SHABA-MARSABIT TRIP 14th-17th April 2019

Dear All,

From 14th to 17th April I had a short trip with Itai Shanni who was back in the country for the first time in ten years, before heading off to lead a tour in Tanzania, and Ben Mugambi. We did something that would not have been considered possible just a couple of years ago. We drove on the all paved road to Archer’s Post and stayed the night in the Best County Hotel which was everything a birder wanted, even 5.30am breakfast for an early start. Itai had two desired species one was Quail-plover, which is a bit of a “good luck with that” bird. The other being Masked Lark. We set off to early on 15th and were going to try for both in Shaba, but being a drought there was none of the Quail-plovers favoured silvery heskanet grass, and although we tried walking on a considerable amount of black lava for Masked Lark, we failed with that also though did still many, many William’s Larks. In the late afternoon we decided that we would try and see if the nominate Somali Sparrows were around the Archer’s Gate entrance into Samburu. These were found by Kevin Easley on a visit from his home in Costa Rica, but is in fact an ex-native of Ongata Rongai as is his brother Steven! He found the Sparrows on November 15th 2015. But since that time no-one else had reported them so we thought we would wander around the buildings from the entrance back towards the main road and see if they were still there. There were plenty of House Sparrows to keep chasing, but we passed a Restaurant no too far from the roof, and there on the roof-top was a male Somali Sparrow of the nominate race, with his attractive all chestnut crown and apart from the black throat all whitish underparts, lacking the primrose and richer orange-chestnut of our much more colourful northern residents. This male was nesting with a female, it’s quite likely that the species has extended it’s range from here in the four years since its discovery, maybe it is in Isiolo but personally I wouldn’t like to walk through the streets there checking sparrows through binoculars! We were delighted that they were still at Archer’s and looking like pure birds. See image.

The thought of suffering heat-stroke on the black lava searching for Masked Larks again the next day was not a pleasant option, so after another good nights sleep in comfort (Ksh1500/night, breakfast Ksh extra), we set out for Marsabit the next morning, and few hours later on the super highway, we were there. In the afternoon we wandered around the desert beyond Bubisa some 40km from Marsabit on the Moyale Road. It was very hot, and whilst Chestnut-crowned Sparrow, Crested and Thekla Larks were common, there was no sign of Masked. We returned to Marsabit and had a look along the decent on to the Maikona-Kalacha Road and were entertained by a fall of mixed migrants. Returning to Marsabit we stayed at the incredible Jirime Hotel with a birdy garden, and only Ksh3,000 room (Wifi, Dstv in room, Electric Jug, Tea/Coffee).

They also served us a 5.30am breakfast and we set off back to finding four White-crowned Starlings on some rubbish, which is the closest I have seen the birds to Marsabit. Birds were active as the sun just broke the horizon, and parties of larks were busy and so were the Masked Larks! We returned to the hotel and had a stroll in the garden, there were a number of migrants but the most interesting was a pair of Swainson’s Sparrows, also the farthest south I have seen these as well. We left at 10am, arrived back at Archer’s shortly before 1pm and were back in Nairobi at 7pm!

Below is a list of species recorded on the trip; the birds in small print were on the return with an hours break at Kisima, for a food and beverage break, and still back in Nairobi at 7pm!

SOMALI OSTRICH, HELMETED GUINEAFOWL, VULTURINE GUINEAFOWL, CRESTED FRANCOLIN, YELLOW-NECKED SPURFOWL, EGYPTIAN GOOSE, LITTLE GREBE on the very green sedge soda crossing in Shaba, never see there before

YELLOW-BILLED STORK, MARABOU STORK, SACRED IBIS, HADADA IBIS, CATTLE EGRET, BLACK-HEADED HERON, GREAT EGRET, HAMERKOP, PYGMY FALCON, GREATER KESTREL several Marsabit area

EURASIAN HOBBY three in Shaba

SECRETARYBIRD just on in Shaba

BLACK-WINGED KITE

AFRICAN SWALLOW-TAILED KITE three singles Marsabit area

BLACK KITE AFRICAN FISH EAGLE

EGYPTIAN VULTURE adult near crater below Marsabit on Moyale Road

HOODED VULTURE at least eight including six around hotel in Marsabit

WHITE-BACKED VULTURE, RUPPELL’S VULTURE, BROWN SNAKE-EAGLE, BATELEUR, AFRICAN HARRIER HAWK, EASTERN CHANTING GOSHAWK, GABAR GOSHAWK, SHIKRA

