

June 2014



Picture by Atif Chughtai

NAIROBI NATIONAL PARK

by Brian Finch

On 28th April, Heather Elkins, Jennifer Oduori, Karen Plumbe and myself, met up at Langata Gate to Nairobi National Park at 6.30am. We were soon processed and headed into the Park. It had been a clear night, but with a very heavy dew, and was a beautiful blue-sky sunny morning, although clouded mid-morning and once this cleared became a very warm day.

Firstly we took the left turn for the glade and continued on to the dam. There were seven Crowned Cranes here dancing and cavorting, and an African Jacana still present and the Little Grebe minus its hippo throne. The marsh caused by the construction of the road still had a few Wood Sandpipers, and amongst the forest birds was a noisy Emerald

Cuckoo. At the Langata Dam was another African Jacana, which was also a long stayer, and the third today was the longest resident of all, at Eland Hollow. Passing Nagalomon Dam it was very quiet, there were three Darters but that was all, apart from a pair of Spotted Thick-knees on the drift.

Ivory Burning Site still held on to an Olivaceous Warbler in the Acacia gerardii, and Brown Parisoma was also present. Along the back road to the new swamp it was quiet but we had out first of eight Willow Warblers, there were plenty of Red-collared and Jackson's Widowbirds, and White-winged Widowbirds have arrived back and are suddenly all over the Park. The swamp had African Water Rails and eight Wood Sandpipers whilst a Black Crane there had a chick.

From here we backtracked and continued on to Hyena Dam. Where we found the small Great Egret, a Spur-winged Goose, a single Long-toed Plover (it would be good if its mate were on a nest somewhere), a single Little Stint, African Water Rail, a very late Common Swift was with the Little, White-rumped and Palm Swifts. The best entertainment was provided by the resident small crocodile, which had caught a very large catfish, but strangely just by the tip of the tail. We stayed a good forty-minutes with the croc and its logistical fishy problem, but it finally succeeded. In the meantime had had a very good following of spectators, and as someone said it looked like an African Road Accident! (See the image attached).

There was not too much on the run-off apart from good numbers of leaping Jackson's Widowbirds. Along the Mokoyeti, the pair of Martial Eagles were back at the traditional nesting tree, ready to have their annual single offspring. Along the road we had our first of fourteen Red-backed Shrikes, whilst Lesser Greys came in at a competitive eleven. Other birds along here were a showy Pangani Longclaw and about eight Orange-breasted Waxbills. At Mbuni Picnic Site there were three Willow Warblers in the acacias. A Croaking Cisticola was particularly loud here today. Also the Tawny Eagle was around the nest site.

At Karen Primary School Dam there was a Spotted Thick-knee, whilst at Eland Hollow were a couple of White-faced Whistling Duck, the first of a healthy seven different Secretarybirds seen today, a pair of Crowned Cranes were battling with a third unwelcome visitor, in the sedges were two very extravert Sedge Warblers, and ten Yellow-crowned Bishops, whilst in the bushes was a Common Whitethroat.

We took the short road onto the East Gate Road, and continued towards Athi. In the seeding grass we found a party of seven African Silverbills, the first for some time and on the small dam near the Empakasi Dam junction were about ten more Yellow-crowned Bishops and another Common Whitethroat. Heading across to the Athi Basin murrum pits was a solitary Wattled Starling amongst a large herd of Eland that contained about forty similarly aged young. The murrum pits had received another good replenishment of water, but the only bird on it was a beautifully plumaged Wood Sandpiper. We were in good time for the vulture drinking session and there were forty-two, of which eight were Ruppell's and the remainder White-backs.

At Athi Dam we could see a group of people outside of their car along the edge of the water. It looked a very seedy assemblage of an African driver, with a Chinese and an Arab looking individual. This would racially profile them as up to no good, and neither were they as they were throwing rocks at the roosting storks and ibises, stirring up all the waterbirds. I have attached images of them, together with clear identification of the car registration. It is hoped that FONNAP will take this issue up with KWS, follow through and set an example with prosecution showing that this behaviour by these unwanted visitors, and maybe even immigrants, is not going to be tolerated.

