



A village baraza held at Empash village in Mosiro, Kajiado County to mark the International Vultures Awareness Day. Photo by Benjamin Taki

Enhancing vulture conservation in the Mara and beyond

■ By Brian Otiego and David Odhiambo

Often misunderstood and unappreciated, vultures play a crucial role in scavenging and disposing of carcasses and consequently preventing zoonotic disease outbreaks. Despite their importance, many vulture species have recorded population declines. Kenya hosts eight vulture species: White-backed, White-headed, Rüppell's, Lappet-faced, Hooded, Egyptian, Bearded (Lammergeier) and Palm-nut vultures. Four species (White-backed, White-headed, Rüppell's and Hooded vultures) face extinction.

On September 2, the world marked the International Vulture Awareness Day (IVAD), a day dedicated to creating vulture conservation awareness. In Kenya, Nature Kenya, in conjunction with Maasai Mara Wildlife Ambassadors - the site support group (SSG) for Maasai Mara Key Biodiversity Area (KBA) - held a public event at Ereyiet-Oltome village to mark IVAD. The event aimed to sensitize communities on the importance of vultures in the Mara ecosystem and highlight the dangers posed by wildlife poisoning. About 130 participants attended the event, including community members, representatives from the Mara Predators Conservation

Programme, Olkinyei Conservancy, the local administration and two local radio stations - Mayian and Sidai FM.

Human-wildlife conflict is of great concern in the Maasai Mara ecosystem. Wildlife poisoning, triggered by human-wildlife conflict, is the leading cause of vulture deaths in Kenya. When livestock is preyed on by predators such as lions or hyenas, herders often resort to lacing carcasses with poison in retaliation, aiming to kill the rogue predators. Vultures often fall victim to these

wildlife poisoning incidents since they feed on carcasses in large numbers.

Through support and capacity building, Nature Kenya has been empowering local communities in the Maasai Mara ecosystem to advocate against wildlife poisoning for the protection of vultures. Maasai Mara Wildlife Ambassadors have been at the forefront of this. The SSG is restructuring to enhance its ability to deliver local conservation actions and extend its reach across the vast Mara landscape. The community group, through its vulture volunteers, monitors, responds to and reports wildlife poisoning incidents. It also carries out public awareness and environmental education. To broaden its vulture conservation reach, the SSG is also engaging the local administration and two local radio stations.

Vulture Liaison Officers (VLOs) from Nature Kenya and the vulture volunteers have so far managed to reach out to 94,732 people through community gatherings, village meetings, chief's barazas, and market outreaches.

To further enhance vulture conservation efforts, Nature Kenya, The Peregrine Fund, Kenya Wildlife Service, Wildlife Research Training Institute, National Museums of Kenya, Kenya Birds of Prey Trust and the Raptor Rehabilitation Centre are developing a National Vulture Multi-species Action Plan. The action plan seeks to mainstream vulture conservation into existing wildlife-related legislation, including the Wildlife Conservation and Management Act 2013, to improve the legal protection of vultures in Kenya, among other objectives. 🦅



A White-backed Vulture, one of the Critically Endangered vulture species found in Kenya. Photo by John Mwacharo

KBA in Focus: Cherangani Hills

■ By Joshua Sese

The Cherangani Hills Key Biodiversity Area (KBA) on the western ridge of the Rift Valley, traverses across Elgeyo Marakwet, Trans Nzoia, and West Pokot counties. Cherangani Hills KBA is characterized by an undulating terrain with steep hills and a series of expansive indigenous forests, savanna and grassland habitats. The site is part of the Eastern Afrotropical Biodiversity Hotspot, and one of Kenya's five main 'water towers'. It hosts the headwaters for Kerio and Turkwel rivers draining into Lake Turkana, and river Nzoia draining into Lake Victoria.

Cherangani Hills ecosystem is home to globally threatened and endemic flora such as *Dendrosenecio cheranganiensis* – EN and Parasol tree *Polyscias kikuyuensis* – NT, and regionally threatened fauna such as De Brazza's Monkey (*Cercopithecus neglectus*), Crowned Eagle (*Stephanoaetus coronatus* - NT), and perhaps the elusive Lammergeier or Bearded Vulture (*Gypaetus barbatus* - NT), among others. Most of the highland forests are gazetted as Forest Reserves.