GRASSHOPPER BUZZARD one at Marsabit

COMMON BUZZARD one at Marsabit

AUGUR BUZZARD, TAWNY EAGLE

KORI BUSTARD

HEUGLIN’S BUSTARD at last eight on the slopes from hotel on to Moyale Road…see image

WHITE-BELLIED BUSTARD, BUFF-CRESTED BUSTARD, SPOTTED THICK-KNEE, SPUR-WINGED PLOVER, CROWNED PLOVER, THREE-BANDED PLOVER

WOOD SANDPIPER only five in Shaba

SOMALI COURSER a few Shaba, but common below Marsabit on both sides of mountain…see image

CHESTNUT-BELLIED SANDGROUSE, BLACK-FACED SANDGROUSE, LIECHTENSTEIN’S SANDGROUSE, SPECKLED PIGEON, Dusky Turtle-Dove, AFRICAN MOURNING DOVE, RED-EYED DOVE, RING-NECKED DOVE, LAUGHING DOVE, EMERALD-SPOTTED WOOD-DOVE, NAMAQUA DOVE, ORANGE-BELLIED PARROT, WHITE-BELLIED GO-AWAY BIRD, GREAT SPOTTED CUCKOO, DIEDERIC CUKOO, WHITE-BROWED COUCAL

PEARL-SPOTTED OWLET very useful at Joy’s Camp, Shaba for stirring up hidden migrants

SLENDER-TAILED NIGHTJAR, AFRICAN PALM SWIFT, LITTLE SWIFT, SPECKLED MOUSEBIRD, BLUE-NAPED MOUSEBIRD, RUFOUS-CROWNED ROLLER, LILAC-BREASTED ROLLER

EURASIAN ROLLER only one near Ololokwe

GREY-HEADED KINGFISHER, LITTLE BEE-EATER, Cinnamon-chested Bee-eater, WHITE-THROATED BEE-EATER

SOMALI BEE-EATER several around Marsabit but none seen Shaba…see image

BLUE-CHEEKED BEE-EATER heard flying over Shaba

AFRICAN HOOPOE, ABYSSINIAN SCIMITARBILL, RED-BILLED HORNBILL, EASTERN YELLOW-BILLED HORNBILL, VON DER DECKEN’S HORNBILL, RED-FRONTED BARBET, BLACK-THROATED BARBET, RED-AND-YELLOW BARBET, NUBIAN WOODPECKER, CARDINAL WOODPECKER, AFRICAN GREY-HEADED WOODPECKER, PYGMY BATIS, SULPHUR-BREASTED BUSH-SHRIKE, ROSY-PATCHED BUSH-SHRIKE, BROWN-CROWNED TCHAGRA, SLATE-COLOURED BOUBOU, Tropical Boubou, BRUBRU, WHITE-CROWNED SHRIKE

RED-BACKED SHRIKE fairly widespread including Jirive garden

TURKESTAN SHRIKE just one bird in Shaba…see image

LESSER GREY SHRIKE only three seen until twenty on the fence crossing the farmlands before Timau (Ol Donyio)

TAITA FISCAL

SOMALI FISCAL very common around Marsabit

COMMON FISCAL only in Marsabit

EURASIAN GOLDEN ORIOLE three birds seen Shaba

COMMON DRONGO, AFRICAN PARADISE FLYCATCHER, Cape Rook, PIED CROW

SOMALI CROW common round Marsabit, side by side with Pied Crows

FAN-TAILED RAVEN

BARN SWALLOW widespread but no concentrations

WIRE-TAILED SWALLOW, ROCK MARTIN, LESSER STRIPED SWALLOW, RED-RUMPED SWALLOW

WILLIAM’S LARK about twenty seen…see images

RED-WINGED LARK five seen Shaba

FAWN-COLOURED LARK, PINK-BREASTED LARK

MASKED LARK three birds near Bubisa…see image

CRESTED LARK common around Marsabit on sand…see image

THEKLA LARK common around Marsabit on lava…see image

CHESTNUT-HEADED SPARROW-LARK common Shaba and the desert blow Marsabit, no chestnut in plumage Marsabit, replace with black, Shaba birds chestnut…see image

