

# NAIROBI NATIONAL PARK NEWS

21st Edition March 2021



STUDIO 10 VR



*Photo by Tanvir Ali*

Friends of Nairobi National Park [ March 2021 ] 21st Edition

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

## Chairman's Report | March 2021



**Jonathan Pereira**  
Board Chairman  
FoNNaP

Dear Members,

The 25th FoNNaP AGM was held on the 27th of February 2021 at the Safari Walk conference room. There were over 30 members who attended and there were some very good deliberations during the AGM. I would personally like to acknowledge and thank the outgoing board for their tireless services to FoNNaP during a challenging year

At that AGM, I was honored to be elected as Chairman of the Board. I am excited and look forward to being of service to our members. My fellow board members are from diverse professional fields and bring their expertise to the board, which I am sure will result in positive contributions to the board and ultimately benefit members too.

The board has already constituted the following committees headed by board members:

1. Events and Fundraiser
2. Habitat and Wildlife
3. Community Engagement
4. Marketing and Education
5. Finance and Accounts

We had requested for members participation in these committees and I must say, the response was very encouraging.

Like in 2020, we are faced with the "new normal" in terms of physical activities and this may restrict the number of such events we will have for the members. However we will resume them at the first opportunity once the restrictions are lifted. In the interim we will have a number of virtual events and look forward to your participation.

In December this year, the Nairobi National Park will celebrate its 75th Birthday. We will keep members posted on the events that will be taking place to celebrate this milestone event. Should any members have suggestions for this celebration, please contact the office. The cordial relationship with KWS that has been developed by previous boards will be maintained and enhanced. This FoNNaP/KWS relationship was acknowledged at the AGM by the Senior Warden of the NNP, Mr. Joseph Dadacha

There is a good selection of merchandise for sale at the FoNNaP offices as well as new Park maps. Please visit the offices and purchase some items to support FoNNaP.

I look forward to your support during the year. Stay safe and healthy.

Best wishes and regards  
Jonathan Pereira

# LIONS IN MARCH 2021

by Trish Heather-Hayes

Mating on and off for at least 6 months now with different females!! Kitili and Mpakasi have a strange game going on. They are almost every week in the company of the KF7 girls or the MF mothers, Solo and Nala, and although they have been seen to mate they have also been spending time just enjoying their company, so what's happening as we don't see any of them looking seemingly pregnant? Maybe in a month or two we may see some changes.



Kitili, left alone by the females. Credit T H Hayes.



Isinya, Naserian and Naipanoi before walking off. Credit T H-Hayes.

Solo and Nala's sub adults are beginning to do their own thing without the mums now, obviously able to hunt well enough on their own and being more adventurous around the Athi basin. They seem to be keen on the hippo pools to No 12 area, as well as the Sosian valley. Two young males and 3 females, fathered by Kitili.



MF Sub adult male at Athi basin Credit T H Hayes

An amazing video was taken on the 16th March, by M Abdul, at the Ololo excavations which have filled up with water. Namunyak, one of the KF7 females, had an impala buck which it seems she had drowned. The video starts with the impala already dead in the water and Namunyak swimming around it then struggling to get it up the fairly steep bank. She manages but it was exhausting. No doubt she doubly enjoyed her meal after the struggle. Unfortunately the video was taken with a phone and not a camera so there are no clear photos of the event.



Namunyak - Credit T H Hayes

Serena is still keeping well hidden. Only a glimpse of her in the distance in the Sosian valley with her 3 cubs was reported at the beginning of the month although the rangers have seen her since and say the cubs are getting big!! They must be coming up for 6 months old now.

Quntai and Leshan are looking good. They have grown into beautiful young males, well skilled at hunting. Occasionally they team up with a sister or two but mainly they are on their own and in so many different places each week. They were chased across the plains by a herd of buffalo last week, as have so many of the groups lately. Sometimes it looks quite serious and they have to get a move on, at other times it looks like "oh bother, we'd better move!" Maybe it's a game with the buffalo at times too.



Quntai & Leshan Credit T H Hayes.

The KF4 sub adult females are now getting more difficult to distinguish at a glance from their mothers. All doing well except for the one who looks thin and emaciated and has done for some months now, although she feeds with the rest of the family. Hopefully something will be done and she will get the attention she obviously needs and deserves. She is the young female who is actually the cub of Alamaya. (nicknamed Tweeny Weeny as she was so small) but was abandoned by her and adopted by Alamaya's sister. Amani, who had two cubs almost the same age and brought her up as her own.



