

Nature East Africa



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Volume 35 Issue 1 2005

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Photo by Bernard Chege

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Dansk
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Kenyan birding goes online



**Kenya BirdFinder at
www.worldbirds.org/kenya**

Philista Adhiambo Malaki

For decades now much bird information has been compiled and reported by scientists, local birdwatchers and visitors. Nevertheless, more has and is still being lost; information that could be vital in making important decisions. Kenya Birdfinder has two advantages: it helps harness data and connects individuals in a global network where information can be exchanged.

Kenya Birdfinder is a new online bird recording system and the first of its kind in Africa. Similar systems are operational in other countries including Svalan in Sweden, Kusbank in Turkey and ebird in the USA. Locally, Nature Kenya and the Department of Ornithology (National Museums of Kenya) manage the system. Launched in February 2005, participants were birdwatchers, safari guides and representatives from conservation organisations.

The system draws on these groups and visitors to submit bird records, previously available only as grey literature.

In Kenya Birdfinder they are available in an attractive, authoritative, and scientifically analytical format to relevant stakeholders for conservation action. For instance, monitoring of the Important Bird Areas (IBAs) and understanding bird population trends and their distribution.

The system is very simple to operate. You log on to www.worldbirds.org/kenya, register and get your password. The password is easy to change. Then you can submit your bird records, view, download or print checklists or maps and make your own contribution to bird conservation in Kenya. You will be able to store and manage personal observations.

To birdwatchers the best news is that the system will act as a quick reference for important birding sites they intend to visit like Lake Nakuru, Lake Baringo, and Kakamega Forest. It can provide a quick view of interesting bird species and where they have been spotted, giving a much better chance at a sought after bird. The database will provide an incentive to individuals to collect high quality data.

It is important to note that internet connections can be slow, and if you are unable to access Kenya Birdfinder your records emailed or posted are still very much welcome. As always please send them to the Department of Ornithology or Nature Kenya at the contacts below.

For technical assistance please also feel free to contact us at the addresses below:

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Welcome to another issue of *Nature East Africa* focussing on some of the conservation work of Nature Kenya.

Important Definitions

Kenya's Important Bird Areas (IBAs)

Nature Kenya published *Important Bird Areas in Kenya* by Leon Bennun and Peter Njoroge in 1999. The sixty sites, which meet global criteria relating to threatened species, concentrations of species restricted in range and congregations of birds, include world famous national parks and forest reserves. Others such as the central montane grasslands and coastal Kaya forests are less well known and less well protected. Overall 25 IBAs are not protected or only partly protected.

Site Support Groups (SSGs)

At a number of these sites, community based groups of concerned individuals, the Site Support Groups, have formed and are taking the lead in protecting the sites and monitoring their biodiversity (see list of SSGs on page 31).

A message leading you to the where you can find Hinde's Babbler in Mukurwe-ini - one of Kenya's threatened bird species



