



A section of River Tana flowing through the Delta. Photo by Mustafa Adamjee

Wetlands and human wellbeing

By John Mwacharo

In Kenya, a country blessed with many natural wonders, wetlands play a crucial role in supporting biodiversity, sustaining livelihoods, and providing vital ecosystem services like filtering and storing water, controlling floods and erosion, sequestering carbon and supporting fisheries, among others. World Wetlands Day, celebrated on February 2nd each year, provides an opportunity to raise awareness about the importance of wetlands for our planet's health – and ours.

Wetlands are places where land and water meet and support characteristic biodiversity. They are important economically, ecologically and socially, yet Kenya's wetlands face numerous threats. These include unsustainable exploitation of wetland resources, encroachment and conversion, habitat destruction and climate change. Most of our wetlands are not under any form of state protection. Others are

seasonal, like the wetlands in Dakatcha Woodland (see page 3), and lie on private land.

The conversion and degradation of wetlands endangers biodiversity, disrupts essential ecosystem services, and poses risks to the livelihoods of local communities. Over the years, Nature Kenya has worked closely with various stakeholders to conserve some of the country's wetlands.

Tana River Delta

The Tana River Delta is Kenya's largest delta. It is a designated Key Biodiversity Area (KBA), a Ramsar site as a wetland of international importance, a Global Biodiversity Hotspot and a proposed World Heritage Site. The Delta supports immense biodiversity of global significance. Over 250,000 people practising crop farming, livestock rearing and fishing depend on it for their livelihoods due to its varied,

extensive and productive habitats. Tana River Delta, however, faces many threats, including over-exploitation of natural resources, poor land use practices, unregulated human settlement and unsustainable large-scale agricultural development.

Over the years, Nature Kenya has worked with local communities and other partners to conserve the Delta. In 2011, Nature Kenya led a collaborative effort by various stakeholders in the development of a Tana River Delta Land Use Plan (LUP) that was guided by a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). The process was concluded in 2015. The Land Use Plan has since been approved and adopted as a policy by the Lamu County government and is currently under implementation. Nature Kenya is also promoting the Indigenous and Community Conservation Areas (ICCAs) approach. Community Conservation Areas are biodiversity-rich sites partially or largely managed by local communities.

Yala Swamp

Yala Swamp is the largest inland freshwater wetland complex in the country, sheltering a great variety of birds, fish and mammals, including some threatened ones, and thus a KBA. Yala Swamp provides useful environmental services like filtering out harmful pollutants from water flowing into Lake Victoria. The swamp is also a source of livelihood for many communities.

Nature Kenya is working to reduce pressure on the swamp for natural resources by supporting community nature-based enterprises like climate-smart agriculture, fish farming, beekeeping and papyrus weaving. Nature Kenya is also working with like-minded organizations in advocating against the controversial allocation of half of Yala Swamp for sugarcane growing by the National Land Commission (NLC); and to push for the sustainable use of the swamp's resources to benefit local communities and biodiversity.

Contd. in pg. 2



LUNGS FOR KENYA

14TH CHARITY GOLF TOURNAMENT

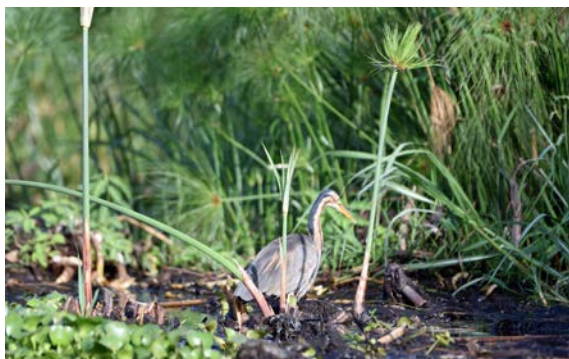
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To register contact Angela: nkmembership@naturekenya.org or telephone 0739200216

ACTION

Wetlands and human wellbeing **Contd.**



A Purple Heron in Yala Swamp. Photo by John Mwacharo

Sabaki River Mouth

The Sabaki River Mouth, where the Athi-Galana-Sabaki River meets the Indian Ocean, is a vital link between freshwater and marine ecosystems. It provides a critical habitat for migratory birds and supports a diverse range of marine life. The mangroves along the river mouth act as a nursery for juvenile fish, ensuring the sustainability of fisheries in the region. Despite its invaluable ecological and economic importance, Sabaki River Mouth KBA faces many threats, including sand harvesting, fishing with illegal gear, illegal mangrove pole harvesting, discharge of solid waste and effluent, encroachment and land grabbing.

