COVER PICTURES

Front

**Blue Swallow** *Hirundo atrocaerulea* chicks in the nest in Nyanga Mountains photographed by Fadzai Matsvimbo

The Blue Swallow is an Afrotropical migrant that breeds in the Eastern Highlands of Zimbabwe. The typical habitat is montane grassland with streams forming shallow valleys. The Blue Swallow is considered to be Vulnerable in the IUCN list of Globally Threatened Species.

Back

Nyazengu Private Reserve in Nyanga Mountains. The area is the typical habitat for Blue Swallows

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Edited by: Chipangura Chirara
ABOUT BIRDLIFE ZIMBABWE

BirdLife Zimbabwe is the BirdLife partner in Zimbabwe and a member of IUCN. The mission of the organization is to promote the survival of bird life in Zimbabwe and elsewhere for its intrinsic value and the enjoyment of future generations. The goal of the organisation is to conserve biodiversity and the general environment by using birds as indicators. The purpose of BirdLife Zimbabwe’s conservation and education programmes is to improve the conservation status of sites and habitats for the benefit of bird species and people, with a view to soliciting conservation action by all.

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ACRONYMS

BLI - BirdLife International
BLZ - BirdLife Zimbabwe
CBD - Convention on Biological Diversity
CHM - Clearing House Mechanisms
IBA - Important Bird Area
PA - Protected Area
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The project “Instituting effective monitoring of Protected Areas (IBAs) as a contribution to reducing the rate of biodiversity loss in Africa” produced a report on the Status and Trends of IBAs in Zimbabwe in 2008. The 2001 baseline data and the 2008 monitoring findings are the basis for comparison and trend analyses. BirdLife Zimbabwe, as the current data repository, has an obligation to provide feedback on the monitoring findings of each year. This report gives a valuable insight into the issues that surround IBA monitoring in Zimbabwe. The recommendations contained in this report provide broad-based conservation solutions that need to be integrated with already existing PAs conservation programmes.

The overall condition of IBAs/PAs in 2009 was near-favourable. The pressure facing the IBAs was medium and conservation response was medium. The mean scores for the state, pressure and response in IBAs/PAs were 1.6(±0.20), 1.6(±0.15) and 2.2(±0.12) respectively. Of the eleven protected IBAs that were assessed, only one IBA was in good condition. Five IBAs were in near-favourable condition and five IBAs were in unfavourable condition. Seven IBAs were facing high pressure whilst four IBAs were facing medium pressure. A high conservation response was confirmed at Stapleford Forest and Save-Runde Junction whilst the rest of the IBAs showed medium response.

The general trend in condition of IBAs was a fluctuation from near-favourable condition in 2001 to unfavourable condition in 2008 and to near-favourable condition in 2009. There was generally high pressure on IBAs since 2001. Major pressures affecting the IBAs in 2009 were natural system modification, over-exploitation and persecution of species, invasive plant species, human intrusions and disturbance and agriculture expansion into Protected Areas through smallholder farming and grazing. The general trend in conservation response was an improvement from low response in 2001 to medium response in 2008 and 2009.

In the case of Driefontein Grasslands, the condition has not changed from the very poor state since 2008. However Birdlife Zimbabwe’s conservation programmes in the IBA in collaboration with the local people is gradually yielding some positive results through increased participation in monitoring and conservation activities by the local communities. The site monitoring teams managed to extend coverage in each of the IBAs that were assessed despite the main challenge of limited resources. The involvement of other stakeholders in data collection has increased the amount of information submitted and also improved the quality of data.
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1.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1.1 The Important Bird Areas Program

Important Bird Areas (IBAs) are sites of international significance for biodiversity conservation. These sites are critical for the long-term viability of wild bird populations. The ultimate aim of the IBA programme in Zimbabwe is to have data from monitoring positively influencing biodiversity conservation and environmental policy formulation processes.

Generally, sites that are important for birds are also important for other biodiversity. IBA monitoring is designed to provide up to date information about bird populations or the condition of their habitats. Such information will promote conservation of birds and critical habitats at IBAs for the benefit of general biodiversity and welfare of people.

The IBA Programme in Africa was launched in 1993. A network of more than 1 000 sites have been identified and designated as IBAs in Africa and its associated islands using an internationally established criteria. The IBA program in Zimbabwe commenced in 1995 focusing on site identification and designation, resulting in 20 sites being designated as IBAs. BirdLife Zimbabwe has a programme to institute effective monitoring of IBAs in eleven Protected Areas and one non-Protected Area. It is vital to understand the status and trends in the condition of IBAs using birds as indicators. The global monitoring framework is applied in the monitoring of IBAs. Site-based monitoring teams from the Parks and Wildlife Management Authority, Forestry Commission, Allied Timbers Holdings and community-based groups are monitoring and coordinating IBA conservation activities.

