

SUNRISE



# Nairobi National Park News



Photo by: Sonia Varma

## Chairman's Monthly Updates | June 2020



**Gareth Jones**  
**Board Chairman**  
**FoNNaP**

Greetings to all of you,

The current global reality of the Covid-19 pandemic is very sobering and still of great concern to many nations. The world as we know it has changed dramatically in a short period of time, with severe consequences regarding health and economic losses. However even with limitations the Nairobi National Park continues to be functional.

As many of you are aware the draft Nairobi National Park Management Plan (2020-2030) is in final stages of moving towards approval by law. A full draft document of the proposed NNP Management Plan was emailed to FoNNaP members in mid April 2020 to allow members to read and comment. Many people including FoNNaP members also participated in an OPEN PLAN public participation forum coordinated by The Conservation Alliance of Kenya (CAK). By the time FoNNaP members receive the June newsletter, all public participation responses from various organisations and individuals will have been officially submitted as per the deadline date of 30th June 2020. It is wonderful to note that FoNNaP and other conservation groups like the Conservation Alliance of Kenya (CAK), have all tirelessly worked together to ensure that the Nairobi National Park remains wild forever. We hope and pray that the alternative proposals and recommendations for the draft NNP Management Plan will be considered and adopted into a revised NNP Management Plan 2020 to 2030, and that KWS will encourage all stakeholders to work together with them to secure the priceless treasure we call the Nairobi National Park, including the buffer zone south of the park.

In summary some of the major issues requiring alternative management solutions include 1) Leaving the ancient migration route open to include the community conservancies therefore having NO fence in that zone 2) Ensure that there is no new large infrastructural developments and no habitat destruction within the NNP 3) Manage water pollution flowing into the park 4) Improve roads 5) Improve picnic sites with hygienic washrooms. A full copy of the final document submitted to the Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife will be shared with all FoNNaP members.

Recently a special meeting to discuss ways to address the current reality regarding visitors misbehaving was held with the senior warden Joseph Dadacha and FoNNaP board member. The meeting resulted in a very positive outcome that also includes increased park patrols with a target of 20 authorised patrol vehicles, at this stage 12 FoNNaP nominees being appointed, with a further 5 nominees pending appointment.

As we move into the second half of the year, it is hoped that FoNNaP will be able to resume normal activities, both within the park and in meetings and functions. Members will be informed of the planned activities as soon as the status of the Covid-19 hygiene protocol changes.

In the meanwhile take care out there and stay well! Pray God help us in our actions!

Kind regards

Gareth Jones



### World Giraffe Day Silent Extinction of Some Sub-Species

By Vincent ole Simel



*A group of giraffes feeding at the Naretunoi Conservancy*

Every 21st day of June, the world celebrates Giraffe Day. The annual event seeks to create awareness, marshal support and highlight giraffe challenges in the wild.

There has never been a critical moment to raise awareness on giraffes, than this. According to the IUCN, giraffes are in serious danger and need to be protected. Some species of this iconic African giant appear on the IUCN's Red List as critically endangered.

According to a report that was published on the 11th of March 2020, there are slightly over 97,000 giraffes in the wild. The report further said that in a period of three decades, the giraffe's population has declined by 40 percent.

The Giraffe Conservation Foundation states that the greatest threats to giraffe varies from habitat loss, poaching, disease and population encroachment. All of these factors can be controlled if the correct measures are taken.

A little over two months ago, Kenya had three rare white giraffes that attracted global attention. After a few days however, park rangers discovered the bodies of the mother giraffe and her seven-month baby slain by poachers.

According to research carried out by the Giraffe Conservation Foundation, there are four distinct giraffe species in Africa. They include Masai (*G. tippelskirchi*), Reticulated (*G. reticulata*), Northern (*G. camelopardalis*) and Southern (*G. giraffa*).

The most common giraffe species in Kenya is the Masai giraffe. This species

roams freely in eastern Kenya and going south into northern Tanzania. It is also the biggest amongst the species. Nairobi National Park has a healthy number of Masai giraffe. These magnificent giants roam freely in and out of the park to the Naretunoi Conservancy where there is a dispersal area for wildlife.