The late Amani with Alamaya and cubs Credit unknown – apologies.

Sirikoi is often in the company of the KF older females, Morana, Leboia and Alamaya. He has been seen mating with them in turn so we wait to see if there will be the patter of little paws before long ??



Sirikoi, the lady left to go hunting! Credit T H Hayes

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## MPAKASI AND KITILI, A BEAUTIFUL BROTHERHOOD

By Veer Sikand, 12yrs

During the Covid pandemic, we have been visiting the Nairobi National Park regularly and have seen many of the park's male lions like Sirikoi, Quntai, Leshan, Kitili and Mpakasi. We have also seen the different females. My favorite lions are Mpakasi and Kitili. The easiest way to recognize them is that Mpakasi has a GPS collar and a droop on his left lip. Kitili is blind on his left eye. Each of them has their own habits, for example, Mpakasi loves to stop what he is doing and look at planes flying above him. These lions are not brothers but have formed a powerful coalition and are never far apart. When one of the two males has a female the other one hangs around but keeping distance not getting too close. Their territory is from Athi Basin to the SGR (Standard Gauge Railway) that cuts across the park.



Mpakasi at plane watching- by Veer Sikand



Kitili- by Veer Sikand



Mpakasi – by Veer Sikand



Egyptian geese fighting – by Veer Sikand

One morning near the number eight murrum pits, we saw Mpakasi and Kitili majestically walking on the road, scent marking. We were so excited to see them, and I took lots of photos. We followed them to a little open field in between the SGR and the murrum pits, where Kitili started roaring and rolling around while Mpakasi slowly caught up. Mpakasi then also roared loudly - it was amazing. After that, the two lions disappeared down the valley. After we left them, we made ourselves a sandwich lunch at Hyena Dam and watched a poolside battle as four Egyptian Geese fought. Then we headed back to find Mpakasi and Kitili and found them at the southern border of the park, they had crossed two valleys.

## ALL ABOUT THICKNEE BIRDS

by Adarsh Nagda, 11 Years old



The spotted thicknee has a black, brown and white plumage that makes it a master of camouflage. They can live for an astounding 10-15 years. Their main diet consists of crickets, grasshoppers and sometimes, even their own eggs, after the chick has hatched of course!

We had the privilege of seeing a newly hatched thicknee chick just on the side of a dirt road, near Nairobi Tented Camp. At first, we nearly missed it, but then it started moving, and we were all excited as it is pretty uncommon to see such a young chick!

The mother sat protectively over the hatching chick and the other egg, while the father was on the lookout for hungry predators such as snakes.



The eggs are about 5 centimetres long, and are dirty brown and ash grey in colour, which is another adaptation to keep scavengers away. Thicknee eyes are big and beautiful, with bright yellow and jet-black pupils.

As soon as the chick was hatched, the mother began pecking at the eggshells. She did this to provide herself with much needed calcium and it helps her to digest seeds in the gizzard. It was remarkable to see how the mother was shading the chick from the burning sun, while trying to protect the other unhatched egg.



Newly hatched thicknee chicks are dull grey in colour, but over time, they grow to be big and beautiful birds with spotted feathers.



As we left the parents taking care of the newly hatched chick, we hoped he would survive the critical stages and live to be an adult!

Thanks for Reading!

(All photos by Adarsh Nagda)

## GEMS OF THE REEDBEDS: REED FROGS IN NAIROBI NATIONAL

By Stephen Spawls (stevespawls@hotmail.com)

Approach any of Nairobi National Park's dams, or permanent rivers, as dusk approaches (or even during the day if it's raining) and you are likely to hear a far-carrying, sharp 'tink' frog call, like the sound of a tiny tinker banging a little pot, or a small xylophone. If several frogs are calling at once, the sound seems to reverberate; a melodic chorus evocative of the savanna night. This is the advertisement call of the Common Reed Frog, *Hyperolius viridiflavus*, a remarkable frog, despite its small size, and one of two species of reed frog found in the park (the other is Kim Howell's Reed Frog, *Hyperolius howelli*, of which more later).



Kim Howell's Reed Frog calling, picture by Martin Pickergill.