BirdLife Zimbabwe aims to increase collaboration with government institutions, local communities and the private sector in IBA monitoring and conservation, and to develop monitoring protocols and systems to report on bird populations at IBAs. The programme also aims to develop a Clearing House Mechanisms (CHM) for biodiversity.

BirdLife Zimbabwe will also continue to lobby decision makers in government to consider IBAs in national planning. The information from monitoring helps to achieve BirdLife Zimbabwe’s conservation goals and contribute to national CBD reporting through the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources Management in Zimbabwe.

1.2 Important Bird Areas Criteria

Important Bird Areas (IBAs) are identified using common, agreed, objective, quantitative and scientifically defensible criteria developed by BirdLife International. Using standardized criteria enables us to compare population trends and status of sites at national,
continental and global levels. It also supports the cause for stronger protection. Protecting IBAs is vital to the long-term conservation of the world’s birds and biodiversity, and helps to conserve globally diverse habitats. A summary of the standardized criteria for selection of IBAs is shown on Table 1 below;

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>CRITERION</th>
<th>NOTES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A1- Species of global conservation concern</td>
<td>The site regularly holds significant numbers of a globally threatened species, or other species of global conservation concern</td>
<td>The site qualifies if it is known, estimated or thought to hold a population of a species categorized as Critical or Endangered, Population-size thresholds for Vulnerable, Conservation Dependent, Data Deficient and Near Threatened species are set regionally, as appropriate, to help in site selection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2- Assemblage of restricted-range species</td>
<td>The site is known or thought to hold a significant component of the restricted-range species whose breeding distribution define an Endemic Bird Area (EBA) or Secondary Area (SA)</td>
<td>The site has to form one of a set selected to ensure that, as far as possible, all restricted-range species of an EBA or SA are present in significant numbers in at least one site in the set and, preferably, in more.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A3- Assemblage of biome-restricted species</td>
<td>The site is known or thought to hold a significant component of the group of species whose distribution are largely or wholly confined to one biome.</td>
<td>The site has to form one of a set selected to ensure that, as far as possible, all species restricted to a biome are adequately represented.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A4- Congregations</td>
<td>(i) The site is known or thought to hold, on a regular basis, ≥1% of a biogeographic population of a congregatory waterbird species.</td>
<td>This applies to waterbird species as defined by Rose and Scott (1997). Thresholds are generated in some instances by combining flyway populations within a biogeographic region, but for other species that lack quantitative data, thresholds are set regionally or inter-regionally, as appropriate. In such cases, thresholds will be taken as estimates of 1% of the biogeographic population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Or (ii) The site is known or thought to hold, on a regular basis, ≥1% of the global population of a congregatory seabird or terrestrial species.</td>
<td>This includes those seabird species not covered by Rose and Scott (1997). Where quantitative data are lacking, numerical thresholds for each species are set regionally or inter-regionally, as appropriate. In such cases, thresholds will be taken as estimates of 1% of global population.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Or (iii) The site is known or thought to hold, on a regular basis, ≥220 000 waterbirds or ≥10 000 pairs of seabirds of one or more species.</td>
<td>For waterbirds, this is the same as Ramsar Convention criteria category 5.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Or (iv) The site is known or thought to exceed thresholds, set for migratory species at bottleneck sites</td>
<td>Numerical thresholds are set regionally or inter-regionally, as appropriate.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Fishpool and Evans (2001)
1.3 Distribution of IBAs in Zimbabwe

Figure 1: Important Bird Areas in Zimbabwe

1.4 Purpose of the Status and Trends Report

The Status and Trends Report intends to highlight the changes in the condition of Important Bird Areas on an annual basis. The assessment of the IBAs, which is based on indicators of State, Pressure and Response help site managers to plan conservation activities, justify resource allocation and focus advocacy efforts. The condition of IBAs determines the urgency for conservation action at priority sites. The report also serves to provide information to decision makers to support policy making. The report is also an important source of information to a variety of stakeholders that are involved in conservation.

1.5 Monitoring of IBAs in Zimbabwe

There are currently 20 IBAs in Zimbabwe. Of these, monitoring is taking place in the selected eleven Protected Areas namely Nyanga Mountains, Stapleford Forest, Chimanimani Mountains,
Chirinda Forest, Robert McLlwaine Recreational Park, Middle Zambezi Valley, Matobo Hills, Chizarira National Park, Hwange National Park, Batoka Gorge and Save-Runde Junction. Biodiversity monitoring in Zimbabwe’s PAs has been part of the institutional conservation planning and management by the responsible authorities and this will ensure the sustainability of the IBA monitoring programme.