Together with other herbivores, giraffes move out of the park into lands which owners have agreed to keep open to be used by wildlife. The animals walk up to 6km and come back to the park as soon as it is morning.

Organisations such as The Wildlife Foundation are on the forefront to ensure that the wild animals outside protected areas are safe, with community rangers on the ground to secure the future of the wildlife.

# Nairobi National Park Lions Series | June 2020

By Trish Heather-Hayes

June has been quite an active month for the park lions.

On Monday 8th June the large KF4 group attacked and killed a buffalo near Kingfisher. They finally managed to bring her down but in the video that was shown by a visitor later it was clear that one of the lionesses had been hit by the buffalo, although only by what looked like a head butt. Sure enough the following day, having eaten their full and resting in the Kingfisher Picnic site, one of Morana's daughters, Johari, was seen with quite a large wound on her right thigh. KWS managed to track her down on the Wednesday and treated the wound which did require a few stitches. She was seen with the group the next day and seemed well.



Photo by KWS Vet - Before cleaning



Photo by KWS Vet Dept - Cleaned



Photo By KWS Vet Dept - Stitching

On a very sad note...on the Thursday 11th June, the lead female of the same group, Amani, was walking on the road near Kingfisher and it is assumed she must have startled a female rhino with a young calf in a bush. The rhino charged her, taking her by surprise and killed her instantly. She has left 3 cubs of almost 1.5 yrs old who luckily are learning to hunt with the rest of the group. One of the cubs is the female that Amani adopted after her sister Alamaya abandoned her when she was very young! RIP Amani.

On a happier note, Sam has been getting his meals from the KF4 group. He joins in happily with all their kills and is looking really good at the moment for a 15 yr old!



Photo By Trish HH. Sam.

Solo and Nala and their one-year-old cubs have been together with Mpakasi and Kitili occasionally in the Athi basin area and No.10 waterhole. It was a surprise when the two females and the cubs were seen up near the SGR and the 7-8 murrum pits one morning ...the next day they had returned to Mokoyiet/Sosian area.

Mpakasi and Kitili have both been mating at different times with Serena, then she was mating for about a week up near the SGR and No.8 with Sirikoi! Makes for hard identification as to whose is Dad if she does produce cubs!



Photo By Trish HH - Kitili and Serena

Sirikoi was then seen mating, for only a day, with one of the young females of the KF7 group, Isinya. As it is her first heat and for such a short time she won't be producing cubs this time.



Photo By Olga Levari Ercolano - Sirikoi & Isinya

Quntai, the collared young male in the KF7 group, together with Leshan and the females have been active with kills. Many comments were made when a video was shown on social media recently, that they were looking thin. By the following morning they were looking well fed again, having found something to fill up on during the night! There is a great difference between looking thin and looking 'lean'. After feasting on a buffalo or good-sized prey, for the next two or even three days, they will have full bellies, but when everything has been digested they get a hollow look around the stomach and hips ...and that is a sign that it is time to hunt again.



Photo by Trish HH - Quntai

Kemboi seems to have gone into hiding again. Seen up near No 8 one weekend with Sirikoi, he soon took himself off to who knows where again and hopefully will just appear as usual one morning. Sad that Sirikoi and Kemboi don't form a coalition like Mpakasi and Kitili have done. Both seem to prefer their own company.



Photo By Trish HH - Kemboi

## Nairobi National Park Game Count

Our Next Game Count is on August 2nd, 2020

Contact FoNNaP for more details  
admin@fonnap.org

Be a member of Friends of Nairobi National Park Society (FoNNaP) and get the benefit of participating in the bi-monthly game counts and clean-ups of Nairobi National Park organized in partnership with Kenya Wildlife Service

## A Vision for Nairobi National Park

Story and Photo by Delta Willis



While Nairobi National Park and Central Park have much in common: providing lungs for a big city to breathe, both an Important Bird Area as designated by Birdlife International, and a green oasis for residents and visitors, the extraordinary ability to see Black and White rhino is an exception. So are large families of ostrich, herds of zebra, Cape buffalo and antelope, resident hippo and crocodiles, towers of giraffe, plus the chance to see leopard or other spotted cats.

