



Members of the Dakatcha Woodland Conservation Group engaging community elders at Kaya Dagmara (left), a beekeeper inspecting an apiary at Kaya Dagmara (center) and the Kaya Singwaya Community Conserved Area. Photos by E. Utumbi and M. Issa

## Conserving the Kaya forests of Dakatcha Woodland

By Edwin Utumbi

To many, the Kaya forests represent the rich traditional Mijikenda culture. The word Kaya, in most Mijikenda languages, means home. Kaya forests are blocks of pristine forest scattered across the Kenyan coast. They once contained hidden fortified villages where Mijikenda communities took refuge from their enemies when they first moved to the region. A specific Mijikenda sub-group occupied each of the Kaya forests that bore cultural and historical significance.

Dakatcha Woodland – the northernmost Miombo (*Brachystegia*) forest and the breeding site for the Kilifi (Clarke's) Weaver – hosts five Kaya forests: Singwaya (Kauma), Dagamra (Chonyi), Bura (Kambe), Bate and Mayowe (Kambe).

"These Kaya forests had shrines that were considered sacred. One had to fulfil certain traditional rites before being allowed to enter the forests," says Shadrack Mwarabu, a Kaya elder and chairperson of Kaya Singwaya.

Every year, before the onset of the rainy season, Kaya elders would go to the shrines to pray for rainfall and a good crop, adds Mwarabu. Some of the cultural beliefs and practices encouraged the conservation of Kaya forests. For example, the strict rules for accessing the forests significantly minimized

disturbances. Trespassing into the Kaya forests was believed to attract the wrath of ancestral spirits. This fear served as a deterrent to would-be poachers, illegal herders and firewood collectors. Damaging any part of the sacred forests would also draw reprimand from Kaya elders.

Over the years, a lot has changed. The once-respected traditional practices associated with the Kayas are declining, exposing the forests to degradation. In Dakatcha, only a handful of elders, like Mwarabu, maintain a cultural connection with the Kaya forests.

"Many elders have abandoned their Kaya traditional roles after being falsely accused of practising sorcery and other harmful things. We risk losing our sacred forests and rich Mijikenda cultural heritage," says Mwarabu.

Currently, a new Kaya committee exists in Dakatcha. The committee acts as a consultative forum and has overseen the establishment of non-cultural local conservation groups for the five Kaya forests in Dakatcha. These community-led groups are championing the conservation of sacred forests and their unique biodiversity. Working closely with Nature Kenya, the groups are conducting environmental education and awareness, linking communities to conservation partners and promoting the

adoption of sustainable nature-based enterprises like beekeeping and climate-smart agriculture to boost community livelihoods.

To enhance the sustainable use of Kaya forests, the conservation groups have established apiaries in some forest sections. Plans are also underway to re-establish some of

the Kaya cultural practices and to seek formal protection of the sites as national monuments.

The Kaya forests in Dakatcha host several coastal birds and mammals. They include Fischer's Turaco, Southern Banded Snake Eagle, the Golden-rumped Sengi and others. 🦋

### 113<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE EAST AFRICA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

**DATE:** Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 112<sup>th</sup> 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.
8. Library, Journal, Committees and Projects Report

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

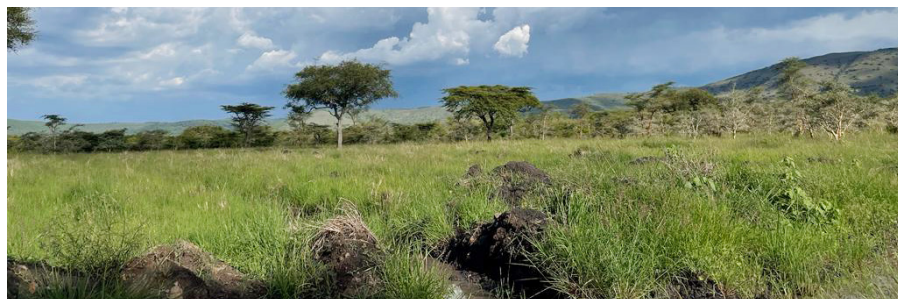
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To register for the virtual (Zoom) version, go to the link below:

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## KBA in Focus: Ruma National Park

By Joshua Sese



A section of Ruma National Park. Photo by B. Ng'weno

**R**uma National Park lies in Lambwe River Valley between the Kanyamwa Escarpment and the Gwasi Hills, 10km east of Lake Victoria in Homa Bay County. The park, 120 square kilometers in area, is a Key Biodiversity Area (KBA). It is characterized by a mosaic of landscapes, ranging from riverine woodland and rolling savannah to magnificent escarpments and towering cliffs offering stunning views of Lake Victoria and the surrounding landscape.

Ruma's pristine nature makes it a suitable home for many animal species. It is the last remaining sanctuary for the nationally endangered Roan antelope (*Hippotragus equinus*). The park is a popular bird-watching destination with many bird species. It is the only protected area in Kenya where Blue Swallow (*Hirundo atrocaerulea*), a globally vulnerable and scarce intra-African migrant, is regularly recorded.

Despite its ecological significance, Ruma National Park faces several threats. These include habitat loss and degradation due to the clearance of forests and grasslands adjacent to the park for agriculture, settlements, and infrastructural development. Other include human-wildlife conflict, forest fires, and poaching, which is a major concern, particularly for large mammals such as the Roan antelope. Climate change also affects the KBA in various ways, including unpredictable rainfall and other weather patterns. Ruma National Park is reportedly a breeding ground for tsetse flies, increasing the prevalence of the *Trypanosoma* parasites that cause sleeping sickness in cattle and humans.

Efforts are being made to address these threats to ensure the long-term survival of Ruma National Park, currently under the management of the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS). In 2020 KWS launched the Roan Antelope Species Recovery Plan to address the steady decline in the species' population. An

electric fence has been installed around the park to prevent wildlife from straying outside, protect its vegetation from degradation caused by domestic animals and help prevent human-wildlife conflicts. Other initiatives to conserve the KBA include the involvement of local communities in conservation and ecotourism activities, habitat restoration, and education and awareness campaigns. Ruma Site Support Group (SSG) is the local community organization undertaking conservation initiatives at the park. Comprising of individuals living adjacent to the park, the SSG plays a critical role in ensuring its well-being.

The SSG conducts biodiversity monitoring, environmental education and awareness creation, and habitat restoration, among other conservation activities. Ruma SSG is also promoting the uptake of nature-based community livelihood options such as beekeeping and the establishment of fruit tree nurseries. To help boost community resilience to climate change, the Ruma SSG is championing for climate-smart agriculture and agroforestry. The SSG's broad membership base has enabled them to advocate for the restoration of heavily degraded neighbouring habitats like Gwasi Hills and Lambwe forest, which are important water catchment areas.

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## The African Bird Club app is a book in your phone

The African Bird Club (ABC) has developed a free birding app 'Birds of Africa' as an identification guide which will eventually cover all the birds and countries in Africa. The latest version of this app can be downloaded from the App Store or Google Play for free.

Currently you can explore details of the birds of Kenya and 41 other African countries with more than 2,300 bird species.

As ABC is a registered charity, the app has been designed as a free resource for birders, guides, rangers, bird clubs and young people new to birding. It contains a wealth of details including photos, sounds, text and maps to help the user to identify birds in their local area or elsewhere.

To date over 20,000 people have downloaded the app and users have said that it has transformed their birding. You can find further details at <https://www.africanbirdclub.org/apps/>.

You can watch a video of the app's use by Bird Clubs in Nigeria at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JdlkomOrXwQ&t=6s>.

The development of the app has been made possible because of the work of volunteers in many countries. Rockjumper Birding Tours and Tasso Leventis have provided generous financial and content support, making significant contributions towards the development and maintenance of the app. The project has been managed by ABC volunteer, John Caddick.