At Athi we found a nice adult Pink-backed Pelican, just two rather scruffy looking White Storks left, and just one Yellow-billed, they have had a low profile the past few months. Amongst the waders there were strangely no Stilts present, but seven Spur-winged and three Kittlitz's Plovers, five Little Stints, a Common Greenshank and two Common Sandpipers. In the weeds was just a single Speckled Pigeon, but on the causeway were five roosting Black-crowned Night-Herons, and whilst we had lunch an immature Great Spotted Cuckoo searched the fig, as did two Willow Warblers of the far eastern race yakutensis. (See images).

From here we had to leave the Park as one had another engagement, on the burnt area there were two Black-winged Plovers, and a Cyrtaceous lily. The pair of Martial Eagles are still at Kingfisher Picnic Site, and have started nest construction, so is a completely different pair from the Mokoyeti residents.

Other birds were just three Black-shouldered Kites, a good scattering of paired Crowned Cranes on various wetlands, a good passage of Barn Swallows continuing and the Quailfinch are now coming back in small numbers, but much more noticeable.

By coming in from the Langata side, we had four single Suni and a pair. Suni were never in numbers like this before, there is an obvious

success story here. Near the strange picnic area on the back road to Hyena Dam we had a superb pair of Egyptian Mongooses. One animal stood up on its hind legs to have a good look at us, and the head was nearly a metre from the ground. They were a large couple. (Image of head attached).

Plains game was almost all confined to the south, with impressive numbers, but especially of Eland.

We were back through Langata Gate at 3.00pm, with no traffic to impede the journey home, and having had an absolutely superb day.

Best for now,

Brian.



As a footnote to the big day on Mukoma Estate last Good Friday, since that day we have now added on the estate.... Cattle Egret, Great Egret, African Spoonbill, Egyptian Goose, African Goshawk, Little Sparrowhawk, African Crowned Eagle, Black-winged Stilt, Dusky Nightjar, Silvery-cheeked Hornbill, White-headed Barbet, Lesser Grey Shrike, Brown-crowned Tchagra, Slate-coloured Bou-bou, Violet-backed Starling and Northern Double-collared Sunbird!

THE MONTAGE ATTACHED

TOP LEFT RHINO POACHERS?

At Athi Dam we could see a group of people outside of their car along the edge of the water. It looked a very seedy assemblage of an African driver, with a Chinese and an Arab looking individual. This would racially profile them as up to no good, and neither were they as they were throwing rocks at the roosting storks and ibises, stirring up all the waterbirds. I have attached images of them, together with clear identification of the car registration. It is hoped that FONNAP will take this issue up with KWS, follow through and set an example with prosecution showing that this behaviour by these unwanted visitors, and maybe even immigrants, is not going to be tolerated.

TOP RIGHT SPECTATORS AT THE CROC AND CATFISH CARNAGE

Here is the action at Hyena Dam this morning. There is much similarity between what is happening here, and a road accident in Africa. Probably all the onlookers are hoping to pick up scraps from the unfortunate victim, yes just like a road accident!

BOTTOM LEFT

Head of very large Egyptian Mongoose.

BOTTOM THREE RIGHT WILLOW WARBLER

These are two different representatives of the eastern race yakutensis. It differs markedly from the more usual acredula in its grey and pallid tones. The upperparts have the olive limited to small areas on wing and tail edges, and forecrown, whilst yellow is restricted to the bend of the wing (protrusion of axillary) and the tibiae. Only an indication of colour on the greyish-white breast and the whitish supercilium. The far right individual also has a heavily streaked breast, and darker loreal area. Other birds seen today were brighter and were of the race acredula, but other yakutensis were also observed. This race breeds as far east in Siberia from the Taimyr Peninsula to the Kolyma Mountains, and winters down in South Africa. This has to be the most understated vast distance annual movement for any passerine anywhere. It is odd that the bird that travels the farthest is also so late in leaving. There is a map with the montage showing the range of yakutensis and excluding the entire north/south of the African continent which it also traverses should it survive the middle-eastern murderers. Remember ALL the yakutensis winter on the African continent, even those that breed hundreds of miles EAST of Japan!!!!



