



Sabaki River Estuary. Photo by Jeremy La Zelle

Boardwalk, bird hide and picnic banda a boost for Sabaki River Estuary

■ By Francis Kagema

Sabaki River Estuary is where the Athi-Galana Sabaki River flows into the Indian Ocean, just north of Malindi in Kilifi County, along Kenya's picturesque northern coastline. This diverse estuarine ecosystem comprises sediments, silt and sand deposited over the years, forming a mosaic of landscapes. Every year, hundreds of tourists and thousands of students visit this site for recreational and educational purposes.

As the salty waters of the Indian Ocean mingle with the fresh water of the Sabaki River, they give rise to unique habitats that teem with crocodiles, hippos, reptiles, crustaceans and birds. The sandy shores flanking both sides of the estuary extend into Malindi Bay and are critical turtle breeding grounds. Mangroves, with their tangled roots and bright green canopies, stand as sentinels against the ebb and flow of the tides and the fury of storms. Beyond the mangroves are mudflats that attract flocks of thousands of Palarctic migrant birds, feeding on invertebrates

in the mud to power their long-distance flights. Many local bird species, including some Lesser Flamingoes, have made this estuary their permanent residence.

Now, as you venture into the Sabaki River Estuary, a new imposing 450m boardwalk greets you. This new structure, along with a bird photography hide and a picnic banda, will offer tourists an unforgettable tour of the estuary once it is operational. Nature Kenya implemented the construction of the new facilities with funding from the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) through its Western Indian Ocean Strategic Action Programme (WIOSAP). Local communities, including members of the Sabaki River Development and Conservation Organization (SARICODO), are expected to benefit from the facilities through ecotourism by offering tour guiding and related services. Part of the revenue collected from the facilities will also go to the communities.

The estuary is one of Kenya's 68 Key Biodiversity Areas, with over 240 bird species recorded, including 91 species of water birds. It is an important resting, roosting and feeding ground for gulls and terns. The estuary

and the nearby turbid coastal waters are also an important nursery ground for prawns and numerous species of fish and crustaceans, which are of commercial importance.

Although the estuary is a haven of natural beauty and biodiversity, it faces numerous threats. Illegal logging of mangroves is a critical issue that jeopardizes the balance of the estuarine environment and destroys essential habitats for various species. Overfishing and harmful fishing techniques endanger the ecological balance of the estuary and the future of artisanal fisheries. Unregulated tourist activities also pose a threat to the site.

To conserve the estuarine ecosystem in perpetuity, WIOSAP also funded a project to develop a site management plan for the estuary. This management plan is expected to guide the estuary's sustainable development and management through a collaborative approach, creating a sustainable future for

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114TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE EAST AFRICA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

DATE: Wednesday 15th May 2024

TIME: Barbecue at 12 noon; AGM 1pm to 2pm

VENUE: Louis Leakey Hall, Nairobi National Museum; and via Zoom

The Agenda

1. Minutes of the 113th Annual General Meeting
2. Matters arising from the Minutes
3. Chairman's Report
4. Honorary Treasurer's Report
5. Appointment of Auditor
6. Any other business of which due notice in the form of the Resolution to be proposed has been given to the Honorary Secretary, signed by not less than 2 members, not less than 21 days before the date of the meeting.
7. Election of Office Bearers, Members of the Executive Committee and Trustees. (Nomination forms for officers or members of the Executive Committee are available from nkmembership@naturekenya.org)
8. Library, Journal, Committees and Projects Report

To confirm your attendance, please go to the link below:

<https://forms.gle/Ns8UJzkjmcXhyBLz5>

To register for the virtual (Zoom) version, go to the link below:

<https://bit.ly/3vLRxJA>

Boardwalk, bird hide and picnic banda a boost for Sabaki River Estuary *contd.*

the estuary and the adjacent community. The Kilifi County government has committed to supporting the implementation of the management plan to ensure that its good objectives are realized within the ten-year implementation period.

