



A section of Yala Swamp with papyrus. PHOTO: JOHN MWACHARO

We say NO to Yala Swamp allocation to private developer

Yala Swamp faces an imminent danger: the National Land Commission's (NLC) intended allocation of a large portion of the swamp to a private developer. In a public notice published recently, NLC seeks to issue 6,763.74 ha of Yala Swamp to Lake Agro Ltd. The company plans to operationalize large-scale agricultural activities on the land.

Located on the northeastern shore of Lake Victoria, Yala Swamp is the largest papyrus wetland in Kenya and is crucial to the survival of Lake Victoria. The swamp acts as a filter for rivers flowing into the lake, trapping silt and agrochemicals.

Lakes found within the swamp shelter two endangered Cichlid fish that are extinct in Lake Victoria. The swamp is one of the few refuges of the Sitatunga, a rare swamp-dwelling antelope, in Kenya. Large flocks of wetland birds, and globally threatened bird species restricted to papyrus swamps, inhabit the wetland. The swamp is a Key Biodiversity Area (KBA) and an Important Bird Area (IBA).

Around 250,000 people residing close to Yala Swamp rely on it for vital resources such as fresh water, fish, cultivated crops, fuelwood, livestock fodder, construction materials and natural medicines.

The proposed allocation by NLC will compromise the wetland's ability to provide essential ecosystem services and threatens its biodiversity. The move also puts at risk community livelihoods and can be termed as a violation of human rights.

Over the years, Nature Kenya, in collaboration with partners including the national government, the County Governments of Siaya and Busia, non-

government organizations and local communities (through the Yala Ecosystem Site Support Group), has been working to put Yala Swamp on a sustainable footing. These efforts culminated in the formulation of the Yala Delta Land Use Plan (LUP) in 2019. The Yala Delta LUP is a framework guiding the management of land and natural resources within a model that optimizes both conservation and development. The LUP's development was informed by a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA).

NLC's action undermines Yala Swamp conservation efforts. The allocation to Lake Agro Ltd disregards the Yala Delta LUP policies and proposals. For instance, the LUP recommends the establishment of an 8,404 ha Indigenous and Community Conservation Area (ICCA) at the heart of the swamp, constituting natural areas surrounded by mixed cultivated areas. The NLC allocation includes areas set aside for the ICCA by the LUP.

The allocation violates the land ownership rights of indigenous communities and compromises their livelihoods. No Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) was conducted for the project as required by law.

Nature Kenya is opposed to the move by NLC. The envisaged conversion of Yala Swamp spells doom for biodiversity conservation. Its long-term ecological, economic and social repercussions are devastating and outweigh any perceived gains. Investment should not come at the cost of the well-being of the country's important habitats. In the end, economic development and food security are dependent on the ecological services provided by a healthy environment.

We call on all members to join us in rejecting the Yala Swamp allocation by signing and widely sharing our online petition: <https://bit.ly/3beRngg>. Together we can protect Yala Swamp and secure its sustainable future.

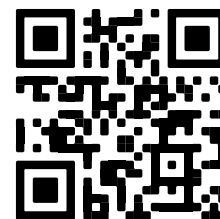
HELP US RECRUIT MORE MEMBERS

Our conservation work is dependent on your support and that of other members, and having more members means more impact.

Help us grow our membership - invite your friends, peers and colleagues to become Nature Kenya members.

Help us spread the word

SCAN THE QR CODE, DOWNLOAD & SHARE our membership flyer with family and friends



Cautiously relaxing Covid 19 rules

Covid-19 is still a threat. The positivity rate has been coming down in October, but the vaccination rate is still low, and new variants are emerging. Politics have confused everyone. We are cautiously relaxing our own Covid rules. In November 2021:

1. Wednesday Morning Birdwalks and Third Sunday Bird walks will resume fully. Participants will meet at the venue. No loaning of binoculars, no sharing of binoculars and guidebooks and no pooled transport. Please do not ask for lifts. Masks are a must and you may carry your own sanitizer. See back page for details.
2. Members talks continue virtually.
3. The Nature Kenya Sales and Membership office will be open to members on weekdays, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Please wear masks, sanitize and keep social distance.
4. 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 any time between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m.
5. Members will continue to receive an electronic version of the Nature Net. A hard copy Nature Net can be posted or collected from the office by request to nkmembership@naturekenya.org or telephone 0726 134029.
6. The Nature Kenya conservation office remains closed. Physical conservation meetings in Nairobi and other Covid hotspots to be avoided unless absolutely critical.
7. The EANHS/NMK Library is open to the public. 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



Ngulia Bird Ringing 2021

Every year since 1969, bird ringers from Europe and Kenya meet at Ngulia Safari Lodge in Tsavo West National Park to participate in the ringling of Palearctic migratory songbirds. These are birds who breed in Europe and Asia and migrate to spend the winter in Africa. Most of these birds fly south at night, passing over Tsavo in November and December. On dark, misty nights, the migrating songbirds become disoriented and land in the bush around the lights of the lodge.

