NAIROBI NATIONAL PARK 7TH FEBRUARY 2019

Dear All,

Thursday morning Magadi Road was just endless snail-pace traffic, necessitating a detour around the back roads to re-join Langata Road, which had hardly any traffic at all, and Nigel Hunter and I were at the processing office of Nairobi National Park to find no-one else checking in. It’s all swings and roundabouts choosing the correct day to go where there will be neither holdups on the roads, or at the check-in.

As we were a little late, we opted to miss the walk around the car-park (which loses a number of birds for the day), and headed off for Ivory Burning Site, on the way the only migrant Shrike of the day (which is a sure sign that we have lost a large percentage to middle eastern heathens slaughtering them as they migrate through their countries), it was a Turkestan. The IBS was extremely quiet, not much was calling from the bushes, but a couple of churring Nightingales and a seemingly cheerful Zanzibar Greenbul. Three Yellow-billed Storks flew towards Hyena Dam, and both Red-rumped (see image), and Lesser Striped Swallows were sitting in the trees, and both species were widespread and common all day. It was a strange morning, there was a haze at ground level making it appear shady but there was not a cloud in the sky and the sun was shining.

The causeway on Nagalomon Dam was absolutely silent, none of the usual migrants uttering a word, and the Nagalomon Dam itself also appeared quite quiet, but there was an indication that birds were coming back in to breed again. Good numbers of Long-tailed Cormorants, at least eight Darters, five African Spoonbills engaged in head-bowing and trumpeting, and Sacred Ibis also looked interested.

On the sand spit, was a party of Green Sandpipers which were widespread today, and one we later found already in breeding plumage was a very beautiful bird (see images). Whilst watching these, in the Typha behind them enjoying the weak sun, was an adult male Little Bittern of the race payesii, with two fledged young, showing that they have successfully and secretively bred. (See image). There were a few Black-winged Stilts and Wood Sandpipers, but not a lot of activity around the edge.

The quietness continued along the back road to Hyena Dam, but there was excitement at the units where a Shikra was hunting, these are very rare anywhere in the Nairobi region. At Hyena Dam were one each of Great and Yellow-billed Egrets, the pair of adult Fish Eagles, the first of five Augur Buzzards, five Crowned Cranes which have been here for some time, ten Black-winged Stilts, five Long-toed Plovers including the white-winged bird, four Common Snipe, a Common Greenshank, a few Green, fifteen Wood a couple of Common Sandpipers and a Ruff. Two Yellow Wagtails were female flava, and the first two of seven Whinchats today. Quite a number of Plain Martins were sitting on the sedges and playing with nesting material on the ground, yet they have never been known to breed in NNP.

Following the road along the Mokoyeti, there were a pair of Black Storks soaring, and a third perched on a tree, the first of over a dozen Black-winged Kites, a female Eurasian Marsh Harrier, the Greater Spotted Eagle adult on its favourite dead tree (see images), and a pair of noisy Martial Eagles. There was no sign of the African Water Rails at the oxbow, or anything else there. There were a few Banded Martins feeding over the grassland, and several seen later in the day. In spite of Olmanyi Dam looking in good condition all we could rustle up were two more Common Snipe. The next stop was the Kingfisher Dam where the pair of African Water Rails was at home, as well as another pair of Crowned Cranes, a Secretarybird, non-breeding Jackson’s but breeding-plumaged White-winged Widowbirds with Red-billed Queleas, only the second Sedge Warbler for this season, and with the breeding swallows were two House Martins. At Kingfisher Picnic Site there were three Black Storks in the air together (it’s very difficult to accurately count Black Storks without knowing if there is duplication of individuals), and a very noisy Abyssinian Scimitarbill. Further along the road the days only Tawny Eagle was associating with a group of scavenging Yellow-billed Kites.

On the road to Ololo there were Grey-capped Social Weavers and Speckle-fronted Weavers with both probably nesting in this patch of Acacias, the Secretarybird there was on its nest and we found the first two of just three Northern Wheatears today. At the river the wintering Spotted Flycatcher was in the car park, and the only individual of the day (see image), and there was a singing Nightingale. The Pallid Honeyguide was as expected singing from his favourite tree below Baboon Cliffs. Not much activity in the woodland above Hippo Pools but Banded Parisomas were singing, and along the Mbagathi and the Rhino Circuit it was so quiet the only species we added were a Striated Heron, a Laughing Dove, a Willow Warbler and the first of just two Olivaceous Warblers. There was also another House Martin with other swallows, and along the Pipeline were a female Pied Wheatear and another Northern.

Athi Dam was the place for birds today, seven Black-crowned Night-Herons roosted on the Causeway (see image), amongst the many hundreds of Marabous were 113 White Storks (see image), and the very young Open-billed Stork was still here (see image), another Black Stork was also present and a dozen Yellow-billed Storks, the first Glossy Ibis in a while fed along the shore (see image), and another five African Spoonbills were asleep. The currently resident Water Thick-knee dozed under the bushes along the waters edge in the SE corner, Spotted Thick-knees occupied other bushes, apart from numerous Blacksmith and Spur-winged Plovers, other waders consisted of four Common Ringed Plovers, five Kittlitz’s and a scattering of Three-banded Plovers, a dozen Little Stints, five Ruff, three Common Greenshank, twenty Wood and a couple each of Green and Common Sandpipers and joining them the first White-winged Black Tern in a while (see image). Banded Parisomas called from the acacias, where sadly there were no migrant warblers.

