

## THE BIRDS OF MIDA CREEK, KENYA [3°22'S, 39°58'E]

Mida Creek is an important passage and wintering area for Palaearctic migrant waders. Counts of over 8,000 waders have been made on Mida Creek including notable species such as the striking black-and-white Crab-plover with its unique heavy bill for crunching crabs. The populations of Greater and Lesser Sandplover and Crab-plovers here are internationally important, and a total of 71 aquatic bird species have been recorded to use the site. The creek is a significant feeding area for Dimorphic Egrets, Lesser Crested and a resident though non-breeding population of Greater Flamingo. Other common migrant shorebirds here include Sanderling, Curlew Sandpiper, Little Stint, Terek Sandpiper, Whimbrel, Grey Plover, and Greenshank.

The mangroves around the edge of the creek do not support large populations of resident birds but are sometimes used as an important roosting site for certain species – the most notable being up to several thousand Carmine Bee-eaters, a beautiful migrant from the northern tropics and Africa's largest bee-eater. Migrant warblers and other groups such as sunbirds, orioles, starlings, helmet shrikes, and flycatchers also use the mangroves for feeding at certain times of the year. Immediately behind the mangroves, the area of rank grass, saline marsh, coastal scrub and forest holds a higher diversity of birds including some rarer species including the regionally threatened Little Yellow Flycatcher, Chestnut-fronted Helmet-Shrike and one Globally Threatened species, Sokoke Pipit. Part of this is a narrow section of Arabuko-Sokoke Forest which runs down to the edge of the creek though is very seriously degraded. In total, within the area around the creek, a further 124 species have so far been recorded.

The lists below covers all species that are found on the creek itself and those found within c.200m of the high water mark. As the latter consists of diverse habitats, the number of species is quite high.

### AQUATIC SPECIES RECORDED ON MIDA CREEK

Pink-backed Pelican	<i>Pelecanus rufescens</i>	Kentish Plover	<i>C. alexandrinus</i>
Reed (Long-tailed) Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax africanus</i>	White-fronted Plover	<i>C. marginatus</i>
Yellow-billed Egret	<i>Egretta intermedia</i>	Lesser Sandplover	<i>C. mongolus</i>
Little Egret	<i>E. garzetta</i>	Greater Sandplover	<i>Charadrius leschenaultii</i>
Dimorphic Egret	<i>E. dimorpha</i>	Caspian Plover	<i>C. asiaticus</i>
Western Reef Heron	<i>E. gularis</i>	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>
+Black Heron	<i>E. ardesiaca</i>	Spur-winged Plover	<i>Vanellus spinosus</i>
Striated (Green-backed) Heron	<i>Butorides striatus</i>	Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>
*Great White Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	Curlew Sandpiper	<i>C. ferruginea</i>
+Grey Heron	<i>A. cinerea</i>	Sanderling	<i>C. alba</i>
+Goliath Heron	<i>A. goliath</i>	Broad-billed Sandpiper	<i>Limicola falcinellus</i>
Black-headed Heron	<i>A. melanocephala</i>	Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>
+Woolly-necked Stork	<i>Ciconia episcopus</i>	Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>
African Open-billed Stork	<i>Anastomus lamelligerus</i>	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>
Yellow-billed Stork	<i>Mycteria ibis</i>	Eurasian Curlew	<i>N. arquata</i>
Sacred Ibis	<i>Threskiornis aethiopicus</i>	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>
Hadada Ibis	<i>Bostrychia bagedash</i>	Common Greenshank	<i>T. nebularia</i>
Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	Green Sandpiper	<i>T. ochropus</i>
African Spoonbill	<i>Platalea alba</i>	Wood Sandpiper	<i>T. glareola</i>
Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
Lesser Flamingo	<i>Phoeniconaias minor</i>	Terek Sandpiper	<i>Xenus cinereus</i>
Fulvous Whistling Duck	<i>Dendrocygna bicolor</i>	Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>
Red-billed Teal	<i>Anas erythrorhynchos</i>	Sooty Gull	<i>Larus henrici</i>
Southern Pochard	<i>Netta erythrophthalma</i>	Gull-billed Tern	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>
Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	Caspian Tern	<i>Sterna caspia</i>
African Fish Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus vocifer</i>	Greater Crested Tern	<i>S. bergii</i>
Palm-nut Vulture	<i>Gypohierax angolensis</i>	Lesser Crested Tern	<i>S. bengalensis</i>
+Crab-plover	<i>Dromas ardeola</i>	Sandwich Tern	<i>S. sandvicensis</i>
Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	*Roseate Tern	<i>S. dougallii</i>
Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>	Common Tern	<i>S. hirundo</i>
Water Thick-knee	<i>Burhinus vermiculatus</i>	White-cheeked Tern	<i>S. repressa</i>
Collared Pratincole	<i>Glareola pratincola</i>	Saunders's Tern	<i>S. (albifrons) saundersi</i>
Madagascar Pratincole	<i>G. ocularis</i>	White-winged Black Tern	<i>Chlidonias leucopterus</i>
Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius biaticula</i>	+Giant Kingfisher	<i>Ceryle maxima</i>
Kittlitz's Plover	<i>C. pecuarius</i>	Pied Kingfisher	<i>C. rudis</i>
Three-banded Plover	<i>C. tricollaris</i>		