FISCHER’S SPARROW-LARK, Hunter’s Cisticola, RATTLING CISTICOLA

BORAN CISTICOLA only Marsabit

ASHY CISTICOLA, DESERT CISTICOLA, TAWNY-FLANKED PRINIA

RED-FRONTED WARBLER, Grey-capped Warbler, GREY-BACKED CAMAROPTERA, GREY WREN WARBLER, YELLOW-VENTED EREMOMELA

DODSON’S BULBUL, Common Bulbul

WILLOW WARBLER widespread in small numbers

EURASIAN REED WARBLER one at Joy’s Camp, Shaba

OLIVE TREE WARBLER one at Bubisa…see image

OLIVACEOUS WARBLER several Joy’s Camp, Shaba

GARDEN WARBLER one Joy’s Camp, Shaba

BARRED WARBLER a female Joy’s Camp, Shaba

COMMON WHITEHTROAT a few Shaba and around Marsabit

BANDED PARISOMA, RUFOUS CHATTERER, KENYA PALE WHITE-EYE, WATTLED STARLING, GOLDEN-BREASTED STARLING, SUPERB STARLING, FISCHER’S STARLING,

WHITE-CROWNED STARLING four at Bubisa…see image

BRISTLE-CROWNED STARLING, RED-BILLED OXPECKER, Olive Thrush

SPROSSER one on Maikona Road

Cape Robin Chat, SPOTTED MOURNING THRUSH, WHITE-BROWED SCRUB-ROBIN

WHINCHAT one on Maikona Road

NORTHERN WHEATEAR one on Maikona Road

PIED WHATEAR one Shaba

BROWN-TAILED ROCK-CHAT

COMMON ROCK THRUSH quite frequent around Marsabit including Jirive Garden…see image

AFRICAN GREY FLYCATCHER

SPOTTED FLYCATCHER Several on Maikona Road, Jirive Gardens a few Shaba

EASTERN VIOLET-BACKED SUNBIRD, HUNTER’S SUNBIRD, Bronze Sunbird, MARICO SUNBIRD, VARIABLE SUNBIRD (white-bellied Marsabit)

WHITE-BROWED SPARROW-WEAVER, DONALDSON’S SMITH’S SPARROW-WEAVER, BLACK-CAPPED SOCIAL WEAVER

HOUSE SPARROW

SOMALI SPARROW a pair Archer’s Post…see images

Kenya Rufous Sparrow, PARROT-BILLED SPARROW

SWAINSON’S SPARROW a pair Jirive garden, Marsabit

CHESTNUT SPARROW, YELLOW-SPOTTED PETRONIA, RED-BILLED BUFFALO WEAVER, WHITE-HEADED BUFFALO WEAVER, SPECKLE-FRONTED WEAVER, BAGLAFECHT WEAVER, LESSER MASKED WEAVER, Speke’s Weaver, CHESTNUT WEAVER, RED-BILLED QUELEA

AFRICAN SILVERBILL the only true estrildid seen!

PIN-TAILED WHYDAH, EASTERN PARADISE WHYDAH…see image, VILLAGE INDIGOBIRD, AFRICAN PIED WAGTAIL, GOLDEN PIPIT, GRASSLAND PIPIT

TREE PIPIT a couple Jirive garden

AFRICAN CITRIL, REICHENOW’S SEEDEATER, WHITE-BELLIED CANARY, STREAKY SEEDEATER, CINNAMON-BREASTED BUNTING, SOMALI BUNTING…see image

KEY TO MONTAGE

ALL IMAGES SUPPLIED BY ITAI SHANNI

1 All William’s Larks

2 Turkestan Shrike

3 Crested Lark

4 Heuglin’s Bustard

5 Olive Tree Warbler

6 Thekla Lark

7 Somali Bee-eater

8 Somali Courser

9 Chestnut-crowned Sparrowlark (no chestnut)

10 Somali Sparrows

11 Masked Lark

12 Somali Bunting

13 Eastern Paradise Whydah

14 Common Rock Thrush

15 White-crowned Starlings