BIRDS NAIROBI NATIONAL PARK 9TH - 10TH JULY 2017

Dear All,

A friend who had birded with me in Madagascar, had organised a family trip in Tanzania, which included Serengeti, Ngorongoro and Manyara. They were there for a week, and when the family went home, she and her step-daughter wanted to see a bit of Kenya first, before they returned home. They asked me what would be the best way to spend the time. I thought that two days is not very much, and with such a short stay it would be better not to waste time travelling, and in fact not to go anywhere! I suggested that all of their time should be spent in Nairobi National Park, and they should stay at Emakoko so that there was really no travelling other than game drives.

I went with them to show the birds and mammals, and we met the Emakoko Driver at Ole Sereni for the transfer at 8.30pm. My first time ever in NNP at night. Between East Gate and the junction with the Main Road we had ten Dusky Nightjars, but no other birds. The only nocturnal mammals were a Spotted Hyena and a couple of Cape Hares. We never exceeded 30kph, but the traverse seemed to take no time at all. Not really knowing what to expect we crossed the short bridge over the Mbagathi and entered Emakoko.

Suddenly we were in, what can only be described as up there in the top lodges in East Africa. Just everything about it was tasteful, and Anthony Childs was there to meet us. He is the perfect mein-host, full of enthusiasm, passionate about wildlife and best of all a birder. As this is not a travel report, I won’t go any further about the incredible rooms, food, surrounding wildlife and truly spectacular views from the higher rooms that made it impossible to associate the view with being so close to Nairobi, there was not one artefact in it, just all pure and natural nature!

So with my friends Carol and Courteney, we planned on spending the next two days looking for everything in NNP staying out all day. So I will treat the report as one single entity as the only locality duplication was Nagalomon and Hyena Dams.

After an excellent 6.00am breakfast we set off with our driver for the first full day. Around the lodge Montane Nightjars and Spotted Morning Thrushes were the two extremes of time for bed and time to rise and shine, or at least sing! Climbing out of the valley alongside Baboon Cliffs we were soon seeing some birds. Interestingly a couple of Violet Wood-Hoopoes were in the scrub, but there was a good variety of bush birds for our first stop. The Red-and-Yellow Barbets that frequent the staff canteen at Emakoko for ugali handouts were duetting. I wonder if this is the same pair that also get ugali handouts at the Hippo Pools bridge, provided by the Maasai ladies selling artefacts, as it is not really any great distance. There was a Red-throated Tit here, the only other sighting being near the lodge. On the acacia patch descending towards Hippo Pools both Speckle-fronted Weavers and Banded Parisoma were obliging, and the first of five singleton Namaqua Doves, and first of five African Hoopoes. At the car park at the bottom of the hill was the first surprise, a pair of Marabous tending their nest. There were, as is usual for this time of year, over a thousand of them along the river but even though they have been nesting in Nairobi for many decades, I believe this is the first time they have nested in NNP. Many of the birds along the river were not on nests, but there was much bowing, wing-flapping, squeaking and bill-clapping all signs that they might also be considering the site. If such a thing does happen this could be a real hazard for open-topped vehicles! There were plenty of White-backed Vultures to be seen, and two attractive adult Ruppell’s. We carried along the road to Rhino Circuit where a few days before a sub-adult Palm Nut-Vulture had been beautifully photographed and constituted only the third record for the Park… no sign of it though. It was fairly busy in the early morning, a Striated Heron fed along the river, a perched Tawny Eagle was being pestered by Yellow-billed Kites, there were more Violet Wood-Hoopoes but nothing really out the ordinary. Near the exit were a co-operative and stunning adult Martial Eagle and a pair of Crested Francolins with several Yellow-necked Spurfowl. Continuing on we had a look at the Pylon track near the railway but only d’Arnaud’s Barbet of any note.

Next stop was Athi Dam, and it was extremely quiet, the only waders were Spur-winged, Blacksmith and Three-banded Plovers, no Palearctic waders but the first Green, Wood and Common Sandpipers should be making landfall in the next few days. Birds present were restricted to three Pink-backed Pelicans apart from scattered species usually present. Only one Black-crowned Night-Heron was roosting on the Causeway, and two each of Yellow-billed Stork and African Spoonbill were present. The first of four Secretarybirds was in the grassy plain, there were a few Little Swifts drinking, amazingly this was the only species of Swift seen in the two days. Several times unseen Quail-finch were heard flying over high, we did actually see a pair here but only in flight.

It was very dull heading up over the grasslands, where it is so dry that more ground is evident than plant cover. We had a short detour bathroom stop to East Gate, where a party of five out-of-plumaged Yellow-crowned Bishops flew over calling noisily.

