



Community members participate in one of the village focus group discussions organized by Nature Kenya in Maasai Mara to better understand their perceptions of wildlife conservation.

Managing Human-wildlife Conflict through community engagement

By Rebecca Ikachoi

Imagine waking up one morning to find your cattle killed by a lion, leopard or hyena, or worse, sustaining serious injuries while trying to protect your livestock from a predator attack. This is an everyday reality for the communities living in the Maasai Mara landscape. The frequency of these grievous occurrences begs the question: do human-wildlife conflicts (HWC) happen due to the community's inability to coexist peacefully with wildlife, or are the majestic carnivores partly to blame? More importantly, can we ever solve these conflicts or are our competing interests and needs too big for this challenge?

Traditional approaches to managing HWC, such as financial compensation, use of physical barriers, and translocation interventions, among others, have proven ineffective due to their focus on wildlife conservation while neglecting community needs. As a result, Nature Kenya is promoting alternative HWC management approaches that promote community

participation and engagement in wildlife conservation, aimed at fostering coexistence between people, livestock and wildlife.

In the Maasai Mara landscape, Nature Kenya, with support from the Darwin Initiative, is implementing a number of community-led initiatives, for instance, the livelihood improvement program. Local communities in Mara are highly dependent on livestock rearing. The high wildlife density makes them vulnerable to HWC, leading to significant loss of livelihoods. This informed the need to diversify livelihood options to minimize over-reliance on livestock rearing. The aim is to improve community livelihoods by encouraging safer onfield herding practices, improved household livestock protection and promoting sustainable nature-based enterprises like beekeeping.

Nature Kenya also holds community-led discussion forums (*barazas*) at the village level to explore and agree on feasible

solutions to managing HWC at the grassroots level. For instance, working with the communities, a guide on the best herding practices was developed. The guide is now being promoted across the landscape to reduce livestock predation incidents at the grazing fields.

The engagement of community volunteers is also pertinent to our conservation work as it enhances ecological awareness and knowledge, increasing understanding and support for conservation efforts. Community volunteers are involved in monitoring species, reporting poisoning incidents, helping with awareness-raising campaigns and recording vulture sightings, with data reported on a monthly basis. This data is essential as it guides conservation interventions within the landscape.

To better understand the needs of the communities and their perceptions of wildlife conservation, Nature Kenya recently conducted focus group discussions within selected villages across the landscape. We conducted this exercise to gauge community attitudes towards wildlife conservation, track changes in community attitudes towards wildlife poisoning and measure the adoption of previously proposed HWC mitigation interventions. The discussions, which involved men, women and youth, provide refreshingly positive feedback that engaging communities in wildlife conservation, and providing opportunities for participation in wildlife conservation through programs such as the community volunteer network, fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility towards the wildlife.

Community-centred conservation interventions are essential in promoting wildlife conservation and fostering coexistence between people and wildlife, as communities get the opportunity to share their perspectives on HWC management and propose solutions to the everyday challenges they face. 🦒

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KBA in focus - Amboseli National Park

■ By Ednah Kulola and Joshua Sese

Located in the footsteps of Mt Kilimanjaro, Africa's highest peak, and approximately 210 kilometres southeast of Nairobi in Kajiado County, is Amboseli National Park Key Biodiversity Area. The name Amboseli comes from the Maasai word meaning "salty dust". Amboseli N.P. is characterized by wooded savannah grassland with permanent herbaceous swamps and marshes, alkaline pools and the dry lake basin of Lake Amboseli that fills up during the rainy season.

The park is home to vast biodiversity. It is an expansive wilderness hosting five mammal and 17 bird species classified by IUCN as threatened (critically endangered, endangered or vulnerable). The mammal species include some 1,800 endangered African Elephants (*Loxodonta africana*), and African Lion, Cheetah, Hippopotamus, and Maasai Giraffe. Amboseli N.P. is an Important Bird Area with over 400 species of birds, among them globally threatened species such as White-backed, Lappet-faced and Ruppell's vultures, and Malagasy Pond Herons. It is one of the six biosphere reserves in Kenya – sites nominated by countries and recognized under UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere (MAB) programme to promote sustainable development based on local community efforts and scientific data.

