**NAIROBI NATIONAL PARK; 28th April, 3rd and 4th May 2019.**

Dear All,

I have been fortunate enough to spend three full days in the Park in the past week. Each of those days has produced many interesting observations, but the most striking thing is that all three days resulted in quite different sets of birds, even though the same route (or pretty close to it) was followed.

I was pondering the idea, that to show the world how ornithologically incredible NNP is, I think a fun and very educational event would be a mass bird watch in the Park some time in the first week of December, when southern passage is at its peak. It could be an event hosted by Nature Kenya, Fonnap, KWS and finally but no means least the Kenya Atlas project, with every atlasser working their fingers to the bone posting data.

Dawn and shortly after is the time when there is most activity and I think it is important to start the day with teams all over the Park, the logical scenario would be people entering Main Gate have stations in the North, and those coming in East Gate take over the south. I think that would be the only caveat and after this initial phase of recording, all teams can go wherever they like in the whole Park. Even if teams are visiting the same areas, the coverage will guarantee additional birds.

I think the total number of species in that Park at that time, could be quite staggering, and I also think even at other times of the year such an event would also produce surprises.

It’s all good publicity for the Park and Kenya.

**NAIROBI NATIONAL PARK 28th April 2019**

Today was a two-car sortie, in the first driven by Samira Khan, was Fleur Ng’Weno, Jennifer Oduore and myself, whilst the second car driven by Peter Steward carried his partner Christine, David Clarance and Angela Waki.

We were soon through the gate, and there had been an overnight shower which brought much activity to the forest birds as we headed off for Ivory Burning Site. Amongst the species seen on the way in were Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird, Hartlaub’s Turaco, Cabanis’ Greenbul, White-eyed Slaty Flycatcher, Amethyst and Collared Sunbirds, none of which we encountered a second time, several Willow Warblers were also feeding with these birds, even on the ground. The Ivory Burning Site was also active and we recorded a rapid succession of new species for the day included Crested Francolin, Common Buzzard, two Common Cuckoos with another three seen, the bizarre sight of Malachite Kingfisher sitting in a small croton well away from the nearest water, the first of three African Hoopoes seen today, a Brown-backed Woodpecker, the first of over 150 Red-backed Shrikes seen today, noisy Zanzibar Greenbuls, with parties of Red-collared, White-winged and Jackson’s Widowbirds, all three species being in breeding plumage.

Nagalomon Dam did not produce much, a Yellow-billed Stork, nesting African Spoonbills, Long-tailed Cormorants and Darters, one each of Great and Yellow-billed Egrets, an African Fish Eagle, and an adult African Jacana. On the back road to Hyena Dam was the days only Turkestan Shrike, the first of four Augur Buzzards, a pair of Grey Crowned Cranes, a Common Whitethroat, the first of three Great Reed Warblers and a Spotted Flycatcher, as well as breeding plumaged Red-billed Queleas. Whilst at Hyena Dam the star attraction was the young Goliath Heron. He had caught an enormous fish; it looked more Tilapia than Catfish but was a good foot long. A couple of Marabous walked towards it hoping it might drop it but the heron waded into deeper water and proceeded to swallow the fish which it seemed to do without too much effort. As it distended the neck the whole slender heron concept was shattered as the neck was now several times thicker and the bird looked very strange (see image). Also here were several African Spoonbills, a Great Egret, a Lanner made a nice low circuit, five Long-toed Plovers, twenty Black-winged Stilts (they must be off soon), eight Wood and two Common Sandpipers and a Ruff. A pair of Banded Martins came in for a drink and there were a couple of Wattled Starlings as well as the first of twenty Lesser Grey Shrikes and a flock of Parasitic Weavers containing a number of adult males.

We headed off to Kingfisher Swamp with the hopes of finding the Dwarf Bittern; on the way was the first of three Secretarybirds, and a late female Whinchat. A nice surprise was a loose flock of fourteen Eurasian Rollers, with only one other bird seen in Athi Basin. At the swamp we found six Common Snipe still here plus breeding plumage widowbirds of all three species and two Sedge Warblers. Kingfisher Picnic Site gave over a few birds including Red-throated Tit.