The reed frogs, *Hyperolius*, are frogs of sub-Saharan Africa. Over 110 species of these brilliantly coloured little amphibian gems are known; at least 14 species occur in Kenya. Four of them are endemic, and include David Sheldrick's Reed Frog, *Hyperolius sheldricki*, known only from eastern Kenya, and the stunning Shimba Hills Reed Frog, *Hyperolius vermiculatus*. An endemic of the highlands, the Kenya Montane Reed Frog, *Hyperolius montanus*, comes in a surprising range of colours; one of them is pink. It was probably this frog that the Kikuyu Seer Mugo wa Kiburu was thinking of when he prophesied, in the early 19th Century, the arrival of the white foreigners; saying that 'strangers would come with skin the colour of the banana frog'. Another Kenyan endemic has the scientific name *Hyperolius cystocandicans*, and *cystocandicans* means 'silver bladder', spotted by Christina Richards, who described the species.



Kenya Montane Reed Frog, the colour of strangers



Silver-bladder Reed Frog from Tigoni, by Daniel Lowry



Shimba Hills Reed Frog

The Common Reed Frog, as presently defined, is a superspecies; a widespread form that occurs virtually throughout the savannas of southern, south-central and eastern Africa. These frogs show an astonishing variety of colours; they are so varied that many were thought to be separate species. Sometimes the male, the female and the juveniles are all different colours. Many were described in the 1930's by Ernst Ahl, a German herpetologist who was thrown out of the Nazi party for being undisciplined! His taxonomic work was equally undisciplined; most of his suggested new species were dumped. Even now, there is vigorous debate about the status of the various forms. But what unites Common Reed Frogs is their distinctive call; they all sound pretty much the same. They usually call from a plant that overhangs or stands in the water; the male hoping to attract a female along, other males come to join in the fun.



Common Reed Frog from Hippo Pools

A German researcher, who was keeping Common Reed Frogs, discovered to his surprise that they can change sex; he had a tank of females and when they matured, to his surprise, he heard one calling. It had changed from a female to a male; a clever strategy when males are not easily available. Reed frogs, like most other frogs in Kenya, are largely harmless (a few have toxic skin secretions) and tolerated, but in some areas farmers dislike them; in the mistaken belief that they may be eaten by cows and poison them

## GEMS OF THE REEDBEDS: REED FROGS IN NAIROBI NATIONAL

continued..

This myth has arisen in a curious way; stock that feed on wet vegetation may accidentally swallow a frog. The animal then dies of bloat from the wet feed. The distressed farmer opens the body up and finds, and blames, the innocent frog. Or just sees frogs in the wet vegetation where the cow died; the poor amphibian gets the blame.

The other species of reed frog in the park is an attractive, tiny green amphibian, Kim Howell's Reed frog, *Hyperolius howelli*. Recently named for the American zoologist Kim Howell, who lectured in zoology at the University of Dar es Salaam for nearly 50 years, this is also part of a big superspecies. Originally called *Hyperolius nasutus*, the Sharp-nosed Reed Frog, the group occurred across much of the tropical savanna of sub-Saharan Africa. A major revision of the complex in 2013, by an international team split the group into sixteen species on the basis of differing calls and DNA; the Kenyan and Tanzanian examples were named for Professor Howell. They have a curious, squeaky insect-like chirp, like that of a cricket. I have heard them at Hyena Dam at dusk, but they don't seem to be as widespread in the park as the Common Reed Frog



Kim Howell's Reed Frog



Grey phase of Common Reed Frog

African frogs can be difficult to identify. It has been jocularly said that no Kenyan frog is difficult to identify to the level of genus, and no Kenyan frog is easy to identify to the species level. The reed frogs, with their varying colour patterns, are a taxonomist's nightmare. In their magisterial 2006 book 'Amphibians of East Africa', the authors Alan Channing and Kim Howell gave keys to every frog genus, except for the reed frogs; even those experts were defeated by *Hyperolius*. The Danish zoologist, Arne Schiøtz, devoted his working life to the study of African tree frogs. In Schiøtz's 350-page book, 'Treefrogs of Africa', he devoted 34 pages, 60 line drawings, 44 photographs and 3 maps to the Common Reed Frog species complex; you get a sense of a work in progress but it's not complete. In the end, in dealing with the Common Reed Frogs of East Africa, Schiøtz moved beyond the traditional taxonomic conventions of species and subspecies, because he was worried about creating confusion; he called the different colour forms 'varieties'. Four such varieties occur in Kenya; and in our book on Kenya's amphibians (available as a free download at [www.kenyareptileatlas.com](http://www.kenyareptileatlas.com), last item on the downloads page)