The Mt. Kenya Eco-Resource Centre

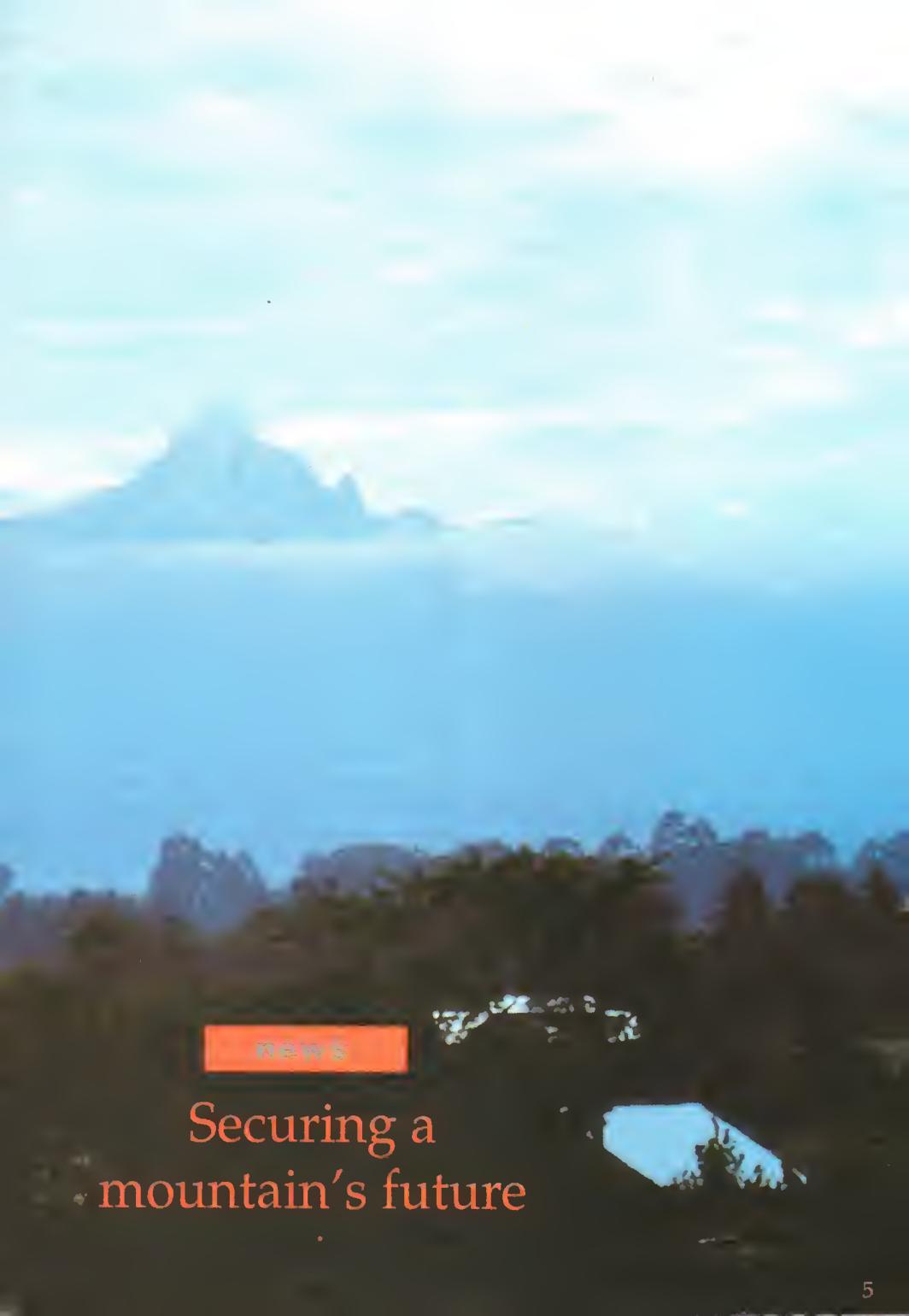
Solomon Ngari

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Straddling the equator and rising to peaks of 5,199m (17,058 feet), Mt. Kenya is Africa's second highest mountain. Gazetted as a forest reserve in 1932 for tourism, it was an important source of fuelwood for locomotive engines. The Mt. Kenya National Park was established in 1947 covering 530 sq.km., but in 1965 the Park was extended to cover 715 sq. km, with three access corridors: Sirimon, Chogoria and Naro Moru.

Spanning an area that goes across seven administrative districts, Mt Kenya is a key biodiversity site with six distinct forest types: *Newtonia* at 1200-1800m, *Croton-Brachylaena-Calodendrum* at 1450-1850m, *Juniperus-Olea* at 1800-2300m, *Ocotea* at 1900-2400m, *Podocarpus latifolius* at 1900-2800m and *Juniperus-Nuxia-Podocarpus falcatus* at 1950-2250m. On the higher slopes, the forest gives way to dense stands of bamboo, *Arundinaria alpina*, then *Hagenia-Hypericum* woodland, *Erica* heathland and afro-alpine moorlands with giant plants. A total of 882 plant species have been recorded, 81 of which are endemic; six mammals of national and international interest including, the Bongo, Black Rhino, Elephant, Leopard and the Giant Forest Hog; as well as a rich montane bird avifauna, including the threatened and little known Abbott's Starling and 53 out of Kenya's 67 African Highlands Biome species.





news

Securing a mountain's future

We understand better than ever the mountain's role as a water tower, in addition to its ecological, economic and biodiversity importance. Mt Kenya is also rich in traditional religious significance for the Kikuyu, Meru and Embu communities that surround it. Human population in the Districts adjacent to the mountain stands at 500,000 people of 117,500 households. The highest concentrations are in the eastern slopes – 507 persons per square kilometre.

Threats to Mt. Kenya Forest

Like many other forests in the country, Mt. Kenya faces serious threats. Most of the forest has already been logged, often destructively and illegally, for valuable timber species including Meru Oak, Camphor and *Podocarpus* species.

Other major threats facing the forest include cultivation of the illegal, but lucrative *Cannabis sativa* in forest clearings and in forest glades, excisions, encroachment by cultivation and settlement, hunting for bush meat, and collection of traditional herbal medicine, firewood and poles at unsustainable levels.

Protection of the forest remains inadequate, but protection alone will not solve the problems of forest loss and degradation. Alternative sources must be found or created to supply the rural communities' needs and replace the proportion of household income that is derived from the unsustainable use of the forest. Given the large number of different uses made of the forest, a multiple-use strategy is required that takes into account the claims of all the varied groups that have an interest in it. Fundamental to the long-term success of any conservation strategy will be greater community understanding of, and participation in, forest conservation and management.

“If you plan to climb all or part of this unique mountain, you will be one of the privileged 15,000-20,000 people who visit it each year, privileged because to local people it is holy, to Kenya it is a vital resource; to international community it is a World Heritage Site,....” Peter Coleridge, Issue 49, Msafiri.

Photo Right: The Mt. Kenya Eco-resource Centre

Why the Eco-resource Centre?

The conservation issues facing Mt Kenya are complex, and success will depend on a combination of approaches including well-informed planning, local awareness-raising and involvement, and the further development of the mountain's great potential for ecological tourism.

At the moment, information on the mountain is scattered and often difficult to obtain, making management planning, advocacy and awareness-raising difficult. Community conservation efforts have been piecemeal, and there are no education and information facilities that can serve a range of different local groups. Visitor facilities are also inadequate with little attention paid to the lower forested slopes.

To help address these issues, with support from the Community Management of Protected Areas Conservation Programme (UNDP/GEF-COMPACT), Nature Kenya is constructing a simple but functional eco-resource centre, located on the lower slopes of the Gathioro Forest Reserve, adjacent to the Mountain Rock Lodge (formerly Bantu Lodge) on the Naro Moru corridor.



What will the Eco-resource Centre offer?

The centre's objective is two-pronged: first, to enhance the experience of visitors to Mt Kenya, so that they obtain the maximum value and satisfaction for their expenditure. Secondly, to provide a means for harnessing the work of community groups, interested donors and concerned individuals, in order to enhance the conservation of this threatened Important Bird Area.

To achieve the two objectives, the centre will:

- facilitate the collation and dissemination of conservation information, thus putting Mt Kenya on the local, national and global map
- provide centre-taught and centre-assisted educational programmes
- organise and deliver indoor and outdoor activities such as birdwatching, wildlife viewing and educational interpretation
- train and equip community guides and conservation groups with various skills such as visitor handling and customer care, alternative energy technology, interpretation, and generally provide the much-needed traditional knowledge and

understanding of the forest resources

- provide e-mail and internet facilities, providing access to information
- set-up a mini-museum, arboretum, herbarium and a semi-permanent campsite

Where are we now?

The Mt. Kenya Eco-Resource Centre is now in its second phase of construction and is expected to open to the public by the end of July 2005. Besides the main building, there will be quarters, which will house a Forester/Warden. A website has been designed and is being tested, over 150 papers and reports have been collated and abstracts computerised, over 100 assorted books are available for the centre's library, two computers and a printer have been purchased, and pictures and artwork are available for the picture gallery.

