

Trading the desk for fitness, rejuvenation and binoculars

Title

Everyday screen-based work can sometimes take toll on productivity, creativity and even health if not well managed. Even staff at the BirdLife Africa Partnership Secretariat in Nairobi knows this resorting to simple yet revitalising remedies to cope with daily pressures of life. One such way is through the one hour aerobic sessions held every Monday and Thursday immediately after work at the office compound. At the beginning, each warm-up routine is performed while fast-paced music plays at the background and thereafter other physical exercises follow. Francis, the energetic aerobics instructor takes staff through the sessions tailoring the exercises to benefit various parts of the body. Although some of the exercises are unpredictable, everyone strives to keep up. *Can I see more energy please....., raise those arms....., take it back with kick- back....., tuck your tummy and not the T-shirt.....I wish I were you* are common phrases from the instructor as he strives to keep the group focussed and boost morale. Missing a step and losing track of the routines by an individual adds a light moment during the exercises. Sometimes a bat or bird flies over and attention shifts trying to identify the particular species.

The other strategy of rejuvenating the mind while still seeking a connection with nature has been through birdwatching. This usually happens on Friday's early in the morning around the office compound.

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Staff during birdwalk at Nairobi River footbridge. Photo by Caroline Njoki

A checklist has been pinned on the office notice board for to staff to record birds sighted during and outside bird walks. Venturing out for birding at Nairobi Museum and Botanic Garden most recently paid off when staff came across two adult Great Sparrowhawks keenly scanning from different branches of a Lemon Gum tree. Closer observations led to a nest with three immature sparrowhawks not far below the alert parents. The young ones with rufous-breasted plumage flapped their wings as if they were testing them in readiness for their first flight. Peter Muriithi of Nature Kenya offered interesting information on how the Great Sparrowhawk and Lanner Falcon fight over the nest and the winner *owns* it to raise its next generation. Maybe next time the Falcon will be the lucky nest owner. Towards the end of the walk, Peter guided the BirdLife team to a transformed section of the Nairobi River with trails, foot bridges, public toilets and indigenous and exotic trees planted at both sides of the river. The rehabilitated area carries the name John Michuki Memorial Park in honour of the late Minister for Environment who initiated efforts to clean the river.

Team building session at end year retreat in Marula Farm. Photo BirdLife Archives

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<http://www.birdlife.org/community/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Team-building-session-at-end-year-retreat-in-Marula-Farm.-Photo-BirdLife-Archives1-300x225.jpg>

The urge to 'escape' from the concrete city has led staff to other more natural places. For instance, the last end-of-the-year staff retreat was held in Marula Farm, Naivasha. The outdoor setting allowed for deliberations to be carried without dependence on modern technology to do presentations. This enabled for more relaxed interaction among staff as they reviewed and made plans for the coming year while enjoying fresh air, wildlife and the variety of soothing bird calls in replace of irritating hooting vehicles in the city.

Amboseli National Park has been the latest destination. Driving 250km from Nairobi was rewarded with stunning views of Mount Kilimanjaro - the highest mountain in Africa, closer view of the free ranging elephants and other fauna, swimming in a canvas-made pool and the best part of it all - a 100 plus bird species out of the recorded four hundred. Some of the encounters seemed pre-arranged for the already eager eye such as when a female Taveta Golden Weaver turned up as the team had lunch at the Observation (Noomotio) Hill picnic site making it easy to observe one of the area's special birds, the Martial Eagle that circled high in the air as if displaying mastery of flight and not forgetting the sight of Collared Pratincole feeding its two young ones.

Getting away from the desk is no easy task, not when there are emerging conservation issues from all corners that require strategic intervention but seeking nature's refreshing benefits to our mental, physical, social and general health cannot be substituted.

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