**NAIROBI NATIONAL PARK 27th January 2018**

Dear All,

This was going to be an interesting weekend, with planned all day visits on both Saturday and Sunday, and to appreciate the day-to-day change in NNP. Almost the same route was followed each day and presence at the localities was almost the same time. There had been no rain over either date, both were sunny throughout so what made them so different?

Nigel Hunter collected me at 6.20am and we went off to Main Gate. The place was already a hive of activity when we arrived just after 6.30am, the car park was entirely full and whilst three ladies were processing the entries the cues started on the other side of the office car park. However they did manage to process everyone with impressive rapidity although we weren’t into the Park until just after 7.00am, as the issue of the cars leaving the car park to queue up to enter having been processed, was a process in itself.

It was amazingly quiet as we set off for KWS Mess, and birds were reticent to call, it being fairly cool and the sun not rising until around 7.00am at this time of year. There were a few birds starting to become active, the best being the resident pair of Black-collared Apalis which were noisy and showy (see image). There were also a couple of Willow Warblers, (with several more seen along Rhino Circuit in the pm), a Blackcap, a few Nightingales and the days only Spotted Flycatcher. Leaving here for Ivory Burning Site it was quieter than the Mess garden; although several Nightingales were now calling there was nothing much else. The Ivory Burning Arena and the Nagalomon Dam were unproductive and the causeway quiet. There was an adult Great Cormorant on the dam, the entire underparts were black with the white restricted to the front of the neck rather similar to a European bird but is an uncommon variant on the usual white-bellied forms. A similar bird to this was present this time last year. Six Darters were present, a single Great Egret, there was a clicking African Goshawk somewhere over the forest, two Swamphens were feeding along the back, six Black-winged Stilt, a few Wood and one Common Sandpiper were along the edge, a Zanzibar Greenbul called somewhere over in the scrub behind the dam, a couple of Nightingales were pinking in the dense scrub and an unseen Garden Warbler was singing. Amongst the swallows were a couple of Sand Martins.

Leaving here we took the back road to Hyena Dam but apart from more pinking Nightingales, a calling unseen Eurasian Reed Warbler and a few Barn Swallows there were no other migrants along here. However a surprise was a juvenile Grey-headed Kingfisher (see image), whilst regular along the Mbagathi in the south are uncommon away from here and certainly up in the higher more richly vegetated northern parts. At Hyena Dam it was relatively quiet apart from two very young Fish Eagles, constantly screaming for food from an adult present and harassing a trouble Cattle Egret that had sisal caught on one leg. It is a mystery that Fish Eagles have never bred in the Park, the adults have been near constant at this and Nagalomon Dam and yet the young had probably not come from very far away, so where did they nest? Around the dam were single Great and Yellow-billed Egrets, a dozen Black-winged Stilts, seven Long-toed Plovers amongst many Blacksmith and Spur-winged, single Common Snipe and Little Stint, three each of Marsh (see image), Green and Common and over eighty Wood Sandpipers, and two Ruff. Also the first of four Whinchats and three flava Yellow Wagtails.

We looked for the Great Spotted Eagle around the run-off vlei where it had been tracked down two weeks previously but not only was there no sign but the only species of Eagle the entire day was restricted to Fish Eagles. On the oxbow along the Mokoyeti was a female Western Marsh Harrier and another Great Egret. We had our first of twelve Red-tailed Shrikes which today consisted of nine Turkestan and three Isabelline, but it was a good number for a day at this time of year. We circled back round to Nagalomon and out towards Kingfisher, and just after crossing the Mokoyeti bridge there was a displaying male Kori Bustard and a very interested female walking towards him (see image). There was a party of four Eurasian Bee-eaters and an Eastern Honeybird, but a sad find was a male Dusky Nightjar on the road which was un-naturally spread-eagled in a perfect identification pose (see image), and at the swamp near Kingfisher we found a Saddle-billed Stork, another but different-looking immature Grey-headed Kingfisher (see image) and a female Rufous-tailed Rock-Thrush (see image). Rounding the corner to the picnic-site was a group of male White-winged Widowbirds which included a bird with all blackish flight-feathers, and the chestnut shoulder-patch replaced by white as seen a month previously. These were the only one of the five euplectes species seen today. Kingfisher was extremely quiet although a Lanner passed overhead.

