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The Nature Kenya Newsletter

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August 2002

LAST CHANCE FOR SUMATRA'S FORESTS

Richard Grimmett,
Head of BirdLife's Asia Division

The lowland tropical forest of Sumatra, Indonesia's largest island is amongst the most biologically diverse on earth. But from 1985 to 1997, over 6 million ha (60,000 sq km) of Sumatra's forest were cleared and forest cover decreased from 49% to 35%. 1997 and 1998 were particularly bad years. Dry conditions, resulting from a strong El Niño, meant that fires were lit to clear forest, often by plantation companies, blanketing the whole region in thick smoke. Since 1997 forest loss has, if anything, accelerated. Another El Niño is brewing in the Pacific, another extended dry spell is likely, and forest fires will once again become a major international environmental concern.

It is mainly the lowland forests (non-swampy forest below the foothill boundary) that have been lost. These forests, occupying around 16 million ha in 1900, were reduced from 5.6 million ha to 2.2 million ha between 1985 and 1997. Without immediate and fundamental changes in policies and management, the World Bank has predicted that virtually all lowland forest will have been cleared in Sumatra by 2005.

In these forests, 21 species of forest birds are considered threatened and, alarmingly, 85 as Near Threatened. Mammals are suffering too. The Sumatran Rhinoceros numbers possibly fewer than 100 individuals. The Orangutan population in Sumatra has declined by around 85% during the 20th Century, and, on current trends, will become ecologically extinct by 2010.

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The forests of Sumatra, Indonesia, forests are fast disappearing, victim of the world's insatiable appetite for timber, palm oil and paper. Richard Grimmett, Head of BirdLife's Asia Division, based in Indonesia, examines the crisis facing Sumatra's forests

TALKS & VIDEOS

LIFE SENSE Our lives through animal eyes

We will screen the third & fourth programmes of this BBC production, which looks at what animals see and how our actions influence their behaviour.

Monday 12 August '02,

5:30 p.m. Ford HALL,

**National Museums of Kenya, Nairobi,
Refreshments prior & Town drop off**

FIELD TRIPS

Bat watching at Oloolua Forest Cave Friday 9 August '02

Inquires and bookings to the Nature Kenya front office. Please indicate if you are able to give rides (limited transport will be available).

Meet at the National Museum, Nairobi car park at 1:30 p.m. to depart at 2:00 p.m.

Organised by the Nature Kenya
Mammal Committee

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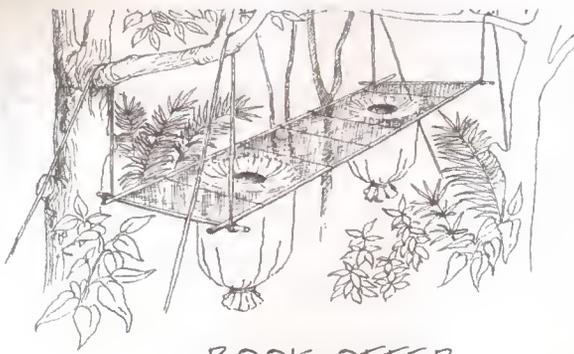
North Coast in October

We are organising a trip to visit Tsavo East, Sabaki, Arabuko-Sokoke Forest, Mida Creek & perhaps Tana River in October.

Details will be in the next newsletter, but if you interested you can drop a note at office@naturekenya.org

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BOOK OFFER

African Forest Biodiversity: A Field Survey Manual for Vertebrates

**Edited by Glyn Davies Authors: Leon
Bennun, Glyn Davies, Kim Howell,
Helen Newing, Matthew Linkie**

The manual is designed to be carried to the field to guide survey work, and enable the user to consider the full range of vertebrates, excluding fish, found in African forests. It explains the basic techniques and basic standards needed for the development of essential inventory and monitoring programmes.

The manual is designed for those carrying out short reconnaissance surveys and monitoring; undergraduate or graduate student carrying out project and thesis work; working in research departments of forest, wildlife and national parks agencies; forest and wildlife managers and technicians with responsibility for monitoring biodiversity.

If you would like to receive a manual, when they arrive, please send us a note or email, explaining your need for the manual. *Please note, on confirmation, we will not mail the manual and you must arrange collection from our offices at the National Museum.*

EVENING SKY

**By Alex and Ian MacKay
and Fleur Ng'weno**

The sky features described below are best seen on a night with few or no clouds, in the early evening (about 7 to 9 pm) in August 2002. Where there are bright lights, for example in the city or in the moonlight, you will only see the brightest stars and planets. In the countryside on a dark night, you may see a myriad of other stars.