As we had been travelling at a relaxed pace, we were running out of time and made a bee-line straight for Athi Dam. Here we found a pair of Red-billed Teal, an African Open-billed Stork, several African Spoonbills, eleven roosting Black-crowned Night-Herons, eleven Pink-backed Pelicans, the two Water Thick-knees that had been residing since last October had now become three, several Spotted Thick-knees were under the bushes, still five Black-winged Stilts, three very smart Common Ringed Plover, six Wood and two Common Sandpipers, ten Little Stints and Banded Parisomas in the woodland.

Leaving the south we picked up the first of two Jacobin Cuckoos, a Zitting Cisticola singing was out ninth species, and a detour for lions gave us an adult Black-chested Snake-Eagle. What was probably the bird of the day, certainly in view of how early it was, was at Karen Primary School Dam. It was almost certainly the same Madagascar Pond Heron that comes back every year to the same place, but the earliest so far recorded (see image).

About ten Black-winged Kites were seen, and a handful of Barn Swallows but they must have left early this year and not through Nairobi.

Mammals had greatest concentrations in the south and particularly Athi Basin.

We exited Main Gate just after 6.00pm having had a wonderful day as always.

**NAIROBI NATIONAL PARK 3rd MAY 2019**

Dear All,

Nigel Hunter and myself were at the Main Entrance to NNP, and with no-one queuing were soon inside. It was quiet along the road, and no obvious recent rain though water levels a little higher than 28th April.

Yellow White-eyes were along the main road, and we started off at Ivory Burning Site where little was happening, and it was quiet, although there was a noisy couple of Zanzibar Greenbuls. So we were soon off to Nagalomon Dam which produced the usual suspects, with two Yellow-billed Storks, a few nesting African Spoonbills, incubating Long-tailed Cormorants whilst Darter chicks were now very big and very demanding. There were solitary Black-crowned Night-Heron and Great Egret. No migrant waders, but the adult African Jacana was still present.

Taking the back road to Hyena Dam we had the first of four Common Cuckoos (one being hepatic), the first of just five Red-backed Shrike and the only Turkestan Shrike, the adult that was here last week. There were the days only Red-billed Queleas around the apartments, the first of four Augur Buzzards and at Hyena Dam a few Marabous, African Spoonbills, but no sign of the Goliath Heron, a couple of Fish Eagles, five Black-winged Stilts, now six Long-toed Plovers, two Wood Sandpiper and that was it. The first of three pairs of Banded Martins flew in to drink, and there were Parasitic Weavers in bushes as we followed the Mokoyeti circuit, also a Tawny Eagle and a Eurasian Roller.

We looked for the Dwarf Bittern at the Kingfisher Swamp which has flooded nicely and whilst no bittern there were a pair of extravert African Water Rails (see image), and a beautiful female Greater Painted-snipe (see image). Also here were a Great Reed and a Sedge Warbler. There were Parasitic Weavers, White-winged Widowbirds, though no sign of the recent Red-collared and Jackson’s Widowbirds. Kingfisher Picnic Site was very quiet, not even a Striped Kingfisher and amazingly no sign of one all day!

On the way to Ololo we had what may be the last Whinchat of this season (see image), a couple of Pangani Longclaws, a few Speckle-fronted Weavers and Grey-capped Social Weavers were calling somewhere, as were White-bellied Bustards. New for this area was a pair of Red-throated Tits. At Ololo it was rather quiet, a Laughing Dove flew up the river, but a Brown Parisoma was giving snatches of song and it is here that you can see why its transfer to Sylvia might be justified. There was a male African Firefinch and Black-faced Waxbill coming in to drink. Further along the road was a family of five Short-tailed Larks feeding in dazzlingly green grass. The next stop was the woodland above Hippo Pools where there was a very late female Eurasian Rock Thrush (see image), and heading off to Rhino Circuit the first Bateleur in a while, three Violet Wood-Hoopoes and a pair of Hildebrandt’s Starlings that get a mention because they were the first in a number of visits, yet before were an expected species on a days tally. The only Lesser Grey Shrike of the day was also along this section.