Driefontein Grasslands is the only unprotected IBA that is being monitored using funds outside the EU-sponsored project. An effort is being made to ensure that this IBA attains some level of legal protection. In order to institute an effective monitoring system in the rest of the IBAs across the country, there is need for financial and resource investment. The process of building monitoring capacity of stakeholders is based on the Global Monitoring Framework developed by BirdLife International (2006). BirdLife Zimbabwe collates monitoring data, analyses and interpretes the data and communicates the monitoring results to all stakeholders.

2.0 METHODS

2.1 IBA Monitoring Approach

The IBA monitoring framework (BirdLife International 2006) provides a standardized way to assign scores for indicators of threats to IBAs (Pressure), indicators to the condition of IBAs (State) and conservation actions taken at IBAs (Response). The framework provides guidelines of how the scoring system works, and also outlines principles for designing and implementing a sustainable monitoring process.

Basic monitoring is applied in all sites and involves awarding simple scores for both status and trend for selected indicators of pressure, state and response. The site monitoring team at a site or individual volunteers collect information from the field and fill in the IBA monitoring forms (see Annex 2). This information is complimented by other sources such as published reports. Based on all this information, the overall improvement or deterioration of the IBA is assessed as a simple score, and a rating is filled in for each site covering state, pressure, and response. The overall score is determined by the scores on the forms and the IBA condition is then established. The general status of IBAs is calculated using IBA mean scores for state, pressure and response.

2.2 Sources of data

Data is collected by teams from the Parks and Wildlife Management Authority, Forestry Commission, Allied Timbers Holdings, Site Support Groups, BirdLife Zimbabwe and other stakeholders working in the IBAs. Monitoring forms are retrieved from all the contributors by October of each year and data is analyzed by BirdLife Zimbabwe to produce the National Important Bird Areas Status and Trends Report.
2.3 Analysis and presentation of data

The scoring methodology and data analysis follows the State-Pressure-Response indices methodology developed by BirdLife International (2006). In this report data is presented graphically and in table formats. The condition trends of IBAs were established based on 2001 baseline data, and the 2008 and 2009 monitoring findings.

3.0 MONITORING RESULTS

The analyses presented are based on the monitoring data collected between December 2008 and November 2009 from 12 IBAs. Eleven of the IBAs that were monitored are in Protected Areas and one IBA, the Driefontein Grasslands, is not protected.

![Graph showing status trends in Protected and unprotected IBAs, 2001-2009](image)

**Figure 2. Status trends in Protected and unprotected IBAs, 2001-2009**

3.1 General status of Protected and unprotected IBAs, 2001-2009

Figure 2 shows the overall condition of Protected and unprotected IBAs in 2001, 2008 and 2009. The overall mean score for the state of eleven IBAs in Protected Areas for 2009 was 1.6 (±0.20) and the score for the unprotected IBA was zero. The overall condition of Protected IBAs was moderate or “near favourable” and the condition of the unprotected IBA was very poor.

3.1.1 State of Protected IBAs in 2009

The state of IBAs in 2009 is shown in Figure 3. Chirinda Forest was the only IBA that was in good condition. A total of 5 of the IBAs were in “near favourable” condition and 5 of the IBAs were in “unfavourable” condition. IBAs that were in “near favourable” condition are Stapleford Forest, Chimanimani Mountains, Chizarira National Park, Middle Zambezi Valley and Save-Runde Junction. The IBAs in “unfavourable” condition were Nyanga Mountains, Hwange National Park, Batoka Gorge, Robert McIwaine Recreational Park and Matobo Hills.
3.1.2 Pressure in Protected IBAs in 2009

The pressure in IBAs in 2009 is shown in Figure 4 below. The following seven IBAs were facing high pressure; Stapleford Forest, Chizarira National Park, Batoka Gorge, Middle Zambezi Valley, Robert Mcllwaine Recreational Park, Matobo Hills and Save-Runde Junction. The rest of the IBAs were facing medium pressure.
3.1.3 Response in Protected IBAs in 2009

Figure 5 below shows conservation response in IBAs in 2009. Stapleford Forest and Save-Runde Junction were the only two IBAs that have shown a high conservation response to pressures. Authorities in the rest of the PAs have shown medium response to pressures.

![Figure 5. Response in Protected IBAs in 2009](image)

3.2 Trends in the status of Protected IBAs

3.2.1 Trend in condition of IBAs

There was a general decrease in the condition of IBAs between 2001 and 2009 (Figure 6). The condition of IBAs was “near favourable” in 2001, reduced to “unfavourable” condition in 2008 and improved to “near favourable” condition in 2009.

