kensington, Harare (1731 C3) property was a pair of **Black-throated Wattle-eyes** *Platysteira peltata* on 24 October (AD).

A pair of **African Paradise Flycatchers** *Terpsiphone viridis* was still feeding two recently fledged youngsters at Victoria Falls on the late date of 1 June (DT). On the strength of that record alone, it is impossible to determine whether these June records were of migrants or over-winterers: a female at Rifa on the 9th and 10th (EB), and singles at Chewore Lodge Campsite (1529 D2) on the 13th (NN) and Kavinga Safari Camp a week later (DB). Thereafter presumed over-wintering occurred with individuals at Rhino Safari Camp on 26 June (PTe), Maabwe Bay, Binga (1727 C3), on 26-27 June (RC), Muchaniwa Pan, Gonarezhou (2132 A4), on 16 July (DCx), Mavuradonha Wilderness (1631 A3) on 14 August (RC) and on the Save River, Sango Ranch (2032 A1) on 21 August (J-MB).

A **Mountain Wagtail** *Motacilla clara* record from Tessa's Pool, Chimanimani (1932 D4), on 24 October (TG-F) is not unusual but is included as little is posted from there these days. **Plain-backed Pipits** *Anthus leucophrys* are seldom reported but were recorded in Kazuma NP (1825 B3) in November (YS). Two **Tree Pipits** *A, trivialis* were on Zombapata Hill, Guruve, just off the Dyke (1630 D4†), on 20 October (IR). In the southeast **Yellow-throated Longclaws** *Macronyx croceus* were on Malilangwe swamp (2131 B2†) on 21 October (BF) and in the Checheche area (2032 C3†) in November (CCr).

Common Fiscals *Lanius collaris* were particularly common around Udu Dam, Nyanga (1832 B3), on 7 September (KW) and adults at Nyamoro Dairy, Troutbeck (1832 B2), in October had three fledglings (JWh). They continue to re-establish in Harare (1731 C3) with one at Royal Harare Golf Course on 28 October and singles at Borrowdale Race Course in September and on 11 November with two there three days later (IR). **Common Mynas** *Acridotheres tristis* are spread countrywide but worth mentioning is an August record from the extreme southeast border in the Sango Village area (2231 B1†) (BM) where the Rutenga railway line crosses into Mozambique. There was another record just to the north of there at Mabalauta (2131 C4) in October (J-MB). A surprising observation from the September Hwange Game Count is that sightings this year were 50% fewer than in 2022 (PD).

Meves's Starling *Lamprotornis mevesii* records in late July about 20 km southeast of Sawmills (1928 C2†) near the Umguza River (VBo) were east of known range. **Miombo Blue-eared Starlings** *L. elisabeth* were first found in a Newlands garden in August 2022. Many more were attracted to flowering *Acrocarpus* trees this year from 12 August to 4 September (IR). A **Gurney's Sugarbird** *Promerops gurneyi* was seen at Froggy Farm, Juliasdale (1832 B3), on 19 November (PZ).

Marico Sunbirds *Cinnyris mariquensis* near Milibizi (1727 C3†), on 25 and 26 June (AK, DCh), were slightly north of known range. A **Purple-banded Sunbird** *C. bifasciatus* record from Swimuwini Camp (2131 C4†) in October (J-MB) was west of its southeast lowveld territory. At least 25 **Scarlet-chested Sunbirds** *Chalcomitra senegalensis* were at a flowering *Cordyla africana* at Ilala Lodge, Victoria Falls, in early August. The males aggressively harassed three other sunbird species as well as their own females and youngsters (CB). **Western Violet-backed Sunbird** *Anthreptes longuemarei* pairs were on mistletoe at Christon Bank on 29 July and on *Erythrina* flowers in Gosho Park on 29 September (IR).