‘SHOOTING’ WILDLIFE !!!

by Gareth Jones

There are different ways to shoot wildlife , the destructive way with a gun or the creative way with a camera .I choose the creative way , and do not pretend to know everything about taking good photo's , but over a period of about a half century hopefully some lessons have been learned .

Here are some factors that help me to “SHOOT WILDLIFE” ...1) Know your camera equipment - even small “point and shoot” camera’s can get good results if used correctly , some people buy the best and expect instant excellence . 2) Practice makes perfect - its ok to make mistakes , as we note how to improve . 3) Hold still – if possible avoid “camera shake” especially if the conditions are dim , a “bean bag” to rest the camera does help . 4) Very often the first and last hours of the day are the “golden hours” when the soft sunlight is just right for great photos. 5) don’t over zoom , try to get the full subject into the frame , if moving use “sport function” and follow with the camera as you click. 6) Try to get out of “City mode” and relax into “Bush mode” 7) Pray for God to show you the glory of creation 8) Slow down , a speed of less than 30km/h is advised . 9) Don’t just look at grass and trees , look through grass and trees. 10) Watch the reactions of different herbivores and birds , I have often seen lions in this way. 11) Go with the attitude of “birdwatching” , show interest in the smaller creatures , often other large creatures , could “get in the way !” 12) Don’t drive to far , stop often and wait . 13) Stop often and scan the area with binoculars. 14) Go with the attitude of “let nature come to me” rather than us trying to “catch a bit of nature”. 15) Be ready – you never know when that special moment could happen , so always have your camera ready and within easy reach .

I hope you all enjoy the moments with your camera when you “ SHOOT !”

The park is open daily from 06h00 to 18h00 .

For more information on the park you can link to the following websites www.kws.org or www.nairobigreenline.com or on facebook – Nairobi national park

THE SERVAL CAT

by Trish Heather Hayes

The Serval is native to Africa, where it is widely distributed south of the Sahara and is closely related to the African golden cat and the Caracal.

The serval is a medium-sized cat. It is a strong yet slender animal, with long legs. Usually 23 - 36 ins in head-body length, with a relatively short, 14-17 in tail, and a shoulder height of about 21-26 ins. The head is small in relation to the body, and the tall, oval ears are set close together. Weight ranges from about 7 to 12 kg in females, and from 9 to 18 kg in males.

The pattern of the fur is variable. Usually, the serval is boldly spotted black on tawny, with two or four stripes from the top of the head down the neck and back, transitioning into spots. Others have much smaller, freckled spots, and was once thought to be a separate species. The backs of the ears are black with a distinctive white bar.

Although the Serval is mostly nocturnal, it is often spotted during the day in Nairobi National Park foraging in the long grass. As part of its adaptations for hunting in the savannas, the Serval boasts long legs (the longest of all cats, relative to body size) for jumping, and moves with amazing speed when necessary. It has large ears with exceptionally acute hearing. Its long legs and neck allow it to see over tall grasses, while its ears are used to detect prey, even those burrowing underground. While hunting, the Serval may pause for up to 15 minutes at a time to listen with eyes closed. Its pounce is a distinctive and precise vertical 'hop', which may be an adaptation for capturing flushed birds. It is able to leap up to 2.6 mts horizontally from a stationary position, landing pre-

cisely on target with sufficient force to stun or kill its prey upon impact. It is an efficient killer. It is specialized for hunting rodents, but it is an opportunistic predator whose diet also includes birds, hares, hyraxes, reptiles, insects, fish, and frogs. They have been known to dig into burrows in search of underground prey, and to leap 2 to 3 m into the air to grab birds in flight. It eats very quickly, sometimes too quickly, causing it to gag and regurgitate due to clogging in the throat. Small prey are devoured whole. The Serval uses an effective plucking technique in which it repeatedly tosses captured birds in the air while simultaneously thrashing its head from side-to-side, removing mouthfuls of feathers, which it discards

The Serval is extremely intelligent, and demonstrates remarkable problem-solving ability, making it notorious for getting into mischief, as well as easily outwitting its prey, and eluding other predators. It often plays with its captured prey for several minutes before consuming it. In most situations, it ferociously defends its food against attempted theft by others. Males can be more aggressive than females.

