

nature net

The Nature Kenya Newsletter

www.naturekenya.org

August 03



photo credit P. Davey

World bird watch

4 & 5
October 03



POPULAR BIRDS OF KENYA

We challenge birdwatchers around the country to enter the biggest birdwatching event and see the highest number of birds! It is exhaustive, competitive and fun. It is also very useful in the collection of data on bird species occurrence and distribution. Plan to participate!

To enter, request a Team Entry Form, which should be returned to the office by 5 September. So rush! and confirm your place at this **WORLD BIRDWATCH!**

Team Coordinator:
Anshul Bhalla (Jonty)
Tel: (20) 3749957 / 3746090
office@naturekenya.org

World Birdwatch T-Shirts

Illustrating the bright yellow, red-eyed Black-headed Weaver, this cotton t-shirt will make a wonderful gift and make the perfect attire for the World Birdwatch weekend!

Available in August 03!



Nakuru Expedition

Fri 18 - Sun 20 October '03

Places to be visited include Lake Nakuru National Park, Hyrax Hill, Menengai Crater and Bahati Forest.

Organised by the Youth Committee

For more details, watch this space!

TALKS & VIDEOS

The Great Ruaha River

*an African Environmental
Film Foundation production*

How water is used today will determine the very survival of people in the future.

The Great Ruaha River in Tanzania is a classic example of the pressures already being exerted on Africa's river systems. This film shows how an entire ecosystem can be threatened by development projects. What seems to be beneficial in the short term can turn out to be disastrous in the long term. Such is the case along the Great Ruoho River.

As a positive, awareness building initiative, the Africon Environmental Film Foundation, with cooperation from the Tanzania National Parks, recorded events over three years to produce this comprehensive documentary (60 minutes).

Mon 11 August '03,
5:30 p.m. Louis Leakey Hall,
National Museums, Nairobi

FIELD TRIPS

**Hike up
Mt Ologesailie**
Sat 23 August 03

Meet at 6:30 a.m. at the National Museum, Nairobi, car park, to drive to the Ologesailie Prehistoric site, along Magadi Rd.

Bring a picnic lunch, hat and water. Book at the Nature Kenya office with 200/- by Tuesday 19 Aug 03.

Ngong Hills Forest Reserve

Saving the Ngong Hills
Mbaabu Mathiu

The range of hills that make up the Ngong Hills Forest Reserve are of outstanding beauty and botanical interest. The Ngong Hills are also an important water catchment area with more than five streams, forming the southern-most headwaters of the Athi River. Situated about 25kms south west of Nairobi the Reserve was gazetted in 1981, consisting of 3077 hectares and is about 20km long. But despite this status, the Reserve is vulnerable.

The area around the Ngong Hills is increasingly being subdivided and the settlement boundaries are being pushed higher up the slopes. The previous government's promise to excise part of it for the landless has fueled further settlement by 'squatters' hoping to get free land. This trend needs to be contained.

As a result of overexploitation, the montane forest of evergreen trees such as pencil cedar and brown olive and the fringing bush land consisting of *Acoanthera schimperi* and *Carisa edulis*, has been reduced to grass and shrubs of secondary bush land with scattered patches of indigenous trees on the eastern side. The vegetation, which had provided food and cover for Klipspringer, Chondler's Mountain Reedbuck, greater Kudu, buffalo, eland, bushbuck, waterbuck, leopards, spotted hyenas and occasional lions (Morgan 1967) now only hosts a few buffalo, waterbuck and bushbuck. But there remains significant species of reptiles and birds.

Most of the springs have become seasonal due to high water abstraction, and livestock further degrade the ecosystem. But, the most serious threat is the looming excision of a 367m wide strip of the Reserve from Kibiko to Corner Baridi (more than 20km) for settlement, which would significantly reduce the size of the Reserve.

The reserve is jointly managed by the Kenya Wildlife Service and Forest Department through a Memorandum of Understanding signed in 1991. Local community groups such as Friends of Ngong Hills and the Centre for Environmental Stewardship, a local NGO, are working to start reforestation, protection of the springs and ecotourism initiatives.