Read full Blog here:

<https://deltawillis.com/a-vision-for-nairobi-national-park/>



## Black Rhinos In Nairobi National Park

By Gabriel Grimsditch, FONNAP member, (Twitter account: @GabrielGrims)

One of the eight proposed conservation priorities of the Nairobi National Park Draft Management Plan 2020 – 2030 proposed by KWS is the conservation of the black rhino. Nairobi National Park provides a home for a significant number of the Eastern Black Rhinoceros, *Diceros bicornis*, and is considered a critical habitat for breeding and foraging. In fact, the wooded grasslands, open grasslands, and the open low shrubland provide the perfect ecosystem for this iconic species to roam freely and happily. Sadly, decimated by poaching and habitat loss, this species is classified as critically endangered in the IUCN Red List meaning it is facing an extremely high risk of extinction in the wild. The importance of NNP as a critical sanctuary for black rhinos cannot be overstated, not only for the Kenyan population, but for the entire species across the whole African continent. The black rhino population in Nairobi has even been used to restock other rhino sanctuaries across the country.

It is thus no wonder that KWS has included the black rhino as a conservation priority for NNP, to manage and enhance the black rhino population in accordance with the Black Rhino Action Plan 2017 - 2021. The overall goal of this national action plan for Kenya is “To achieve a meta-population of 830 black rhinos by the end of 2021; a net growth of at least 5% per annum maintained in at least six established populations; and positive net growth achieved in all recovering populations. This is to be achieved through an emphasis on biological monitoring and management, protection and law enforcement and community engagement.” NNP is thus a critical population for achieving this national goal.

Within the proposed park management plan, the main threats to the black rhino in NNP have been identified as population in-breeding, wildlife diseases, and abstraction of water for irrigation and domestic uses. Given the high security and the brave, tireless and fantastic work of KWS rangers, the poaching threat for rhinos within NNP is considered as low. In line with Kenya’s Black Rhino Action Plan, the draft management plan proposes that rhino diseases will

be diagnosed and sick animals treated in a timely manner. In addition, disease surveillance and timely interventions will be made during disease outbreaks.

Earlier in June I was lucky enough to have a close encounter with two Eastern Black Rhinos, distinguishable from the white rhinos due to their hooked upper lip which is perfect for browsing on trees and bushes (white rhinos have square lips which are good for grazing, the names have nothing to do with their skin colour!). The black rhinos were moving quickly through the grassland and scattered bushes close to Athi Dam, pausing every few seconds to turn around and inspect us. Eventually they crossed the road in front of us and moved out of sight further into the bushes. We spotted them again from a high vantage point on the Athi Basin Circuit, happily browsing in the bushes. The importance of keeping Nairobi National Park protected and free from threats has never been more important for this critically endangered and iconic species!

## The Frogs of Nairobi National Park An Introduction

By Stephen Spawls (stevespawls@hotmail.com)

Spend a day in Nairobi National Park in the dry season, and you probably won’t see a frog (not that many people come to look for frogs anyway; amphibian watching is an esoteric hobby!). But visit in the rains, at dawn or near dusk, it’s a different matter. When the light is low, you might see frogs ambling, or jumping, across the road, or sitting at the edges of puddles. Another reason for always driving slowly, the small fauna should not be crushed under our wheels. Nairobi National Park has about 20 species of frog, and although most of them are widespread species of the African savannas, there are some nice endemics.

Frogs are amphibians, a name that means ‘two lives’, as they live on land and in water. Two orders of amphibians occur in Kenya; the frogs and the caecilians. Caecilians are poorly known, wormlike burrowing amphibians that live in damp soil. Only seven species occur in Kenya (and none in Nairobi National Park, although one is known from Ngaya Forest, near the Nyambene Hills). However, Kenya has at least 100 species of frog.

We know frogs. We see them at night on wet roads or around our outside taps. And yet little is known of their lifestyle. The humble chura is a creature of the dark and of water, active only in the rainy season. We hear them; the boom of frogs and toads in the night has often disturbed our sleep. However, frogs are good for humanity. They eat mostly insects; in Kenya’s rice and maize fields it is the frogs that keep the insect numbers down and thus provide more food for us; around our homes they eat mosquitoes. And they are also excellent indicators of environmental health; their permeable (leaky) skins mean they are sensitive to pollution.

