

# NAIROBI NATIONAL PARK NEWS

20th Edition February 2021



cover photo by Khush Hirani 19yrs



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**Content, articles & photos sourced, edited and compiled by Olga Levari Ercolano.  
Presentation in collaboration with Janet Kavutha**

## Chairman's Monthly Updates | February 2021



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

Greetings to all of you,

We all hope and pray that the year 2021 will be a better year for all of us. In reflecting on the last 12 months, it is very easy to report on all the negatives, as there was much that went wrong worldwide. However, regardless of the situation, there were also many positive results and actions.

FoNNaP participation in the draft amendments of the NNP – 10 year Management Plan proved to be very worthwhile. As a copy the draft 10 year Management plan was only received in early April 2020, members worked well together to formulate a document for submission to the Director General – KWS just in time on the afternoon of the deadline the 19th April 2020 at 15h30. Failure to submit in time would have resulted in the 10 year management plan being gazetted as drafted in May 2020. For the record, of the 122 proposed actions FoNNaP fully agreed with 75% and partially agreed with 20%. Thankfully, the initial FoNNaP submission resulted in a stakeholders participation extension. Many people participated and there were at least 5 amended versions of the draft 10 year management plan during the year. Finally, the Ministry of Tourism & Wildlife – CS Hon Najib Balala, approved the Nairobi National Park 10 year Management plan and it was officially gazetted on the 7th January 2021. For those who would like to read the entire document, a pdf format is available as a download on the Kenya Wildlife Service website – [www.kws@go.ke](http://www.kws.go.ke)

As many of us are aware, relationships are always important in life. Likewise the relationship between FoNNaP and KWS has been rather strained in recent years, largely due to FoNNaP actively opposing a number of activities within the park. Activities like the southern bypass, oil pipeline, SGR railway line, Electric pylons etc. However, even with the ongoing submissions regarding the 10 year management plan, the board made every effort to meet regularly with the Senior Warden, Joseph Dadacha, to discuss a number of issues needing solutions, including the revival of the park patrols. The meetings also resulted in the agreement that a sub-committee will be formed with FoNNaP and KWS members working together to plan events leading up to the 75th Anniversary of the Nairobi National Park on the 16th December 2021.

In May 2020, a “treasure hunt” event was held in the park, with a meal and prize giving being held at the Kingfisher Picnic site. The event also served as a farewell for Reinhard Bonke as he was presented with a new laptop computer bought with funds raised by generous members. This computer will no doubt be of great use to him as he studies conservation management in the United Kingdom. We also officially welcomed the new FoNNaP admin assistant, Janet Kavutha, at the same function.

In June 2020, FoNNaP moved to a new slightly larger office, currently shared with TWF in the Langata-link complex off Langata road.

FoNNaP members also participated in a number of joint tree planting activities within the park, as seedlings were planted predominantly in areas where the SGR construction had disturbed the soil.

A wonderful informative, early morning bird walk was enjoyed by those who participated in the Silole Sanctuary, followed by a Koroga meal together. The park has an incredible amount of birdlife with close to 500 species being recorded annually.

In August 2020, FoNNaP was asked to submit a nominee for the Task Force to work on alternative routes to connect the Nairobi National Park with the Athi Kapiti plains. We were invited to the official function at Hopcraft ranch where a large portion of land was registered as a conservancy. It is hoped that actions in the future will result in a narrow corridor being created to once again allow seasonal wildlife movement. To do this, a number of expensive projects are required including at least one underpass and high secure fencing.



## ELECTION OF FONNAP BOARD FOR THE YEAR MARCH 2021 – FEBRUARY 2022

FoNNaP participated in an invasive species removal initiative in mid January 2021, that involved the removal of many toxic parthenium plants. Well done to those who participated in this effort. The process remains an ongoing battle to ensure that these invasive species do not dominate the park flora species.

On Saturday 20th February 2021, FoNNaP held a very successful fundraising event at Matbronze Cafe. The turnout of about 75 people resulted in some great prizes being won through raffle tickets, and there was a delicious renowned Matbronze barbeque meal included in the price. Financially the year 2020 was a very difficult year for FoNNaP. Income sources need to increase in the year 2021 to ensure that FoNNaP can continue to operate meaningfully. Following an analysis of the current membership fee structure the FoNNaP Board approved an increase to annual membership fees effective from the 1st February 2021. We appeal to all current members to renew their memberships when due. Your contributions will be meaningful in ensuring that FoNNaP can continue to be a voice for the creatures who cannot speak in the Nairobi National Park.

In the last 2 months, the FoNNaP board introduced two new initiatives. Firstly, a new NNP large folding map which is now available from the FoNNaP Office and at FoNNaP events for only Ksh.500. Secondly, the new FoNNaP website has now been officially launched. The website was designed by a company called Page One under the management of Karin Gasser. Members are encouraged to visit the new website on [www.fonnap.org](http://www.fonnap.org). There is also a members section on the website that requires a password. The plan is to grow this website to ultimately become a sort of reference library full of useful information about the Nairobi National Park.

During January 2021 a pollution incident in the Hyena dam, was spurred to action by reports made to Senior Warden by the Park Patrollers, as well as some shocking photos by Paolo Torchio and the FoNNaP board taking rapid action to request that NEMA & KWS work together to find the cause. This resulted in a big broken sewer pipe being repaired. However, the smell of toxic water in the dam was still terrible. Many people, including myself, began to pray for rain, and thankfully the prayers were answered as it rained hard for quite a few days, resulting in the dam being flushed out with fresh rain water.

The FoNNaP AGM was held at 10am on Saturday 27th February 2021 in the Safari Walk hall. Thankfully there were enough paid up members to be able to vote, and some good nominees resulting in a new board being elected. Details regarding the new board will be shared with the members, in this newsletter and via email. So despite tough conditions during 2020 it is wonderful to know that there was a core of faithful and at times selfless members who were almost always available to make a difference. It is my sincere hope that the new board will also work well together with the members and strengthen meaningful working relationships with the Kenya Wildlife Service, particularly those associated to the Nairobi National Park. Please continue to take care out there and stay well! Pray God help us all in our actions!!!

Kind regards  
Gareth Jones  
Chairman (March 2020 – February 2021)



### NEW Updated Maps of Nairobi National Park by FoNNaP



Available at the FoNNaP Office for  
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At the 25th Annual General Meeting on 27th February, 2021, a new Board was elected for the year commencing March 2021 to February 2022, and a vote of thanks and appreciation for its achievements was given to the outgoing Board members from the previous year, who had guided FoNNaP under difficult and unusual circumstances caused by the Covid pandemic.

It was highlighted that FoNNaP will continue to concentrate on, and maintain, its key constitutional mandate to protect and conserve Nairobi National Park and its ecosystem, and foster good relations with the Kenya Wildlife Service.

