



Kipini CFA Chairperson, Islam Abdulla (left), receives a copy of the Forest Management Agreement from Beatrice Mbula, the Deputy Chief Conservator of Forests. Photo by Hassan Golo

Communities embrace Participatory Forest Management (PFM) in Tana River Delta

By Milka Musyoka

In the heart of the Tana River Delta lie lush expanses of terrestrial and mangrove forests. These forests are treasure troves of biodiversity and are a source of sustenance for the local communities. Over the years, these vital landscapes have undergone massive degradation, resulting in habitat and biodiversity loss. In response to the forest degradation threat, communities in Mpozi, Chara, Kilelengwani and Kipini in the Delta are embracing participatory forest management (PFM). The PFM entails the legal transfer of forest resources (use rights) from the Kenya Forest Service (KFS) to community forest associations (CFAs). This transfer is enabled by, and dependent upon a negotiated and documented Forest Management Agreement (FMA).

The PFM process is not just a bureaucratic procedure but a collaborative effort that places the destiny of the forests in the hands of those who call it home. Community members actively involved in this transformative process have witnessed firsthand the positive impact it has on their well-being.

"The journey began with a series of community consultations and workshops where the diverse voices of the forest-adjacent residents were heard. This inclusive approach ensured that the PFM process truly reflects the aspirations and concerns of our community," says Said Nyara, the chairperson of Mpozi CFA.

Through lively discussions and shared insights, the communities collectively identified the unique ecological features of their forests, acknowledged the resources they offer, and resolved to address the challenges they face, adds Nyara.

Nature Kenya, in collaboration with Kenya Forest Service (KFS) and Kenya Forest Research Institute (KEFRI), organised training workshops for the communities to equip them with the requisite knowledge and skills for effective forest management.

"These training sessions have empowered us with the necessary skills to manage and conserve our forests. From gaining insights into sustainable harvesting practices to developing the ability to identify signs of ecosystem distress, my community is

steadily growing more proficient in its role as guardians of Ozi forest," says Nyara.

In October 2023, Mpozi, Chara, Kilelengwani and Kipini CFAs signed forest management agreements with KFS. The signing event took place in Chara and marked a transformative move toward locally-led initiatives for sustainable forest conservation and management. This shift is crucial for mitigating climate change impacts on local communities. It also holds the potential to improve living standards through the sustainable use of forest resources such as firewood. The PFM process extends beyond environmental concerns, signalling a devolved approach that empowers local communities to plan, seek financing and implement sustainable development livelihood options.

"Signing these agreements is a strong affirmation of our dedication to conserving forests in recognition of the fact that their health is inseparable from the well-being of our communities," says Nyara.

The four CFAs have also developed PFM plans to guide their engagements. As an ongoing process, the PFM plans are envisaged to adapt and respond to the changing community and forest needs. Through continued collaboration, monitoring, and adaptation, the process will contribute to the resilience and vitality of the forest.

Nature Kenya supported the development of the PFM plans by helping to mediate potential internal conflicts that could have hindered their implementation. The collaborative effort between the communities, county and national government agencies, and conservation organizations is a testament to the positive outcomes that can emerge when stakeholders unite for a common cause. The journey towards sustainable forest management in the Tana River Delta is a beacon of hope, demonstrating the potential for harmony between human development and environmental preservation. 🌱



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KBA in focus - Dunga Swamp

By Joshua Sese



Dunga beach, Kisumu. Photo NK Archives

Located about 10 km south of Kisumu City on the shores of Winam Gulf, Lake Victoria, is the Dunga Swamp Key Biodiversity Area (KBA). The KBA is at the mouth of River Nyamasaria, traversing through the extensive and populated Kisumu city. As the water trickles into the lake, the swamp filters it, regulating pollution. The swamp is an important fish breeding ground, and a favourite fishing spot for fishermen.

The KBA is a carbon sink and a significant habitat for rare species such as the nationally threatened Sitatunga antelope (*Tragelaphus spekii*) and the Vulnerable bird Papyrus Yellow Warbler (*Calamonastides gracilirostris*). Papyrus reeds dominate the swamp. Local communities use papyrus to make baskets, mats, brooms and to thatch houses. Given its proximity to the city center, the KBA is an ideal tourist destination.

The KBA faces many threats. These include pollution (disposal of solid waste and sewerage from surrounding estates), unregulated tourism activities, over-harvesting of papyrus and encroachment for farming and settlement. Infestation of water hyacinth due to eutrophication in the swamp has rendered some areas impassable by boat, affecting the fishermen's livelihood. Affected fishermen have opted for alternative livelihood methods such as papyrus harvesting and farming. The KBA currently has no official protection, making the Sitatunga and other animals dependant on the papyrus swamp habitat more vulnerable to illegal hunting.