Climate change, falling pasture productivity, habitat loss, water diversion, poaching and the rising human population in adjacent communities, remain the biggest threats affecting the Amboseli ecosystem. Constant land fragmentation for commercial agriculture, settlement expansion,

and infrastructural development has led to the isolation of wildlife populations and interferences with their migration routes. Increased contact between humans and wildlife has also led to an intensification of human-wildlife conflicts. Invasive species, both native and exotic, have infested large swathes of the park's wetlands, further impacting on its ecosystem dynamics. Illegal extraction of resources such as logging, charcoal production, and sand harvesting within and around the park have played a role in the degradation of the precious ecosystem.

A collaborative approach between government agencies, conservation organizations, local communities, and other stakeholders is essential to ensure the long-term survival of Amboseli and its biodiversity. The approach would include actions such as effective law enforcement, community engagement and empowerment, habitat restoration, sustainable land use planning, and climate change adaptation strategies. To this effect, two management plans (Amboseli National Park Management Plan, 2020-2030 and Amboseli Ecosystem Management Plan 2020-2030) were launched in 2020 and are now in the implementation stage. In collaboration with the Amboseli Ecosystem Trust and partners, the Kenya Wildlife Service has also developed human-wildlife co-existence protocols to guide response to negative human-wildlife interactions. At the moment there is a new initiative to change Amboseli N.P. to become a National Reserve managed by the County – a slow and cumbersome legal process whose outcome is unclear. 🐘

2024 World Wetlands Day highlights

■ By David Odhiambo

The World Wetlands Day 2024 was marked on 2nd of February 2024 with the theme "Wetlands and Human Wellbeing". Nature Kenya collaborated with nine community groups to mark the day.

In the west, Friends of Dunga Site Support Group engaged with the local community in awareness creation on conservation of wetlands at Dunga Beach, reaching over 1,230 people, including 800 school children. Kakamega Environmental Education Programme organized 256 community members and stakeholders at Chirobani Primary School to plant 1,000 assorted indigenous tree seedlings along River Shitiya. And Kanyaboli Ecosystem Site Support Group reached out to 89 people in awareness creation towards conserving the Lake Kanyaboli ecosystem in Yala Swamp.

At the lakes, Lake Elmenteita Community-based Organization partnered with Lake Elmenteita Serena Camp to celebrate the day. Eleven volunteers from the

SSG conducted a clean-up, collecting about 9 kg of waste. The SSG also shared the importance of the lake as a habitat for Lesser Flamingos, Great White Pelicans and other waterbirds with the local community. At Lake Ol'Bolessat, the Nyahururu Bird Club engaged 700 people to plant 850 tree seedlings.

At the Coast, the Sabaki River Conservation and Development Organization engaged 166 people, including 70 school children, to plant 1,500 mangrove seedlings and collect about 200 kg of waste in a beach clean-up exercise at the Sabaki River Mouth. The Mida Creek Conservation Awareness Group organized a bird walk to mark the day; and the Dawida Biodiversity Conservation Group in Taita Hills planted 30 tree seedlings. In Tana River Delta, the Tana River Conservation Network marked the event in Tana River and Lamu counties. Poems, traditional dances, speeches and clean-ups were part of the proceedings during the events. More than 240 people were reached, including 139 school children. 🌿



School pupils join other participants to plant mangrove at the Sabaki River estuary to mark World Wetlands Day.
Photo: Courtesy

For updates visit
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EDITORIAL TEAM

Fleur Ng'weno, Angela Mecha, Richard Kipngeno and John Mwacharo

LAYOUT

John Mwacharo

FRONT BANNER

Lorenzo Barelli



For contributions, advertising and subscriptions, contact us by:

Post: P. O. Box 44486 GPO, Nairobi

Telephone: 020 3537568/0780149200/0771343138

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Sky Watching

By Fleur Ng'weno

The planet Jupiter is bright, low in the west over the sunset. In March, small bright Mercury rises below Jupiter, then sinks again. The faint, thin crescent moon is near Mercury on March 11.

In the predawn sky, Venus is bright, low in the east over the sunrise. Faint, reddish Mars is much higher in the east. The waning crescent moon is near Mars on March 8. At mid-month,

golden Saturn rises in the east, passing Venus on March 22.

March 20 is the equinox – for the next six months, we will see the sun in the northern part of the sky.

The cell phone App skymaps.com has equatorial skies and all of the viewable stars, reader Don Worley informs us. Thank you!

