

The month of March was very special for Kenya as citizens peacefully voted in their leaders to serve them for the next five years. In conservation, another milestone was achieved in regards to unravelling the breeding aspects of the Clarke's Weaver that had remained unknown. The tireless and dedicated efforts of Fleur Ng'weno (Executive Secretary of *Nature Kenya*) and members of Dakatcha IBA Site Support Group led them to a seasonal wetland in Dakatcha where several hundreds of the bird was observed busy displaying, building nests and feeding young. The mystery would have been remained were it not for a decision by National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) not to grant an Italian Company the greenlight to convert 50,000 hectares of Dakatcha woodland for large-scale growing of *Jatropha*- a biodiesel crop. The discovery comes with extra challenges as we not only have the woodland to worry about but also the wetland, said Dr. Paul Matiku, the Executive Director of Nature Kenya upon receiving news of this finding.



Fleur receiving her award from Florian Keil of UNEP- AEWA photo by Caroline Njoki

This achievement did not go unnoticed during the national celebrations to commemorate World Migratory Bird Day held on 11th May at Lake Elementaita as Fleur was recognized for her immense contribution in conservation. She has even mentored many young birders who have become accomplished bird guides and naturalists. Charles Mwangi is one such example whose interest in birds and birding started nine years ago by attending the Wednesday morning bird walks organized by Nature Kenya and led by Fleur. Mwangi, now a professional bird guide imparts what he has learnt over the years on environmental conservation to other members of Lake Elementaita Conservation and Awareness Group. The group was started in 2009 and is actively involved in birdwatching, treeplanting especially of indigenous trees, environmental education, desnaring and mammal census around Lake Elementaita. He received an award on behalf of the group and was grateful for the recognition which he said would motivate them as they carry on with conservation work. Lake Elementaita which is held in high regard as an Important Bird Area, Ramsar Site and World Heritage Site is a key breeding site for the Great White Pelicans as well as a wildlife haven.



FokP members receiving award from Kuki

Gallman CMS Ambassador. Photo by Caroline Njoki

The Friends of Kinangop Plateau (FoKP) - a Site Support Group (SSG) working in the Kinangop Grasslands IBA was also hailed. For a bird only found in Kenya, the grasslands are a critical habitat for the critically threatened Sharpe's Longclaw. The site too is relied on annually by large numbers of Palearctic migrants in passage. FoKP encourages sheep farming that depends on tussocks as Sharpe's Longclaw. Wool from the sheep is then woven to various quality products. Since 2007, the community has earned more than Ksh 2,000,000 from sale of wool-made products. The SSG also carries out environmental education in over 48 schools and the wider community, runs an Eco-Resource Centre serving as an information dissemination point to an average of 1000 community members annually, conducts detailed monitoring of the site, engaged in environmental-friendly livelihood activities such as beekeeping, rabbit rearing and kitchen gardening. The occasion was also used to unveil a commemorative plaque to mark the event led by the Deputy High Commissioner of the German Embassy and the County Commissioner of Nakuru on behalf of the County Governor, Mr. Kinuthia Mbugua. Participants too drawn from Eastern and Southern African countries who completed a five day International Training of Trainers workshop on the flyway approach to the conservation and wise use of waterbirds and wetlands at the Kenya Wildlife Service Training Institute received certificates. Kenya Wildlife Service, Kenya Forest Service, Wildlife Clubs of Kenya, Egerton University among others showcased their work to the many guests who attended. Schools and community groups presented lively entertaining pieces with some integrating powerful conservation messages.



Carol Academy reciting a powerful poem 'Pride of Africa'. Photo by Caroline Njoki

Since 2006, the second weekend of May is meant to raise awareness on conservation of migratory birds and their environments. Events to mark this year celebrations were guided by the theme *'Networking for Migratory Birds'* emphasizing on the need to both maintain ecological networks as well as networks between organizations, governments and individuals for long term conservation of migratory birds. By: *Caroline Njoki*