



Nairobi National Park News

August 2020



Sam by Tanvir Ali

Chairman's Monthly Updates | August 2020



Gareth Jones
Board Chairman
FoNNaP

Greetings to all of you,

The current global reality of the Covid-19 pandemic is still very sobering and is still of great concern to many nations including Kenya, as we approach 6 months since this change. We do, however, continue to pray that this threat ends soon.

As the 2020 moves into the second half of the year, FoNNaP has started resuming some normal activities, within the park. On the 30th August, a “treasure hunt” event is scheduled to be held within the park as participants look for the most treasured species, and a prize is awarded to the person who sees and records the most treasured species on a list. FoNNaP has continued with a series of webinars on Zoom to discuss various topics of interest to the NNP. The full list of topics and planned speakers will be made available to FoNNaP members.

At the beginning of August, FoNNaP moved office within the Langata-link complex to number 14. The office move will allow improved functionality, as it is shared with The Wildlife Foundation (TWF). Janet Kavutha has settled down into the role of Administrative Assistant and we wish her well as she grows from strength to strength in her role.

FoNNaP is currently also in the process of having a new website designed and developed. In the interim, the current website will be maintained. We hope to have the new website launched by the end of November 2020, with a number of exciting changes that will include exclusive member access and information archives for past records, species and photos. FoNNaP also recently set up a new method of rapid communication to members using Whatsapp. There has generally been a positive response from most members. However, it has also been noted that some members do not enjoy unneeded chatter on the same Whatsapp group.

A new range of FoNNaP merchandise with the FoNNaP logo in combination with an “OUR PARK – OUR HERITAGE” logo is now available. A full range of the available priced items will be advertised on the FoNNaP website and also circulated to the members via email. Members qualify for a 10% discount on all purchases. It is hoped that this range of items will communicate a clear message regarding the NNP and at the same time raise funds. Following a successful meeting with the senior warden, KWS has agreed to allow FoNNaP to operate an Information and Membership recruitment post in one of the tents next to the main entrance. It would be greatly appreciated if members who are available to assist would contact the FoNNaP office to discuss details.

FoNNaP was contacted by Dr Erastus Kanga of the Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife regarding a nominee for the task force to investigate the possibility of a wildlife corridor between the Nairobi National Park and the Athi Kapiti plains. The gazetted FoNNaP nominee is Caroline Nkamunu Patita. Effective from the 11th August 2020, the task force has 60 days to investigate possibilities and submit a detailed report of their findings to the Cabinet Secretary, Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife, Hon Najib Balala.

Please continue to take care out there and stay well! Pray God help us in our actions!!!

Kind regards

Gareth Jones
Chairman

Mosaic Dedicated to Sam

By Kian Shah (15 Years)



Sam, the Simba.... The oldest lion in the Nairobi National Park who roamed and explored the park will never be forgotten.
Rest In Peace Sam.

Nairobi National Park Lions | August 2020

By Trish Heather-Hayes

As most people who are familiar with the lions and regular visitors to the NNP will most probably have know the “old man” of the park Sam.



Photo by TH-Hayes Sam in 2019

15 years old and maybe not as strong as he used to be, but still a force to be reckoned with when it came to overseeing the kills made by his family, the KF4's . He was looking healthy with the care they were giving him, so it was a shock to see him on the Sunday morning at the Karen Dam looking very beaten up, sad and with pain reflecting in his eyes. He was unable to get up , so I called for help for him by contacting the Deputy Senior Warden Maurine Musimbi, who promptly got in touch with the veterinary dept. They were quick to respond and darted him at the scene, they started to clean his many wounds and check out his back legs, but because of the severity of the wounds they took him back to the Veterinary Dept. Sadly the wounds were quite seriously infected and he died the following morning. It was a very sad day for all that knew him and for the Park.



Photo by TH-Hayes - Sam and Cheru (facing) enjoy a meal together



Photo by TH-Hayes - Sam

Several of the other male lions were thought to be the culprit or culprits, but after news filtered in of each sighting of them, it was obvious that none of them were wounded in any way, and I feel sure that Sam would have not have given in without a fight. A mystery as to what caused all his wounds, but I wonder if it was possibly caused by some hyena? We will never know and any witnesses out on the plains are not saying anything!

RIP Sam.... I like to believe he is happily roaming the plains above us, together with his brothers Simbeo and Cheru, who were known as the Ivory Trio in their prime days, for their fondness of the Ivory site area and the tarmac road up to main gate. They loved to lie on the warm tarmac in the evenings, causing many a traffic jam! Who knows, maybe also joined once again by their litter brother Mohawk who would often be with them for a while before wandering off his own again, until the next time he felt like being with them.



Sam (back) and Simbeo in 2012

Kemboi is still not showing himself, coming up for almost 4 months now, although there is a faint possibility that he was seen near 16 by two rangers, both of whom are familiar with Mpakasi and Kitili and say it was definitely not either of them. We just keep the faith that he is still alive and well.

The KF4 family, which consists now of 6 adult females, the three daughters of Morana now into their third year and 5 sub adults are a real pleasure to see together wandering along the roads as they often do, on a kill or as seen a few days ago lazing around the Karen C Dam after a good meal. They can now easily bring down a buffalo which seems to be their favourite meal and the sub adults are growing rapidly.



Photo by T H-Hayes

There have been more regular sightings this month of Solo and Nala together with their 5 cubs, which are over a year old now and doing well. They have been seen on different occasions on the 8-9 plains, and on the road from 8-14, also at the No.10 waterhole and most recently with a huge Eland bull kill on the road to 10b. It seemed they had made the kill in the early morning but for some reason did not start to eat until mid afternoon, having been sleeping soundly in the long grass and bushes around the kill then it was a feast into the following day with Mpakasi and Kitili joining in. These two males are still ruling the roost in the Athi basin area and with last months mating with Serena and Safi we could be seeing new cubs in a couple of months time.



Photo by T H-Hayes. Nala enjoying her eland kill.

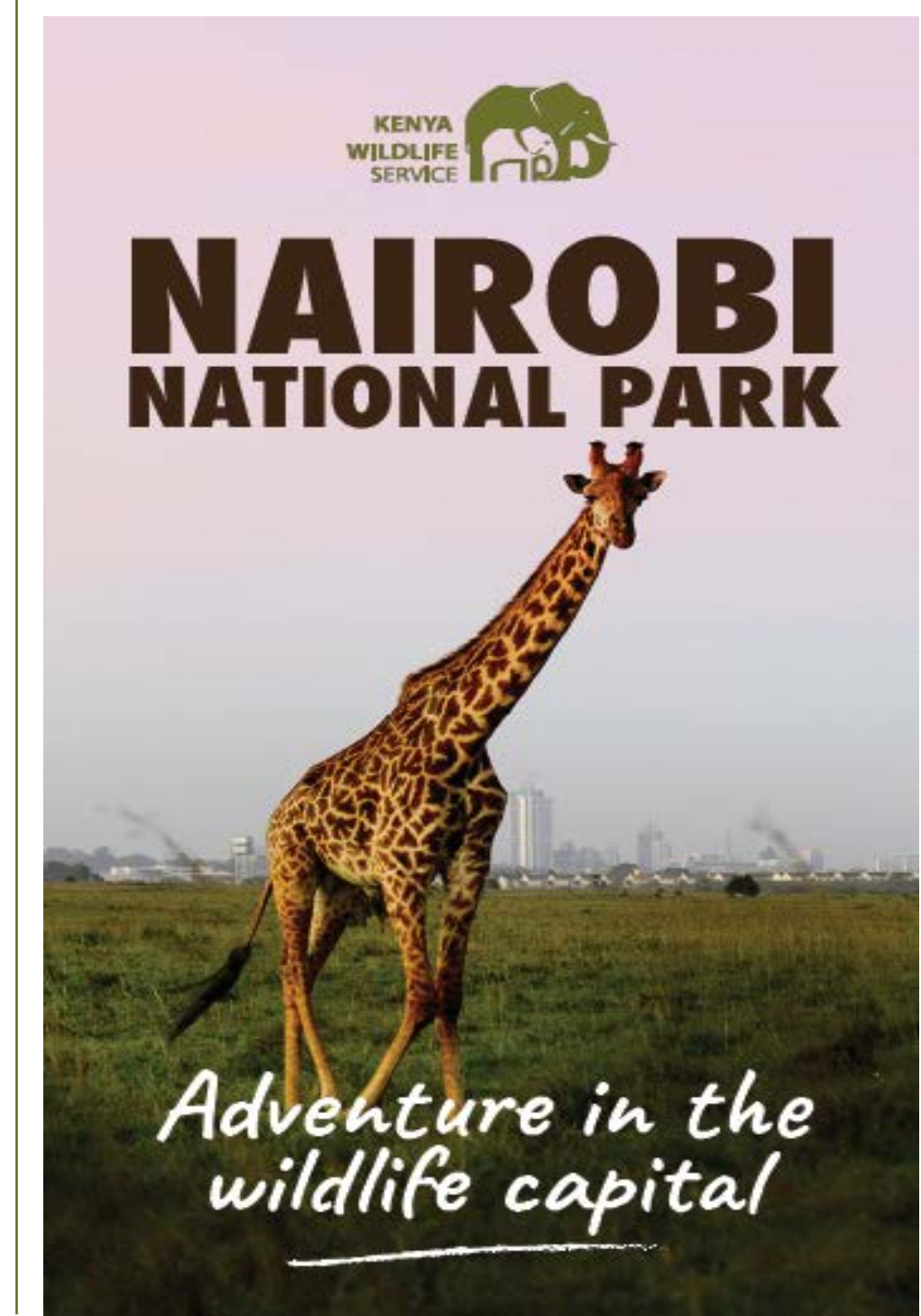
They KF7's with the 5 females and two males Quntai and Leshan continue to appear in various places, Quntai spends quite a bit of time on his own now without Leshan, who is often with his sisters, and strangely seemed to have invited himself to enjoy a kill made by the KF4's at hyena dam on the Saturday, only to have left again on the Sunday.



