**NAIROBI NATIONAL PARK 30th NOVEMBER 2018**

On the last day of November Fleur Ng’Weno and myself having checked in were waiting for Jennifer Oduore to appear. There had been a Matatu strike and she was having difficulty in getting to the Park from her home.

Whilst waiting we decided to have a walk around the main car park area. It was quite busy with up to ten Willow Warblers, single Garden Warbler and Spotted Flycatcher, amongst the migrants. It was very overcast and looked threatening. Many resident were active including a pair of silent Honeybirds, but so dark we could not be sure whether they were Green-backed or Wahlberg’s. I took an image, and on lightening it up could clearly see that the bird was a Green-backed, very useful birding tools cameras! (See image). We had a good time but then the skies opened, we were fortunate to be near a shelter over a petrol pump when it happened. When it stopped the birds became exceedingly active all around us. In the meantime Jennifer had now taken a Boda Boda and was having a fairly damp ride. Whilst we were now being offered tea, coffee and snacks but a lady working in the new restaurant by the car parking area, which is well worth noting if you fancy refreshments before you go in, or it’s pouring with rain and you will only be sitting in a vehicle with streams of water running down the panes unable to see anything. I said I would put the word out for them and this is it!

About 8.20pm Jennifer appeared and was as cheerful as if she wasn’t wet, tired and fed up with the morning. She was soon processed and we set off to KWS Mess.

There was less activity than in the car parking, but a few Nightingales were active and a single Blackcap, but there wasn’t a good representation of the residents. So we continued to Ivory Burning Site, a Brown-backed Woodpecker on the way then more Nightingales, a few Blackcaps and Garden Warblers but otherwise quiet.

We had planned on leaving early afternoon and realised that we would not make it to the Athi end, and decided to stay in the Northern end, in fact we never left “Finch Pentad.”

At Nagalomon Dam were the usual suspects but the only Fish Eagles were perched high above the dam a long way into the forest. Four Darters were present, and single immature Black-crowned Night-Heron, Great Egret and Yellow-billed Stork, and three African Spoonbills. There was a female Eurasian Marsh Harrier over the back of the dam. Around the edge were five Black-winged Stilts, but no other Palearctic waders, and in the Rus bushes Blue-naped Mousebirds were gorging on the fruits.

We took the back road to Hyena Dam, but it was quiet as well as getting late, whilst at the dam was a Yellow-billed Egret, a pair of Crowned Cranes, a dozen Black-winged Stilts, six Long-toed Plovers, a Ruff, a very jaunty Common Snipe (see image), three Green, two Common and thirty Wood Sandpipers, whilst on the causeway was a young Eurasian Cuckoo (see image), a few Eurasian Bee-eaters were circling around, and a Rosy-breasted Longclaw was starting to sing though did not show much colour. A couple of Banded Martins came in to drink with the other Swallows present, but very few Barn were seen today.

From here we took the circuit around the Mokoyeti River, the only Black-shouldered Kite and Augur Buzzards of the day were here, more Nightingales calling from cover, the days only Whinchat, and a male Turkestan Shrike, (see image). Taking the road to Olmanyi Dam all we found was a Common Greenshank and continued on to Kingfisher Picnic Site on the way finding a Spotted Thick-knee nearby (see image), and a fruiting tree attracting ten Greater Blue-eared Starling which were glowing, and a Hildebrandt’s Starling (see images). At Kingfisher was a male Isabelline Shrike, (see image). There were the only Northern and Isabelline Wheatears of the day here but little else on the old burnt area. When I was drawing up my list of species for “Finch Pentad” I was not sure if I had seen Southern Black Flycatcher in it. But looking at Google Earth there appeared to be a nice parcel of riverine acacia along the Mbagathi on the track to Ololo Lodge which is just outside the Park but has a bridge access. I had never been there and thought it looked ideal for Southern Black Flycatcher. Apart from Maasai Gate this is the only accessible part of the Mbagathi in NNP in this Pentad. It was quite nice and provided Striated Heron, two Spotted Flycatchers, more Nightingale, Red-faced Cisticola and a very obliging pair of Brown Parisomas, (see image), and as we left there was a pair of Southern Black Flycatchers next to the car waiting for us! (See image). On refection I and sure I used to see, and there probably still is a pair at the Swimming Pool in the grounds of Maasai Lodge.

We now retreated back with a Bohor Reedbuck cowering in short dry grass no-where near water, and at Langata Dam ended with a Yellow-billed Egret and Little Grebe.

We were through the Langata Gate shortly after 4.00pm. It had been a fairly short time in the Park, an enjoyable day with nothing too outrageous, but a nice group of seven lions near the upper Mokoyeti Bridge, one large young fell asleep and the remainder wandered off. When he woke up and they were gone he searched for the scent, and howled, we found the rest of the group who never responded, and could still hear the lost individual howling away whilst no other lion seemed to care. Perhaps it was their plan!

NAIROBI NATIONAL PARK 9th DECEMBER 2018

On 9th December Nigel Hunter and I arrived at the Main Entrance at 6.40am. There had been a shower but it was gloomy and cool. In the car parking were the only Willow Warblers and Tree Pipit for the day amongst others resident species we did not re-encounter. We were in the Park at just before 7.00am and set off for Ivory Burning Site. Still cold and spitting with rain there was not only not much activity but even Ruppell’s Robin-Chats were quiet, but not far from the entrance was a group of Yellow White-eyes.