Illustration of Sagittarius from The Safari Star Guide by Alex and Joy MacKay

Stars

Look to the north. About halfway up in the sky is the brilliant star Vega, in the small constellation of LYRA, the lyre. Vega is a bright white star, but sometimes it seems pale blue among all the yellow stars.

East of Vega (to the right) is the constellation of CYGNUS, the flying swan. Look for three stars forming a triangle; these are the tail and wings of the swan. The swan's long neck reaches up into the sky, above Vega.

Almost overhead, a little to the east, is the bright star Altair in the constellation AQUILA, the eagle. Two smaller stars seem to escort Altair.

Looking south, the constellation SCORPIUS is just south of overhead. To the east (left) of SCORPIUS is the constellation SAGITTARIUS, a group of stars in the shape of a teapot. The ancient Greeks saw Sagittarius as the Archer, firing an arrow at the Scorpion. SAGITTARIUS marks the centre of the Milky Way, the great galaxy of stars which includes our own Sun.



Planets

Bright Venus is high in the west in the evening, slowly going down. Tiny Mercury is lower than Venus. In the morning before dawn, bright Jupiter and medium-bright Saturn can be seen in the east.

Moon

1 August Last quarter (rises at midnight)
* 8 August New moon * 15 August First quarter (overhead at sunset) * 23 August Full moon * 31 August Last quarter (rises at midnight)

Meteors

When the Earth passes through space dust and debris, some enter the Earth's atmosphere. They burn up in the atmosphere, forming meteors or "shooting stars". The Leonid meteor shower around August 18 is predicted to be intense this year. However, the bright moon makes it more difficult to see shooting stars, so look before dawn, after the moon has set.

The causes of forest loss are complex and interlinked. But we are all involved, although generally do not realise it. Forest clearance is being driven by a global demand for commodities. Coffee, rubber and cinnamon are products from Sumatra grown at the cost of natural forest. Illegal logging and weaknesses in governance and management also contribute. However, two commodities, palm oil and paper, stand out as playing a major role in forest clearance in Sumatra over the past decade.

Palm oil

Palm oil, financially Indonesia's most important agricultural commodity, has become the main agent in accelerating deforestation in Sumatra during the 1990s. Produced from the fruit of the oil palm, a tree growing up to 15 m tall and originating from West Africa, it is the world's highest yielding vegetable oil crop. Between 1984 and 1998 the area under oil palm increased from 0.4 million to 2.2 million ha in Sumatra. Of the 6.7 million ha of forest lost in Sumatra between 1984 and 1987, it is estimated that 1.7 million was replaced by oil palm estates with up to a further 2 million ha cleared and destined for this use. Expansion is continuing. Indonesia is aiming to overtake Malaysia to become the world's leading producer. The world's largest palm oil importers are China (1.8 million tonnes in 1997), India (1.4) and Pakistan (1.2), where palm oil is primarily used as cooking oil. Next are the Netherlands (0.6), Germany (0.4) and UK (0.4). In 1997, the EU bought 37% of total Indonesian palm oil exports.

In Europe, palm oil is widely used in the food manufacturing industry to make biscuits, crisps, chocolates, ice cream, cooking oil, margarine and frying fat. Non-food uses include soaps, lubricants, and cosmetics (lipstick, hand creams, and sun cream). Next time you eat a packet of crisps, or wash your hands, think about what vegetable oil you might be using.

Big corporate names are major users of palm oil. Household names include Unilever, Colgate-Palmolive and Procter & Gamble. Some companies, particularly in the food industry know where their palm oil comes from: a major supermarket chain in Switzerland,

REGULAR ACTIVITIES

BIRD RINGING

Meet at the Museum, Nairobi Botanic Garden, at 7:00 a.m. every Thursday.

SUNDAY BIRDWATCH

Members meet at the National Museum, Nairobi car park at 9:00 a.m. the third Sunday of every month, i.e. **18 August**. The members decide where to go. Bring lunch

TREE WALK

Guided Tree Walks in the Arboretum on the last Monday, i.e. **26 August from 9:30 a.m.** Meet at the FONA offices beside the Girl Guides HQ. Those who are not members of FONA or Nature Kenya pay Ksh 100/- fee on arrival at the gate.

