



Some of the team members who participated in the monitoring of the Abbott's Starling (right) at Castle Forest. PHOTOS: MARTIN NJOGU AND PETE STEWARD

Monitoring the Abbott's Starling in Mt. Kenya

By John Mwacharo

Kenya is home to [46 globally threatened bird species](#). These birds live and breed in various sites scattered across the country; or spend time in Kenya during their migrations. Monitoring of threatened bird species is a critical conservation action Nature Kenya is undertaking with the assistance of local community volunteers referred to as site support groups (SSGs).

The Mt. Kenya Biodiversity Conservation Group (Mt. KEBIO) is the SSG for Mt. Kenya Important Bird Area (IBA), now considered a Key Biodiversity Area (KBA). This SSG is actively engaged in numerous activities to conserve the site's unique habitats and species.

Abbott's Starlings are among the threatened bird species that call Mt. Kenya home. This rare blue-black and creamy white bird only lives in some tropical moist montane forests in Kenya and Tanzania, with its population on a decline. In 2021, the Abbott's Starling was uplisted to Endangered in the [International Union for Conservation of Nature \(IUCN\) Red List of Threatened Species](#). According to BirdLife International, between 1,000 - 2,500 individuals are remaining. Forest loss and degradation are listed as the major threats to the bird's survival.

Last year, Mt. KEBIO conducted monitoring of the Abbott's Starling in Castle forest on the southern slopes of Mt. Kenya. The objective was to establish the status of the bird's estimated population and the condition of its habitat in the forest block. A monitoring team, comprising of members of Mt. KEBIO and Castle Community Forest Association (CFA), Nature Kenya and Kenya Forest Service (KFS) officers, and birders and guides from Castle Forest Lodge, undertook the exercise on four separate days in August, September and December 2021.

Interactions with local bird guides proved helpful. The guides provided invaluable insights into the Abbott's Starling's behaviour patterns. From their observations, Abbott's and Waller's starlings are commonly spotted together in Castle forest. The two species prefer nesting in cleavages of dead trees. According to the local bird guides, the best times to see the Abbott's Starling at Castle forest are 7:00 to 10:00 in the mornings and 3:00 to 5:00 in the evenings.

Other birds observed during the monitoring exercise included African Green Pigeon, White-headed Wood Hoopoe, Silvery-cheeked Hornbill, Grey-backed Camaroptera, Kikuyu (Montane) White-eye, and

Mountain Wagtail, among others.

Famous for its breathtaking landscapes, the Mt. Kenya ecosystem is also a significant contributor to Kenya's economy. Its forest catchment is a source of water for domestic use, agriculture, hydropower generation and industrial use. Deforestation remains the greatest threat facing the Mt. Kenya forest.

Established in 1999, Mt. KEBIO has been championing the conservation of biodiversity in the Mt. Kenya ecosystem. The group is undertaking several conservation activities such as forest habitat restoration, biodiversity monitoring and environmental education and awareness creation. Mt. KEBIO plans to make monitoring of the Abbott's Starling at Castle forest a regular activity. 🐦

112TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE EAST AFRICA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

DATE: Thursday 28th April 2022

TIME: 10:00 AM - Noon

VIA: Zoom virtual meeting

The Agenda

1. Minutes of the 111th Annual General Meeting
2. Matters arising from the Minutes
3. Chairman's Report
4. Honorary Treasurer's Report
5. Appointment of Auditor
6. Any other business of which due notice in the form of the Resolution to be proposed has been given to the Honorary Secretary, signed by not less than 2 members, not less than 21 days before the date of the meeting.
7. Election of Office Bearers, Members of the Executive Committee and Trustees. Nomination forms for officers or members of the Executive Committee are available from nkmembership@naturekenya.org
8. Report by Committees, Projects, Library and Journal

To register for the virtual AGM in advance, please click [here](#).

Covid 19: Moving on

February 2022 was a month for wetlands. The World Wetlands Day was celebrated on 2.2.22. Nature Kenya joined the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) to raise the profile of Ondiri Swamp, the source of Athi River. Athi River water is said to be contaminated with metals, pharmaceuticals and human waste rendering the water unfit for use by people, livestock and wildlife downstream. The awareness raising events at Ondiri Swamp included a bird walk led by Richard Kipng'eno and Peter Muriithi of Nature Kenya.