Like most cats, the Serval is a solitary animal. It is known to travel as much as 3 to 4 km each night in search of food. The female defends home ranges of 9.5 to 19.8 km², depending on local prey availability, while the male defends larger territories of 11.6 to 31.5 km² and marks its territory by spraying urine onto prominent objects such as bushes, or, less frequently, by scraping fresh urine into the ground with its claws. Threat displays between hostile Servals are often highly exaggerated, with the animals flattening their ears and ar-

ching their backs, baring their teeth, and nodding their heads vigorously. In direct confrontation, they lash out with their long fore legs and make sharp barking sounds and loud growls. Like many cats, the Serval is able to purr. It also has a high-pitched chirp, and can hiss, cackle, growl, grunt, and meow.

Oestrus in the Serval lasts for up to four days, and is typically timed so the kittens are born shortly before the peak breeding period of local rodent populations. A Serval is able to give birth to multiple litters throughout the year, but commonly does so only if the earlier litters die shortly after birth. Gestation lasts from 66 to 77 days and commonly results in the birth of two kittens, although as many as four have been recorded

The kittens are born in dense vegetation or sheltered locations such as abandoned aardvark burrows. If such an ideal location is not available, a place beneath a shrub may be sufficient. The kittens weigh around 250 g (8.8 oz) at birth, and are initially blind and helpless, with a coat of greyish woolly hair. They open their eyes at 9 to 13 days of age, and begin to take solid food after around a month. At around six months, they acquire their permanent canine teeth and begin to hunt for themselves; they leave their mother at about 12 months of age. They may reach sexual maturity from 12 to 25 months of age.[5]

Life expectancy is about 10 years in the wild.

Photos by Gareth Jones





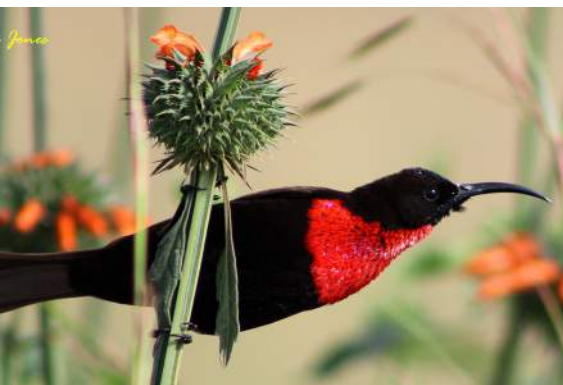
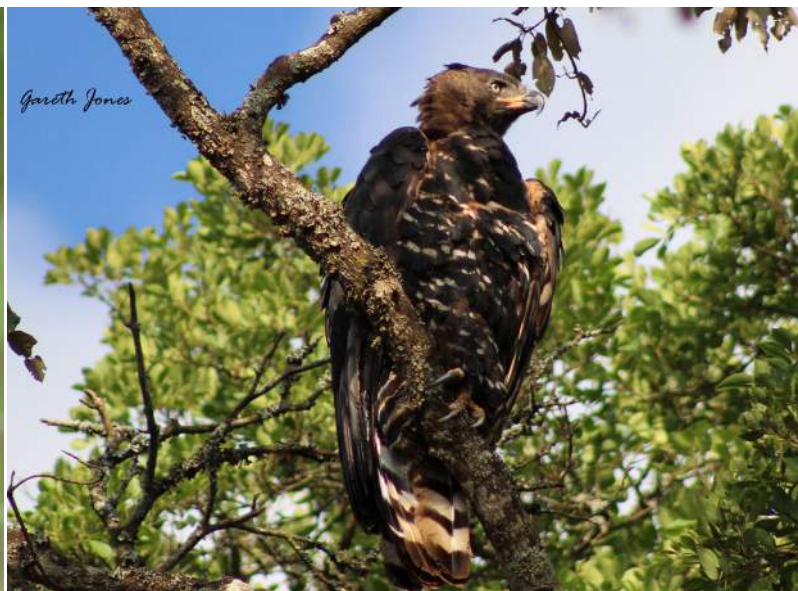
Birds !!