Nature Kenya and other stakeholders are undertaking several conservation actions to safeguard the estuary. These include supporting the development of the River Sabaki Estuary Management Plan 2022-2032, led by the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) in collaboration with the Kilifi County Government and other stakeholders.

Nationwide, Nature Kenya is working with 11 site support groups (SSGs) in 11 KBAs to promote wetland conservation through site restoration, monitoring, advocacy, awareness creation and environmental education activities. 🐦



Sabaki River Mouth. Photo by Jeremy La Zelle

KBA in focus - Lake Bogoria

By Joshua Sese

Lying in the rugged and faulted terrain of the Rift Valley floor in Baringo County, is Lake Bogoria National Reserve, a narrow alkaline lake with a series of spectacular bubbling hot springs and boiling geysers. The lake is a designated Important Bird Area (IBA), being a vital feeding site for the near-threatened Lesser Flamingo (*Phoeniconaias minor*) and an important Kenyan site for the Black-necked Grebe (*Podiceps nigricollis*) and Cape Teal (*Anas capensis*), and therefore a Key Biodiversity Area (KBA). It is a Ramsar wetland of international importance designated in 2000 and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The site hosts several of Kenya's Somali-Maasai Biome bird species in the bushlands and woodlands around the lake.

Since 2019, Lake Bogoria has been hosting the highest number of Lesser Flamingoes recorded in the annual water bird counts. This is partly due to the rising water levels in all the Rift Valley lakes, turning many of them into freshwater lakes; Lake Bogoria has remained relatively alkaline. The Lesser Flamingo population in Kenya has been fluctuating dramatically in the last few years.

The reserve offers stunning landscapes with panoramic views of the lake, the surrounding hills, geothermal features, and wildlife such as Greater Kudu. It is a great destination for ornithologists, nature enthusiasts, and local and international tourists interested in birdwatching, photography, and enjoying the natural beauty of the Rift Valley. Rapid population growth in areas adjacent to the lake has led to increased pressure on the lake, however. Encroachment, abstraction of water from the catchment, invasive species such as *Prosopis spp.*, pollution, soil erosion,



A flooded section on the shores of Lake Bogoria, showing birds caught in thorny trees. Photo by C. Chebet

and climate change are among the leading threats to the existence of biodiversity in the lake and its environs.

Conservation of the outstanding value of this precious site needs a multi-sectoral approach involving the local community, county and national governments and civil society, among others. A local Site Support Group (SSG), Friends of Nature Bogoria, is at the forefront in spearheading the conservation agenda for the lake and its biodiversity. Friends of Nature Bogoria was formed in 1996 and was officially registered in 2003. It has been actively participating in the waterfowl census since 2002 and undertakes research on the Greater Kudu. Other activities include awareness creation through school outreach programs, beekeeping and professional tour guiding. 🐦

For updates visit

www.naturekenya.org

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Clarke's (Kilifi) Weavers nesting again in seasonal wetlands

By Fleur Ng'weno

In July we brought you the good news that Clarke's Weaver had been seen again after six months and a long drought. Flocks of males, females and juveniles were seen in Dakatcha Woodland in Magarini sub-county, Kilifi County (as this bird is found only in Kilifi County, we are beginning to call it Kilifi Weaver).