Thick-billed Weavers *Amblyospiza albifrons* continue to expand their range in Makonde, having reached the Karoi area where seen several times on Maora Farm (1629 D3†) during August (ASt). Some reported from near Checheche (2032 C3†) in July indicates movement west from the Mozambique border. **Scaly-feathered Finches** *Sporopipes squamifrons* were also at Checheche (CCr), having been reported there the previous year. First noted in 2015, a viable population now exists in the southeast lowveld. **Spectacled Weavers** *Ploceus ocularis* were seen near Manjolo (1727 C4†) in early November (PvH). They are of sparse, fragmented occurrence from below Victoria Falls to Kariba's upper reaches. Single **Cuckoo Finches** *Anomalospiza imberbis* were on Monavale vlei on 15 October (*The Babbler*) and 26 November (IR).

Orange-winged Pytilias *Pytilia afra* were noted at Mangaingai, east of Chitake (1629 B1†), in September (JMk). Dozens of **Red-throated Twinspots** *Hypargos niveoguttatus* on Nyamuswa Ranch near Alaska Mine, Chinhoyi (1729 B4), in mid-July (DS) were on the western edge of their range. They were reported from the National Botanic Gardens, Harare (1731 C3), on 10 September (DD) and some at Tessa's Pool, Chimanimani Mountains (1932 D4), on 24 October (TG-F) seem to represent movement from the Chipinge uplands. Three **Locust Finch** *Paludipasser locustella* pairs were on a wet vlei on Shangani Ranch (1929 C4†) at the end of June (LT). This is far to the southwest of this sparsely-recorded species' known range. A pair was seen near Marondera (1831 B1†) on 26 October (GD). **Bronze Mannikins** *Lonchura cucullatus* are not known as aggressive occupiers of new territories but some at Masau Camp (1530 C2†) in November (IR) had either moved in from the south or downstream from the west.

Cabanis's Buntings *Emberiza cabanisi* were recorded on the July and October Great Dyke (1630 D4†) surveys (IR) where they were more common than **Golden-breasted Bunting** *Emberiza flaviventris*. Two **Cape Buntings** *E. capensis* of the race *smithersii* were at Terry's Cave, Chimanimani (1933 C3), on 11 July (JP). This subspecies is unique to these mountains. **Lark-like Buntings** *E. impetuani* were found in Kazuma NP (1825 B3†) in the first week of September (SL) and one at Massasanya Dam on 28 September (DMacD) was unusual so far east.

Arrivals

Abdim's Stork *Ciconia abdimii* 24 October Harare (KvL, BMcK), 1 November Kent Estate (GT), 2 November Masoka (AK), 4 November Kanyemba (KvL), 6 November Mutare (TCx), 10 November Banket (DSm); **Yellow-billed Kite** 24 July Nyabira (1730 D2) (JWh), 30 July near Lion's Den (KF), 3 August Chewore (DS), 5 August Hwange NP (JWh), 9 August Great Dyke (JBe), 10 August Gweru (DK) and Musango (SE); **European Honey-buzzard** *Pernis apivorus* 27 November Burma Valley (1932 B2) (BMb); **Steppe Eagle** *Aquila nipalensis* 13 October Shangani (LT), 24 October Gonarezhou NP (DS); **Lesser Spotted Eagle** *Clanga pomarina* 17 October Hwange NP (MN), 25 October Shangani (LT), 13 November Banket (DSm); **Wahlberg's Eagle** *Hieraaetus wahlbergi* 31 July Chitake (DS), 5 August Domboshawa (KvL), 13 August Harare (RD), 14 August Mavuradonha Wilderness (1631 A3) (RC); **Steppe Buzzard** *Buteo buteo* 12 October Chamabonda vlei (CB), 20 October Bulawayo (HL), 14 October Harare, 16 October Great Dyke; **Eurasian Hobby** *Falco subbuteo* 14 November Harare (IR); **Amur Falcon** 22 November Cawston Camp (SN), 27 November Harare (IR).

