

Commemorating World Wetlands Day

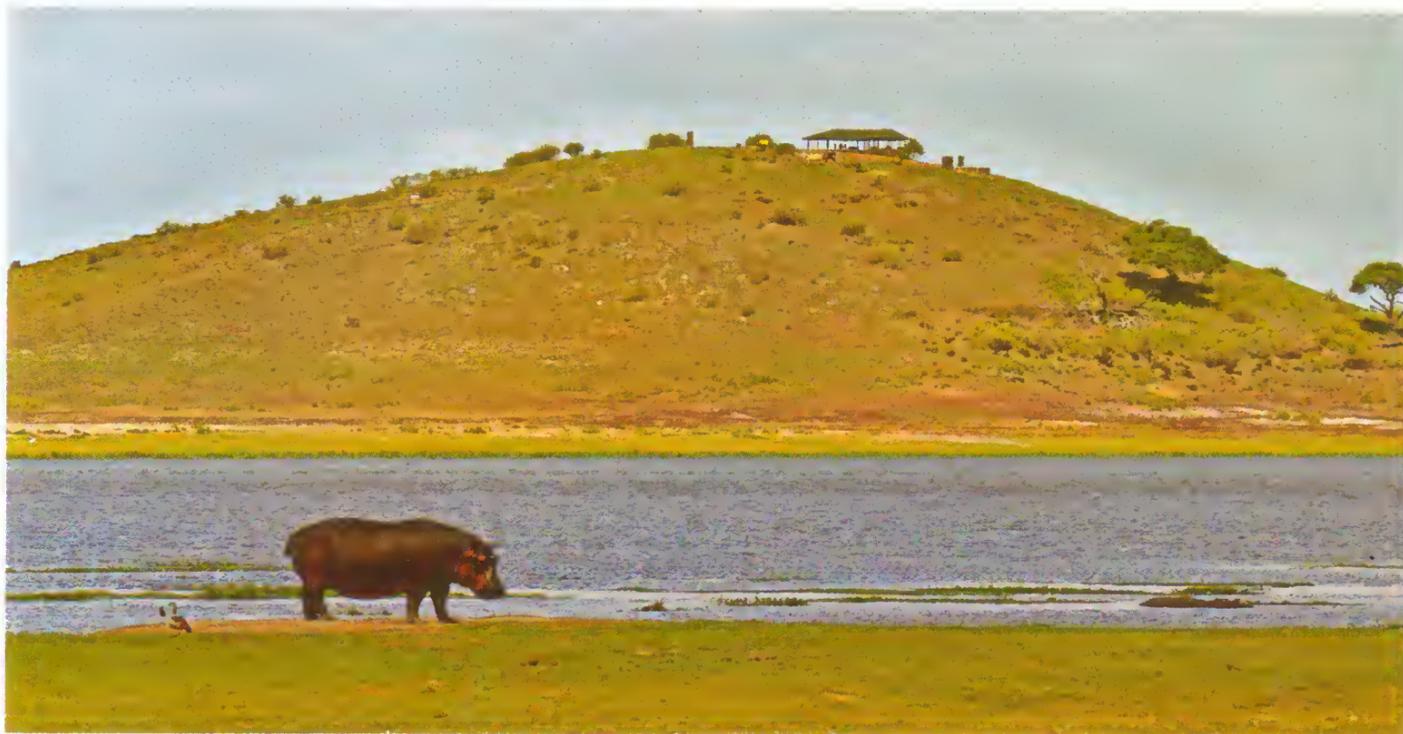


PHOTO BY PETER USHER

A wetland at Amboseli National Park. Besides providing essential services such as water, food and energy, wetlands also offer significant opportunities for tourism.

BY JOHN KIPTUM, SERAH MUNGUTI AND GEORGE ODERA

Wetlands serve a broad range of functions. They play an important role as filters for pollutants arising from their catchment. They provide ecosystem services such as water, papyrus products, fisheries, and recreation. Local communities rely on wetlands for products including firewood, thatch grass and fodder for their livestock. They are very important carbon sinks that contribute to global climate regulation.

These functions have a key contribution in achievement of the government's Big Four agenda especially on promoting expansion of the manufacturing sector, affordable housing and achieving food security.

However, wetlands are also very attractive to both large and small-scale farmers for crop production. Although it is an important ecosystem service, cultivated food production and other development activities within wetlands directly compete with other services. This sometimes leads to conflicts between different stakeholders.

