

## Knowledge Sharing: Mara communities visit Lion Guardians



Lion Guardian Kikanai (right) shows Harris Taga from Friends of Maasai Mara how we use radio telemetry to monitor troublesome collared lions at the Eselenkei conservancy in Amboseli. Harris was part of the Maasai Mara team that visited the conservancy while on an exchange visit. PHOTO: J. KISIMIR

By R. Ikachoi and J. Mwacharo

Community exchange visits have always been considered as important strategies that can be applied to promote a practical-based learning approach to some of the best lessons worth replicating. The Lions Guardian model is one such notable approach. This community wildlife conservation initiative encourages "sustainable coexistence" between lions and humans. The model has successfully managed to blend science with Maasai traditional knowledge and cultural practices to drastically reduced incidents of human-wildlife conflict and minimized cases of retaliatory wildlife killings in Amboseli.

Based on this understanding, Nature Kenya, under a BAND Foundation funded project, organized a visit to Amboseli for a community group from Maasai Mara. The eighteen community members were part of a community exchange visit whose aim was to learn more about the Lion Guardians' proven community

conservation model, as well as gather ideas, lessons and strategies for sustainable coexistence with wildlife from communities that the Lion Guardians is working with. The group comprised of opinion leaders and representatives from various conservation organizations involved in the implementation of human wildlife conflict and poison control related projects within the Mara ecosystem.

The methodology applied for this activity was a practical approach that entailed visiting and interacting with locals in community managed ranches, and conducting field visits to get feel of how wildlife conservation is carried out with minimal interference to human activities as a key objective of mitigating human wildlife conflicts.

Like in any other ecosystem where there is direct interaction between human and wildlife, it is expected that there would be conflicting interests as far as utilization of ecosystem services is concerned. In such cases, different

communities residing within these ecosystems devise strategies on how to manage conflicts arising from these interactions.

For the Maasai community living around Amboseli National Park, the key approach they have adopted is preserving indigenous culture which promotes co-existence between humans and wildlife. Most of their communally owned land has been divided into ranches, with grazing patterns. The ranches have further been subdivided into different sections for different uses including grazing and conservancies. The communities, under the guidance of their leaders, have developed grazing plans that guide where the communities can graze their livestock at specified times, ensuring minimal conflict with wildlife.

Problematic lions are collared and 'morans' using skills acquired on GPS use complemented by their traditional knowledge, keep track of them. This enables them to pin-point the location of the lions and guide cattle grazers away from

them. Furthermore, community scouts patrol grazing zones to ensure that cattle herders and wildlife do not cross paths. 'Moreso', a Maasai culture of killing lions as a rite of passage, was turned around with the introduction of the Lion Guardians program. The morans have instead been transformed into guardians of lions.

The community also devised ways of ensuring there is a balance in satisfying the needs of all resource users; for instance, local communities have been mandated to ensure that water points (mainly those fed by pumped water from boreholes) have readily available water at night for use by wildlife so as to minimize conflicts.

It is hoped that the delegation from Maasai Mara will replicate some of the lessons they learned to manage human-wildlife conflict and reduce poisoning incidents. After thoughtful review, the community representatives will develop action plans for implementation of the lessons learned.

Among the long term outcomes expected from the visit are to engage local communities in and around Maasai Mara in implementation of non-poisoning control systems for predators, and creating greater public awareness of the vulture crisis and appreciating the role they play in human and wildlife health.

Nature Kenya is implementing the "Saving the African Vulture" Project in the greater Mara Ecosystem. The project seeks to reduce poison related vulture deaths as a contribution towards the halting and long-term reversal of vulture declines in Africa. The vulture crisis is complex and multi-faceted, but poisoning is by far the most important and urgent threat they face. Stopping vulture poisoning is therefore a top priority to enable their numbers to stabilise and build solid foundations required to effectively address other threats they face. 🦅

## IBA IN FOCUS



### MAASAI MARA NATIONAL RESERVE

The **Maasai Mara** ecosystem is home to approximately twenty-five per cent of Kenya's wildlife. It hosts more than 95 mammal species besides being a recognized Important Bird Area (IBA). Presently, about 70 per cent of this wildlife is living outside the gazetted conservation area - the Maasai Mara National Reserve. Adjacent land owned by local communities form key dispersal and diversity areas.

The Maasai Mara National Reserve is Kenya's most-visited protected area. It is world famous for its high density of herbivores and predators and the spectacular annual migrations of wildebeest. In 1996, the reserve was nominated for designation as a World Heritage Site.