For more details check the above links or email [app@africanbirdclub.org](mailto:app@africanbirdclub.org).

The African Bird Club is a UK-registered charity with members from across the world. In addition to publishing a peer-reviewed Bulletin and raising the profile of birds and conservation in Africa, ABC has donated more than £570,000 to conservation and research projects in 48 African countries, including Dakatcha Woodland in Kenya.

Issued on behalf of the African Bird Club by John Caddick

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For updates visit

[www.naturekenya.org](http://www.naturekenya.org)

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## The 2023 “Lungs for Kenya” charity golf tournament

By John Mwacharo

The 13th edition of the Nature Kenya annual charity golf tournament took place on Friday, March 31, at the Karen Country Club. The event, under the Lungs for Kenya banner, brought together golfers and businesses to raise KSh. 2 million for the restoration of Mount Kenya and Aberdare forests. Over 130 golfers participated in the one-day tournament. Kenya Commercial Bank (KCB) was the tournament’s lead sponsor.

Other sponsors included Kenya Breweries Limited, Family Bank, Williamson Tea, Nairobi Hospital, Knight Frank, Ol Pejeta Conservancy, Platinum Credit Limited, Prime Bank, Syngenta, I&M Bank, Bata Shoes, and AIC Kijabe Hospital. Several other business entities and individuals supported the fund raiser with auction and raffles items. They included Emrok Tea Factory, Coca-Cola Beverages Africa, Karen Country Club, Safarilink, Serena Hotels, Air Kenya, Angama Mara, Skyward Express, Hemmingways Collection, Matbronze Wildlife Art, Elewana Collection, Parapet Cleaning Services, Davis and Shirtliff, Cookswell, Andrew Kamiti, Karen Lawrence, Andy and Salma Watt and Alex Duncanson.

We say a big ‘thank you’ to all our sponsors.



Part of the action during the 2023 “Lungs for Kenya” charity golf tournament at the Karen Country Club. Photos by J. Mwacharo

## May Evening Skies

By Fleur Ng'weno

### Moon, May ‘23

Full moon is on May 5; as it rises in the east, the moon may look just a little darker or more golden than usual. It’s a penumbral lunar eclipse – not very obvious, and in Nairobi or to the west it won’t last long. The night of May 5 to 6 is also the peak of the Eta Aquarids meteor shower, but the meteors or “shooting stars” will be hard to see in the bright moonlight. Then, May 12 – last quarter (moon half-lit at dawn). May 19 – new moon. May 27 – first quarter (moon half-lit at sunset).

### Planets, May ‘23

Venus is brilliant in the western sky from sunset to about 9:30 pm. The bright light to the south (left) is the star Sirius. Reddish Mars, less bright now that its orbit takes it further from the Earth, is high in the west above Venus. The waxing crescent moon appears near Venus on May 23 and near Mars on May 24.

In the eastern sky before sunrise, Saturn is high and Jupiter is low. At mid-month, small bright Mercury rises below big bright Jupiter. The waning crescent moon appears near Saturn on May 13, near Jupiter on the 17th and near Mercury on the 18th.

### May Stars

As Kenya is on the equator, we see most of the constellations – the patterns formed by the stars – of the northern and southern hemispheres.

A famous constellation of the north is Ursa Major, the Great Bear, also known as the Plough or the Big Dipper. To see it, turn towards the north (to the right of the sunset). Look for three bright stars in a line, next to four stars forming the corners of a box shape. You can imagine this constellation as a toy car pulled by a string.

Across the sky, in the south, is a famous constellation of the south, the Southern Cross. Look for three bright stars and a fainter fourth star forming the shape of a Christian cross. This is Crux, the Southern Cross. There are two very bright stars to the east (left). At sunset in May, the Cross is low in the southeast and tilted to one side. It straightens up during the evening.