by Brian Finch

A car stopped next to me and asked 'Where are the lions ? '. I answered them in the way I often do and said " Well actually I usually pray before going to the park , that God with allow us to see the glory of creation , then we just go bird watching , and really enjoy our fantastic feathered friends , and amazingly , often larger creatures like lions just "get in the way !" of the feathered friends ! It is very rewarding to drive very slowly and watch and sometimes wait , to see many different species , each area of the park has birds that are unique and localized , in the forest , in marshy water areas , grasslands , shrub-veld etc . Last week I saw an Augur Buzzard (a kind of eagle) devour a green snake and then fly away . Birds are often doing something interesting if you watch them . Secretary Birds are also very rewarding to watch especially when they are hunting . When watching birds it is always useful to have a good pair of binoculars , and if possible a good camera . A bird identification book for East African species is also useful to keep in the car when driving . The park has a great variety of birds , over 500 different species at certain times , and some of them like the bee-eaters have beautiful colours , birds like Kingfishers , Narina Trogon , Bush Shrikes , Grey Crowned Cranes , Saddle billed storks , various ducks and many more . The park is looking very lush and green at the moment due to the recent rains and many bird species are thriving at the moment .

I always find it a joy to see birds when driving in the park , God has created so such amazing diversity . So remember when we go on into the Nairobi National Park with the attitude of "bird watching" , all to often the larger species like Rhino , Buffalo , and even Lions , just "get in the way !" .

The park is open daily from 06h00 to 18h00 .



Fonnap Members' Meeting 7th June

by Aliya Habib

On the 7th of June, we had our members' meeting at Silole Sanctuary where Will Knocker took us on a tour of the park boundaries for a lesson on invasive species and the dangers they pose to the wildlife and the habitat in general.

Nairobi National Park is home to a few of these species, most notable the deadly parthenium and the prickly pear. A huge thank you goes out to all those members who attended what turned out to be a fun filled and educative day, despite the distance.

We keep fingers crossed that we will soon be able to address the parthenium issue in the park and find a way to get rid of it.





WELCOME TO NAIROBI NATIONAL PARK *The Worlds only Wildlife Capital.*

Please observe the following while in the park

- Respect the privacy of the wildlife. This is their habitat
- Don't feed the animals, it upsets their diet and leads to human dependence
- Keep quiet, noise disturbs the wildlife and may antagonize your fellow visitors
- Stay in your vehicle at all times, except at designated picnic sites.
* Sitting on top of vehicles during game viewing is strictly prohibited
- Keep below the maximum speed limit (40kph/25mph)
- NO PETS are allowed in the park
- Never drive off-road, this severely damages the habitat
- When viewing wildlife keep to a minimum distance of 20 meters and pull to the side of the road so as to allow others to pass
- Leave no litter and never leave fires unattended or discard burning objects
- Ensure that you get correct receipts at the gate and produce these to the park officials on demand
- Use only designated entry/exit gates
- Stay over or stay before dusk, visitors must vacate the park between 6.00 p.m-6.00 a.m unless they are camping overnight
- Night game driving is not allowed
- Entry at park is at your own risk

NB

Breakdown or towing stuck vehicles is charged Kshs. 7500/-

Customer care line:-0729 125502/020 2587485/020 2423423



Newsletter compiled by Aliya Habib.

Formatted by Donald.

Additional Photos by Aliya Habib