Taking the track across to Eland Hollow, we found an attractive Short-tailed Lark feeding on a sandy area, but Eland Hollow Dam has dried. Amongst soaring raptors over the grasslands was a sub-adult Black-chested Snake-Eagle, and near the dam was a faded adult Red-capped Lark feeding a black and white scaly immature. Although resident in NNP there are not many breeding records. This was our fifth species of Lark for the morning.

Continuing northwards we arrived at Main Gate to collect our picnic lunch and had this at Hyena Dam where the water level was maintaining itself somehow, with a constant small flow coming from an unknown source. There was a reasonable variety but of course no migrants. Yellow-billed Stork fed in the shallows, two African Spoonbills, an adult and immature Fish Eagle, still a persistent and extravert African Water Rail sticking it out quite successfully in spite of the lack of cover, also a pair of African Jacanas.

Taking the back road we found our first of three Augur Buzzards, at the apartment block, where we are usually arriving very early morning, (it was now mid-day), a woman on the third floor came out and threw down some seed, and all of a sudden the bushes irrupted and it instantaneously became covered in Speke’s Weavers which was very impressive. We picked up the usual House Sparrows here, and there was one non-breeding male White-winged Widowbird, but no sign of any Quelea.

Nagalomon Dam apart from the nesting Sacred Ibis, was quite quiet. There was only one Long-tailed Cormorant, but three adult African Darters, one pair with a nest with two large white young. Additionally the first of three Great Egrets, Sacred Ibis were breeding again, but far less than last year and all low down not far above the ground, an adult Fish Eagle kept watch on top.

On the dam near Kingfisher Picnic Site there was a Saddle-billed Stork, but the picnic site itself was unrewarding. The inside road near Maasai Gate was as usual worth the short detour. This time there was a commotion of Crowned Plovers, Cisticolas, Babblers and Yellow-throated Longclaw with a few Rufous-naped Larks. The disturbance seemed to be progressive, as if the birds were being disturbed by something in the grass, and I said that I suspected that a Serval was in the grass. We had stunning views as it sneaked through the grass with its entourage following noisily behind it. It then came close to a pair of noisy White-bellied Bustards, our only bustards in the two days. We also had our first of four Black-shouldered Kites.

We got back to Emakoko in daylight, for some private time, and I watched the sun dropping towards the horizon from a bubble-bath! At dusk whilst both content and clean I sat on the balcony trying to identify some very early small bats with silvery membrane translucency and pale bodies, Spotted Thick-knees and Montane Nightjars started calling, as did Lions, Hyenas and Greater Galagos.

After a delicious meal we were visited by a Large-spotted Genet, but usually they eat “Whiskas” from their dish by the bar, but someone had made the mistake of giving them something that was not their preference and they had taken umbrage!

The next morning birding from the bridge failed to produce the Finfoot that had been there the day before, an hour after we had left for our game drive, but it did have a Striated Heron, a pair of Mountain Wagtails and three cavorting African Moustached Warblers. Some Fischer’s Lovebirds were nesting in a hollow but spent their time sitting outside it. Southern Black Flycatchers were in the same bushes as Black Cuckooshrike and Drongos which made a nice comparison. Our only Holub’s Golden Weavers played around the lawn area. African Firefinches were common and easy to see (though easier to hear) around the bridge, but other estrildids like Purple Grenadiers, Red-cheeked Cordon-bleus and Common Waxbills also appreciated the bushes.

After breakfast we walked from the bridge birding upstream for an hour or so, we did not count this section apart, but had an amazing 61 species. Amongst these were a pair of Cinnamon-chested Bee-eaters hunting from the tree tops, Plain Martins looked like they might be nesting close by, and I don’t believe that there is a breeding record for NNP… and there still isn’t. Seven species of swallows were in the area. A pair of noisy Black-headed Orioles were in the Yellow-barked Acaias, most days they are not recorded in the Park, as they are inexplicably scarce here. There was also a pair of Yellow-spotted Petronias calling noisily from an acacia top. Otherwise the usual suspects, three Woodpeckers…..

Our plan was to leave for a day birding in the Park at 7.30am, we were already running late not that there was any schedule, and Anton suggested a walk downriver and led the way. It was six hours from our original projected time of departure that we left!

Amazingly downstream produced many birds we has not seen on our earlier upstream walk, and we added another twenty species. A Gabar Goshawk flew into a tree and watched for a potential meal. At last a good sighting of White-bellied Go-Away Birds which up to now had just been voices. Our only Honeyguide so far was a Lesser calling further down the river towards a territorially vocal male Lion! We didn’t walk much further in that direction. In a grassy clearing were our first White-browed Sparrow-Weavers and a Yellow Bishop. On the return to the lodge, there was a small Honeyguide which was characteristically wiping its bill along the stems of a fig, presumably getting some sort of wax on the plants surface. I said this was what Pallid Honeyguides did when they fed, we watched it for a little while but it was not easy to see in the tree, and was quiet.

