



Community members conduct biodiversity monitoring at Mumoni Hills, Kitui. PHOTO: DAVID MUSYA

Moving forward, cautiously

The Covid 19 situation in Kenya is still concerning. The Government is encouraging those at high risk to get the Covid 19 vaccination. The risk of catching Covid 19 anywhere in Kenya remains very high. We continue being vigilant – wearing masks, washing hands and working from home when we can. We are doing all we can to keep staff and members safe!

Membership activities are taking place with caution:

1. A virtual talk: Birds and Tourism by Titus Imboma will be held on 13th August
2. Wednesday Morning and Sunday Bird walks will continue this month. See back page for details.
3. The Nature Kenya office is closed. However, membership can be renewed online <http://naturekenya.org/support/membership/> or via M-Pesa. Books, honey, etc. may be purchased online or with M-Pesa (Paybill 100300, Account: write in your purchase) and collected on Mondays or by arrangement. Ring the bell at the entrance of the office behind the galleries.
4. Members will continue to receive an electronic version of the Nature Net.
5. The EANHS/NMK Library is open to the public. Museum galleries and sites are open to the public under Ministry of Health guidelines (as of the end of July 2021).
6. A successful Golf Day was held in July.

In July 2021, actions to save species, conserve habitats, encourage ecological sustainability and empower people were implemented at various sites:

Site Monitoring

Trained community scouts from the Sabaki River Conservation and Development Organization (SARICODO) initiated voluntary patrols at the Sabaki River Estuary. At the Tana River Delta, the Tana Delta Conservation Network (TDCN)

conducted biodiversity monitoring, reporting the first recent sighting of the Critically Endangered Hooded Vulture at the Delta.

Biodiversity monitoring conducted by the Mt. KEBIO site support group (SSG) recorded the occurrence of Abbott's Starling at the Chehe Forest Block in Mount Kenya. In Ruma National Park, the SSG conducted monitoring of the threatened Blue Swallow at the park jointly with Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS).

In Kisumu, at the Dunga swamp adjacent to Lake Victoria, Friends of Dunga Swamp SSG undertook waterfowl counts that revealed a population increase of the Near Threatened Papyrus Gonolek, despite rising lake water levels and ecosystem disturbance. Biodiversity monitoring also took place in North Nandi and South Nandi; and in Mumoni and Mutitu forests in Kitui County.



Mumoni SSG members preparing a tree seedbed. PHOTO: MWANGANGI KITHEKA

Habitat Restoration

Nature Kenya is restoring forests, grasslands and bushlands using participatory approaches. In the Tana Delta, 600 kgs of assorted grass seed was

seeded in an area of 1.54 Ha in 25 villages. These will function as grass seed banks to be source of grass seed for restoring grasslands for livestock, wildlife and carbon sequestration.

The Mida Creek Conservation and Awareness Group (MCCAG) planted 2,100 mangrove trees courtesy of Millennial Environmentalists in partnership with Blue Earth Organization.

Advocacy and Awareness Creation

There is a proposal to mine Titanium ore about 100 meters from Arabuko-Sokoke Forest. Nature Kenya worked closely with community groups in Arabuko-Sokoke Forest to voice concerns. The Arabuko-Sokoke Forest Adjacent Dwellers Association (ASFADA) coordinated three Community Forest Associations (Gede, Sokoke, and Jilore CFAs) who submitted comments seeking review of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) report for the proposed titanium mining. The groups together with Nature Kenya want the titanium mining site moved at least 400 meters from edge of the Arabuko-Sokoke Forest.

The Busia Environment Conservation Education Programme voiced their concerns against the proposed installation of a liquified petroleum gas (LPG) facility in a wetland at the Busia grasslands Key Biodiversity Area (KBA).

Livelihoods Improvement

The Yala Ecosystem Site Support Group generated KSh. 2.3 million from the sale of climate-smart agricultural produce, papyrus products, fish, honey, tree seedlings and ecotourism. In Dakatcha Woodland, members of the Dakatcha Woodland Conservation Group successfully hatched 120 chicks using an incubator supplied by Nature Kenya.



Chicks hatched from an incubator supplied by Nature Kenya to the Dakatcha Woodland Conservation Group. PHOTO: EDWIN UTUMBI

Please support us as we work towards a greener future!