Nature Kenya Site Support Groups celebrated at their respective sites in style. The Yala Ecosystem Site Support Group collaborated with the Siaya County Government to raise awareness for the sustainable management of Yala Swamp – Kenya's largest freshwater wetland. The wetland faces a myriad threats; over-exploitation of its natural resources is one major threat. Nature Kenya worked with local communities and the Siaya and Busia county governments to develop a Land Use Plan to balance the various interests within the wetland. Nature Kenya, through funding from the Darwin Initiative, convinced the Busia County Members of the County Assembly to approve the Land Use Plan to ensure development overall is sustainable and compatible with biodiversity protection. Nature Kenya also mobilized communities in Yala, who have submitted requests to Kenya Wildlife Service and the Siaya County Government to consider the listing of Yala Swamp under the Ramsar Convention.

In the Tana River Delta, the Tana Delta Conservation Network (TDCN) and the County Governments of Tana River and Lamu brought together local people and decision makers to raise the profile of Tana Delta – a vast seasonal wetland complex on the Kenyan coast of national and global importance. Nature Kenya is currently involved in the implementation of the Tana River Delta Land Use Plan (LUP). The LUP's implementation process seeks to ensure that biodiversity needs are considered in the planning of development activities within the Delta. As part of the implementation of the Land Use Plan, Nature Kenya is supporting the designation of Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas (ICCAs) to conserve important cultural values and biodiversity and also promote ecotourism. Nature Kenya is also spearheading Green Value Chains and forest landscape restoration in the Delta under the Tana River Delta Restoration Initiative funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) through the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). In February, Tana River County gazetted the Green Heart Committee, a new institution that will oversee sustainable land management for nature and people in the Delta.



Members of the Arabuko-Sokoke Forest Adjacent Dwellers Association (ASFADA) engaged in a waterbird count at Lake Jilore.

PHOTO: CHARO NGUMBAO

Many businesses have also recognized the need for 'Green Recovery'. Kenya Breweries Limited, for instance, joined Nature Kenya to raise awareness for wetland conservation through an article published in the Sunday Standard under the name of Paul Matiku. Kenya Breweries is leading business efforts to restore Mt Kenya forests to enhance water quantity and quality. Coca-Cola Beverages Africa - Kenya has joined this tree planting effort and more partners are invited to join.

At other sites, Site Support Groups celebrated the World Wetlands Day in their own style. Waterfowl counts were conducted by Nature Bogoria, Friends of Dunga Swamp, Lake Elmenteita Ecosystem Community Based Organization (LECBO). The Kijabe Environment Volunteers (KENVO) counted birds at Manguo swamp. Data collected from the counts will be collated, analyzed, published and used to inform conservation actions.

In Dakatcha, members of the Dakatcha Woodland Conservation Group conducted detailed monitoring for the Kilifi (Clarke's) Weaver. The SSG members observed around 300 weavers flying among Brachystegia trees near Gandi wetland.

On the policy front, we sincerely thank members for signing the Nature Kenya petition against the proposed amendment to the Forest Act. Nature Kenya coordinated Site Support Groups and Community Forest Associations who submitted their petitions against the proposed amendment. If the law is amended as proposed, the Kenya Forest Service will have no say in alteration of forest boundaries. Under the current law, any change of forest boundary has to be advised by the Kenya Forest Service based on an

Environmental Impact Assessment. If you know someone who knows an influential person, please ask them to say NO!

In March 2022, membership activities will continue in adherence to the Covid-19 protocols as follows:

1. A members' talk titled 'The role of forensic entomology in the criminal justice system in Kenya' will take place virtually on 18th of March.
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 Birdwatch in Nairobi and Thursday afternoon and Fourth Saturday bird walks in Malindi continue with caution. 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 EANHS/NMK Library is open. Museum galleries and sites are open to the public under Ministry of Health guidelines.

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

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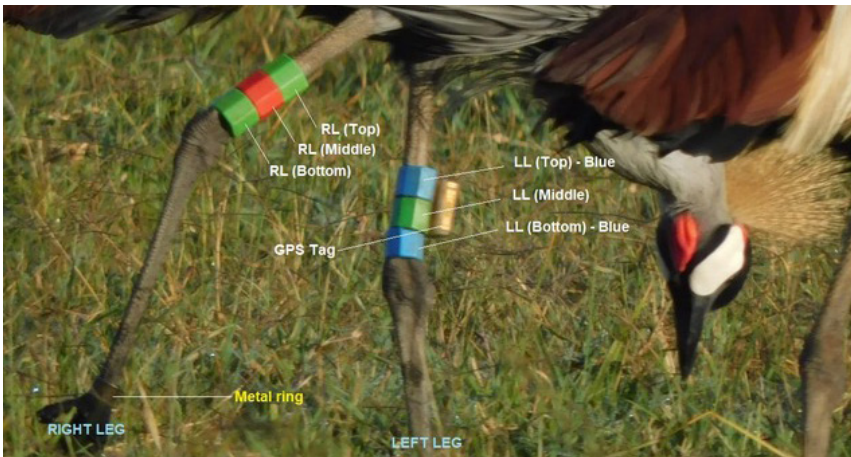
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Africa Cranes Ringing Program