Despite the undoubted significance of the KBA, impacts of climate change and increased anthropogenic pressures in the region continuously threaten its persistence. The human activities affecting the KBA include illegal logging, charcoal production, and encroachment and land clearing for agriculture and settlement. Unsustainable land use practices such as overgrazing, land fragmentation and clearing, have led to soil erosion and degradation. Unchecked encroachment in the KBA has led to frequent human-wildlife conflict incidents. Forest fires are frequent, especially during the dry season, stemming from slash-and-burn land preparation methods, use of fire during honey harvesting, and burning of grazing land to allow for pasture regeneration. Inadequate awareness of the KBA's ecological significance and poor enforcement of safeguarding measures also impede conservation efforts.

Chebororwa Sekemiat Site Support Group (SSG) is the local community organization championing the conservation of the Cherangani Hills KBA. The SSG actively engages in tree planting and growing, biodiversity monitoring, and conservation awareness creation. It undertakes environmental education through school outreach programmes, community gatherings, and marking national and global awareness days such as World Environment Day. Chebororwa Sekemiat SSG also promotes sustainable community livelihood activities such as beekeeping and tree seedling production. 🌱



African and other global leaders pose for a group photograph during the Africa Climate Summit. Photo courtesy of Africa Renewal

Africa Climate Summit summary

Nairobi hosted the inaugural Africa Climate Summit (ACS23) on September 4-6, 2023.

Organized by the African Union and hosted by the Government of Kenya, the Summit brought together 17 African Heads of State and Government and other leaders from across the continent and globe, including the Secretary-General of the United Nations António Guterres and the President of the European Union Ursula von der Leyen.

Under the theme "Driving green growth and climate finance solutions for Africa and the World", the Summit focused on five key areas: climate finance, loss and damage, energy transition and green jobs, sustainable agriculture and nature-based solutions.

The outcome document of the Summit was the Nairobi Declaration on Climate Change and Call to Action. It will form the basis for Africa's position during the Conference of the Parties (COP28) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Dubai in November. In the Declaration, African countries committed to and called for:

- Accelerating all efforts to reduce carbon emissions to align with goals set forth in the 2015 Paris Agreement (such as limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius or less);
- Upholding commitments to a fair and accelerated process of phasing down coal, and abolishment of all fossil fuel subsidies;
- Developed countries to fulfil their commitment to provide \$100 billion per year (pledged 14 years ago) in climate financing by 2023;
- Swift operationalization of the Loss and Damage Fund to help developing countries cope with the impacts of climate change – by COP28;
- Restructuring of the climate financing architecture to be responsive to Africa's needs. For example, restructuring of existing debt and fair and flexible terms for climate financing;

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- Establishment of a carbon taxation regime, including a carbon tax on fossil fuel trade, maritime transport and aviation, that may also be augmented by a global financial transaction tax;
- Global leaders to join Africa in seizing this unprecedented opportunity to accelerate global decarbonization, while pursuing equality and shared prosperity.

Notably, the Declaration recognises the role of nature and biodiversity in resolving the climate crisis. There are six references to “biodiversity” and four to “nature.” In clause 24, African leaders commit themselves to “Strengthening actions to halt and reverse biodiversity loss, deforestation, desertification, as well as to restore degraded lands to achieve land degradation neutrality.”

Climate Finance commitments

During the Summit, \$4.5 billion was committed to climate adaptation and mitigation. Pledges made were from governments, businesses, and development partners. The United States pledged \$3 billion annually for adaptation, as part of its President’s Emergency Plan for Adaptation and Resilience (PREPARE) initiative. The United Arab Emirates pledged \$1 billion for climate action in Africa. The African Development Bank (AfDB) committed \$1 billion for the African Adaptation Initiative and \$100 million for the Climate Resilience Adaptation Finance and Technology Transfer Facility.

