NAIROBI NATIONAL PARK 8th April 2018

David Guanieri, Fleur Ng’Weno convened at Langata Gate at 6.30am, and were welcomed by the cheerful and efficient staff and soon processed and on our way. It was a cloudy start and soon started spitting with rain, there had been over an inch of rain on Saturday afternoon on this side of the Park, when there was a short torrential downpour accompanied by very strong gusts of wind. The road to the vlei in the forest had been re-opened, but there was not much to see there, with two of Grey Crowned Cranes being the first of a dozen see today. We followed the road through the forest with a number of woodland species being recorded, amongst the more interesting being an African Black Duck flying through the forest, the Bateleur at the usual site had not had become airborne yet, and a solitary male Wattled Starling was on the road. The road was blocked off at the first junction as it was presumably still a hazard, and we took the right hand turn back to the Nagalomon Bridge where we encountered a Common Buzzard, the days first Palearctic, both Yellow-whiskered and Cabanis’s Greenbuls and White-starred Robin, and stopping briefly at the Langata Dam which was full with impressively dense sedge beds, we found that it had failed to attract any water associated birds apart from a Malachite Kingfisher. There was an African Goshawk displaying overhead. We continued along the right had road on the edge of the forest, coming to a place where buffalo had been wallowing in the mud and slid off into a rut and became bogged. This was a bit inconvenient, but could have been a lot worse as in little over half-an-hour and we were moving again having had an Ayres’s Eagle chasing another raptor that was gone before it was identified, and a Tree Pipit flying over. From here we backtracked the short distance and took the left hand road along the edge of the forest which was in very good state, and at present at least the right side should be avoided! There were three Hyenas feeding at a buffalo carcass, with fourteen White-backed and a Ruppell’s Vulture.

As we went along the forest edge there were Garden and Willow Warblers started to sing. Garden were widespread but only in the north, Willows were everywhere around the Park perimeter, but all singles apart from one pair. There was also the first of fifteen Spotted Flycatchers that were evenly spread over all of NNP. It was starting to brighten up as we arrived at Nagalomon Dam, and no more rain was seen that day. There was quite a bit of activity on the island, with large numbers of Sacred Ibis incubating, four pair of African Spoonbills though none actually seen on the nest, at least seven African Darters on nests with others around the dam and arriving with fresh nesting material as were the Long-tailed Cormorants. Black-crowned Night-Herons were sitting on their nests, but most are too buried to give an accurate count. There was nothing around the closer edge, but birds seen to be attracted to the area on the Ivory Burning Site side. Amongst birds here were a couple of Yellow-billed Storks and Black-headed Herons, a Fish-Eagle surveyed everything from the top of the island. Along the Causeway there was a very vocal Marsh Warbler and a Greater Blue-eared Starling next to the Nagalomon Drift, a few Eurasian Bee-eaters were feeding along the Mokoyeti, but little else.

Ivory Burning Site was extremely quiet, although a Zanzibar Greenbul was singing. So we took the back road to Hyena Dam, which was dry for the entire circuit, which came as a surprise, also the fencing wire that was a hazard on the road had been pushed to the side. The first of three Augur Buzzard, this one dark sat on the acacias, a lack of birds in the scrub though the first of six Common Whitethroats appeared, many more were probably concealed inside the scrub today. Hyena Dam had hit another new low, the only birds were one each of Common and the days only Wood Sandpiper, apart from the odd Blacksmith and Spur-winged Plovers so we did not linger. Additionally there was a Marabou, this was to be our only bird today, where have the thousands all disappeared to?

At the junction along the Mokoyeti was a stunning and posing Pygmy Kingfisher, on the ox-bow a Great Egret and the African Water Rail still present, the first of twenty-five Red-backed, five Turkestan and of the seasons first of five Lesser Grey Shrikes were also along here. A Yellow-billed Kite was being harassed by a pair of Long-toed Plovers, one of which was the white-winged individual. There was a Red-collared Widowbird, but we only saw five today. As we crossed back over the Mokoyeti there was a Striated Heron at the bridge. Cutting across to Karen Primary School Dam we were rewarded with the days only Little Grebe and a pair of Spotted Thick-knees, in the grassland was the first of eight Jackson’s Widowbirds, but the plains were amazingly devoid of bird-life. At East Gate including the Tree Nursery which has not yet been destroyed with the proposed construction of the new road along this edge of the Park, we found a Laughing Dove, the days only Olivaceous Warbler and a party of Red-billed Quelea. More Eurasian Bee-eaters could be heard overhead. We crossed the eyesore railway compound, they now have people with Stop-Go signs as the trucks move so fast that they are a mortal hazard should you try and cross. Also you cannot see them behind the fence, so these lollipop people are very necessary! On the small dam near the Empakasi junction was a Red-billed Teal, there were no vultures drinking at the murrum pits above Athi Basin, but there were two nice Short-tailed Larks, and along the road to Athi Dam, a pair of Crowned Plovers had two very new chicks, and the days only Wheatear, a female Northern.

Athi Dam was desperate, the high water-level had certainly left a too heavily diluted food resource for waders, the only palearctics being two Common Greenshank and one Common Sandpiper, an nice adult Kittlitz’s Plover was also present and a Spur-winged Plover was incubating within a couple of feet of the track. Although high water, much lower than two weeks ago, and the causeway is again fully accessible. Seven Black-crowned Night-Herons roosted in the acacias sharing them with Lesser Masked Weavers that were singing frantically. At the end of the causeway there were nine Spotted Thick-knees under the bushes and a Banded Parisoma. There was a Eurasian Cuckoo, the first returning bird of the season, with three more seen along the Mbagathi later. The most surprising birds of the day were here, not because they are rare in the Park, but because of what it suggests. After two weeks ago having an Open-billed Stork at Nagalomon Dam standing on a nest platform, here was an adult with two fledglings!!!! The two young birds were extremely immature though could fly, at least one could the other didn’t budge. (See images). This still doesn’t confirm a breeding in the Park however as they could still have come from somewhere outside the Park. We completely circumnavigate the dam without problem and set off for Rhino Circuit.

