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A New Working Group on Amphibians – The Declining Amphibians Populations Task Force (DAPTF)



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Perhaps only a few people are aware of the mass decline of amphibians (frogs, toads, Caecilians, salamanders and newts), with the extinction of a number of species over the last 50 years. The loss of biodiversity is not a new phenomenon; amphibians are declining as are most, if not all, other groups of life on Earth. However, there are good reasons for thinking that the decline of amphibians is especially significant, based on the fast rate at which it is taking place, equally in disturbed and undisturbed habitats.

In many instances, loss of biodiversity is attributed to adverse human influences acting locally, such as deforestation, draining of wetlands, and pollution. However, amphibian studies from many parts of the world have revealed declines in amphibian populations in protected and apparently pristine habitats, such as national parks and nature reserves, where such local effects could not be implicated. This has led to the suggestion that there may be one or more global factors that are adversely affecting amphibians.

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GRASSROOTS

Voices from communities around Important Biodiversity Areas in East Africa to WSSD

"We urge our Governments to recognise and acknowledge the full potential of local communities and actively involve them in decision-making, co-management and monitoring of biodiversity and its sustainable use"

This was one of the statements directed at the upcoming World Summit for Sustainable Development (WSSD), scheduled for 24 August to 2 September 2002 in Johannesburg, South Africa.

As a contribution to the NGO-Civil Society process towards the WSSD, Nature Kenya (the East Africa Natural History Society) and The Environment Liaison Centre International (ELCI), brought together, at a workshop, members of communities from fourteen local conservation groups living near Important Biodiversity Areas in Kenya and Uganda.

"We urge our Governments, the private sector and the international community to establish flexible resource management schemes that will ensure access to and equitable distribution of benefits accruing from the sustainable use of biological resources."

The workshop deliberated on biodiversity conservation issues as viewed by grassroots communities in

East Africa. The workshop came up with statements they wished to be voiced at the World Summit.

Nature Kenya, Nature Uganda, with other organisations, have been working to urge the Kenya and Uganda Government delegations to present the views of the communities.

photo credit Solomon Ngari



The Community groups are Site Support Groups (SSGs) working with Nature Kenya and Nature Uganda around Important Biodiversity Areas:

Arabuko-Sokoke Forest Guides Association (ASFGA) • Friends of Kinangop Plateau (FoKP) • Kijabe Environment Volunteers (KENVO) • Mukurwe-ini Environment Volunteers (MEVO) • Musambwa Islands Conservation Group (MCG) (Uganda) • Mabamba Bird Guides and Conservation Association (M.B.G. & CA) (Uganda) • South Nandi Biodiversity Conservation Group (SONABIC) • South Lake Conservation Group (SLCG) • Rakai Tourism Development Authority (RTDA) (Uganda)

Resource persons, at the workshop, came from: Nature Kenya • Nature Uganda • Environment Liaison Centre International (ELCI) • Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) • University of Nairobi (UON)

Illustration from *The Safari Star Guide* by Alex and Joy MacKay

'Rainwater Harvesting for a Better Life'

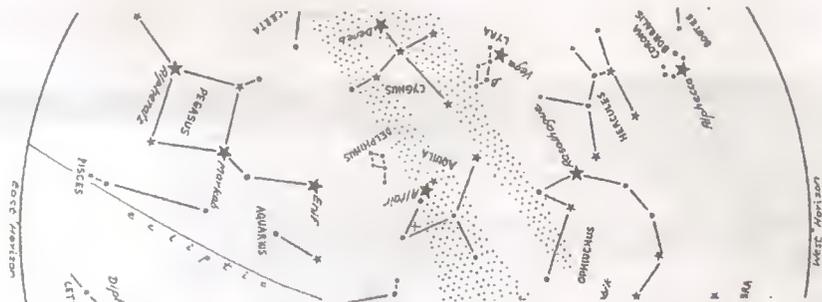
3RD Rainwater Harvesting Exposition
On Wednesday 25 & Thursday 26 October '02: At the National Museums, Nairobi, Louis Leakey Hall, car park; Entrance free

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Possible causes are climatic and atmospheric changes, such as increased UV-radiation and widespread pollution, such as acid rain and diseases.

The declines can be said to result from direct and indirect human activities. It is possible that amphibians, being sentinel species, are responding adversely to these changes in ecosystems because of their intimate contact with the environment (air, water and soil). The highly permeable eggs and skin of amphibians easily admit toxic substance. Acid rain has caused amphibian decline in industrialised countries. Heavy metals, fertiliser compounds, and agricultural chemicals also take a toll. Examples of species, which have disappeared in the last 50 years, include the leopard frog *Rana fisheri*, Costa Rica Golden toad *Bufo periglenes*, Australia Gastric-brooding frog *Rheobatrachus silus* and Australian mountain mist frog *Litoria nyakalensis* among others.