The long term goal is to use this centre as a focus for conservation networks around the mountain, nationally and in the region. This will catalyse fund-raising for other projects to help improve the livelihoods of forest-adjacent communities and carry out conservation action . ❁

Milk, potatoes and birds



Bird monitoring through tussock grassland at Kinangop Plateau

What do these mean to the people of Kinangop?

By Dominic Kimani
domiekamau@yahoo.com

I would like to share my personal experience from Kinangop, where I have been born and brought up and where I am now assisting in collecting data. Kinangop is a Maasai name having various meanings, but the one that I am most familiar with is ‘cold and flooding place’.

It’s been nearly one year since I started assisting in collecting data for the on-going project: *“Land use and economics of farming on the Kinangop Plateau: Implications for conservation of grassland birds”*. The study sites are distributed from the foot of the Aberdare range to the edges of the Great Rift Valley, and from what I gather, the results of this work will greatly help in recommending the ‘best practice guidelines’ for managing grasslands for birds and for people. On a day-to-day basis, among other activities, I search for birds’ nests in differently managed

grasslands, monitor them for success, record grassland structure and take farm production records. I also take this opportunity to interact with farmers and gather insights from them as relates to birds and farming.

The principal investigators of this research are Dr. Muchai Muchane, Research Scientist and Head of the Department of Ornithology at the National Museums of Kenya and Mr. Kariuki Ndang’ang’a, now working at BirdLife International. I am their Principal Field Assistant, working closely with other museum staff and with members of the Friends of Kinangop, especially two volunteer assistants based at the Njabini and Magumu-Nyakio study sites.

Being born and bred in Kinangop, I've always thought of Kinangop as the biblical 'promised land' since there has always been a lot of milk and potatoes and I am inclined to believe that whoever talked of milk and honey in the Bible mistook potatoes for honey. Over a long period of time, people have been cultivating small portions of land for subsistence, mostly with potatoes and cabbages; huge tracts of land have always been left for grazing. Milk has always been vital for farmers as the major source of income. But with the collapse of the Kenya Co-operative Creameries (KCC) about seven years ago, things started to change. There was no longer a ready market for milk and this drove farmers to seek alternatives like wheat cultivation. Wheat farming results in little or no grassland left for species which are dependant on grassland.

My observation during this 'two in one project' (social economics and ecology) show strongly that people are now aware that they host an important heritage, as the Kinangop grasslands are the habitat for a globally threatened bird, Sharpe's Longclaw. However, as farm land remains the main resource for many, most of the farmers I have talked to need more convincing about eco-friendly alternatives to wheat farming that could bring them a similar income.

Thank you to the donors who have funded the purchase by Nature Kenya of some demonstration grassland, though more are still needed. Hopefully, the recommendations on the way forward at the end of this project will have a positive impact on the conservation of Kinangop's riches.

Last but by no means the least, I have acquired a lot of experience in data collection and interacting with members of the community in explaining the roles and importance of grassland birds in the ecosystem (not forgetting exercise on bumpy roads with a bike on a daily routine). I have found field work to be great fun and an unforgettable learning opportunity.

For more information on this project please contact the Ornithology Department at (020) 3742131/2/3//4
Long live Sharpe's Longclaw! 🌻



Site Support Groups exchange experiences

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*Right: SSGs on an
exchange tour to
Hell's Gate
National Park*

*Photo credit -
Anthony Kiragu*

Globally, exchange visits are proving to be an effective way to broaden the scope of experience within conservation projects. They aim at influencing good governance of projects and encouraging participants to deliver results as required. In building the capacity of Site Support Groups (SSGs), Nature Kenya charted an exchange programme that would enhance the networking of these community groups located near Important Bird Areas (IBAs). The project was designed by Nature Kenya, the Danish Ornithological Foundation or DOF (Danish BirdLife Partner) and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (UK BirdLife Partner). Financial support was awarded from the Danish International Funding Agency (DANIDA).

"Developing a network among Local Community-based Environment and Development Groups in Kenya" started in July 2003 and officially ended 31st March 2005. Exchange visits were one component of the project, which enabled 128 SSG members (forty ladies and eighty-eight men), from twelve groups, to visit six IBAs and learn from each other.

Exchange objectives:

- (i) to acquire skills needed in running and operating sustainable and successful income generating initiatives like butterfly farming, tree nurseries, eco-tourism, tour guiding and plastic recycling
- (ii) to improve skills in advocacy and campaigning using successful models in environmental education and AIDS awareness
- (iii) to acquire skills required in successfully managing large and growing civil society groups (the experience of the Friends of Kinangop Plateau's federal system providing an excellent example).

The visits provided great opportunities for the groups to interact, gain knowledge from each other and see different parts of the country. Some groups managed to link up with potential markets for products and with prospective donors.

Spin offs

The South Nandi Biodiversity Conservation Group (SONABIC) organised a teachers' and environmental clubs patrons' workshop at South Nandi Forest. They designed a plan for environmental education with facilitators from the Kakamega Environmental Education





*SSG members discussing activities on site during an exchange visit
Photo credit - Anthony Kiragu*

Programme (KEEP). This was shortly after visiting KEEP in February 2004.

KEEP were able to get contacts to potential markets for their butterfly pupae, which challenged them to increase production, consequently improving incomes from this activity. *This was after KEEP visited Arabuko Sokoke in March 2004 to interact with Arabuko Sokoke Forest Guides Association (ASFGA).*

Mt. Kenya Biodiversity Conservation Group (Mt.KBCG), better known as Summit Ventures, has approached schools in the Naro Moru area of Mt. Kenya to involve them in environmental education. This programme is working with the William Holden Foundation, a conservation charity in the area. *This was inspired by their visit to Arabuko Sokoke Forest in April 2004, interacting with ASFGA and A Rocha Kenya, a Christian Conservation organisation which manages a school bursary scheme.*

Twenty-two SSGs members from various parts of the country collected more than seventy-five kilogrammes of trash off the mountain, on their visit to the Summit Ventures group at Mt. Kenya. *This event was organised to commemorate World Environment Day June 2004.*

Two potential SSGs have been identified with the help of existing groups. Lake Victoria Sunset Birders have interacted with Kombo Youth Fishing Group operating at the Yala Papyrus Swamps IBA. SONABIC is working with the Pyramid Youth Group in North Nandi Forest IBA, to enhance their knowledge on forest conservation issues. The groups have encouraged their counterparts to have good governance and leadership to facilitate conservation activities in their areas.