Violet-backed Starling, the Kakuzi Affair

Text and photos by Simon Odhiambo (Kenyanbirder)

Of the over 200 bird species I have spotted within the Kakuzi ecosystem in Makuyu north of Thika, the Violet-backed Starling strikes me as an interestingly beautiful bird with a unique plumage that makes its identification a walk in the park. I see them from time to time perching on the fencing posts, sometimes not bothered by my presence, most of the time hardly giving me a chance to recall their name as I am left mumbling to myself '... that was a Violet-backed Starling. The violet back means it is male and the other duller one that took off after him is female. I know they will be back again...'

Early this month, I noticed a male Violet-backed Starling busy collecting 'dudus' from the ground, grass and tree-barks. I say 'collecting' because it made several flights, back and forth, and each time leaving with a beak full of wriggling caterpillars and coming back with an empty beak, so to speak, for more. Of course there were occasional squabbles between it, an Abyssinian (Olive) Thrush, a Fork-tailed Drongo and the noisy White-browed Sparrow Weavers on whose territory these birds were trespassing.

On 18th February 2024 during the Sunday Monthly Bird Watch at Kakuzi, I learnt that the Violet-backed Starling

is generally considered a migratory bird. 'I see them here all the time' was my response. 'There are very few records of them breeding in Kenya' said Fleur, as I narrated my observation. These return-trips can then be read as the usual feeding behaviour by other birds whenever they have hatchlings in their nests. If this is true then this could be an interesting record at Kakuzi!

Meanwhile, a Ruppell's Robin Chat continued singing and mimicking other birds calls, undisturbed ... until the female Violet-backed Starling joined the male for a round of caterpillar collection. There was spiteful chase that didn't last long. The singing continued.

I consider the Kakuzi ecosystem an ecotone inviting various bird species. hence making it an interesting area to go birding. A Black-headed Oriole call echoes from my garden, I lose my line of thought. Did I mention that all along I had my camera with me and managed to get some shots of the Violet-backed Starling?

I remain hopeful that the fledgling will soon accompany the parents for water or to be shown the feeding grounds. Fingers crossed! 🐦

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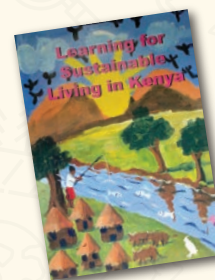
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Birding Updates

Wednesday Morning Birdwalks in Nairobi.

6th March – Ngong Road Forest Sanctuary. Meet at 8:30 am at the Main Gate. There's a Sanctuary fee of Ksh. 100 for citizens payable via Mpesa or cash. Directions: Coming from the city centre, take Ngong Road towards Karen. After Jamhuri Sports Ground take the first left turn (before the Commonwealth Cemetery). It's 500m to the Sanctuary main gate.

13th March – Karura Forest. Meet at the Limuru Road entrance, Gate A, at 8:30am. We will then proceed to Amani parking. Thanks to Friends of Karura Forest for welcoming the birdwalk.

20th March – 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 1.5Kms after Karen Country Club.

27th March – 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.

17th March. Sunday Birdwatch - Gatamaiyu Forest. Meet at Total Energies Petrol Station, Kimende, at 8:30 am. Directions: Along Nairobi – Naivasha Road, Total Energies Petrol Station is on the left after Great Rift Valley View Point, before Kimende Town. We will take a matatu or drive to Gatamaiyu Centre then walk to the forest. Average fare is **Ksh. 100** to Gatamaiyu Centre. It will be a day trip, bring snacks and water. Thanks to Kijabe Environment Volunteers (KENVO) and Kenya Forest Service (KFS) for welcoming the birdwalk.

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. Please confirm with Titus Imboma <Imbomati911@gmail.com> Phone 0721-649452.

There is a WhatsApp group for those who often attend the Wednesday birdwalks, and another for those who take part in bird ringing. If you would like to be in either group, please write <news@naturekenya.org> or phone 0780-149200

Malindi Birding Updates

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

Note: There will be NO organized birdwalks on 14 and 21 March 2024.

28th March – Malindi Harbor. Meet at 4:00 pm at Malindi Museum near the Nature Kenya Membership Office.

30th March. Saturday Birdwatch – Camp Gedeng. Meet at 7:00 am at Malindi Museum near Nature Kenya Membership Office. Thanks to Mr. Dominic and Ms. Marion for welcoming the birdwalk.

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 <thamzali@gmail.com> / 0733-980540 or Kelvin Mazera <klvnrua@yahoo.com> / 0720-928783

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