Photo by TH-Hayes - Quntai following the KF4's



Photo by T H-Hayes - Isinya of the KF7's with young zebra kill



Stupendous Stripes

Photos and Article By Aditya Shah (@mowglishah on Instagram)

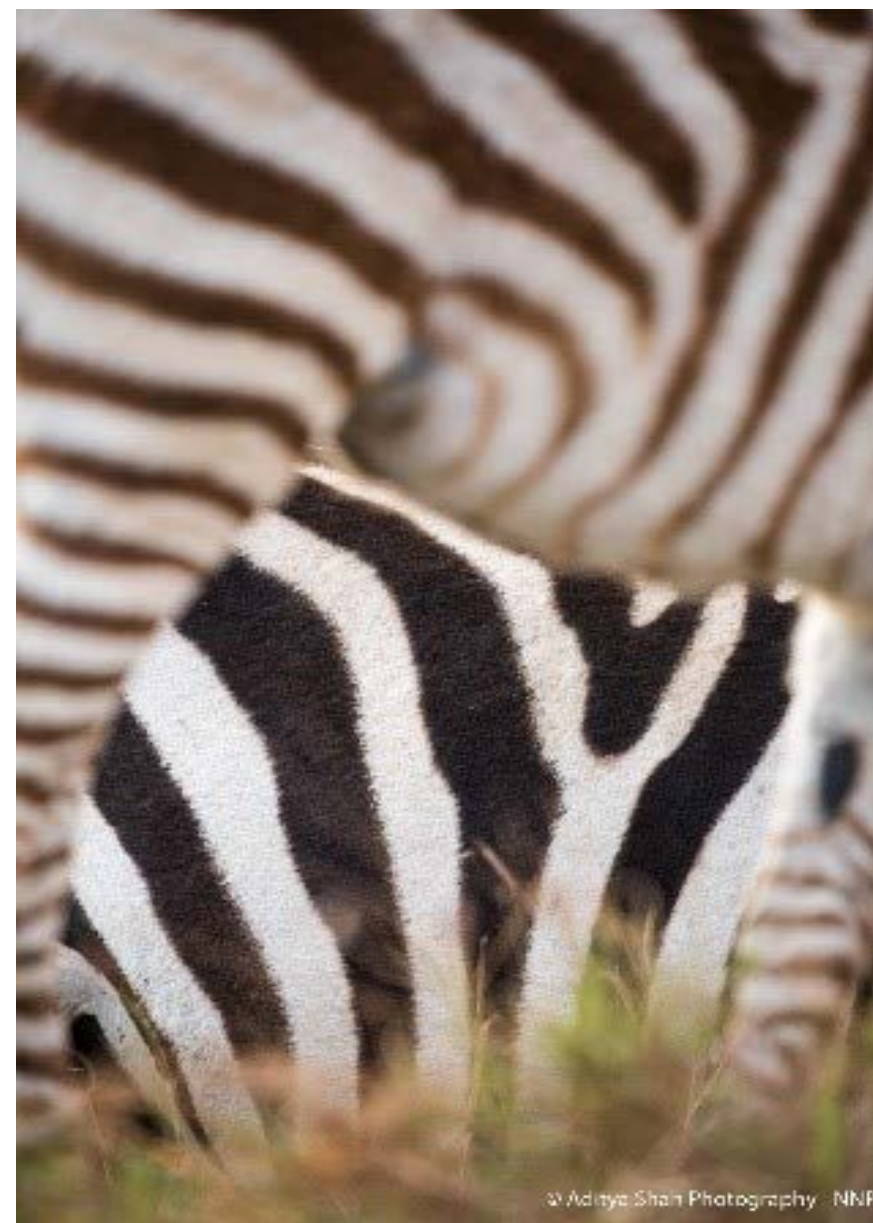


Zebras are one of my favourite animals and it has been great to see them venturing back into the park over the last weeks. It never ceases to amaze me just how habituated the park zebras are to cars and humans; allowing us to drive up and park right into the midst of their herds and observe their fun and frolics, for hours on end. Whether it is the constant chomp, chomp, chomp of the herds symphonizing with the whisk and whistle of the breeze, their rolling about in the rust red soil raising puffs of dust or their jousts with bared teeth and flying hind legs, they are always ready and able to entertain.

A special moment in August remains the one when I sidled up to a “youngling” who patiently stared at me head on for several minutes, like a fresh new starlet, still enjoying the razzle and dazzle of showbiz and soaking in the pleasure of every click of my camera.



She later joined her mother, brown and white stripes, melding beautifully into black and white stripes, a snapshot of two generations, a portrait of where one came from and where the other is heading.



So why do zebras have stripes? For it is these stripes that make zebras so magical and iconic, so different and distinct from the greens and yellows of the savannah and the yellows, oranges, reds, browns, blacks and greys of all the other mammals.

Theories abound, including most recently:

(a) Protection from biting insects – studies have demonstrated that flies tend not to land on striped surfaces because stripes somehow disrupt the “optic flow” through the “aperture effect”, leading the fly to believe the landing surface is further away than reality. This means it struggles to land successfully. I do not agree or disagree but point to the abundance of flies on and around zebras which they whisk away with the constant swishing and lashing of their tails in any event.

(b) Camouflage / protection from predators – the stripes hide the zebras in grassland and thicket environments by breaking up their body shape (they don't want to be spotted :p) and confuse predators when the chase is on. I do not agree or disagree but point to zebras being pretty consistent on the menu for big cats particularly lions.

(c) Thermoregulation – the theory is that the black stripes absorb heat in the morning and warm up the zebras whereas the white stripes reflect light more in the course of the day and cool the zebras as they graze into the day. I do not agree or disagree but why then black and white stripes as opposed to black and white spots or patches. Each of these theories have been studied, modelled and tested but not one concretely proves the issue, so take your pick of one, both or all.

Or choose to go with the wisdom and creativity of Kenyan folk tales, which explain that the father of all zebras had a fight with the father of all baboon over a pool of water, next to which a fire was burning. The fight led to the baboon burning his bottom (which explains the bald patch) and the zebra falling half in and half out of the fire (which explains the black “*scorch*” marks).

As for me, I will stick to the humour and whimsy of Rudyard Kipling, who wrote that the stripes were created by “*the slippery-slidy shadows of the trees falling upon a zebra’s body*”.

Stay safe and drive slow (and not just at the crossings).





