

Kenya birding safari

Written by Neil Gray

Tuesday, 14 December 2010 10:46 - Last Updated Friday, 24 May 2013 11:45

When I decided on a birding trip to Kenya in late September 2010, it was planned to maximise the number of species seen, while hopefully having a high ratio of lifers in the final list. The trip was planned and all accommodation and transport bookings made for me by Moses Kandie (<http://www.birdwatchingexpress.net>), whom I contacted via the BirdingPals website - <http://www.birdingpal.org>

The trip he put together had as the primary birding locations Lake Nakuru National Park, Lake Baringo and the Kakamega Forest. En route between these locations we were able to bird the Eldoret-Kerio-Tambach-Kabarnet area, the road from Naivasha to the Kinangop Plateau, home of the endangered Sharpe's Longclaw, the Limuru Ponds NW of Nairobi and take in a boat trip on Lake Victoria at Kisumu. The vehicle used was a 4WD Toyota "Kombi" with a safari roof allowing you to stand up fully and have an uninterrupted 360 deg view.

My final list was 354 species with 134 lifers (a very good 3 in 8 ratio of species seen). Bird highlight of the trip was undoubtedly the endangered Sharpe's Longclaw, flushed from long grass after 10 minutes of circling around in a field in which Moses usually has success in finding one of this elusive species. Moses also has a great network of locals who keep him updated on the whereabouts of some of the sought-after species. Without their help I probably would not have seen some other lifers in Slender-tailed Nightjar, Greyish Eagle-Owl and Three-banded Courser. Without Moses's intimate knowledge of his home area - Baringo - I would have missed species like Black-headed Lapwing, Senegal Thick-Knee, Hemprich's Hornbill, Brown-tailed Rock-Chat and Northern Masked Weaver - all of which were found off the beaten track, and would not have been seen by anyone trying to bird the area without an experienced guide.

Venue highlight was definitely the Kakamega Forest, where almost every bird that put in an appearance was a lifer - Brown-chested Alethe, Blue-headed Bee-Eater, Red-headed Bluebill,

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Brown-throated Wattle-Eye, Double-toothed Barbet - to name but a few. It was here that our Kakamega guide called up a Scaly-breasted Illadopsis, so close that when it finally appeared in dense undergrowth it was inside the focussing range of my 300mm lens!

Moses Kandie can also be contacted by cellphone on either +254 72 2420699 or +254 72 2273866.