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* 2 August Musango (SE), 6 August Victoria Falls (CB), 20 August Gonarezhou (DMacD); **Wood Sandpiper** 20 July Chinga Pan, Sango (2032 A2) (J-MB), 21 July Musango (SE), 31 July Malilangwe (GD) and Chitake; **Marsh Sandpiper** *Tringa stagnatilis* 19 August Chewore (DS), 4 September Robins Camp area (RC); **Common Greenshank** 21 July Musango (SE), 27 July Chinga Pan, Sango (J-MB), 19 August Victoria Falls (SC), 20 August Gonarezhou (DMacD); **Curlew Sandpiper** 4 September Robins Camp area (RC); **Little Stint** 22 August Victoria Falls (SC, CB), 3 September Hwange NP (RC); **Ruff** *Philomachus pugnax* 9 August Matusadona NP (SH), 17 August Gonarezhou (CS), 19 August Hwange NP (AJ), 22 August Victoria Falls (SC); **Collared Pratincole** 31 August Lake Manyame (JWh), first week September Kent Estate (GT), 5 September Gonarezhou (NM); **Rock Pratincole** *Glareola nuchalis* 27 August Victoria Falls (CB).

African Cuckoo *Cuculus gularis* 21 September Hwange NP (JV), 7 October Senuko (CS), 15 October Mabalauta (EvdW), 17 October Plumtree area (2027 D4) (CJ); **Red-chested Cuckoo**

Cuculus solitarius 11 September Vumba (PM), 14 September Juliasdale (PZ), 21 September Honde Valley (MS), 29 September Harare (RT), 6 October Masoka (MZ), 12 October Malilangwe (AH); **Black Cuckoo** 30 September Marondera South (SC) and Malilangwe (AH), 8 October Masoka (MZ), 22 October Cawston Block (SN), 23 October Save-Runde junction (TM); **Great Spotted Cuckoo** *Clamator glandarius* 14 October Shangani (LT), 16 October Hwange NP (BN), 18 October Tambahata Pan (TM); **Levaillant's Cuckoo** 12 October Harare (PZ), 15 October Lake Kariba (SH), 18 October Kavinga (DB), 19 October Hippo Pools (SCh) and Banket (DSm), 21 October Umguza (AR); **Jacobin Cuckoo** *C. jacobinus* 15 October Bulawayo (TF), 18 October Kadoma (JMa) and Kavinga (DBr), 20 October Masoka (MZ) and Malapati (EvdW), 23 October Save-Runde junction (TM); **African Emerald Cuckoo** 22 October Chirundu (TN), 31 October Masoka (MZ), 4 November Hippo Pools (SCh), 4 November Kanyemba (IR), 9 November Kavinga (AMacD), 10 November Sango (J-MB); **Klaas's Cuckoo** 14 August Masoka (MZ), 28 August Chegutu (JWh) and Hippo Pools (Simba C), 30 August Harare (PM), 5 September Bindura area (RK) and Victoria Falls (CB); **Diderick Cuckoo** *Chrysococcyx caprius* 9 September Chiredzi (NM) and Harare (GL), 14 October Fothergill (SH), 15 October Gonarezhou (DMacD), 18 October Chirundu (TN) and Kavinga (DB); **Black Coucal** *Centropus grillii* 4 November Harare (BL), 26 November Banket (DSm).

Pennant-winged Nightjar *Macrodipteryx vexillarius* 27 September Kavinga (DB), 28 September Harare (JeF) and Chirundu (EB), 16 October Chamabonda vlei (SC), 19 October Great Dyke; **Common Swift** *Apus apus* 26 November Harare (IR); **African Pygmy Kingfisher** 9 September Mutare (GD), 24 September Mazvikadei (AMacD), 15 October Kavinga (DB) and Matusadona NP (PTe); **Woodland Kingfisher** 18 October Kavinga (DB), 26 October Gonarezhou NP (CS), 2 November Malilangwe (AH), 9 November Chirundu (EB); **Grey-headed Kingfisher** 17 August Malilangwe (BF), 4 September Zambezi NP (RC), 13 September Esigodini (LK), 22 September Hwange NP (SWm), 5 October Harare (PZ), 10 October Shangani (LT); **European Bee-eater** *Merops apiaster* 6 September Harare (ME), 10 September Suni Pan, Sango (2032 A4) (J-MB), 16 September Victoria Falls (DS), 23 September Umguza (AR); **Southern Carmine Bee-eater** 12 August Matusadona NP (SH) and Chirundu (DP), 17 August Masoka (MZ), 19 August Tambahata Pan (TM), 25 August Sango (J-MB), 31 August Hwange NP (SA), 9 September Harare (IR).