It could hardly have been quieter, we ate our lunch but birds were not there to entertain us and we failed to encounter a whole host of species, after all four woodpeckers two weeks ago, this was a woodpecker-less day. The Rhino Circuit was amazingly dry and we got all the way round without any mud on the tyres and continued towards old Cheetah Gate. There was a compact group of seven stunning Eurasian Rollers, a showy d’Arnaud’s Barbet, and on the pipeline a male Eurasian Rock-Thrush in all its colours. A few Speckle-fronted Weavers were also along this stretch. Towards Hippo Pools we found a pair of Spotted Thick-knees bringing the day’s total to thirteen, a couple of Fish Eagles, Gabar Goshawk and a Martial Eagle and above Hippo Pools in the woodland another Banded Parisoma, more Speckle-fronted Weavers and a pair of Long-billed Pipits. An extremely black cloud hovered over Kiserian and we thought it would be encountered of the way to Kingfisher, but it did the extraordinary thing of crossing over the Ngongs and disappeared from sight. There was the first of three Tawny Eagles at the vulture roost, near the Maasai Gate road which we did not take, were a pair of Secretarybirds and an obliging Eurasian Hobby, the only falcon seen all day, a small party of Wattled Starlings and a pair of noisy White-bellied Bustards. On a flooded depression were a Common Greenshank and a Red-billed Teal. At the back of the swamp near Kingfisher was a Saddle-billed Stork, a flock of twenty out-of-plumage White-winged Widowbirds, and a pair of Lappet-faced Vultures were roosting on the same tree as they were a few weeks ago.

We were out of Main Gate at 6.00pm. It had been a very mixed day, massive numbers of migrants have left us although mid-April can often been the most productive time, hopefully there are still many others winging towards us. With only three Palearctic waders it made the count low, but for land birds it wasn’t bad with another eighteen species. These included the first of Eurasian Cuckoos, Lesser Grey Shrikes and Marsh Warbler, and the first thrust of Red-backed Shrikes. Strangely though it is doubtful if we saw more than ten Barn Swallows!

Mammals were good, but not if you wanted to see Lions today, as they appeared to be taking the day off. Most mammals were down towards the Mbagathi, and all the Zebra and almost all Eland were in the basin. Flowers continue to emerge, especially noticeable were the yellow Bulbine Lilies amongst vast number of the white Gladiolus candida. The impressive Gloriosa superba were seen in several places. The place has responded well to the rain, so much greenery but apart from abundant Yellow Pansies today, butterflies haven’t.

In spite of some very dull periods, and the early morning bogging we still came in at 191 species,

Best to all

Brian

KEY TO MONTAGE

1. KENYA RAILWAYS AUTHORITY STILL OCCUPYING THE LAND THEY HAVE STOLEN

KRA still occupy private land stolen from rightful owners on Kitengela and continue to build the Railway with no regard for Kenyan law or the rightful owners of the land. Or any offer of buying it!

1. A QUARTET OF WELL FED WHITE RHINOCEROSES

The size of these animals can be well appreciated against the full-grown Hartebeest in the background.

1. GREEN PIGEON

Always nice to see this one was on the lower Mokoyeti causeway.

1. SPUR-WINGED PLOVER AT NEST AND EGG

At Athi Dam nest right next to track.

5 SPOTTED THICK-KNEE

An impressive thirteen found today, this bird near Hippo Pools one of a pair, may be on a nest.

6 OPEN-BILLED STORKS

The adult on the right appears to be a parent of the two fledglings to the left. This looks remarkably like the birds have been raised very locally.

7 RED-BACKED SHRIKE

The first mass arrival of the species is starting with over twenty-five recorded.

8 NEOCOENYRA MASSAICA

This Satryrid butterfly has not got a common name. It is confined to the Kenya border with Tanzania and is only to be found in Maasailand. In Larsen’s “Butterflies of Kenya,” it says it is only in lower rift in the southern Mara. I have seen this in NNP in several different years. This is the first time I have been able to photograph it here. Instantly recognisable by uniquely having two white spots in the ring on the forewing, no other E Af butterfly possesses this. As it is only in Maasailand and the scientific name is massaica, here is its new common name MAASAI RINGLET!

9 SALVIA NILOTICA

This beautiful flower is common in the grasslands after good rains.

10 COMMON GREENSHANK

I have never known a withdrawal of Palearctic waders as early as this year. All day just 3 Greenshank,

2 Common and a single Wood Sandpiper!

11 AFRICAN PYGMY KINGFISHER AND IN FLIGHT

This bird was sitting out in the bushes near the Mokoyeti, in flight where does all the blue go?

12 JACKSON’S WIDOWBIRD AND IN FLIGHT

These are now returning although only eight see, in flight Fleur calls them flying tadpoles, you can see why!

13 CROWNED PLOVER SMALL CHICK

It’s amazing that only a few days old and the down shows the pattern of the adult’s head, and the same goes for Blacksmith Plover.

14 EURASIAN ROLLER

The only birds today were a compact group of seven birds below Athi Dam near the river.