Leaving here we found an Isabelline Wheatear on the old burnt area which was the first of five today, and the days only Eurasian Roller. On the inside quarry road near Maasai Gate there was a posing Pangani Longclaw (see image), and the first of only three Northern Wheatears met with today. The Pallid Honeyguide was in the fig by the causeway over the Mokoyeti below Baboon Cliffs. He has now been calling from this tree for the entire past year, which is a great example of site fidelity but also interesting, is that he is territorial and vocal all through the seasons. Also here were a pair of Mountain Wagtails, but the prize went to a dragonfly with the first Rock Hooktail for the Park and in fact a lifer for me! (See image). There was nothing much after leaving here until the wooded patch above Hippo Pools where we had an African Hoopoe, the days only Namaqua Dove flying by, the first of five Olivaceous Warblers (there seems to be an influx into the Park after a nil showing when they were expected in Nov-early Dec), and a few faithful Speckle-fronted Weavers. The Rhino Circuit provided a few more species although nothing of note, and the Pipeline failed to give us Pied Wheatear which we entirely missed today.

Were it not for the very impressive stork numbers at Athi Dam it would have been bordering on disappointing (see image). There were over five hundred Marabous and one-hundred and twenty White Storks which are as tame as the Marabous only grudgingly stepping to the side as you slowly drive through them on the road. No White Storks, or Marabous in fact appear to be feeding in the Park, but just coming in from the exterior for water and a sun-bathe. With them were six Yellow-billed and three adult Open-billed as well (see image). Around the dam were three White Pelicans, three African Spoonbills, ten Black-winged Stilts, a Common Ringed and five Kittlitz’s Plovers, five Greenshank, twenty Wood and four Common Sandpipers, fifteen Little Stints and a Ruff. There were two adult Black-crowned Night-Herons along the Causeway, an adult Fish Eagle was in place and whilst we had our lunch a Banded Parisoma came and fed very close to us.

Now heading northwards there were a pair of Spotted Thick-knees under a very isolated tree above Athi Basin, with nine Ruppell’s and just six White-backed Vultures sitting around having watered at the barely flooded murrum pits, and as we drove through the plains two more Kori Bustards, one Common and a dozen Lesser Kestrels, a female-plumaged Pallid Harrier, and the days only Banded Martin were encountered. Karen Primary School Dam provided three Little Grebes of which two were young, although a few seen in flight during the day Quailfinch were coming in to drink on the edge, and at Eland Hollow a lion was sprawled out on one of the new mounds following the deepening of the dam.

Passing Hyena and Nagalomon changes revealed that there had not been much in the way of change, but off the bridge there were three Black Storks along the river which gave us a very rarely achieved six-stork day, and at the vlei near Langata Gate was a different Western Marsh Harrier female (see image), from the one in the morning.

We were through Langata Gate at 6.00pm having had a great day as always, with impressive plains game and 201 species of birds recorded. It had been rather warm and a little humid but sunny virtually throughout the day although clouds that built up on the Ngongs failed to deliver any moisture and the hills were all clear by evening.

**NAIROBI NATIONAL PARK 28th January 2018**

With no rain overnight and a clear morning though the sun was still fairly well below the horizon, David Guarnieri and Simon Carter collected me from the bottom of Mukoma Road at 6.20am and we set off for the Main Gate. The queue was nothing like the previous day and the car park still had plenty of space and we were processed and through the entrance by 6.50am. Just after entering there were a pair of Hartlaub’s Turacos and a calling Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird, two species not recorded the previous day so it was showing promise already, but at the same time although the sun was probably only just above the horizon the woodland was so very silent as we made our way to the KWS Mess. After a little while, there was some reasonable activity and we saw several Willow Warblers in the mixed flocks, and two of the several Nightingales present. Black-collared Apalis were calling on the army base on the other side of the fence.