If you would like to get involved or receive more information on the Friends of Ngong Hills please contact Dr. Mbaabu Mathiu at mmbaabu@uonbi.ac.ke



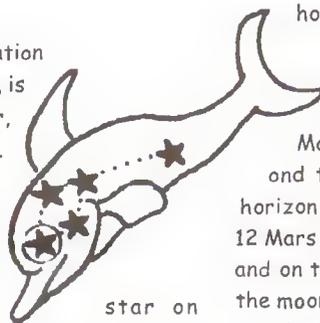
EVENING SKY

By Ian Mackay and Fleur Ng'weno

August Sky, from *The Safari Star Guide* by Alex and Joy MacKay

August Stars

The charming constellation Delphinus, the dolphin, is easy to see on a clear, dark evening in August. Look overhead, a little to the east, to find the bright star Altair. Altair is flanked by a smaller star on each side. Below Altair, about halfway up the eastern sky, is a small, neat group of five stars. They form the shape of a leaping dolphin.



hour or two after sunset.

You can use the full moon to locate Mars: on August 10 and 11, Mars is some way below the moon, and to the left. Look low over the horizon from about 8:30 p.m. On August 12 Mars is just below the rising full moon, and on the 13th it is as near as it gets to the moon this month. For the rest of the month Mars continues to climb the ecliptic (the path traveled by the moon and planets).

Planets, August 2003

Mars, the 'red planet', is at its closest approach to Earth on August 27. (The last time it was this close may have been some 60,000 years ago!) Here in Kenya we are well placed for an excellent view.

Mars looks like a bright, reddish star, but it does not twinkle like a star. In early August 2003, Mars rises in the east on

The small planet Mercury climbs steadily above the sunset until the middle of August, and then starts going down, to disappear early in September. (Always look in the early evening to see Mercury.)

Moon, August 2003

5 August first quarter (overhead at sunset); 12 August full moon; 20 August last quarter (rises at midnight), 27 August new moon.

Volunteers for the next Know Kenya Course

A meeting of volunteers will be on **18th August at 10.00 a.m** in Kenya Museum Society office.

If you have a little time to spare please join KMS at this meeting and give your ideas. Your thoughts on any aspect of the course is highly valued.

KMS info@KenyaMuseumSociety.org

CLASSIFIEDS

Nairobi Music Society Concert

Organ and Piano Recital
Saturday August 30
at 5:00 p.m.,
All Saints Cathedral

Duncan Wambugu, Kenyatta University, Atigala Luvai, and Gacigi Kung'u, Kenya Conservatoire of Music, performing Bach, Franck, Schubert, Mendelssohn...
Admission: 200/- students, 50/-

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REGULAR ACTIVITIES

BIRD RINGING

Meet at the Museums' 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. **17 August**. The members decide where to go. Bring lunch

TREE WALK

Guided Tree Walks in the Arboretum on the second Saturday and last Monday, i.e. **9 & 25 August from 9:30 a.m.** Meet at the Arboretum gate. 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 Sokoke Forest Guides Association is on the first Saturday of each month i.e. **2 August, at 6:30 a.m.** from the Visitor Centre, Gede. Cost 100/- per person. KWS fees may now apply (100/- Citizens, 500/- Residents)

FFJ Bird Walk (Coast)

Friends of Fort Jesus birdwalks are held the third Saturday of each month, i.e. **16 August** Please call Marlene Reid on (041) 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. **2 & 16 August, at 9:00 a.m.** Meet at the stairs leading to the Restaurant at the Racecourse.

Lake Victoria Sunset Birders (Kisumu)

The Lake Victoria Sunset Birders are a Nature Kenya Site Support Group and organise bird walks at sites in and around Kisumu every Friday of the month. For further details call 035 42952 or email wck@vicweb.net

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

Black-collared Barbet & Orange-winged Pytilia Maweni Beach Cottages, near Kwale Junction/ May Ben Mugambi

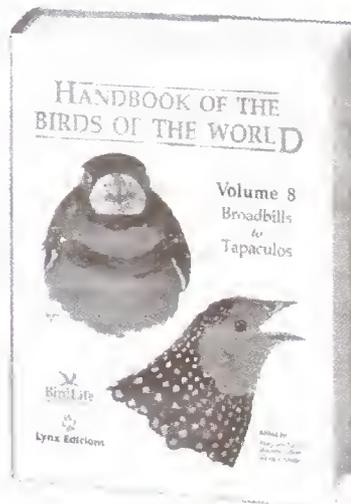
Senegal Plover, Red-necked Falcon, Plain Nightjar & Madagascar Pratincole Sabaki River mouth/ May Joseph Kariuki, Nairobi Ringing Group & Calin Jackson