Gradually birds were calling but were only about three Nightingales and several Blackcaps, many expected species were not revealing their presence in the gloomy conditions. A few White–rumped Swifts were back at the Nagalomon Causeway, and were widespread today, there was also the first pair of returning Lesser Striped Swallows, but only a single other bird was seen. The bushes were silent apart from mournful-sounding Blue-naped Mousebirds which were throughout the Park today which suggested a local incursion, and Zanzibar Greenbuls were calling from both the NE and NW of Nagalomon Dam. The water and edges were as quiet as it has ever been seen, three Darters were present with a few Long-tailed Cormorants, there was a Great Egret, three African Spoonbills, an adult Fish Eagle, with the days only Common Greenshank and single Green and Wood Sandpipers on the banks. Green Sandpipers had largely fled the dams today in favour of wet potholes. This seems to be the usual thing after a reasonable rain, but I wonder what the attraction of a puddle is that cannot be found in a dam. A pair of Crowned Cranes were here with the only other pairs being at Hyena Dam and below Impala Lookout. Three Pied Kingfisher were active fishing, and a few White-winged Widowbirds were about, including breeding males.

Taking the back road to Hyena Dam, the road was damp but still in good condition, Crested Francolins called, the only Yellow Wagtail seen today looked like an adult female flava and a Dark-capped Yellow Warbler posed by the road, (see image). Red-billed Quelea including breeding males, were in small parties. At the Dam were the Squacco Heron, an African Spoonbill, a pair of Fish Eagles, a dozen Black-winged Stilts, only three Long-toed Plovers were visible, two Ruff, three Green, thirty Wood and two Common Sandpipers. The strangest and saddest site was seeing a Grey Heron stabbing at and after a struggle swallowing a Green Sandpiper, however we were not witnesses to the murder only the eventual disposal of the evidence! (See images). Additionally there was a Rosy-breasted Longclaw on territory, an annoying Red-throated Pipit which called twice fairly close but stayed hidden, probably feeding at a puddle in the grassland, the first of just three Whinchats, an occasionally co-operative Sedge Warbler, (see image), and the first of very few Quail-Finch today. There has obviously been a major dispersal out of the Park.

Immediately on leaving the Dam there were fifteen Jackson’s Widowbirds on the road, all with no trace of breeding plumage, the circuit around the Mokoyeti Bridge past Nagalomon and on to Kingfisher failed to produce. We had our third Augur Buzzard of which two had been black, and there were scattered pairs of Parasitic Weavers with males in full breeding plumage, but no flocks were encountered and it appears that they have paired up now. Turning off from the escarpment were a flock eight Eurasian Bee-eaters, and a dozen Red-collared Widowbirds with two long-tailed birds already, and the road alongside the dam which still holds African Water Rail, gave us the first of three Northern Wheatears. Kingfisher was full of people and we recorded nothing.

On the old burnt area was a very dark Northern Wheatear (see image), and at the small bridge an African Firefinch was singing beautifully. Apart from the days only Isabelline Wheatear the Quarry Road near Maasai Gate held no surprises, but a look at the forest patch near Ololo Lodge gave us another Pied Kingfisher and Nightingale, Red-faced Cisticola, co-operative Brown Parisoma, a fly-over Chestnut Sparrow and a bright Yellow Bishop.

Having not visited the big fig along the Mbagathi near the confluence with the Mokoyeti for some time we thought we would have a look, but all we scored from it were White-bellied Bustard, Grey-headed Kingfisher and Lesser Honeyguide, whilst nearby below Baboon Cliffs the Pallid Honeyguide was happily singing away from his usual Fig. The next stop was at the acacia woodland above Hippo Pools where we had the first of four Black-winged Kites, Banded Parisoma, three Speckle-fronted Weavers and a Long-billed Pipit.

It was the far south-east that has had the most rain, some puddles along the river were very deep, the access to Rhino Circuit impassable and the track to Athi Dam from the Pipeline was flooded at the lowest point. There was another pair of Fish Eagles by the river. The ox-bow is still receding and attracting birds to the exposed mud. Here we had the days only White-faced Whistling Duck and Common Snipe, and also here were a Little Stint, two Marsh Sandpiper, a Green three Woods and two Common Sandpipers.

Athi Dam had raised water level and we found two Little Grebes, a Darter, five roosting Black-crowned Night-Herons, one of the two only Marabous of the day, a Yellow-billed Stork, the Open-billed Stork that has been there some six months, two African Spoonbills, Spotted Thick-knee, three Kittlitz’s Plovers, eight Little Stints, twenty-five Ruff, two Marsh, Green and Common, and four Wood Sandpipers and four Black-winged Stilts. At the Vulture Drinking Pools, these too now had water and the vultures were back with eight Ruppell’s and twenty White-backs as well as one each of Steppe and Tawny Eagles, (see image).

Not far from the Hyena Dam run-off was the days only Secretarybird, and on the way past Langata Dam which was harbouring a Little Grebe and a Yellow-billed Egret, numbers of Blackcaps and Garden Warblers were coming to drink, but nothing was at the Langata Gate Vlei, and we exited at 5.20pm.

It had been a good day, but a day with no surprises and impoverished as far as migrants were concerned, Barn Swallows were only at Hyena Dam, with just one migrant raptor, no migrant falcons yet, nor rollers and today no shrikes. We seemed to be visiting many places and not seeing very much, but this not very much adds up and we finished the day with a surprising 196 species!

Best to All

Brian

KEY TO MONTAGE

1. DARK-CAPPED YELLOW WARBLER

A very co-operative individual near Ivory Burning Site.

1. RUPPELL’S VULTURES

Vulture Drinking Pools

1. NAGALOMON DAM

A view of Nagalomon Island

1. SEDGE WARBLER

First returning bird Hyena Dam

1. TAWNY EAGLE

These pallid buff young birds only ever seem to occur at this time of year, possibly indicating an arrival from outside of the region

1. NORTHERN WHEATEAR

A very dark and seemingly long billed individual

1. GREY HERON EATING GREEN SANDPIPER

Sequence