The new Board members elected at the AGM were as follows:

Jonathan Pereira – Chair  
Jim Kinyany – Vice Chair  
Daljeet Kaur – Treasurer  
Gaye D'Costa – Board Member  
Dr. Elizabeth Migongo-Bake – Board Member  
George Ochenge – Board Member  
Fizan Chaudhry – Board Member  
Nkamunu Patita – Board member



OUTGOING BOARD – March 2020 to February 2021  
L-R

Janet Kavutha (Admin), Jacob Tukai (Vice Chair),  
Trish Heather-Hayes (Treasurer),  
Nkamunu Patita, Gaye D'Costa, Olga Levari Ercolano, Gareth Jones (Chairman)  
Jagi Gakunju



INCOMING BOARD – March 2021 to February 2022  
L-R

Jonathan Pereira (Chair), Daljeet Kaur (Treasurer), Jim Kinyany (Vice Chair),  
Fizan Chaudry, George Ochenge, Nkamunu Patita, Gaye D'Costa, Dr. Elizabeth Migongo-Bake

We wish the FoNNaP Board all the very best as it begins its term, with the support of the FoNNaP membership.



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## FoNNaP BARBECUE FUNDRAISER

by Janet Kavutha



The year began on an energetic note for FoNNaP, starting with a parthenium pull-out in the park in January, game count in the beginning of February, a Barbecue fundraiser and an AGM.

The barbecue fundraiser on 21st February, 2021, was a great success, after an earlier, scheduled wine tasting event in Nov 2020 was cancelled due to the heightened Covid 19 pandemic cases at the time. Since it has become a norm for people to take precautions by sanitizing, social distancing and wearing a mask all the time, the paranoia is less. Matbronze Café offered to host our event, which was great given the convenience of their location, and we did well with our time to ensure no one got home past curfew. The food was excellent. The event started at 4.30pm and by 8pm everyone had left.

At the entrance we had a check-in table, raffle ticket sales, a merchandise table, Dave Mascall's lion lights exhibition and a welcome alcoholic and non-alcoholic Sangria drink provided by Gaye D'Costa. The Chairman welcomed guests, launched the new map for Nairobi National Park and the FoNNaP website. Rupert Watson was in great form as the MC. A sumptuous barbecue (vegetarian and non-vegetarian) with an array of salads, was laid out by the Matbronze team. The evening was full of interactions and attendees catching up after a long period, getting themselves FoNNaP branded merchandise, books and the new park maps and thoroughly enjoying the meal, subsequent silent auction and raffle draw.

Thanks to the generosity of several companies and organizations we had exciting raffle prizes and auction items. The silent auction consisted of 2 Nights for 2 at the idyllic Borana Conservancy and lodge in Laikipia; a Canon EF 400mm telephoto lens from Delta Willis and an exquisite canvas print from talented artist, Kim Kay. All these attracted competitive bids.

The raffle prizes list had an amazing combination of gifts starting from restaurant meals vouchers, cake vouchers, cutlery, stays at lodges, furniture, books on wildlife and conservation stories by the legends Dinesh Patel, Jagi Gakunju and Cynthia Moss, house plants, wildlife prints, beauty products, massage vouchers, bags, engraved glassware, Kitengela glass jug with 4 glasses, a beautiful handcrafted wooden tray, seedballs, energy saving jiko and sparkling wine. Having close to 75 attendees, they didn't shy from purchasing raffle tickets and help FoNNaP raise money for Conservation projects in Nairobi National Park.

We are grateful to the sponsors of the raffle prizes, to those who attended the function, to those who bought raffle tickets even without attending, Rupert the MC and Bella Parrot a young lady who helped the MC do the raffles draw.

It was a successful event. We hope the year 2021 will be better for FoNNaP to have more interactive events for the members.



## FoNNaP BARBECUE FUNDRAISER

Continuation...



photos credits to Trish Heather-Hayes, Olga Levari Ercolano and Ryan Napo



## ANIMAL CENSUS: CONSERVATION LESSONS BEYOND COUNTING

by Caroline Kibii

Environment Scientist. kibcaroline@gmail.com

The last animal census (game count), February 2021, is a kind I consider educative, engaging, and very interesting.

I had the chance to ride alongside Mr. Jagi, a well-versed birder, patroller, and a long-serving member of the Friends of Nairobi National Park. To say I was not taken back to kindergarten, I would be lying.

Jagi and Caroline, who both have a deep relationship with birds, took us to Mars, Pluto, and back as they tried to figure out the names and characteristics of different birds we came across amid our counts.

It dawned to me that game counts are not just about counts but an opportunity for many lessons in wildlife management and conservation strategies as listed below;

**Animal identification:** The Nairobi National Park is rich in several animal species, including birds. Because the count requires specification of the particular type of animal or bird, it provides an avenue to critically analyze and identify the animal before recording the counts. Essentially, persons with limited knowledge on wildlife and birds will be forced to refer to books or consult google.

**Wildlife management:** Each animal has specific requirements and needs. The attention they receive depends on their endangerment and rarity. Nonetheless, game counts create a platform for members to deliberate how best certain animals should be managed and the attention they should receive.

**Reporting new species:** In the event of taking the census, unfamiliar animal or plant species may be encountered. While this scenario might be rare, it is common with birds. Thus, before deciding whether a species is new, it requires consultations and debates, making the exercise healthy and meaningful. One can easily recognize whether an animal is migrating or a resident in the park.



**Identification and reporting unusual events:** The Park is vast. Regular visitors or patrollers to the park can quickly tell when something is unusual. The game count necessitates participants to assess the situation within and out of their allocated blocks to point out peculiar occurrences; for instance, during the last count, we realized that many wildebeests had babies approximately two months and below an indication that they were giving birth within or close to the park.

**Conservation strategies:** The park faces several environmental challenges such as poor waste disposal, growth of invasive weeds, and development of new infrastructure. Boundary conflicts are also a challenge curtailing conservation. Consequently, taking part in the game count is an excellent opportunity for members to discuss pressing conservation issues, weigh in on what works and what not. Therefore, the activity is not just about counting but immersing oneself in a critical thinking state and productive discussion leading sound proposals.

**Learning about ecosystems:** The Park has a savanna ecosystem characterized by open grass plains, shrubs, and scattered acacias. One of the requirements is to record the recent weather patterns, whether it rained recently or not, and the nature of grass or vegetation, whether long or short. As a result, it becomes easy to establish which animals live where and why.

**Networking and Bonding with fellow conservationists:** FoNNap has been in existence for decades. It has several members; young and old, environmentalists by passion and practice. Game counts are a platform to learn from those who have been in the field before, network, exchange contacts for business or friendship. Simply bonding.

**General understanding of the park:** The game count does not just end there. Traversing a given block and later exploring the park is a chance to a broader knowledge of the park. Often, individual animals like spending time in specific areas at certain times of the day. You will also understand where to find animals during the dry and rainy seasons. If you are regular at the park, you will realize that some animals only inhabit certain parts of the park; if you are curious enough, then you will take a step further and research.

In the end, becoming a member of Friends of Nairobi National Park will surely give you more opportunities to mingle with animals and engage in conservation activities.