Healthy wetlands will have healthy frogs; if frogs are dying it is a warning of pollution. Frogs are our friends.

Most Kenyan frogs have astonishing lifestyles. In a land with few rivers, in the dry season, they aestivate; meaning that they bury themselves, hiding deep in the soil, often surrounded by a waterproof cocoon. But when the rainy season comes, pools form. Kenya’s savanna frogs use these pools, in a rapid reproduction strategy. Stimulated by changes in air pressure, the boom of thunder and the patter of raindrops above, the frogs wake up, dig their way out onto the surface and rush to temporary pools. As darkness falls the males begin to call, filling the night with melody. The females arrive and frantic mating occurs. The female releases a stream of eggs, the male on her back fertilises them with a stream of sperm, the primed eggs settle in the water. They hatch into tadpoles in a few days. The tadpoles have gills, they eat and they metamorphose into froglets. They keep eating the insects that have also appeared. Their weight increases rapidly. When the rains end, as the pools dry, the frogs burrow back down, often to depths of a metre or more. They secrete their cocoons, slow down and await the next rainy season. It is a mad lifestyle; evolved to suit a hostile environment.

Seeing frogs isn’t always easy. They are secretive and need to stay moist and relatively cool. So they emerge at night, in the rains. As mentioned, look for them on the road at dusk. At the Hippo Pools, especially in the wet season, look carefully on the leaves and stems of the waterside vegetation, you might see a little Reed Frog, usually white in colour. This is the Athi River Reed Frog, *Hyperolius viridiflavus*, variety *ferniquei*, a member of a wildly variable ‘superspecies’ of the savannas of the southern half of Africa, and a taxonomist’s nightmare. You might also see, as you stroll near the water’s edge (keeping a wary eye out for crocodiles), a frog suddenly make a prodigious leap in front of you, out of the grass into the water. This will be a rocket frog, (also called a

grass frog, or ridged frog), *Ptychadena*. And sometimes, in the wet season, if you stop your car near a flooded ditch, even in the day, you will hear a chorus of the little frogs known as Snoring Puddle Frogs, *Phrynobatrachus natalensis*. Most frogs only call at night, the male has a loud call to attract females, but the puddle frogs also call by day. Stop near one of the park’s dams, late in the day, and listen for the distinctive ‘quoip’, like a drop of water falling into a upturned bell. This is the call of the Senegal Running Frog, or Senegal Kassina, *Kassina senegalensis*. Or you might hear the deep snore of the Guttural Toad, *Sclerophrys gutturalis*, or the loud booming ‘quaaak’ of Garman’s Toad, *Sclerophrys garmani*. For those interested, a free book, ‘The Amphibians of Kenya’, with over 200 colour pictures and maps for all species, can be downloaded from our website, [www.kenyareptileatlas.com](http://www.kenyareptileatlas.com); go to downloads, last item on the list. Get to know our frogs!



Achieta's Rocket Frog



Athi River Reed Frog dark phase



Athi River Reed Frog light phase



Garman's Toad



Guttural Toad



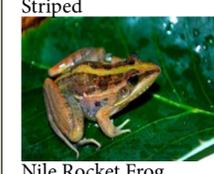
Kim Howell's Reed Frog



Natal Puddle Frog Striped



Natal Puddle Frog unstriped.



Nile Rocket Frog



Senegal Kassina.



## Fun in The Forest

Aditya Shah (@mowglishah on Instagram)

The forest is my favourite part of the park. Each time I visit, I make sure I drive through part or all of it, weather dependant. It is not particularly teeming with larger wildlife and my most exciting sighting remains from several years ago, when a tower of giraffes thundered past my stationary car for no apparent reason at all. That is, until several seconds later, a sub-adult lion bounded out of the bushes after them. It was moving too slowly to be hunting and I am not sure who was more surprised to see the other; as our eyes locked mid-spring.

