NAIROBI NATIONAL PARK 3rd JUNE 2019

Dear All,

On 3rd June, Fleur Ng’Weno and myself arrived at the Main Gate and were soon inside the Park.

Although there had been some good rains it was overcast but dry this morning, and fairly chilly. The common species were calling as we drove to Ivory Burning Site, including the Emerald Cuckoo recorded last Thursday near the Entrance. IBS was also quiet and we continued to Nagalomon Dam. Here there were four Yellow-billed Storks around the edge, but on the island were eight adult Open-billed Storks resting amongst the breeding Darters, and it was looking like they might soon join this colony, however a pair seen mating last year did not come to anything. A few pairs of Long-tailed Cormorants were incubating. Only one African Spoonbill was incubating but another pair in breeding condition was present. A bird that was incubating for six weeks without any results had now given up. A little further around the dam, only visible from the eastern end, is a tree attracting large numbers of Sacred Ibis and looks like another colony is about to spring to life. Amazingly today, although we did not visit Athi Dam, we recorded no Marabous! The small Great Egret was present around the edge with the resident African Jacana. On the water was a Red-knobbed Coot, only the second I have seen on this dam. A Gabar Goshawk flew over the water, many Yellow-billed Kites were present, and were a common sight in much of the Park today. The first of several Red-chested and the first of many Diederic Cuckoos were calling, a couple of Pied Kingfishers fed around the island, and Speke’s Weavers were nest building in reeds and around the edges, and were found commonly all through the Park today, indicating a large incursion into the area. The only bird singing on the Causeway was a Spotted Morning Thrush.

From here we went direct to Hyena Dam fearing that the back road would be treacherous and impassable. As with last Thursday, no sign of any Long-toed Plovers, and in fact only a few Spur-wings and Blacksmiths had been left behind after most of their own kind had also vacated. The young Goliath Heron was still finding the place to his liking but apart from one African Spoonbill and a pair of Crowned Cranes there really was nothing else here. On the run off, on a dead tree sat the days only Fish Eagle, and in the adjacent Whistling Thorn scrub was the first of the rains visiting male Black-bellied Bustard.

Heading through the grasslands towards the SGR intersection with the old “Beacon,” we found the first of two Tawny Eagles, a Jacobin and very confiding immature Great Spotted Cuckoo. Yellow-necked Spurfowls were very common and obvious today, with most being seen perched on bushes, there was a nice male African Hoopoe at East Gate, and several brilliant Yellow-crowned Bishops in swampy patches along that road. Whilst in the lush grasslands were many each of White-winged, Red-collared and Jackson’s Widowbirds, and we encountered seven Rosy-breasted and two Pangani Longclaws as well as Yellow-throated Longclaws. Apart from abundant Rufous-naped Larks we had one White-tailed fly up from the side of the road and disappear into the grass. Pectoral-patch Cisticolas were very numerous, Deserts were common and we encountered seven territories of Zitting. Wherever there were bushes there were noisy Siffling, and amongst the larger cisticolas, Winding was abundant, Stout common and Croaking encountered on about fifteen territories. Further southwards Rattling appeared in numbers, whilst Singing were widespread in rank bush growth and forest edge. Just one Parasitic Weaver was encountered. By the SGR many swallows were feeding over the grassland, and still included four Barn Swallows which delighted to sit on the same piece of the road just ahead of us, a very late date for this species in NNP. The days only Red-billed Quelea was also here. On the dam near the Empakasi Junction were a Little Grebe, Yellow-billed Duck and a very bluish Grey Heron.

At the nearby now flooded murrum pits, the usual three Chandler’s Reedbucks were present, and the pair of Banded Martins that looked as if prospecting for a nest site last Thursday were still present. We continued as far as the Vulture Drinking pools above Athi Basin, it was only 1.00pm but a dozen White-backs were very amusing bathing in the shallows. They hop into the water, lower one wing until it is saturated the raise it and shake the contents over them, then lower the other wing and repeat the process. As they then immerse themselves, the wing washing would appear to be for cleaning the flight feathers rather that enjoying the shower when they shake them. The surprise on the pools was another Red-knobbed Coot, as there was a pair on Athi Dam last Thursday this suggests an arrival in the Park, birds being present in three locations. We did not go to Athi Dam and turned back towards Karen Primary School Dam, on the way were a pair of Spotted Thick-knees in short grass with no bushes within hundreds of metres, but at the dam we found what was probably the same adult Lesser Moorhen as seen there two weeks ago, was still present. Crowned Cranes were on a nest in exactly the same patch as they bred successfully last year. A pair of Little Grebes was also here, and a Nyanza Swift dropped in to drink with the other swifts present, and the Palm Swifts were flying around their nesting palms, the only breeding site in the Park.

Taking the road to Baboon Cliffs for the return, there was an young Ayre’s Hawk-Eagle that still was old enough to have the spotlights, and the days only Augur Buzzard.

With our sixth cuckoo species for the day with Klaas’s, we were through Main Gate at 3.00pm having had a very enjoyable stay and although it was close at times, avoided getting stuck on some muddy sections of roads, and avoiding places that we thought might be a problem to negotiate.

The rains have not worried the Black-shouldered Kites and they are still a common sight over much of the Park although no sign of breeding yet.

Mammals are largely in the grass plains, from the Beacon southwards, and Eland are unusually common whilst Zebra numbers have dropped dramatically.

The strangest sight was of a young male Chandler’s Reedbuck in grassy plains, that was associating with a bachelor heard of Impala and seemed to think he was one of them!

Best to all

Brian

KEY TO MONTAGE 3rd JUNE 2019

All these images are grabs taken from video, so might not be very sharp, as my camera has ceased to focus on photographic mode as a result of a bump in the road!

1. BARN & LESSER STRIPED SWALLOW

We have seen the odd single June Barn Swallow in NNP in other years but it is very rare, on this occasion there were four present.

1. CHANDLER’S (MOUNTAIN) REEDBUCK

Found regularly at a few sites in NNP, always near hilly ground, this animal is a young male associating with a bachelor group of Impala, and seems to think it is one of them!

1. LESSER MOORHEN

This adult looks like the adult that was in the same place two weeks ago.

1. YELLOW-CROWNED BISHOP

Several on the road to East Gate were displaying in swampy sections of the roadside, the females however don’t appear to have arrived as yet.

1. BLACK-BELLIED BUSTARD

Unlike the other three bustard species in NNP which can be seen at any time of year even if the individuals are not resident, Black-bellied is only a regular rains visitor occurring in the same places as Hartlaub’s. This adult male was the first this season and was on the road from Hyena Dam that circumnavigates the run-off area on the eastern side.

1. GREY HERON

Whilst Grey Herons are common enough, unlike the case in Black-headed Herons, immatures are very rarely found. This very attractive bird on the Empakasi Junction Dam was even more unusual in that the ground colour was more lavender-blue than grey.

1. GREAT SPOTTED CUCKOO

This young bird was in the same bushes as the days only Jacobin Cuckoo, near the “Beacon.” It was finding plenty of hairy caterpillars on grass stalks and was remarkably confiding and feeding terrestrially.