Leaving here we found Ivory Burning Site fairly quiet but as it brightened there were many Nightingales, and a Eurasian Reed Warbler was singing well in the same clump as it was in two weeks previously. There was our first species of Red-tailed Shrike but we did not know that it was going to be the first of a staggering thirty-five encountered today in all corners of the Park, of these just four were Isabelline and the rest of the identified birds were Turkestan. This is three times as many as yesterday and surely indicates a late arrival as well as a record number for the Park. On the Ivory Burning Arena was the first of fifteen Isabelline Wheatears, again three times the figure for the previous day. There was quite a bit of noise coming from the bushes on the Nagalomon Causeway, pointing out where the Basra Reed Warbler had been two weeks previously David played the call off the App, and to our amazement it came in and showed itself, so it was in fact on a winter territory. There were also another four Eurasian Reed Warblers and many Nightingales calling. The dam was fairly quiet, but brightened up by a young Grey-headed Kingfisher on a twig by the water with another seen later towards appropriately named Kingfisher Picnic Site. After two in other northern sites yesterday this is strongly indicating a movement. The black-bellied Great Cormorant was still present, as well as at least six Darters. Around the edge there were a Yellow-billed Stork, six Black-winged Stilts, but only a couple each of Green, Wood and Common Sandpipers.

Leaving here we scanned the area towards Hyena Dam finding something that looked like a very distant Roller on a Balanites, and so decided not to take the back road but go straight to Hyena Dam. It was a Eurasian Roller, and three more were seen during the day (see image), we also had our first of nine Whinchats along the road. We drove along the causeway with the usual birds taking no notice of us as Long-toed of which seven present, Blacksmith and Spur-winged Plovers stayed within two feet of the wheels and not budging, and coming to the end there was a group of three duck, two were Red-billed Teal but the shock was that the third was a beautiful Cape Teal and only the second ever for the Park. What a soda-loving duck was doing on a fresh-water dam is a real surprise and the day was going well. Other birds here were an African Spoonbill, Yellow-billed Egret, fifteen Black-winged Stilts, two Marsh, seventy Wood, four Green and three Common Sandpipers and two Ruffs. The adult Fish Eagle was in the acacia with its two noisy offspring, the other adult was back at Nagalomon Dam enjoying the peace! The three Yellow Wagtails present all appeared to be flava. We now went back round towards Ivory Burning Site the wrong way but picking up a host of species that was already pushing over 100 species for the day that was just starting.

On circling round we took the road along the Mokoyeti to the ox-bow swamp but as usual it was not very productive, but on crossing the ford a Black-winged Plover called and so we took the track into the Hyena Dam run-off area, and amazingly found the plover hiding in some eaten reeds where it was very well camouflaged. Whilst watching the bird an eagle appeared over the vlei and circled around and was the adult Great Spotted Eagle, we watched it circling then it plummeted into short Whistling Thorn some distance away and we did not see it again. Backtracking we crossed the Mokoyeti Bridge where a Garden Warbler fed on Carissa berries quite openly and headed back up towards Nagalomon Dam with a Black Stork flying in which was to be the only sighting for the day.

Heading towards Kingfisher two lions disturbed some Kongoni as they walked past. We detoured along the track by the swamp where yesterdays Saddle-billed Stork was still present, and had a very quiet time at the picnic-site although Eurasian Bee-eaters were in the area. Along the old burnt area two pairs of Black-winged Plovers had moved in and will presumably breed here. Having now run into Crowned Plovers we now had five Vanellus species for the day. Also here was the first of the days three Tawny Eagles. On the inside quarry road near Maasai Gate we found two very attractive Short-tailed Larks and the days only Rufous-tailed Rock-Thrush which was a female. Rejoining the main road there was a male Pied Wheatear the first of three, but after this it was quiet until we reached the Pallid Honeyguide in his usual place and whilst watching him he was attacked by a Lesser Honeyguide. In the woodland above Hippo Pools were the usual Speckle-fronted Weavers; the first of six Olivaceous Warblers and a Namaqua Dove flew by. A short walk at Hippo Pools was worthwhile, a Hoopoe was calling but there was nothing out of the ordinary apart from a noisy male Von der Decken’s Hornbill which is a very rare species in the Park (see image).

