



Spur-winged plovers in Tana River Delta. PHOTOS: COURTESY

■ BY JOHN MWACHARO AND FLEUR NG'WENO

2.2.22: Action for Wetlands!

February 2nd – 2.2.22 – is World Wetlands Day. It's the anniversary of the Convention on Wetlands, adopted as an international treaty in 1971 in Ramsar, Iran.

Wetlands host birds, fish, amphibians, reptiles, mammals, insects, plants and microorganisms, providing food, shelter and breeding grounds. The seasonal wetlands of Dakatcha woodland, for instance, are the known breeding grounds of the Clarke's (Kilifi) Weaver, a threatened bird found only in Kilifi County. Kingwal swamp in Nandi hills is a breeding site for the rare Sitatunga antelope.

Wetlands provide essential ecosystem services and support the livelihoods of millions of communities. Global recognition of the conservation value of the Tana River Delta confirms the significance of the ecosystem services it provides. This vast wetland system provides intangible environmental services, including: regulation of the hydrological cycle, moderation of the climate, protection of soil from erosion, stabilization of the shoreline and reduction of the impact of storm surges. The Delta significantly contributes to the livelihoods of farming, herding and fishing communities, cultural and recreational activities, and supports economic development for Tana River and Lamu Counties and the nation.

Despite the critical functions they provide, wetlands are continually under threat. Yala Swamp, for example, currently faces imminent danger from agricultural development. Yet Yala Swamp filters and cleans water entering Lake Victoria, supports local communities and protects papyrus-dependent birds and wildlife.

Lake Nakuru in the Rift Valley is choking with raw sewage and industrial waste. In Lake Naivasha, new industrial developments compete for fresh water with the lake, the horticulture it supports

and the wildlife it shelters. Dunga swamp in Kisumu faces pollution from sewerage from adjacent residential estates, encroachment and excessive and unsustainable harvest of papyrus.

Seasonal Wetlands face special threats

Seasonal wetlands are under particular threat, because they appear dry much of the year. They are thus converted to agriculture, not reserved during land demarcation, and ignored in road construction and other infrastructural development. Aerial photographs are usually taken in the dry season, and seasonal wetlands may be "invisible" to planners and decision makers, leading to ecological and hydrological degradation and habitat loss.

Seasonal wetlands include floodplains; seasonal marshes, lakes and springs; temporary pools in grassland, woodland and bush; and ephemeral rock pools, flooded rock slabs and seeps. They play a critical role in dryland ecology.

Seasonal wetlands are breeding and regeneration sites for animals and plants. During the rainy season, fish, reptiles, amphibians, invertebrates and birds disperse to seasonal wetlands to breed. Mammals such as wildebeest migrate to areas with seasonal rain pools to give birth. Trees germinate on silt brought by flooding rivers. Seasonal wetlands are critical feeding grounds for livestock, migratory waterfowl and wildlife.

Some actions to protect seasonal wetlands include: Making at least one survey for an EIA during or immediately after the rainy season or enquire from local people which areas hold water during the rainy season; discouraging the planting of trees on seasonal wetlands, as trees may speed the natural conversion of wetland to land.

Addressing threats facing Kenya's wetlands

In Tana River Delta and Yala Swamp, two of Kenya's largest and most important wetlands, Nature

Kenya has been championing for better planning of developments in the wetlands to minimize biodiversity loss.

In 2011, Nature Kenya led a collaborative effort of various stakeholders to develop the Tana River Delta Land Use Plan (LUP). The LUP was informed by a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). The LUP is a framework that guides the management of land and natural resources for various uses, including conservation, at the Tana River Delta, a wetland of international importance (Ramsar site). Implementation of the Tana Delta LUP is ongoing.

Nature Kenya is leading different initiatives to support the Tana Delta ecosystem:

- Promoting the indigenous and community conservation areas (ICCAs) approach at the Delta. The ICCAs are biodiversity-rich conservancies based on traditional, cultural, and multiple land use under the management of local communities.
- 'The Restoration Initiative (TRI) Tana Delta' project funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) through the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) seeks to restore degraded forest landscapes and reverse biodiversity loss for increased and improved ecosystem services at the Delta. Nature Kenya is the project's implementing partner.
- Promoting sustainable livelihood activities to enhance community resilience to climate change and conserve the 130,000-hectare Tana River Delta. The livelihood activities include climate-smart agriculture and beekeeping. This initiative is funded by the European Union (EU) through its Rebuilding Community Resilience-Building in Livelihood and Disaster Risk Management (REBUILD) project. This project is being implemented by CISP, in collaboration with Nature Kenya, the National Drought Management Authority, GROOTS and Procasur.

A land-use plan for Yala Swamp has also been developed. The land-use plan seeks to put the use, management and conservation of Yala Swamp on a sustainable footing.

