NAIROBI NATIONAL PARK 4TH JANUARY 2019

Dear All,

Nigel Hunter, his grandson Dillon and myself arrived at the Main Entrance to Nairobi National Park at 6.40am. The road had been clear in spite of it being a Friday, but the weather was dark and gloomy and it had rained the previous night.

There were not many people ahead of us in the queue to get the ticket organised, but it was made up of groups of residents, there were delays in processing with so many queries and all entrance being checked against ID’s and not all travellers were in the office and had to be sought etc. The four groups processing ahead of us took 40 minutes, we took two. However it was still dark and gloomy, so we decided to have a look around the car park before going in. This gave us a few birds not seen the rest of the day such as Brown-backed Woodpecker, the two Willow Warblers constituted the only migrant warblers we were to see all day and Northern Double-collared Sunbird which when I think of it, apart from KWS Mess I have never seen after going through the gates, though common enough to see at both Main and Langata Gates! It seems remarkably tied to people in NNP.

Entering the Park it was so gloomy and dark, and now there were drops of misty rain to make conditions for seeing difficult and hearing, well there wasn’t anything happy enough to be singing! By the time we had reached Ivory Burning Site we had a temporary brighter spell, and the Zanzibar Greenbul woke up. A few Nightingales were also calling and singing. Sitting on the ivory mounds were a stunning pair of Lesser Striped Swallows back in full plumage (see image), they were a welcome return after their absence to parts unknown, and thinking that there would have been a major return, we were wrong, these were the only of their kind.

Nagalomon Causeway was silent, and there was not much going on the dam, the only migrant waders were five Black-winged Stilts, there was a Squacco Heron in partial breeding plumage, a Great Egret, four Darters with few Long-tailed Cormorants, the pair of Fish Eagles were in residence, and the first of about ten Black-winged Kites appeared. We also had the first of three Martial Eagles, and nothing of any note amongst the passerines. Another drizzle started as we set off the back way to Hyena Dam, there was an immature brown and woolly-headed Black Stork but the bill and legs were bright red. This makes this a readily recognised individual, the only Common Snipe of the day was on the swampy area, the first of eleven Grey Crowned Cranes, sixteen Speckled Pigeons were on the balconies, first two of just three Whinchats, and very nice gathering of fifty Eurasian Bee-eaters, first of just two Turkestan Shrikes, the Red-faced Cisticola was singing, and a few Red-collared Widowbirds. Around the dam were ten Black-winged Stilts, five Long-toed Plovers, two Green, twenty Wood and two Common Sandpipers and a Ruff, the only Yellow Wagtail; a female flava type was also here.

Continuing along the Mokoyeti we found an adult Black Stork, and circling around back up to Nagalomon Dam we continued to Kingfisher. An African Water Rail was on the swamp, but there were many picnickers at the Picnic Site and we recorded nothing. The inside road at Maasai Gate was now very slippery but we got through and saw the first of two Secretarybirds today, also several Pangani Longclaws were along here. The Pallid Honeyguide was in full voice in its fig at the Mokoyeti Causeway, and not in the slightest put off by the weather. The handsome Striated Heron also sat tightly on his regular perch.

At the woodland above Hippo Pools a female Irania was the only bird we saw there, it was otherwise deserted, we called in at the Ox-bow, where there were no waders that were hoped for, the days only African Spoonbill so far was here, but the Parks second-only White Wagtail entertained us during the next heavy shower (see images). It was unusual in being in winter plumage on the head and in breeding plumage from throat downwards, as this was the 4th January things were not right and I sought advice on what was happening with the birds moult timetables to be so out of alignment. Clive Mann kindly sent the details with images and query to the Natural History Museum in UK, which was very speedily answered by Hein Van Grouw, and this is as follows confirming that there is indeed something wrong with the moult patterns.

"Hard to tell from the photos only, what is going on with this Wagtail but I  
assume, as Brian already suggested, that this bird has a ‘disturbed’  
moulting pattern and therefore already shows (partly) breeding plumage.  
  
I cannot think of any (heritable) melanin aberration which could cause this  
plumage pattern.  
  
All the best  
  
Hein"

The heavy rain made access to Rhino Circuit impassable, but along the edge we had two Spotted Flycatchers, a Banded Parisoma and a few other woodland species, and a Steppe Eagle sat on a treetop, (see image). We drove along to the Pipeline, the heavy rain also made uncomfortable going and having found a Pied Wheatear, a dozen Chestnut Sparrows, and the days only Speckle-fronted Weaver we turned back. Then we found that no matter what access road we tried to get to Athi Dam, all were impassably slimy and too much of a risk.

In the afternoon it got brighter, Shelley’s Francolins started calling, a stunning male Pallid Harrier flew by, a few Rosy-breasted Longclaws launched themselves into the air, and Eurasian Bee-eaters flew around noisily.

Thinking the attempt to get to Langata Gate may be fraught with potential bogging hazards, we had a final look at Hyena Dam finding the days only Yellow-billed Egret and the left through Main Gate at 4.00pm. Barn Swallows were widespread but no large concentrations, we finished the day early with 169 species.

We had outrageous experiences with thee lions near Hippo Pools with the animals literally alongside for 10 minutes and walking a good kilometre with us, three Black-backed Jackals above Hippo Pools were so indifferent almost brushing the car to get to the other side of us. Mammals were in good numbers, and a good variety was seen including three Mountain Reedbuck in the murrum pit not far from “The Beacon.” (See image).

It was without doubt a miserably wet and cool day, and the birds did not respond to it favourably, however this was punctuated by surprises as always, making the visit most worthwhile.

Best to all

Brian