“At the end of the management plan’s implementation period, we hope to have a conserved estuary, increased biodiversity and enhanced livelihoods for local communities,” says Omar Said Omar, the County Executive Committee Member (CECM) for Water, Environment, Forestry, Climate Change, Natural Resources and Solid Waste Management, County Government of Kilifi.

The project has also empowered SARICODO to conduct conservation activities such as site monitoring and patrol, mangrove restoration, and awareness creation. 🌿



A section of the newly constructed boardwalk. Photo by Francis Kagema



Mugura Falls in Aberdare Mountains and Abbott's Starling (inset). Photos by John Mwacharo and Pete Steward

KBA in focus - Aberdare Mountains

■ By Joshua Sese

The Aberdare Mountains Key Biodiversity Area (KBA) is in the central Kenya highlands, forming part of the eastern escarpment of the Rift Valley. It is a stunning landscape where lush forests, sweeping grasslands, bamboo thickets, montane moorlands and misty peaks converge to create a sanctuary like no other. It comprises 76,600 ha of National Park and 108,400 ha of Forest Reserve. The ecosystem is amongst the five main ‘water towers’ of Kenya, forming a catchment area for dams supplying water to Nairobi City, the Athi-Galana-Sabaki River draining into the Indian Ocean, the Ewaso Nyiro River draining into Lorian Swamp, and the Malewa River draining into Lake Naivasha.

The Aberdares Key Biodiversity

Area boasts a diverse array of wildlife, including the critically endangered Mountain Bongo. Over 300 bird species have been recorded, including the rare and globally threatened Aberdare Cisticola, Abbott's Starling, Jackson's Widowbird, and Sharpe's Longclaw. Endemic species such as the Aberdare mole shrew and the Aberdare frog highlight the area's evolutionary importance. A hotspot for biodiversity, the KBA serves as a living laboratory for scientists, offering insights into ecological processes, species interactions, and the intricate web of life that sustains this remarkable ecosystem.

Regardless of its outstanding importance, the KBA now faces several threats, which include illegal logging, illegal

grazing, poaching of wildlife, illegal water abstraction, destruction of riparian areas, excisions and encroachment of forest areas and climate change. There is also an imminent threat of infrastructural development. In January 2024, the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) approved the construction of a 49-kilometre road section cutting through the forest to connect Nyandarua and Nyeri counties. According to an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) report, 104 hectares of vegetation in the KBA will be cleared for the road project. These will include 75 hectares of bamboo, 14 hectares of forest, and 14 hectares of moorland.

Safeguarding this essential site require strong collaboration among government agencies, conservation organizations, local communities, and other stakeholders. Due to the site's importance and uniqueness, countless restoration initiatives have been undertaken by the conservation community and other stakeholders around the ecosystem. Currently, the Conservation Alliance of Kenya (representing 73 member organizations, including Nature Kenya) has lodged an appeal at the National Environment Tribunal seeking to halt the construction of the proposed 49-kilometre road section. The Alliance has highlighted the detrimental impact of the road on the KBA and proposes an alternative route for the road that will have minimal effects on biodiversity and will be just as effective for travel. 🌿

For updates visit www.naturekenya.org

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Players in action during the 14th Nature Kenya charity golf tournament.



One of the winners receiving a present from the Nature Kenya Executive Director Dr. Paul Matiku.

Golfing to restore degraded forests

Text by Richard Kipngeno and photos by John Mwacharo

The 14th Nature Kenya charity golf tournament was held on Friday, March 15th at the Karen Country Club. The charity event raised Ksh 1 million for Mt. Kenya forest restoration.

A total of 93 golfers participated in this fundraiser. The event was sponsored by 17 corporates. Kenya Breweries Limited was the main sponsor. Platcorp Foundation, Knight Frank, Williamson Tea and Privatization Authority were hole sponsors.

Others who supported the event with auction and raffles items included Young Muslim Association, Serena Hotels, Karen Country Club, Cormorant Tours, Davis & Shirliff, Safarilink, Air Kenya, The Safari Collection, Emrok Tea, Cookswell Jikos, Matbronze, Woburn Residences - Salma and Andy Watt, Alex Duncanson, Patricia Odima, Karen Lawrence and Andrew Kamiti.

THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS



Fostering children's connection with nature through environmental education

By David Odhiambo

Every year, the Kakamega Environmental Education Programme (KEEP) – the Site Support Group (SSG) for Kakamega Forest Key Biodiversity Area (KBA) – engages schoolchildren in various greening activities. These include the establishment of tree nurseries in schools, kitchen gardening, tree planting and environmental awareness. Through these activities, children get to appreciate the value of nature by actively participating in its conservation.

Since January, KEEP has run a school environmental programme that has seen them visit 19 schools (12 primary and 7 secondary). Through this programme, the SSG has reached out to over 13,000 pupils and students. As a result, they have also supported the planting of 2,600 trees in the schools.

"When we visit schools, we show children environmental conservation videos for them to learn. We also plant trees

with them and teach them the importance of forests and trees. These activities bring children closer to nature and make them environmental stewards," says Dominic Shilabila, a member of KEEP.

Dominic adds that through their engagements, children have become more conscious and appreciative of their surroundings. "We have noted a change in the children's mindset. They are now more aware of birds, insects, snakes and trees found here and how to live with them," he says.

Kakamega Forest, located in Kakamega County, is the only remnant in Kenya of the great tropical rainforest that once stretched across Central Africa. The forest is designated a Key Biodiversity Area and is home to various mammals and birds, including Black-and-White Colobus and De Brazza's monkeys, Great Blue Turaco, Grey Parrot, Turner's Eremomela and others. The forest also hosts several unique insect, reptile, amphibian and plant species.

Learn Nature with these exciting Children's Books



These and other children's books are now available at our shop at the Nairobi National Museum. You can also shop online at: <https://naturekenya.org/shop/>

Birding Updates

Wednesday Morning Bird walks in Nairobi.

3rd April - City Park. Meet at 8:30 am at the parking near the Coca-Cola Kiosk. Directions: Coming from the City centre, take Limuru Road past Aga Khan Hospital. Make a U-turn at Total Energies Petrol Station, Limuru Road. Drive back along Limuru Road and turn left onto City Park Road next to City Park Market.

10th April - Museum Grounds/ Michuki Memorial Park. Meet at 8 am in the open space in front of the entrance to the museum galleries.

17th April - Giraffe Centre. Meet at 8:30 am at the Giraffe Centre main entrance. Thanks to AFEW for welcoming the bird walk.

24th April - 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 bird walk.

21st April. Sunday Birdwatch - Yeyani Resort, Athi River. Meet at 8:30 am at Coloho Mall, Off Mombasa Road, Athi River. Directions: Coming from the City Centre, take Mombasa Road. Turn left at Athi River Interchange onto Wuyi Road. Turn right towards Tuff Foam Mattress Store. Turn right and proceed straight. Coloho Mall is on the left, after China Wuyi (Kenya) Precast Co., Ltd. Thanks to the management for welcoming the bird walk.

It will be a day trip, bring snacks and plenty of drinking water.

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 bird walks, 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

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

11th April - Mayungu. Meet at 4:00 pm at the Malindi Museum near Nature Kenya Membership Office.

18th April - Malindi Marine Park. Meet at 4:00 pm at Malindi Museum Nature Kenya Membership Office.

25th April - Malindi Harbor. Meet at 4:00 pm at Malindi Museum near the Nature Kenya Membership office.

27th April. Saturday Birdwatch - Mida Creek. Meet at 7:00 am at Mida Creek ticketing office. Thanks to the Mida Creek Community Conservation group for letting us do birding at their site! If you wish to attend, please reach out to us for better planning through: malindimembers@naturekenya.org before 25th April.

Please carry drinking water and wear water-friendly shoes. Bird walk is likely to end after 2 to 3 hours' time.

For more information, email: <malindimembers@naturekenya.org> or phone 0725 223042.

Mombasa Bird walks 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 Apr Time: 9:00 AM
Contact: 0780 149200 or 0726 006283

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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**