Rhino Circuit was absolutely birdless with no sight nor sound, but the river end of the Pipeline gave us a few Lesser Masked Weavers in breeding plumage and quite vocal.

The Dam had a lot of muddy verge but nothing much using it, apart from residents, the waders were restricted to four Black-winged Stilt, two Kittlitz’s Plovers, a Marsh and four Wood Sandpipers, four each of Ruff and Little Stint. Three Water Thick-knees were on the shore (see image), whilst Spotted Thick-knees were under the bushes. Also present were 31 Pink-backed Pelicans, a few Marabou, several African Spoonbills, single Glossy Ibis and Little Egret (see image), five Black-crowned Night-Herons roosted on the Causeway, and whilst we were having our lunch, the adjacent tree entertained us with a Willow, two Sedge and Eurasian Reed Warbler, plus a stunning immature Great Spotted Cuckoo with its bright orange wing panels. Banded Parisomas were the only warblers in the Acacia mellifera woodland. Whilst we were there a pair of Secretarybirds came in to drink, this is the third successive trip that this has happened, another three birds were seen towards the North of the Park.

On the return we had a few Shelley’s Francolins sheltering under bushes from the hot sun, a pair of Little Grebes in breeding plumage on the dam at the Empakasi junction and the same Madagascar Pond Heron found on 28th April was still in the same place at Karen Primary School Dam. This, Eland Hollow as well as other dams harboured large numbers of Black-headed Herons. The final bird was a Great Egret by the Mokoyeti River just before Langata Gate where we exited at 5.00pm.

Some ten Black-winged Kites were met with, but only five Barn Swallows.

Plains game was most numerous in the south and Athi Basin which has great concentrations of Giraffe. An impressive Black-necked Spitting Cobra conservatively two metres long was near the Rhino Circuit junction but even though it spread its hood, was very shy.

It was of course a very interesting day, but being a Friday there were not many people sharing the Park with us, we recorded 185 species for the day.

Best to all,

Brian

**NAIROBI NATIONAL PARK 4th MAY 2019**

This was a special outing for Mike Davidson out on his annual visit. Fleur Ng’Weno and Heather Elkins were the rest of the party, and Fleur was holding our place in the queue, but it wasn’t necessary as there wasn’t anyone else waiting to be processed, apparently there was a queue but the staff was very expedient with the processing.

We entered the Main Gate at 7.15pm, it was overcast and fairly cool, there had not been any desired rainfall and yet rivers, and dams were higher than the previous day!

It was quiet as we headed off to Ivory Burning Site, which was also quite silent so we hastened off to Nagalomon Dam.

There was an Open-billed Stork that had probably spent the night, a couple of African Spoonbills were on their usual platforms but no sign of any young as yet, whilst Long-tailed Cormorants were also sitting tight on nests, but the Darters young were as large as adults now. There was one Black-crowned Night-Heron, a Great Egret and an African Fish-Eagle keeping watch. No migrant waders. But the adult African Jacana still present. The first of two Common Cuckoos flew down the Causeway, the only other migrant being the first of just two Willow Warblers today. From here we went straight to Hyena Dam, Parasitic Weavers were sitting on the bushes, there was a Yellow-billed Stork, a couple of more African Spoonbills, and after not being visible all day yesterday the young Goliath Heron was back large as life. Another Fish Eagle was in the tree, four Black-winged Stilts were all that was remaining, the other twenty that have wintered here must have headed off to the Palearctic as they do every year, and soon these last birds will also leave, just two Wood Sandpipers were the remainder of the migrant waders. Long-toed Plovers had climbed back up to seven.

Taking the back road towards Ivory Burning Site gave us the only Red-backed Shrike of the day (over 150 were seen on 28th April), also the first of three Augur Buzzards, the first of three pairs of Grey Crowned Cranes encountered today, two Red-throated Pipits dropped into the green area along the creek but disappeared into cover and never reappeared, whilst a flock of Red-billed Quelea busied themselves around the pigeon coop.

The circuit around the Mokoyeti only gave us a calling Eurasian Reed Warbler on the ox-bow.

