Title Bird migration constitutes one of the most impressive natural phenomena and is one of the wonders of nature involving millions of birds world-wide. However, migratory birds worldwide are facing a significant decline due to human-induced threats emanating from human activities at their breeding, stop-over and wintering sites. Various forms of interventions taking place at various levels include site-based conservation action, research and monitoring, education and awareness are targeted at minimizing these threats. One of the key events meant to raise awareness about the plight of migratory birds include the World Migratory Bird Day (WMBD), which is a global awareness-raising campaign highlighting the need for the protection of migratory birds and their habitats. The theme of the 2011 event was ?Land Use Changes from a Bird's-Eye View? based on the emerging global concerns about the currents trends in conversion and modification of natural habitats and its implications on the conservation of migratory birds. This year, staff of BirdLife International office in Nairobi together with members of Nature Kenya, Olorgesaile Environment and Wildlife Conservation Group (OEWCG) and staff of the Olorgesaile Prehistoric Site celebrated the WMBD on 21-22 May 2011. The event was celebrated at Olorgesaile Prehistoric Site and L. Magadi. Olorgesaile is around 70km south of Nairobi City. The site is a bird watcher's paradise with over 400 species recorded including a high number of both Palaearctic and afrotropical migratory bird species especially those using the Great Rift Valley flyway. Recently, attention has been drawn and concerns raised by the bird watching fraternity concerning habitat degradation and deleterious land cover change that has occurred more rapidly in the past few years at Olorgesaile and its environs. This is driven by the charcoal production to meet the increasing and insatiable demand for charcoal and fuel wood by the urban population in Nairobi and other adjacent small towns. According to George Eshiamwata who spent three years in the area conducting research on a Banded Parisoma almost a decade ago when he was involved in a 3-year ornithological research at this site and its surroundings, he confirms that the vegetation cover has significantly declined and feels that for the sake of biodiversity and livelihoods, urgent interventions are needed to reverse these worrying trends. This year?s theme was very appropriate for this site where even though migratory soaring birds, water birds and passerines bird species especially make stop-over or wintering during their long epic journey, the current rates of land cover is a major issue that needs to be mitigated. The highlights of the event included a birdwalk within the Olorgesaile area by BirdLife staff, Olorgesaile Prehistoric Site staff and members of OEWCG. This birdwalk provided an opportunity to the OEWCG and Museum staff members to watch birds and interact. The OEWCG members who are drawn from the local Maasai community are very knowledgeable about birds? ecology and ethno-ornithology. They also demonstrated their mastery of the indigenous traditional knowledge such as stories about their socio-cultural association with birds since time immemorial. The second activity on the programme was speeches, talk, question and answer and discussion sessions. There was a speech from two members of OEWCG Elijah Ole Kotkash and Thomas Ntiaki who both acknowledged the urgent need for action considering the recent land cover change observed in the area. They recognized that the weather pattern had changed drastically in the recent times and rainfall had become erratic and unreliable thus affecting not only the flora and fauna but also the socio-economic aspects of their lives. Their fears are driven by the fact that being a pastoral community, climate change and a reduced resilience will have a devastating impact on pasture, water availability and increase livestock mortalities. ?A further reduction in land cover change and the associated disastrous consequences will make us even more susceptible to persistent loss in livestock and have devastating effect on our socio-economic conditions including acute food insecurity and catastrophic famine? said Elijah Ole Kotkash one of the Community elders They also highlighted the initiatives they are currently undertaking and shared perspectives on planned efforts and future interventions including environmental education and awareness, establishment of conservancies as well as other income generating activities to boost the living standards of the local communities and encourage them into appreciating nature and environmental and biodiversity conservation. However, both speakers highlighted the challenges that they face including poverty, persistent drought, insufficient resources (both funding and capacity) to enable them to effectively realize some of their innovative ideas, scale up and sustain current activities. However, there are enormous opportunities including linking livelihoods, ecotourism and biodiversity conservation. Paul Ndang?ang?a gave a stimulating talk which focused on BirdLife International and how it works globally, regionally, nationally and locally to conserve birds and work with people towards the sustainable use of natural resources, threats facing birds, migration, threats facing migratory birds, current interventions and the purpose of

the annual WMBD event. The talk was followed by a question and answer session between the community and BirdLife staff. As part of the efforts to demonstrate that deleterious land cover change can be reversed, a few trees were planted by the team from BirdLife, the community and the Museum staff. Efforts will be made to scale up the tree planting at the site in future. The museum staff as well as the members of the OEWCG pledged to take care of the trees to ensure that they survive. BirdLife donated various advocacy material including booklets, brochures, posters and magazines for their respective resource centres. As part of promoting the spirit of bird watching, BirdLife International donated an ornithological Field Guide (Birds of Kenya and Northern Tanzania by Zimmerman et al) to the staff of Olorgesaile Prehistoric Site. This will enable them to maintain an up-to-date checklist of the site and its surroundings as well as make the book handy to visitors keen on bird watching at the area.

Birdwatching with local community at Olorgesaile Prehistoric site

The second day was spent bird watching at L. Magadi, which is 45km away from Olorgesaile. A total of 65 bird species were recorded on both days though considering the timing, there were very few migrants such as Ruffs. Logistical support for this event was provided to BirdLife International through the Policy Making and Improving Livelihoods Project funded by the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional for Development, AECID). For more information about Olorgesaile Prehistoric Site, visit: http://www.museums.or.ke/content/blogcategory/34/60/ Compiled by George Were Eshiamwata (george.eshiamwata@birdlife.org)