For clarifications 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

Dr. Paul Matiku,
Executive Director, Nature Kenya – the East Africa Natural History Society



Sharpe's Longclaw. PHOTO: J. PITTELOUD

Sharpe's Longclaw survey

BY MARTIN MWANGI

A Sharpe's Longclaw survey recently conducted by a group of volunteers in Kinangop grasslands indicates the Endangered bird's habitat is still under threat from human activity. Friends of Kinangop Plateau (FoKP), a Nature Kenya site support group (SSG), conducted the study between April and May this year. The study covered four locations in Kinangop, namely Magumu/Nyakio, Njambini, Engineer and Murungaru.

Bird experts from BirdLife International assisted the volunteers in the study, which had identified 24 farms as suitable habitats for the grassland specialist Sharpe's Longclaw.

Various data was captured and recorded during the survey. It included: the number of Sharpe's Longclaw individuals observed, their breeding status, GPS coordinates of the areas visited, habitat quality as per the requirements of the target species, among others. Other bird species observed were also noted. A total of 286 Sharpe's Longclaw individuals were recorded during the survey.

Sharpe's Longclaw depends on tussock grass that grows in Kinangop. The grass species grows in clumps or tufts and thrives in dry highland habitats. The bird uses tussock grass to feed, nest, and protect itself from predators when threatened.

The Kinangop grasslands are one of the three main areas where Sharpe's Longclaw, a bird endemic to Kenya, is found. Mau Narok and Timau grasslands

are the other two areas. In Kinangop, the bird's range is mostly restricted to privately owned grasslands.

The study noted that loss of the tussock grass habitat due to land-use conversion for farming and woodlot establishment is a leading contributor to the Sharpe's Longclaw population decline. Over 12 newly converted private grasslands were recorded in the course of the survey. Overgrazing was also observed as a contributor to tussock grass habitat degradation.

To mitigate the threats, FoKP proposes the strengthening of grassland and species conservation knowledge and the capacity of private landowners and managers in Kinangop. Other recommendations include the annual monitoring of the Sharpe's Longclaw in Kinangop, Mau Narok and Timau grasslands, and conducting a nationwide survey for the species after every five years.

Volunteers who participated in the survey also took time to create community awareness on habitat conservation. The interaction between FoKP members and bird experts also served to sharpen the SSG's monitoring skills.

Nature Kenya is working closely with FoKP to promote the conservation of Sharpe's Longclaw and its habitat in Kinangop. In 2010, Nature Kenya secured the purchase of 20 hectares of land at the Kinangop Grasslands Key Biodiversity Area (KBA) to protect the Endangered bird's habitat. 🐦

Wildlife Poisoning in Kajiado

Nature Kenya's Vultures Conservation Program endeavors to conserve vultures in Kenya especially the Southern Rangelands (Narok and Kajiado Counties). One of the actions taken is responding to wildlife poisoning to save vultures, other raptors and any other species that might be affected by poison. Nature Kenya is working with community members (vulture volunteers) in raising awareness and support in responding to wildlife poisoning and employing citizen science by collecting data which will inform vulture conservation actions.

A series of suspected wildlife poisoning incidents were reported in Kisaju, Kajiado County, in July. The Olerai/Kisaju area is a known breeding and roosting site for White-backed Vultures.

A team from Nature Kenya and partner organizations were alerted of the incidents and promptly responded.

With support from Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) scouts, the team traced six dead White-backed Vultures at various locations within the area between 7th and 8th July. One vulture carcass was found on an acacia tree next to a beehive. It is suspected that the vulture had consumed a poison-laced bait somewhere else.

The location of the poison-laced bait is unknown. The dead vultures had red stains on their heads and necks. A readily available pesticide going by the name of Marshal is suspected to have been used to lace the bait. Samples from the dead vultures were collected by a KWS veterinarian and sent to the government chemist for further analysis. The vulture carcasses were later safely disposed of by burning.



A tagged White-backed Vulture, whose location had remained stationary for some time, was found dead a few days later. The vulture's radio transmitter was recovered.

Elsewhere, a partially burnt lion carcass was discovered near Osewan village in the Emotoroki area of Kajiado on July 16. The dead lion is suspected to have died after consuming a goat carcass laced with poison. It is not known who baited the goat carcass nor burnt the lion.