A little further up the road we flushed the only Pangani Longclaw of the day, and in Rhino Circuit had a few things including more Eurasian Bee-eaters, the biggest surprise however was a party of nine Namaqua Doves feeding on the ground together whilst a Laughing Dove was nearby, and a party of Lesser Masked Weavers with males in full breeding plumage and noisy, finally three Tree Pipits.

At the pipeline we went to the river where the best bird was a Jacobin Cuckoo, whilst a Spotted Thick-knee started calling but the acacias were otherwise quiet. Further along the Pipeline were our five Northern Wheatears for the day and then nothing of note until Athi Dam. The Storks were putting on a fine display not as many Marabous as yesterday and just over sixty Whites. There were five Yellow-billed and the Open-billed was down to one lone bird, but now there were an adult and immature Abdim’s (see image), giving us the staggering total of seven out of the eight African Stork species for the day!!! Also here were four African Spoonbills, two adult Black-crowned Night Herons on the causeway, two White Pelicans, another Spotted Thick-knee, six Black-winged Stilts, three Common Ringed Plovers, four Common Greenshank (the species was seen at four other sites today), a few Wood and Common Sandpipers, fifteen Little Stints and a Ruff.

There were nine Ruppell’s Vultures at the drinking pools, Quailfinch were showing well as they also came to quench their thirst, and crossing the grasslands we had six Lessers and a Common Kestrel, a female-plumaged Montagu’s Harrier, and a few Banded Martins but it was very parched. At Karen PS Dam the Little Grebes were present, and a handsome Spur-winged Goose had moved in, and there was another Spotted Thick-knee. Whilst towards Eland Hollow we found another Short-tailed Lark. Checking the old Speke’s Weavers nests in the very large Acacia drepanolobium next to the Rhino guard’s camp we noticed many Red-billed Queleas in the tree and stopped to look. We were amazed to see that under the Speke’s nests the Queleas had constructed much smaller nest and were themselves breeding (see image). This must be the first nesting record of the species in NNP. Whilst watching the birds a warbler came out of the tangle and started hopping past the nests swinging its tail in circles and was an Upcher’s Warbler! Whilst we watched right next to an extraordinarily tame Black-shouldered Kite (see image), of which only one other had been seen today, a female-type Pallid Harrier came in very fast and started diving and flying rapidly after the Quelea but was not successful.

A last minute check of Hyena Dam showed that the Cape Teal was still happy there, and although not seen in the two days, the adult African Jacana was still present, and also although not seen at all in the last two days up to now, the Secretarybird was padding around his territory near the Ivory Burning Arena over which was another Lesser Kestrel. Nothing new had come in to Nagalomon Dam and we headed off towards Langata Gate via the beautiful Kisembe valley. Along the river there was a movement in a bush tangle and a stunning White-starred Robin emerged in full view. Although most certainly resident in the forest, it may not have been reported for a few years. Our last birds of any note were a couple of Banded Martins fluttering over the vlei near Langata Gate where they have shown favour in previous years.

We were through the gate by 6.00pm having had a truly rewarding day with 214 species of birds and a good assemblage of mammals. The comparison of the two days shows amazing differences in what seemed identical conditions. With the total of species over that period amounting to 239 species. In the morning we met up with Fleur Ng’Weno, Sidney Shema and Jennifer Oduori and they had recorded ten species that we had not had any sign of, It shows what an incredibly diversity of birdlife we have on our doorstep thanks to Nairobi National Park.

