**NAIROBI NATIONAL PARK 27th JANUARY 2019**

Dear All,

Nigel Hunter and myself arrived at the Main Gate at 6.30am, it was a Sunday and if you can by any means avoid a Sunday, or even Saturday… you should! The queue for processing the entry came out of the office and right across the Car Park. We were processed at 7.10am and had recorded a few things around the Main Entrance before entering, though the only species not found once through the gate were Great Sparrowhawk, Willow Warbler, White-eyed Slaty Flycatcher and Yellow White-eye. The queue for processing by now extended across the Car Park and had a tail to the side and vehicles kept on arriving, NNP was doing great business today.

Along the entrance road we had Tree Pipit and the first Nightingale, but although a completely clear morning things were extraordinarily quiet. Ivory Burning Site produced a few more Nightingales and a some Lesser Striped Swallows, but we were to find these common throughout the entire Park, they were now really and truly back, but very late compared to previous years. The next stop was Nagalomon Dam, with nothing singing from the scrub along the causeway and both the Drift and the Bridge were bird less. At the Dam there was a Little Bittern that gave an alarm but we never saw it, around the edge were three African Spoonbills, a breeding and a non-breeding plumaged Squacco Herons, (see image and discussion), a Great Egret, three Darters, an adult Fish Eagle, several noisy Green Sandpipers, a couple of Wood, and a singing Zanzibar Greenbul.

Taking the back road to Hyena Dam there was not much activity on the road, but sitting on the tops of the acacias was a group of four Palearctic Black Kites, all were adults (see images and discussion). Further along was the first of three Augur Buzzards, the first of three Turkestan Shrikes, concealed Eurasian Reed Warbler and African Firefinch called from deep cover, and a male flava Yellow Wagtail was on the swamp, with a second similar bird seen later at Eland Hollow. A few out of plumaged Red-collared Widowbirds were the only individuals encountered today. A count up of the species so far recorded before arrival at Hyena Dam was a surprising 120 species. At the Dam all we added were a Marabou, Yellow-billed Egret, the first of over eight Black-winged Kites, seven Crowned Cranes were part of twenty counted today, ten Black-winged Stilts (there were none on Nagalomon earlier which was most unusual), five Long-toed Plovers, two Common Sandpipers which were the only two today, and the first of six Whinchats, the first time over three in a day this season. Additionally were another Fish Eagle, a few more Green and over twenty Wood Sandpipers. On the ox-bow along the Mokoyeti the pair of African Water Rails were at home.

The dry conditions over the last few weeks had resulted in very dusty roads, but this was exacerbated by the fact that many of the roads had been recently graded. We inhaled a lot of dust today. We took the road along the Mokoyeti but the vegetation was yellowing and grassland birds were not in evidence at all, and this was the case throughout the Park with very dull plains driving. We continued to Olmanyi Dam where there was still quite a bit of water, here we found eight Yellow-billed Storks with five African Spoonbills and a Common Greenshank. Continuing to the road below Impala Lookout we stopped for a couple of cars going past as they were kicking up dust, and another came and another whilst we sat and waited, after some time the fortieth vehicle passed and was the final and evidently someone must have found a Lion, this was another convincing incident showing us the disadvantages of being there on a Sunday. Wherever we went, even to the remotest parts of the Park there was someone already there! We carried on to Kingfisher Swamp where a second pair of African Water Rails announced their presence. White-winged and only a handful of Jackson’s Widowbirds were in the sedges, there was a nice party of around ten Eurasian Bee-eaters, and two other parties encountered today, and a Gabar Goshawk. The Picnic Site was unsurprisingly full so we continued towards Maasai Gate.

Along the road towards Ololo there were flocks of Red-billed Queleas in the Acacia brevispica woodland, and with them were a number of Speckle-fronted and Grey-capped Social Weavers, the last named whilst common on Kitengela is very rarely recorded in the Park. At Ololo unlike last week when so much was coming down to drink, nothing was today even though it was equally as hot. There was another Fish Eagle present, and Red-faced Cisticola, the first of three Olivaceous Warblers, and first of just two Spotted Flycatchers, and Brown Parisoma, were all additions for the day. Returning to the main track there was a Secretarybird on its nest, a Black Stork flying down the valley, the Pallid Honeyguide sounded louder than usual at the Mokoyeti crossing where a Garden Warbler was singing, and along the Mbagathi were an adult Martial Eagle and several parties of Blue-naped Mousebirds. Above Hippo Pools was a pair of White-bellied Bustards, a few more Speckle-fronted Weavers and four Black-faced Waxbills behaving most unusually in that they were persistently creeping around sheer tree trunks then flying off to another trunk. This suggests that they were finding some protein, as it was unlikely there were seeds to be found, but that would be as unusual as their behaviour if they had turned carnivorous! After Hippo Pools was another adult Martial Eagle with the Steppe Eagle on his usual tree close by, and whilst Rhino Circuit seemed quiet we were lucky enough to locate a feeding party further inside the woodland with Laughing Dove, a pair of Abyssinian Scimitarbills, several Red-throated Tits and a group of noisy Lesser Masked Weavers.