we chose to call the variety found in Nairobi National Park (*Hyperolius viridiflavus*, variety Ferniquei) the 'Athi River Reed Frog', as it occurs mostly in the Athi River basin. It's an attractive frog, ranging from blue-white to grey, yellowish or pale brown, with distinctive red toe tips and inner legs. Another variety, 'Pantherinus', occurs in high central Kenya, a third form, 'Glandicolor' is found in the Taita Hills and the streams draining off it. It may be that studies of the DNA of these little frogs will shed light on their relationships; but in the meantime we must just enjoy their colours!



Brown phase of the Athi River Reed Frog



Variety Pantherinus from Naro Moru, photo Bob Drewes

PHOTO OF THE MONTH



© 2021 David Gottlieb

(Crocodile at Hyena Dam by David Gottlieb)

# CHEETAH UPDATES – MARCH 2021

By Olga Levari Ercolano

During the month of March, the cheetahs have been thriving and been seen regularly by the Emakoko staff, guides and visitors.

On March 4th, the cheetah mama and three cubs were seen in the Athi ridge area of Rhino Valley, by Atif Chughtai, who kindly shared some of his photos with us. He mentioned that they were very shy and quick to run.



© Atif Chughtai

Photo credit – Atif Chughtai



© Atif Chughtai

Photo credit – Atif Chughtai

Various other sightings of the cheetahs within the Athi basin areas were subsequently reported, but no photos provided.

On Thursday, 25th March 2021, Rihaz Sidi of The Emakoko came across the cheetah mother with her 3 cubs in the No.10 area of the Park. This time, the cheetahs appeared to be less shy. Perhaps they are beginning to get used to seeing vehicles and visitors admiring them. The cubs have grown into handsome young juveniles. We have received this classic photo of 2 of the cubs, courtesy of The Emakoko (Boutique Lodge bordering Nairobi National Park). The photo was taken by Rihaz Sidi. Thanks to Emakoko and Rihaz for kindly sharing this photo.



Photo credit – Rihaz Sidi, courtesy of The Emakoko

We hope that these cheetahs will now become a regular feature in the park circuit, to be enjoyed by visitors.

Keep looking out for the cheetahs whenever you are in the vicinity of the Athi basin! You may be lucky to see them!