Community Engagement

Communities living adjacent to wetlands play a critical role in their conservation. Nature Kenya works with local conservation groups that serve as Site Support Groups (SSGs) for Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs). These KBAs include wetlands. Community groups engage in site restoration, monitoring, advocacy, environmental education and awareness creation, and promotion of sustainable livelihood activities. The SSGs are active in Yala Swamp, Tana River Delta, Lake Bogoria, Lake Naivasha, Lake Ol' Bolossat, Mida Creek, Sabaki River Mouth and Dunga Swamp. The Dakatcha Woodland Conservation Group (DWCG) works to conserve Dakatcha Woodland, including its seasonal wetlands. 🌿



A section of Ngangao forest in Taita hills. PHOTO: IAN FRANCIS

Why do members of parliament want to condemn Kenya and the world to an unbearably hot future by weakening the Forest law?

According to the existing law, a forest boundary can only be amended based on stakeholder consultations, environmental impact assessment report and recommendations to parliament by the Kenya Forest Service. The amendment proposed to Parliament in January is seeking to take away the powers of the Kenya Forest Service and local communities. Instead, it allows anyone to petition for a boundary change to the Clerk of the National Assembly.

Yes, it's our constitutional right to petition Parliament about anything. However, it's also proper for a petition to vary forest boundaries to undergo consultations and EIA before it is voted on by busy MPs.

The world is burning and forests are one tool to reduce the heat. It is dangerous to weaken the laws that protect our forests. It is dangerous to entrust the remaining forests to parliamentarians alone. World nations just agreed in the 2021 Climate Change meeting (COP 26) to protect, conserve and increase tropical forests in order to reduce climate change. Kenya promised to halt deforestation by 2030.

Removing KFS from decisions on forest boundaries is ill-advised, ill-timed and exposes our forests to imminent destruction. This could damage Kenya's water catchment areas, hydroelectricity, irrigated food and thereby human well-being and economic development.

Nature Kenya submitted a letter of concern to the National Assembly regarding the amendment Bill. We also launched and widely circulated an

online petition to say NO to the proposed Bill. This petition is still active, and members are urged to sign it here: <https://bit.ly/33ArlDR>. Members are also encouraged to directly submit written petitions to the National Assembly through this link: <https://bit.ly/3nGHtdL>.

To further galvanize public support for the rejection of the Forest Act amendment bill, Nature Kenya mobilized local community groups to submit letters of concern to the National Assembly. Twenty site support groups (SSGs) and 20 Community Forest Associations (CFAs) working with Nature Kenya submitted their petitions. Two working groups (the Youth Committee and Habitat Restoration Initiative for East Africa) also made submissions.

Nature Kenya has also teamed up with like-minded conservation organizations to issue joint statements to oppose the Bill.

We count on your support to reject this proposed bill to keep Kenya's forests safe.

Nature Kenya conservation and membership activities continued despite a surge in Covid 19:

Nairobi Water bird counts were held in Manguo Pond, Limuru, and Dandora Sewage Works (Nairobi Oxygenation Ponds, Ruai). The 3rd Sunday bird watch was held at Ondiri Swamp, Kikuyu, as a build-up activity for the World Wetlands Day national celebrations organized by NEMA. Activities in our recently opened Malindi office in January included eight successful bird walks.

In February 2022, membership activities will continue with caution as follows:

1. Two Members' talks will be held virtually: 'Mosquitoes: The New Domestic Animals' on 4th and 'Are the gentle giants of Africa (Maasai Giraffe) slowly sliding into extinction?' on 25th.
2. The 'Lungs for Kenya' charity Golf tournament is scheduled to take place on 25th March 2022 at the Karen Country Club. Book your slot to participate by contacting Gloria Waswa Membership and Marketing Manager at nkmembership@naturekenya.org.
3. Wednesday Morning Birdwalks and Third Sunday Birdwalks continue with caution in Nairobi. Our Malindi bird walks also continue on various dates. See back page for details.
4. The Nature Kenya Sales and Membership office will be open to members on weekdays, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Please wear masks, sanitize and keep social distance.
5. Online membership functions to continue: 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 "books" or "honey") and collected from the membership office between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m.
6. Members will continue to receive an electronic version of the Nature Net. A hard copy of Nature Net can be posted or collected from the office by request to nkmembership@naturekenya.org or telephone 0726 134029.
7. The Nature Kenya conservation office remains closed. Physical conservation meetings in Nairobi and other Covid hotspots to be avoided unless absolutely critical.
8. The EANH/NMK Library is open. Museum galleries and sites are open to the public under Ministry of Health guidelines.

Nature conservation actions will continue locally and nationally in February 2022.

