

Bird Awareness Programme in Zimbabwe

Locations	Renco, Masvingo province; Eiffel Flats, Mashonaland West province; Murowa Diamonds, Midlands province, Zimbabwe
Rio Tinto companies	RioZim (no longer a Rio Tinto company); Rio Tinto Murowa Diamonds
Partner organisations	BirdLife Zimbabwe; Zimbabwe Schools and Colleges Permaculture Programme (SCOPE)
Key people	Leslee Maasdorp (BirdLife Zimbabwe); Brian Peters (RioZim); Israel Chokuwenga (Rio Tinto Murowa Diamonds)
Habitats	School and college gardens
Outcomes	Raised environmental awareness and strengthened conservation management skills for school children



Birdwatching and conservation clubs were activated in participating schools

BirdLife Zimbabwe is currently implementing a Bird Awareness Programme in five schools around the Murowa Diamonds mine. This programme builds on an earlier initiative at schools in the catchment areas of the Renco and Eiffel Flats mines of RioZim. The programme seeks to empower young people to change their environment and themselves, through gardening skills, land management ideas and by developing a lifelong interest in birds and their conservation.

Project background and history

Over the past few years, BirdLife Zimbabwe's Bird Awareness Programme has been introduced into over 100 schools in Zimbabwe, under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture. The initial development of this environmental education programme was supported by RSPB (the BirdLife Partner in the UK).

In 2003, the Rio Tinto-BirdLife International Programme facilitated the expansion of the Bird Awareness Programme into the catchment areas of Renco and Eiffel Flats, two mines managed by RioZim (a Rio Tinto company at the time). This collaboration assisted RioZim to meet its objectives with regard to local communities and the environment. At the same time, it enabled BirdLife Zimbabwe to extend a successful programme into new rural areas. The three-year project at the RioZim sites was successfully completed in 2006. In the same year, RioZim ceased to be a Rio Tinto company.

Following the successful implementation of the project at the RioZim sites, the Bird Awareness Programme was extended to communities within the Murowa Ward, around Murowa Diamonds, a the newly developed Rio Tinto-owned diamond mine in Zvishavane district, Midlands province. Although the programme has only recent been established at Murowa Diamonds, results to date have been very positive, with keen community interest in the initiative shown.

Project details

The Bird Awareness Programme uses school grounds and the surrounding habitats as an environmental resource where birds and their habitats can be observed, monitored and appreciated. In addition, a key link between environmental health and personal well-being is provided through developing gardening skills and sustainable land-use design in the school grounds.

At participating schools, birdwatching and conservation clubs have been activated, with the support and guidance of BirdLife Zimbabwe. Through these clubs, many school children have had the opportunity to enjoy donated binoculars, bird books and posters. Birdwatching competitions, quizzes and poems concerning the wonder of birds and our relationship with the natural world have all featured in these clubs' programmes, and teachers' skills and resource base have also been improved.

Around the RioZim mines, where the programme ran for three years, there were a number of noteworthy activities. In 2004, the Eiffel Flats schools combined to set up a bird awareness stand at the Kadoma show, which enabled them to spread bird conservation messages into the wider community. The Eiffel Flats conservation club also organised a trip to the Rifa camp within the Mid-Zambezi River IBA, where the participating students counted no less than 95 bird species, including approximately



Students participated in the birdwatch event at Murowa Diamonds

80 vultures feeding at a single carcass. Another achievement of participating schools was the establishment, by Chemukute Secondary School, of a wilderness area near the school, which has become a popular place for the school's birdwatching club to visit.

The Bird Awareness Programme at RioZim sites culminated in an educational expedition to Malilangwe Game Reserve for teachers and pupils at schools near the Renco mine. The aim of the expedition was to give participants an experience of viewing one of Africa's biggest drawcards, its spectacular wildlife, and promoting a long-term interest in birds and other wildlife linked to conserving local and wilderness biodiversity. The participants had an unforgettable experience, which may hopefully lead to at least some of them becoming converted to protecting wilderness areas, and/or taking up birdwatching as a hobby. After returning to school, the pupils drew on their experiences during the trip for their studies across the curriculum, including geography, creative writing and environmental work at all levels. The completed notes and drawings of the pupils were used, together with pictures and posters provided by BirdLife Zimbabwe, to produce an exhibition for schools, parents and the mine community.

At Murowa Diamonds, the Bird Awareness Programme was launched in 2007, with a birdwatching event for school pupils, teachers and the mine community. The event began with an essay competition for the pupils of five schools around the mine, on the topic "*Connecting people with birds*". This was followed by a birdwatching trip to habitats on the mine lease for 100 participants, during which over 100 bird species were seen. Since the inception of the programme at Murowa Diamonds, birdwatching and conservation clubs have been established in all five local schools, and over 100 school pupils have already joined, including all of the participants in the birdwatching event.

The future

The future development of the Bird Awareness Programme at Murowa Diamonds is being guided by the 'Murowa BirdLife Committee', comprising local leaders, head teachers and representatives of BirdLife Zimbabwe and Murowa Diamonds. The local schools will remain the nucleus of environmental education activities but the programme is set to branch out to cover other sectors of the community.

Community at Murowa Hill