## New Updated Maps of Nairobi National Park

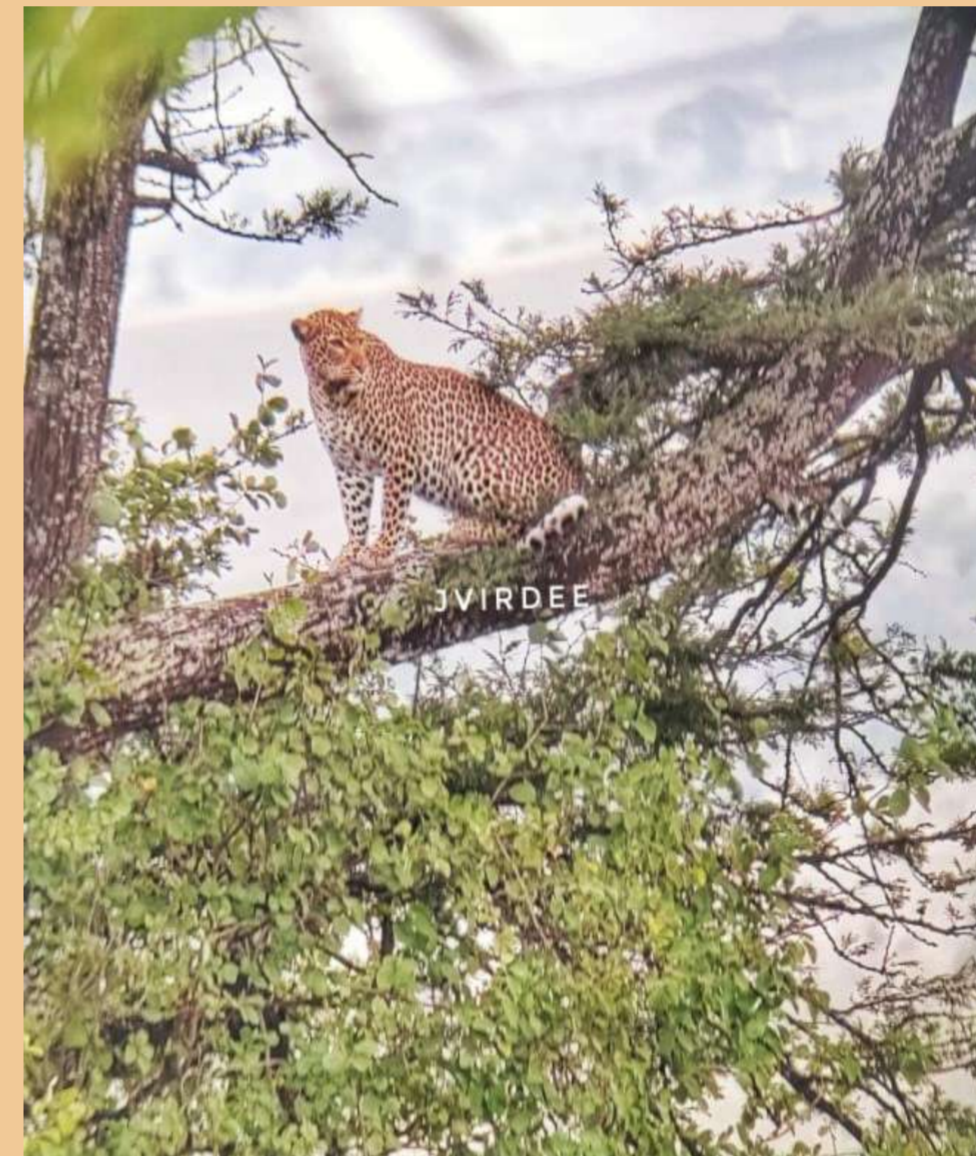
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During the month of March, Koko, has been giving visitors a grand show! She has been self confidently, regularly walking on the park roads and entertaining visitors on an almost daily basis. In particular, on 19th and 20th March, two days consecutively, she lay on a tree opposite the apartments above Hyena dam. The residents of those apartments were overjoyed at having grandstand views of Koko displaying her beautiful body, full bellied from an apparent meal she had hidden in the bushes below the tree. She came up and down and lay on the upper branches for everyone to see and slept soundly on those branches, occasionally stretching and sitting up. For two days, there was Koko fever, and the track next to the fence became a trail of vehicles with visitors, all wanting to catch a glimpse of Koko.



Photo, courtesy - Jasveen Sehmi



Photo credits – Siddharth Patel

# LEOPARD UPDATES

By Olga Levari Ercolano



Photo credits – Lamak Sheikh

She has been seen regularly in various sections of the Nagolomon/Kisembe forest, walking, hunting and generally feeling quite at ease with visitors.

Another interesting leopard sighting was reported by Sonia Varma on 29th March when she came across a mother leopard with two cubs in the Mokoyiet area. We believe the leopard is Mokoyieti, as named, with her cubs. Unfortunately, no clear photos are available, as they were seen at quite a distance. One of the cubs was reportedly, very shy.

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# DIGNITY HOUSING FOR RANGERS

A project by Maniago Safaris, The Luigi Footprints Foundation & SUSO



Container units – photo Olga L Ercolano

The “Dignity Housing Project” by Maniago Safaris Ltd, The Luigi Footprints Foundation and Stand Up Shout out (SUSO) is the first of its kind ranger housing in Eastern Africa.

It all started when the Senior Warden of the Nairobi National Park, Joseph Dadacha, had a dream to upgrade the living accommodation from the current small tents with no beds or bathroom and kitchen facilities, for the “rhino” rangers. These are the special rangers who live in the rhino blocks inside this park, which is a rhino sanctuary, in order to take care of all the rhinos residing here.

The success story of maintaining the rhinos residing in this park, continues with the birth of several rhinos during the last year.

Maniago Safaris Ltd with their partners, Luigi Footprints Foundation and Stand Up Shout Out (SUSO) came together and collectively designed and built the first two self-contained container homes, to replace tent accommodation, with fabricated 20 feet insulated containers which include a kitchenette, mounted beds, wardrobes, washrooms, shower, water tanks and plumbing systems, plus solar power units for warm water and electricity. Containers are ideal for the small teams as they can be easily moved from one location to another.