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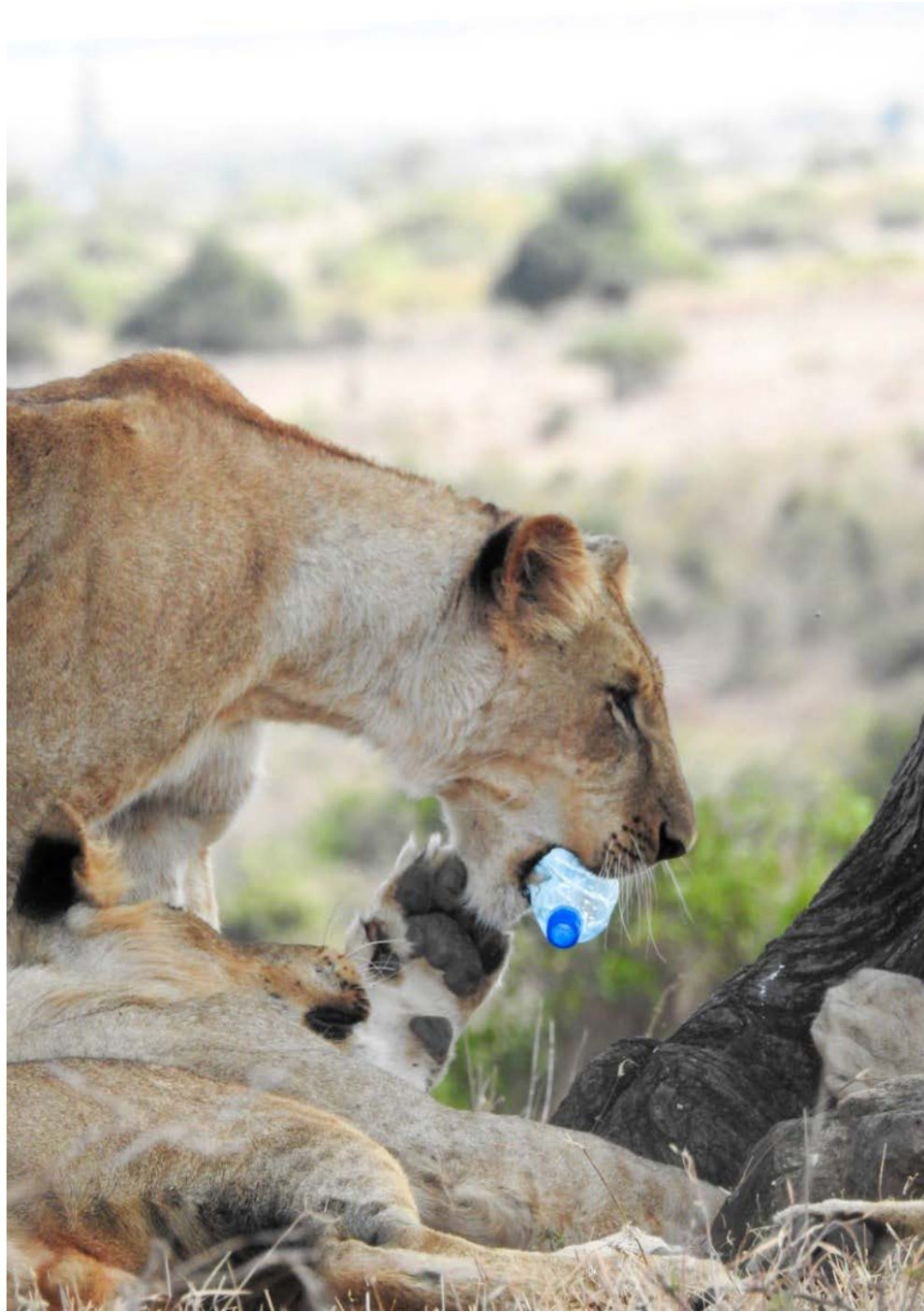
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The Park...is NOT your Dumpyard!

By Areef Admani



If you run a search on the internet, an “Ecosystem,” as stated by the National Geographic, is ‘a geographic area where plants, animals and other organisms, work together to form a bubble of life.’

For the human species, their perception about an ‘ecosystem’ is that they are superior to all other living organisms, hence abuse the ecosystem in various ways, one of which is by polluting it. The National Parks all over Kenya receive several visitors, especially the Nairobi National Park that boasts being the only Park within a city.

They call themselves ‘wildlife lovers’, ‘conservation enthusiasts’ and many among others, BUT do they leave the Park the way they found it? They probably don’t, because you’ll still come across empty plastic bottles, drink cans, food wrappers, disposable containers, cigarette butts, even though there are designated areas for disposing these.

The attached image shows us how curious a cat can be. Plastic is not biodegradable. To the cats, that’s a foreign lifeless object, a new toy for them, little do they know, if consumed, it could mean the end of their life. One moment these Big Cats could be playing with plastic and the next they could bite a chunk off and swallow it. What next?

Gut obstruction will lead them to starve to death.

Now we sure don’t want to see that happen, do we? Let’s be responsible wildlife conservationists and leave THEIR homes as clean as we found them.



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Nairobi Tented Camp

Photos and article by Gabriel Grimsditch



Tucked away in the forested area in the west of Nairobi National Park is a gem of a tented camp (<http://nairobitentedcamp.com/index.html>). It’s the only camp inside the park, and it is so well camouflaged in the forest environment that it can be difficult to find for newcomers! The drive there is to be enjoyed, snaking up into the upland dry forest, which is one of the last remaining intact patches of the once expansive Ngong Forest. Here the diversity of Nairobi National Park’s ecosystems and species is highlighted, as trees, birds, reptiles and mammals can be found that are not often seen elsewhere in the park. If you’re keen you may catch a sighting of the magnificent Hartlaub’s Turaco or the diminutive Suni antelope hiding amongst the foliage of the croton trees and African olives.



The meandering, and sometimes confusing, drive is worth it in the end. Nairobi Tented Camp is the perfect get-away from the hustle and bustle of the hectic city. It’s great if you don’t want to leave the park after your evening game drive and a sundowner overlooking the plains at Impala Observation Point. It’s also perfect if you want to wake up at the crack of dawn and feel like you’re in the wilderness ready for a safari. The camp is comfortable in classic safari-chic style, the food is delicious, and the service is impeccable. As you relax around the campfire in the evening and listen out for the whooping hyenas, it is easy to forget that you are only just about a kilometre from Magadi Road and the traffic! Although it is not the cheapest accommodation, it is definitely a worthwhile option for a wilderness feel without having to drive for hours out of town, and it’s perfect for special get-togethers or a romantic get-away.





PHOTO OF THE MONTH - by Vishal Shikotra

*Quntai & KF7 family
Photographed by Vishal Shikotra*

Chameleons in the Park

By Stephen Spawls (stevespawls@hotmail.com)



Side striped Chameleon

Unlike many African reptiles, chameleons are easily identified. They are unusual lizards, with curly tails that cannot be shed, disturbing independently moving eyes, grasping clawed feet and the ability to change colour. They are totally harmless, and beneficial to humanity. They catch insect pests with telescopic tongues that can shoot to a distance longer than their bodies; an adaptation to silent predation on a flimsy branch. So it seems cruelly ironic that, all across sub-Saharan Africa, chameleons are greatly feared, for irrational reasons. They are associated with bad luck or evil; or having brought suffering to humanity. Many people believe that if you encounter one on your journey, you must turn back. And yet, to some, chameleons are charming, beautiful and endearing. Alex MacKay, for many years the herpetologist at the National Museum, wryly observed that chameleons could melt the heart of a bank manager.

Africa is chameleon country, they originated here, although some time in the past 60 million years, some chameleons rafted to Madagascar, and others spread out into southern Europe and parts of the Middle East (one species even reached India). In all of Africa, Tanzania has the greatest chameleon diversity, with over 40 species. However, Kenya is not far behind with 25 species, and details of all Kenya's chameleons can be obtained from two free downloads at the website of the Kenya Reptile atlas (www.kenyareptileatlas.com). Many have been discovered and described recently. In 1997, Damaris Rotich and I published a checklist of Kenya's lizards; we listed only 16 chameleon species, so nine species have been added in the last 23 years.

Two species of chameleon occur naturally in Nairobi National Park, living in different habitats. In the forest area, you may find Jackson's Chameleon, also called the Kikuyu Three-horned Chameleon, in Swahili Kinyonga na pembe tatu; scientific name *Trioceros jacksonii*. They live in trees, and may climb high, up to 10 m or more, but they do come down; watch out for one crossing a road in the forest. In the open country the Side-striped Chameleon, *Trioceros bitaeniatus*, is found, and they live on tall grass and shrubs. They are fond of Leonotis plants; look out for them on the upright stems.

Both species, unusually, give live birth, although it isn't like mammalian birth, there is no placenta, the eggs develop inside the mother and emerge just before hatching. The two species look very different, however. Male Jackson's Chameleons are imposing three-horned animals, up to 40 cm long, usually shades of green. The females usually have a single horn, and are smaller, and not always green. The Side-striped Chameleon is rarely longer than 16 cm, has no horns and is brown or grey. Both species are almost endemic to Kenya. Jackson's Chameleon occurs in the mid-altitude woodland on the east of the rift valley, from the Nyambene Hills south to Nairobi, with two isolated populations on Ol Donyo Orok and on Mt Meru, Tanzania. The Side-striped Chameleon occurs in medium to high altitude central Kenya, with a handful of small isolated populations in northern Tanzania, Uganda and Ethiopia.