## ANIMAL CENSUS: CONSERVATION LESSONS BEYOND COUNTING

Continuation...



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THE KORI BUSTARD DISPLAY

by Gabriel Grimsditch



Male kori bustard in full display, with the Standard Gauge Railway and Nairobi city in the

The kori bustard, the heaviest flying bird in Africa capable of flight, is not an uncommon sight in the grasslands of Nairobi National Park. In fact, it is estimated that Kenya may have the largest population of kori bustards of any country in the world! These regal birds are often seen meandering slowly and seemingly aimlessly through the savannah, picking at insects and other hidden delicacies as they walk. The subspecies found in Kenya is the *Ardeotis kori struthiunculus* as opposed to the *Ardeotis kori kori* found in southern Africa, and seeing these bustards is a good health indicator of the existence of the wide-open rangelands that is their habitat. Although they can fly, they prefer to spend most of their time on foot because they are so heavy: a male kori can reach 20kg in weight, although the average is around 11kg. Kori bustards are often found roaming and foraging in small but loose groups, with each bird keeping its distance from the others in the group as they move in similar directions looking for food.



Male kori bustard in full display.

Even in normal circumstances, these birds are a magnificent sight – the proud titan of the bustards towering above its relatives. During mating season, they go a step further and put on a fascinating, somewhat comical, show. The male of the species holds his head backwards and swells his throat into a conspicuous white balloon, attracting the females with his impressive display. The cheeks bulge, the head is thrown back, and the gullet inflates to up to four times its normal size. The frontal neck feathers are spread, and the brilliant white underside becomes prominently visible to the world. The display is so spectacular that the white colour can be seen from up to a kilometre away! Kori bustards engage in what is known as “lek mating”, where males gather to engage in competitive displays and courtship rituals to entice visiting females selecting prospective partners to mate with. In the case of the kori bustard, several males may gather in a wider area but usually only the dominant one displays and attracts the female. The less dominant ones rarely display in the presence of the alpha male, and they move away. However, fights do occur between males when display territories are contested. Recently, displaying males have been spotted in Nairobi National Park, so keep an eye out for this curious and captivating sight in the wild!

Conservation status	
Extinct	Least Concern
EX	EW
CR	EN
VU	NT
Near Threatened (IUCN 3.1) <sup>[1]</sup>	
Scientific classification	
Kingdom:	Animalia
Phylum:	Chordata
Class:	Aves
Order:	Otidiformes
Family:	Otididae
Genus:	<i>Ardeotis</i>
Species:	<i>A. kori</i>
Binomial name	
<i>Ardeotis kori</i>	
(Burchell, 1822)	

Information on the kori bustard. Source: Wikipedia.

Why Male Birds Are Prettier Than Females

by Sidney Shema

Have you ever noticed that there are birds where the male and female look very different? So different that you might think they are different species. Have you also noticed that in these birds, the males are almost always brighter, more colorful and better-looking than the females? Have you ever wondered why this is so? Well, you're not alone. This question has been explored since the earliest days of ornithology (the study of birds) and scientists have uncovered some interesting answers. Have you ever noticed that there are birds where the male and female look very different? So different that you might think they are different species. Have you also noticed that in these birds, the males are almost always brighter, more colorful and better-looking than the females? Have you ever wondered why this is so? Well, you're not alone. This question has been explored since the earliest days of ornithology (the study of birds) and scientists have uncovered some interesting answers. Competition among the males will keep intensifying with each subsequent generation, and therefore their colors will keep getting brighter and more vibrant. If this trend continues over very many generations, a species that started off with similar-looking sexes will end up having males that are much more colorful than females. This is how “sexual dimorphism” (as the term is called) evolves. It's a process that takes several thousand or millions of years of course.



Variable Sunbird - male



Variable Sunbird - female

The females of such species do not need to be colorful because they are the ones selecting their mates and so are not competing with each other for the attention of the males. The ‘selection pressure’ is only on the males. This is often a feature of polygamous species (one male mates with many females) and tends to be very limited or not present at all in monogamous species (a male and female stay together for life, or most of their lives). This is because in the polygamous system, each male is actively trying to mate with as many females as possible while the females are very selective and only mate with the few ‘top’ or ‘dominant’ males. If color is the main ‘weapon’ the males are using to compete, then this is what will become most pronounced. Evidence that this is true can also be seen in the fact that sexual dimorphism is reversed (meaning, females are brighter-coloured than males) in the few species where the females are the ones that compete for males. These are called polyandrous species (one female mates with many males), and often the males are the ones that raise the offspring in these species. An example is the Greater Painted Snipe. I'm using color as an example but for some birds the females may select other features such as the longest tail or most elaborate song, and these are the features that end up becoming exaggerated in the males of that particular species over time. It may also be a combination of features.



Red-collared Widowbird – breeding male



Widowbird - female



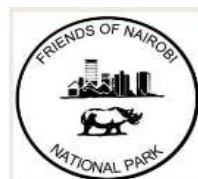
## Why Male Birds Are Prettier Than Females

*Continuation...*

This phenomenon also happens in other animals where there is intense competition amongst males for females. In mammals for instance, it is size rather than color than is often the biggest difference between males and females. This is because males of many mammal species compete for females through physical battles, rather than displays of beauty as birds like widowbirds do. Size ends up becoming the feature that is 'selected for' since the biggest males win the most fights or intimidate their opponents into submission. Males therefore become much bigger than females. Examples of this can be seen in cats, elephants, buffalo, antelopes, primates, and many other mammal groups. Features such as the mane of a male lion or male antelopes having bigger horns than females are also part of this.

The topic of sexual dimorphism is a complex one and there are other factors that are at play beyond simple male-male or female-female competition. There is some size dimorphism among many birds too for example, but it is rarely as pronounced as what you will see in mammals. Birds of prey (raptors) and a few other highly predatory groups of birds tend to show some of the greatest cases of avian size dimorphism, and usually it is the females that are bigger. The reasons for this are complicated and beyond the scope of this article.

In short, competition for mates is the greatest driver of the evolution of sexual dimorphism but it is not the only factor that contributes to it. We do not know everything of course and there is still a lot of research being done on this topic. I hope you get the overall idea though!.