Broad-billed Roller *Eurystomus glaucurus* 28 September Hwange NP (AJ), 30 September Kanyemba (GD), 1 October Marondera (JeF), 4 October Sapi Safari Area (1529 D1) (TAr), Kent Estate (AvL) and Umguza (AR), 5 October Harare (CdC) and Gonarezhou NP (TM); **Barn Swallow** 27 September Mabalauta (EvdW) and Kazuma NP (DS), 30 September Chegutu (DK), 1 October Kanyemba, 5 October Mutare (GD), 8 October Chamabonda vlei (CB); **White-throated Swallow** *Hirundo albigularis* 9 August Harare (DD); **Eurasian Golden Oriole** 24 October Umguza (DSi); **African Golden Oriole** 5 October Harare (DD); **Capped Wheatear** *Oenanthe pileata* 2 June Hwange NP (AJ), 3 June Chamabonda vlei (CB); **Garden Warbler** *Sylvia borin* 18 November Vumba (BMb); **Barratt's Warbler** *Bradypterus barratti* 11 September Vumba (PM); **Willow Warbler** 4 October Umguza (AR), 5 October Victoria Falls (CB); **Spotted Flycatcher** *Muscicapa striata* 17 October Great Dyke Guruve (IR) and Victoria Falls (CB); **African Paradise Flycatcher** 7 September Chirundu (TN), 8 September Old Ndungu (MH), 10 September Harare (DD), 15 September Mazvikadei (BM) and Chewore South (1630 A1) (NN); **Tree Pipit** 20 October Guruve (IR), 24 October Hwange NP (SWm); **Lesser Grey Shrike** *Lanius minor* 29 October Chamabonda vlei; **Red-backed Shrike** *L. collurio* 14 November Victoria Falls (CB), 19 November Harare (PM); **Violet-backed Starling** *Cinnyricinclus leucogaster* 8 September Mazvikadei (BM), 10 September Bulawayo (TF), 14 September Chamabonda vlei (SC) and Harare (GD).

Departures

Swallow-tailed Bee-eater *Merops hirundineus* 2 September Dete vlei (RC), 9 September Harare (IR), 27 September Kazuma NP (DS), 28 September Victoria Falls (CB); **Capped Wheatear** 22 October Bulawayo (TF), 28 October near Suri Suri Dam (*The Babbler*), 29 October Chamabonda vlei (CB).