Side striped Chameleon

How are they doing? Chameleon conservation is complicated by lack of knowledge about how well they cope with agriculture and urbanisation, and also by their curious reproduction strategies. Although in undisturbed areas, Jackson's Chameleons inhabits mid to high altitude woodland, even venturing into bamboo, they seem to cope well with urbanisation. So they remain common in and around highland farms and Nairobi's wooded suburbs, so long as trees, hedges and shrubs remain and the farmers and householders don't use too much insecticide. The Side-striped Chameleon, out in the grassland, has not been studied; but some brief research in the Naivasha area indicates that they disappear when open savanna or rangeland is converted into smallholdings. They also have populations that peak and crash, and this may be connected with predation by birds. In the 1960's, we used to look for snakes and other reptiles along a dirt road that lead from the Belle-Vue Drive-in Cinema across to the Carnivore, an area that is now totally built-up. Sometimes we would go for months without finding any Side-striped Chameleons, and then find 20 in a day. Chameleons are also at risk from collection for the pet trade. They are easily harvested, at night they sleep on the outer branches and show up clearly in torchlight, a professional collector can find dozens in a night and devastate local populations.

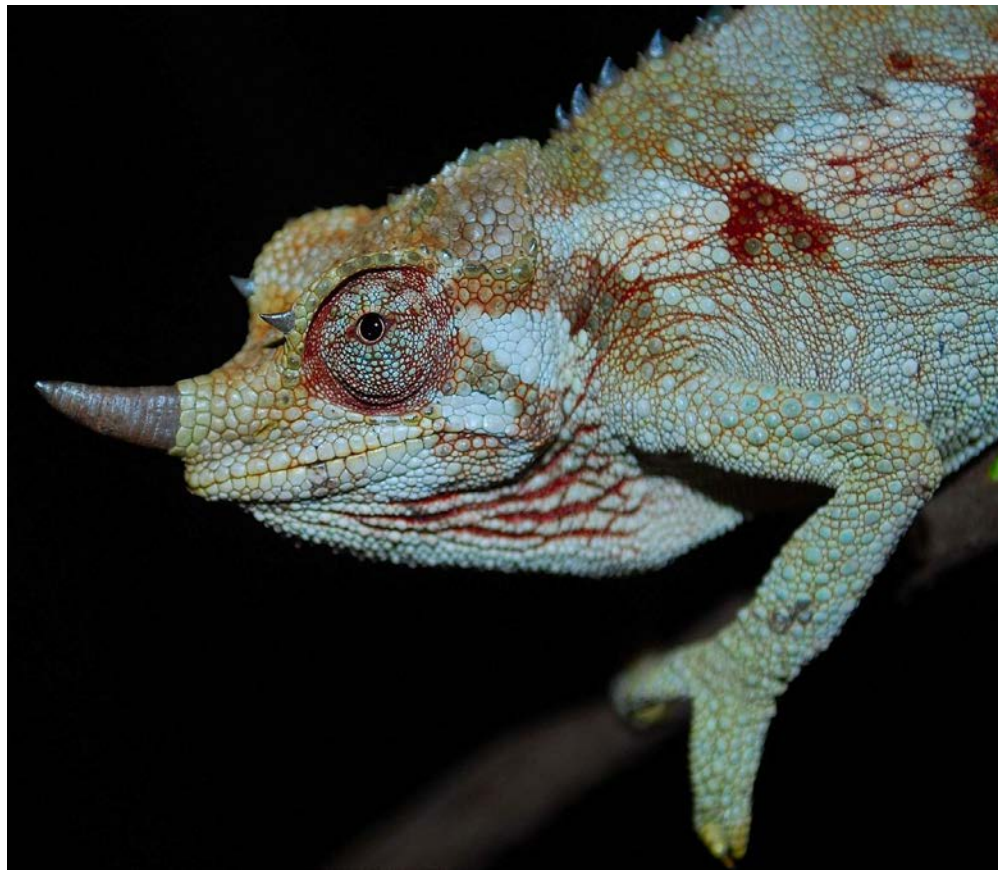
I should mention a couple of nearby species and interlopers. The Flap-necked Chameleon, *Chamaeleo dilepis*, a big unspecialised savanna chameleon, occurs widely across low-altitude Kenya.

It is found at Lukenya Hill, the Swedish herpetologist Thomas Madsen did an elegant mark-recapture study of the species there, and yet the Flap-necked Chameleon doesn't reach Nairobi National Park. The attractive close relative of the Side-striped Chameleon, Von Hoehnel's Chameleon, *Trioceros hoehnelii*, originally common in the uplands north of Nairobi, is now extending its range downwards, and although it has not been found actually within the National Park, it is common in Karen and Langata.



Male Jackson's Chameleon

Being harmless, beautiful and popular as pets, chameleons are also often translocated. Children bring them back from holiday, and then release them at home. In the 1940's, there was a population of a Madagascan giant chameleon, *Furcifer oustaleti*, in the Ngong forest, although none have been seen since 1974. A pilot brought back some pygmy chameleons from Tanzania and released them into the bushes around the Aero Club at Wilson airport, where they could be found for a few years. And an introduced population of the attractive West Usambara Blade-horned chameleon, *Kinyongia multituberculata*, has been established in Karen, and there is worrying evidence that these are displacing the indigenous Jackson's Chameleon. Monitoring is called for.



Female Jackson's Chameleon



Flap necked Chameleon



The interloper West Usambara Blade-horned Chameleon



Von Hoenel's Chameleon



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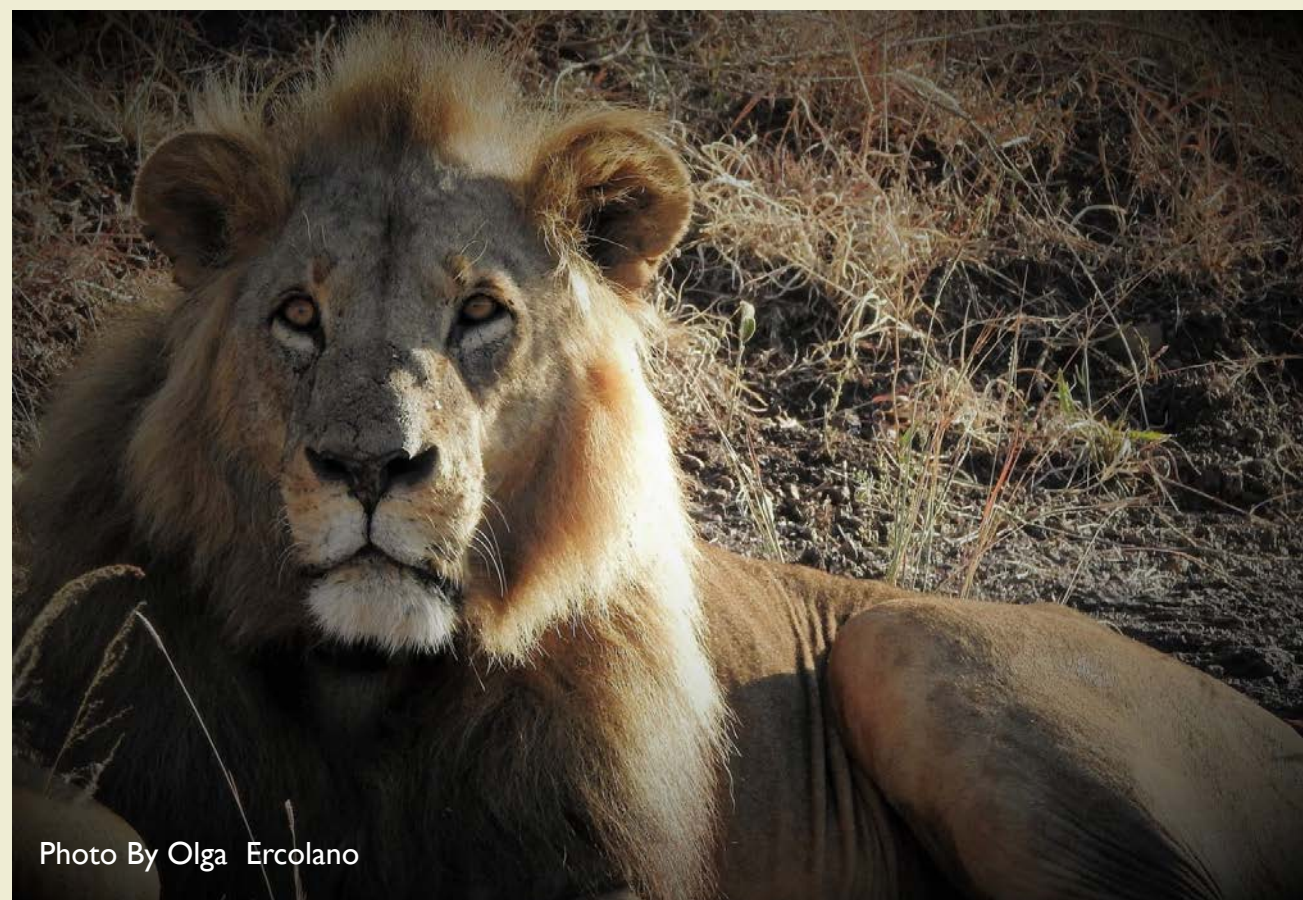
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Sironka's Bane:The King Departs

by Nova Waithaka (@justmbuu)



The sky was a shade of grey. A lifeless hue. It was hard to tell what lay above or beyond; so dull and close-set was the cover of clouds all around. The gloom was not limited to the skies or to the air beneath it, but seemingly to all under it. The Mokoyeti was darker than usual, running slowly down the gorge with remarkable sloth. Bera observed all this from where he sat, and kept moving his eyes around. He searched all around for something bright, anything to ease the gloom. The rocky faces were as grey as ever. There was hardly a flower in bloom in the riverine vegetation. The plants themselves looked oddly dark. There was nothing. He turned to himself. He was almost surprised to find his skin grey. "What colour did I think my skin had turned to?" he thought to himself. "A baboon is not a man to think of difference in skin, my father always said. It is as sure as stone." He even wished there was a man in his moving tool there to break the monotonous hues.