Nature Kenya applauds the

government's efforts in the recent past to reclaim wetlands against encroachment, together with legal protection of some wetlands such as Lake Ol'Bolossat.

WETLANDS AND CLIMATE CHANGE

As we commemorate the World Wetlands Day 2019 whose theme is wetlands and climate change it is worth noting that wetlands play a critical role in enabling communities to mitigate and build resilience against the impacts of climate change. At the same time, wetlands are fragile ecosystems which are highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change.

Wetland ecosystems can be severely impacted or even destroyed by drought, but also provide water storage and often groundwater recharge capacity which can contribute to drought management. When changing rain patterns bring heavy rainfall, wetlands may be negatively impacted by increase in contaminated runoff, but can also provide flood storage and filter at least some pollutants from runoff reaching other waters. Wetland habitat can be altered by hydrological changes. Their

biodiversity richness may shift following temperature alterations, but they can also provide migration pathways and refuge for some species.

Wetlands sequester significant amounts of carbon as compared to

other ecosystems. Findings from an ecosystem services assessment for the Yala Swamp conducted in 2015 indicated that soil and vegetation carbon pools were greatest in natural and semi-natural papyrus-dominated habitats and lowest in the drained farmed areas. The study was done by Nature Kenya and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

NATURE KENYA WORK IN WETLAND CONSERVATION

Nature Kenya has supported a number of wetland conservation interventions. These are geared towards supporting ecosystem and community resilience to climate change. In Tana River Delta and Yala Swamp, Nature Kenya has supported the formulation of landscape level land use plans, informed by strategic environmental assessment.

Currently Nature Kenya is implementing a project funded by the Darwin Initiative. The project's primary goal is to catalyze the

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implementation of the Tana Delta land use plan in Lamu and Tana River counties through the establishment of multiple use Community Conservation Areas (CCA).

Traditional land uses which include subsistence crop farming, livestock and fishing will continue within the CCAs. Developments that are recommended within the Tana Delta land use plan will also be promoted. The CCAs will be managed by local communities with support from the County Governments of Tana River and Lamu and national government agencies.

There are early successes for the project. Communities have established a demonstration farm for Climate Smart Agriculture where they farm vegetables in two greenhouses. This demonstration site has become a learning site that has drawn the attention of the wider community, leaders at the national and county levels, business enterprises and NGOs. Two fishponds in Ozi Village were assessed and rehabilitated in preparation for stocking. Villagers harvested close to 1,000 litres of honey from 369 beehives (with 100 supported by the project), which has earned them Ksh.567,735. Pastoralists were supported to purchase 94 goats using a business model of fattening and selling. In less than two months, one beneficiary community (Hurara Village) reported the sale of nine goats for Ksh.27,800, earning a net profit of Ksh.9,700/-. The community has since opened a new butchery to slaughter and sell the meat, with the support of health and veterinary departments, with the aim of value addition, improving their marketing strategy and increasing profit prospects. A total of 500 energy saving stoves were installed in thirteen villages. A spot assessment indicated that these stoves save the communities 39% of the time spent cooking, and enabled a 44% reduction in wood fuel use.

The Tana Delta is also benefiting from a Tana River catchment restoration project in Mt. Kenya. This project supports communities to carry out forest rehabilitation and restoration through partnering with the private sector, with support from Darwin Initiative and the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF). The Tana River

watershed, with its source in Mt. Kenya Forest, provides drinking water to over two million people.

In Yala Swamp, Nature Kenya in 2014-2018 implemented a program whose goal was to secure the future of the swamp, recognizing both development and conservation needs. The Yala Swamp land use plan was formulated, informed by a strategic environmental assessment. Some 8,400 ha of community conserved areas (CCAs) were identified within the swamp with a committee established to manage, guided by a draft management plan. The program was supported by the Darwin Initiative, MacArthur Foundation and USAID-PREPARED.

Within the CCA, 320 ha of degraded areas were planted with papyrus. Local farmers were supported to plant 186,293 indigenous tree seedlings in the lower River Yala riparian area and on farms. This has led to increased tree cover and rehabilitation of 175.41 ha, upstream of the Yala Swamp.