Vincent Otieno

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NATURE BUZZ



A Pied Kingfisher hovering. PHOTO: P. USHER

Wings beating the odds of gravity

BY RICHARD KIPNG'ENO

Not all birds fly, but the majority do. Flight is the most defining and distinct locomotory feature in birds, which places birds in a fascinating world of their own. Varying from species to species, each exhibits a different flight style and wing shape.

For instance, hovering is achieved by beating the wings more or less horizontally, balancing the forward thrust by a wind gust as seen in Pied Kingfishers and Augur Buzzards. Seabirds like gulls and albatrosses employ gliding. Pelicans and cranes fly in V-shaped formations, cormorants in a single file, while vultures, storks and large birds of prey use thermals to soar in the sky.

But how do they beat all the odds to do this? Different forces act on a bird's body enable it to fly up and remain airborne. These forces include gravity, lift, drag and thrust.

Gravity keeps us on the ground. It is the force that pushes down on the bird and is the first force that a bird in flight interacts with during take-off. To overcome it, birds create lift and thrust by flapping their wings, making air flow over and under them.

Birds have evolved over the years to adapt to flight. For starters, they have thin, hollow bones. They have no teeth, so no heavy jaws. Birds have light but strong feathers. They lay eggs rather than give birth to live young. Birds have rapid and efficient digestion. Their overlapping feathers give them a perfect streamlined body shape needed for flight.

These beautiful creatures have managed to conquer the gap of distances and explore the aerial spaces with ease, having confidence in their wings and feathers. Amazing! 🦅



Part of the action during the 11th Nature Kenya charity golf tournament. PHOTOS: J. MWACHARO

Golfers and businesses come together to support Mount Kenya forest restoration

Golfers and businesses converged at the Karen Country Club on Friday, July 23rd, for the 11th Nature Kenya charity golf tournament. The event, under the *Lungs for Kenya* banner, raised KSh. 2.2 million for the restoration of Mount Kenya forest.

A total of 142 golfers participated in the one-day tournament that had seen several postponements due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Africa Data Centers were the lead sponsors of the event. Vivo Energy Kenya and Kenya Breweries were the silver sponsors, Platinum Credit double bronze sponsors and Knight Frank bronze sponsors. Williamson Tea, Prime Bank, Syngenta, NCBA Bank, Nedbank Kenya, DT Dobie Kenya, Kenya Forest Service and Boskovic Air Charters were hole sponsors.

Several business entities and individuals also supported the fundraiser with auction and raffles items. They included Basecamp Explorer Group, Angama Mara, Royal Mara, Skyward Express, Safarilink, Hemmingways Collection, Serena Hotels, Matbronze Wildlife Art, Elewana Collection, San Valencia Restaurants, Travellers Beach Hotel, Davis and Shirliff, Cookswell, Coca-Cola Beverages Africa, DT Dobie Kenya, Salma and Andy Watt, Alex Duncanson and Andrew Kamiti. We say a big **'thank you'** to all our sponsors.

Gloria Waswa



Scorpion in the Sky

BY FLEUR NG'WENO

Planets August '21

Venus is the beautiful bright light in the west, above the sunset. Below Venus is reddish Mars, very faint now. Mars is joined at mid-month by smaller but brighter Mercury. The planets do not produce light; they reflect the light from the sun. Their brightness, for us on Earth, depends on their size and their distance from Earth.

The crescent moon is near Mars on Aug. 9-10, near Venus on the 11th. Mars sinks towards the horizon while Mercury rises; they pass each other on August 18.

Across the sky, in the east, the planets Saturn and Jupiter rise during the evening. Jupiter is very bright. Saturn and Jupiter seem to move across the sky with the stars, setting in the west around dawn. The nearly full moon is near Saturn on Aug. 20, near Jupiter on Aug. 21 and 22.

August stars

The constellation of Scorpion, the Scorpion, crawls across the southern sky. Look for the red star Antares, the Scorpion's fiery eye – some say its heart. The waxing moon is near Antares on August 16. Above Antares, three bright stars form the Scorpion's claws. Southeast of Antares, the Scorpion's body and tail curve like a fishhook, with two stars for the sting.

Left (east) of the Scorpion is the constellation that the ancient Greeks called Sagittarius, the Archer. The stars in part of Sagittarius form a shape like a teapot, or a shopping basket. The golden light rising below the "teapot" is the planet Saturn.

North (left) of Sagittarius, the bright star Altair, escorted by two smaller stars, is rising. Still further north, look for the bright white light of the star Vega.