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

For updates visit
www.naturekenya.org

EDITORIAL TEAM

Fleur Ng'weno, Gloria Waswa,
Richard Kipngeno and John
Mwacharo

LAYOUT

John Mwacharo

FRONT BANNER

Lorenzo Barelli



For contributions, advertising and subscriptions, contact us by:

Post: P. O. Box 44486 GPO, Nairobi

Telephone: 020 3537568/0780149200/0751624312/ 0771343138

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NATURE BUZZ



White-browed Robin Chat feeding a Red-chested Cuckoo chick. PHOTO: JEAM AGUTU

Brood parasitism in birds

BY RICHARD KIPNGENO

Ever been out on a bird walk and encountered birds exhibiting some extraordinary behaviours? Nature never ceases to amaze! Every moment outdoors has its surprises. Such was Jeam Agutu's experience during a birding trip in Homa Bay. A White-browed Robin Chat feeding a Red-chested Cuckoo chick? Where did this relationship begin, and how did it happen?

This bird behaviour is called brood parasitism. It occurs when one bird lays eggs in the nest of another bird (the host). The host then plays foster parent to the chick of the parasitic bird. Brood parasitism occurs only in birds of different species. About one per cent of the world's birds are brood parasites. They include some cuckoos, a duck, honeyguides, whydahs and indigobirds.

But how do they manage to lay their eggs in other birds' nests? Brood parasites may spend long hours patiently watching their hosts' nest, anticipating an opportunity. Time is of the essence when the chance arises. The brood parasite lays its eggs in quick succession.

Some species even remove some of the host's eggs. Others lay identical eggs to their specific host, making it difficult for them to distinguish the intruder's eggs.

The eggs of brood parasites develop quickly and are usually the first to hatch. The nestlings of some species even kill the young of the unsuspecting host bird to get all attention.

In the case of the Village Indigobird that lays eggs in the nests of Red-billed Firefinches, the young indigobirds and firefinches grow up and feed together. 🐦

Following the moon in February '22

BY FLEUR NG'WENO

On 1st February 2022 the moon is in the sky during the whole day, with its sunlit face turned away from us. We don't see it, so we say it becomes a 'new' moon. A day later, the moon appears briefly as a slender crescent above the sunset. On February 2 it is near the bright planet Jupiter.

Each evening the moon appears higher in the sky, with more of the sunlit side visible, until it reaches first quarter – half-lit, high overhead at sunset. This is on 8 February this year. The moon is near the star cluster Pleiades or Seven Sisters on the 9th, and near the bright star Pollux in the constellation Gemini on the 13th.

Now the moon appears lower in the sky each evening, waxing fuller, until it is a full moon, rising in the east as the sun sets in the west. This month the moon is full on the 16th. The full moon, with all its sunlit side facing us, is in the sky the whole night. The bright star Regulus in the constellation Leo the Lion appears nearby.

The full moon then wanes narrower, rising later at night, and visible in the west before dawn. This month it is near the bright star Spica in the pre-dawn sky on the 21st. On February 23, the moon reaches its last quarter, half-lit and high overhead at dawn. On the 24th it is near the bright star Antares in the constellation of the Scorpion.

Finally, the moon wanes to a thin crescent, lower and lower in the pre-dawn sky. On February 27 it appears not far from the bright planet Venus and the fainter planet Mars. The moon will become 'new' again on 2 March '22.

Planets, Feb '22

The bright planets that filled our evening skies for the past several months are now transitioning to the morning sky. Jupiter is still visible in the evening most of February, sinking slowly into the sunset glare.

Venus is brilliant in the predawn sky. The red planet Mars is not far from Venus, but quite faint at the moment. Mars will brighten during 2022.

The small but bright planet Mercury joins Venus and Mars during February, low over

the sunrise. By month's end Saturn too is visible at dawn, close to Mercury. The waning crescent moon appears near them on March first.

February stars

Sirius, the brightest star we see at night, is the bright light high in the south-eastern sky on February evenings – visible even from lighted city streets. Canopus, the second-brightest star, is low in the south.

If you are in a dark location on a clear night, you will see many more stars. The people who travel over wide open spaces, such as the desert or the sea, gave names to the stars. They imagined that some stars formed patterns in the sky, and also gave names these patterns, or constellations. Today in English, we mainly use the names given by ancient Greek and Arab astronomers.

The constellation that the ancient Greeks called Orion, the Hunter or Warrior, rises due east and is high in the east on February evenings. Three bright stars in a row form Orion's belt, and three fainter stars in a row are his sword. Four bright stars mark Orion's shoulders and knees. A blue-green star, Rigel, marks one 'knee' in the west. An orange-coloured star, Betelgeuse, forms one 'shoulder' in the northeast. A group of fainter stars are Orion's head. With binoculars, you can see the glowing nebula M42 in Orion's belt.