![Figure 6. Trend in condition of Protected IBAs](image)
3.2.2 Trend in pressure in IBAs

Pressure scores generally increased between 2001 and 2009 (Figure 7). However pressure in IBAs was generally high for all the years, despite the variations in mean pressure scores.

![Figure 7. Trend in pressure in Protected IBAs](image)

3.2.2.1 Major pressures in Protected IBAs

**Natural system modifications**

More than 60% of the IBAs that were assessed were affected by natural system modification. Natural system modification includes fire and fire suppression, reduction of land management, habitat modification by elephants and intensification of forest management.

The occurrence of uncontrolled fires was high at Chizarira National Park, Middle Zambezi Valley, Matobo Hills and Save-Runde Junction while fewer incidences of fires were recorded at Nyanga Mountains, Batoka Gorge, Robert McIlwaine Recreational Park and the rest of the IBAs. Nine of the IBAs suffered from reduction of land management. Batoka Gorge was highly modified as a result of reduction of land management, recreational activities and to a minimum extent by elephants. Save-Runde Junction, Middle Zambezi Valley, Chizarira National Park and Hwange National Park continue to be modified by elephants. Intensification of forest management occurred in Stapleford Forest.

**Over-exploitation, persecution and control of species**

Gathering of plants for firewood was the most common pressure in this category. Chirinda Forest faced a medium level of illegal collection of firewood at the forest margin by nearby communities that surround the IBA. However the pressure was low in most of the IBAs. In most cases where the threat occurred, firewood
poachers mainly targeted dead wood/trees. Harvesting of fish and logging occurred at Robert McIlwaine Recreation Park and Stapleford Forest respectively.

**Alien Invasive plants**

Invasive species were found in eight IBAs. Robert McIlwaine Recreational Park and the Middle Zambezi valley are threatened by high level of water hyacinth. The wattle and pine trees moderately threatened IBAs of the Eastern Highlands such as Nyanga Mountains, Stapleford Forest, Chimanimani Mountains and Chirinda Forest. The grasslands of these sites are shrinking while the natural woodlands are being modified by the invasive alien species.

**Agriculture expansion and intensification**

Smallholder grazing and farming was the major form of agricultural expansion into IBAs. Matobo Hills, Chizarira National Park and Chirinda Forest are faced with a moderate level of the threat. The livestock from communal areas invade the Protected Areas to graze on the peripheries. However smallholder farming and grazing is low in the rest of the IBAs.

**3.2.3 Trend in response in IBAs**

There was generally an improvement in conservation response from 2001 to 2009. The management plans for Nyanga National Park and Gonarezhou National Park, where Save-Runde Junction is located, were updated and this accounted for the slight improvement in conservation response from 2008 to 2009. Conservation responses that generally influenced changes in scores were management planning and conservation actions through habitat and species management; anti poaching and law enforcement; grading of roads and fire guards and invasive species control in Protected Areas.

There were also Species Action plans for the Blue Swallow *Hirundo atrocaerulea* and Wattled Crane *Bugeranus carunculatus* that were implemented during the period through surveys and bird awareness activities. The Parks and Wildlife Management Authority was involved in bird species surveys in Nyanga Mountains, Chimanimani Mountains, Stapleford Forest, Robert McIlwaine Recreational Park and Driefontein Grasslands.

There was an advocacy initiative by BirdLife Zimbabwe to stop helicopter use by Safari Operators along the Batoka Gorge. The helicopter flights were stopped through Parks and Wildlife Management Authority and this will go a long way in ensuring the breeding success and survival of the Taita Falcon *Falco fasciinucha*. A policy on the control of Indian Myna *Acredotherus tristis*, an invasive bird species, was also issued by the Parks and Wildlife Management Authority. The institution is coordinating the Indian Myna control programme in
areas affected, with support from BirdLife Zimbabwe. The general trend in response in IBAs is shown in Figure 8.

### 3.3 Monitoring results from non-protected IBAs

#### 3.3.1 Status of Driefontein Grasslands in 2009

The Driefontein Grasslands is an IBA of the central plateau of the Chivhu, Mvuma and Felixburg areas in Zimbabwe. The area is an important habitat for Zimbabwe’s crane species, the Wattled Crane *Bugeranus carunculatus* and the Grey Crowned Crane *Balearica regulorum*. The soils are sandy and fast-draining except where water runs into shallow clay-lined depressions called vleis which support dense reed beds. The area is not well-suited to cultivation, and until about 2002 was divided into large white-owned commercial cattle ranches. Livestock were watered from mechanically-powered boreholes, not from the vleis, which were mostly fenced off to exclude cattle. The cranes and their habitat were thus until recently protected with the support of the commercial farming community. In 2001, land-use changed as the government embarked on a fast-track resettlement programme and the population in the area increased drastically. Droughts and lack of farming skills and resources led to cultivation and draining of the vleis by the new settlers. This IBA is currently unprotected.