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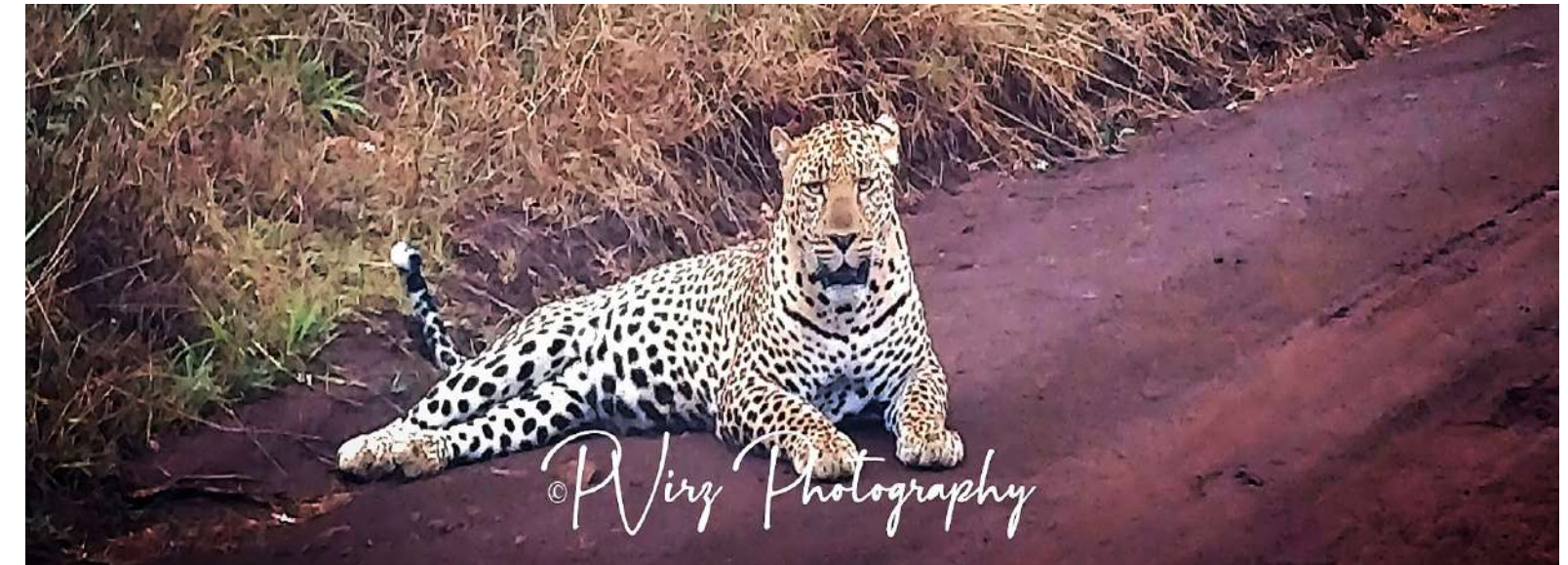
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## NARETUNOI COMMUNITY RANGERS HELP SAVE NGURUMAN

*By Vincent Lemayen Simel*



*Photo Credit – Viral Shah*

On 3rd February, 2021, Nguruman the iconic leopard of Nairobi National Park was trapped at the Naretunoi community conservancy. This is after a number of predations were reported.

Since September last year, the community members had reported seeing leopards moving at night in the conservancy. This prompted the community rangers to investigate. As days went by, different homes reported losing livestock to an unknown predator.

When James Ntilalei woke up one morning, he noticed a few dead sheep in his boma. On investigating he concluded that they had been killed by a leopard. He was certain it was a leopard since it had left some carcass on top of a tree just by his livestock enclosure. It is at this home that Nguruman would later be trapped.

There were few more attacks on different homes. The community members were becoming agitated. They kept vigil to keep their livestock safe.

Meanwhile the community rangers saw the leopard and started trailing it. However this was difficult as the leopard had no tracking device.

After a few days without incidents, the leopard attacked another home killing several livestock and injuring others. The community rangers in consultation with Kenya Wildlife Service decided to trap the leopard. For a whole month, a trap was put outside Mr. James Ntilalei's home. KWS provided a trap, Mr. Ntilalei offered a bait and community rangers kept an eye at the trap.

One night at around 9 pm, the leopard was trapped as it tried to reach the bait. The rangers guarded the leopard from outraged community members who came armed with spears to kill it in retaliation. The rangers managed the crowd until KWS arrived to take the leopard away. One night at around 9 pm, the leopard was trapped as it tried to reach the bait. The rangers guarded the leopard from outraged community members who came armed with spears to kill it in retaliation. The rangers managed the crowd until KWS arrived to take the leopard away.

The leopard was taken by KWS for examination and collaring where it would later be taken to another park where it will be safe. This is the same procedure done to any problematic wildlife to protect it and the community.

Thanks to the rangers' efforts and a friendly community, the leopard wasn't speared nor poisoned. This is despite a number of predation attacks and no compensation from the government. The Naretunoi community conservancy is safe for all wildlife to roam free and still promote the peaceful human-wildlife coexistence.



*Nguruman captured in a trap – photo credit*

**ADDENDUM by Editor**

Nguruman was subsequently treated by KWS vets for the injury sustained on his face during capture, and later collared and released, to our knowledge, in Tsavo East, where we hope he will lead a safe life away from human habitat. We shall miss Nguruman, who was the highlight of the NNP experience and a leopard who walked like a lion, along the roads and rubbed himself against visitors' vehicles, without fear, and loved putting on a show. Goodbye and good luck, Nguruman. Hope to see you one day again in the near future, wherever you may be. We shall treasure your offspring that have remained in NNP.



## The Speed Merchants of the Nairobi National Park Savanna

By Stephen Spawls (stevespawls@hotmail.com)

Drive in the open country of Nairobi National Park, particularly in the late morning or early afternoon of a warm day, and you might see a snake shoot across the road, glinting in the sunlight, and rapidly disappear into the roadside vegetation. It will almost certainly be either a sand snake, genus *Psammophis*, or a skaapsteker, *Psammophylax*, snakes of open country.

You don't often see snakes in Africa. Despite the continent's reputation as a snake-infested place (a belief that sometimes puts off potential visitors), snakes are secretive and rarely seen, and many are only active at night. But if you see one snake on a safari, it is likely to be a sand snake. About 30 species of sand snake occur in Africa. All are diurnal, active on warm days, most are relatively large (80 cm to 1.6 m), widespread and fast-moving. One species found in Kenya (although not in Nairobi National Park, but in the low dry country of the east and north), the huge Speckled Sand Snake, *Psammophis punctulatus*, is probably the fastest snake in Africa; its long (up to 2m) powerful body enabling it to rapidly catch prey or escape in the semi-desert. All sand snakes are rear-fanged, with poison fangs set towards the back of the upper jaw. However, they are not dangerous to humanity; avoiding confrontation and their venom is relatively weak, although one or two snake handlers have suffered odd symptoms, like intense itching or local bleeding, following a bite.



Africa's fastest snake, the Speckled Sand Snake

Two species of sand snake occur in the park. The most common is the Northern Stripe-bellied Sand Snake, *Psammophis sudanensis*. They are beautifully marked snakes of Eastern Africa. Both the upper and underside are distinctly striped and the head has dark-edged, light crossbars. They reach a length of about 1.2 m. I have sometimes seen them on the Athi Basin Circuit, and when I was young, a day spent hunting for snakes around Embakasi usually yielded a sand snake or two.