Bera did know why it was so; the news had reached him and the others in the troop as dawn broke. The hyraxes had broken the news moments after it happened as was their mandate. Gerald, their leader, had come up to the troop in company of six hyraxes as the baboons awoke. "The great tree is fallen," he said somberly. A silence ensued. They all knew what he meant. They had heard grave news two days prior and were half expecting this soon. It did not make it any less grave. The ruler had fallen. The king had died. King Sam had gone the way of his co-rulers, Cheru and Mohawk, and their father Ujonjo before them, and his father Redd before him.

It was difficult to think of life without these lion kings of Nairobi, and the dark gloom all around was testament of this. All the beasts knew and revered them, from the old forests of the West to the enduring meres in the North and down the rivers flowing into the great plains of the East.

They had made a name for themselves. Even in man's city, it was said that they were loved and feared. "Our tribe mourns with all the land. Send our commiserations to the pride", Bokombe had said to Gerald, the herald after the long silence. Unspoken thoughts lingered in Bera's mind. He was certain it was so for all the others. He had thought of nothing else since the hyraxes brought the news. They were thoughts of the reign of Sam. Eight long rains ago it was when he and Cheru had dethroned their father and he had fled to the South; and a long eight seasons it had been. Much had taken place: a drought, man had built a way for his moving tools through the lands in the North and now the great bridge. In those times, the ruling trio had roamed the lands uninhibited. They had ruled the three prides in the lands at their peak of two score lions. They even went to man's city when they wished, so it was said. They had lived to their kind's ripe old age. Sam and Cheru had seen fifteen seasons. It was hard to think of a time before them.

Bera, however, knew that life would move on, as it always did. Many who still lived had seen the days before these kings. Bokombe was among them. The old baboon had been born in the Age of Vile Men, when intruders killed many beasts in the lands, he had witnessed the Great Fire – when the ruler of men had burnt ivory with his right hand with the aid of the ivory in his left - in his youth, and had seen the Age of Prosperity that lasted until the great bridge was built through the lands. There was life before them, and hopefully after. He also knew that life would move on not as usual. He was certain Bokombe would soon announce a meeting of all the troops of the southern lands; the cliff baboons, as many called them. He was certain many other animals would be meeting in droves soon. Change was nigh. The young princes of Nairobi would soon be contending for power and all eyes would be on three strong princes - Sirikoi, Kitili and Mpakasi. The clouds had gathered, the storm was fast approaching.

My First Encounter With Leopards

by Seyan Hirani (13 yrs)



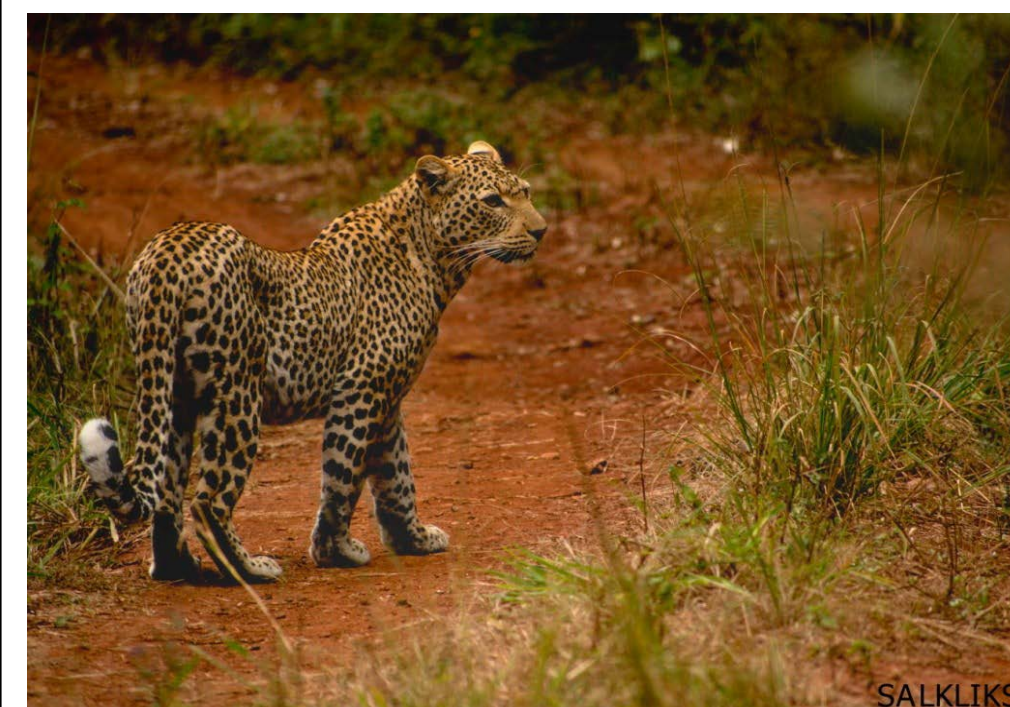
It was a very dull and cloudy Saturday morning and we were lazing around at home when we suddenly thought of rushing to the Nairobi National Park. We quickly dashed there and upon arrival, we heard that there was a pride of lions near the SGR, but as has been our ritual for the past two months or so, we started our journey at the forest behind the Nagolomon Dam hoping to see the most elusive of the big cats, the leopard.

We headed there and after searching for some animals and birds that can be found in the forest, my Dad and Sister saw a leopard jump across the narrow road and disappear into the forest and were over the moon because it was very rare to see a leopard in the wild and they had managed to do so. At that time, I was quite annoyed with myself but more determined than ever because I had not seen it and my favourite animal is the leopard. We then waited patiently screening the area where the leopard entered the forest. We had waited for less than two minutes when suddenly I looked back and saw two of the leopardess's cubs walking gracefully and elegantly on the road.

I was now very excited and we hurriedly turned the car and drove towards them whilst keeping our distance. Both cubs were almost the same size and age. Our hearts were pounding with excitement and out of the lush forest, we heard the snapping of twigs and the leopardess appeared and walked gracefully towards her cubs. We took some videos and photos to always remember this wonderful encounter with the elusive big cats. The two cubs then stared at us inquisitively while the leopardess continued walking on the road.

One cub dashed to the small stream to drink water and quench its thirst while the leopardess and the other cub continued on their way along the road. After a few metres they turned and leaped across the small stream and disappeared into the dense forest of the Park. We immediately posted the sighting of the leopards on the FoNNaP sighting group and immediately got a response from FoNNaP members confirming that these were Koko and her cubs.

Our leopard encounter, which was my first ever encounter with a leopard, is one that none of us will ever forget in our lives. This shows the real meaning and truth of the words, patience and perseverance pay.



General information on leopards.

Scientific name: Panthera Pardus.