Now setting off for Kingfisher, we tried for the pair of African Water Rails and the female Greater Painted-snipe that were so showy yesterday, we also searched for the Dwarf Bittern photographed here by James Kashangaki just over a week ago. This is Mike’s bogey bird as in all his time living in Africa he had never seen one, and he didn’t this time either. There was also no sign of the Great Reed and Sedge Warblers here yesterday. So we consoled ourselves by having our breakfast under the large tree up the side road. There were three Common Snipe still here, in the same place as six were on the 28th April so we settled down to refreshments, but of course such a nice looking wetland has to be scanned, and there in the reeds almost completely concealed was a dark shape with what might be a bluish cast. This shape then walked out into an open patch and even though so far away, undoubtedly made Mike’s day, a Dwarf Bittern (see image). Curiously whilst scattered White-winged Widowbirds were seen, the fresh Red-collared and Jackson’s here and Ivory Burning Site on 28th April appeared to have left immediately after arrival.

The Picnic Site was not very lively there was the first of two Tawny Eagles, a Brown Parisoma was scolding but had no friends, so we continued on past the old burnt area. Here was the first of just two Lesser Grey Shrikes for the day, but it was unusual in having grey not black shoulders, (see image). The days only Pangani Longclaw was also here and a real Red-chested Cuckoo was singing.

The road to Ololo also quiet, a few Speckle-fronted Weavers and overflying Grey-headed Social Weaver, and nothing noteworthy in the Car Park, but on the way back we stopped for a close-up view of flowering Asparagus racemosus, the only essentially open-grassland Asparagus species locally and was flowering in abundance all through the grassland. But what was very interesting about this particular on is that there was a pair of Side-striped Chameleons Trioceros bitaeniatus on the stem. This is the first time I have ever seen this species in NNP.

The southern grasslands were quiet as we headed for Hippo Pools, but on the descent just after Leopard Cliffs was a most co-operative Madagascar Bee-eater (see image). In the woodland above Hippo Pools were the usual Speckle-fronted Weavers and a Common Whitethroat, and towards the pipeline (we didn’t do Rhino Circuit) the first of two Jacobin Cuckoos, this one was rakish (see image), but not nearly as rakish as the Long-crested Eagle! (See image). There was also another Fish Eagle, this one a young bird with heavy streaking down the chest, and the first two of five Secretarybirds, all in different places to the five yesterday!

There was a broad margin all around Athi Dam, but hardly anything there, another Open-billed Stork, a few Marabou and several African Spoonbill, five roosting Black-crowned Night-Herons, thirty Pink-backed Pelicans, the three Water Thick-knees still present and the usual Spotted Thick-knees under the bushes, other waders being four Black-winged Stilts, yesterdays Marsh Sandpiper, five Wood and two Common Sandpipers and four Little Stint. Banded Parisomas we in the Acacia mellifera, but no migrant warblers could be seen on the Causeway.

As we left Athi Basin, there was a stunning Eurasian Roller on the road (see image), perhaps the last for this season and two co-operative Shelly’s Francolins. At the Vulture Drinking Pools with the few White-backs were two Ruppell’s and further up the road we encountered a confiding Gabar Goshawk. Sadly no falcons were in the grasslands. The now well-filled dam at the Empakasi junction still had its pair of Little Grebes from yesterday, but also a Yellow-billed Egret.

No sign of the Madagascar Pond Heron at Karen Primary School Dam, but our only three Quail-Finch were nearby, Eland Hollow fared better as not only was there a female Knob-billed Duck (see image) present but just the third record for the Park, a pair of Cape Teal (see image).

The extraordinary Black-headed Heron invasion continues over most of the Park, there must have been fifteen Black-shouldered Kites today, and the grand total of Barn Swallows was one!!!

Mammals were in spectacular numbers in Athi Basin, other encounters were Black and White Rhinos, Lions, Black-backed Jackal, Slender Mongoose and Suni.

We were out of Main Gate at 5.00pm having not looked at Kisembe Forest.