The Cabinet Secretary for Tourism and Wildlife, Hon. Najib Balala officially flagged off the Dignity Housing Project at the Kenya Wildlife Service Headquarters, in Nairobi on 8th March, 2021. The project aims at improving the living conditions of the 72 strong dedicated rangers that offer 24 hours surveillance and monitoring of rhinos in Nairobi National Park.



Tents and uniports are currently used to house rangers in the blocks. These have many challenges ranging from inadequate space even for the basics such as lighting, kitchen, washrooms, discomfort during adverse weather not to mention the high rate of wear and tear. Tents have to be replaced almost every 3-4 years.

The Dignity Housing Project seeks to replace the tent accommodation with 25 fabricated 20 feet containers. “Dignity Houses” will go a long way in providing comfort for rangers manning our wildlife.



photo by Olga L Ercolano



photo by Olga L Ercolano

# DIGNITY HOUSING FOR RANGERS

continuation.....

“There are 250 blocks all over the country for the rhino sanctuary. These 25 containers donated by our partners is a start. We need to come together, develop a clear framework, and come up with a funding strategy for the remaining blocks,” said the CS.

The CS also added that in 2020, 0 rhinos were poached and only 9 elephants were poached.

“With the improved living conditions of the rangers, we are positive that security will be beefed up and we shall bring the number of poached rhinos and elephants to zero by 2022,” added CS Balala.

The two container units have been placed in two of the blocks in the Park. They will have appropriate vegetation around them so as to give them privacy.



Photo by Olga L Ercolano



Photo by Olga L Ercolano

Thanks to Maniago Safaris Ltd, The Luigi Footprints Foundation and SUSO for excerpts in this article and for this great initiative in making the lives of the rangers so much more comfortable.

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Rohan Bindal



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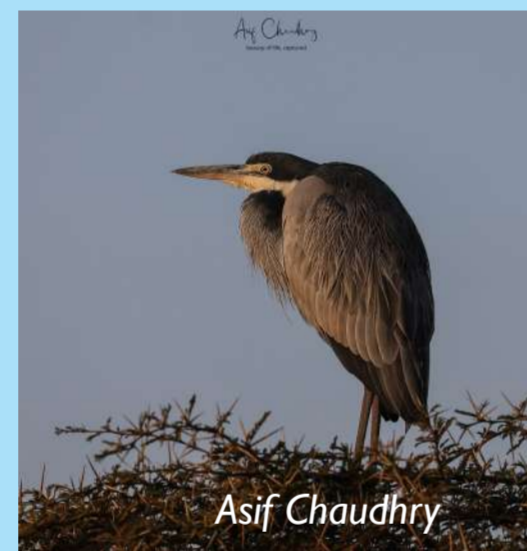
Bird Sightings



Ofir Drori



Sukuro Etale



Asif Chaudhry



Tanvir Ali



Hema Shah



Rufus Kim



Ofir Drori



Trish H-Hayes



Festus Musili



Rufus Kim



Edwin Kanumbi



Asif Chaudhry



Denise C Wagner



Samman Vohra



Edwin Kanumbi



Siddharth Patel

# WILD PLANTS OF NAIROBI NATIONAL PARK

By Trish Heather-Hayes



Carissa



Caesalpinia decapatala



Bothriocline calycinapg



Blepharis ciliaris



Crinum kirkii



Gomphocarpus physocarpus



Cycnium tubulosum (Rhamphicarpa)



Grewia similis



Hibiscus calyphyllus



Ipomoea cairica



Lantana



Nymphaea nouchali



Pentanasia ouranogyne



Pentas parvifolia

# THE HYENA DAM CROCODILE

By Olga Levari Ercolano

There is a crocodile in Hyena dam that has become a major attraction in that he/she (yet to determine whether male or female), has the habit of sunning itself across the bend of the Hyena dam perimeter road. Most days, this crocodile can be seen quite happily, without a care in the world, lying across the road, fast asleep and does not move, no matter what.



photos by Festus Musili

Festus Musili, KWS guide, has daily regular encounters with this crocodile, whom he refers to as "Maji ya Fisi" (Hyena water). Amongst his peers, it has become a trade mark and a matter of amusement.