The forest is to me like a temple is to a priest, tranquil and revitalizing. It is filled with shade and glades where I am happy to park (no pun intended) and spend hours just existing. At times I read a book or write and at times I just sit. Early mornings are especially fantastic, but cold – so take a blanket or whisky-laced coffee. The air is still and full of energy, which you can almost inhale into your body.

As the sun tenderly reaches in through the canopy of branches you hear the forest come alive. Hesitant twittering from the birdlife, which gets stronger every minute and takes on a life of its own. The shrill chirping of insects is like a call to prayer, rising and falling. The rustle of the forest's mammals,

dik-diks and forest bucks, is soothing like a balm, reassuring me that I am not totally alone in a sometimes eerie landscape.

In June, I parked at my favourite glade and settled down to wait for what might appear. Out of the corner of my eye I glanced a shimmering ghostly apparition. As the light grew stronger I saw it was a massive spider web, easily three to four feet across. "Wow!", I thought, "I wonder how many bugs are going to get caught in that today?"



As I looked around I spotted several smaller and individual webs each with a tiny little reddish-orange spider hard at work. Looked at sideways some of the webs were like little parachutes moving back and forth gently in the morning breeze with a tiny parachutist clinging on for dear life!

Spiders are often mistakenly referred to as insects but are arachnids; a class of arthropods that include scorpions, mites and ticks. There are over 8000 species of spider in Africa and they play an important biological function of keeping insect numbers in check.

Did you know that spiders survive on a "liquid diet"? They exude digestive juices so strong that they break down their victims' tissues; after which they suck up the liquified remains (like a milkshake).



Zarek Cockar, a spider expert, kindly helped to identify the spiders which built the huge web as Community Nest Spiders (*Stegodyphus mimosarum*) from the family *Eresidae*. It was interesting to find out that they are the only truly social and communal spiders in East Africa – they share the web and food resources equally and do not have a hierarchical system like ants or termites. Unfortunately, the distance was too great for me to get a clear photo of the spiders building the smaller webs but Zarek tentatively identified them as belonging to either the family *Araneida* or *Tetragnathidae*, given the forest habitat and the nice circular "orb" shaped webs.

A perfect moment; illuminated by chance rays of sunlight, without which I would not have noticed the smaller webs. I wonder just how much of the park's biodiversity we are missing as we follow sightings and focus primarily on "exciting" animals during our game drives. At times, sitting still reveals the most beautiful of nature's bounty. It is all the more special because of that.

Photo of Sirkoi by L Miranda



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**PHOTO OF THE MONTH**

*Martial Eagle vs Rüppell vulture by  
Dyan Rhodes*

## World Environment Day 2020 Time for Nature – The Nairobi National Park

By Lorraine Miranda.



The foods we eat, the air we breathe, the water we drink and the climate that makes our planet habitable all come from nature. Yet, these are exceptional times in which nature is sending us a message -- To care for ourselves we must care for nature. It's time to wake up. To take notice. To raise our voices. It's time to build back better for People and Planet.

As we celebrate nature, I celebrate Kenya in all its uniqueness, with a focus on our exquisite Nairobi National Park. The only national park in the world in a capital city, that offers a chance to spot some of the continent's most iconic species against the backdrop of the city's skyline.

The park's diverse topography, ranging from its open savanna grasslands scattered with Acacia bushes to its deep rocky valleys, gorges and riverine forest abound with a plethora of wildlife. It is a bird lover's paradise with a staggering number of over 400 migratory and endemic bird species and it is also a sanctuary for the endangered black rhino. One is simply awed by this breathtaking display of beauty that nature provides just a stone's throw away from the hustle and bustle of our vibrant city.

We arrive at the gates of the park at 6.00am armed with our flasks of steaming hot coffee, a few other goodies and of course my camera. A gush of excitement takes over as we embark on our "safari" with bated breath speculating on what nature might have in store for us today.

A magical experience awaits us as the darkness of the night disappears and the Earth's star rises on the horizon, an orange ball of fire spreading red and yellow hues in every direction. As we drive along the dusty road deciding to turn left or right we are stopped in our tracks – a sight to behold - sitting grandly and contently as the perfect silhouette behind our beloved KICC is the majestic Mt. Kenya in all her glory.