This is a rare occasion in bird migratory phenomena in the world. The birds are gently

caught, carried in cloth bags, identified, measured, and fitted with a light metal ring on one leg. Then they are released to continue their journey. A total of 597,694 Palearctic migratory birds of 72 species and 15,570 individuals of Afrotropical birds of 234 species have been ringed in the last 51 years (1969-2020) at the site.

Last year (2020) 10,666 Palearctic migrants of 32 species and 588 Afrotropical birds of 75 species were captured and ringed. With so many birds, it was a challenge for the local Kenyan team to take the lead, since the ringers from Europe could not participate due to travel restrictions because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Plans for the 2021 ringling are on; it will be a two-week session commencing on 30th November and ending on 10th December 2021. The Kenyan team is expected to carry out the event, since international travel is still difficult. Nature Kenya members are welcome to book a stay at Ngulia Lodge during that time and observe the ringling. You may also volunteer to "scribe" (write the notes) for the ringers. It is a rare opportunity to see many species and big numbers of Palearctic songbirds in ringers' hands both day and night.

For more information or to sign up, please contact <nguliabirdmigration@gmail.com> or Dr. Titus Imboma <imbomati911@gmail.com>.

Coca-Cola support boosts Hombe forest restoration

BY MARTIN KIAMA AND GLORIA WASWA

Coca-Cola Beverages Africa-Kenya (CCBA-K) supported Hombe Community Forest Association (CFA) members to plant 15,000 trees in Mt. Kenya forest, facilitated by Nature Kenya. Early this year, Nature Kenya and CCBA-K signed a three-year memorandum of understanding (MoU) to implement socio-economic investment programs in environmental conservation in Kenya. The MoU, geared towards CCBA-K's sustainability agenda, targets forest reforestation programs in Kenya's catchment areas.

Planting took place during the April rains season. The Hombe restoration site includes a swamp on the verge of drying up. It is hoped that the newly planted trees will resuscitate this wetland as they mature.

Hombe CFA has a membership of about 1,900 individuals drawn from the neighbouring community. Most members engage in tree seedling production as their main source

of income. The CCBA-K support has helped to improve the livelihoods of Hombe CFA members through the sale of 15,000 tree seedlings.

"The support from Coca-Cola Beverages Africa-Kenya has helped me pay for rent and other basic family needs like food, particularly during this difficult Covid-19 period," says Gladys Wangu, a member of Hombe CFA.

"I am grateful to the management of Coca-Cola Beverages Africa-Kenya and Nature Kenya for their support towards restoration of our forest. I appeal to others to also join us in making Hombe and the larger Mt. Kenya forest regain its original state," says Wilson Thige, the chairperson of Hombe CFA.

Mt Kenya forest is home to rich flora and fauna. Among the species it hosts is the Critically Endangered Mountain Bongo and Kenya Jewel Damselfly, and the vulnerable Abbott's Starling. 🐦

For updates visit
www.naturekenya.org

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NATURE BUZZ



Part of the October Big Day action at Michuki Memorial Park, Nairobi. PHOTO BY JOHN MWACHARO

A world united by birds!

BY RICHARD KIPNG'ENO

Global Big Days of birding are a 24-hour opportunity to celebrate birds near and far. On October 9th nearly 33,000 birders around the world took part in the 2021 October Big Day. Participants were drawn from 195 countries and reported 7,269 species, making the day the biggest ever in birding history!

This year's global team consisted of more than 800 eBirders from Africa, 2,000 from Asia, 2,500 from Europe, and 5,300 from Central and South America. These tremendous efforts showcase the power of birds to bring people together.

Kenya was ranked in position 7th globally with 791 bird species recorded on the day. The top country was Colombia (1,347 birds), followed by Peru (1,223), Ecuador (1,100), Brazil (1,082), Bolivia (817) and India (793). A total of 368 checklists were submitted from Kenya. 📍



SPOTTED AT MICHUKI MEMORIAL PARK DURING OCTOBER BIG DAY
Yellow-billed Stork and Egyptian Geese (top left), Black Crake (top right), Augur Buzzard and Brown-backed Woodpecker. ALL PHOTOS BY JOHN MWACHARO

Bright planets in the evening sky

BY FLEUR NG'WENO

Brilliant Venus, golden Saturn and bright Jupiter seem to draw closer together in the evening sky this month. Venus is high in the west, Jupiter higher in the south, and Saturn between them, nearer to Jupiter. The crescent moon is near Venus on November 7 and 8, near Saturn on the 10th and near Jupiter on the 11th.