Friends of Dunga Swamp Site Support Group (SSG), a local community group, is at the forefront of ensuring that the swamp is valued and conserved. The group regularly conducts bird and biodiversity monitoring, restores degraded swamp areas by planting papyrus and runs conservation awareness creation activities. Friends of Dunga Swamp SSG owns and manages a boardwalk – a raised walkway that stretches over the swamp. Tourists visiting the wetland can observe its beauty and mystery and embrace nature through the boardwalk. The group also actively participates in international environmental days such as World Wetland Day, World Environment Day, and World Migratory Bird Days, among others. 🐦

Site Support Groups mark 2023 National Tree Planting Day

By David Odhiambo

Through the *Jaza Miti* presidential campaign, Kenya plans to plant more than 15 billion trees by 2032. The initiative encourages citizens to actively participate in tree growing to meet the 15 billion trees target. This ambitious bid is also an effort to restore Kenya's degraded forests and increase tree cover from 8.83 per cent to above 10 per cent by 2032 to mitigate the effects of climate change.

Following the declaration of 13th November 2023 as a National Tree Planting Day, President William Ruto was at the Kiu catchment area in Makindu, Makueni County, where the Chyulu Site Support Group and other organizations hosted the national tree growing event. More than 100,000 tree seedlings of different species were planted.

Community members from 26 Site Support Groups

(SSGs) for the the following Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) collaborated with relevant County Governments and national government agencies to plant over 155,344 trees to mark the day: Mutitu Hill forest, Lake Elmenteita, South Nandi Forest, Mida Creek, Dunga Swamp, Tana River Delta, North Nandi Forest, Ruma National Park, Sabaki River Estuary, Kakamega Forest, Lake Ol' Bolossat, Lake Bogoria, Dakatcha Woodland, Mukurwe-ini valley, Kikuyu Escarpment, Kinangop Plateau, Busia grasslands, Mumoni Hill forest, Mt. Kenya Forest, Arabuko-Sokoke Forest, Yala Swamp and Taita Hills forests (see photos).

While celebrating the achievement of the National Tree Planting Day, we need to remember that protecting existing forests is the most important for biodiversity, the climate and our future. 🌳



Tree planting at the Kipsirwo catchment, South Nandi.

For updates visit
www.naturekenya.org

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Mangrove planting at Mida Creek.



Tree planting at Lake Bogoria National Reserve.



Tree planting at the Nyahururu KWS Station.

Stars behind the clouds

By Fleur Ng'weno

December stars

When rain clouds allow us to see, December skies are full of bright stars. The constellation of Orion rises due east on December evenings, climbing higher each night. Look for three bright stars in a row, with four bright stars like a box around them. To the ancient Greeks, this was a hunter or warrior striding across the sky.

Imagine the highest, brightest star of this constellation, blue-green Rigel, as Orion's knee, and the orange star Betelgeuse as Orion's shoulder. Betelgeuse will be in the news on 12 December when an asteroid (a rock in space) passes between it and the Earth, briefly blocking its light. We won't see the occultation from here, but astronomers hope to learn about the star from the unusual event.

North (left) of Orion, the stars of the Hyades cluster form a shape like the letter V. The reddish star Aldebaran is at the open end of the "V". Further north, several bright stars are grouped close together – the Pleiades or Seven Sisters of Greek myths. With binoculars, you can see more stars and a glowing blue haze. The waxing gibbous moon is near the Pleiades on December 23 and 24.

As the year ends, Sirius, the brightest star we can see at night, rises southeast of Orion. Canopus, the second brightest star, appears further to the south. The star Fomalhaut is high in the southwest, and below Fomalhaut the bright star Achernar is still prominent in the south.

Planets Dec '23

Jupiter is the bright light high in the east in the evening; it seems

to travel west with the stars, setting before dawn. Golden Saturn, like a bright star but with a steady light, is in the west, setting before midnight. The moon appears near Saturn on 17 December, near Jupiter on the 22nd.

In the first half of December, bright little Mercury is low in the western sky, above the sunset. On 14 December, the thin new crescent moon appears near Mercury and the star Nunki in the basket-shaped part of the constellation Sagittarius. Mercury sinks below the horizon and reappears in the predawn sky at month's end, together with the reddish planet Mars.

Venus is the bright light in the east before dawn. The moon is near Venus on December 9.

Geminids Meteor Shower

In mid-December, the Earth travels through an area of dust and rocks in space. Some of these particles may fall into the earth's atmosphere and burn up. We call them meteors or "shooting stars" (although they are not stars). Look for the Geminids meteor shower on a dark, clear night between midnight and dawn from Dec 7 to 17, peaking on the 14th (after midnight on the 13th).

Month Dec 2023

Dec 5 – last quarter. Dec 12 – new moon. Dec 19 – first quarter. Dec 27 – full moon.

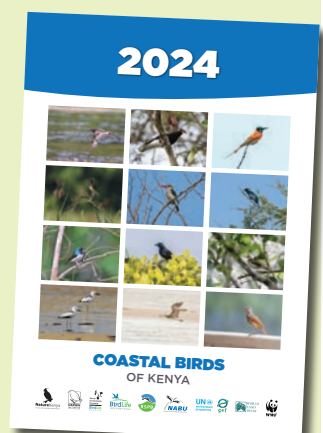
Sun Dec 2023

The December solstice, when the earth tilts towards the sun in the south, is on the 22nd. Here on the equator the days remain the same length, but sunrise and sunset come later (according to the clock) until February. 🌞

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Birding Updates

Wednesday Morning Birdwalks 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.