By Wamiti Wanyoike, Gunter Nowald, George Ndung'u, Joseph Mwangi and Werner Shroeder

Background:

Grey Crowned Cranes are being ringed to study their movements and timing, determine regional populations, mortality and other aspects of their natural history such as age at first pairing and breeding. Ringing involves placing a metal or coloured ring or band on the bird's leg. This is a joint initiative of several organizations (NMK, KWS, NABU, ICF/EWT and Cranes Conservation Germany). The focus for now is to mark a substantial population of Grey Crowned Crane (GCC) across the range States.

Colour bands or rings: The ringing program being adopted for Kenya and the rest of the GCC range is from the European Crane Ringing Program that has been running since early 1990s led by Cranes Conservation Germany. In Kenya, the program was rolled out in December 2017, and by August 2020, a total of c.60 flightless chicks had been colour-marked in Lake Ol' Bolossat and Mugie Wildlife Conservancy – initially considered as one population (NB: Kenya is perceived to have six GCC populations but GPS data is proving otherwise!). A few individuals were additionally fitted with GPS tags.

Why ring flightless chicks? These have the advantage of avoiding the use of traps that could injure delicate waterfowl such as cranes, and give us the certainty of both origin (hatching place) and age (GCC chicks fly from 12 weeks of age) – compared to an adult with an unknown past. Due to chick mortality (especially from predation by stray dogs and mongoose) and mysterious disappearances (likely from poaching for the bird trade), we prefer to mark them at age 10 or 11 weeks – just when they are about to fledge.

Colour Combinations: Currently, there is a choice of 7 colour rings. A set of three is placed on each leg. The following is an interpretation of each ring:

LEFT LEG: The top and bottom rings are the country colour code which for Kenya is Blue (Bu) while the middle ring is the population. We have been using Green (G) for the Lake Ol' Bolossat basin population, and western Kenya has settled on Red. The combination is read top to bottom thus BuGBu.

RIGHT LEG: This is the unique individual combination of any 3 colours from a choice of 7 [Green (G), Blue (Bu), White (W), Yellow (Y), Red (R), Brown (Br) and Black (Bk)]. The combination is also read top to bottom: GRG.

GPS tags: At the moment, two types of solar-powered tags are in use: a backpack, and one glued to the colour rings.

Some findings so far: Re-sighting of colour-marked individuals has been very poor, especially after the chicks take to the air as they disperse to join the non-breeding ('floater') flocks. The most rewarding data is from individuals marked with GPS tags.

Report marked crane sightings: This study is just starting and we hope to spend quite some time unravelling the little-known life of the Grey Crowned Crane. We would therefore appreciate it if any information on marked cranes is shared with us at Wanyoike Wamiti wamiti@gmail.com (WhatsApp +254 733 599 686) with a cc to George Muigai georgeccv.ke@gmail.com. Your records will be highly appreciated and acknowledged. 🐦

March Evening Skies

By Fleur Ng'weno

March stars

Sirius, the brightest star in our night sky, is high in the south; below it is Canopus, the second brightest star. The star Procyon is high above, on the other side of Sirius.

North of Procyon, four bright stars form the corners of a long rectangle – the constellation of Gemini, the Twins. To the east of Gemini, the constellation of Leo the Lion is rising. Imagine its bright star Regulus as the lion's heart, and a half-circle of stars to the north as the lion's mane.

The waxing moon is near the star Pollux in Gemini on March 12 and 13 and fairly near Regulus on the 15th and 16th.

The distinctive constellation of Orion, the Hunter or Warrior of the ancient Greeks, is high in the west: Three bright stars in a row, and around them, four stars like the corners of a box.

The big pentagon of Auriga, the charioteer, with its bright star Capella, is in the northwest.

The Pleiades cluster and the reddish star Aldebaran are between Orion and Auriga, dipping towards the west. The waxing crescent moon is near the Pleiades on March 8, near Aldebaran on the 9th.