The wellbeing of Yala Swamp communities has also improved. Eleven fish ponds were established and 156 households benefited from the harvest of at least 9.2 tons of fish. Households made up of 448 individuals earned a total of Ksh.224,950 from sale of high value papyrus products by the end of 2018. Energy saving stoves were installed in 2,000 households and 177 schools; this has seen consumption of wood fuel in households and schools reduce by 50%. Other initiatives include training of 113 community tour guides who currently engage in eco-tourism as a source of livelihood, and carry out biodiversity monitoring within the swamp.

The main legacy of the program was the establishment of Yala Ecosystem Site Support Group, made up of 55 community-based organizations. The Site Support Group coordinates conservation work in Yala Swamp even after the program came to an end. For instance, on February 2nd the group will coordinate Siaya County level World Wetlands Day Celebrations with key activities aimed at creating awareness on the importance of the swamp in climate change adaptation and mitigation. 🌿

Putting boots and more on the ground in Arabuko-Sokoke



Since its relaunch in 2016, Friends of Arabuko-Sokoke Forest, a Committee of Nature Kenya, has been putting 'boots on the ground' to support Kenya Forest Service and Kenya Wildlife Service to protect this treasured forest. This was further boosted when in 2017 FoASF received funding from the Minara and Oak foundations to train and employ 10 community scouts and carry out daily patrols to help heighten the security of the forest.

Through these patrols the Friends of Arabuko-Sokoke's profile has been greatly increased and they are seen as one of the key protectors of the forest. Arrests have been made and snares and logs confiscated.

Apart from this vital work, Friends of Arabuko-Sokoke continue to create awareness of the forest amongst local and international communities and to support the local farming communities. Recently, with the assistance of African Fund for Endangered Wildlife (AFEW) FoASF has rented land for 17 local women and one man to plant cassava. AFEW also provided a solar drier and processor to help following the harvesting of the crop.

Recognising that the future of the forest is in the hands of the youth, FoASF has started a concentrated programme of bringing 2,000 primary school pupils into the forest. This has been made possible with 500,000/- raised from the Kilifi Gold Triathlon and help from AFEW.

Friends of Arabuko-Sokoke Forest promotes the conservation of the forest through participation and was relaunched following a critical threat to the forest from oil and gas exploration surveys. Its more than 200 'friends' are drawn from individuals, people from the local community who are passionate about the conservation and sustainability of the forest, academia and commerce.

Check our website <<https://www.friendsarabukosokoke.org>> or Facebook page for more information. And when next at the coast do visit the Arabuko-Sokoke Forest!

For updates visit
www.naturekenya.org

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HELP MONITOR MAMMALS IN KENYA

The **Mammals Atlas for Kenya (MAKE)** project gives you a chance to contribute to science. The distribution of different mammal species in Kenya is not well known. Information about the existence of different species in many places in and outside protected areas is scattered in different publications, online databases and personal field notebooks. Hence there is need to consolidate this data into a single database and produce up to date distribution maps for different species of mammals.

To do this, the Mammalogy Section staff and other members of the Mammal Committee of Nature Kenya would like you to assist in the citizen science mapping of the distribution of mammal species in Kenya. You can do this by contributing the following information:

1. List of identified wild mammals of all species in places you visit (in and outside protected areas) while on a game drive or while birding in your village
2. Provide names of the places where you recorded the mammal species
3. Provide GPS coordinates, if you have them, for the places where you recorded the mammals. If you have no GPS go to Google play on your phone and download the Handy GPS (12MB) free location app and install it in your phone for coordinates of places you visit (<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=binaryearth.handygpsfree&hl=en>)
4. If you cannot identify a particular mammal but have a photo, send the photo

For enquiries about MAKE, or on how to send mammal observations, or to get an electronic version of the *Annotated Checklist of the Mammals of Kenya*, kindly contact:

Simon Musila

<surnbirds@gmail.com> or <smusila@museums.or.ke>

Mobile 0727-093737 or 0788-349227

MAKE Project Opportunities: We are looking for volunteers to assist in compiling mammal species information from all protected areas in Kenya managed by Kenya Wildlife Service and Kenya Forest Service, as well as all private and community ranches. Volunteers are also needed to compile mammal species information scattered in existing publications on mammals from Kenya, either from online publications or in library journals and reports. More volunteers are needed to fundraise for the establishment of a mobile based online volunteer mammal sightings reporting tool for MAKE. If you are interested in participating in the MAKE project volunteer opportunities, please contact

Simon Musila at <surnbirds@gmail.com> or phone **0727-093737** or **0788-349227**



Striped Leaf-nosed Bat (top) and African Trident bat (bottom).

