



Members of the Mt. Kenya Biodiversity Conservation Group (Mt. KEBIO) participating in one of their past monthly bird walks at Kabunda dam. Abbott's Starling (inset). Photos courtesy of Mt. KEBIO

Promoting conservation in Mount Kenya Forest through nature-based enterprises

■ By Martin Kiama

Mount Kenya - a Key Biodiversity Area (KBA) - is in the limelight for several reasons, from being the second-highest volcanic mountain in Africa to being a World Heritage Site, a major catchment feeding the Tana and Ewaso Ngiro basins and a tourist destination attracting about 20,000 local and international visitors annually.

The mountain's unique montane forest offers a range of essential ecosystem services valued at US\$220 annually. These include the provision of water, energy, food, medicines, timber and habitat for biodiversity. Mount Kenya Forest helps to conserve soil fertility, regulate the climate and store carbon dioxide. The forest also provides livelihoods to adjacent communities.

One of the many community groups reaping ecosystem benefits from Mount Kenya Forest is the Mt. Kenya Biodiversity Conservation Group (Mt. KEBIO). Mt.

KEBIO, the Site Support Group (SSG) for the Mount Kenya Forest KBA, is engaged in eco-tourism and other nature-based enterprises. The group organises hikes to the forest and bird-watching excursions. Thirteen of its members are professional tour guides trained in mountain climbing, map navigation, first aid and rescue, and ornithology, among other skills. Local and international tourists make up Mt. KEBIO's eco-tourism clients. Neighbouring hospitality facilities like the Mountain Rock Hotel also contract the group for tour guiding and birding services.

In 2023, Mt. KEBIO held 12 monthly bird walks in different forest and wetlands habitats within Mount Kenya. The group participated in the May and October Global Big Days, conducted two Abbott's Starling monitoring surveys at Castle Forest and two biodiversity assessments.

Mt. KEBIO also operates three tree nurseries, namely Tumaini, Mazingira and Gathiuru,

that currently have 11,400 indigenous and exotic tree seedlings. Last year, the SSG distributed 7,400 tree seedlings to schools, churches and community members. The SSG collaborated with other conservation groups to support restoration of Nanyuki River through the planting of indigenous trees and construction of gabions to control degradation of the river banks. So far, 1200 trees have been planted and six gabions constructed through an initiative dubbed 'A Tree for My River'.

To ensure the sustainability of the ecosystem benefits, the group conducts awareness creation activities to promote environmental conservation knowledge in Mount Kenya, reaching 240 pupils from local primary schools. The group also hosted several conservation clubs from institutions, including Thika Technical Training Institute and Red Cross members from Laikipia County. 🌱





LUNGS FOR KENYA

14TH CHARITY GOLF TOURNAMENT

DATE: 15TH MARCH 2024 | VENUE: KAREN COUNTRY CLUB | TIME: 8:00 AM

PLATINUM SPONSOR: KSH. 1,000,000 | GOLD SPONSOR: KSH. 750,000

SILVER SPONSOR: KSH. 500,000 | BRONZE SPONSOR: KSH. 250,000 |

HOLE SPONSOR: KSH. 100,000 | INDIVIDUAL PLAYER: KSH. 2,500 (NK MEMBER), KSH. 3,000 (NON MEMBER) | TEAM ENTRY KSH. 12,000

To register contact Angela: nkmembership@naturekenya.org or telephone 0739200216

KBA in focus - Nairobi National Park

By Brian Otiego

Amidst the hustle and bustle of city life, about 7 km from the centre of Kenya's capital city, lies a unique gem, the Nairobi National Park Key Biodiversity Area (KBA). Tucked within the city's southern border, Nairobi National Park is separated from the busy Nairobi metropolis by an electric fence on the northern, western and eastern borders. The southern border of the park is open, marked by the Mbagathi River and serving as a gateway for wildlife dispersal to the Athi Kapiti plains that connect the park to the Amboseli ecosystem. The park is one of the world's most unique wildlife reserves due to its vicinity to a major urban centre. Local and international visitors have the opportunity to witness Africa's iconic wildlife against the backdrop of Nairobi's skyline.

The KBA stands right on the line between two great ecosystems: the forested hills that rise toward the Aberdare range, and the grasslands that stretch all the way to Kilimanjaro. The park's distinctive landscape, encompassing upland forest, open grasslands, rocky outcrops, acacia (now *Vachellia*) woodlands, dams and other wetland habitats host a remarkable array of biodiversity.

The park is a haven for a diverse range of wildlife species, featuring iconic large mammals such as lions, giraffes, zebras, buffaloes and rhinoceros. Rare plants bloom on rocky outcrops. Also found in this park are the charismatic but critically endangered obligate scavenging birds of prey: White-backed vultures (*Gyps africanus*) that breed inside the park, and Rüppell's and Lappet-faced vultures that visit to feed. Other resident raptor species are Martial, Tawny, Long-crested and Crowned eagles,

Bateleur, and Secretarybird, among some 500 other bird species.

