

nature net

A newsletter of Nature Kenya-The EANHS

April 2023



An anti-wildlife poisoning meeting in session at Samai village. Photo E. Kulola

Addressing wildlife poisoning in Amboseli

By Ednah Kulola and John Mwacharo

On a sunny mid-morning, 99 men and women are gathered at the Enchilishili Social hall at the Eselenkei Group Ranch in Amboseli, Kajiado County. Like in other grassroots public gatherings, the attendees keenly listen to the speakers. Vulture conservation and wildlife poisoning are the topics under discussion today. This village meeting is one of the many that Nature Kenya has scheduled to educate communities living within the Amboseli ecosystem on the dangers of wildlife poisoning.

"Wildlife poisoning is prevalent in Amboseli. Vultures are the most affected victims. We use such gatherings to sensitize our people on the threats posed by the poisoning," says Jackson Oloibon, a community vulture volunteer based in Kimana.

"We are thankful to Nature Kenya for this informative session. Over the years, we have witnessed a decline in vulture numbers in this area and assumed that the birds have migrated to other places in

search of food and shelter. Today we have learned that these birds are disappearing due to wildlife poisoning," says Mejiro ole Kerina, an Enchilishili village resident.

Upon learning about the importance of vultures in keeping the environment clean and the threats facing them, ole Kerina pledges to mobilize fellow villagers to report anyone who attempts to poison wildlife.

During such meetings, community members ask questions, share their opinions and give suggestions on preventing wildlife poisoning incidents in their areas. Villages adjacent to the Amboseli National Park frequently experience predator attacks on cattle. In retaliation, villagers lace cattle carcasses with poison to kill the predators, including lions and hyenas. These poisoned carcasses are consumed by vultures and other scavenging animals, which are unintended targets. Poisoning is a leading cause of vulture deaths in Kenya.

Chiefs and other administration officers are engaged to reach out to the communities. So far, four meetings have been held this year in Iltital, Samai, Nolasiti and Enchilishili villages,

with 408 community members reached. Stakeholders from the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS), Maasai Community Wilderness Trust and Big Life Foundation are also involved in the outreach.

Nature Kenya has recruited 17 community volunteers in the Amboseli area to monitor vulture populations and wildlife poisoning incidents. Nature Kenya is also supporting the construction of predator-proof bomas to reduce cases of big cats and hyenas preying on cattle in homesteads.

Amboseli National Park is a designated Important Bird Area (IBA) and Key Biodiversity Area (KBA). Besides having many large wild animals like African Elephants, Black Rhinos, giraffes and lions, the park hosts over 400 bird species with more than 40 birds of prey, including the threatened Secretarybird, Martial Eagle, and Lappet-faced, White-backed, Hooded and Rüppell's vultures. 🦅

113TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE EAST AFRICA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

DATE: Wednesday 3rd May 2023

TIME: Barbecue at 12 noon; AGM 1pm to 2pm

VENUE: Louis Leakey Hall, Nairobi National Museum; and via Zoom

The Agenda

1. Minutes of the 112th 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. Library, Journal, Committees and Projects Report

To confirm your attendance, please go to the link below:

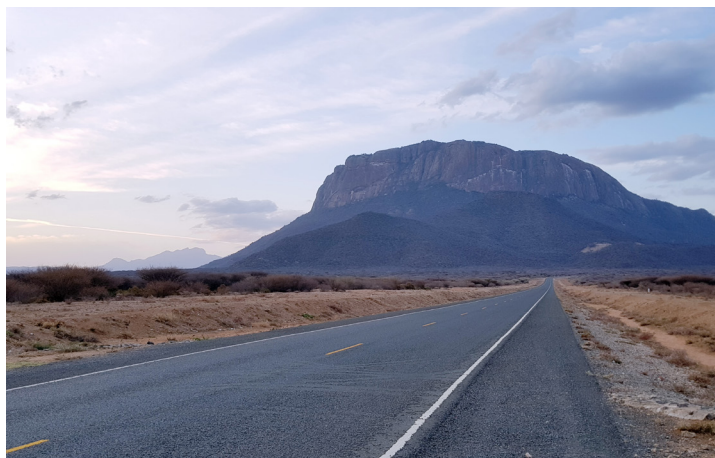
<https://forms.gle/kXZXiea18xLX5Ja3A>

To register for the virtual (Zoom) version, go to the link below:

<http://bit.ly/3IHKfBF>

KBA in Focus: Ol' Donyo Sabache

By Joshua Sese



Mount Ololokwe. Photo by P. Gacheru

In the east of Namunyak Conservancy, Samburu County lies the magnificent Ol Donyo Sabache Key Biodiversity Area (KBA). The KBA, also known as Mount Ololokwe, is a massive basalt rock outcrop with dramatic cliff faces towering above the surrounding plains. Ol Donyo Sabache is a sacred site for the Samburu people, often used as a traditional shrine for prayers and rituals. It is a popular destination for hikers and trekkers, offering stunning views of the surrounding landscape from its summit.