Today, Mother Nature is really showing off after many years, and treats us to another dazzling view on the right - the tallest mountain on the continent, the magnificent snowcapped Kilimanjaro glistening in all her resplendent beauty. What an incredible start to the day reminding us to be grateful for some of the positive outcomes of the current pandemic - clear skies and fresher air in most cities around the world.

As the sun gets higher, it becomes a burning yellow in the sapphire blue sky and the day's activities begin. On the banks of the different dams are mud flats and reeds, teeming with bird life, where crocodiles bask in the sun, while hippos frolic or submerge themselves in the water to keep cool. When the waters are calm, the reflection of the sky above creates ripples of sparkle stirring up a mesmerizing feeling. Further in the park, a stream of crystal clear water triggered by the recent rainfall, shimmers in the sun as it swirls and gushes over pebbles and rocks, making its way down to a tiny swamp by a cluster of delightful palms. The big cats find shade and lie down, making it an exciting hunt for all visitors out to catch a glimpse, if they are lucky, of the majestic King of the jungle, the seldom seen cheetah or the elusive leopard.

As we wind our way around the somewhat uneven terrain, the sight of the grey crowned cranes stretching their wings in readiness for take-off, the scuttling of the guinea fowl on the road and the songs of countless birds set the tone for the game drive ahead. The grasslands come alive with the sighting of eland - elegantly moving across the plains as they graze, while

the fidgety impala and jumpy Thompson's gazelles cavort and run after each other playfully. A herd of buffalos stop to eye us suspiciously as the calves find refuge with their mothers. Not far off, a male ostrich displays some elaborate dancing skills, fluffing and flapping his feathers while the female plays hard to get and walks away. News of lion sightings on the murrum between 9 and 10 send us and others scurrying in that direction. We stop briefly to watch a pair of silver-backed jackals trotting gingerly down the road. Further on, an epic giraffe "necking" is ongoing. These otherwise social, tall and graceful mammals with their distinctive, irregular, star-like patches known as the Masai giraffes have been declared an endangered species.

The grass is long and golden in the morning sunlight providing the perfect camouflage for the queens of the park. Two lionesses sit under the shade of a bush, keenly watching the Cokels hartebeest a short distance away while "Sirikoi" sits grandly across the ridge, his regal mane intensifying his intimidating and threatening gaze as he guards his territory.

The lions do what they do best and

lie down for a nap in the long grass. As we drive on in the hope of spotting the slithery python or "Nguruman" the park's famed resident leopard, we come across three spotted Hyenas who bring back memories of a famous childhood song – "Hynie the laughing hyena" -- *who would laugh and laugh, kick his troubles away and never be whiny but make life sun shiny and sing his happy song all day long.*

The evening nears, and we head back for the main gate. We stop to let the stylish black and white zebra cross our path – almost like a scene from a 1960's movie. A waterbuck sticks his head out from behind a bush to watch the happenings on the road and not far on the plains we spot a mother rhino with her calf.

The setting sun paints the sky with streaks of pink and orange and the baboons grudgingly make way for us to pass. We drive home in silence, marvelling at the splendour of the park and overcome by a feeling of gratitude for all these gifts given so freely. The dusk gives way to the night sky, studded with glittering stars and a huge silver moon. A spectacular day – nowhere else do you get this abundance of birds, animals and other

wonderful displays of nature in such a small space.

This simplistic beauty and peaceful charm of our park that we would want to preserve for the generations to come may be at risk! The park's migratory species are already threatened by changing settlement patterns, fencing, the southern bypass, container depot road and the SGR which cuts right through the park. Further developments in the park will continue to fragment the ecosystem and destroy the habitat of the wildlife. When we destroy biodiversity, we destroy the system that supports human life. It is our duty as individuals and as a country to be the voice of the voiceless and protect our wildlife and their homes. Let us be united in this cause to protect our unique national park, a natural jewel of infinite value in our city, from any further constructions that may permanently damage its authenticity and negatively affect the environment. Raise your voice #for nature.