They feed largely on lizards and snakes, but will take other vertebrates including diurnal rodents and birds if they can catch them. The other sand snake in the park is the big brown Olive Sand Snake, *Psammophis mossambicus*, which can reach 1.6 m. It used to be called the 'Hissing Sand Snake', and as James Ashe, the curator of Nairobi Snake Park in the late 1960's used to say, 'it has that name because it doesn't hiss and isn't found in sandy areas'. Although this is a snake with a huge range, from South Africa north to Ethiopia, it isn't particularly common in the park; I only ever found one in eight years of active collecting in and around Nairobi. The lion expert Judith Rudnai, who lived at Embakasi, wrote a short article on the Embakasi snakes, in the EANHHS bulletin, and she found a few Olive Sand Snakes near her house, but in other areas of Kenya, it can be common; Eliud Waweru, who worked for the Nairobi Snake Park and lived at Makuyu, used to regularly bring 5 or 6 of these snakes back to the park after a weekend at home.



Boldly marked underside of Northern Stripe-bellied Sand Snake



Northern Stripe-bellied Sand Snake by Rihaz Sidi

## The Speed Merchants of the Nairobi National Park Savanna

continued..

Interestingly, although these two sand snakes are clearly different in the Nairobi area, and are reproductively isolated, in other areas (particularly towards the coast) they sometimes hybridise, and intermediate animals are known. Other sand snake species also interbreed. In fact, the taxonomy of sand snakes is a minefield, with several different names having been applied to both the larger brown animals (*Psammophis mossambicus*, *Psammophis sibilans*, *Psammophis afroccidentalis*, *Psammophis rukwae*) and the smaller striped ones (*Psammophis sudanensis*, *Psammophis orientalis*, *Psammophis subtaeniatus*, among others). There is impassioned and often angry debate among taxonomists about the status of the various 'forms', and whether they are true species; some herpetologists have spent literally years trying to define the species boundaries between various sand snakes. As the zoologist Steve Jones has memorably said; what is mere variety to some is granted its own identity by others; similar debate is sometimes applied to the savanna and forest elephants. With sand snakes, it doesn't end there, even the English or common name is debated; in southern Africa they call the Olive Sand Snake the 'Olive Grass Snake' or 'Olive Whip Snake'.



Olive Sand Snake



Little Stripe-bellied Sand Snake hatching out

The other fast-moving diurnal snake of Nairobi National Park is the Kenyan Striped Skaapsteker, *Psammophylax multisquamis*. The common name Skaapsteker is of Afrikaans origin and means 'sheep stabber'; a monstrous libel on this grassland snake, but it springs from early farming days in South Africa. The farmer would see a dead sheep in the field, possibly bitten by a far more deadly snake like a Cape Cobra, look for a culprit and would happen to see the innocent little skaapsteker, which got the blame. Like sand snakes, skaapstekers are snakes of open country. They sometimes bask in a curious, kinked fashion, and no-one knows why, it has been suggested that the kinking makes them look more like a twig, and thus of less interest to snake-eating birds of prey. They also pretend to be dead if threatened, turning the head over and lolling in a lifeless fashion. Unlike most snakes, where the females tend to be much larger than the males, as they carry a large load of eggs, in skaapstekers the males are larger than the females.



Kenyan Striped Skaapsteker



Striped Skaapsteker pretending to be dead

There is an interesting rule about striped snakes in Africa. There is no hard and fast way of telling a venomous African snake from a harmless one (despite some positively dangerous myths circulating on the internet, about the shape of the eye pupils, or the head, etc). You have to know all the species, but in general, any African snake with long stripes down the body is unlikely to be dangerous. Not that I advise picking up any snake, unless you are certain what it is!



## PHOTO OF THE MONTH

*Flamingoes in Athi Dam (an extremely rare occurrence)*



17

Photo courtesy of Mary Mackinder-Jonas and Clinton Gachaiya (Community Guide).  
We had a fantastic evening game drive seeing so much diversity on 28th February, 2021.  
Clinton Gachaiya spotted and identified the flamingoes



## CHEETAH NEWS – FEBRUARY 2021

By Olga Levari Ercolano



*photo credits – Paras Visavadia*

There have been multiple cheetah sightings during the month of February, on a regular basis in the Athi Basin area. At the end of January (after the January newsletter had been published), we received a beautiful photo of a cheetah sighting (see photo above) by Paras Visavadia.

On 4th February, 2021, Ambassador Julia Pataki, of Romania, whilst on a game drive, was fortunate to come across Lukenya, a male cheetah, hunting along the lower track beyond Athi dam and has kindly shared her photo with us.



*Photo Credits – Amb. Julia Pataki*

On 5th February, 2021, Liz Bean Crookston of Bush & Beyond, with Emakoko guide, Joel, saw the cheetah mother with 3 cubs, also in the Athi basin area. Photo is a screenshot of a video taken by Liz, and published with her kind permission.

 **lizbeancrookston**  
Nairobi National Park



**lizbeancrookston** Cheetah!! How amazingly lucky were we on our last morning game drive to see 4 cheetah in Nairobi National Park!

Cheetah are my favourite of the big cats and with only 7,000 of them left in the wild, they are 10 times more vulnerable than the leopard population (approximately 69,000 found in the wild).

Cheetahs prefer wide open plains for hunting so to see them in Nairobi National Park is fantastic and for it to be a mother with 3 juveniles! Wow!!

The city of Nairobi is home to over 4 million people and the National Park borders it. I am always thrilled to see how healthy & abundant the wildlife is within the Park.

On 18th February, the mum and 3 cubs were seen by Rihaz Sidi between 10b and Athi dam, Then again, on 26th February, Kevin, a guide in NNP, saw them running across the plains at No.10 waterhole and shared his video with us.

On 28th February, Ebrahim Mansoor also came across the cheetah mum and 3 cubs at the No.7-8 murram stacks. Most of the sightings involve the cheetahs moving at speed, so getting good sharp close up photos is quite a challenge! The young cheetahs are still very shy and run away as soon as one gets close to them. Hopefully, they will learn to get used to visitors admiring them.

We are happy to report that to date, the cheetah mum and cubs are doing well.

## UNUSUAL LEOPARD SIGHTINGS

By Olga Levari Ercolano

On 31st January, 2021, Paras Visavadia, came across this leopard on the inner track between 25c and 26a in the forest, near the big dam that always has a very slippery patch of road next to it. I have tried to identify this leopard, but its facial and body markings do not appear to match any of the regular well known Nairobi National Park leopards. Could this be a visitor from the Langata forest leopards? We do know that there are more leopards in the forest, than those that are regularly seen in the open.



*Photo credits – Paras Visavadia*

Another unusual visitor in the Kisembe forest (at the Langata side of the Park) was Sosian, a Mokoyiet leopard who usually resides and moves along the Southern end of the Park. On 25th February, 2021, Shiv Malde captured beautiful photos of Sosian, completely out of territory and in a neck of the woods where he had never been seen before.



*Sosian – photo credits Shiv Malde*



*Sosian – photo credits Shiv Malde*

The Park continues to surprise us with numerous leopard sightings on a regular basis.



