



Birding Calendar for El Karama Lodge 2018

By Lavinia Grant

The personal bird list of Lavinia Grant for El Karama now lists 428 species - still counting. These have been compiled over 47 years.

Introductory Note:

We are lucky at El Karama to be so placed geographically that we have not only our regular resident and breeding bird species that are here permanently, but also local migrants and visitors from lower altitudes (particularly in dry weather) and from higher altitudes- Mount Kenya, the Aberdares and Loldiaigas – (Particularly in the rains). In the Northern winter we have the migrants from Europe and Asia. Then there are riverine species that frequent the watercourses, such as Black river duck and African Finfoot, Goliath Heron and Giant Kingfisher; and waterfowl and waders at the dams. There is a variety of vegetation, from open grassland and bare areas, to thick bush along the gullies, riverine forest, open bush and some rock areas.

January: This is normally a hot, dry month when we sometimes see species from lower altitudes, which move up to escape desert conditions – such as Swallow-tailed kite, Grey-headed silver-bill, Fischer’s Starling, and Sand grouse (Chestnut-bellied and Lichtenstein’s). Migrants from Europe and Asia are here for their winter holidays e.g. Isabelline, Common and Pied Wheatears, Great spotted cuckoo, Steppe Eagle and Eurasian Roller. Local Helmeted Guinea Fowls scratch for “onion-grass” bulbs, congregating in large flocks. The shortly grazed grass makes smaller species easier to see- such as larks, pipits and cisticolas.

February and March: The European and Asian migrants are all here, and March sees a peak as many more in from the South on the start of their migration Northwards: E.g. many species of warblers, waterfowl, and waders such as sandpipers, European Spoonbill, Greenshank; and passerines such as Redstart, Whitethroat and Spotted Flycatcher. Local migrant flocks of Wattled starlings move in towards the end of March, expecting rain, Red-chested Cuckoos may start to call “It will rain! It will rain!”

April and May: Often the rainiest season on El Karama one may see high altitude birds coming lower- such as Mottled Swift, Alpine swift and Golden-winger sunbird. Resident birds are displaying and breeding. Courtship displays include those of Buff-crested bustard and Kori bustard, Crowned

crane, D'Arnaud's barbet and hornbills to name a few, as well as the die-bombing flights of the courting Tawny eagle. Unusual birds may be seen at the dams, such as white-faced whistling ducks and Temminck's stint. Weavers such as Red-Headed, Spekes, and Vitelline masked, frantically build their nests and breed, as do all the other resident birds.



June and July: The grass should be getting long by now. One may see the courtship flights and dance-floors of the Jackson's and Lon-Tailed widow-birds, and courtship steeping and parachuting of Pectoral-patch cisticolas. Large flocks of seedeaters, such as Grey-capped social weavers Rufous and Chesnut sparrows, and Queleas are seen. Local migrants may appear, such as Buffalo weavers and Plum-backed starlings. A few individuals, non-breeding Northern migrants may remain here all year – such as a few Eurasian swallows (Perhaps one day they may breed here).

August: Sometimes light rain falls in August. All the resident birds may be seen, their numbers augmented by their earlier breeding – such as Hildebrandt's starlings, Crowned plovers, Hadada Ibises, Brown Parrots and White-bellied Go away birds. Secretary birds stalk the plains as they do throughout the year.

September: The earliest migrants start to return again from Europe and Asia – such as Sandpipers (Common, Marsh, Green and Wood) and Swallows and Yellow wagtails. Flocks of European bee-eaters start to fill the air with their lovely mellow trills again, and little brown jobs from elsewhere complicate the issue of identifying the local ones.

October: Winter migrants are here in force, including Golden Oriole, Lesser Kestrel, and Eleanor's falcon, European Hobby, Chiffchaff and Nightingale. The Buff-chested bustard may be chanting and displaying. Rufous-naped larks wistful repeated call might be heard throughout the bush land. Towards the end of October the white-browed coucal might make its bubbling water bottle call to herald November rain – as it does before rain throughout the year.

November: This is the shorter rainy season, although recently, weather patterns have changed, and the once dependable rainy seasons are more sporadic and unpredictable. Northern migrants are again to be seen everywhere. Local sunbirds such as Mariqua, Scarlet-chested and Bronze mix with Purple-banded (locally migrant) at the second= flowering of some trees, shrubs and aloes. Migrant rarities, such as the Black stork or Glossy ibis may be seen at the dams.

December: Usually hot and dry. Winter migrants are present, such as European cuckoo, Harriers, (Pallid, Marsh and Montague's). Ethiopian Swallows (resident here) start to wing near their intended nest sites or on they fly. Unusual birds may suddenly appear, such as Carmine bee-eaters or Crowned hornbill.

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