Habitats in the Maasai Mara are varied, including open rolling grassland, riverine forest, Acacia woodland, swamps, non-deciduous thickets, boulder-strewn escarpments, and Acacia, Croton and *Tarchonanthus* scrub.

The Mara's extensive grasslands are a stronghold for the threatened,

migratory corn crane and the near threatened, restricted-range Jackson's widow bird. The woodlands around the reserve are probably the centre of abundance for the threatened, restricted-range grey-crested helmet shrike. The restricted-range rufous-tailed weaver has recently been sighted within the reserve, near the southern border, and may be expanding its range northwards. More than 500 other bird species are known to occur, including 12 species of *Cisticola* and 53 birds of prey. Grassland birds are especially well represented. Large numbers of Palearctic migrants winter in the area, including Caspian plover and white stork.

Friends of Maasai Mara (FoMM) is the Maasai Mara IBA site support group (SSG). Since its formation in 2014, Friends of Maasai Mara has addressed critical environmental and wildlife biodiversity conservation and protection actions meant to create awareness and sustainable conservation among the community, government, and other stakeholders.

## Mainstreaming Biodiversity: A key component to Sustainable Economic Development

By J. Mwacharo

**T**he economic survival of various production sectors, and of the people depending on those sectors for their livelihoods, is intricately connected to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. As such, biodiversity is considered as part of the functioning of the productive sectors. However, over the years we've witnessed the rapid decline of biodiversity. One of the major challenges in preventing this decline has been finding ways of addressing the issue where it matters most; the production sectors that exert the greatest pressure. It is out of this realization that a forum was convened in Nairobi in July to deliberate on mainstreaming biodiversity into sectors of the economy. The forum dubbed the "National Dialogue on Biodiversity Mainstreaming into Sectors of the Economy" was organized by the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources as part of the National Forest Program (NFP). Stakeholders from various sectors of the economy who attended the forum at the Laico Regency Hotel on July 25 were in agreement that biodiversity conservation is a pre-condition for achieving sustainable development. As such, it needed to be integrated into all sectors and across sectors: biodiversity needed to be mainstreamed. Addressing stakeholders during the forum, the Cabinet Secretary, Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources Prof. Judi Wakhungu explained that forests hosted the bulk of biodiversity

in addition to providing water, sequestering carbon, providing a base for renewable energy, hydro generation and supporting other sectors of development. "In spite of the centrality of forests in environmental stability, forest ecosystems are increasingly under threat from the ever growing pressure to meet human needs," noted Prof. Wakhungu. Major threats to Kenyan forests include competition for land due to agricultural expansion, settlement and urban development, excessive extraction of forest products, unsustainable charcoal production and overgrazing. Prof. Wakhungu informed stakeholders that the government was developing a National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) and also the first National Wildlife Conservation Strategy. She added that implementation of the strategies and programmes would require substantial budgetary allocation and called for a creative mix of resources from all stakeholders including public, private sector and local communities. Participants in the forum were drawn from government agencies, the private sector, civil society and community forest associations (CFAs). Nature Kenya in collaboration with the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources is organizing a similar forum to discuss implementation of conservation initiatives and biodiversity mainstreaming in the Taita Hills and Tsavo conservation area. 🐘

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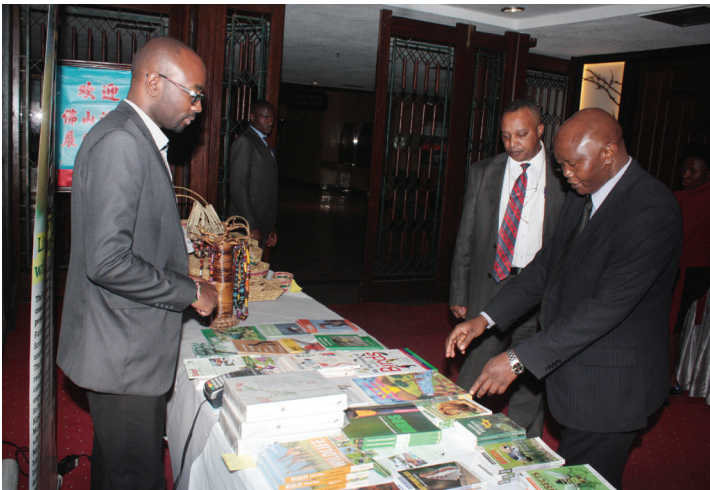




## NATIONAL BIODIVERSITY DIALOGUE



The Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Natural Resources Prof. Judi Wakhungu (fourth right) poses for a group photo with some of the panelists during the National Dialogue on Biodiversity Mainstreaming into Sectors of the Economy. PHOTO: D. OGUTA