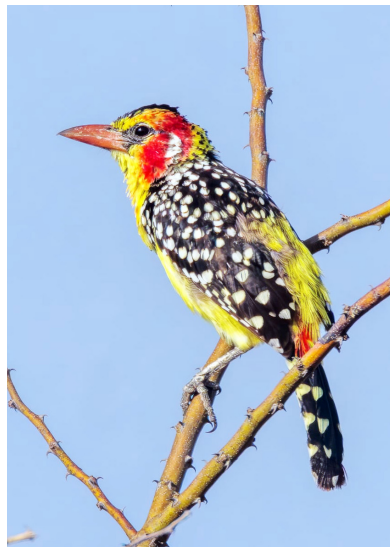
It was agreed that the Africa Climate Summit will be held every two years. 🐘

Birds of Olorgesailie

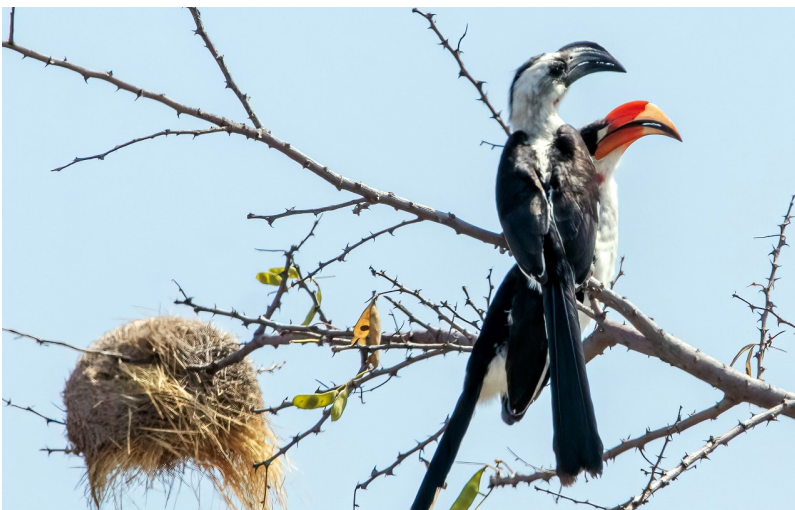
A pictorial by John Gateru and Simon Odhiambo



African Grey Flycatcher



Red-and-yellow Barbet



Male and female Von der Decken's Hornbills

Planets, Stars and Galaxies

By Fleur Ng'weno

Planets, Oct '23

Bright Jupiter rises in the east in the evening and is in the sky most of the night. Golden Saturn, bright like a star but shining steadily, is high in the east, almost overhead. Mars, quite dim now, sinks towards the sunset glare. Mars appears close to the bright star Spica in early October, and close to Mercury at month's end. The gibbous moon is near Jupiter on October 2, 28 and 29, and near Saturn on the 24th.

In the morning before dawn, Venus is brilliant in the east, near the star Regulus. Can you still see Venus after sunrise? The waning crescent moon is near Venus on October 10 and 11.

October stars

The constellation of the Scorpion, with its bright reddish star Antares and long curved tail of stars, crawls towards the sunset. The constellation Sagittarius the Archer, part of it shaped like a teapot or basket, follows the Scorpion to the west. The waxing crescent moon is near Antares on October 18 and 19, near the star Nunki in Sagittarius on Oct. 21.

In the northwest, to the right of the sunset, the bright stars Altair, Deneb and Vega form a huge triangle. Vega is very bright and low in the sky. Deneb is east (right) of Vega. Altair is high above them and flanked by two smaller stars. Overhead, to the east of Altair, five small bright stars form a shape like a leaping dolphin.

Distant galaxies

Our sun and all the stars we see with the naked eye are part of the Milky Way galaxy. On clear dark evenings in October and November, we can see other, more distant galaxies.

In the south

Find a viewing point where you can see low in the south, on a cloudless, moonless evening. The bright star Fomalhaut is high in the south. Lower in the sky and a little further left in the southeast is the bright star Achernar.

Below Achernar, low on the southern horizon, look for two pale areas like small round clouds. These are the Small and Large Magellanic Clouds. The two Magellanic Clouds are actually small galaxies, composed of millions of stars.

In the north

Turn around to find the bright white star Vega low in the northwest (to the right of the sunset). Higher in the north is the bright star Deneb, in the constellation Cygnus the flying swan. High above and to the right (east), four stars form the corners of a large square shape. This is the Great Square of Pegasus, the flying horse of the ancient Greeks.