In 1991 the Species Survival Commission (SSC) of the World Conservation Union (IUCN) established a Declining Amphibian Task Force (DAPTF), to monitor amphibian populations worldwide. The objective of the group is to collect geographical data on amphibian decline and their causes and to submit it to the DAPTF office at the Open University in Milton Keynes, UK, for compilation. DAPTF produces a bimonthly newsletter *Froglog*. The Task Force operates through a network of Regional Working Groups comprising of volunteers. Presently there are 90 working groups including 8 from Africa, with the Kenyan group being the latest addition. The Kenyan Working Group was established in May 2002 and has recruited 10 volunteers. The Group is seeking affiliation to Nature Kenya, as a committee.



EVENING SKY

By Alex and Ian MacKay and Fleur Ng'weno

The evening sky in September is brilliant. Go outside on an evening when there are few or no clouds. On a dark, clear night you can see the Milky Way, a ribbon of light made up of millions of stars, stretching from the northeast to the southwest. Try looking at the Milky Way through binoculars!

The names of the stars, constellations and planets used in this column come from the ancient Greek, Latin and Arabic, and are the names generally used in English. The information below will be most accurate in the early evening (7:00 - 9:00 p.m.).

September Stars

Overhead is the constellation AQUILA, the Eagle. Its bright star Altair is flanked by two smaller stars. Below Aquila in the east is the beautiful little constellation DELPHINUS, a small group of stars like a leaping dolphin.

The brightest star in the northern part of the sky is Vega. It is about halfway between the horizon and overhead. CYGNUS the swan is flying to the right of it. Look for the three bright stars that make up the swan's tail and wings, and its long neck stretching into the sky.

In the north-east, the Great Square of PEGASUS, the flying horse, is coming up. This is a big constellation, with four stars marking the corners of a large square. The Scorpion and the Archer are beginning to go down towards the west.

Planets, September 2002

Venus, a brilliant light in the western sky, is beginning to get lower each evening. Jupiter and Saturn are in the eastern sky in the morning before dawn.

Moon, September 2002

7 Sept. New moon · 13 Sept. First quarter (overhead at sunset) · 21 Sept. Full moon · 29 Sept. Last quarter (rises at midnight)

A revived African Convention on the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources in the new African Union

The African Convention on Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources is one of the older environmental conventions, dating back to the early days of the Organisation of African Unity. It was adopted in Algiers in 1968, and Kenya became a party on 9 October 1969. However, over all those years it has not been very effective.

Now, as the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) becomes the African Union (AU), the African Convention has taken on new significance. During 2001, the African Convention on Nature and Natural Resources was under revision through a number of high-level regional meetings. BirdLife, through the Council of the African Partnership (CAP), the BirdLife Secretariat and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), have all contributed via IUCN's Environmental Law Centre and their senior counsel, Francoise Burhenne.

At the invitation of the African Union, Nature Kenya's Executive Director, Paul Matiku, represented CAP at the key UNEP consultation in Nairobi in January 2002. Thanks to Matiku's interventions a number of BirdLife's proposed revisions were added. These notably include the listing of threatened species as conservation targets.

The revised Convention now better reflects modern conservation thinking. To make it an effective piece of international law, the African Union needs to provide it with a secretariat and the member states need to implement its provisions in their domestic legislation.

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. **15 September**. The members decide where to go. Bring lunch

TREE WALK

Guided Tree Walks in the Arboretum on the last Monday, i.e. **30 September 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. **7 September, 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. **21 September, 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. **7 & 21 September, at 9:00 a.m.** Meet at the stairs leading to the Restaurant at the Racecourse.

SEPTEMBER DIARY

Sat 7	ASF Birdwalks & NRF walk
Mon 9	Talk on Ostrich
Sun 15	Sunday Birdwatch/ outing to North Kinangop
Wed 18	KMS talk on Seasonal Wetlands
Sat 21	FFJ Birdwalk & NRF walk & Solar Energy Day
Mon 30	Tree Walk

Birdwalks every Wednesday Morning
Bird ringing every Thursday Morning

Editor, **Catherine Ngarachu**

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.

Bird Hotline 3749957

**African Marsh Harrier, Sukari Ranch/
Aug Nature Kenya Sunday Birdwalk**

**Fan-tailed Raven, Loresho, Nairobi/
Aug Bernd de Bruijn**

**Rufous-bellied Heron, Masai Mara/ Aug
Shailesh Patel, Anne Powys**

**Golden-tailed Woodpecker, Mbagathi
Ridge, Karen/ July
Wednesday Morning Birdwalk**

CLASSIFIEDS

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PLANT INDIGENOUS!

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- Visit the nursery for individual advice or trees can be delivered to Nairobi

Contact: Carole Hemmings

0151 47332

hemmings@africaonline.co.ke

Malindi Camp and Cottage



Budget Lodgings in Idyllic Surroundings Sabaki River Estuary, Kenya Coast

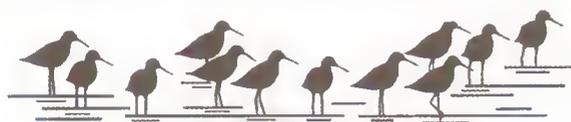
Five miles north of Malindi lies the Sabaki River; the second largest in Kenya. The site is renowned for its many beautiful birds--Madagascar Pratincole, Malindi Pipit, Carmine Bee-eater, Zanzibar Red Bishop, Fish Eagle, flamingoes and thousands of migratory waders, gulls and terns. This diverse landscape of tall dunes, delta wetlands, lily-covered hippo ponds and Giriama Tribe farms offer infinite hikes and photo opportunities. Malindi Camp and Cottage overlooks the Sabaki Estuary. The two large rooms have private shower and flush toilet and are US \$15.00 for single, US \$20.00 for double. The campsite is US \$5.00 per night per person. Meals are available.