Orion, the Hunter or Warrior, sets due west in the evening. Sirius, the ‘dog star’ and brightest star of the night, is in the southwest. Canopus, the second brightest star, is further south, low in the sky; and Procyon, the ‘little dog’, is above Sirius.

There are also bright stars high in the sky. Regulus, in the constellation of Leo the Lion, is overhead. Arcturus is a bright orange light in the northeast. Spica is a sparkling blue-white light in the east. And Pollux, the brightest star in Gemini (the Twins) is high in the west. The moon is near Spica on May 3 and 31, near Pollux on May 23, and near Regulus on May 26 and 27. 🌙



Stella Kariuki (left), the Lady Winner, receives a prize item from Millicent Marutit Mello, Kenya Commercial Bank’s Senior Manager, Industrials (Corporate Banking Division), during the awards ceremony of the 2023 “Lungs for Kenya” charity golf tournament. Photo by J. Mwacharo

## Birding Updates

### Wednesday Morning Birdwalks in Nairobi

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

**3rd May – Museum Grounds/Michuki Memorial Park.** Meet at 8 am in the open space in front of the entrance to the museum galleries.

**10th May – Giraffe Centre.** Meet at 8.30 am at the Giraffe Centre main entrance. Thanks to AFEW for welcoming the birdwalk.

**17th May – 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.

**24th May.** Meet at 8.30 am at the junction of Magadi Road and Bogani East Road for a walk at a nearby site.

**31st May – Ondiri Swamp.** Meet at 8:30 am at the Ondiri Wetland Information Centre. Directions: Coming from the city centre, take Waiyaki Way towards Kikuyu. Turn left at Gitaru onto Southern Bypass. Slip left onto Kikuyu overpass. Take first left turn at overpass and drive straight to the Information Centre. Ondiri Swamp is the only quaking bog in Kenya, a presumed source of the Nairobi River.

### Sunday Birdwatch

**21st May Sunday Birdwatch - Ololua Nature Trail, Institute of Primate Research, Karen.** Meet at 8.30 am in the Nature Trail's main entrance. Directions: Coming from the city centre, take Ngong Road towards Karen. Turn left at Shell Petrol Station onto Karen Road. The Nature Trail is about 500m after Karen Blixen Museum. There is an entrance fee of **Ksh. 100** per adult and **Ksh. 50** per child for Nature Kenya members (bring your membership card – soft or hard copy).

If you have questions, please write to [news@naturekenya.org](mailto: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](mailto:Imbomati911@gmail.com)> Phone 0721-649452.

### Malindi Thursday Birdwalks

**4th May – Mtangani.** Meet at 4:00 pm at the Malindi Museum near Nature Kenya Membership Office.

**11th May – Malindi Harbor.** Meet at 4:00 pm at the Malindi Museum near Nature Kenya Membership Office.

**18th May – Mayungu.** Meet at 4:00 pm at Malindi Museum Nature Kenya Membership Office.

**25th May – Malindi Museum Ground.** Meet at 4:00 pm at Malindi Museum Nature Kenya Membership Office.

**27th May Saturday Birdwatch – Arabuko-Sokoke Forest.** Meet at 7:00 am at the Arabuko-Sokoke Forest Gede Gate. The bird walk is likely to end after 3 hours (Bring drinking water).

For more information, email: <[malindimembers@naturekenya.org](mailto: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](mailto:thamzali@gmail.com)> / 0733-980540 or Kelvin Mazera <[klvnrua@yahoo.com](mailto:klvnrua@yahoo.com)> / 0720-928783



In order to coordinate the birding effort in Kenya, if you plan to take part on 13th May, 2023, please send your name, contacts and birding location to **Richard Kipngeno** at <[news@naturekenya.org](mailto:news@naturekenya.org)> or to **Pete Steward** on WhatsApp +44 7473957279.



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For details on associated groups such as Youth Committee, Succulenta, and Friends of Nairobi Arboretum or City Park, contact [office@naturekenya.org](mailto:office@naturekenya.org)