In mid-November, Venus will seem close to the star Nunki, part of the "teapot" or "basket" shape in the constellation Sagittarius.

At dawn in early November, Mercury and Mars – quite faint now – are low over the sunrise. They pass each other around Nov 10, and Mars rises into the pre-dawn sky.

Moon Nov 2021

The new moon on 4 November marks the Hindu festival of lights, Diwali. Look for the slender crescent moon near the red star Antares on the 6th. Nov 11, First quarter (half-lit moon at sunset). Nov 19, Full moon, rising in the east. Nov 27, Last quarter (half-lit moon at sunrise).

November stars

The bright star Fomalhaut is high in the south, below Jupiter. The very bright star Achernar is below Fomalhaut. Below Achernar on a clear, dark night, you may see two rounded, pale, cloud-like areas: the Small and Large Magellanic Clouds. These are small galaxies, composed of millions of stars.

High overhead, four stars form the corners of the Great Square of Pegasus, the flying horse of the ancient Greeks. Low in the northeast, the constellation Cassiopeia is a group of bright stars in the shape of a letter "M". Look for a hazy, blurry spot of light between these two constellations. This is the Great Spiral Nebula M31 in the constellation of Andromeda – also a galaxy of stars.

The Pleiades or Seven Sisters – a cluster of bright stars close together – are rising in the east. Below the Pleiades, a group of stars form a cone-like shape, the Hyades cluster, in the constellation of Taurus the Bull. The bright, reddish star Aldebaran is at one end of the cone. The full moon is near the Pleiades on Nov 19.

Morning Sky

Sirius, the brightest star we can see at night, is high in the southwest, almost overhead, at dawn. Canopus, the second brightest star, is below, in the south. The constellation Orion is high in the west. Sirius – the Dog Star, Procyon – the Little Dog, further east, and bright Rigel in Orion, seem to form a big triangle high in the sky. 📍

Birding Updates

Wednesday Morning Birdwalks and **Sunday Birdwatch** are on! In November, participants will meet at the designated venue. 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 3rd November, 2021 – Museum Grounds/Michuki Memorial Park. Meet at 8 am in the open space in front of the entrance to the museum galleries, near the Fisheries gate.

Wednesday 10th November, 2021 – Museum Grounds/Michuki Memorial Park. Meet at 8 am in the open space in front of the entrance to the museum galleries, near the Fisheries gate.

Wednesday 17th November, 2021 – 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 24th November, 2021 – Museum Grounds/Michuki Memorial Park. Meet at 8 am in the open space in front of the entrance to the museum galleries, near the Fisheries gate.

November 21st **Sunday Bird Watch – Kakuzi.** Meet at the Kakuzi Main Entrance, at 8:30am. The main entrance is in Makuyu a few kilometres past Kenol. 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.

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

Bird Ringing at Nairobi National Museum grounds usually takes place on Tuesday mornings. Ringing in Karen may be arranged on November 19th. Please 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

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 on Google Groups at: <https://groups.google.com/d/forum/kenyabirdsnet>