Weight: Males(50-80 kg), Females(32-55 kg)

Height: 60-70 cm

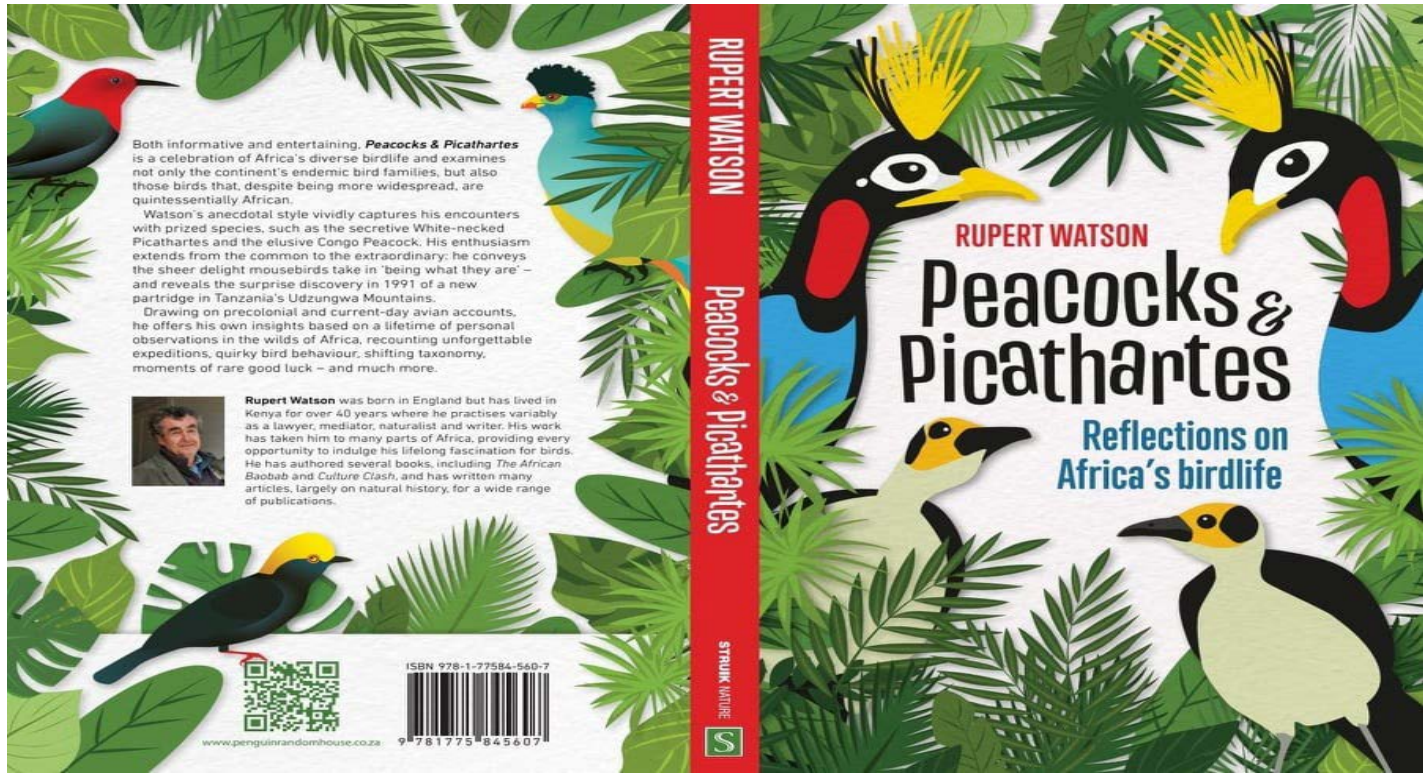
Length: 1.2-1.8 m(plus tail), Without tail 70 cm-1m

Lifespan: 12-15 years

Home range: Leopards mark their home range by raking their claws on tree barks, spraying urine, calling and walking with the white underside of their tails arched high.

Food: The prey varies according to the surroundings/ habitat, they prefer Thompson's gazelles and impalas and they also take young wildebeest, warthogs, hyrax, monkeys, game birds, hares and pythons, and sometimes kill prey far larger than themselves.

With Bateleurs the subject of recent photographs and comments on the FoNNaP WhatsApp site, Rupert Watson provides us with an adapted excerpt from his recent book, *Peacocks and Picathartes - Reflections on Africa's Birdlife*, published by Struik in South Africa, and available at selected Nairobi bookshops or from him (rupertwatson48@gmail.com)



The Bateleur by Rupert Watson

The Bateleur answers every birdwatcher's prayer for a large, instantly recognisable raptor. The prayers must have been impassioned as it would take only one of its three most distinctive features of colour, shape or flight to identify the adult bird beyond any doubt.

The juvenile, just flown from its nest, is plain brown all over and takes up to 7 years before attaining full grown-up brilliance. Then, unusually for large raptors, its gender is easily identifiable, even in flight, with the black band on the trailing edge of the male's wings much broader than that of the female. When the bird is perched, the vivid red face and legs, chestnut back and tiny tail are common to both, but the male shows all-black wings, while the female has a distinctive pale grey panel along its secondary wing feathers.

The Bateleur's shape is something of a mystery. Francois Levillant named the bird after the French word for 'juggler', and – by extension – tightrope walker, as an allusion to the bird's side-to-side rocking motion to compensate for its lack of tail. It was formally described by 25-year-old Frenchman, Francois Daudin, from specimens obtained in coastal southern African – where, sadly, it will take more than a miracle to spot a Bateleur today. The birds have suffered from a number of threats over the last two centuries; and, being partial to carrion, have proved particularly susceptible to the poisoning of animal carcasses intended to kill lions, jackals and other livestock predators.

The tail of a bird acts as a rudder to help it steer up, down, left, right – an appendage never put to better use than by the Black Kite, which can open, close and twist its broad, forked tail at will as it swoops down to pluck a morsel of road-kill off the ground in front of an oncoming vehicle.

The Bateleur has no such agility, with such a stunted tail that its bright red feet even protrude beyond it – and this despite these feet being on the end of particularly short legs! As so often, the taxonomic tag *Terathopius ecaudatus* finds the essence of the bird; the genus (of which this is the only species) *Terathopius* derives from the Greek *teras*, meaning a 'marvel' and ops, 'appearance'; *ecaudatus* is Latin, ex meaning 'lacking' and cauda, a 'tail'.

Bateleurs feed on a wide range of live prey, including birds as big as guinea fowl, mammals weighing up to 5 kilograms (which would make most dik-dik worth going after), and creatures as small as termites, when these are hatching. They hunt in a very different way from other raptors, closer to the ground as they quarter back and forth over their territories. Flying slowly and relatively low allows them to spot much smaller prey, whether carrion or living. They are smaller than other carrion eaters such as vultures and Tawny Eagles, and so either avoid the larger carcasses, which these big birds focus on, or else visit them when the others are sated.

Once the morning has warmed, Bateleurs take to the air, where they may spend most of the rest of the day, some estimates suggesting they travel well over 300 kilometres before the day is over. The birds sometimes follow road lines in search of dead animals or birds, and are said to have tracked old foot convoys in the hope of picking up discarded food remains, prey disturbed by the travellers or even snakes killed en route. Generally, though, with such catholic tastes it seems surprising that Bateleurs need to cover so much ground to find their food.

South African ornithologist Peter Steyn spent a long time studying Bateleurs in the savanna country of his homeland,

recording much of what he found in *Breeding and Food of the Bateleur in Zimbabwe*, published in Ostrich 51 of 1980. He monitored three nests for a total of 22 nestings, his records demonstrating only too well how varied are the birds' diets. In the remains of 238 prey items, assessed from either pellets or prey pieces in the nest itself and on the ground below, birds made up 47 per cent, mammals 42 per cent, reptiles 8 per cent and fish 3 per cent. At least half the animals were scrub hares, and while doves, guinea fowl and francolin accounted for most of the birds, avian remains derived from a total of 26 species. It was not usually possible to tell whether a bird had been taken dead or alive, but the three species of nightjar he was able to identify most likely all derived from road kill. Of the 19 reptiles, 16 were snakes; and of the fish, five out of six were catfish, which the eagles could easily have picked out of drying pools. For all the number and range of prey, Steyn never once witnessed a Bateleur kill.

Most seasons, the female Bateleur lays only one egg – large for the size of the bird – in what is a much more substantial nest than that of any of its close relatives. The same nest may be used for many years and, with only a single chick, there are no problems of sibling rivalry – but also no question of 'an heir and a spare'! During the 22 nestings Steyn monitored, he watched 17 young grow to maturity, usually taking their first flight aged around 4 months, giving an average of 0.77 offspring per pair per year.

Captive Bateleurs become very tractable. Geoffrey Archer was the nephew of Frederick Jackson, co-author of the wonderful three-volume *Birds of Kenya Colony and the Uganda Protectorate*. After many years in the colonial service, Archer retired to England to co-author the four-volume *The Birds of British Somaliland and the Gulf of Aden*. In this he records:

"Taken young [Bateleurs] are easily tamed. After keeping one young bird for a year at Sheikh I took it with me to England. It lived in the stables and spent the day at liberty in a Sussex park. In the evening it would return of its own accord to the stables and was so tame that my [helper], Ibrahim Sayed, would pack it under his arm and take it with him by bus to spend the day in the neighbouring town."

Now that would be a picture worth the painting!



Photo, by of Gareth Jones



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Winners of Treasure Hunt, left to right Adarsh Nagda (11 yrs), Tanuj Shah, Akshay Vishwanath, Disha Hindocha with Reinhard who presented the prizes

A FoNNaP TREASURE HUNT

By Gareth Jones

On Sunday 30th August 2020, a number of people (51) participated in a “treasure hunt” in the Nairobi National Park. For those who might not be aware, this is a very different kind of treasure hunt. The “treasure” is actually various species of animals seen within the park. Participants had pre-registered during the previous week and assembled at the main gate by 07h00 in the morning. All participants were given a list of selected species as “treasure”, with rarer or more special species getting more treasure points if sighted. For example a leopard sighting is 100 points and a lion sighting is 50 points. Participants have 5 hours to find as many “treasures” in the form of species as possible, conditional that they have a time dated photo of each sighting and submit their form for judging by 12h30 at the Kingfisher picnic site. Feedback from the various participants was that while they found the treasure hunt challenging they really had a great time and enjoyed this fun outing.