## Half-Day Safari in Nairobi National Park

By Adarsh Nagda, 11 Years Old

It was a warm, sunny morning in Nairobi and I woke up very early to head to Nairobi national park. Our cameras, safari hats and food were packed, and we set off, hopeful to see some of the park's superb wildlife. As soon as we entered, we already spotted the elusive bushbuck! It was a great start to our eventful game drive.

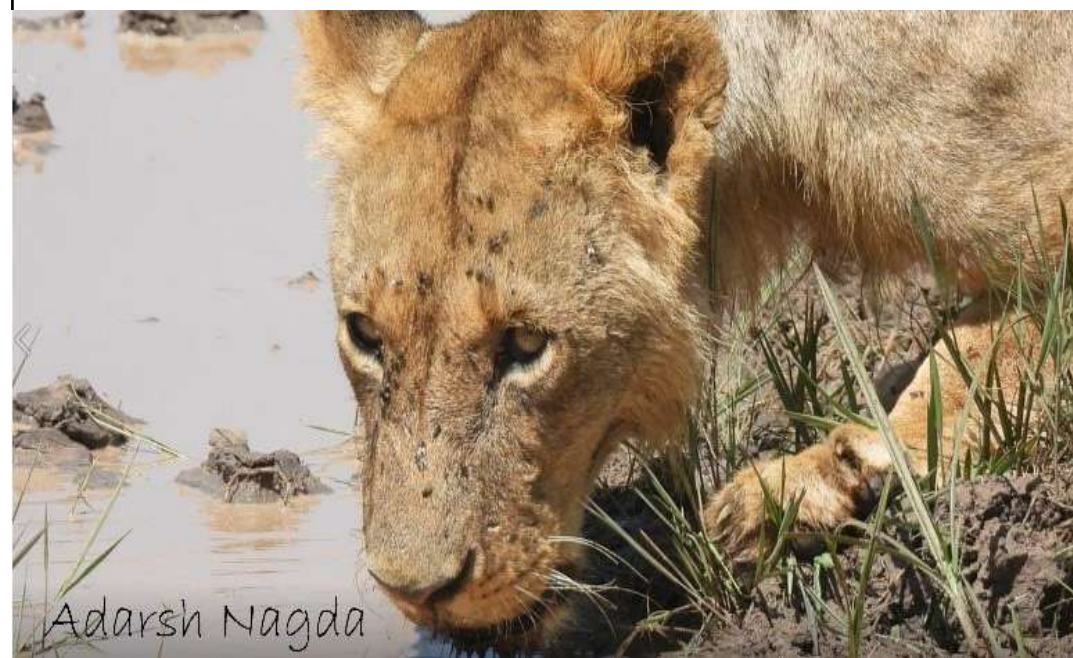
At Nagolomon Dam I was stunned to see the amount of game there! Impalas rutting, baby zebras, lots of ostrich, wildebeest, endless number of hartebeest, egrets and many waterbirds flying over the dam, hippos and crocodiles! We saw a lovely black sunbird drinking some nectar upside down! It was complete bliss. We spent the whole morning there, enjoying nature at it's best.



We continued our game drive and saw 2 white rhinos sitting on the vast plains of the park! Almost suddenly we came across some lions! I got super excited, and my heart was pounding fast! The gorgeous creatures were walking right in front of us.



The pride decided to go into the thicket. As we know with wildlife, patience is key and patience really did pay off. The lions all came together to quench their thirst at a stream next to the road. What a sighting!



We also saw other beautiful animals. At hyena dam, we saw a wide array of birds, from pied kingfishers to pelicans on a tree, some skittish guineafowl and a big crocodile basking on the banks.

We stopped at impala observation point to enjoy the breathtaking view and eat our sandwiches, sprinkled with a bit of dust. We looked at the gorgeous view of the park with its expansive plains and small forests.

We came across some cheeky vervet monkeys, playing with their siblings and curiously peeking into our cars. Our phenomenal safari in Nairobi National Park ended in the evening and we left the park with smiles on our faces. Thanks for reading!

## KOKO ON THE STAGE

By Seyan Hirani – 14yrs



Koko – photo credits Seyan Hirani – 14yrs

On the 19th February 2021, we went for an afternoon drive in NNP. We first went to look for the cheetahs but we did not succeed. However we were not discouraged but headed towards the forest behind Nagolomon Dam where leopardess Koko and her two beautiful cubs, Kichaka and Maridadi stay.

After entering the lovely green forest, we saw a few leopard paw prints imprinted on the layer of top soil and decided to follow them to see where they would lead us. Excitement was boiling in us like we were a bunch of five year old kids left with a whole jar of candy as we followed them moving at a snail's pace so we wouldn't lose them. We followed them for a few minutes, before they disappeared into the many bushes of the forest. Suddenly, as we turned a corner, there proudly sitting on the side of the road, was the leopard queen of NNP, Koko. We immediately started taking pictures of her as she curiously peeped from behind a small shrub to see what we were doing. After observing us for some time, she put her head on her paw and had a nap in the shade of the trees. We set up camp there as we admired her.



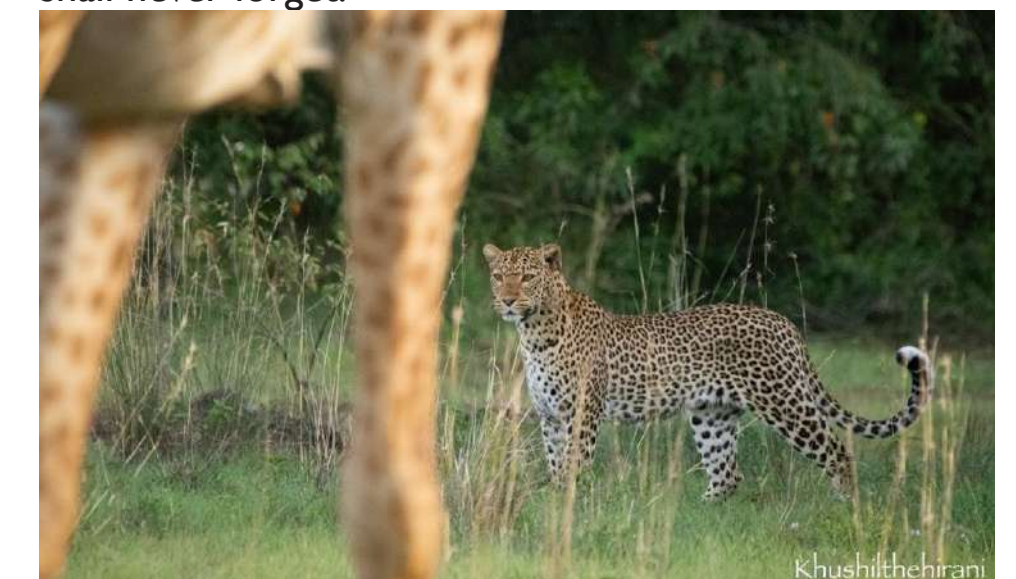
Koko – photo credits Seyan Hirani – 14yrs



Koko – photo credits Seyan Hirani – 14yrs

She rested for about an hour after which she stood up and walked into a clearing which she would later use as a stage to perform for us. She walked around majestically while yawning a lot. She did that for quite some time when suddenly, a tall giraffe appeared from the dense forest and they both looked at each other eye to eye for a few seconds before the giraffe continued on its journey.