Nairobi National Park faces several conservation challenges, primarily stemming from its proximity to the capital. Nairobi City is at the epicentre of rapid infrastructural development. Human-wildlife conflict, land use changes and associated fragmentation, pollution from liquid and solid wastes and degradation and loss of wildlife corridors and dispersal areas are key, escalating issues. Encroachment by the expanding city infrastructure have led to increased pressure on the park's boundaries, posing threats to its biodiversity.

Navigating the challenges of conservation and urbanization requires a multifaceted approach that brings together Kenya Wildlife Service in collaboration with civil society organizations in conservation, researchers, community members and key decision-makers to sustain the delicate balance between urban development and wildlife preservation.

One of the noteworthy elements of such engagement is a vulture study project funded by *The Rufford Foundation Small Grant*. The study aims to establish the breeding population of vulture species within Nairobi National Park and its dispersal habitats and to raise community awareness on the plight of vultures. Through such efforts, community engagement, and sustainable tourism practices, Nairobi National Park KBA stands as a beacon of success in the realm of urban conservation, offering a blueprint for other metropolitan areas facing similar challenges. 🐾

National Site Support Group Workshop Update

By David Odhiambo

Nature Kenya works with 30 Site Support Groups (SSGs) to implement biodiversity conservation actions in 27 Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) stretching from the coastal, eastern, and central to the Rift Valley and western regions of the country. Every year, Nature Kenya organizes a National SSG Workshop where representatives from these community groups meet to share their experiences and learn lessons and best practices for biodiversity conservation.

In 2023, the National SSG Workshop took place in December in Nairobi. Under the theme *Local Actions Safeguarding Nature and Livelihoods*, the workshop focused on how SSGs are undertaking conservation actions within their localities while improving the livelihoods of communities. Sixty representatives (18 women and 42 men) from 28 SSGs attended the workshop. The 4-day engagement saw the SSGs share their experiences in forest and landscape restoration, site monitoring, locally-led advocacy, participation in policy and legislation formulation and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) processes, promotion of green value chain and climate-smart production, leadership and governance, resource mobilization, communication and marketing.

The 28 SSGs represented at the workshop made presentations about their 2023 achievements and challenges. The SSGs also used the workshop to set conservation targets for their sites for the year 2024. 🐾



A group photo of Site Support Group (SSG) representatives and Nature Kenya staff taken during the National SSG Workshop in Nairobi. Photo by David Odhiambo

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Birds seen



Black-headed Gonoleks by Simon Odhiambo



Mountain Wagtail by Anthony Mokaya



White-bellied Go-away-bird by Kevin Maimba

January evening sky

By Fleur Ng'weno

The sky is filled with bright stars on clear January evenings. Look towards the east, with your back to the sunset. The brilliant planet Jupiter is almost overhead. Below Jupiter, can you see three bright stars in a row, with three less bright lights in a row at an angle to the right of the first three?

Look closely at the three fainter lights in a row: the middle one, a fuzzy, blurred light, is M42, the Orion Nebula. You can see it with the unaided eye on a clear, dark night, or with binoculars. The glow of M42 was considered the fire of creation by the Maya people of central America. According to NASA, "The Mayan culture's likening of the Orion Nebula to a cosmic fire of creation is very apt. The nebula is an enormous cloud of dust and gas where vast numbers of new stars are being forged."

To the ancient Greeks, the two sets of three stars were part of the constellation or star pattern of Orion the Hunter. The three bright stars in a row are Orion's belt, and the three less bright light are his sword, hanging from his belt. Four bright stars like the corners of a box form Orion's body.

Viewed from Greece, Orion seemed to walk across the sky, rising in the east and setting in the west. Actually, it is the Earth that spins towards the east. And to us near the equator, Orion seems to lie on his back as he rises in the east.

The Hunter is followed by his hunting dogs: Sirius, the brightest star we see at night, in the southeast, and Procyon in the east. Here near the equator, we can see the second brightest star, Canopus, low in the southeast. To the right of Canopus, the bright star Achernar is low in the southwest.

To the north of Orion there are constellations, or star

patterns, named by the ancient Greeks. The Pleiades cluster or "Seven Sisters" is high in the northeast. Between the Pleiades and Orion, the Hyades cluster forms a cone-like shape, the face of Taurus the Bull. Aldebaran, a bright, reddish star, the Bull's fiery eye, is at one end of the cone.