Meanwhile at the Kingfisher picnic site (Gaye & catering team) were preparing a delicious Koroga meal for lunch. After a slight delay that involved a vehicle breakdown, the guest of honour, Mr Reinhard Bonke, arrived. When the

winners were announced Reinhard gave out the prizes. It was great to see that a junior member outdid all the senior members and won the treasure hunt with 970 points in total.



Trish, Olga, Reinhard cutting cake, Akshay & Gareth

Little did Reinhard know that many members had secretly also contributed towards buying a leaving gift for him as he prepares to go the United Kingdom to study for his masters degree in Conservation. Reinhard looked totally shocked and surprised as a redeemable voucher for a new laptop computer was presented to him.

During the event, the winner of the Junior Essay competition,

Claire Wambugu, 8yrs old, read her moving essay about the Park.



Claire Wambugu, winner Junior Essay competition.

Overall, it was a very successful day, organized by Trish, Olga and Gaye, that was greatly enjoyed by those who attended, definitely an event that needs to be repeated more often.

Congratulations!

Jonathan Pereira
for Winning the July-August FoNNaP
Membership Recruitment Drive.

Enjoy The Mara!

Dear Members,

Thank You!

As the old adage goes, every finish line is the beginning of a new race. It has been an interesting journey for me here at Friends of Nairobi National Park. My journey with you started back in 2016 when I was in my final year in the University, all very many thanks to Akshay, Trish and Aliya who believed in a young schoolboy with the challenging position in this great organization. Thank you very much Akshay for trusting me with this noble job and opening the door for me to join the special FoNNaP fraternity. I owe you.

Last weekend during the treasure hunt was a surprise I did not see coming. You members came together and solved one of my major needful in getting me a good laptop towards my research programme. I am humbled and honoured. Words cannot express how grateful I am to you. Thank you.

I would like to particularly immensely thank Trish and Olga. You two practically took me like your own biological son. Corrected me where I went wrong, offered me your shoulder to lean on when things went south, celebrated with me in victories, understood the personal challenges that drove me towards depression, fought for me when I least deserved it and mostly, taught me the art of compassion. I found the love of a mother in you. Were it not for you, I would not have come this far. To this, I will never forget and you will always be special to me.

When I joined FoNNaP, I met a confidant, an inspiration and a disciplinarian in Irinah Wandera. To you, I am forever indebted. The much you have done I may not list them here. You shared in my grief and cheered me on when I was low. This opportunity for my Masters programme, you felt I was best fit, pushed it my way and guided me through. Thank you for everything.

I also thank Marco Pruiksmas a lot for being more than a boss. You are a friend who as well supported me when things were difficult. It was an honour. I also thank Bryony Anderson for sharing in with me the dreams of where we would like to see FoNNaP. You did a lot and being the chair became a full time job for you. You introduced me to critical people that would play a major role in my career growth. You have been a mentor as well and I thank you.

To Nkamunu Patita, Ed Loosli and the entire TWF team, you have stood with me, fought beside me, cried with me in defeats and celebrated with me in victories. I have been your own and massively contributed towards giving me a sense of focus especially in my conservation efforts. Thank you very much.

I am very much thankful to Gareth Jones who has particularly opened my eyes in the short time we have worked together. Thank you very much for rallying together members to support me and for the much you have taught me. You have showed the way to greater things and God bless you.

Finally to members, I was not the best admin you had, neither was I the perfect employee you got, in many times I did not meet your expectations but you went ahead to support me in my endeavours and still believed in me. In you I have found an idiosyncratic family, made great friends, a sense of belonging away from home and it is here I grew wings to fly. So let me fly the FoNNaP flag high to the world.

Long Live FoNNaP, The Park Shall Never Die!!!

Sincerely,

Nyandire Reinhard Bonke



Reinhard – Safari Njema!