The KBA presents an ideal roosting and nesting site for several birds of prey such as the Critically Endangered Rüppell's Vultures and the elusive Taita Falcons. Ol Donyo Sabache is also a stopover for numerous Palearctic migrants like Levant and Eurasian sparrowhawks, Saker and Peregrine falcons. It also shelters numerous plant and other animal species of conservation importance.

Despite its magnificence and biodiversity importance, the KBA faces many threats. They include habitat loss and fragmentation due to the expansion of human settlements, agriculture, and infrastructural projects. Power lines passing near the KBA pose bird electrocution and collision threats. Increased demand for pasture and water has escalated competition for natural resources between wildlife and livestock.

This has led to overgrazing and depletion of vegetation cover and reduced the availability of food and shelter for wildlife. Poaching and illegal trade in wildlife products, such as ivory and rhino horns, remain a major conservation challenge in the area, resulting in a population decline of some wildlife species.

Changes in temperature and rainfall patterns due to climate change have also impacted negatively on the distribution and behaviour of some wild animals.

To address these challenges, conservation actions such as restoring habitats, promoting sustainable land use practices, instigating anti-poaching measures and conducting public education and awareness campaigns are critical to ensuring the continued biodiversity of the Ol Donyo Sabache KBA and surrounding areas. Community conservancies in the area, like the Kalama Community Conservancy to the south and West Gate Community Conservancy to the west, play a crucial role in ensuring that the KBA remains pristine.

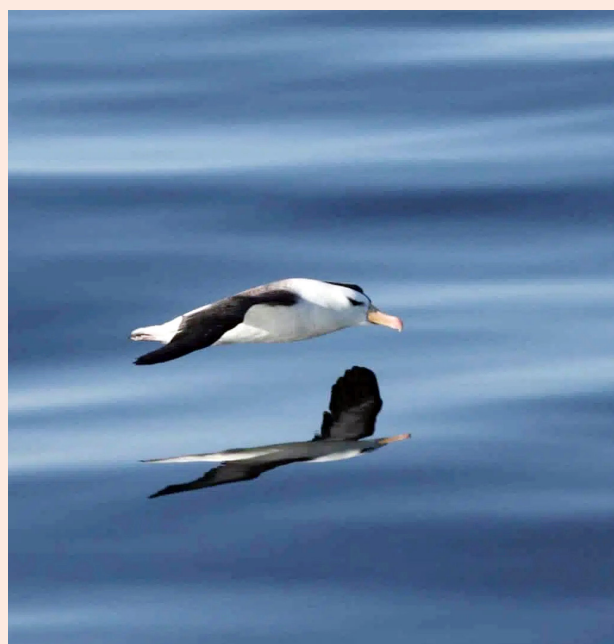
Nature Kenya has been submitting comments to the national and county government departments and agencies for infrastructural projects deemed likely to affect the KBA, like the Lamu Port-South Sudan-Ethiopia-Transport (LAPSSET) Corridor project.

Good News: Treaty Agreed for High Seas

The oceans and the seas along their edges cover about 71% of the Earth's surface. Countries control the first 200 nautical miles of ocean or seas next to their coasts. The rest - over half of the oceans - are called the High Seas.

The High Seas are vast, little-known and little explored, rich in minerals and in biodiversity - plants, animals and micro-organisms, the genes they contain and the ecosystems in which they live. Now, a treaty has been agreed to protect and manage the High Seas. It's called the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) agreement.