Nature Kenya Executive Director Dr. Paul Matiku (right) shows the Conservation Secretary-Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources, Mr. Gideon Gathara items for sale at the membership desk at Laico Regency Hotel during the National Dialogue on Biodiversity Mainstreaming into Sectors of the Economy. Looking on (left) is Norman Kiboi, Nature Kenya's Membership Marketing Officer. PHOTO: D. OGUTA

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## August Evening Skies

By F. Ng'weno

### August eclipses

On August 7, the full moon rises in the east at about 6:30 pm. By 7 pm, part of the earth's shadow falls across the moon. The moon may become a deep coppery colour. The lunar eclipse will continue until almost midnight.

The solar eclipse of August 21, however, will only be seen from part of the United States. On August 30, a "half" moon - called the first quarter - is overhead at sunset.

### Stars & Planets, August 2017

The bright planet Jupiter is prominent in the west. The blue-white star Spica is near Jupiter, getting nearer during August. The moon is near Jupiter on August 25.

Arcturus, a bright orange star, is in the northwest. Below it, the constellation of the Big Dipper (the Plough) seems to be pouring towards the horizon.

The large constellation of Scorpio, the Scorpion, dominates the southern sky. Look for three bright stars forming the Scorpion's claws; below them, its fiery eye, the reddish star Antares; and the long tail like a fishhook with two stars for the sting.

To the east, the golden planet Saturn seems to be escorting

the Scorpion. At month's end Saturn is high overhead. The moon is near Saturn on August 2, 3 and 30; and near Antares on the 29th.

To the right (southwest) of the Scorpion are the two bright stars of the Centaur, and the Southern Cross, now setting.

To the left (east) of the Scorpion, a group of bright stars form a shape like a basket with a handle. This is the constellation of Sagittarius, the Archer.

North (left) of Sagittarius, the bright star Altair, escorted by two smaller stars, is rising. Further north, look for the very bright white light of the star Vega.

### Morning Sky

Planet Venus is brilliant in the east over the dawn, sinking lower each day. The moon is near Venus on August 18 & 19.

### Meteor Showers

From early to mid August, you may see meteors ("shooting stars") from the Perseids meteor shower. Meteors are bits of dust and rock from space burning up in the Earth's atmosphere. The ones this month were left by the passage of Comet Swift-Tuttle. You are most likely to see them after midnight from a dark location. 🌠

## LEARNING ABOUT NATURE



Pupils from Loreto Convent Primary School Mombasa are taken through the butterfly's life cycle at the Mombasa Butterfly House. The Butterfly House, located at Fort Jesus, features a live butterfly display and is frequented by school children and tourists. PHOTO: J. MWACHARO

# in the FIELD

## AUGUST AT A GLIMPSE

Aug 2 <sup>nd</sup>	Morning Bird Walk
Aug 5 <sup>th</sup>	FoCP Nature Walk
Aug 9 <sup>th</sup>	Morning Bird Walk
Aug 16 <sup>th</sup>	Morning Bird Walk
Aug 19 <sup>th</sup>	FoCP Nature Walk
Aug 20 <sup>th</sup>	Sunday Bird Watch
Aug 23 <sup>rd</sup>	Morning Bird Walk
Aug 30 <sup>th</sup>	Morning Bird Walk

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

**Birders Please Note!** Wednesday Morning Birdwalks meet at 8:30 am at the Nairobi National Museum. Members meet in the courtyard of the Museum, past the entrance to the galleries. We may walk in the museum grounds or visit a different site in Nairobi. The walks end at about 12:30 pm. Please note that we are unable to provide transport, although some members share.

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

**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/>

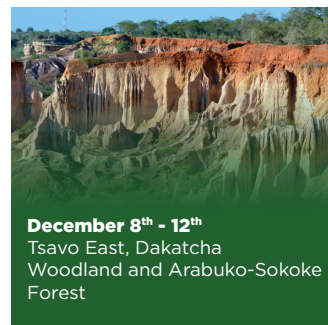
Contact the office for information on other birdwalks in Kakamega, Kisumu, and other sites

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

## UPCOMING MEMBERS TRIPS FOR 2017



**October 20<sup>th</sup> - 22<sup>nd</sup>**  
Samburu National Park



**December 8<sup>th</sup> - 12<sup>th</sup>**  
Tsavo East, Dakatcha Woodland and Arabuko-Sokoke Forest

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- Confirm details & press OK

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](mailto:office@naturekenya.org)