



Louise Ndegwa, treasurer of Hombe CFA assesses wild tree seedlings at a nursery. PHOTO: CAROLINE CHEBET

Collecting seeds to restore Mount Kenya forest

BY CAROLINE CHEBET

John Mwithimbu spreads out the freshly collected heap of *Syzygium guineense* seeds to dry on a mat outside Imenti Forest station offices. The sun is blazing hot and the Community Forest Association (CFA) members are streaming in for a brief meeting. As is the norm, each is carrying a heap of wild seeds collected from the forest. The seeds are part of the many varieties of indigenous tree seeds aired out to dry every day at the forest station.

Collecting wild seeds for propagation in Mt. Kenya forests is part of the ambitious initiative by Nature Kenya targeted at restoring degraded parts of the forest – a critical water tower.

“Every member collects seeds from the forest, which are then dried out and propagated into seedlings. The seedlings are planted in degraded parts which have been marked,” explains Mwithimbu.

Once the seeds are dried, CFA members sow the seeds in nurseries. The germinated tree seedlings are tended by CFA members who have mastered the art of tree seedling

propagation. Mature seedlings are sold to individuals and organizations for replanting.

The seed collection initiative also seeks to address the challenges of sustainability and viability of seedlings that do well in Mt. Kenya forests. Initially, restoration initiatives in Mt. Kenya relied on purchasing seeds from elsewhere. This posed a challenge of low growth rates, as some tree species sourced from outside did not do well. Now, community members collect seeds directly from the forest.

Sebastian Kiogora, the chairperson of the CFA, said that wild seed collection, introduced by Nature Kenya to involve communities in sustainable efforts to restore the forests, is also a revenue-earner. “CFA members get proceeds from selling these seedlings to individuals and organizations.”

On the other side of Mt. Kenya, members of Hombe Community Forest Association are also documenting the progress of their conservation efforts. At Hombe, tens of nursery beds alongside beehives dangling from trees tell the story

of a restoration initiative targeting 6,200 hectares of degraded forests in Mt. Kenya.

“We collect these seeds as members and propagate them. Besides restoration, it also generates revenue because we are integrating it with bee-keeping,” says Mary Muriithi, treasurer of Hombe Community Forest Association.

“The seeds we used to purchase failed to grow and through training from Nature Kenya, we started collecting our own from the forests and propagating them. When we do this ourselves, we get to know

the specific sites where certain trees grow,” says Louise Ndegwa, secretary of the group.

Milka Musyoki, a community liaison officer from Nature Kenya, said communities play a key role in restoration of the water tower, by providing seedlings and removing the aggressive *Lantana camara* which is spreading within the forest.

“While the communities help to restore the forest, they also have to benefit. Activities that generate money include tree nurseries and bee-keeping,” she said. ▲

111TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE EAST AFRICA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

DATE: Wednesday 19th May 2021

TIME: 10:00 AM - Noon

VIA: Zoom virtual meeting

The Agenda

1. Minutes of the 110th 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.

The Executive Committee proposes a **Constitutional amendment to remove the NAMES of branches.**

Amend article XVI of the EANHS Constitution to DELETE (d) in below.

XVI. BRANCHES

Branches of the Society may be formed with the approval of the Committee and Registrar of Societies and they will adopt the same Constitution as that of the headquarters with the following exceptions:

- (a) The aims and objects will not include the formation of branches
- (b) Amendments to the Constitution can only be made by the headquarters of the Society in accordance with the provisions of Rule XX
- (c) The provisions of Rule XXI shall apply to branches but, in addition, branches will not be dissolved without consultation with their headquarters.
- (d) The branches formed in member countries of the East African Community shall bear the following names;
 - (i) "Nature Kenya" in respect of the Kenya Branch of the Society.
 - (ii) "Nature Uganda" in respect of the Uganda Branch of the Society.
 - (iii) "Nature Tanzania" in respect of the Tanzania Branch of the Society.

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](#).

Helpful vaccines, Dangerous waves

Whilst the vaccine provides hope for frontline workers and the elderly, Covid-19 risks remain high. The third wave is described to be more virulent. We hope that some members were vaccinated, and that all members will remain safe. Nature Kenya is following the Kenya Government directives to help reduce the spread of the virus. We remain careful – wearing masks, washing hands and working from home when we can. Nature Kenya conservation efforts continue locally and nationally.

1. The 111th EANHS Annual General Meeting will be held virtually on 19th May 2021 from 10 a.m. by Zoom.
2. Museum galleries and sites are open to the public under Ministry of Health guidelines as at end April; however, the EANHS/NMK Library and the Museum headquarters are closed until further notice.
3. The Wednesday Morning Birdwalks and Sunday Birdwatch have been postponed again. Updates will be published in the June Nature Net.
4. The Nature Kenya office is closed. However, 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 and collected on Mondays or by arrangement. Ring the bell at the entrance of the office behind the galleries.
5. The 'Lungs for Kenya' Charity Golf Tournament has been postponed until further notice. For further information please contact Gloria Waswa, Membership and Marketing Manager at nkmembership@naturekenya.org or telephone 0726 134029.
6. Members will continue to receive an electronic version of the Nature Net.