Climbing out of Athi Basin we had a Shelley’s Francolin under a bush, and a Long-billed Pipit, whilst at the Vulture Drinking Pools were nineteen White-backed and seven Ruppell’s accompanied by a young Steppe Eagle (see image). Nothing new appeared over the grassland as we drove to Karen Primary School Dam, where a female Saddle-billed Stork posed beneath the Phoenix palms, and the days only two Little Grebes were on the water. Eland Hollow had its army of Black-headed Herons with nineteen present but apart from non-plumaged Jackson’s Widowbirds coming in to drink with a number of Quailfinch, the only other bird was a changing male lutea Yellow Wagtail.

Nothing additional at Hyena Dam but the Yellow-billed Egret was there, this only being mentioned because when we arrived at Nagalomon Dam there was one there also. Along the Causeway there was a Eurasian Reed Warbler feeding in the acacias. Heading towards Langata Gate, we had a young Martial Eagle (see image), a Common Buzzard, five Crowned Cranes at the Vlei where they seem to be a resident group, and feeding quietly right at the Nagalomon Bridge near the exit was the Woolly necked Stork very confiding and feeding on frogs under the deep shade. This bird has been in the area for some three months, though only seen three times it is a expert at concealment. Once again we had had seven Stork species in NNP on the same day.

We were through Langata Gate at 5.15pm having recorded 191 species. Barn Swallows numbers were up on past visits and suggests that the northward movement is already under way. There have been major returns of Eland, Kongoni and Zebra now the grass is dry.

Best to all

Brian

**KEY TO MONTAGE**

1. **LITTLE BITTERNS**

We had a sighting end of December which was a pale male and thought the migrant nominate, then hearing a bird give an alarm once ten days ago but did not see it. This morning in the same area in the NW corner of Nagalomon Dam behind the sand spit in the Typha and a long way from for the camera, but being a bright morning a male of the resident race payesii (more orange) was sunning with two juveniles. This is a good breeding record for the Park.

1. **RED-RUMPED SWALLOW**

These were common all through the Park today, with Lesser Striped only in slightly smaller numbers, both species in spite of how dry it is look as if they are going to settle down to breed.

1. **GREATER SPOTTED EAGLE**

After not being on it’s favourite dead tree ten day ago as it was an overcast morning, it was back on today’s nice sunny but still cool morning for all the world to see. It is a reasonable way from the road, but easily identified with the very white bill, short peak at back of head, very black overall, chubby appearance with a short tail. The tree can be seen in the Hyena Dam run-off, from the Mokoyeti section of the Main Road just past the ex-bow on the right, it can also be seen more distantly from the Hyena Dam Causeway.

1. **WOOLLY-NECKED STORK**

Amazingly making this another Superb Septemciconius Day after one so recently, this bird was tucked away by the bridge near the Langata Exit. There was enough time to get a shot of it tossing a frog (probably Ptychadena), up into the air and swallowing it. The bird was amazingly tame happily feeding in the swampy shade of the Nagalomon River only five metres from the car. As luck would have it, a large truck with concrete piping pulled up behind us with a car of rangers, and could not get past us, we had to let them pass but when we got back, no Stork! This bird which really hides well has been resident in the Park for nearly three months now.

1. **SPOTTED FLYCATCHER**

This spotless Spotted Flycatcher has being wintering in the tree at the car park for Ololo Lodge, and was the only one seen today.

1. **WHITE-WINGED BLACK TERN**

They have been very scarce this season; this bird at Athi Dam hardly shows any signs of breeding plumage.

1. **KIRK’S CHARAXES**

This is a dry country butterfly common on the lower stretches of /Magadi Road after Kisamese, however I have only seen a few along the Mbagathi, but this male holding territory on the Acacia nilotica (is this the only one in the Park?) on the Athi Dam Causeway posed for a couple of photographs.

1. **GREEN SANDPIPER**

This is an appreciation of this species in breeding plumage as early as it may seem. Green Sandpipers pull out very early and numbers will fall dramatically from mid this month. This one is already in fine spring dress, and the wings and shoulders a shiny bronzy green which gives the bird its name.

1. **SADDLE-BILLED STORK**

The female with the yellow eye, was posing at the base of the magnificent clump of Phoenix reclinata palms on the Karen Primary School Dam Causeway. The day’s sixth Stork species.

1. **MARTIAL EAGLE**

Two adults were very talkative in the same area as the Greater Spotted Eagle, but this young bird was not far from Langata Gate but Kisembe Forest.

1. **STEPPE EAGLE**

This is a young bird, and not the same that has been seen recently. The inset shows the extent of the gape-line almost reaching the level of the back of the eye very well. It was with the vultures at the Vulture Drinking Pools at the top of Athi Basin.

1. **GLOSSY IBIS**

This looks like a dull non-breeding adult, and was at Athi Dam. There hasn’t been a Glossy Ibis in the Park for several months now.

1. **BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON**

These birds are very photogenic and trusting in their roost on the Athi Dam Causeway, there were seven today.

1. **AFRICAN OPEN-BILLED STORK**

This is the same very young fluffy bird seen at Athi Dam ten days ago.

1. **WHITE STORK**

A total of 113 were amongst the hundreds of Marabous at Athi Dam.