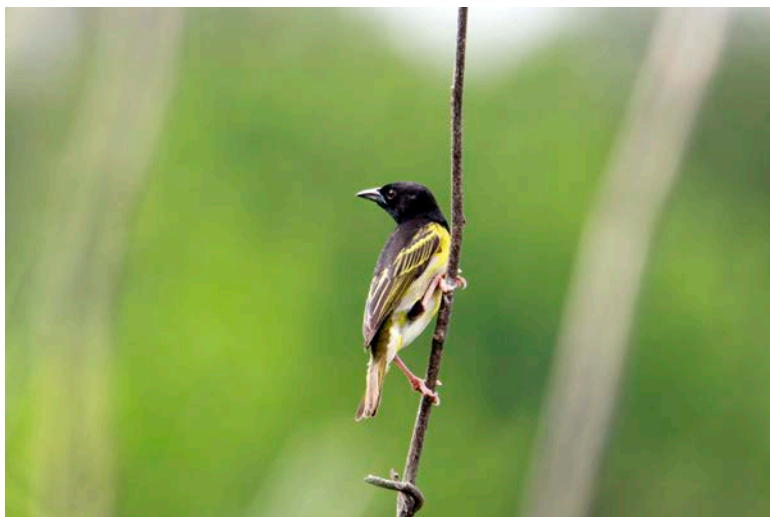
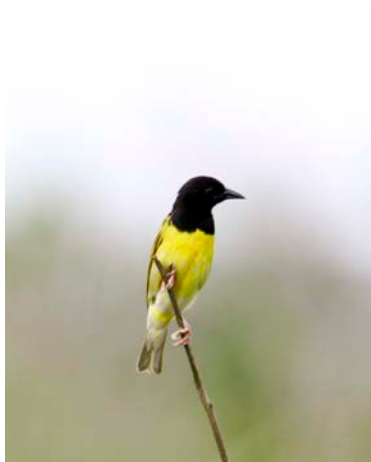
The good news this year is that Kilifi/Clarke's Weavers were breeding again in the seasonal wetlands of Dakatcha Woodland. It rained heavily in November and December, filling the seasonal wetlands, and sedges and water lilies grew rapidly. The weavers nested in Nature Kenya's Kamale Nature Reserve and a smaller wetland to the west, and small flocks were seen in the big Bore (Munyenzeni) wetland near Marafa.

Despite the successful breeding and regular monitoring, however, we still do not know the size of the Clarke's/Kilifi Weaver population. These Endangered birds are only known to nest in seasonal

wetlands – sites that fill with water and water plants during the rainy season. Because these wetlands become dry in the dry season, they are often overlooked and subject to demarcation for other uses. Yet seasonal wetlands play a critical role in the ecosystem – in this case, supporting a species threatened with extinction.

Clarke's/Kilifi Weavers are different from most other weavers in that they feed mostly on insects and small wild fruits. Parent birds could be seen bringing fat green caterpillars to feed their young. Their breeding cycle is also very rapid: the eggs hatch quickly, the young grow fast and soon fledge and fly – enabling them to make use of temporary, seasonal wetlands.

During January, Julio Mwambire and Maxwell Issa of Dakatcha Woodland Conservation Group took many birders to see the endangered birds at their nesting sites. In this issue we feature the beautiful photos of James Apolloh. 🐦



Photos by James Apolloh

Using Apps to find the stars

By Fleur Ng'weno

Most people in Kenya seem to have a smartphone, and there are now several Apps available to name the stars and planets we see in the night sky. For example, Star Walk and Sky Map. There are also many websites with good information, for example Sky & Telescope and EarthSky. So this column is going to phase down from next month to just a paragraph or two when there is something special to see.

Remember that the sky information in most websites is written for the Northern or Southern Hemispheres. For us on the equator, the position of the moon, planets and constellations may look different. For us, the path of the moon and planets is basically from east to west across the sky above us, with some variations each month.

Planets, Feb '24

Jupiter is bright, high in the west in the evening sky, setting before midnight. Saturn, much less bright, sinks below the western horizon at mid-month. The thin new crescent moon is near Saturn on Feb 10 and 11; waxing to half-lit, the moon is near Jupiter on the 15th and 16th.

In the predawn sky, Venus is brilliant low in the east. Faint, reddish Mars and small but bright Mercury are below Venus. The thin, waning crescent moon is near Venus and Mars on February 8. Mercury dips rapidly below the sunrise horizon, Venus sinks slowly, while Mars rises, passing Venus on the 23rd.