Please support us as we work towards a greener future!

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

Exploring Mida Creek

BY CAROLINE CHEBET



Mida Creek. PHOTO: CAROLINE CHEBET

A blend of red, orange and yellow paints the sky whilst the setting sun casts silvery glitters on the vast expanse of Mida Creek, a tidal inlet in Kilifi County. On the beach, hundreds of silhouettes of birds move with the constant ebb and flow of waves. A suspended boardwalk cutting through the dense thicket of mangrove forest completes the charm of this special place tucked within Kenya's North Coast.

All around the boardwalk, which opens up to the sea at the end, is a rich concentration of mangroves. Of Africa's nine species of mangroves, Watamu's Mida Creek boasts of eight, making it an important breeding and feeding ground for marine species.

"Mida Creek is a place rich in biodiversity. This creek attracts tourists and researchers who come to learn more and study the complex marine ecosystem," says Ali Bakari, the chairperson of Mida Creek Conservation and Awareness Group.

From the boardwalk, one can discover the many aspects of Mida Creek: mud and sand flats, open shallow waters and mangrove forests. It is these diverse habitats and the birds and marine life they sustain that give Mida Creek global recognition.

Together with the adjacent Arabuko-Sokoke Forest, Mida Creek is part of a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve – terrestrial, marine and coastal ecosystems that promote the reconciling of conservation of biodiversity with sustainable use.

The mangrove channels form important feeding and breeding grounds for various fish species, including parrotfish, rabbitfish, jacks, snappers, groupers, emperors and barracudas. The creek is also hosts thousands of migratory and resident birds, including regionally and globally threatened species. Mida Creek is designated as an Important Bird Area for hosting large congregations or gatherings of migrating birds from Europe and Asia

With binoculars, one might observe Dimorphic Egrets, Lesser Crested Terns and Roseate Terns feeding. Between September and May, one can also spot migrant birds like Sanderling, Curlew Sandpiper, Little Stint, Whimbrel, Grey Plover, and Greater and Lesser Sand Plovers. Mida Creek is famous for hosting Crab Plovers, white and black shorebirds that nest in Somalia.

In the water, marine life includes varieties of seagrass and seaweeds that provide food and habitat for other aquatic species. Among the mangroves, one can spot fiddler crabs with one big bright claw carpeting the sand.

Nature Kenya Coast Regional Coordinator Francis Kagama explains the need to keep the creek's environment healthy to support its large number of marine species.

"To sustainably conserve the creek, we rolled out livelihood empowerment programs that involved building capacity of local communities to enable them to tap from tourism and conserve Mida Creek," Kagama says.

The Mida Creek Conservation and Awareness Group is the area's Site Support Group (SSG). The group conducts conservation activities, including site monitoring and restoration, awareness creation and environmental education. It also runs income-generating activities in the form of a restaurant and boat rides for visitors. Nature Kenya provided the group with life jackets and other marine safety gear.

"Our group is actively engaged in various conservation activities," notes Bakari. "These include beach cleanups as well as the planting of mangroves in degraded areas. This creek plays a critical role both in conservation and in supporting our livelihoods." 🌿

For updates visit
www.naturekenya.org

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NATURE BUZZ

Wings high, cruising to the North

BY RICHARD KIPNG'ENO



Female Red-backed Shrike. PHOTO: S. SHEMA

The epic northward bird journey is now at its peak. Every winter visitor is racing against time to reach their breeding grounds in Europe and Asia in good time.

Last year, around September, Palaearctic Migrants (migratory birds born in Europe and Asia) started checking in to Africa to avoid winter and take advantage of warm conditions in the South. During this period, food is abundant in Africa, with the onset of the rainy season. Conditions here are favourable.

It is now time for summer breeding. There is more food to be exploited up North as a result of longer days. More food and more time to feed give these migrants an advantage for raising young ones.

Kenyan birders have been out birding. Interestingly, during April, migrant encounters have been enormous in most birding hotspots. These include Segera Conservancy, Mida Creek, Sabaki Estuary, Nairobi National Park, Nairobi Museum grounds, to mention only a few.

Waders reported from Kenya's coastal strip are already wearing their alluring breeding plumage. In Nairobi, Red-backed Shrikes, Lesser Grey Shrikes, Isabelline Shrikes and Willow Warblers are foraging for their last bites of insects before their long journey over deserts and seas.

Birders to Nairobi National Park noted they saw at least 300 Lesser Grey and Red-backed shrikes! There were migrants on almost every bush!

More than 30 Red-backed Shrikes were reported at the museum grounds close to Nairobi River in a single birding moment. One Tuesday in April, the bird ringing exercise at the Museum grounds yielded 29 Willow Warblers out of a total of 59 birds ringed!