Mammal sighted

A family of **Dwarf Mongoose** at Water Point, Oltepesi / June Nature Kenya Field Trip

TALKING SHOP

Handbook of the Birds of the World
Volume 8 (*Broadbills to Tapaculos*) The first volume covering the passerines



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AUGUST DIARY

Sat 2	ASF Birdwalks & NRF walk
Sat 9	Tree Walk
Mon 11	Great Ruaha River Video
Sat 16	NRF walk
Sun 17	Sunday Birdwalk
Sat 23	Olorgesailie Climb
Mon 25	Tree Walk

Birdwalks every Wednesday Morning
Bird ringing every Thursday Morning

Editor, Catherine Ngarachu

NATURALISTS CORNER

Photo credit Andrew Kamiti



Camel Spider

Dino Martins
dinom@elci.org

Stalking the silent sands of Kenya's drylands is a nocturnal creature whose appearance often terrifies those who are unfamiliar with it. This is the lot of the Camel Spider, or Solifuge, as they are also known. It always elicits awe and fear when encountered. Camel Spiders are large, generally more than ten cm long, with lots of hairy, sand-coloured legs. Unlike the eight-legged spiders, Camel Spider legs are usually ten in number, though often some may have been lost in nocturnal feeding forays whilst tackling prey or evading predators.

The overall colour of the Camel Spider is a sandy-brown, with pale hints of grey. The fangs, borne at the front end of the head, are often darker, almost red, and tipped in black. The beady, alert black eyes, sit squarely on the flat top of the creature's head. What does a creature so armed and attired do? Other than scurrying into campsites, Camel Spiders play an important role in the drylands as ruthless predators of a range of creatures.

Their fierce fangs, however, contain no venom, and they simply hunt down and subdue their prey using their sheer strength and speed. Using the elongate first pair of legs as sensors, they move lithely over the ground, picking up signals. Typical prey includes scorpions, spiders, mice and lizards. Therefore, they are helpful in controlling numbers of scorpions, as they are voracious hunters. While they can deliver a strong bite, Camel Spiders are otherwise totally harmless to humans, and should not be persecuted. Next time you're out camping in the bush, watch the ground at night for an amazing Camel Spider, they often come near lights to stalk prey.

GRASSROOTS

Launch of the Mida Bird Hide & Mangrove Walkway

Jacqui Kaye

As of mid July 03 visitors to the Watamu area will be able to enjoy the open stretches of Mida Creek from a new angle. The launch of the Mida Bird Hide and Mangrove-walkway offers unique views of the mangroves at canopy level.

The mangrove story starts at the visitor centre banda, from which, following the fishermen's path and interpretation boards, you get to the suspended mangrove walkway. The boards, illustrated in pyrography on wood, highlight features of particular interest in the changing habitat. The 260m suspended walkway leads to the bird hide, where visitors can spot thousands of feeding birds during peak season and near high tide. Identification boards illustrate the more common wading birds.

The walkway was made possible by A Rocha Kenya, a local Christian conservation organisation, and the local community. Funding was received from the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Small Grants Programme and KWS kindly allowed confiscated "muhuhu" from the forest to be used for the planks.



Donations and proceeds from walkway ticket sales will go directly back to the local communities and conservation via the ASSETS fund for secondary school children. Tickets are staggered for different income brackets starting at Ksh 10 for schools on the ASSETS programme, up to Ksh 80.

To get to the Mida Bird Hide and Mangrove-walkway, drive south from Gede on the Malindi-Mombasa road. After a few kilometres, look for the signpost on the left (opposite the Arabuko-Sokoke Forest main gate). Follow the narrow track to the western shore of Mida Creek.

ASSETS (Arabuko-Sokoke Schools and Eco-Tourism Scheme) is an eco-bursary

fund which benefits the communities living around Arabuko-Sokoke Forest and Mida Creek. Funds from eco-tourism go back to the community through bursaries for secondary school children who otherwise would not be able to afford it. By relieving the burden of school fees the pressure on parents to exploit the environment is reduced. By distributing the benefits of eco-tourism ASSETS is gaining the local community support for the conservation of the forest and creek. For more information and an on-line donation form, log on to www.assets-kenya.org. Limited number of brochures are also available from the Nature Kenya front office.