

Living with the New Normal

We are forced to adopt and adapt to a new normal. Covid-19 cases are surging. The world feels like a war zone with an invisible enemy. Like others, Nature Kenya is adapting. We encourage staff and members to follow health guidelines and hope you stay safe and well.

We continue with conservation work, including advocacy at the national and county level and working with communities to protect sites and species and sustain livelihoods. Some activities remain postponed, and some may be postponed further; others that had been postponed may be possible within new approaches, as follows:

- The 110th Annual General Meeting will take place virtually by zoom on 19th August 2020 from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. See separate announcement and link to the meeting.
- Members will receive an electronic version of the 2020 issue of the Kenya Birding magazine.
- Members will receive an electronic version of the Nature Net until further notice
- The Membership office and shop is closed until further notice. Membership recruitment and renewal however continues. Visit <http://naturekenya.org/support/membership/> and use cashless payment options such as M-Pesa or credit/debit cards. Your membership cards will be processed and mailed to you.
- As long as the main office remains open part of the time, members may also buy Arabuko-Sokoke honey. Pay by M-pesa (Pay bill 100300, account "Honey") and arrange a time to collect the honey. Ring the bell at the entrance of the office behind the galleries.
- Some museums and sites are expected to re-open soon. All visitors will observe new access protocols including sanitising and wearing masks.
- The Wednesday Morning Birdwalks have been postponed until further notice.
- Sunday bird walks and other field trips and talks remain suspended until further notice.
- The 'Lungs for Kenya' Charity Golf Tournament 2020, re-scheduled for Friday, October 2nd, 2020 at the Karen Country Club, may be moved to March 2021.

Staff continue to optionally work from home. Support staff are on paid leave. On site conservation actions by field staff and Site Support Groups (SSGs) across 26 sites has continued despite the Covid-19 disruptions:

SAVING SPECIES

Human-wildlife conflicts in the Maasai Mara and Kajiado landscapes has continued to lead to wildlife poisoning, causing deaths of vultures as non-target species. Four vulture liaison officers supported by 65 community vulture volunteers in Narok and Kajiado counties continued local awareness raising to stop wildlife poisoning. To reduce wildlife attacks on livestock, Nature Kenya is working with partners in Mara and Kajiado to construct wildlife proof 'bomas' to reduce livestock predation at night.

SITE ACTIONS

Threats on sites increased during this Covid-19 period. Site Support Groups (SSGs) have continued to utilize the Covid-19 emergency response support provided from the Society financial reserves. In partnership with Kenya Forest Research Institute (KEFRI) and Kenya Forest Service (KFS), Participatory Forest Management Regulations were drafted and approved by the Ministry of Environment. Public consultations on these regulations is hampered by Covid-19 directives.

To increase support for the 1,310 acres of land purchased by Nature Kenya in Dakatcha Woodland as a nature reserve, a baseline socio-economic survey is being done in partnership with KEFRI. This will make it possible to target investment for climate related community interventions supported by donor programmes.

A letter of agreement has been signed between Nature Kenya and NEMA to facilitate the implementation of a new project in Sabaki River estuary.

RESTORATION

In July 2020, the Ontulili Community Forest Association (CFA) in Mt Kenya planted 30,000 indigenous trees in Ontulili forest block. This tree planting is supported by Safaricom. Staff and CFAs developed tree growing business plans and engaged in field monitoring for 35,200 trees planted in Aberdares (Wanjerere, Kimakia, and Gatara and Kieni forest blocks) in year 2020. Mt.Kebio Site Support Group (SSG) undertook spot weeding and of 12 hectares of previously planted forest area. In Yala Swamp, 16,750 tree seedlings were planted, bringing the total seedlings planted in Yala this planting season to 60,202.

Partnerships for forest restoration have continued with key partners including Kenya Breweries and Safaricom. Nature Kenya has joined (as BirdLife Kenya) the Trillion Trees Partners (BirdLife, World Wide Fund for Nature and Wildlife Conservation Society). Joel Siele and Paul Gacheru received training on BirdLife Forest Landscape Sustainability Accelerator.

POLICY AND ADVOCACY

Nature Kenya has continued to hold government authorities to account for sustainable development in Kenya. Comments were provided on the draft National Forest Policy to ensure forest cover is increased with the involvement of all stakeholders. Nature Kenya attended a stakeholders meeting convened by the Ministry of Water and Sanitation to drum up support for the Malewa dam that threatens Lake Naivasha, and joined other stakeholders to object to plans to build this dam. Nature Kenya also urged the Ministry of Tourism to move the proposed Lake Naivasha waterfront project from the shores of Lake Naivasha to the escarpment overlooking the lake. And Nature Kenya provided comments on the proposed variation of Ndaragwa forest boundary and aerial fumigation of birds in Mwea.

The Climate Change Directorate of the Ministry of Environment and Forestry, Ministry of Agriculture and other national stakeholders and Murang'a, Meru, Kirinyaga, Embu and Nyeri Counties are engaged in discussions on mainstreaming climate smart agriculture and ecosystem-based adaptation into the coffee sector.

LOCAL EMPOWERMENT

Site Support Groups (SSGs) at 26 sites are the caretakers of Key Biodiversity Areas. The Dakatcha Woodland Conservation Group was able to thwart charcoal making in a small kaya forest. The 450 butterfly farmers in Arabuko-Sokoke forest, who were supported with seeds in April in response to Covid-19 challenges, are now harvesting their farm produce.

In Tana Delta, 27 people were trained to use an online data collection and storage mobile phone App Epicollect5. The App allows remote real-time access to data for review and analysis. So far data collected includes beneficiaries for conservation agriculture (1,570 households (HH)); Agroforestry (70 HH), Galla goat rearing (180 HH), irrigation farming (157 HH) and fishponds (120 HH). The Tana Delta Conservation Network (TDCN) submitted written memoranda to the Tana River County Assembly on budget estimates for the financial year 2020/21.

Nature Kenya local empowerment capacity was sought by the Global Environment Facility Small Grants Programme (GEF-SGP). Nature Kenya is supporting eleven grantees to implement their SGP funded projects. These projects are targeting the conservation and protection of Mijikenda Sacred Kaya forests in Kilifi County. Adaptive training approaches will be applied to overcome Covid-19 challenges on gatherings. These include pre-recorded virtual training materials shared with the target groups.

LIVELIHOODS

In July in Yala, 9 ponds were stocked with fingerlings (6 with tilapia, 3 with catfish); 775 kgs of high value vegetables were produced in conservation and climate smart agriculture; and assorted papyrus products were produced. The YESSG fish and chicken feed milling machine was operationalized with 200 kgs of starter mash produced and distributed to fish farmers. The chicken rearing unit in Gem Sub-County has become a community model, training and demonstration centre where 25 visiting chicken farmers received hands-on training in poultry production practices. At the fish feed making mill in Usenge, 10 fish farmers were trained through demonstration in fish feed formulation and milling.

Nature Kenya will continue to update you on further developments. Threats remain to species and habitats, and conservation work must go on. Please continue to support Nature Kenya, and to observe and enjoy nature from wherever you are. For any clarification or to report your observations on species and sites, kindly contact us through email: office@naturekenya.org or telephone: **020 3537568, 0780 149200, 0751 624312, 0771 343138.**

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