NAIROBI NATIONAL PARK 3rd December 2017

Dear All,

On 3rd December Nigel Hunter picked me up and with a fairly empty road we were at the Main Entrance of Nairobi National Park at 6.40am. Here we met up with Richard Bishop, previously a very long time resident of Kenya and having left at the beginning of this year was back on a consultation with ILRI. Fleur Ng’Weno soon arrived and although it was a queue extending out the door at the payment office we were through and in the Park in ten minutes having as usually been expertly processed by the cheerful and efficient team.

It was sunny there had been no recent rain. In fact the sun was not blocked by a cloud for the entire day we were there. Lions were on show not very far from the entrance and there were many happy people very early in the morning. We started at KWS Mess, which was not too productive but did provide the first of six Nightingales met with today, and an obliging Green-backed Honeybird and the first of just five Willow Warblers encountered today. It was extremely quiet down to Ivory Burning Site and birdless there as well. The first returning Lesser Striped Swallows were present, but none were seen at any of the breeding sites as yet. Nothing was on the Nagalomon Drift, the Bridge and little at the dam itself. The Black-crowned Night-Herons busily building their nests in the Typha two weeks earlier had all vanished. We did see one of only two Great Egrets today, an adult Great Cormorant with five Darters, and the Fish Eagle was in residence. Amongst the waders were a couple of Black-winged Stilts and a few Wood with one each of Common and Marsh Sandpipers, and the days only African Jacana.

Leaving here we took the back road to Hyena Dam, again not much activity, Crested Francolin were calling, a Great Sparrowhawk flew by, and the dam itself was in a very sorry state with just one Yellow-billed Stork, the persistent African Water Rail, a pair of Crowned Cranes were the first of five pairs met today, five Long-toed Plovers included the southern white-winged bird, twenty Wood Sandpipers and five Black-winged Stilts, and an unseen Tree Pipit flew over.

Taking the loop around the Mokoyeti there was a young Green Sandpiper on the ford, a sub-adult Pallid Harrier, the first of four Namaqua Doves seen today, twenty Eurasian Bee-eaters, the first of five Red-tailed Shrike species, which today amounted to three Isabelline and two Turkestan. Only one of the Isabelline was an adult all others young birds, (see image). The only four Quail-Finches were along here. On passing Nagalomon Dam, there were now two African Spoonbills and about a hundred Cattle Egrets had descended.

Heading towards Kingfisher we had a few Red-collared and Jackson’s Widowbirds which although widespread were in very small numbers, and an immature Parasitic Weaver and an uncoloured Yellow-crowned Bishop. At the swamp near Kingfisher a Saddle-billed Stork was present, as were several displaying White-winged Widowbirds including one with no white on the wings and no chestnut on the shoulders, something I had never come across before, (see image). We were also entertained by a male and two female lions stalking unsuccessfully. Kingfisher Picnic Site was not very active but did include the usual Red-throated Tit and Brown Parisoma. A Secretarybird was soaring around, with another pair seen later in Athi Basin. The inside road near Maasai Gate gave us the first of five Northern and only Isabelline Wheatear today, and the first of five Whinchat. Back on the main road towards along the Mbagathi was the only Martial Eagle, first of two male Kori Bustards, and parties of Mottled and Common Swifts.

Above Hippo Pools there were a very young and grey African Hoopoe testifying to very local breeding as adults were seen carrying food here two weeks ago, a half-hearted refrain from Olivaceous Warbler, a few Speckle-fronted Weavers, a Tree Pipit and first of three Long-billed Pipits. Rhino Circuit, again very quiet but with three very nice Violet Wood-Hoopoes (see image), and the days only Spotted Flycatcher. Along the main road was a showy d’Arnaud’s Barbet.

Along the pipeline towards Athi Dam was handsome male Pied Wheatear with a female seen later above Athi Basin, and a pair of Banded Parisomas at the end of the Causeway. Whilst having lunch for the third successive visit Spotted Thick-knees started calling in the afternoon and this time we looked for them but it was a shock to find there were nine. I had never seen such a gathering of this species before anywhere. At the end of the Causeway there were two roosting Black-crowned Night-Herons in the usual place.

The dam itself was quite a disappointment with five Black-winged Stilts, eight Common Greenshank, a few Wood and one Common Sandpiper, three Little Stints and a Ruff, the best being two young White-winged Black Terns. There were also four White-faced Whistling Duck and a couple of Red-billed Teal.

Above Athi Basin we had the surprise of a party of eight Cut-throat Finches, probably only the third record since the NNP Checklist was produced, and the largest gathering (see image). A Laughing Dove flew off the side of the road. At the turn-off to Empakasi Dam a glowing Yellow-crowned Bishop was displaying in the inundated grass but there was nothing to display to! At the murrum pits the last of the vultures were still loafing (it was late afternoon by now), with nine White-backed and six Ruppell’s, otherwise the only other bird was a Greenshank. Towards the “Beacon” we found six Mountain Reedbuck at the quarry, a stunning adult male Pallid Harrier (the only migrant raptor species seen today), and both Pangani and Rosy-breasted Longclaws.