Because of disturbance by an ever increasing human population and the associated disturbance around wetlands, the population of the Wattled Crane has decreased over the years (Table 2). The Grey Crowned Crane is more widespread in Zimbabwe and its population was recorded as stable between 2001 and 2009.
3.3.2 Major pressures in Driefontein Grasslands in 2009

Driefontein Grasslands has been in a very poor state, high pressure and low conservation response since 2008. The major pressures in 2009 were smallholder crop farming, smallholder grazing and ranching, uncontrolled veld fires, illegal collection of eggs, gathering of plants, logging, fishing and harvesting of aquatic resources. The human-crane conflict in the IBA is prevalent. The habitat of the cranes is continuously being degraded and lost through wetland cultivation, gardening, livestock farming and uncontrolled veld fires. The Wattled and Grey Crowned Cranes are also regarded as pests during the cropping season and are persecuted through snaring and poisoning.

Table 2. Number of Wattled Cranes and Grey Crowned Cranes recorded in the Driefontein Grasslands between 2000 and 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey details</th>
<th>Wattle Cranes</th>
<th>Grey-crowned Cranes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Month</td>
<td>Type of survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Oct</td>
<td>Ground</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>August</td>
<td>Ground</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>April</td>
<td>Ground</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Aug/Sep</td>
<td>Ground</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Sep/Oct</td>
<td>Ground</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Nov</td>
<td>Aerial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Nov</td>
<td>Ground</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Sep</td>
<td>Ground</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Nov</td>
<td>Ground</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>June</td>
<td>Ground</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Sep</td>
<td>Ground</td>
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<td>2008</td>
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<td>Ground</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>April</td>
<td>Ground</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Nov</td>
<td>Ground</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Chirara in press (2010)
4.0 DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The status of biodiversity in Protected Areas in Africa is progressively declining according to BirdLife International. Sites identified as being in a poor state increased from 43% in 2001, to 57% in 2008. Results of monitoring in Africa indicate that there is generally an increase in pressure on biodiversity, thwarting our high hopes of reducing biodiversity loss by 2010. Most PAs face various pressures that may prevent the authorities from achieving their conservation goals. Ideally PAs should have a huge impact on conservation since they are widely viewed to be among the most effective means of conserving biological diversity in situ (Leader-Williams et al, 1990).

Most of the Protected Areas in Zimbabwe were designated as Important Bird Areas. There are eleven IBAs/PAs that are being monitored using the standardized IBA monitoring methodology. The monitoring findings for 2009 indicate that the overall condition of IBAs is near-favorable, overall pressure is medium and overall conservation response is medium. There is an improvement from the unfavorable condition of IBAs in 2008 to near-favorable state in 2009. However, more than 50% of the IBAs are still facing high pressures. Generally IBAs have been facing high pressure since 2001. The IBAs in unfavorable condition and whose conservation responses need to improve are Nyanga Mountains, Hwange National Park, Batoka Gorge, Robert McLlwaine Recreational Park and Matobo Hills. In 2008 the spread of invasive species was the major pressure in IBAs. In 2009 the major pressure was natural system modification. The shift could have been due to the control of invasive species mainly in Nyanga Mountains and Chimanimani Mountains. However to better understand the spatial extent and distribution of invasive species in IBAs there is need for application of remote sensing and GIS techniques. Such techniques could also be applied in assessment of habitat degradation. Although fire incidences occurred in all the IBAs, only 36% of the IBAs experienced high levels of fire that might cause detrimental effects to the habitats of trigger species.

Overexploitation of biological resources and agriculture expansion into PAs may require the revision of existing regulations and more restrictive measures to be put in place. However in IBAs where sustainable exploitation of resources is practiced, there is need to revise management plans and to continuously monitor the numerous forestry requirements e.g. at Stapleford Forest. In the case of human intrusions and disturbance, necessary precautions should be taken to prevent further environmental disturbance. The pollution pressure that has been persistently affecting some of the IBAs including Robert McLlwaine Recreational Park may need a wider stakeholder involvement. The responsible authorities should meet sewage and effluent treatment requirements and monitor pollutant thresholds at designated points along the polluted river systems.