Back on the main road again we carried on as far as the Pipeline, here apart from a large male Lion under a bush we picked up two Pied and four Northern Wheatears of which one male was already showing spring colours although still in heavy moult. These were our only wheatears all day, (see image). At Athi Dam one Water Thick-knee was in the usual place under a waterside bush and undoubtedly its mate was close at hand in deeper shade. Spotted Thick-knees were under the bushes away from the water. Around the edge were five White-faced Whistling-Ducks, a very young Open-billed Stork (see image), up to a thousand Marabous with seventy White Storks scattered amongst them (see images), huge numbers of Marabous appear at this time of year, after a period of almost total absence so they are a regular migrant, three African Spoonbills, just three Black-crowned Night-Herons at their roost, five Black-winged Stilts, the days only Marsh Sandpiper and Common Snipe, three Common Greenshank, a few Wood and Green Sandpipers, ten Little Stint and five Ruff. There was a lone Little Ringed Plover that was already almost in breeding plumage (see images), and amongst an impressive flock of 42 Kittlitz’s Plovers (see image), were three Common Ringed all in non-breeding plumage (see image). The scrub was quiet with just species already encountered such as another Laughing Dove and pair of Banded Parisomas.

Leaving here it was time to head back, at the Vulture-Drinking Pools were twenty-two White-backed, ten Ruppell’s and an immature Lappet-faced Vulture (see image). The family of four Short-tailed Larks seen on the last visit was in the same place and nearby was a handsome male Kori Bustard (see image). With nothing to see at Karen Primary School Dam, Eland Hollow was equally impressive were it not for the strange scattered twenty-four Black-headed Herons. Up to now only a few Quail-Finches had been met with, but driving through the Whistling Thorn we put up reasonable numbers. Both Hyena and Nagalomon Dam contributed nothing extra although there was another Secretarybird, but heading towards Langata Gate we found three different Common Buzzards (see image), only singles had been met so far this season, and the last bird being a pair of breeding-plumaged Little Grebes on Langata Dam. We were out of Langata Gate at 5.10pm.

The total number of species recorded today was 202, which was again more than we thought we were seeing because there were some very long stretches that produced nothing. Barn Swallows were barely a handful today but the silliest misses numbered Helmeted Guineafowl, Yellow-necked Spurfowl, Cattle Egret, Cardinal Woodpecker, Chin-spot Batis, Pectoral-patch Cisticola and Village Indigobird.

Mammals were widespread but greatest concentrations below Impala Lookout to Kingfisher and Athi Basin.

**KEY TO MONTAGE**

1. **COMMON BUZZARD**

As we passed alongside Kisembe Forest to exit Langata Gate, we had three different Common Buzzards; this is the first time more than one has been seen in a day in this season.

1. **YELLOW-BILLED KITE**

This large and heavy-billed bird is one of two Yellow-billed races, either the common resident parasitus or the middle-eastern aegypticus. It’s an immature hence the dark not yellow bill. Compared to the two adult nominate Black Kites photographed in the morning (7 & 8). I am trying to find out more about these structural differences.

1. **LITTLE RINGED PLOVER**

Until the past ten years rarely recorded in NNP, but now appears almost annually, this bird is extremely advanced towards breeding plumage for end of January.

1. **COMMON RINGED PLOVER**

There were three birds in non-breeding dress associating with the Kittlitz’s Plover flock.

1. **KITTLITZ’S PLOVER**

A compact flock of forty-two birds is by far the largest party in many years.

1. **KORI BUSTARD**

This male was near the Vulture Drinking Pools at the top of Athi Basin.

1. **BLACK KITE**

Migrant from the Palearctic, this is an adult in brownish plumage. Compare the structure with the Yellow-billed Kite (2).

1. **BLACK KITE**

One of a group of four (as was 7), all were nominate birds with are migrants. This bird is also adult but very reddish below.

1. **OPEN-BILLED STORK**

In the same corner of Athi Dam as an adult on the previous visit, now the spot occupied by this immature. It is a very young bird still showing much creamy-brown feathering on head and breast, with profuse pale tipping over much of the plumage. It doesn’t look as if it was much time since it left the nest.

1. **TURKESTAN SHRIKE**

Only three migrant shrikes seen today, all were Turkestan.

1. **SQUACCO HERONS**

I cannot recall having seen two Squacco Herons together before in NNP. These were on Nagalomon Dam. The left is almost in breeding plumage with soft biscuit back and head, and very whitish wings. The right bird is in non-breeding plumage with heavily streaked head and underparts, soft brown wings with darker back. It seemed odd having two differing plumages at the same time, but maybe the right-hand bird is a migrant from the Palearctic, something suspected but never proven.

1. **LAPPET-FACED VULTURE**

This bird was at the Vulture Drinking Pools with ten Ruppell’s and twenty-two White-backed. It was being singled out for prodding by a Marabou. Not many young birds like this are ever recorded in NNP, usually they are fully adult.

1. **MARABOU STORKS ARE BACK**

And how! Two views at Athi Dam, there were seventy White Storks with them.

1. **NORTHERN WHEATEAR**

Wheatears today were only on the Pipeline, where there were two Pied and four Northern. This male is in advanced stages to moulting into breeding plumage.