Observers

Derek Adams (DA), Steve Alexander (SA), Tessa Arkwright (TAr), Elspeth Baillie (EB), Rachel Bain (RB), Colin Baker (CB), Jonathan Baker (JBk), Julia Baker (JB), James Ball (JBa), Wayne van den Bergh (WvdB), Blade Bester (BB), Jamin Bews (JBe), Jean-Michel Blake (J-MB), Steve Bolnick (SB), Jenna Booth (JBo), Vernon Booth (VBo), Mark Brewer (MBr), Charles Brightman (CBr), Vanessa Bristow (VB), Dylan Browne (DB), Chris du Cane (CdC), David Charlton (DCh), Liam Charlton (LC), Simba Chibike (SCh), Ronnie Chirimuta (RC), Stan Chizipi (SC), Anthony Cizek (AC), Jane Clegg (JC), Graham Cochrane (GC), Tracey Couto (TC), Douglas Cox (DCx), Trevor Cox (TCx), Chris Cragg (CC), Charles Crawford (CCr), Asher Dare (AD), David Dalziel (DD), Richard Dennison (RD), Peta Ditchburn (PD), Gary Douglas (GD), Rob Durrett (RDu), Graham Edwards (GE), Steve Edwards (SE), Murray Evans (ME), Lucina Faccio (LF), Kevin Fallon (KF), Thomas Godfrey-Faussett (TG-F), Terry Fenn (TF), Brad Fouche (BF), Jen Francis (JeF), Anthony Fynn (AF), Nyasha Gomwe (NG), Grant Griffiths (GG), Mark Hadingham (MH), Pieter van Heerden (PvH), Sean Hind (SH), Derek Hinde (DH), Gary Hobbs (GH), Bridget Holland (BHo), April Hundermark (AH), Derick Bruk-Jackson (DB-J), Courtney Johnson (CJ), Adam Jones (AJ), Abilgail Karimanzira (AK), Doug Kew (DK), Rebecca Kilner (RK), Laraine King (LK), Karl van Laeren (KvL), Barry Launder (BL), Alex van Leenhoff (AvL), Pam van Leenhoff (PvL), Helen Lewis (HL), Stephen Long (SL), Geoff Lowe (GL), Ursula Lowe (UL), Jim Mackie (JMk), Ali MacDonald (AMacD), Doug MacDonald (DMacD), Roger MacDonald (RMacD), Bruce McKinlay (BMcK), Peter Magosvongwe (PM), Nyaradzai Mapara (NMa), Jacquie Marais (JMa), Bekezela Masuku (BMa), Norman Mellett (NM), Bev Morgan (BM), Frances Morris (FM), Buluwesi Murambiwa (BMb), Thomas Mutombeni (TM), Neil Nativel (NN), Bhekizulu Ncube (BN), Mongameli Ncube (MN), Tadious Ndadziira (TN), Sean Nicolle (SN), Daniel Norman (DN), Ruth Paice (RP), Sophie Phillips (SP), Julia Pierini (JP), Dickie Probst (DP), Ali Randell (AR), Bev Reeler (BR), Marcus Campbell-Reynolds (MC-R), Jill Rickard (JR), Ian Riddell (IR), Yakov Sabag (YS), Morgan Saineti (MS), Vusumuzi Sibanda (VS), Dane Simmonds (DSi) Doug Smith (DSm), Alexander Stidolph (ASt) Clive Stockil (CS), Glenn Stockil (GS), Richard Stubbs (RS), Debbie Swales (DS), Luke Terblanche (LT), Peter Tetlow (PTe), Gilly Thornycroft (GT), Darryl Tiran (DT), Ray Townsend (RT} James Varden (JV), Dylan Vasapolli (DV), Ron Webb (RW), Elsabe van der Westhuizen (EvdW), Johnny Whitfield (JWh), Spike Williamson (SWm), Carl Wilson (CW), Christine Woods (CWd), Chris Worden (CWn), Ken Worsley

(KW), Sue Worsley (SW), MacKenzie Zirota (MZ), Faidon Ziwoyo (FZ), Piet Zwanikken (PZ), Dirk van Zyl (DvZ).

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

The Babbler - Newsletter of BirdLife Zimbabwe.

TRAVEL

COSTA RICA

In January 2024 Lynn and I spent two weeks exploring the north of Costa Rica, travelling from east to west on a customized holiday planned by an expert travel agent with the emphasis on diversity and wildlife. It was January, as this is the driest and coolest period in most of the country, but one that misses the nesting of the sea turtles which takes place in July-August.

A bit of basic geography; Costa Rica lies on the isthmus between North and South America about 10° north of the Equator, with Nicaragua to the north and Panama to the south. The country is divided by a range of mountains and volcanoes which run N-S. The eastern, Caribbean half, being humid and rainy, the western, Pacific, slopes cooler and drier.

We flew from London to San Jose, a 15-20-hour marathon but worth it to experience this wonderful country which has no army, is powered by green energy mostly from geo-thermal or hydro-electric sources, directs its resources to conservation of the environment and consequently has one of the happiest populations in the world according to various surveys.