When we got back to the lodge, Anton downloaded the ITunes East African Bird App on the lodges Wifi, and when it was in his phone, went out into the garden to try it out. He played a call and I said that it was Pallid Honeyguide, to which he replied that it had just come in. It was incredibly aggressive and gave outstanding views. Singing Cisticola was tried, and again highly responsive. It became the seventh species of Cisticola we had seen, Red-faced was only heard and not a squeak from either Croaking or Desert. But no cisticolas appreciate drought.

Before we left we had to get the bird lists up to date from todays additional finds. An adult Shikra appeared over the river whilst we were sitting in the lounge, and soared around for some time. This is only the fourth I have ever seen in NNP.

Finally we had to go, which was a bit sad, but there were birds waiting for us in Kisembe Forest.

Near Kingfisher we took the cul-de-sac road alongside the nearby swamp as there were buffalos, and up to this point we had not found Yellow-billed Oxpecker, but here we had very close views of a pair.

Then it was a bit quiet until we reached the cool shade of Kisembe Forest picking up a nice Tambourine Dove on edge of Hippogrebe Dam, and near here a glowing adult Klaas’ Cuckoo. We recorded our last of the seven NNP Barbet species with Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird, but we only ever saw three species Red-fronted, Spot-flanked and Snowy (split from White-headed) now a Kenyan endemic. We heard Brown-backed Woodpecker but in the confines of a car in the forest it is not easy to see everything you hear. Calling Placid (Cabanis’) Greenbuls ignored us, whereas normally they are responsive, but Yellow-whiskered that usually do the ignoring were highly responsive and perched openly. A pair of Pale Flycatchers were our fourth species of true flycatcher, not a bird you can guarantee in NNP. Our first Waterbucks were our eleventh Antelope species for the two days so we failed to see five, Red and Grey Duikers, Oribi, Steinbok and Dik-Dik. The first named I have only ever seen one, and last named only three times along the Mbagathi so no complaints!

We stopped at Nagalomon Dam on our way to exit at East Gate, but no surprises or additions, although a huge crocodile was hauled out on the edge. Facing us it looked like a gargantuan slug with big teeth. Its mass oozed out of its sides like a jelly or a scene from “The Blob.” Our final stop was at Hyena Dam, where much as yesterday and again no sign of Long-toed Plovers, sadly after four solid years of residence they seemed to have left, at least for now. Additions for the two days list were Yellow-billed Egret and Grosbeak Weaver.

So there we have the two days in the Park, thank goodness I told them not to go anywhere!

Best to all

Brian

List of Mammal species recorded, heard only are non-bold typeface.

Lion

**Serval**

**Black-backed Jackal**

**Spotted Hyena**

**Large-spotted Genet**

**Wart-Hog**

**Cape Buffalo**

**Maasai Giraffe**

**Black Rhinoceros**

**White Rhinoceros**

**Hippopotamus**

**Bush Hyrax**

**Impala**

**Eland**

**Bushbuck**

**Chandler’s Reedbuck**

**Bohor Reedbuck**

**Defassa Waterbuck**

**Suni**

**Thomson’s Gazelle**

**Grant’s Gazelle**

**Coke’s Hartebeest**

**Eastern Wildebeest**

**Cape Hare**

**Olive Baboon**

**Vervet Monkey**

**Syke’s Monkey**

Greater Galago

**Side-striped Ground Squirrel**

**Olivaceous Bush-Squirrel**

**Wahlberg’s Epauletted Fruit-Bat**

….and unidentified bats.

List of Bird species recorded, heard only are on non-bold typeface.