Glorious February skies

BY FLEUR NG'WENO

February stars

Look east, with your back to the sunset. Sirius, the brightest star of the night, is high in the southeast. (The sun, seen by day, is of course our brightest star). The second brightest star, Canopus, is to the right of Sirius, low in the southern sky. Still further southwest is the bright star Achernar.

Orion, the Hunter or Warrior of Greek myths, is overhead, to the east (left) of Sirius. Look for three bright stars in a row. To the ancient Greeks, this was Orion's belt. They saw the three fainter stars in a row, at a right angle to his belt, as his sword. Four bright stars represent Orion's shoulders and knees. The star Rigel, blue-green in colour, is one knee, kicking into the sky. The orange star Betelgeuse is one shoulder, on the other side of the 3-star belt.

To the north (left) of Orion, the reddish star Aldebaran is at one end of a cone-shaped group of stars, the Hyades cluster. A larger cluster of stars, further north, is the Pleiades or Seven Sisters. The moon passes past the Pleiades and Aldebaran on Feb 12-13.

With binoculars, you can see the great nebula M42 in Orion's sword, and the glow around the stars of the Seven Sisters and Hyades cluster. In a dark location away from urban lights, you can look for the faint star cluster M41 near

bright Sirius.

Lower in the northern sky, five bright stars form a giant pentagon. This is the constellation of Auriga, the Charioteer. The brightest of the five is the star Capella – which is actually two stars.

Planets, Feb '19

Mars, fading now, is high in the west, setting before midnight. The crescent moon is near Mars on Feb 10. In mid-month, the small but bright planet Mercury rises above the sunset for the rest of the month.

Three bright planets are in the east before dawn: Jupiter is now the highest, brilliant Venus is slowly dropping back, while Saturn rises. Venus and Saturn seem to pass each other on February 17-18. The moon appears very close Saturn on Feb 2; then the moon is near Jupiter on Feb 28, near Saturn on March 1-2, and near Venus on March 3.

Moon, Feb 2019

Feb 4 – new moon. Feb 12 – first quarter. Feb 19 – full moon, closer than usual, so appearing slightly bigger and brighter. Feb 26 – last quarter.

Feb sun

During February, the sun rises and sets later than usual – rising after 6:40 am and setting after 6:50 pm in Nairobi. ☀

WATERBIRD CENSUS



PHOTO BY NORMAN KIBOI

Volunteers participating in the annual waterbird counts at Lake Magadi. The counts were conducted at the Rift Valley lakes and other wetlands within the country in January. The objective of the counts is to monitor changes in waterbird numbers and distribution in representative wetlands across the country. This information is useful in guiding the management of wetlands and the wider environment with benefit eventually reaching the people.

IN THE FIELD

FEBRUARY 2019 AT A GLIMPSE

Feb 2 nd	FoCP Nature Walk
Feb 6 th	Morning Bird Walk
Feb 13 th	Morning Bird Walk
Feb 16 th	FoCP Nature Walk
Feb 17 th	Sunday Bird Watch
Feb 20 th	Morning Bird Walk
Feb 27 th	Morning Bird Walk

Bird ringing every Tuesday morning (check with Ornithology section, National Museums).

Birders Please Note! The Wednesday Morning Birdwalks meet at 8:30 am at the Nairobi National Museum. Transport is on a self-help basis. The group meets in the courtyard of the Nairobi National Museum, past the entrance to the galleries. We normally return at about 12:30 pm.

The Sunday Birdwatch on the **THIRD** Sunday of each month now also meets at 8:30 am, at the same location. It is a day trip; please bring water and lunch.

Mombasa Birdwalks On the 3rd Saturday of each month. For meeting time and place, please contact Taibali Hamzali <thamzali@gmail.com> / 0733-980540; or Doris Schaule <dorischaule@gmail.com> / 0722-277752. Or check Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/FFJmombasa/>

Contact the office for information on other birdwalks in Kakamega, Kisumu, and other sites

Ngong Forest walks - 1st and 3rd Saturday at 9.00 am. Contact Simon 0729-840715



PUBLIC LECTURE

KENYA'S WILDLIFE:

A SUCCESS STORY STILL IN THE MAKING?

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BY DR. DAVID WESTERN

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For details on associated groups such as Youth Committee, Succulenta, and Friends of Nairobi Arboretum, City Park or Arabuko-Sokoke Forest, contact office@naturekenya.org

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