The exchange visits have proved to be a very useful tool in building the capacity of SSGs, with tremendous gains in knowledge. But there were challenges:

A lot of coordination and consultation was needed between the visiting and host groups through Nature Kenya. A lot of time is spent in tripartite consultations, but the cell-phones provided to SSGs by the project came in handy by facilitating communication. Seven out of twelve SSGs also have email addresses that further enable efficient information exchange.

The excitement of going on an exchange visit caused some considerable strain to groups when choosing who should benefit from the experience. However, over time the members have reconciled their differences to allow smooth running systems.

It is expected that the SSGs will continue to successfully implement their new lessons at sites, which will also give justification for further support in the future. ❁

Partnerships in Conservation A case study of South Nandi

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South Nandi Forest is an Important Bird Area (IBA) in Kenya, in the districts of Nandi North and Nandi South. This forest shelters birds characteristic of both Afromontane and Guinea-Congo forests, and in particular the threatened bird, Turner's Eremomela. Although the larger part of the forest is in the South, you can still get a good view of it in Nandi North, west of Kapsabet town, as you travel along Kapsabet-Chavakali route.

The political will has not always been favourable to non-government organisations, which are perceived by political leaders and the provincial administration as being anti-government. It is my view that this attitude remains from the colonial era when the Nandi people didn't want white settlers and they thought of non-government organisations as white's people business, coming again to rule them. However, due to exposure to other communities and rising literacy, this perception is changing. It also helps that people are benefiting from the work of non-governmental organisations.

Nature Kenya's intervention was well received in the district, as people wanted to learn how they can use the forest resources in a sustainable manner, to improve the livelihoods of those living adjacent to the South Nandi forest. Nature Kenya appointed a 'Site Conservation Intern' to work with people and local authorities in creating awareness on conservation, a responsibility I

undertook for a few years. This meant building relationships with various potential stakeholders and I soon found a close working ally in the Forest Department (FD), which even provided space at Kobujoi Forest Station to use as an office.

There were a number of reasons why these government and other local partner relationships are possible:

- Nature Kenya activities at South Nandi supplement government efforts
- Our conservation goals assist in meeting government targets
- Nature Kenya's operation focus on forest conservation attracts other partners who have the same interest
- Nature Kenya activities in other parts of the country are able to illustrate best practises in conservation and participatory forest management
- We do not engage in politics
- Nature Kenya is able to take part in numerous public barazas, meetings and workshops
- We are able to provide resource material, especially publications such as newsletters and magazines

Positive & Negative Experiences working with local partners

Positive Experience

* There are currently more activities being carried out jointly with local partners such as Forest Department (FD), National Environment Management Authority (NEMA), Ministry of Agriculture, Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS), Provincial Administration (PA), Wildlife Clubs of Kenya (WCK), Rural Initiatives for Sustainable Development (RISDEV) to name a few

* Working jointly with various partners helps achieve progress more quickly

* Nature Kenya's involvement in decision-making has been recognised and has been allocated a position in the District Environment Committee (DEC) of Nandi South, where Nature Kenya is gazetted as a member

* Nature Kenya is in the State of Environment (SoE) Committee team and I participated in the writing of the SoE reports for the years 2003 and 2004

* Sharing information, giving technical advice and taking on responsibilities as pertaining conservation in South Nandi forest has earned Nature Kenya respect

* Nature Kenya's participation is sought for, and we are invited for meetings when they are being organised by the local partners and vice versa

* Nature Kenya has been supportive of World Environment Day, which is led by the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) through DECs. This event has been very successful, with many people from the surrounding communities, including students, having participated since it was first organised in 2000

* Local Conservation Groups that are affiliates of Nature Kenya will be allowed to put up some infrastructure (for eco-tourism) in the forest so long as they have funds to support it

Negative experiences are thankfully few and require an amount of diplomacy. It also takes time to dispel suspicion and gain trust. Some government and local authority officials are not cooperative. But perhaps the most difficult condition to deal with is the high expectation from government and local authorities in terms of support like fuel, allowances and even funds for their projects as they believe that Nature Kenya is getting a lot of funding from donors.

The key lessons that have been drawn from these experiences include

- Where Nature Kenya takes the lead in stimulating action groups to participate in natural forest management, the government is ready to recognise the work of Nature Kenya and the local action groups

- It is very important to work with the local partners to avoid duplication of work and instead pool resources to gain strength in programmes

- By working with government and other partners, the wider community more readily accepts the role that Nature Kenya plays in conservation

- By working with stakeholders the concept of Important Bird Areas has been largely understood and accepted and they in turn sensitise the community on the conservation of these key biodiversity sites

- Being open and transparent in our operations gains the partners trust and confidence in Nature Kenya

- Innovative ideas are most welcome

Conclusion

Site conservation is challenging and a lot is eventually expected of Nature Kenya. But in the case of South Nandi conservation has come a long way – in gaining government recognition and community acceptance, which is translating year by year into tangible benefits for nature and people. 🌿



Paul Matiku and Solomon Mwangi of Nature Kenya receives binoculars from Morten Hansen of BirdLife Denmark to support eco-tourism and monitoring by SSGs



Morten Hansen of BirdLife Denmark hands over binoculars to the Vice Chairman of KEEP in Buyangu, looking on is Bakari Mungumi the KWS Assistant Warden in Kakamega Forest Reserve