The blue-white star Spica is high in the west, and Arcturus, a bright orange star, is in the northwest. Below it, the constellation of the Big Dipper (the Plough) seems to be pouring towards the horizon.

In the southwest, the two very bright stars of the Centaur are pointing to the Southern Cross, now setting.

Moon August '21

The 'new moon' – when the moon passes between the Earth and the sun, and we can't see its sunlit side – is on August 8. Look for a slim crescent over the sunset, near the planet Mars, on the 9th. On Aug. 15, it's the 'first quarter' – a half-lit moon above us at sunset. The full moon rises in the east at sunset on August 22. The 'last quarter' – a half-lit moon above us at dawn – is on the 30th.

Meteor showers

From July to August 24, you may see meteors from the Perseids meteor shower. Meteors are bits of dust, rock and ice from space burning up once they fall in the Earth's atmosphere. This month's meteors were left by the passage of Comet Swift-Tuttle. People may call the meteors "shooting stars" or "burning spears". The meteor shower peaks on August 11 to 13. You are most likely to see meteors between midnight and dawn from a dark location with a clear sky. 🌠

Birding Updates

Wednesday Morning Birdwalks and **Sunday Birdwatch** are on, subject to Ministry of Health guidelines. No loaning of binoculars, no sharing of binoculars and guidebooks and no pooled transport. Please do not ask for lifts. Masks are a must and you may carry your own sanitizer.

Birders Please Note! Participants are meeting on site. For Wednesday Morning Birdwalks at the Nairobi National Museum, meet at 8 am in the open space in front of the entrance to the museum galleries, near the Fisheries gate.

All August 2021 Wednesday morning birdwalks will take place at the Nairobi National Museum and Michuki Memorial Park.

August 15 **Sunday Bird Watch - Ngong Road Forest Sanctuary.** Meet at 8:30 am at the Main Gate. (There's a Sanctuary fee of Ksh. 100 for citizens.) Directions: Coming from the city centre, take Ngong Road towards Karen. After Jamhuri Sports Ground (now under construction) take the first left turn (before the Commonwealth Cemetery). It's 500m to the Sanctuary main gate. It is a day trip; please bring water and lunch.

Bird Ringing at Nairobi National Museum grounds usually takes place on Tuesday mornings. Ringing in Karen may be arranged on August 6th. Please confirm with Titus Imboma <Imbomati911@gmail.com> Phone 0721-649452.

Mombasa Birdwalks are held the 3rd Saturday of each month. To check meeting time and place, check Facebook page: <<https://www.facebook.com/groups/FFJmombasa/>> Or contact: Taibali Hamzali <thamzali@gmail.com> / 0733-980540 or Kelvin Mazera <klvnrua@yahoo.com> / 0720-928783

Send your birding records to:

Kenya Bird Map <<http://kenya.birdmap.africa/>>

If you have questions re KBM, write to <kenyabirdmap@naturekenya.org>

And stay updated with the birding scene in Kenya by signing in to the new Kenyabirdsnet platform on Google Groups at: <https://groups.google.com/d/forum/kenyabirdsnet>

After signing in you will be able to post your records through the following email address: kenyabirdsnet@googlegroups.com

Online birding:

- Wings Over Kenya Facebook page
- Ndege Wetu (blog series on the birds of Kenya) <<http://www.shotsbyshema.com/category/ndege-wetu/>>
- "The Safari Naturalist" on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCajjLtyL9G6mJ20AjwIRLxX>
- "The Safari Naturalist" blog website: <https://www.thesafarinaturalist.com/virtual-birding-tours/>
- BirdLife International and eBird



DONATION Members of the Mida Creek Conservation and Awareness Group deliver 700 mangrove seedlings donated to the Millennial Environmentalists. The seedlings were planted in Makupa and Miritini, Mombasa County during the World Mangrove Day held on July 26. PHOTO: PANDE KAILO



SPOTTED An Abbott's Starling caught on camera at Castle Forest on the eastern side of Mt. Kenya PHOTO: ALEX MWANGI



KEEPING VIGILANT A team of community scouts makes patrols at the Sabaki River Estuary. PHOTO: MARCO CHARLY

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Schools, Clubs	1,500
Corporates	20,000 -30,000



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For details on associated groups such as Youth Committee, Succulenta, and Friends of Nairobi Arboretum, City Park or Arabuko-Sokoke Forest, contact office@naturekenya.org