After a short night in the unremarkable capital, San Jose, our first port of call was Tortuguero, a village on the humid, rainy Caribbean coast was our first port of call. We left at 5.30 a.m. noting only Great-tailed Grackles and small, noisy flocks of Finsch's Parakeet in town. Our 4-hour coach ride took us to the river dock of Cano Blanco from which we transferred to a boat for the hour's ride on a waterway shaded by pristine rainforest, offering sightings of Green Heron, Amazon and Green Kingfisher, Great Egret, Northern Jacana, Black-necked Stilt, Neotropic Cormorant and an American Crocodile. Everywhere we went in CR there were Black and Turkey Vultures wheeling lazily about searching for carrion. Magnificent Frigatebirds sailed overhead as we arrived at the very attractive all-wooden accommodation, Mawamba Lodge.

After lunch, in the extensive gardens of the lodge we saw our first Keel-billed Toucan, Great Kiskadee, Variable Seedeater, Social Flycatcher and the colourful, extrovert Montezuma Oropendola flying back and forth to their huge, untidy, pendulous weaver-type nests. Scurrying about in the leaves was the Clay-coloured Thrush, an unimpressive national emblem. It was there, too, that we found our first Two-toed and Three-toed Sloths relaxing in a tree. In nearby trees we were shown the ubiquitous Howler Monkeys and Green Iguanas.

Later that day we went to explore the Caribbean beach which formed the eastern boundary of the lodge garden. There were Whimbrel, Sanderling, other unidentified waders and Laughing Gulls on the beach but bathing was prohibited due to rough sea and riptides. The next day we explored the small village of Tortuguero, a one street location which had no vehicular access, a general store, church, school and a few tourist shops and cafes. It rained lightly all day but we returned on foot through the dense dripping forest.

At 5.30 the next morning we made a guided canoe trip into the eerie, narrow, fresh water jungle canals off the lagoon to find a Boat-billed Heron, still as a statue, Sungrebe (like a Finfoot), Ringed Kingfisher, Anhinga (much like the African Darter), White-crowned Parrot, Little Blue Heron, Least Sandpiper, Snowy Egret and Squirrel Cuckoo. In more open water we saw Snail Kite and Plumbeous Kite and an Osprey.

Our next transfer was also by boat and private car, past vast Del Monte banana plantations to La Fortuna at the foot of Arenal volcano (1674 m), its summit covered in a blanket of mist for most of our stay. From the hotel, with its freeform and thermal pools, we visited the rainforest with its 8 daredevil hanging bridges and sky tram but few birds owing to the heavy grey clouds. Rufous Motmot and Yellow-crowned Euphonia were new species. The sky tram, like a ski lift, took us up to the highest point in the Arenal Reserve where we made a damp muddy circuit with amazing views of the volcano, a couple of snakes but few birds. That afternoon we made our one and only shopping trip into a town on the hotel shuttle. La Fortuna was a bustling, friendly place but all we came away with was a few beers and bottles of wine, much cheaper than in our hotel. Breakfast each day in the hotel restaurant, which was windowless and jutted out high into the surrounding forest, was an unforgettable experience. Iguanas lay along branches, Howler Monkeys played in the trees and small birds like the pretty Passerini Tanager flew in and out.

Naturally, there was time for lots of birding in the grounds, from the verandah of our room and on external unmade roads. Crested Guan (Guineafowl-like), seedeaters, many and various tanagers and saltators, flycatchers and Inca, White-winged and Pale-vented Dove. Hummingbirds appeared fleetingly but were difficult to identify, being too small and fast moving for the untrained eye. One species we hadn't expected was a House Sparrow.