**Sightings of Nairobi National Park | June 2020**



Zahoor Isak Ismail

**Junior Photography Section**



Fareed Gulamhusein - 15 yrs

*Fareed*



Tilakraj Nagaraj



Harsh Gutka - 18 yrs



Monitor Lizard by Olga Levani Ercolano



The Kf4 Cubs Murtaza Shakir - 17 Yrs



Baby python by Hitesh Kalyan

**Please send photos to  
newsletter@fonnap.org  
to be featured in the NNP  
sightings column**



Nguruman by Miraj Shethia



Sosjamaal



Sim Vish

svpho.tography



Agama Lizard - Areef Ammani



Suhaib Alvi



Trish Heather Hayes



Shazir Virji

Shazir Virji

# Why the Nairobi National Park Bird List is One of the Longest in Africa

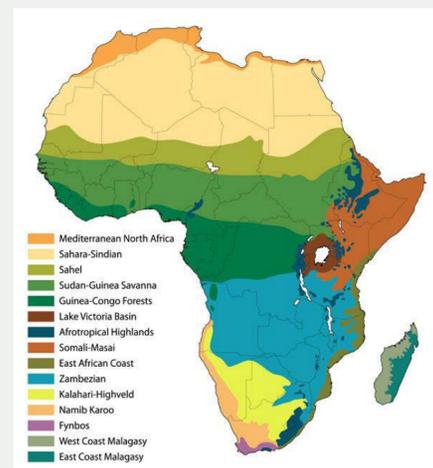
By Sidney Shema

In my previous blog post, I described a day of birding in Nairobi National Park in which a few friends and I jointly recorded 213 bird species in the park. I also mentioned that, despite it being a great number, it is fairly average by the park's standards. This is because the Nairobi National Park bird list is in fact the longest among Kenya's national parks, with over 520 species recorded, despite the park's tiny 117 km<sup>2</sup> size! This is almost half of all the birds recorded in Kenya (about 1,100 species).

## Exceptional diversity

The reason for such a staggering diversity of birdlife in such a small area is simple: habitat diversity. Nairobi is situated at the transition zone between two of Kenya's major ecological regions:

1. The Afrotropical Highlands biome - a high, cool and wet zone that includes Kenya's large mountains and massifs e.g. Mount Kenya, the Aberdares, the Mau and the Cherangani Hills. The dominant natural habitats are forests, moist grasslands and wetlands.
2. The Somali-Maasai biome - an area of low-lying dry savanna, thornbush and semi-desert that includes most of eastern and northern Kenya.



This map roughly shows the different biomes of Africa. (Courtesy: BirdLife International)

It might be difficult to appreciate this while in the city, but Nairobi is at the meeting point of these two biomes and the park shows this well. Nairobi National Park is therefore a great place to appreciate what the whole of Nairobi would have looked like before human development.

The Afrotropical Highlands are represented in Nairobi National Park by the upland dry forest in the west/northwest of the park, from the main gate and clubhouse area to the Lang'ata, Banda and Workshop gates. This area is above 1700m in elevation and receives more rainfall than the rest of the park.

As you move east/south-eastwards, you notice that the habitat changes from forest, through a narrow strip of bushland to open savanna. This savanna is fairly moist near the forest and gets drier as the altitude gradually drops until about 1500m in the Athi Basin, in the park's south-eastern corner, which receives the least amount of rainfall in the park. This drier savanna zone represents the beginning of the Somali-Maasai biome, which stretches all the way east and north to Somalia and Ethiopia and south into northern Tanzania. Amboseli, the Tsavo national parks and the Samburu-Shaba-Buffalo Springs reserves are all within this biome.



Transition from the forest to the savanna in the north-western section of the park. Closer to the forest, the grass is typically long as you move south-eastwards, the grass gets shorter.



These zebras are in the Athi Basin, the park's driest area.

Each of these biomes has its own wildlife community. And within these broad zones, there several micro-habitats including dams, streams/rivers, seasonal wetlands, rocky gorges, riparian woodlands, forest glades, dense shrub and different types of grasslands. All these are home to different types of birds and other wildlife that feed, breed and live in them. In general, the higher the diversity of habitats in an area, the higher the number of species that can be found there.