SPECIES IN THE MONTAGE

1. KORI BUSTARD

Although four adults seen on 27th, no bustards were to be seen on 28th.

1. HAMERKOP

Five were engaged in a comical group display along the side track by the swamp near Kingfisher Picnic Site.

1. AFRICAN FISH EAGLE

This is one of a pair of very young birds that have appeared at Hyena Dam. They have at least one adult attendant. The amazing thing is that Fish Eagles have never been found to nest in NNP, yet these must not have come far.

1. ABDIM’S STORK

With an adult and immature at Athi Dam on 28th was an impressive seventh species of Stork seen on that day.

1. OPEN-BILLED STORK

Three were at Athi Dam on 27th but only one bird remained on 28th.

1. WESTERN MARSH HARRIER

Two different birds were seen on 27th, but whilst Montagu’s and Pallid were present on 28th none of this species made an appearance.

6b GREAT SPOTTED EAGLE

The wintering adult at a fair distance taken by Simon.

1. RUFOUS-TAILED ROCK-THRUSH

Single females at swamp near Kingfisher on 27th and the inside road near Maasai Gate on 28th were different individuals.

1. GREAT CORMORANT

This strange all black breasted adult was seen at Nagalomon Dam on both days.

1. GREY-HEADED KINGFISHER

On 27th single birds were recorded in the north where they are very rarely seen on the back road to Hyena Dam and near Kingfisher Picnic Site, and on 28th birds were at Nagalomon Dam and below Impala Lookout, all birds being immatures. This indicates a movement into the area.

1. BLACK-COLLARED APALIS

Whilst almost always only heard at the KWS Mess, and representing the only members of their species in NNP, on 27th they were very active and noisy and were not too camera shy for the species, on 28th they were only heard as usual.

1. ROCK HOOKTAIL

A single male of this dragonfly (Paragomphus cognatus) was on a rock in the Mokoyeti River crossing below Baboon Cliffs. This seems to be the first ever recorded in NNP.

1. MARSH SANDPIPER

Three were at Hyena Dam on 27th down to two on 28th.

1. VON DER DECKEN’S HORNBILL

In mid-December the first for five years was along the Mbagathi, and on 28th a male was calling on territory at Hippo Pools.

1. NAMAQUA DOVE

This image taken on the Rhino Circuit is of an amazing nine together feeding on the ground on 28th.

1. ISABELLINE SHRIKE

On 27th of the twelve Red-tailed Shrikes seen, three were Isabelline and the rest Turkestan. But incredibly the 28th over thirty-five Red-tailed Shrikes were encountered which might have meant a late overnight arrival; of these only four were Isabelline.

1. BLACK-SHOULDERED KITE

Only two different birds met with and with the short and dry grass currently, many have departed from the region.

1. COMMON SNIPE

Single birds were met with at Hyena and Karen PS Dam on 27th, but none on 28th.

1. CAPE TEAL

A big surprise on 28th was finding this bird with two Red-billed Teal. Being a bird of soda not freshwater lakes, there had only ever been one other record in NNP before. It was still present in the evening.

1. BLACK-WINGED PLOVER

On 28th one was calling and located on the Hyena Dam Run-Off, and later two separate pairs were on the old burnt area near Kingfisher, where they have bred in previous years.

1. DUSKY NIGHTJAR

This adult male was dead on the road below Impala Lookout, and was in exactly this perfect posture for nightjar identification!

1. EURASIAN ROLLER

There was one on 27th, but four birds were seen on 28th including two adult birds.

1. PANGANI LONGCLAW

Single birds seen on both days.

1. RED-BILLED QUELEA

A surprise was finding a breeding colony next to the Rhino Rangers Camp at Eland Hollow. Their nests were under an obvious previous colony of Speke’s Weaver. This is very likely the first time the species has ever been recorded as nesting in NNP.

1. STORKS

A spectacular sight of Marabou and White Storks at Athi Dam.