Below Pegasus and east (right) of Deneb, is the constellation of Cassiopeia: Five bright stars forming a giant letter 'M'. Between the square of Pegasus and the M-shape of Cassiopeia, look for a blurred bright light. That bright, fuzzy spot is the Great Spiral Nebula M31, the Andromeda galaxy.

Moon, Oct '23

Oct. 6: Last quarter (half-lit moon at dawn). Oct 14: New moon. Oct 22: First quarter (half-lit moon at sunset). Oct 28: Full moon, with a partial lunar eclipse. The Earth passes between the sun and the moon, casting a shadow on the full moon. At around 22:35 in Nairobi, the Earth's shadow seems to take a 'bite' out of the moon. The dark 'bite' increases until about 23:14, when it starts to decrease.

Meteor Shower

As the Earth travels round the sun, it passes through areas of dust and rocks, some left by passing comets. If a rock falls into the Earth's atmosphere, it burns up, leaving a bright trail of light. These are meteors, also called “shooting stars” and “burning spears”. In October, you may see the Orionids Meteor Shower, peaking in the early morning of October 22. Best viewing from a dark location with a clear sky, after midnight October 21-22. 🌠

Birding Updates

Wednesday Morning Bird walks in Nairobi. In case of heavy rain on any Wednesday morning, we will meet at the Nature Kenya membership office and perhaps visit the Bird Gallery of the Museum. Bring your membership card, in hard or soft copy.

4th October – 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.

11th October – 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.

18th October – Museum Grounds/ Michuki Memorial Park. Meet at 8:00 am in the open space in front of the entrance to the museum galleries.

25th October – Karen Blixen Museum. Meet at 8:30 am in the Karen Blixen 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.

15th October. Sunday Bird Watch – Kakuzi. Meet at the Kakuzi Main Entrance, at 8:30 am. Directions: Drive along Thika Road past Kenol, turn left opposite Kakuzi Butchery/Kakuzi Timber Shop. Alternatively, take Muranga PSVs at Nyama Kima, Nairobi and alight at Kenol. From Kenol, take Makuyu PSVs and alight opposite Kakuzi Butchery/Kakuzi Timber Shop. Walk from there on the same side that you have alighted from Nairobi towards the main office.

This is a day trip; bring packed lunch and water.

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

Bird Ringing at Nairobi National Museum grounds usually takes place once a week, usually on Tuesdays. Please confirm with Titus Imboma <imbomat911@gmail.com> Phone 0721-649452.

Thursday Birdwalks in Malindi

5th October 2023 – Mayungu. Meet at **7:00 am** at the Malindi Museum near Nature Kenya Membership Office.

12th October 2023 – Malindi Harbour. Meet at 4:00 pm at the Malindi Museum near Nature Kenya Membership Office.

19th October 2023 – Mtangani. Meet at 4:00 pm at Malindi Museum Nature Kenya Membership Office.

26th October 2023 – Malindi Marine Park. Meet at 4:00 pm at Malindi Marine Park Gate.

28th October. Saturday Birdwatch – Kibaoni Nature Kenya Reserve, Dakatcha Woodland KBA near Marafa. Meet at **6:30 am** at Malindi Museum near Nature Kenya Office. This is a day trip; bring packed lunch or snacks and drinking water.

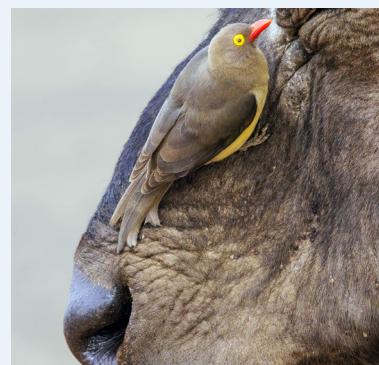
For more information, email: <malindimembers@naturekenya.org> or phone 0725 223042.

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

October Big Day

In order to coordinate the birding effort in Kenya, if you plan to take part on 14th October, 2023, please send your name, contacts and birding location to Richard Kipngeno at <news@naturekenya.org> or to Pete Steward on WhatsApp +44 7473957279.



Red-billed oxpecker on a buffalo
Photo by Simon Odhiambo



The Cornell Lab
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Western Yellow Wagtail Motacilla flava © Mathieu Bally Macaulay Library

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