6th December – Museum Grounds/ Michuki Memorial Park. Meet at 8:00 am in the open space in front of the entrance to the museum galleries.

13th December – 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 after overpass and drive straight to the Information Centre. Ondiri Swamp is the only quaking bog in Kenya, a presumed source of the Nairobi River.

20th December – 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.

Note: There will not be an organized birdwalk on 27 December

17th December. Sunday Bird Watch – Migaa Golf Club. Meet at 8:30 am at the Main Entrance. Directions: Coming from the city centre, take Kiambu Road towards Kiambu town. Turn right onto Kiambu-Kamiti Road before Kiambu town. At Kirigiti round about, drive straight onto Riabai Road and continue for about 7kms. Turn left towards ArkLight International School. The Golf Club is on the right, next to the school.

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

The Annual Waterbird Counts will be held in January-February. Sites in and near Nairobi will be counted with the Wednesday birdwalks. Counts on the Rift Valley (and Nyandarua) lakes have been tentatively scheduled as follows:

Tentative January 2024 Waterbird Counts on the Rift Valley lakes:

Lake Ol'Bolessat January 5 and 6
Lakes Bogoria and Baringo, January 12, 13 and 14.
Lakes Naivasha, Sonachi, and Oloidien, January 26 and 27.
Lakes Elmenteita, Nakuru and Solai February 9, 10 and 11
Lake Magadi February 23-24

Experienced counters and those who can provide 4x4 transport are needed and welcome. Please sign up with Nature Kenya or the Ornithology Section of the National Museums **before 15 December 2023.**

Thursday Birdwalks in Malindi

Please Note that the Saturday Bird walk will be on 23rd December (fourth Saturday) and not on the last weekend as normal.

7th December – Mayungu. Meet at 4:00 pm at the Malindi Museum near Nature Kenya Membership Office

14th December – Malindi Harbor. Meet at 4:00 pm at the Malindi Museum near Nature Kenya Membership Office

21st December – Mtangani via Afya Hospital. Meet at 4:00 pm at the Malindi Museum near Nature Kenya Membership Office

Note: There will not be an organized birdwalk on 28 December

23rd December. Saturday Bird Watch – Gedi Ruins. Meet at 6:30 am at Gedi Monument Gate. The bird walk is likely to end after 3 hours (Bring drinking water).

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



Variable Sunbird seen at Kakuzi. Photo by Simon Odhiambo

Office Closure Notice

The Nature Kenya office will close for the festive season at 5 p.m. on 22nd December 2023 and reopens at 8 a.m. on 3rd January 2024.

Happy Holidays
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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

Share the joy of **giving to Nature** this festive season



Support our '**Lungs for Kenya**' charity golf tournament by **sponsoring, donating auction or raffle items or registering to play**. Proceeds from this tournament will support restoration of degraded forest landscapes in Mt. Kenya and the Aberdares.

To be part of this initiative or get more details, kindly get in touch with Angela by email: nkmembership@naturekenya.org or call **0739200216**.

Renew your membership or gift someone with Nature Kenya **annual membership**.

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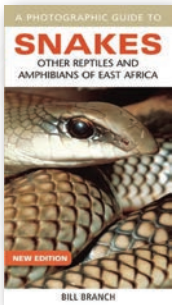


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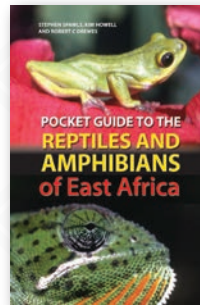
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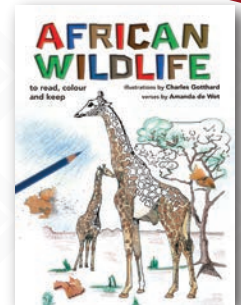
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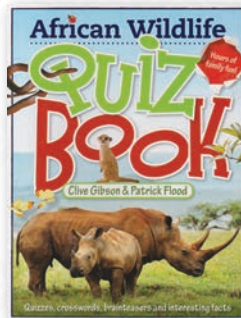
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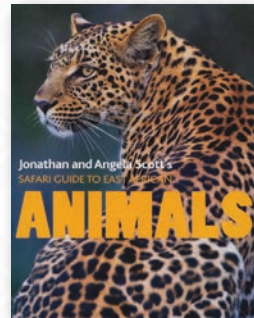
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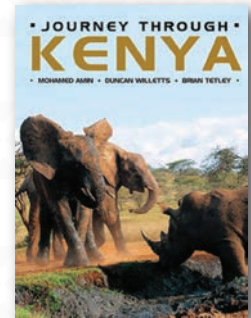
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For any inquiries kindly call 0739 200216 or send an email to office@naturekenya.org