Morten Hans of BirdLife Denmark hands over binoculars and Computer to Lake Victoria Sunset Birders members at the WCK Western region offices in Kisumu



The Danish Ambassador Hon Finn Thilsted visiting the community tent during the Nature Fair in October 2004

SSGs receive some training on communication during one of the National Workshop



Community conservation initiatives receiving media coverage to market and disseminate best practices at Kikuyu Escarpment Forest



Nature Kenya staff playing a courtesy match with Mukurwe-ini Environment Volunteers during the Hinde's Babbler Volleyball challenge Cup during the World Environment Day 2004



KENVO dancers entertaining guests during the Nature Fair





Friends of Kinangop Plateau wool-spinners and weavers graduation ceremony



Solomon Mwangi handing over spinning wheels and other equipment to the graduands after the training



Anita Pederson the International Officer at BirdLife Denmark visiting the spinners and weavers during their training at Masai Weavers, Nairobi



FoKP displaying how they spin and weave their wares during Nature Fair

The Nature Kenya Conservation Manager Solomon Mwangi, delivers a wool rug, woven by the Friends of Kinangop Plateau for the Danish BirdLife partner (DOF), to the DOF Director Jan Ejlsted



Solomon braces against the Danish cold and visits a Danish bird site with DOF colleagues.



Finding consensus Group discussions at one of the National Workshops



Visitors from Denmark get an explanation from John Wachira of Mt. Kenya Biodiversity Conservation Group at the community tent during the Nature Fair



Corncrake records monitoring from Mpala Ranch and South Kinangop

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Corncrake by Edwin Selempo

Coming in from Eastern Europe, flying over Arabia and the Red Sea into Africa, Corncrakes *Crex crex* are long-distance Palaearctic migrants. They avoid the cold winter months of the north by visiting Africa and choosing wintering grounds anywhere from Sudan southwards (see Cramp *et al* 1980). They are largely a passage migrant in Kenya, but locally common in Tanzania (Zimmerman *et al* 1996 and Backhurst *et al* 1973 in Cramp *et al* 1980).

Corncrake is a member of the Rallidae family that comprises the Rails, Crakes and Coots. Its appearance is that of a small chicken-like bird, buffy-brown in colour with rufous wing patches.

Populations

Cramp *et al* (1980) reports a steep decrease in the species' range and population size in Europe as a result of the use of machinery and early mowing in agricultural fields. Corncrakes breed in open, wet or dry long-grass areas, alpine meadows, marsh fringes and unimproved fields (Collar *et al* 1994). The

main threat to their survival has therefore been the unavailability of suitable breeding habitat, which has been lost through drainage of breeding sites, agricultural intensification and changes in grassland management. In Africa they winter in dry and wet grasslands.

Corncrake is listed in Appendix 1 of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES); and as globally-threatened and vulnerable by Bennun & Njoroge (2001), Collar *et al* (1994), and BirdLife International (2000). Zimmerman *et al* (1996) describes it as a local and uncommon passage Palaearctic migrant in savannah or grassland, but regular in Masai Mara National Reserve in April.

Previous records in Kenya

Sightings of Corncrake are rare. According to Bennun & Njoroge (2001), only 3 Important Bird Areas (IBAs) – Tsavo West National Park, Nairobi National Park and Masai Mara National Reserve, have recorded Corncrakes.

An unusual record is reported in *Kenya Birds* Volume 7 of August 1999 from Athi River Game Ranching Ltd on 28th January 1998. This is an unusual date for this species, which is considered a passage migrant in Kenya, raising the question as to whether it was wintering here. See also *Kenya Birds* Vol. 6 No. 1 & 2 December 1997 for another record reported from the ILRI compound in Kabete, Nairobi.

Here we report two other sightings of this globally-threatened species from Mpala Ranch and South Kinangop.

Mpala Ranch

In April 2001, Nicodemus Nalianya, Natalia Emlen, Stephen Emlen and I (WW) had set up mist nets at Clifford Boma in Mpala Ranch, Laikipia District. The main target species for the mist nets were the collaborative breeders Grey-capped Social Weavers (which we refer to as GCSWs). The nets are set around the GCSWs colony tree the day before, ensuring maximum capture of individuals who spent the night there, no matter in which direction they may fly after leaving their nest. This is called target-netting. It has proved very effective, although you cannot miss one or two 'wise' birds escaping. We ring them with colour rings, in addition to metal rings, to enable field behavioural observations.

This type of netting also captures other birds who may be using deserted and/or old GCSW nests as their home, or roosted in the tree. Among those we often capture at Mpala in this

way are Chestnut Sparrow, Cut-throat Finch and Red-fronted Barbet.

However, the morning of 5th April 2001 was different. We had opened nets at 6 am. A few minutes later, the GCSWs started leaving their single-chambered two-holed nests - one hole is closed during nesting then re-opened on winding up of breeding. As I went to the nets, I noted that there was what looked like an unusually large 'GCSW' and I decided to go for it first. In the darkness of dawn, I could tell that this was not one the weavers! It was something different for sure. I easily 'picked' it from the net and used a large bird bag for its comfort. I thought of several species possibilities in my mind, but none seemed correct as the nearest water body, the Ngare Nyiro River, was about 200 meters down the slope. I decided not to say anything to the other ringers about it until we extracted the remaining birds and proceeded to the ringing station.

Nicodemus was the lucky ringer who landed this 'extra large weaver'. As he had an idea of what it might be, he was amused at our baffled looks. We confirmed it to be an adult Corncrake, with slightly worn flight feathers. Nicodemus gave it a size C ring No. 7832 and took several measurements.

Before releasing the Corncrake we also took a digital photograph and a blood sample for the Department of Ornithology's blood bank.

This was the first record of Corncrake for Mpala Ranch and for the Atlas Square 50D. Other interesting species ringed that morning were Olivaceous Warbler, Black-necked Weaver, Northern Grey Tit, Speckle-fronted Weaver and Yellow-bellied Eremomela.