For Reservations Contact: Mr. Rodgers Karabu, PO Box 5289
Malindi, Kenya, East Africa

Email: rodgers@malindi.africaonline.com

Phone: International: 00254 722 797 213--In Kenya: 0722 797213

For more information see: www.malindicampandcottage.com



TALKS & VIDEOS

COMMUNAL NESTING OF THE OSTRICH *A molecular genetic analysis*

By Charles Nguli Kimwele
ckimwele@uonbi.ac.ke

Lecturer, Department of Animal
Physiology, Faculty of Veterinary
Medicine, University of Nairobi



The ostrich, *Struthio camelus*, has a unique communal nesting system; up to 18 hens may lay in a communal nest, but only one female, the major female, together with the territory holding male, provides parental care from incubation to the independence of the chicks.

The major female is the one that initiates laying in a particular nest. What is remarkable about the system is that even though the minor females contribute nothing but their eggs and are scrounging the parental investment of the major female, she is very tolerant of them coming to her nest and makes no attempt to prevent them laying in the nest.

Are ostriches just altruistic or is there a functional significance (do they derive a biological benefit) to this behaviour?

Dr. Kimwele uses current molecular DNA techniques to examine this system.

Monday 9 September '02,

**5:30 p.m. Louis Leakey HALL,
National Museums of Kenya, Nairobi,
Refreshments prior & Town drop off**
Ostrich illustration by June Dirks

HAPPENINGS

Kenya Museum Society talk

**Life in Fast-Forward: The secrets of
seasonal wetlands** - By Fleur Ng'weno
Wednesday 18 September 02, 6:30 p.m.
at the National Museum, Nairobi, Louis
Leakey Hall - 200/- at the door

Gardening and Compost making Organised by the Friends of Nairobi Arboretum (FONA)

Fri 20 Sept '02, 9:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.
A one-day course that covers basic
landscaping, hedge pruning, plant
propagation, soil aeration, colour wheels,
tree trimming and balance.

Participants will be provided with
writing and reading material (English and
Kiswahili), and a certificate of
participation is awarded.

Cost: 600/- including lunch -
register at the Nature Kenya front
office

Solar Energy Day

Saturday 21 September '02 at the
Nairobi Arboretum
An all day exhibition on the latest in
solar energy equipment: Entrance free

IN THE HOUSE

New EANHS Chairman Dr Ian Gordon



We welcome Dr Ian Gordon, as the new
Chair of the East Africa Natural History
Society, Executive Committee. His skills
and experience in conservation are an
asset Nature Kenya.

Ian thought up the award-winning
Kipepeo Project and directed the
Arabuko Sokoke Forest Management
Team for many years, working at
Arabuko-Sokoke Forest. He is now in
Nairobi, working as the Head of the
Environmental Health Division at ICIPE.

FIELD TRIPS

North Coast Trip

Tsavo, Arabuko Sokoke Forest, Mida
Creek, Sabaki River
Sunday 13 - Sunday 20 October '02

Sun 13/ Mon 14 Tsavo East
(Patterson's Camp) Meet at the
National Museums, Nairobi car park on
Sunday at 7:10 for 7:30 a.m. departure.
Drive to Tsavo; lunch on arrival at
Patterson's; game drives and birdwalks
around camp Full board (fb) Patterson's
(KWS Smart Cards needed for Tsavo)

Tue 15 Malindi (Malindi Marine Park
bandas) Drive through Tsavo East to
Malindi Marine Park; Self catering (sc)
MMP

Wed 16/ Thu 17/ Fri 18
Spend time at Arabuko Sokoke Forest,
visit the Visitor Centre, the tree house
and birdwatch using one of the many
trails; drive to Sabaki River Estuary for
an early morning birdwalk (depends on
tides), if possible drive up the road
towards Garsen, birding on the Tana;
visit Mida Creek (depending on the
tides); visit Kipepeo project; optional
snorkling at the Malindi Marine Park; sc
MMP

Sat 19 Taita Discovery Centre
Early departure for TDC; depending on
time, fb TDC

Sun 20 Early morning birdwalk; drive
back to Nairobi

*Trip Cost per person, with a minimum of
12 persons 12,000/- Inclusive of
accommodation (* fb full board or sc self
catering)/ activities as listed/ meals as
indicated*
Minibus Transport 8,500/- per person

*Not inclusive of Park fees, Snorkling
fees or personal expenses.*

Book by 20 September

****** Possession of travel insurance
must be shown before trip date**