Catch up with the last-minute sights of the migrants! Go outdoors, bird and share your observations with us. If the migrants from the North have already left, you might find some arrivals from the South! 🐦



Lesser Grey Shrike. PHOTO: S. SHEMA

Sighting a Rare Leucistic Ring-necked Dove

BY VINCENT OTIENO



Ring-necked Doves (*Streptopelia capicola*) are common birds in our gardens, parks and even in towns in dry country. They are grey in colour, with darker colours on their back, the iconic black feathered collar and black eyes.

Sighting a leucistic Ring-necked Dove in the bushes of Ilelunyi village (2 degrees south and 37 degrees east) in the Amboseli Ecosystem was thrilling. We immediately noticed the grey collar which drew our attention. A few seconds later, it started calling, which ascertained that it's a Ring-necked Dove. This individual had all white feathers, grey collar and dark eyes.

What are Leucistic birds? – These are birds with a genetic mutation that results in a total or partial reduction of colour in a bird's feathers. Due to this mutation, pigments are inadequately fixated or fail to be deposited properly in the feathers.

Leucistic birds have a normal coloration of the eyes, bill, legs, and bare parts which make them different from albino birds that totally lack melanin (this is what gives the feathers and eyes their colour). Albino birds are always pure white and have reddish or pink eyes.

Venus rising

BY FLEUR NG'WENO

Planets, May '21

Venus and Mercury, the two planets that orbit the sun between the Earth and the sun, are rising over the western horizon immediately after sunset. Mercury, small but bright, is above brilliant Venus most of the month. In the first week of May, the Pleiades or Seven Sisters star cluster is near Mercury; in the second week, near brilliant Venus. The slender crescent moon joins them on May 12 and 13.

On May 15 and 16 the moon is near the "red planet" Mars, far away and faint this year. Towards the end of May, Mercury is near the star Elnath in the constellation Taurus the bull. Mercury sinks back towards the horizon while Venus continues to rise. They pass each other on May 28.

The other planets are best seen just before dawn: bright Jupiter high in the east at first, then almost overhead; golden Saturn overhead, then high in the west. The moon is near Saturn on May 4 and 31, near Jupiter on May 5 and June first.

Meteor Shower

When a bit of dust or rock from space falls into the Earth's atmosphere, it burns up, forming a bright trail of light. The bright light is called a meteor – sometimes nicknamed a 'shooting star' or 'burning spear'. In late April and most of May, the Earth passes through dust particles left in space by the famous Halley's Comet. This is the Eta-Aquarid meteor shower. Best viewing in 2021 is from midnight to dawn on May 5 or 6 from a dark location; but meteors may be seen on any clear nights.

Moon, May '21

May 11 – new moon. The sighting of the faint new moon on May 11 or 12 will signal the end of the Islamic holy month of Ramadhan and begin the holiday of Idd ul Fitr. May 26 – full moon, rising in the east at sunset.

May Stars

The ancient Greeks gave names to the patterns formed by the stars, called constellations. As Kenya is on the equator, we see most of the constellations of the northern and southern hemisphere.

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. The moon is near Regulus on May 19 and near Spica on May 24. 🌌



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We value your readership and would love to know how best to avail the newsletter to you. If you have any preferences on how you would like to receive the Nature Net, kindly let us know. Send your feedback to: communication@naturekenya.org

Birding Updates

Wednesday Morning Birdwalks and the Sunday Birdwatch remain suspended. We hope you continue to enjoy the birds in your local area and send your records to:

Kenya Bird Map <<http://kenya.birdmap.africa/>>
If you have questions re KBM, write to
<kenyabirdmap@naturekenya.org>

The **Global Big Day** of bird-watching is 8 May 2021. If you would like to take part, please send your name, contacts and location to birds@naturekenya.org or phone 0780-149200 BEFORE 5 May.

The **World Migratory Bird Day** is celebrated on the same date, 8 May 2021. In Kenya, however, most migrants from the North are already winging their way home. Migrants from the South are arriving at the Coast. And when it becomes cold, some birds may make an altitudinal migration, moving from the highlands to such places as Nairobi.

Regarding **Bird Ringing at Nairobi National Museum** grounds, confirm with Titus Imboma <Imbomati911@gmail.com> Phone 0721-649452

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

Stay updated with the birding scene in Kenya by signing in to the new **KenyaBirdsnet** platform on Google Groups at: <https://groups.google.com/d/forum/kenyabirdsnet>

After signing in you will be able to post your records through the following email address:
kenyabirdsnet@googlegroups.com

Online birding:

- Wings Over Kenya Facebook page
- Ndege Wetu (blog series on the birds of Kenya) <<http://www.shotsbyshema.com/category/ndege-wetu/>>
- "The Safari Naturalist" on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCajjLtyL9G6mJ20Ajw1RLxA>
- "The Safari Naturalist" blog website: <https://www.thesafarinaturalist.com/virtual-birding-tours/>
- BirdLife International and eBird



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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