

A new ringer and a ringing visit to Kenya

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As a trainee ringer you are exposed to bird ringing in a particular way and until you have the opportunity to join other ringers in other parts of the country you do not get to see how other ringers operate. I learned my ringing habits in Gauteng with the Pretoria Bird Club (PBC) ringing group and qualified in September 2002.

In the latter part of 2002, a visiting ringer from Kenya, James Ndungu, joined us on a number of PBC ringing outings and he impressed with his knowledge and enthusiasm. While on these outings he was able to extend his list of ringing lifers even though many of these would generally be regarded as 'junk birds' by most of the Gauteng ringers. So when I had the opportunity to undertake a business trip to Kenya and Uganda in the latter part of 2002, I took time to consult with James before asking my hosts to make arrangements for a little birding in my free time.

As a result of this, I was well equipped for a trip to Lake Naivasha situated some 80 km northwest of Nairobi. During a walk around the grounds of the Country Club and along

the shores of the lake I saw a number of species which were new to me. These included African Golden Oriole, Rufous Sparrow and a large group of Blacktailed Godwits.

The following morning I joined the Nairobi Ringing Group on one of their regular outings in the Nairobi Museum gardens. This is one of their regular ringing sites and they apparently record a retrap rate of about 70%. The nets were erected in riverine bush below the museum. In the period I was with them, they must have caught and processed about 20 birds, including many Baglafaecht (or Reichenow's) Weaver. However, they did have one Nightingale for me to see – another lifer for me.

However, it was here that I saw how different it is to learn ringing in Kenya. The group that morning was 12 strong, and I believe most of them were trainees. They were Nicodemu Nalianya, Rufus Miring'u, Simon Musila, James, Martin Kahindi, Moses Kinuthia, Ann Okelo, Rosemary Bahati, Shailesh Patel, Nickson Otieno, Irene Kinuthia, Mercy Njeri and Elias. They had one book in which to record data, and one set of rings, so each bird was carefully handled by a number of trainees before being released. Apparently a day's catch at this site would be about 30 to 40 birds and one can imagine that it would take substantially longer to qualify under these circumstances than in South Africa. I understand that this is one of the difficulties that ringers face in Kenya.

Mercy Njeri has expressed an interest in visiting the PBC in November this year to extend her practical exposure to ringing and we are trying to make appropriate arrangements for such a visit.



Ringing in the Nairobi Museum gardens.