Sightings at Nairobi National Park | August 2020



Trish Heather-Hayes



Hippos at Nagolomon dam by Dyan Rhodes



Fareed

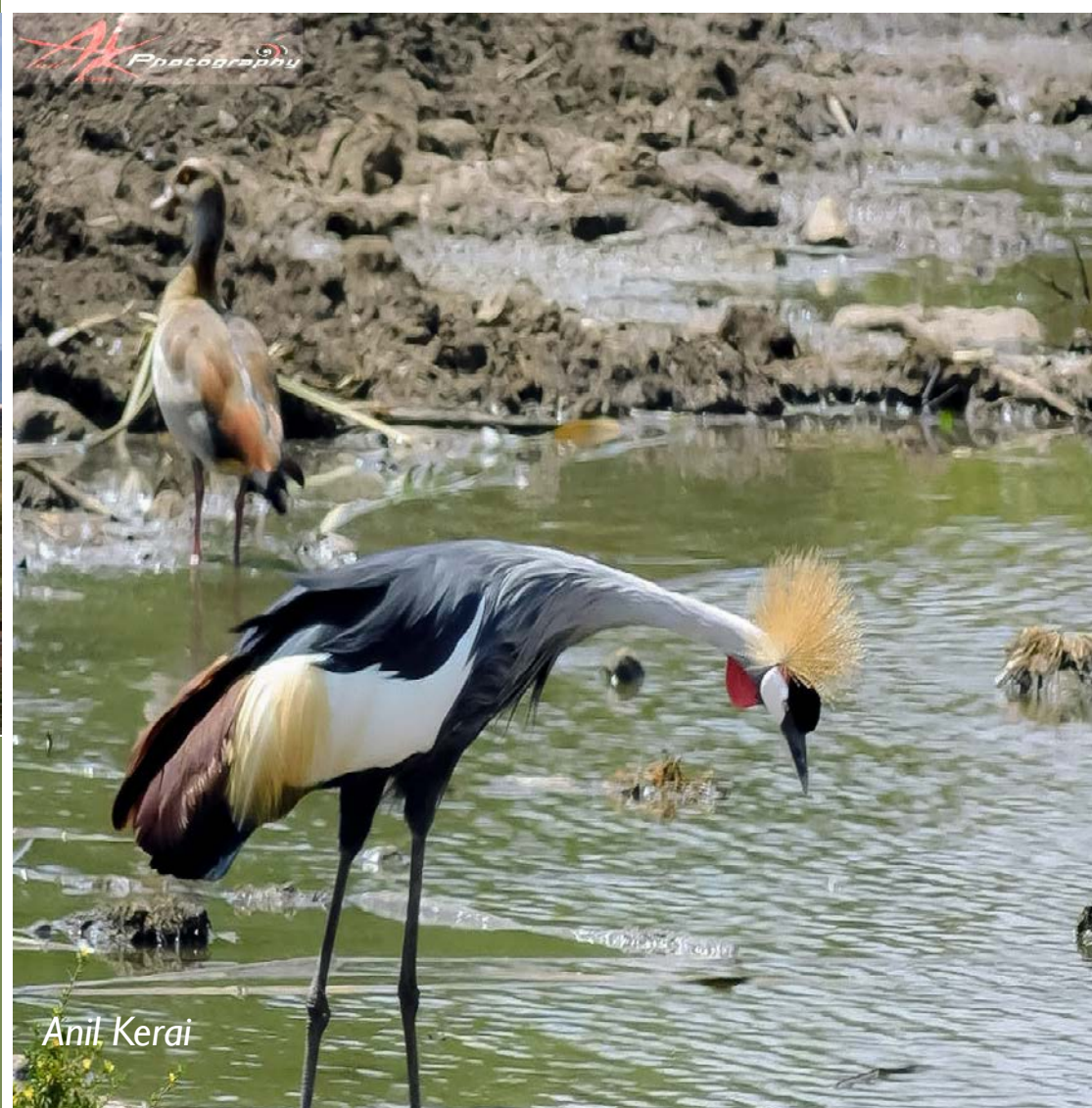
Fareed Gulamhussein - 15 yrs



Lorraine Miranda



Dheer Savla 8 yrs



Anil Kerai

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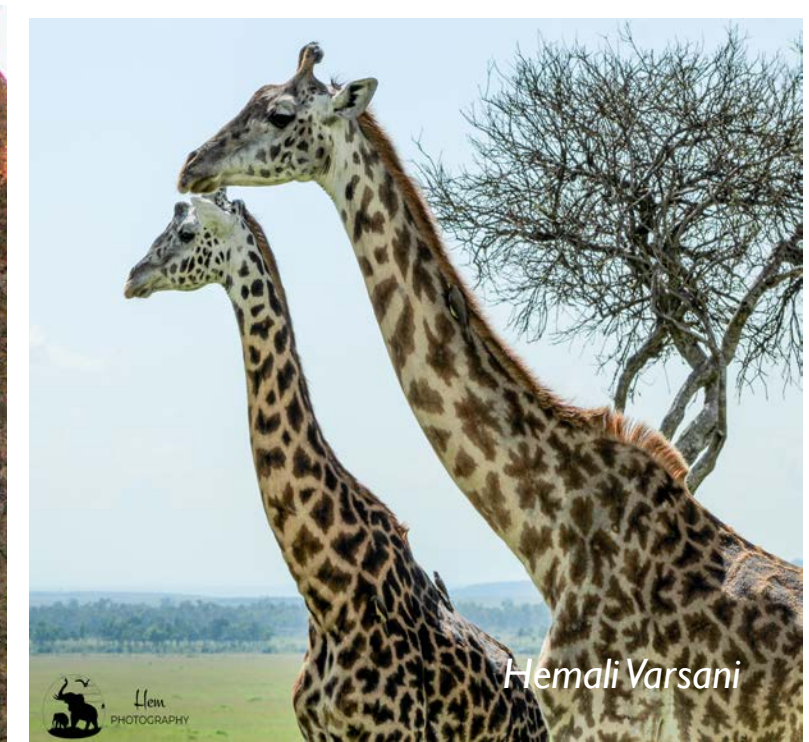
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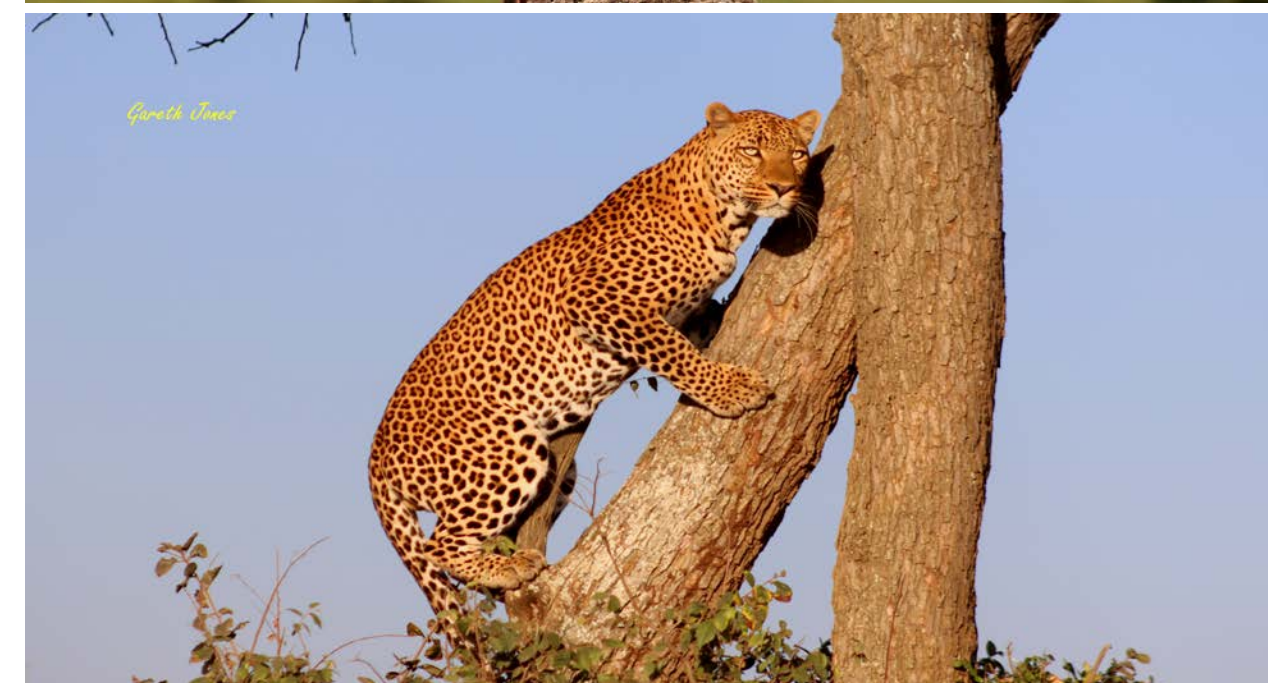
Hemali Varsani



Sirikoi by Vishva Patel



Harsh Gutka



Gurish Tiwari



Jonathan Pereira



Desire Wainaina

The Unconventional Parents

By Sidney Shema



When you think of birds raising their young, you probably think of something like this: parents build a nest, they lay their eggs, the eggs hatch, chicks are fed until they grow up and they finally leave their parents to make their own way in the world.

That's true for most birds, but there are some that don't follow this established order. They choose to take a shortcut. They don't want to spend their own time and energy raising their chicks, so they instead trick other birds into doing it for them! This rather 'shifty' behaviour is called brood parasitism.

A number of birds in Nairobi National Park are brood parasites. Two main groups are the most infamous: cuckoos (belonging to the Cuculidae family) and honeyguides (Indicatoridae family). Not all members of the Cuculidae are brood parasites though. Coucals belong to this family but they raise their own chicks.



Diederik Cuckoo (*Chrysococcyx caprius*). A brood parasite

Generally, this is how brood parasites breed: the pregnant female searches for a 'host' bird of similar size that is currently nesting (though the host can sometimes be ridiculously smaller!), she sneaks into the nest when the host is not aware and quickly lays her egg among the host's eggs. If the parasite's egg hatches first, the chick may push out the host's eggs to eliminate competition. Even when the host's eggs hatch first, the parasitic chick will often outcompete them for food from the parents and they will eventually die. The host parents' instincts to raise any chick that hatches in their nest is so strong that they don't seem to tell the difference between their own chicks and the 'imposter', even when the foreign chick is bigger than the parents themselves! The most ridiculous size difference I have ever seen was a Variable Sunbird (*Cinnyris venustus*) working very hard to feed a young Klaas's Cuckoo (*Chrysococcyx klaas*) that was nearly twice its size!

Some brood parasites only target one specific host species and their distribution will mirror that of their host. Others are less choosy.



Scaly-throated Honeyguide (*Indicator variegatus*).

The closely related Greater Honeyguide (*Indicator indicator*) is famous for its charming behaviour of leading people to bee nests for honey (which is not a myth). Fewer people however know the less charming part of its character - that it is a brood parasite.

So why do brood parasites do what they do? Well, it's quite simple. It's all about survival and reproduction. They are trying to spread their genes as widely as possible while using as little energy as possible to do so. It's an attempt to minimize effort and risk while maximizing gains, and it's something all living things (including us) do in one way or another. One female may lay 4 eggs, for example, but it will lay them in 4 different nests just in case one or two of the nests fail. This ensures that at least some of its offspring survive.

Breeding strategies among birds are as diverse as the birds themselves. It is part of what makes birds so fascinating.

We can judge brood parasites from our human perspective as much as we want, but if you really think about it, it's a pretty smart way of making sure that at least some of your children survive. Remember that this is the wild, where chances of reaching adulthood are rarely high for a young animal. In nature, there is no right or wrong. There is only what works and what doesn't. It's natural selection. Right and wrong are subjective. They are human judgments. In the case of brood parasites, their strategy is what works. It maximizes their chances of passing on their genes (their bloodline) to the next generation. It is success.

Other brood parasites that you can see in Nairobi National Park include the Pin-tailed Whydah (*Vidua macroura*), Village Indigobird (*Vidua chalybeata*) and Cuckoo-finch (or Parasitic Weaver) (*Anomalospiza imberbis*).



Stout Cisticola (*Cisticola robustus*) feeding a juvenile Cuckoo-finch.



Pin-tailed Whydah parasitizes birds of the waxbill family (*Estrildidae*). Its chicks are not aggressive to the hosts' chicks and are usually raised alongside them.



Jacobin Cuckoo, or Black-and-white Cuckoo (*Clamator jacobinus*). Can be common in the park after good rains.

This is an edited version of an article that was originally published in the Ndege Wetu series of the ShotsByShema blog (shotsbyshema.com).

FoNNaP

Kids Column



Colour Me



Claire Wambugu, winner Junior Essay competition.

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OUR CORPORATE MEMBERS



FoNNaP CALENDAR OF EVENTS -2020

Annual Treasure Hunt – 30th August

Members' Bird Walk – 20th September

Park Clean Up/Parthenium pull out – September (date to be confirmed)

Game Count – October (date to be confirmed)

Lion naming ceremony for the cubs turning of age (date to be confirmed)

End of Year event – November (date to be confirmed)

Game Count – December (date to be confirmed)



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!

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