February stars

Sirius, the brightest star we see at night, is the bright light high in the southeastern sky on February evenings. Canopus, the second-brightest star, is low in the south.

On a clear night in a dark location, many more stars can be seen. The people who travel over wide open spaces, such as the desert or the sea, gave names to the stars. They imagined that some stars formed patterns in the sky, and also gave names these patterns, or constellations. Today in English, we mainly use the names given by ancient Greek and Arab astronomers.

The constellation that the ancient Greeks called Orion the Hunter, is high in the east on February evenings. Three bright stars in a row form Orion's belt, and three fainter stars in a row are his sword. Four bright stars mark Orion's shoulders and knees. A blue-green star, Rigel, marks one 'knee' in the west. An orange-coloured star, Betelgeuse, forms one 'shoulder' in the northeast. A group of fainter stars are Orion's head. With binoculars, you can see the glowing nebula M42 in Orion's belt.

Two 'hunting dogs' follow Orion in the sky. One is Sirius – that bright light in the southeast. The other dog, Procyon, is east of Orion. On the other side of Orion, in the northwest, is the reddish star Aldebaran. Beyond Aldebaran is a group of several stars close together – the Pleiades or Seven Sisters.

Further north, lower in the sky, five bright stars mark the corners of a pentagon shape. It is part of the constellation Auriga the Charioteer. The brightest of the five is the star Capella.

February Sun

This is the time of the latest sunrises and sunsets of the year, according to the clock. For most of February, the sun rises at 6:42 am and sets at 6:51 in Nairobi. 🌅

Birding Updates

Wednesday Morning Birdwalks in Nairobi.

7th February - Nairobi National Park/Lang'ata Wetlands with the waterbird counts. Meet at 8:30 am at the Nairobi National Park Main Gate, KWS headquarters, along Lang'ata Road. Thanks to KWS for welcoming the birdwalk. If you plan to attend, kindly send your name and contact (and vehicle number if you can bring one) to news@naturekenya.org or phone 0780- 149200.

Please also write or call the above if you can count Hillcrest/Sam Mburu Retreat Dam in Karen/Lang'ata during the same week.

14th February - Waterbird Counts at Ruiru. From city centre, take Thika road, get off at Eastern Bypass and drive back towards Nairobi on the service road. Meet at left turn labeled Northlands at 8:30 am. For more information, and if you plan to attend, kindly send your name and contact (and vehicle number if you can bring one) to news@naturekenya.org or phone 0780-149200.

21st February - 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.

28th February - Museum Grounds/Michuki Memorial Park. Meet at 8:00 am in the open space in front of the entrance to the museum galleries.

February 18th 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.

Tentative January 2024 Waterbird Counts on the Rift Valley lakes:

Lake Elmenteita February 10
Lake Nakuru February 11

Lake Naivasha February 17
Lake Magadi February 24

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 4x4 for transport, please contact Ireene 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

1st February 2024 - Mtangani. Meet at 4:00 pm at the Malindi Museum near Nature Kenya Membership Office.

8th February 2024 - Mayungu. Meet at 4:00 pm at the Malindi Museum near Nature Kenya Membership Office.

15th February 2024 - Mtangani via Afya Hospital. Meet at 4:00 pm at Malindi Museum near Nature Kenya Membership Office.

22nd February 2024 - Malindi Harbor. Meet at 4:00 pm at Malindi Museum near the Nature Kenya Membership office.

29th February 2024 - Buntwani. Meet at Malindi Museum near the Nature Kenya Membership Office

Saturday Bird Watch

24th February 2024 - Malindi Airport. Meet at 7:00 am at Malindi Airport Gate; this is a special invitation for the Bird walk, thanks to the Kenya Airports Authority, Malindi - Operations department and Wildlife Control section.

If you wish to attend, please send your name and identification card (ID/Passport number) to malindimembers@naturekenya.org before 22nd February, and please carry it with you on Saturday. The Birdwalk is likely to end after 3 hours.

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 <tthamzali@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 23rd Feb Time: 9:00 AM

Contact: 0780 149200 or 0726 006283

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Wetlands Day
2 February 2024
Wetlands and Human Wellbeing

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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