She moved about but sat down ever so often to have a small rest and yawn some more. After spending a few more precious minutes with her, she yawned a massive one before deciding to get off the stage and look for a place to spend another starry night. It was truly a wonderful experience for all of us and one that we shall never forget.



Koko – photo credits Khushil Hirani – 19yrs



# Sightings at Nairobi National Park | February 2021

## Junior Sightings



Seyan Hirani 14yrs



Sumaiya Yakub 16yrs *sumaiya yakub*

## Bird Sightings



Kunaal Bhundia



Anil Kerai



Harsh Gutka



Khush Hirani



Kunaal Bhundia



Hitesh Kerai



Dyan Hall



Mary McKinder- Jonas



Rufus Kim



Edwin M Kanumbi



Areef Admani



Ofir Drori



Rufus Kim



Viral Shah



Julius K Ngugi



Samaan Vohra



Jonathan Pereira



Dyan Hall



Olga Levari Ercolano



## LIONS IN FEBRUARY 2021

By Trish Heather-Hayes

All the 'babies' are now grown up and the four young males (two from the KF4s and two from the Mf family) are moving slowly into their own spaces. Their hunting skills are still amateurish and some days they are looking pretty skinny. Luckily they are able to go back and join the family when a kill is made. The young females are still with the mothers, joining in the stalking and hunting.



Sub adult Lenana joined up with Johari & Barika for a meal after an unsuccessful hunt on his own. Credit T H Hayes

Sirikoi is rarely alone these days, spending quite a fair amount of time with one onother of the KF4 older adults, Leboia, Morana and Alamaya, occasionally all 3. They are experts at hunting buffalo and zebra and look well nourished.



Alamaya looking cross after Sirikoi hid their kill in a bush. Credit T H Hayes

Sirikoi tends to be rather selfish with his kills and often eats on his own. Lastweek it was sad to hear that he had chased off an impala female from the Hyena swamp reeds, then casually went back and ate her new born fawn.... Nature at its cruelest!!



Sirikoi with his newborn impala 'snack'. Credit Olga Ercolano



The picture of innocence – Sirikoi. Credit Jonathan Pereira

The SGR still attracts both the MF family and the KF family from 16 to the China gate at the beginning of the SGR. They like the shade provided and can regularly be found there. Mpakasi and Kitili can quite often be seen enjoying their company around those area as well. Mpakasi was lying at the Ololo waterhole with Namunyak for the day before walking off down into the valley to join Kitili.



Mpakasi walking off and leaving Namunyak(next) at Ololo waterhole. Credit T H Hayes

## LIONS IN FEBRUARY 2021

continuation



Namunyak - Credit T. H-Hayes

Quntai and Leshan killed a large old buffalo near the Wilson Airport emergency gate and Rangers post. They were visible from the southern bypass and attracted a large crowd with vehicles blocking the road ....some people never having seen a lion before and the excitement was high.



Lions with kill visible from Southern bypass Credit Edwin Abade

The two males were joined by their KF7 sisters and the following Sunday morning, having eaten themselves almost to a standstill, walked across the plains to the small stream near 4a and spent the rest of the day sleeping off their heavy meal in the riverine forest there. The two males, Quntai and Leshan move around the whole of the SGR to Kingfisher and Hyena dam and you never know where you will see them next !

It is amazing how much territory all the lions pass through. The females are also to be found at the 7-8 murrum excavation area today and tomorrow at Kingfisher or up in the forest. Never know which corner you may come round and find them sleeping on the road!



Isinya fast asleep making a pillow out of a rock - Credit Olga Ercolano



Isinya, Naisenya – KF7 sisters at 7-8 murrum. Photo credits Olga Ercolano

Kitili was surprisingly seen by Edwin Abade on the 25th Feb alone in the forest. Although this was his childhood range, since moving down to the Athi basin, his only visits have been up as far as far as No 6, so this was a first sighting of him up in the forest. Mpakasi, at the same time, has been on his own back down near Acacia Bridge in the Athi basin and is now up again at 14 with 3 females. Kitili was seen back at no.7-8 murrum pits on Sunday 28th February. Mpakasi and Sirikoi tolerate each other, but for some reason Sirikoi does not like Kitili.





Unusual to see Kitili resting up in the forest. Credits Edwin Abade



Unusual to see Kitili resting up in the forest. Credits Edwin Abade

News of Serena and her babies. She was seen by visitors on the plains near 10b obviously hunting and still signs that she was lactating. Then Rangers reported her with 4 cubs (?) near hippo pools last Saturday the 27th. We knew she had 3 cubs so not sure if it was actually a fourth one seen or a duplicate count. The Rangers between 10a and Hippo Pools have seen her on 3-4 occasions with the cubs but no visitors that we know of have seen her and the cubs yet. Safi not reported seen in the last 3 weeks. She should be due this month sometime... if she was definitely pregnant when I saw her and not just because she had eaten well, so we wait for a report. There has been an abundance of prey around the park this last month, With unusual rains, not normal for February, the game seems a bit confused, like most of us, and have moved again down towards the Athi Basin. Hopefully most of them stay in the park and move back up again. The No 2 area where the grass has been cut has proved to be a popular area for both game and of course the lions.