One day we made an excursion to Cano Negro, a small port near the Nicaraguan border for a boat trip on the Rio Frio, giving us close-up views of Howler, Spider and White-faced Monkeys, sloths and Caiman, not to mention the birds. En route, our guide brought us to an emergency stop beside a pool in a wet grassy area as he had spotted a Jabiru, a huge, long-legged wader and rare vagrant. It was feeding in a group of egrets, herons, Wood Stork, Wilson's Plover and other waders. Once on the water, Mangrove Swallows accompanied our boat as Wire-tailed Swallows do on a houseboat on Kariba. Our cruise produced Little Blue and Great Blue Heron, Bare-throated Tiger-heron and Yellow-crowned Night-heron, Roadside Hawk and a perched Lesser Nighthawk (nightjar). On the muddy banks we saw Grey-necked Wood-rail, Solitary Sandpiper and American Crocodile and Caiman. My wife and I, keen to see more species, were rather frustrated by the guides' technique of training a telescope on a bird or animal of interest and then taking each person's mobile phone to photograph the object through the lens of the 'scope, a rather tedious business. This was taken to inordinate lengths when a guide spotted a unique orange baby Howler Monkey, the colour said to a form of albinism (although there are other theories) seen only 9 times "on the planet" and most often in CR.

From Hotel Manoa we took a boat across Lake Arenal, seeing Muscovy Duck, Black-necked Stilt, Great Egret and Snowy Egret and herons plus a second Osprey, followed by a 3-hour drive to Monteverde and its verdant Cloud-forest Reserve. The driver apologised for the rough and bumpy final section but we Harare residents found it pretty smooth. A word about the drivers here: always punctual and polite, most are fluent English speakers, well-trained, obviously enjoying their work and all very positive about life in Costa Rica. Our excellent accommodation was at the Trapp Family Boutique Hotel only

15 minutes' walk from the Cloud-forest Reserve. As usual it had an attractive garden buzzing with hummingbirds.

On our first evening we went on a night tour to see sleeping Yellow-throated Toucan and Black-headed Trogon, a tarantula, sloth, olingo (arboreal raccoon), woolly possum and a Mottled Owl. The next day we arrived at the Reserve to find that as self-guided walkers we could enter only when others exited to restrict the number of visitors at any one time. Having studied the map illustrating all possible trails we opted for the longest taking about 5 hours. It was clearly marked and had steep ascents and descents among the impossibly tall forest trees. There were many small groups from all corners of the globe gathered around guides who had telescopes trained on birds in the canopy, mainly trogons and the occasional Quetzal glimpsed at great height. Hummingbirds (Violet-headed, Blue-chested, Stripe-tailed, Blue-vented and the Green-crowned Brilliant), Cocoa and Plain-brown Woodcreeper, Lesson's Motmot, Orange-breasted Trogon and many others. At one high viewpoint we emerged from the forest to enjoy distant views over the surrounding landscape of tree-covered mountains and came across a Sooty Thrush. However, the highlight of the walk, the day, the whole holiday was the Resplendent Quetzal, signature species of the cloud-forest and, they say, seen by only 5% of visitors, usually through a guide's telescope. My personal guide, my wife, found one near the path we were following at a convenient height and we were able to observe it first from the back and then the front, displaying its strikingly coloured blue-green plumes and scarlet belly with its gorgeous long tail. It rose from its perch, performed its delightful dance then disappeared into the foliage high above. This breath-taking sighting occurred late in our trek, the unforgettable culmination of a wonderful day.

A leisurely 4-hour transfer took us further west to Rincon de la Vieja and another forested thermal resort with pools, mud baths and a natural sauna where steam rose through gaps in the floorboards from a bubbling fissure below. The Rincon Reserve straddles the Guanacaste Cordillera whose terrain ranges from tropical forest to lower mountain rainforest. Lots of monkeys, Montezuma Oropendola and the sky full of Black and Turkey Vultures. I went on a windy forest birding walk which produced Broad-billed Motmot, Streak-headed Woodpecker, Keel-billed Toucan, hummingbirds and a Pauraque (nightjar). Subsequent self-guided, steeply up-and-down walks took us into the National Park with views of the active 1900 m volcano and more new birds like Swainson's Thrush, Inca Dove and Melodious Blackbird. The volcano had erupted in 2022 but fortunately on the side facing away from our resort. We had a bungalow-cottage on a steep slope affording us marvellous birding from the balcony. Oropendolas, Brown Jay, White-throated Magpie-Jay, Lesser Kiskadee and Great Kiskadee, Grey Kingbird, Tooth-billed Tanager, Dusky-capped Flycatcher, Northern Beardless Tyrannulet, Orange-chinned Parakeet and Olive-throated Parakeet, were observed from here, most identified with the help of the Merlin app.