WEDNESDAY MORNING BIRDWALKS

Bird watching walks at sites in and around Nairobi. Meet at the National Museum car park every Wednesday at 8:45 a.m. Return about 12:30 p.m. Those who are not members can get temporary membership at Ksh 100 per birdwalk, payable on arrival at the car park.

ARABUKO-SOKOKE (COAST)

The Saturday birdwatch with the Arabuko Sakoke Forest Guides Association is on the first Saturday of each month i.e. **3 August**, at **6:30 a.m.** from the Visitor Centre, Gede. Cost 100/- per person.

FFJ Bird Walk (Coast)

Friends of Fort Jesus birdwalks are held the third Saturday of each month i.e. **17 August**, at **4:00 p.m.** Please call Marlene Reid on (011) 491 648 to confirm

Ngong Road Forest Walks, Nairobi

The Ngong Road Forest Sanctuary Trust Nature walks are held on the first and third Saturdays of the month i.e. **3 & 17 August**, at **9:00 a.m.** Meet at the stairs leading to the Restaurant of the Racecourse.

AUGUST DIARY

Sat 3	ASF Birdwalks & NRF walk
Fri 9	Bat watching at Oloolua
Mon 12	Life Sense Video
Sat 17	FFJ Birdwalk & NRF walk
Sun 18	Sunday Birdwatch Leonid meteor shower
Mon 26	Tree Walk

Birdwalks every Wednesday Morning
Bird ringing every Thursday Morning

Editor, **Catherine Ngarachu**

Bird Hotline 749957

Little Bittern, Cape Wagtail, Red-throated Wryneck
Rasslyn River Garden Centre, Nairobi/ July
Wednesday Morning Birdwalk

Denham's Bustard Kuki Gallmann's Ranch,
Laikipia/ July Anthony Wandera

Somali Courser Samburu / July Itai Shanni

African Cuckoo Hawk Brackenhurst Baptist International Centre, Tigani/ June
Wednesday Morning Birdwalk

Dwarf Bittern, Madogoscor Squacco Heron, Lesser Moorhen Endoshont Swamp/ June
Shailesh Patil and Itai Shanni

DECLARATION

Nature Kenya does not accept any responsibility whatsoever in respect of negligence of any of its staff, volunteers or members organising the outings/trips or for any loss, injury, death or damage to property.

botanical expressions... plants thro' art

A Botanic Art Exhibition at the National Museums of Kenya from 29 June to 27 August 2002 to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the East Africa Herbarium

A few catalogues of artwork on sale are available free for upcountry members. If you are interested please phone or email at office@naturekenya.org, availability on a first come, first served basis



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Dreams & Wishes

You DREAM of growing your own vegetables and WISH it was true? Let me make your DREAM come true. With organic & companion planting, herbs & flowers, sustainable and enjoyable.
Call Grete Davey on 0150-22283, email kikoken@africanline.ca.ke
We can meet and make a plan.

TREES for the FUTURE,
TREES for YOU, your CHILDREN & GRANDCHILDREN,
TREES for the ENVIRONMENT,
CELEBRATE every OCCASION by planting a TREE.

Call 0150-22283 or email kikaken@africanline.ca.ke
Make a date to see the selection of TREES in the nursery & enjoy a cup of tea.
Welcome. Peter & Grete Davey.

DO YOU ENJOY BIRDS?

Come and spend a couple of hours with Peter Davey, Ornithologist & photographer, in his bird filled garden. Gain knowledge on birds and photography. Bring your family, visitors and friends for tea or salad lunch. Contacts are 0150-22283, email kikaken@africanline.ca.ke
Welcome.

RENEWALS

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Migros, has recently committed to source palm oil from suppliers that do not contribute to forest loss. Other corporate users need to do the same, otherwise, along with the general public, they may unwittingly be supporting forest clearance in Sumatra and elsewhere.

Financial institutions continue to fund the expansion of the oil palm sector and often the most costly phase of plantation establishment - land clearance. Few institutions seem to guard against financing tropical deforestation, even though their customers and shareholders might reasonably expect them to do so. However, there are some encouraging signs. Three of the top four banks in the Netherlands - ABN AMRO Bank, Rabobank and Fortis Bank - are to stop, or substantially restrict, the financing of oil palm development involving forest clearance. In Sumatra, the Commonwealth Development Corporation, which has recently taken over management of a large plantation, appears to be committed to conserving areas of natural forest within its concession and supporting conservation efforts in adjacent natural forests. Could the tide be turning?