Corncrake habitat in Laikipia
Photo credit Wanyoike Wamiti

South Kinangop

On the sunny morning of December 3, 2004, the community members of Kinamba in Njabi-ini, South Kinangop noted a bird hanging from a barbed wire fence. It was 10 a.m. when I (FM) was called to try to rescue the bird. It was a horrible sight as blood dripped from this bird, which struggled to let itself out of the wire. I quickly noted the seriousness of the bird's injuries, which had its stomach exposed and protruding. It still had spirit enough to peck at me as I tried to extract it, but I certainly knew that it would not survive and it died shortly.

I little knew it had travelled thousands of miles to come this far. I had not seen one like it before and could therefore not discard its body. I decided to inject the specimen with formalin to ensure retention of some of the characteristics – formalin stops all tissue degradation – and took the specimen to the Department of Ornithology for identification. It ended up being a new species for my list as well as for the Kinangop Grasslands Important Bird Area.

This Kinangop record brings to four the IBAs where Corncrakes have been recorded in Kenya. Perhaps there are many other unreported site records out there that we would appreciate to have as well. 🌱

Further reading

The following are the cited references for further reading. Some of them are available at the Department of Ornithology's library.

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The East Africa Natural History Society's 95th AGM

The Chairman took members through the Society's current strategic plan, and the progress made in its implementation during the past year.

Nature Kenya - the EANHS: Its aim and mission

- Aim
To promote the study of natural history, and conservation of the natural environment, in eastern Africa
- Mission

Connecting nature and people

The following activities have been organized to achieve seven strategic targets over the past year 04/05

1 Public awareness of the global, national, and local values of biodiversity increased

Publications of Sub-Committees:

- Environmental Legislation and Policy Working Group (ELPWIG) published the "Community Guide to Forest Conservation"
- Succulenta East Africa produced four issues of the *Succulenta newsletter*
- *History of Succulent Plants in Kenya* by Professor Len Newton
- Bird Committee produced 1 issue of *Kenya Birds*, 1 issue of *Scopus* & Launched the online database - Kenya Birdfinder

Kenya Birdfinder is a web-based tool to:

- influence the collection of quality bird information
- encourage collection of full checklists for sites
- provide useful information to estimate abundance trends of bird populations at a national level
- document birds' distributions
- gain a more complete picture of the state of the world's birds

Media coverage increased:

- A Public Relations Intern (Ms Pauline Muriuki) was recruited to work with the media
- Two articles published in foreign magazines (South Africa's *African Millionaire* and Netherlands *Ecologie & Ontwikkeling*) on Nature Kenya
- Nature Kenya activities were regularly featured in national press
- Three environmental programmes with Nature Kenya staff were aired on a local FM Radio Station (Radio Waumini on 88.5 FM)
- Feature on birds with Nature Kenya contacts published in *KenyaLife*, the Kenya Tourist Board guide to Kenya 2004/5

The 1st Nature Fair was held on 2nd and 3rd October 2004, at the Nairobi Arboretum with about 1000 people attending. Communities and Site Support Groups exhibited their wares



Nature Fair October 04

The working groups on different taxa organised 'live' exhibits which were very popular

The Journal of East African Natural History

- JEANII now up to date
- Has managed to secure funding from the Critical Ecosystems Partnership Fund (\$120,000) for four special issues on the Eastern Arc Mountains and Coastal Forest (EAMCF) biodiversity hotspot
- Web-based publishing which will enable all previous articles/abstracts to be available on the web

2 Key biodiversity conservation sites prioritised, studied, documented and findings disseminated

- The Important Bird Areas (IBAs) Status and Trends report was published
- The process to expand IBAs to Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) has been initiated and a global methodology has been developed and published with Nature Kenya input
- **A Bioscience Paper: *Rebuilding Noah's Ark: Key Biodiversity Areas as site conservation targets*** with 14 authors including Paul Matiku and Leon Bennun was published
- The Biodiversity database for Eastern Arc Mountains and Coastal Forest (EAMCF) Hotspot has been maintained and expanded

3 Nature Kenya's influence on decisions affecting biodiversity increased

- We've had input into national policy and legislation e.g. the Forest Bill, Land Policy, Environment Management and Coordination Act, Wetlands policy, etc
- We're active in national fora: Parliamentary Workshop, Kenya Forest Working Group (KFWG), Forestry/Range Rehabilitation and Environmental Management Strengthening Initiative (FORREMS), National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) etc
- Nature Kenya is involved at global fora: Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) including Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) and Conference of Parties (COP), BirdLife Global Conference, World Conservation Union (IUCN) World Parks Congress, World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD)
- The Important Bird Areas-National Liaison Committee (IBA-NLC) established & strengthened through donor funding
- We're involved with National reporting processes, with contributions to the national land policy and 2nd National report to CBD COP 7 and the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) 9.
- The IBA monitoring status and trends 2004 report launched by the Director General, National Environmental Management Authority (NEMA), contributed to the 2nd National report to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)
- Nature Kenya is involved in the development of a National Capacity Self-Assessment project with NEMA to implement environmental agreements: Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs)

4 Action for protection of key species, sites and habitats identified and initiated

- Expeditions have been taken to Machakos river valleys (habitat of an endangered bird, Hinde's Babbler) and contact established with the District Environmental Conservation Officer (DECO) and a local community group
- Nature Kenya continues to work closely with National Museums of Kenya to undertake surveys to other sites like Ndere Island on L. Victoria and Mt. Elgon Forests
- 45 acres of land have been purchased and 40 acres more to be bought in Kinangop grasslands to establish a grassland reserve for the protection of the globally threatened endemic bird, Sharpe's Longclaw.
- The Mt Kenya Resource Centre is under construction, supported by GEF UNDP-COMPACT