According to BirdLife International, the Treaty is welcome news for the future of marine conservation, and that of the entire planet. It is perhaps the biggest breakthrough in marine management since the UN convention on the law of the sea in 1982. It is hoped it will be adopted in the next few weeks, before officially coming into force once it receives 60 signatories. "It's really important for marine biodiversity conservation to see this Treaty reach its closing phase, there is still the adoption and ratification to complete, but it's a momentous task to have agreed the text of the Convention after 15 years of negotiation and preparatory meetings," says Dr Susan Waugh, Global Marine Policy Coordinator at BirdLife International. "Now the management of the High Seas has an appropriate framework for managing human activities, and importantly the mechanism to enable protection of this important ecosystem has been secured. Under the BBNJ agreement, it will now be possible to create and manage marine protected areas on the High Seas. This area is vital for biodiversity, but also for the earth's climate, covering half of the planet's surface." 🐼



A Black-browed Albatross soaring over the ocean. Photo © RSPB (rspb-images.com)

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EDITORIAL TEAM

Fleur Ng'weno, Angela Mecha, 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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Unusual and rare: the Taita Hills Warty Frog

By Thomas Odeyo

The Taita Hills Warty Frog does not go through a tadpole stage like most other frogs. The frog's eggs directly hatch into froglets morphologically similar to the adults, skipping the tadpole stage! This distinct reproductive cycle eliminates the need for a moist or watery substrate to deposit the eggs. And unlike most other frogs, the Taita Hills Warty Frog prefers walking to jumping.

The Taita Hills Warty Frog (*Callulina dawida*) only occurs in the indigenous forest fragments in the Taita Hills. This unique little frog is classified as Critically Endangered in the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species due to the fragmentation of its habitat. The frog population is scattered in the isolated Taita hills forest patches. Unfortunately, these patches are facing degradation due to human activity, such as logging and planting exotic trees. The survival of this endemic amphibian hangs in the balance as a result.

Scientific evidence indicates that the Taita Hills Warty Frog thrives on the indigenous forest floor and spends much of its time in soil or leaf litter. The frog's permeable skin that absorbs water and oxygen makes it well suited for the indigenous forest environment, making these habitats vital for its survival.

In January 2023, a team of researchers comprising members of the Kenya Herpetofauna Working Group (KHWG) conducted searches and surveys in Ngangao, Ndivenyi, Chawia, and Fururu forest blocks to understand the distribution of the Taita Hills Warty Frog. During the five-day sampling exercise, the team recorded seven Taita Hills Warty Frogs, including a gravid female with approximately 30 eggs. The team also came across a female frog sitting on her eggs.

A notable new red colour variation of the species was also observed by the researchers. This differed from the dark silver appearance recorded in the past.

The visit to Taita hills was part of a project supported by the Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund that seeks to enhance the protection of the Taita Hills Warty frog habitat through community participation and education. Working with the Dawida Biodiversity Conservation (DaBiCo) Community-based Organization, the researchers conducted community meetings at Ngangao to inform the community on the linkage between the unusual frog and the indigenous forests. More than 300 trees were also planted at a local school during the community engagements.

The researchers plan to continue engaging communities and other stakeholders in monitoring the Taita Hills Warty Frogs. 🐸



A Taita Hills Warty Frog with normal coloration (above) and a red coloured one recently observed. Photos by T. Odeyo

Holiday month

By Fleur Ng'weno

Three major religious holidays are celebrated in April 2023, on dates chosen in relation to the sun and the moon. Christians celebrate Easter on April 9 this year – the first Sunday after the first full moon after the Equinox. Jews commemorate Passover on April 5 and the week that follows. And Muslims celebrate the feast day of Eid ul Fitr at the end of the holy month of Ramadan on April 21 – if the new moon is sighted on April 20.

Planets, April '23

Brilliant Venus dominates the western evening sky, setting after 9 pm. In the first half of April, the small bright planet Mercury is below Venus, above the sunset. In the second week of April, Venus seems near the star cluster called the Pleiades or Seven Sisters. The thin crescent moon appears near Mercury on April 21, near the Pleiades on the 22nd, and near Venus the 23rd.

The planets Mars, in the evening, and Saturn, in the morning, look like stars. However, stars sparkle, whereas planets, much nearer to Earth, shine with a steady light, reflecting the sun's light. The waning moon appears near Saturn before dawn on 16 April, and the moon, waxing now, appears near Mars on the 25th and 26th. At month's end, bright Jupiter rises in the east before dawn.

April Stars

Sirius, the night's brightest star, is high in the southwest, and Canopus, second brightest, below it in the south. The Little Dog – the bright star Procyon – is high overhead. The constellation Orion – Hunter or Warrior – walks towards the west.