Further north, bright stars form a large pentagon, Auriga the Charioteer. At Auriga's northern end is the bright star Capella. Below Capella, low in the north, is the constellation Cassiopeia, shaped like the letter M. In the northeast, between Auriga and the dog Procyon, the constellation Gemini, the twins, is rising.

The waxing moon seems near the planet Saturn on 14 January and near Jupiter on the 18th. The moon, gibbous now, seems near the Pleiades on January 20 and very near the star Pollux in Gemini on the 24th. There are now several Apps available to help observers find the names of the stars in the night sky.

In the morning before dawn, the beautiful constellation of the Southern Cross is prominent, upright in the southern sky.

Planets, Jan '24

Beautiful, brilliant Venus is in the eastern sky on January mornings. Little Mercury is also in the east at dawn, rising higher and brighter until January 12. Mercury then sinks back towards the eastern horizon, passing the planet Mars at month's end. The waning crescent moon seems near Venus on January 8 and 9, near Mercury on the 10th.

Jupiter is the bright light overhead after sunset, setting around midnight, and Saturn is low in the west.

Moon, Jan '24

Last quarter – Jan 4. New moon – Jan 11. First quarter – Jan 18. Full moon – Jan 25.

Birding Updates

Wednesday Morning Birdwalks in Nairobi.

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

10th January – Manguo Pond, Limuru, with the African Waterbird Census. Meet at 8:30 am at Manguo Pond, off the upper Nairobi-Naivasha Road, just past the flyover to Limuru.

17th January – Dandora Sewage Works (Nairobi Oxygenation Ponds, Ruai), with the African Waterbird Census. Meet at 8:30 am at the main entrance to the Sewage Works/Oxygenation Ponds off Koma Rock Road in Ruai, Nairobi. Birding and counting likely to end at 2 or 3 pm. For more directions, please e-mail <news@naturekenya.org> Or WhatsApp 0738 682773 Or phone 0720 335819.

24th January – Paradise Lost with the waterbird counts. Meet at Paradise Lost Main Gate at 8:30 am. Directions: From city centre, 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.

31st January – Karen Blixen Museum. Meet at 8:30 am in the 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 1.5 Kms after Karen Country Club. If you have questions, please write < news@naturekenya.org> or phone 0780-149200.

January 21st Sunday Bird Watch – Thika Sewage Treatment Works with the waterbird counts. Meet at 8:30 am at the Sewage Works gate. Directions: Driving along Garissa Road, turn right at BAT. Turn left at the T-junction, turn right where the tarmac ends. Turn left at Full Gospel Church Sign post (Opposite P.C.E.A.), turn left at Kiganjo Primary School gate. Take the first right turn and drive ahead to the Sewage Works gate.

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

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.

If you are experienced in identifying and counting waterbirds and if you can meet the group at the site or provide a 4x4 for transport, please contact Irene Madindou at <ilhanmadindou@gmail.com> or phone 0701-028739.

Bird Ringing at Nairobi National Museum grounds usually takes place on Tuesday mornings. Please confirm with Titus Imboma <Imbomati911@gmail.com> Phone 0721-649452.

Malindi Birding Updates

4th January 2024 – Malindi Harbor. Meet at 4:00 pm at the Malindi Museum near Nature Kenya Membership Office.

11th January 2024 – Mayungu. Meet at 4:00 pm at the Malindi Museum near Nature Kenya Membership Office.

18th January 2024 – Mtangani via Afya Hospital. Meet at 4:00 pm at Malindi Museum Nature Kenya Membership Office.

25th January 2024 – Malindi Harbor. Meet at 4:00 pm at Malindi Museum near the Nature Kenya Membership office.

28th January. Saturday Birdwatch – The Hanging Gardens of Malindi. Meet at 6:30 am at Malindi Museum near Nature Kenya office. The bird walk is likely to end after 3 hours; bring drinking water.

For more information, email: <malindimembers@naturekenya.org > or phone 0725223042.

Coast January 2024 Waterbird Counts

If you would like to take part; if you are experienced in identifying and counting waterbirds; and if you can meet the group at the site or provide a vehicle for transport, please contact: Amina Simba <malindimembers@naturekenya.org > / 0725 223042 or Lennox Kirao <Lennox.kirao@arocha.org > / 0738 575431

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

Tree Walk By Nature Kenya Plants Committee

Venue: National Museums of Kenya

Meet at Nairobi Museum main gate

Date: Friday 26th Jan Time: 9:00 AM

Contact: 0780 149200 or 0726 006283



A male lion at the Nairobi National Park.
Photo by John Mwacharo

Yes! Start my NatureKenya membership

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Corporate Sponsor	500,000
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- Select 'Pay Bill'
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- Enter account number (put your **lapsed membership number or write new member**)
- Enter the amount, enter your PIN
- Confirm details & press OK

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