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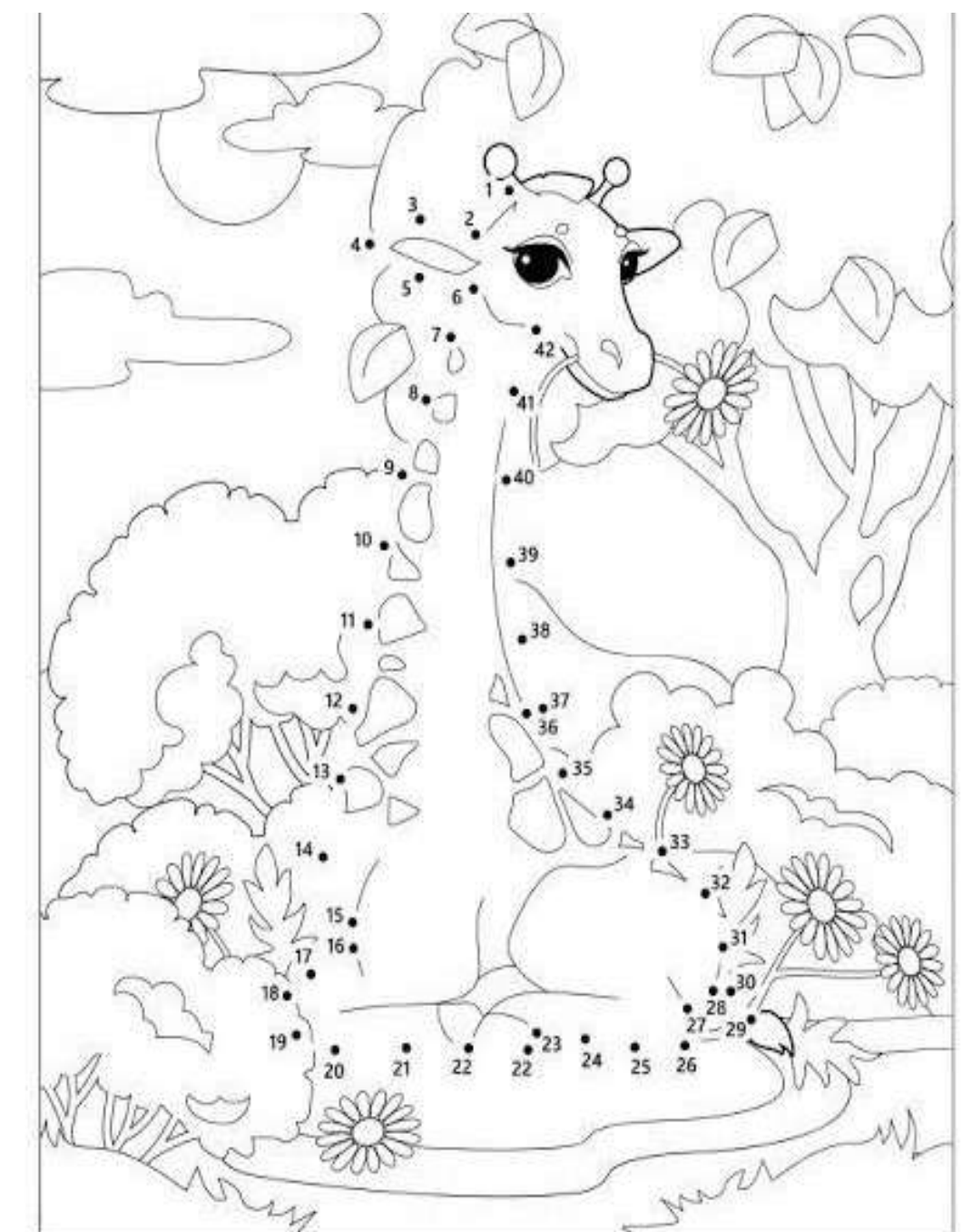
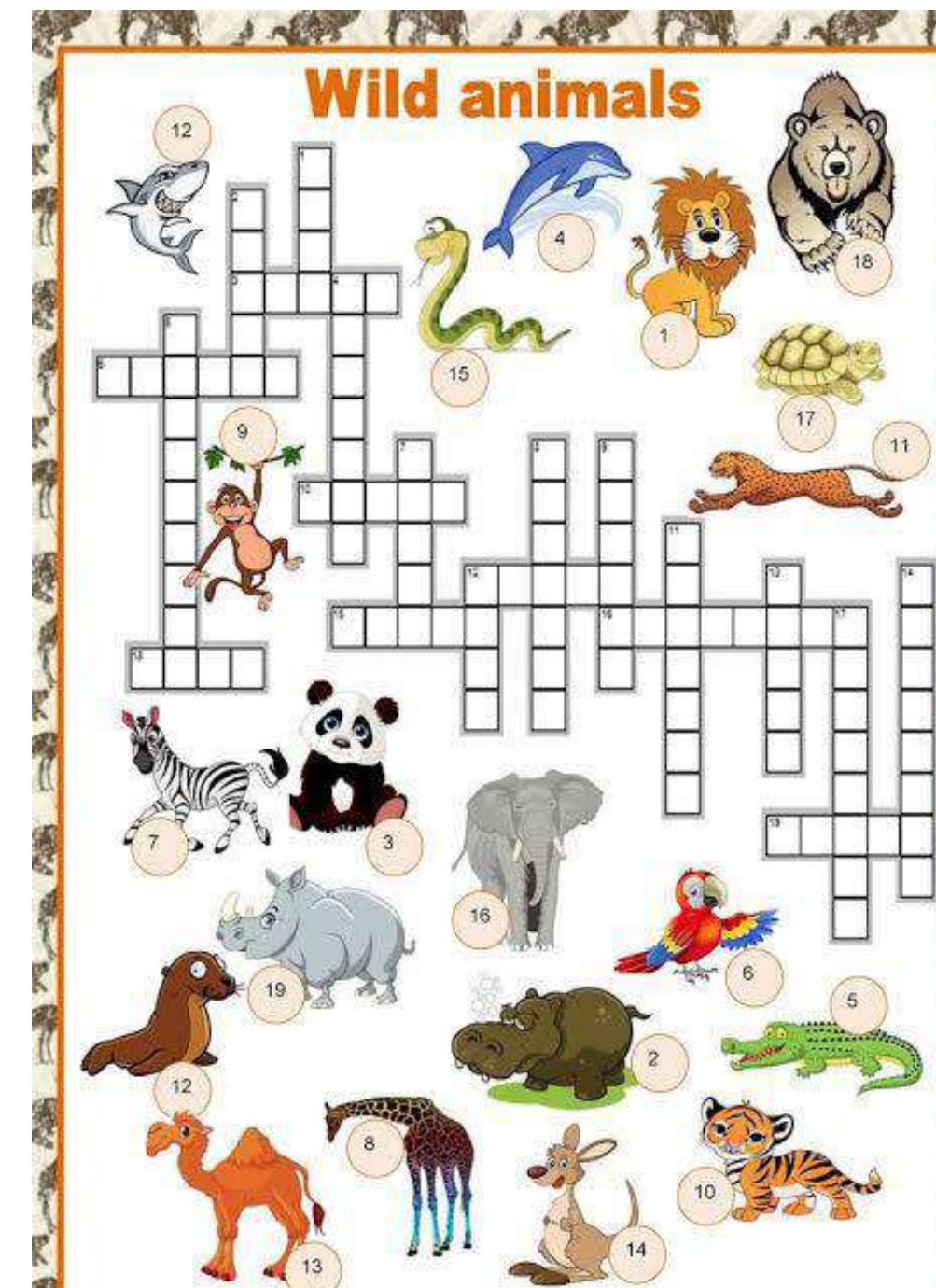
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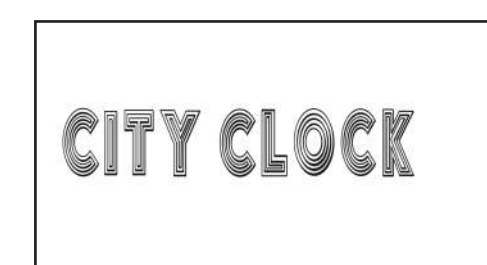
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### CONTACT US

Office No.14, Lang'ata Links I off Lang'ata South Road

Opp, Kenya School of Law

P.O Box 45124-00100. Nairobi, Kenya

Tel: +254 (0) 723 690 686 | Email: [fonnap1@gmail.com](mailto:fonnap1@gmail.com)

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