5 Larger, broader, active membership base developed

- Membership growth is gradual with over 1000 members
- Campaigns for recruitment are ongoing with outreach recruitment of members through booths at shopping centres
- Members are engaged in various taxonomic action groups with a new one in formation - *Samaki Working Group*
- An Evening Programme of talks has included
 - Dr Geoffrey Mwachala on the Botanical diversity of Taita Hills
 - WINGED MIGRATION wildlife film
 - Dr David Harper on the conservation of Lake Naivasha
- Field trips, birdwalks and numerous other field activities included
 - Field trip to Lake Solai
 - Succulenta day trip to Maanzoni
 - Plant hunting at Kitengela
 - Trip to Tsavo East
 - Training on Basic Botany for Beginners
 - Field trip to Mutomo Hill Plant Sanctuary
 - Herpetofauna trip to Lake Magadi
 - Weekly and monthly bird walks and twice-monthly tree walks
- The quality of membership services will be greatly enhanced with
 - The donation of a wooden prefab building, which will make available much needed extra space
 - The appointment of a Membership Marketing Officer (Ms Neema Mbeyu)

6 Funding increased from diversified sources

- Donor sources diversified, with funding achieved from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Kindernothilfe/Naturschutzbund (KNH/NABU), Dansk Ornitologisk Forening (DOF)/DANIDA, Darwin Initiative, BP, Ford Foundation, Global Environment Facility (GEF), Global Environment Facility-Community Management of Protected Areas Conservation (GEF-COMPACT), World Conservation Union (IUCN) Netherlands, Jensen Foundation, and the European Union-Biodiversity Conservation Programme (EU-BCP)
- Internal fundraising has also been very useful, from use of vehicles, equipment, and staff time, etc
- We had over ten projects (some very small) in 2004
- The funding support from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) is becoming a smaller proportion of the total funding of Nature Kenya
- Fundraising on going for conservation projects with six new projects funded from
- Jensen Foundation
- Spanish funding for Kakamega tree planting
- Bird Monitoring in Kakamega forest
- Biodiversity Conservation Programme (BCP) support for FONA (Friends of Nairobi Arboretum)
- Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) Hotspots database
- UNDP-GEF COMPACT second funding for Mt. Kenya Eco-resource & Education Centre



7 Effectiveness and efficiency of NK's management and administration enhanced

There have been improved terms of service for Nature Kenya staff

- New staff recruited (in membership and accounts)

However, some setbacks due to rapid growth and absence of accountant through illness led to dismissal of three employees

Thank you to our volunteers

All our volunteers are critical for the Society, but we would especially like to mention the following:

Shailesh Patel

Diana Maena

Lara Salido

Irene Kinuthia

Joshua Kiama Wambugu

* And most important, Fleur Ng'weno, who has made an invaluable contribution to publications, bird walks, management, and conservation in general and we are pleased to award her with a **Conservation Award**

And A BIG THANK YOU to all our members and staff



E
KARIBU

ASANTE



Woolspinning to Save Birds

Solomon Ngari

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Kenya's Kinangop highland grasslands are a critically threatened Important Bird Area. The entire montane grass area of some 77,000 ha, is at an altitude of between 2,400-2,700m on the Kinangop Plateau on the eastern edge of the Rift Valley. It is privately owned and has no official protection status. The area holds a suite of restricted-range bird species including several of global conservation concern. These include the Sharpe's Longclaw *Macronyx sharpei*, Jackson's Widowbird *Euplectes jacksoni* and Aberdare Cisticola *Cisticola aberdare*. Non-avian species confined largely to the Kinangop highland grassland include two frogs *Hyperolius montanus* and *Phrynobatrachus kinangopensis* and one snake Kenya Horned Viper *Bitis worthingtonii* (Sprawls 1978, Duff-MacKay 1980).

Originally, the entire plateau was open tussock grassland, grazed by large ungulates and having numerous bogs. Settlement by small-holders started some 40 or 50 years ago, and this agriculturally productive area is now densely settled. Woodlots of water-hungry exotic trees have drained many of the swamps and moderated the climate, which is now warmer and drier. Large areas have been given over to crops and the remaining grassland is intensively grazed; tussock grass, which is unpalatable to livestock, is ploughed up or physically removed by many farmers.

Sharpe's Longclaw prefers short grass with tussocks and avoids cultivation or woodlots. The continued loss of the longclaw's habitat through conversion and fragmentation has led to its being listed as 'Endangered' (BirdLife International 2000). The species is distributed over most of the highland grasslands but its specific habitat requirements make it quite sensitive to changes in grassland cover and quality. In order to reverse the negative trends in the bird's population and habitat quality, Nature Kenya has been working with the Friends of Kinangop Plateau (FoKP) to develop grassland-friendly nature-based enterprises. Woolspinning offers the most direct linkage between economic benefits to the farmers and the conservation of Sharpe's Longclaw and its habitat.

Progress to date

1. The Kinangop Plateau has been a livestock zone since the 1900s when white settlers declared Kinangop a 'White Highland' and began milk and wool production. The Woolspinning Project commenced in 2003 with generous support from the Danish International Funding Agency (DANIDA) through the Danish Ornithological Foundation (BirdLife in Denmark).
2. **March 2004:** Members of Friends of Kinangop Plateau - 7 women and 3 men -

undertook and successfully completed a six-week training in Rug weaving (yarn preparation, warping, colour use, design formation and finishing) and Yarn spinning (wool freeze selection, opening of raw wool, cording, dyeing, spinning and boiling) at Maasai Weavers and Spinners at Ongata Rongai.

3. May 2004: Upon graduation, a woolspinning section of the Friends of Kinangop Plateau was established and endorsed by the Joint Management Committee – an umbrella body that governs the operations of the four branches of FoKP. The section has been in operation now for the last one year.

4. Also in May Nature Kenya with DANIDA funding procured equipment on behalf of the woolspinning section, which included 4 spinning wheels, 2 hand carders, 1 scale balance, 2 buckets, 4 knitting needles and other materials, to facilitate the opening of a workshop. Members of the woolspinning group made a matching contribution by availing their own equipment including: 3 spinning wheels, 3 hand carders, bobbin holders, timber and nails among other equipment

5. June 2004: The woolspinning section established a small-scale workshop at Njabini town, located in the southern part of Kinangop, and started purchasing raw wool from the farmers and producing finished yarn for sale. The workshop attracts visitors from the community and members use the visits as an opportunity to explain the connection between sheep farming and grassland conservation. Other visitors to the workshop include staff from European Union, DOF, Nature Kenya, BirdLife Africa and Finn-Craft Sauna Ltd.