## A rich avifauna

As NNP has an exceptionally high habitat diversity, the diversity of bird species is equally high. In the forest, you have the chance to see forest specialists like Hartlaub's Turaco, Crowned Eagle, Lemon Dove and Cabanis's Greenbul, while in the savanna you can see birds of the dry country such as Black-faced Sandgrouse, D'Arnaud's Barbet, Short-tailed Lark and Desert Cisticola. In the dams and wetlands you can find numerous species of waterbirds including Yellow-billed Duck, Purple Swamphen, African Water Rail, Little Grebe and African Darter. Additionally, there are numerous birds which are generalists that are not restricted to a particular habitat. Add onto this of course that several migratory species use the park at certain times of year. It is not unusual in a single day in the park to see two or three similar species that occur in completely different habitats. Examples include Cinnamon-chested Bee-eater (forest) and Little Bee-eater (savanna); Ayres's Hawk Eagle (forest/moist woodland)

and African Hawk Eagle (savanna/dry woodland); Crowned Eagle (forest) and Martial Eagle (savanna); Yellow-throated Longclaw (moist grassland) and Pangani Longclaw (dry grassland); African Pygmy Kingfisher (forest/ woodland) and Malachite Kingfisher (wetlands); Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird (forest) and Red-fronted Tinkerbird (savanna); and Tambourine Dove (forest), Emerald-spotted Wood Dove (savanna) and Namaqua Dove (dry savanna).



Yellow-thoated Longclaw



Pangani Longclaw

NNP is one of the few places where both Yellow-throated and Pangani Longclaws can be seen in the same area. A third species, the Rosy-breasted Longclaw, can also be seen in the park, usually during the rains.



Hartlaub's Turaco. Denizen of the montane forests. Some people have suggested that this species should be declared the national bird of Kenya since it has all the colours of the Kenya flag: black, white, red and green. It is also nearly endemic to Kenya, with its range only slightly extending into northern Tanzania where it is found on the major mountains near the border including Mt. Kilimanjaro, Mt. Meru, the Pare Mountains and the West Usambaras.



Desert Cisticola. A bird of dry short-grass plains. With 10 cisticola species, Nairobi National Park has the second-highest number of cisticola species of any protected area in Kenya. Only the Masai Mara has more; 12 species. This is a reflection of the diversity of grassland habitats in NNP, as cisticolas are birds of the grasslands. The name 'cisticola' is a Latin word that literally means "grass dweller".



Yellow-billed Duck and Red-billed Teals at an inundated patch of grassland in the park. These are two of the many waterbirds that can be seen in NNP.



The Black Stork is also a waterbird. But it is only present from around October to April, as it is a migrant from the Palearctic region.

## A natural heritage to be proud of

The long length of the Nairobi National Park bird list is also slightly influenced by the fact that the Nairobi region has more bird watchers than any other part of Kenya. It is therefore logical that the more birders there are, the longer the area's list will be over time. This, however, does not take away from the fact that the park is exceptionally diverse and rich in species. It is quite impressive, to say the list, that one of the country's smallest national parks has its longest bird list. All else being equal, Nairobi National Park and its wider ecosystem still ranks among the most ecologically productive regions not only in Kenya but in Africa, and in fact on the planet.

Add to this that it is the only national park in a capital city globally, where mega-fauna like lions, rhino and giraffe still roam free. Is it therefore a long shot to suggest that Nairobi National Park should be declared a [World Heritage Site?](#)

([Click here](#) to check out the full report of the coordinated team effort that resulted in 213 bird species recorded in the park on a single day)

To support conservation efforts on the plains south of Nairobi National Park, where a new conservancy has been set up to help protect the remaining wildlife dispersal area that is so crucial to NNP's wildlife, please visit [The Wildlife Foundation's website](#).

(Article originally published on the ShotsByShema blog: [www.shotsbysHEMA.com](http://www.shotsbysHEMA.com))

**FoNNaP**  
Kid Column

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## **Friends of Nairobi National Park**

FoNNaP is a non-profit membership society founded in 1995, dedicated to assisting the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) to nurture and protect biodiversity within Nairobi National Park, and the broader ecosystem to which the park belongs.

Join today and be a Friend of the Park!

**CONTACT US TODAY!**

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