Karen Primary School was to produce the bird of the day with a handsome pair of adult Lesser Moorhens, not usually seen at this time of year (see image). Also the same Squacco Heron as seen two weeks ago, but now getting gingery feathers on the back, otherwise a single Greenshank completed it. There was a lutea Yellow Wagtail at Eland Hollow, and taking the road through the grasslands two White-tailed Larks were up displaying. Back at Hyena Dam not much change with the addition of two Green Sandpipers and the last bird species was the Emerald Cuckoo singing in his usual place not far from the Main Gate.

There was dearth of migrants considering it was early December, even down to not more than fifteen Barn Swallows seen all day! However with so many places seeming quiet, we did in fact record 208 species today.

Mammals were widespread with major concentrations in Athi Basin. Wildebeeste have vacated with only one seen.

Best to all

Brian

KEY TO MONTAGE

FIRST ROW

FAR LEFT

Adult winter Green Sandpiper

SECOND FROM LEFT

Immature Green Sandpiper.

It’s only when the images are side by side like this that the many differences in the

plumage between adult and first year Green Sandpipers can be appreciated. It’s like two different species, and only for the first time today did I notice such marked differences when the comparison was there to be made.

THIRD FROM LEFT

LESSER MOORHEN

One of a pair at Karen Primary School Dam. We usually associate this species as visiting the Park in June-July, not November-December.

SECOND ROW

FAR LEFT

Adult Isabelline Shrike showing the pale grey head and upperparts, the only rufous in the plumage being the tail.

SECOND FROM LEFT

White-winged Widowbird, male in breeding plumage.

THIRD FROM LEFT & THIRD ROW FAR LEFT

White-winged Widowbird.

This bird at the swamp near Kingfisher Picnic Site grabbed my attention as soon as it flew, when it was obvious that whilst a White-winged WB it had no white on the wings at all. I had never come across this before. The bird on the third row is displaying its lack of white wings. Not only is it lacking this but the usually rich chestnut shoulder patch is replaced by black. The areas on the flight feathers that should be white are black but the area that should be black on the wings are brown. For comparison later, I took the photograph second row, second from left, from the same place. Thinking at the time it was a normal looking White-winged Widowbird, and to look at later as comparative material, which I have since done. When I reviewed this bird it too did not look like a typical example of the local race *eques.* For a start it has an entirely white patch on the wing-coverts. A check of the local field guides, Zimmermann & Turner and Stevenson & Fanshawe are not like this at all, with both showing only the outside edge of the wing-coverts as a white patch, whilst the inside coverts like the flight feathers are white edged. The bird photographed clearly shows all white wing-coverts and only the central primaries are white edged. So this markedly differs from both books illustrating the race *eques.* From S Tanzania southwards is the nominate race, which differs from our *eques* in having bright yellow not chestnut shoulders. The image in S&F shows an all white patch on the wing-coverts and all black not white-edged inner coverts, just as in the bird photographed in NNP, which is also lacking the chestnut shoulders. Normal White-winged Widowbirds with chestnut shoulders were also present with the other two odd birds. This has certainly convinced me to have more than a cursory glance at this species in future to see if these exceptions are not that uncommon. Maybe there is a cline from *eques* to nominate.

FOURTH FROM LEFT

Cut-throat Finches, a party of eight above Athi Dam.

FIFTH FROM LEFT

Violet Woodhoopoes. Part of a group of three birds on Rhino Circuit.

THIRD ROW

SECOND FROM LEFT

Lioness approaching a Kongoni and an Eland who are keeping an eye on it, at the swamp near Kingfisher Picnic Site.

FOURTH ROW

FAR LEFT

Part of a group of six Mountain Reedbucks at the quarry near the “Beacon.”

SECOND FROM LEFT

This is the underside of a territorial Kirk’s Charaxes *Charaxes kirkii.* Upperparts are mainly black with yellowish spotting on the border, usually associated with dryer country like the Magadi Road, this was holding a territory in the group of *Acacia mellifera* above Hippo Pools. The acacia is also the food plant of the species.

THE FLOWERS

All the species here are either in the family *Acanthaceae* or look like them in having irregular petals.

FIRST ROW FAR RIGHT

Very pretty and very small, just a solitary example seen, no idea as to what it is, and any help greatly appreciated.

SECOND ROW FAR RIGHT

I believe this is *Dychoriste radicans.*

THIRD ROW

THIRD FROM RIGHT

I believe this is *Blepharis maderaspatensis.*

SECOND FROM RIGHT

I believe this is *Striga latericea.*

FAR RIGHT

No idea what this is, help appreciated.

FOURTH ROW

THIRD FROM RIGHT

*Barleria eranthemoides*

SECOND FROM RIGHT

No idea about this either. Very small, the bark-like object on the right of the image is a dry seed-pod of *Acacia gerardii* to give some idea of just how minute this flower is. Any help appreciated.