High in the northwest, two sets of two stars form the constellation Gemini, the Twins. High in the northeast, the bright star Regulus is at the heart of the constellation Leo the lion. The moon

seems near Regulus on April 2 and 29, near the blue-white star Spica on April 6, and near the star Pollux in Gemini on the 26th.

Two iconic constellations rise in the east on April evenings. The Plough or Big Dipper is low in the northeast. Crux, the Southern Cross, is low in the southeast.

This column points out the brightest stars and planets and most distinctive constellations in the early evening and predawn skies. You will see many more stars on a clear night in a dark location away from urban lights. It's safe to use binoculars to look at the moon, planets and stars, but DON'T look at the sun.

There are many good websites that provide more in-depth information. At <earthsky.org> you can subscribe to a free daily e-mail newsletter. Remember that most websites target viewers in the North or South; here near the equator, planets and constellations will appear in a slightly different position. The App Star Walk is free and tells you the names of the stars it sees at night.

Moon, April '23

April 6 – full moon. April 13 – last quarter. April 20 – new moon; its sighting will herald the end of the Islamic holy month of Ramadan. April 27 – first quarter.

Meteor Shower

At times, the Earth passes through bits of dust and rocks in space, often the remains of a passing comet. If some dust or rock falls into the Earth's atmosphere, it burns up, creating a streak of light. People call it a shooting star or burning spear. The Lyrid Meteor Shower runs from April 16 to 25, peaking on the evening of the 22nd and morning of the 23rd. Best viewing from a dark location after midnight.

Birding Updates

Wednesday Morning Birdwalks in Nairobi

Please observe Covid-19 protocols as needed: wear or bring masks and meet at designated venues.

5th April – City Park. Meet at 8.30 am at the parking near the Coca Cola Kiosk. Directions: Coming from the City centre, take Limuru Road past Aga Khan Hospital. Make a U-turn at Total Energies Petrol Station, Limuru Road. Drive back along Limuru Road and turn left onto City Park Road next to City Park Market.

12th April – Museum Grounds/Michuki Memorial Park. Meet at 8 am in the open space in front of the entrance to the museum galleries.

19th April – 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.

26th April – Paradise Lost. Meet at Paradise Lost Main Gate at 8:30 am. Directions: Take Kiambu Road. Turn Left at Paradise Lost junction in Thindigua after Runda Greens before Quick Mart Supermarket. 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.



A Brown-crowned Tchagra.
Photo C. Gohen

16th April. Sunday Bird Watch – Brackenhurst. Meet at the Brackenhurst Main Gate, at 8:30am. Directions: Drive along Limuru Road to Ruaka, take a right turn and continue straight along Banana Hill Road. Turn right at the two big white stones with signage, the gate is 1km ahead. Alternatively, take PSV number 106, 114 or 115 at the Khoja roundabout in Nairobi, alight at Brackenhurst gate. There is an entrance fee of **Ksh. 200** per adult and **Ksh. 100** per child below 12 years.

There may also be a birding day in Nairobi National Park on April 16. Information will be provided on our website.

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

Bird Ringing at Nairobi National Museum grounds usually takes place each week. Please confirm with Titus Imboma <Imbomati911@gmail.com> Phone 0721-649452.

Thursday Birdwalks in Malindi

6th April – Malindi Harbor. Meet at 4:00 pm at Malindi Museum near Nature Kenya Membership Office.

13th April – Mtangani via Afya Hospital. Meet at 4:00 pm at Malindi Museum near Nature Kenya Membership Office.

20th April – Malindi Museum Ground. Meet at 4:00 pm at Malindi Museum Nature Kenya Membership Office.

27th April – Mayungu. Meet at 4:00 pm at Malindi Museum Nature Kenya Membership Office.

Saturday Bird Watch

29th April. Saturday Birdwatch -Baolala (Malindi-Tsavo East via Sala Gate Road). Meet at the Malindi Museum at 7:00am. The bird walk is likely to last 3 hours or more. Bring a hat, water and snacks.

For more information, email: <malindimembers@naturekenya.org > 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

Tree Walk By Nature Kenya Plants Committee

Venue: National Museums of Kenya
Meet at Nairobi Museum main gate

Date: Friday 28th Apr Time: 9:00 AM
Contact: 0780 149200 or 0726 006283

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