Two 'hunting dogs' follow Orion in the sky. One is Sirius – that bright light in the southeast. The other dog, Procyon, is east of Orion. On the other side of Orion, in the northwest, is the reddish star Aldebaran. Beyond Aldebaran is a group of several stars close together: the Pleiades or Seven Sisters.

Further north, lower in the sky, five bright stars mark the corners of a pentagon shape. This constellation is Auriga, the Charioteer. The brightest of the five is the star Capella.

February Sun

This is the time of the latest sunrises and sunsets of the year. For most of February, the sun rises at 6:42 am and sets at 6:51 in Nairobi. 🌅



LUNGS FOR KENYA

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DATE: 25TH MARCH 2022 | VENUE: KAREN COUNTRY CLUB | TIME: 8:00AM

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To register contact Gloria: nkmembership@naturekenya.org or telephone 0739200216

Birding Updates

Wednesday Morning Birdwalks, Nairobi

Please observe Covid-19 protocols: No sharing of binoculars and guidebooks and no pooled transport. Masks are a must and you may carry your own sanitizer.

Wednesday 2nd February, 2022 – Museum Grounds / Michuki Memorial Park. Meet at 8 am in the open space in front of the entrance to the museum galleries, near the Fisheries gate.

Wednesday 9th February, 2022 – Nairobi National Park / Langata Wetlands with the waterbird counts. Meet at 8.30am at the Nairobi National Park Main Gate, KWS headquarters along Lang'ata Road. Thanks to KWS for welcoming the birdwalk.

Wednesday 16th February, 2022 – Waterbird Counts may take place in a site North of Nairobi. If you would like to participate and get confirmation updates, please write to news@naturekenya.org or phone 0780- 149200. Alternative birdwalk will take place at the **Museum Grounds / Michuki Memorial Park** if the waterbird counts do not happen.

Wednesday 23rd February, 2022 – Paradise Lost with the waterbird counts. Meet at Paradise Lost Main Gate at 8:30 am. Directions: From Kiambu Road, turn towards Paradise Lost. Turn right at Kencom Apartments just after Kasarini Primary School. It's about 500m to the main gate. Thanks to the management for welcoming the birdwalk.

Sunday Birdwatch

February 20th. Sunday Birdwatch with Waterbird Counts - Thika Sewage Treatment Works. Meet at 8.30am at the Sewage Works gate. Directions: Driving along Garissa Road, turn right at BAT. Turn left at the T-junction, turn right where the tarmac ends. Turn left at Full Gospel Church Sign post (Opposite P.C.E.A), turn left at Kiganjo Primary School gate. Take the first right turn and drive ahead to the Sewage Works gate. If you have questions, please write < news@naturekenya.org > or phone 0780-149200.

February 2022 Waterbird Counts on the Rift Valley lakes:

If you would like to take part, and you are experienced in identifying and counting waterbirds and can meet the group at the site, please contact Irene Madindou at <ilhanmadindou@gmail.com> or phone 0701-028739.

Bird Ringing at Nairobi National Museum grounds usually take place on Tuesday mornings. Please confirm with Titus Imboma <imbomati911@gmail.com> Phone 0721-649452.

Malindi Birding

Tuesday 1st February 2022 - Malindi Museum and Shoreline. Meet at 8am in the open space at the Museum near Nature Kenya Membership Office.

Thursday 3rd February 2022 - Malindi Museum. Meet at 4:00pm at the Museum near Nature Kenya Membership Office.

Tuesday 8th February 2022 - Malindi Museum grounds and Vasco Pillar. Meet at 7am at the Museum near Nature Kenya Membership Office.

Thursday 10th 2022 - Malindi Museum and Harbour. Meet at 4pm at the Museum near Nature Kenya Membership Office.

Tuesday 15th February 2022 - Malindi Museum grounds and Shoreline. Meet at 8am at the Museum near Nature Kenya Membership Office.



Montane White-eye. PHOTO: LORENZO BARELLI

Saturday 19th February 2022 - Mtangani Afya road, Malindi. Meet at 6:30am at the Museum near Nature Kenya Membership Office.

Tuesday 22nd February 2022 - Malindi Museum ground/Shoreline. Meet at 7am at the Museum near Nature Kenya Membership Office.

Saturday 26th February 2022 - Sabaki River estuary. Meet at 7am at the Museum near Nature Kenya Membership Office.

For more information, contact Amina Simba at aminasimba6@gmail.com or phone 0725223042.

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>

Stay updated with the birding scene in Kenya by signing in to the new **Kenyabirdsnet** platform:

<https://groups.google.com/d/forum/kenyabirdsnet>

After signing in you will be able to post your records to: kenyabirdsnet@googlegroups.com

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Family	2,800
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Schools, Clubs	1,500
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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