On any sunny day, one will find this larger than life and rather well fed croc occupying this bend in the road and he/she is oblivious to any moving traffic or vehicles, which are forced to stop and/or squeeze their way around it.



photo by Dyan Rhodes

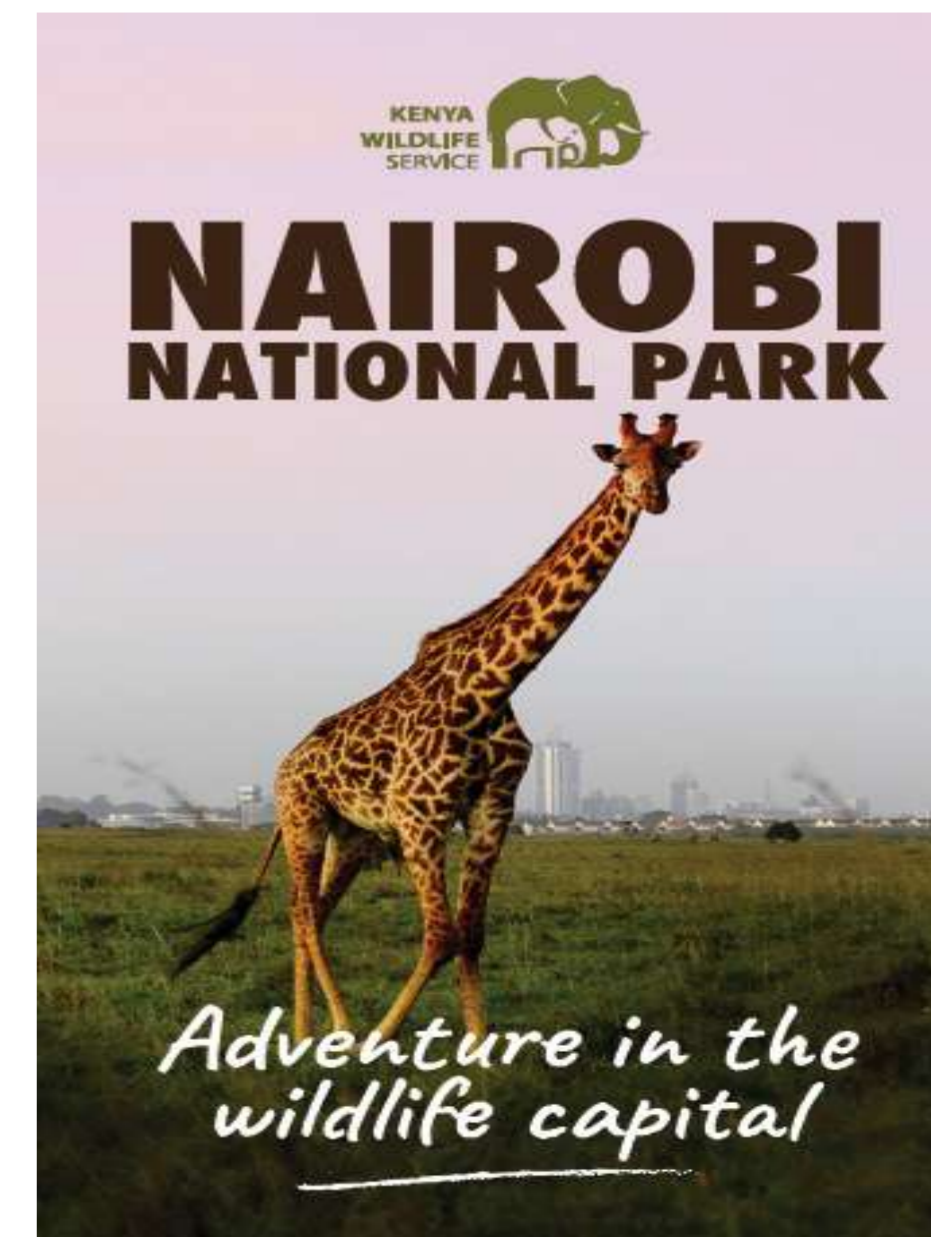


photo by Robert Ngobia



Photo by Olga Levari Ercolano

Anyone up to determining whether this is a male or female? Be our guest! No prizes.



# Animals

Write the name of the animal in the place they belong.

Farm animals	
Zoo animals	
Pet animals	

*Arif Chaudhry*  
beauty of life, captured

Friends of Nairobi National Park

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

Join today and be a friend of the Park

**CONTACT US**

Office No.14, Lang'ata Links I off Lang'ata South Road  
Opp. Kenya School of Law  
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