Best to all,

Brian

**KEY TO MONTAGE 3rd & 4th MAY 2019**

1. **GREATER PAINTED SNIPE**

Adult female roadside at Kingfisher Swamp whilst looking for the recent Dwarf Bittern,

1. **MADAGASCAR POND HERON**

A very early bird at the Karen Primary School Dam run-off on 28th April, this appears to be adult with much white from the breeding plumage still present on the lower belly and a as a broad line down the centre of the chest. Present in the same place 3rd but not found 4th May. This is quite likely the same bird returning each year to this dam.

1. **WHINCHAT**

This female on 4th May could be the last for this season.

1. **DWARF BITTERN**

We were very lucky to find it creeping around at quite a distance in the swampy vegetation at Kingfisher Swamp on 4th May. It is almost certainly the bird that James K found a week ago when he had such a wonderful close encounter.

1. **CAPE TEAL**

This pair on Eland Hollow 4th May, was only the third documented for NNP. The other two have been at Hyena and Athi Dams, both single birds but no Pentad has had them twice!

1. **EURASIAN ROLLER**

This bird on its spiky perch was one of a party of fourteen below Impala Lookout on 28th April. The second largest group I have recorded in NNP.

1. **AFRICAN WATER RAIL**

Another bonus whilst looking for the Dwarf Bittern unsuccessfully on the 3rd May at Kingfisher Swamp. It was a pair of very extravert birds right by the road, then right in the open, proceeded to mate!

1. **SHELLEY’S FRANCOLIN**

Seen on all three dates above Athi Basin.

1. **KNOB-BILLED DUCK**

Always uncommon in NNP, this female was at Eland Hollow on 4th May.

1. **GOLIATH HERON**

At Hyena Dam on 28th April, we watched this first catch then swallow a very large fish, and stared in disbelief as it then swallowed the prey whole and watched it slowly sink down its neck. The neck was so distended that it completely changed the shape of the bird, as it was no longer tall and slender. There was no sign of the bird anywhere on 3rd May but on 4th it was back at Hyena Dam.

1. **WATER THICK-KNEE**

Three birds seen as a group at Athi Dam on all three dates.

1. **GLOSSY IBIS/LITTLE EGRET**

Neither species is particularly common in NNP, but it saved on pixels getting the two together at Athi Dam on 3rd May.

1. **JACOBIN CUCKOO**

This bird is wearing an impressive punk hair-do! Two were seen on 28th April and two on 4th May. They are presumably Asian birds heading off to take their non-stop flight across the Indian Ocean from the Kenya or Somali coast-making landfall on the west coast of India. It’s difficult to imagine it!

1. **LESSER GREY SHRIKE**

On 28th April there were twenty Lesser Greys, compared to over a hundred Red-backed and just two Turkestan Shrikes. By the 3rd May it was down to five Red-backed, one Turkestan and one Lesser Grey, and on 4th just one Red-backed and two Lesser Greys of which this bird is one of them. It is an interesting individual because instead of showing black shoulders, they are grey and only the flight feathers are black. The low maximums, and the drastic plummet in figures are indicative that at least Lesser Grey and Red-backed are declining rapidly, but Turkestan and Isabelline are also suffering being slaughtered by idiots in the Middle East.

1. **EURASIAN ROLLER**

This was a glowing bird sitting on the road above Athi Basin on 4th May, possibly the last of the season.

1. **EURASIAN ROCK THRUSH**

I cannot remember ever having seen a May Eurasian Rock Thrush before, but this female was in the woodland above Hippo Pools on 3rd May. It was also the only one I have seen in NNP this entire season. Three birds were recorded on the day the Abyssinian Roller was found.

1. **SECRETARY BIRD**

For three successive visits a pair of birds has come in to drink at Athi Dam. On 3rd May, five birds were seen during the day, on the 4th May also five were seen during the day, but none of them were seen in the same places!

1. **MADAGASCAR BEE-EATER**

On 3rd May, I thought I heard either Blue-cheeked or Madagascar Bee-eaters at Rhino Circuit and near Langata Gate, but scanning the sky failed to produce any sighting. On 4th May this handsome Madagascar was above the Mbagathi near Leopard Cliffs.

1. **LONG-CRESTED EAGLE**

This used to be a regular sight in NNP, but now we are down a barely a few observations each year, this bird was near the Rhino Circuit junction on 3rd May.