Pulp and paper

Following selective logging, Indonesia's palm oil corporate groups apply for land-use to be changed to conversion forest, for plantation development, with the residual timber being used as pulp-fibre. Over the last 10 years, more than US\$15 billion has been invested internationally in the Indonesian pulp and paper industry. But this industry is responsible for seriously damaging Sumatran forests, through clearance for pulpwood and the establishment of pulpwood plantations. It is also accused of being linked to high levels of illegal logging. Currently, most of the wood consumed by the pulp industry comes from natural forests.

The world's two largest pulp mills are sited in Riau Province, Sumatra. The Asia Pulp and Paper (APP) group's Indah Kiat mill and the APRIL group's Riau Andalan mill have production capacities of 1.8 and 2.0 million tonnes. In 2000 Indah Kiat sourced approximately 75% of its logs from clear-cutting natural forests, and their operations have accounted for 287,000 ha of deforestation over the last 10 years.

Recently, APP and APRIL announced plans to source all of their raw materials from sustainably managed pulpwood plantations, by 2007 and 2009, respectively. To meet these targets, the two producers intend to clear a combined area of 440,000 ha of natural forest above and beyond the large areas that each has already cleared at its existing pulpwood plantation sites. This threatens to undermine the Indonesian Government's 1998 moratorium on natural forest conversion. Furthermore, APP and APRIL are two of Indonesia's largest corporate debtors, owing a combined total of US\$15 billion, and these debts may restrict further investments in sustainably managed plantations. The only option, other than continuing massive forest loss, is a major scaling back of the industry until plantations come on line or importing wood at substantially higher costs than they have paid thus far.

Major financial institutions heavily involved in financing the pulp industry over the last 10 years include Barclays Bank, Morgan Stanley Dean Witter, Credit Suisse, First Boston, GoldmanSachs, Franklin Templeton, Merrill Lynch, Bank of America, Deutsche Bank, National Westminster Bank, Legal and General, Royal Bank of Scotland, and ABN Amro. I have banked with one of these since my childhood, and have modest savings with another. My heart sank when I recently learnt of my personal investment in forest destruction.

Signs of Hope

With the recent change of government in Indonesia came the appointment of more conservation-minded officials to senior positions in the Ministry of Forestry. This, combined with continued pressure from the NGO and donor community, gives cause for some optimism. The government has signalled several important intentions. These are: to tackle illegal logging, especially those loggers operating in national parks, and close illegal saw mills; to place a moratorium on all natural forest conversion until a National Forest Programme is agreed; and to downsize and restructure the wood-based industry. The Ministry has passed a decree establishing a moratorium on any new allocation of forest land for conversion, and has said that from 2003 onwards it will not allow any new

clearance, even if land conversion has previously been approved. Significantly, the Ministry appears unwilling to grant any new forest land for supplying pulp fibre or land for plantations for APP's pulp mill in Riau. But politics and pressure from vested interests could overrule these good intentions.

The plantation industry, with advice from the conservation community, should develop 'best practice' guidelines for the establishment and management of plantations as a step towards environmental responsibility. These should include commitments not to clear natural forest; careful management and safeguarding of remnant forest patches - including those along watercourses - within existing concessions; adherence to ASEAN's policy against land-clearance through burning; and the prohibition of hunting within concessions. Owners of plantations adjacent to protected or important areas of natural forest should be expected to assist with any strategy to protect those areas.

BirdLife's work

BirdLife is addressing the issue of forest loss in Sumatra through two major initiatives. BirdLife is a key member of an NGO consortium that is raising awareness about the loss of tropical forest and biodiversity in Indonesia. The project, funded by the GEF, will focus on journalists and the media, and local government and decision-makers, to build broader and deeper national support for forest conservation efforts.

Secondly, the Important Bird Areas (IBA) project is assessing, and has already identified, many important lowland forest areas in Sumatra. Partnerships are being developed with local NGOs to establish Site Support Groups (SSGs) around priority forest areas. These SSGs will review current land-use, and develop and implement conservation plans.

Acknowledgement

The author acknowledges the important work on the pulp and paper industry in Sumatra by Christopher Barr, Forest Policy Scientist with the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) in Indonesia.