**Common Ostrich**

**Pink-backed Pelican**

**Long-tailed Cormorant**

**African Darter**

**Black-crowned Night Heron**

**Cattle Egret**

**Striated Heron**

**Yellow-billed Egret**

**Great Egret**

**Grey Heron**

**Black-headed Heron**

Hamerkop

**Saddle-billed Stork**

**Marabou Stork**

**Yellow-billed Stork**

**Sacred Ibis**

**Hadada Ibis**

**African Spoonbill**

**Egyptian Goose**

**Secretary Bird**

**Black-shouldered Kite**

**Black Kite**

**African White-backed Vulture**

**Ruppell’s Vulture**

**Black-chested Snake Eagle**

**Gabar Goshawk**

**Shikra**

**Augur Buzzard**

**African Fish Eagle**

**Tawny Eagle**

**Martial Eagle**

**Crested Francolin**

**Yellow-necked Francolin**

**Helmeted Guineafowl**

**African Water Rail**

**Black Crake**

**Common Moorhen**

**White-bellied Bustard**

**African Jacana**

Spotted Thick-knee

**Blacksmith Plover**

**Spur-winged Plover**

**Crowned Plover**

**Three-banded Plover**

**Tambourine Dove**

**Emerald-spotted Wood Dove**

**Namaqua Dove**

**Speckled Pigeon**

**Red-eyed Dove**

**Ring-necked Dove**

**Dusky Turtle Dove**

**Fischer’s Lovebird**

**White-bellied Go-Away Bird**

**Klaas’ Cuckoo**

**White-browed Coucal**

Montane Nightjar

**Dusky Nightjar**

**Little Swift**

**Speckled Mousebird**

**Blue-naped Mousebird**

**Striped Kingfisher**

**Malachite Kingfisher**

**Pied Kingfisher**

**Little Bee-eater**

**Cinnamon-chested Bee-eater**

**African Hoopoe**

**Violet Wood-Hoopoe**

Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird

Red-fronted Tinkerbird

**Red-fronted Barbet**

**Spot-flanked Barbet**

**White-headed Barbet**

Red-and-Yellow Barbet

d’Arnaud’s Barbet

Lesser Honeyguide

**Pallid Honeyguide**

**Nubian Woodpecker**

**Cardinal Woodpecker**

**Grey Woodpecker**

Brown-backed Woodpecker

**Rufous-naped Lark**

**Fawn-coloured Lark**

**Red-capped Lark**

**Short-tailed Lark**

**Fischer's Sparrow-Lark**

**African Pied Wagtail**

**Mountain Wagtail**

**Grassland Pipit**

**Yellow-throated Longclaw**

**Banded Martin**

**Plain Martin**

**Wire-tailed Swallow**

**Red-rumped Swallow**

**Lesser Striped Swallow**

**Rock Martin**

**Black Saw-wing**

**Yellow-whiskered Greenbul**

Cabanis’s Greenbul

**Common Bulbul**

**Northern Pied Babbler**

**Ruppell’s Robin-Chat**

**Cape Robin-Chat**

Spotted Morning Thrush

**White-browed Scrub Robin**

**White-eyed Slaty Flycatcher**

**Southern Black Flycatcher**

**African Grey Flycatcher**

**Pale Flycatcher**

Lesser Swamp Warbler

**African Moustached Warbler**

**Singing Cisticola**

Red-faced Cisticola

**Winding Cisticola**

**Stout Cisticola**

**Rattling Cisticola**

**Siffling Cisticola**

**Zitting Cisticola**

**Pectoral-patch Cisticola**

**Tawny-flanked Prinia**

**Grey-backed Camaroptera**

**Yellow-breasted Apalis**

Grey-capped Warbler

**Red-faced Crombec**

**Yellow-bellied Eremomela**

**Buff-bellied Warbler**

**Banded Parisoma**

**Abyssinian White-eye**

**White-bellied Tit**

**Red-throated Tit**

**African Paradise Flycatcher**

**Chin-spot Batis**

**Long-tailed Fiscal**

**Common Fiscal**

**Brubru**

**Brown-crowned Tchagra**

**Sulphur-breasted Bush-Shrike**

**Tropical Boubou**

**Slate-coloured Boubou**

**Black-backed Puffback**

**Black Cuckoo-shrike**

**Common Drongo**

**Black-headed Oriole**

**Pied Crow**

**Ruppell's Long-tailed Starling**

**Hildebrandt's Starling**

**Superb Starling**

**Red-billed Oxpecker**

**Yellow-billed Oxpecker**

**Collared Sunbird**

**Scarlet-chested Sunbird**

**Variable Sunbird**

**House Sparrow**

**Rufous Sparrow**

**Yellow-spotted Petronia**

**White-browed Sparrow-Weaver**

**Speckle-fronted Weaver**

**Grosbeak Weaver**

**Baglafecht Weaver**

Spectacled Weaver

**Holub’s Golden Weaver**

**Speke’s Weaver**

**Yellow-crowned Bishop**

**Yellow Bishop**

**White-winged Widowbird**

**Red-billed Firefinch**

**African Firefinch**

**Red-cheeked Cordon-bleu**

**Purple Grenadier**

**Common Waxbill**

**Common Quailfinch**

**Bronze Mannikin**

Streaky Seedeater

**Yellow-rumped Seedeater**

**African Citril**

**Brimstone Canary**