Yarn Production & Marketing

The group has in the past several months concentrated on the production of processed yarn for sale to other well established weaving and spinning groups mainly in Nairobi and Naivasha. The group produces two types of yarn: Medium 2 ply washed and Medium 2 ply unwashed.

By December 2004, the group had purchased, processed and sold 186.3 Kg of medium 2-ply washed and 7.8 Kg of medium 2-ply unwashed yarn. The group has been selling to two main endpoints including Weaver Bird Ltd and Trio Craft.

On marketing, the group is investigating other options to broaden its range of markets, and in March 2005 the group visited the National Chambers of Commerce and Industry (NCCI) seeking advice on the procedures for marketing their products abroad. They have also inquired from the Nyandarua County Council the possibility of establishing a curio shop at one of the view-points along the Nakuru–Nairobi Highway.

Exchange Visits

The woolspinning team has visited three well-established weaving workshops in Nairobi, Naivasha and recently in Nanyuki. The purpose of these exchange visits was to expose the members to: skills needed in high quality yarn production, skills in designing marketable products, ideas on how and where to fundraise for entrepreneurial projects, workshop management, specialization and division of labour, quality control and marketing. The group was able to learn how to efficiently use drum carders, use of traditionally designed spindles in spinning and the value of combining chemical and natural dyes such as black jack. The trips are an eye-opener and motivator to the team; the skills gained are currently being applied in improving the quality of products.

Challenges

The success of this nature-based enterprise has not been without challenges:

- *A small workforce* – In order to meet the high standards required in terms of quality and quantity, specialization and division of labour is a must and this requires a bigger number of skilled workers than there are at the moment.
- *Marketing* - The establishment of a curio market and marketing the same to travel agents requires extra finances and effort.
- *Lack of efficient and adequate equipment* - The use of hand carders instead of drum carders determines the quality and quantity of yarn produced per day. The group is currently using hand carders, which are less efficient.
- Lack of a stable market for both yarn and finished products is a drawback
- Insufficient working capital

Looking Ahead

- The group plans to train more community members to increase the workforce, and three members of the community are already training on-the-job.
- Diversification of products is planned to capture the different markets. In particular, to focus more on producing finished products.
- The group is planning to open a curio shop at a view-point along the Nakuru-Nairobi Highway to help broaden their market for finished products.
- Branding their products is also planned - taking advantage of the conservation status of the Kinangop and the rich historical background 🌿

Trainees at the Maasai Weavers and Spinners, Ongata Rongai



Saving threatened Bird Species Action Plans for birds in Africa

Kariuki Ndong'ang'a
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Many of Africa's 349 globally threatened bird species need co-ordinated action to ensure their future survival. Site conservation programmes are not enough and species action plans help focus on birds which might not otherwise get attention. The BirdLife African Partnership established an African Species Working Group (ASWG) to promote single species action plans and conservation initiatives. However, neither the African partners nor their Government colleagues had the experience or the resources to do species action plans.

Actions for the Conservation of Globally threatened birds in Africa (SAP project) is a BirdLife project, which aims to build the capacity for species action planning in Africa. The first three-year phase of the project started in April 2001 and was coordinated on behalf of the Partners by Nature Uganda and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) (BirdLife Partners in Uganda and UK respectively). BirdLife Partner organisations in 17 African countries, including Nature Kenya, participated with co-funding from the UK Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) under the Darwin Initiative.

The SAP project produced 7 international and 15 national action plans for priority species in Africa. Cross-border species were selected to be used in the participative training because they are particularly difficult to conserve, require concerted action in all important range countries and it ensured that a high number of people from a wide range of countries received training and practical experience in a short time. Three of the eight candidate species – Spotted Ground Thrush *Zoothera guttata*, Blue Swallow *Hirundo otocroerulea* and Lappet faced Vulture *Torgos trocheliotus*, have their ranges extending into Kenya.

An initial step towards developing the species action plans was the identification of volunteer National Species Action Plan Co-ordinators (NSAPCs) from each of the African BirdLife Partners in the programme. With training, the co-ordinators are able

to apply their knowledge in species conservation, develop and implement species action plans and train colleagues. Nature Kenya collaborates closely with the Ornithology Department of the National Museums of Kenya, where I worked as a Research Scientist, and nominated me to co-ordinate this programme in Kenya. I spent 10% of my time on this programme, and participated in several 'Trainers' training' sessions and action planning workshops, which has led to the development of international and national action plans for the endangered Spotted Ground Thrush *Zoothera guttata*.

The second phase, also funded under Darwin Initiative and running a further three years, was initiated immediately after the first one in 2004. It is aimed at going further and implementing the already developed actions, with considerable effort to be devoted to fundraising to ensure that the Partners continue the process of producing plans for more species in their own countries.

Further training was achieved through two International Management Training workshops held from 22 February to 4 March 2005 and from 7 to 13 June 2005 in South Africa and Uganda respectively.

Nature Kenya and National Museums of Kenya in the SAP project

As a member of the BirdLife African Partnership, Nature Kenya is actively involved in the SAP project. Nature Kenya continues to seek technical support on bird-related issues from its collaborator, the National Museums of Kenya. As the NSAPC since 2001, I have implemented some of the identified research-related actions of the SAP priority species. I have also fundraised for and done surveys and some ecological studies for the Spotted Ground Thrush and Blue Swallow *Hirundo otocroerulea*, both of which are also departmental priorities for research. 🌸

NB: Kariuki Ndong'ang'o has since April 2005 moved to the BirdLife Africa Partnership Secretariat and is the current Africa Species Working Group Coordinator. Ronold Mulwo is now the NSAPC for Kenya.

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