Planets at dawn, March '22

The planets are seen in the morning sky above the sunrise this month. Brilliant Venus is the highest. Mars is fairly close to Venus all month, but the "red planet" is still quite faint.

Below Venus and Mars, Mercury, small and bright, and Saturn, large but not so bright, appear close together at the start of March. Then Saturn rises slowly while Mercury sinks towards the horizon. After mid-month, bright Jupiter joins them over the sunrise, passing Mercury on the 21st.

At month's end, the waning crescent moon seems close to Venus, Mars and Saturn on March 28. On the 30th and 31st it is near Jupiter, low over the eastern horizon.

Moon, March '22

March 2, new moon; look for a slender crescent over the sunset on the 3rd. March 10, first quarter (half-lit moon overhead at sunset). March 18, full moon rising in the east at sunset. March 25, last quarter (half-lit moon overhead at dawn). April 1, new moon.

March Sun

On March 20 the sun crosses the equator, marking the equinox: the time of equal day and night, all over the world.

LUNGS FOR KENYA

12TH CHARITY GOLF TOURNAMENT

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

PLATINUM SPONSOR: KSH. 1,000,000 | GOLD SPONSOR: KSH. 750,000
SILVER SPONSOR: KSH. 500,000 | BRONZE SPONSOR: KSH. 250,000 |
HOLE SPONSOR: KSH. 100,000 | INDIVIDUAL PLAYER: KSH. 2,500 (NK MEMBER),
KSH. 3,000 (NON MEMBER) | TEAM ENTRY KSH. 12,000

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

Birding Updates

Wednesday Morning Birdwalks in 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 March, 2022 – Museum Grounds / Michuki Memorial Park. Meet at 8 am in the open space in front of the entrance to the museum galleries.

Wednesday 9th March, 2022 – Nairobi Arboretum. Meet at 8:30 am at the main entrance off State House Road. There is an entrance fee of **Ksh. 65** per person payable via Mpesa.

Wednesday 16th March, 2022 – Museum Grounds / Michuki Memorial Park. Meet at 8 am in the open space in front of the entrance to the museum galleries.

Wednesday 23rd March, 2022 – Karen Blixen Museum. Meet at 8.30am in the Museum's Car Park area. Directions: Coming from the city centre, take Ngong Road towards Karen. Turn left at Shell Petrol Station onto Karen Road. The Museum is about 1.5Kms after Karen Country Club.

Wednesday 30th March, 2022 – Museum Grounds / Michuki Memorial Park. Meet at 8 am in the open space in front of the entrance to the museum galleries.

Sunday Birdwatch

March 20th. Sunday Birdwatch - 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 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.

If you have questions, please write <news@naturekenya.org> or phone 0780-149200.

Bird Ringing at Nairobi National Museum grounds usually take place on Tuesday mornings. Please confirm with Titus Imboma <Imbomati911@gmail.com> Phone 0721-649452.



Rufous Sparrow. PHOTO: SAM GUCHU

Tree Walk

By Nature Kenya
Plants Committee

Venue: National Museums of Kenya
Meet at Nairobi Museum main gate
Date: Friday 25th March Time: 9:00 AM
Contact: 0780 149200 or 0726 006283

Malindi Birding

Thursday 3rd March 2022 – Malindi Harbour. Meet at 4:00 pm at the Malindi Museum near Nature Kenya Membership Office.

Thursday 10th March 2022 – Malindi 'Le Pleiadi' Golf Course Rd. Meet at 4:00 pm outside Naivas Supermarket, Malindi.

Thursday 17th March 2022 – Malindi Marine National Park. Meet at 4 pm at the Malindi Museum near Nature Kenya Membership Office.

Thursday 24th March 2022 – Malindi Museum grounds and Shoreline to Vasco da Gama Pillar. Meet at 4:00 pm at the Museum near Nature Kenya Membership Office.

Thursday 31st March 2022 – Sabaki via Gedeng' Camp Malindi. Meet at 4:00pm outside Naivas Supermarket, Malindi.

Saturday 26th March 2022 – Mida Creek. Meet at 7 am at Mida Creek Ticketing office. The bird walk is likely to end at 11:30 am; bring water and a hat.

For more information, contact Amina Simba at aminosimba6@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 <tthamzali@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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MEMBERSHIP TYPES

<i>Ksh Per Year</i>	
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Student	1,200
Schools, Clubs	1,500
Corporates	20,000 -30,000



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- Confirm details & press OK

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