Our final destination was Nosara, a small town on the Nicoya Peninsula on the busy Pacific coast reached by a scenic 3-hour drive. Lagarta Lodge looked out onto Nosara Bay where we could see local fisherfolk vying for the fish with lots of Brown Pelicans diving clumsily into the bay. A long stretch of unspoilt, sandy beach stretched away to the north, all this viewed from the infinity pool. Our hotel had its own biological reserve which we visited with an expert guide the next morning. Our first afternoon, we walked to a nearby beach for our debut swim in the Pacific among the surfers and bodyboarders. From the beach we could see large numbers of Willet, Whimbrel, Laughing Gull and Brown Pelican on a rocky peninsula.

The bioreserve, reached by a long, precipitously steep stairway, consisted of freshwater lagoons and tall forest. On the muddy banks of the lagoons were egrets, Boat-billed, Tri-coloured and the more common Herons, various waders, Wood Stork, White Ibis and Laughing Gull, while in the forest we were shown Black-headed Trogon, Roadside and Common Black Hawk, Rufous-naped Wren and many amazing plants and trees.

On our last afternoon we took the free shuttle to another beach for our final swim and a sundowner at a rustic beach bar. The next morning, after packing all our happy memories of a wonderful, peaceful, contented country we were driven the final 200 km to the airport at Liberia, Costa Rica's second city.

As this was my wife's retirement treat we did spoil ourselves with high standard accommodation and private transfers, but tourism is such a vibrant industry that one can hire a car, find reasonably priced hotels and restaurants everywhere. There was a wide choice of food to suit all tastes; lots of fish, "gallo pinto" (rice and beans) was good and the "shrimps" turned out to be queen prawns. Prices in general were about European levels and service excellent whatever one wanted to do. Plenty of expert bird guides to find a fair number of the 948 recorded species.

Ken Dixon

BIRDLIFE ZIMBABWE COUNCIL 2023-2024

President	Neil Deacon	neilrobindeacon@gmail.com	0772-363369
Vice-President	James Ball	jameszwe@gmail.com	0772-310351
Hon. Treasurer	David Scott	dashcott@gmail.com	0772 -572966
Hon. Secretary	Paula Dell	paula.dell@strachansphoto.com	0712-610746
Councillor	Dave Dell	david.dell@strachansphoto.com	0712-630152
Councillor	Richard Hoare	rhwildlife@gmail.com	0771-052888
Councillor, Mashonaland	Wendelin Zwanikken	hararebirdwalks@gmail.com	0712-219311
Councillor, Matabeleland	John Brebner	brebnerj@acolchem.co.zw	029-2242634
			0782-781108

BLZ Member Consultants

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

Publications

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

BLZ NATIONAL OFFICE

Chief Executive Officer	Julia Pierini	juliapierini@birdlifezimbabwe.org	0772-894562
Finance & Administration	Sylvia Muzavazi	sylvia@blz.co.zw	024-2481496
Preventing Extinctions Programme	Leeroy Moyo	leeroy@blz.co.zw	024-2481496
IBA/KBA Manager	Togarasei Fakarayi	toga@blz.co.zw	024-2481496
IBA/KBA Officer	Shingirai Sakarombe	sakarombe90@gmail.com	024-2481496
Avitourism	Ronnie Chirimuta	ronnie@blz.co.zw	024-2481496
	Abigail Karimanzira	abigail@blz.co.zw	024-2481496
Messenger/Caretaker	Vengai Dengu		024-2481496

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