After signing in you will be able to post your records at: 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/>
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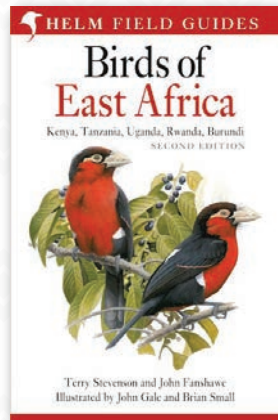
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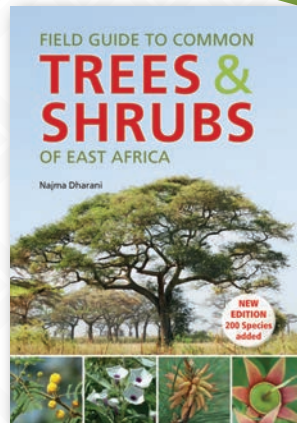
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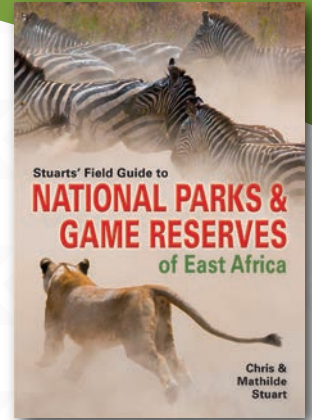
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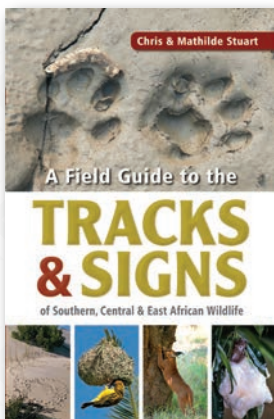
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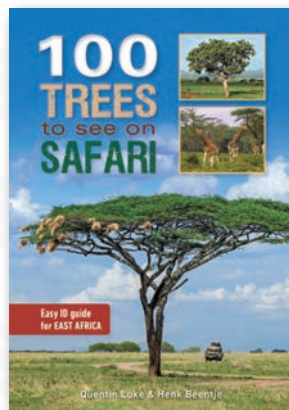
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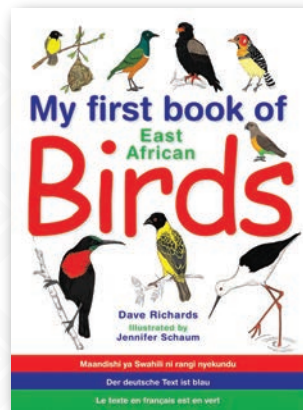
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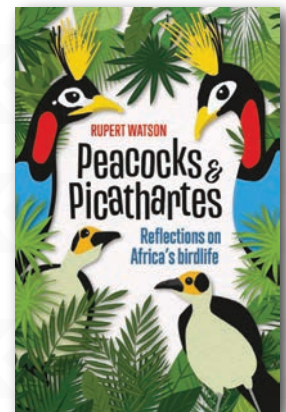
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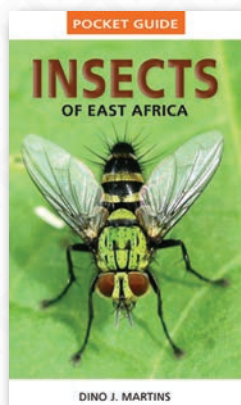
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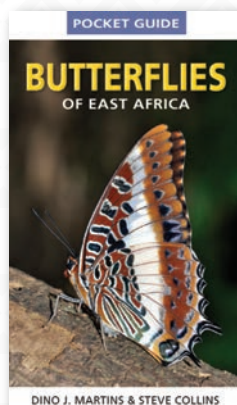
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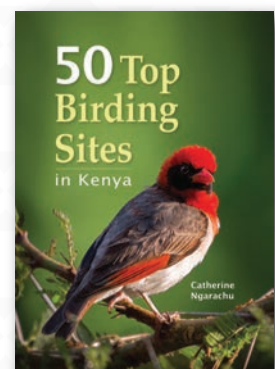
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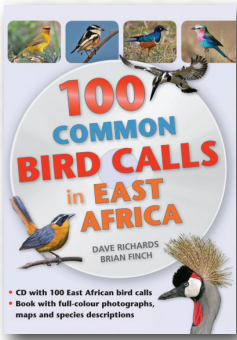
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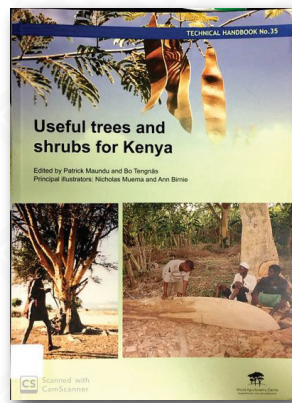
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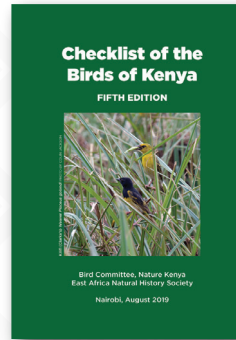
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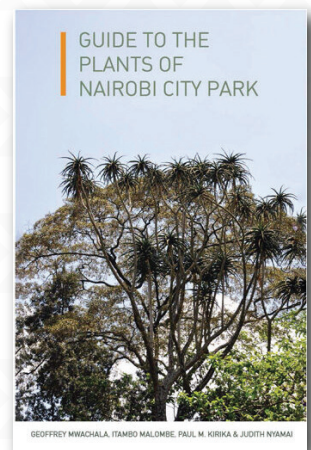
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