BIRDS FOUND WITHIN 200M OF HT MARK, MIDA CREEK

Pygmy Falcon	<i>Polibierax semitorquatus</i>	Common Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus barbatus</i>
Eurasian Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis apivorus</i>	Eastern Nicator	<i>Nicator gularis</i>
Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	Scaly Babbler	<i>Turdoides squamulatus</i>
Black-chested Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus pectoralis</i>	Red-capped Robin-Chat	<i>Cosypha natalensis</i>
African Harrier Hawk	<i>Polyboroides typus</i>	Bearded Scrub Robin	<i>Cercotrichas quadrivirgata</i>
African Goshawk	<i>Accipiter tachiro</i>	Bare-eyed Thrush	<i>Turdus tephronotus</i>
Little Sparrowhawk	<i>A. minullus</i>	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapra striata</i>
Great Sparrowhawk	<i>A. melanoleucus</i>	Pale Flycatcher	<i>Bradornis pallidus</i>
Lizard Buzzard	<i>Kaupifalco monogrammicus</i>	Wood Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus sibilatrix</i>
Wahlberg's Eagle	<i>Aquila wahlbergi</i>	Willow Warbler	<i>P. trochilus</i>
Ayres' Hawk Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus ayresii</i>	Coastal Cisticola	<i>Cisticola haematocephalus</i>
Long-crested Eagle	<i>Lophaetus occipitalis</i>	Tawny-flanked Prinia	<i>Prinia subflava</i>
Tambourine Dove	<i>Turtur tympanistris</i>	Grey-backed Camaroptera	<i>Camaroptera brachyura</i>
Emerald-spotted Wood Dove	<i>Turtur chalcospilos</i>	Black-headed Apalis	<i>Apalis melanocephala</i>
Namaqua Dove	<i>Oena capensis</i>	*Little Yellow Flycatcher	<i>Erythrocerus holochlorus</i>
Red-eyed Dove	<i>Streptopelia semitorquata</i>	Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher	<i>Trochocercus cyanomelas</i>
Ring-necked Dove	<i>S. capicola</i>	African Paradise Flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone viridis</i>
Black-and-white Cuckoo	<i>Clamator jacobinus</i>	Forest Batis	<i>Batis mixta</i>
Red-chested Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus solitarius</i>	Pale Batis	<i>B. soror</i>
Eurasian Cuckoo	<i>C. canorus</i>	Retz's Helmet-Shrike	<i>Prionops retzii</i>
Klaas's Cuckoo	<i>Chrysococcyx klaas</i>	+ Chestnut-fronted Helmet-Shrike	<i>P. scopifrons</i>
Yellowbill	<i>Ceuthmochares aereus</i>	Red-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>
White-browed Coucal	<i>Centropus superciliosus</i>	Lesser Grey Shrike	<i>L. minor</i>
Black Coucal	<i>C. grillii</i>	Long-tailed Fiscal	<i>L. cabanisi</i>
Dusky Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus fraenatus</i>	Black-crowned Tchagra	<i>Tchagra senegala</i>
Eurasian Nightjar	<i>C. europaeus</i>	Brown-crowned Tchagra	<i>T. australis</i>
Slender-tailed Nightjar	<i>C. clarus</i>	Grey-headed Bush-Shrike	<i>Malacothus blanchoti</i>
Mottled Spinetail	<i>Telecanthura ussheri</i>	Tropical Boubou	<i>Laniarius aethiopicus</i>
African Palm Swift	<i>Cypsiurus parvus</i>	Black-backed Puffback	<i>Dryoscopus cubla</i>
Eurasian Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	Black Cuckoo-shrike	<i>Campephaga flava</i>
Forbes-Watson's Swift	<i>A. berliozi</i>	Common Drongo	<i>Dicrurus adsimilis</i>
White-rumped Swift	<i>A. caffer</i>	Eurasian Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>
Little Swift	<i>A. affinis</i>	African Golden Oriole	<i>O. auratus</i>
Speckled Mousebird	<i>Colius striatus</i>	Black-headed Oriole	<i>O. larvatus</i>
Grey-headed Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon leucocephala</i>	House Crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>
Brown-hooded Kingfisher	<i>H. albiventris</i>	Pied Crow	<i>C. albus</i>
Mangrove Kingfisher	<i>H. senegaloides</i>	Black-bellied Starling	<i>Lamprotornis corruscus</i>
African Pygmy Kingfisher	<i>Ispidina picta natalensis</i>	Shelley's Starling	<i>L. shelleyi</i>
Eurasian Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>	Violet-backed Starling	<i>Cinnyricinclus leucogaster</i>
Blue-cheeked Bee-eater	<i>M. persicus</i>	Magpie Starling	<i>Speculipastor bicolor</i>
Madagascar Bee-eater	<i>M. superciliosus</i>	Wattled Starling	<i>Creatophora cinerea</i>
Carmine Bee-eater	<i>M. nubicus</i>	Plain-backed Sunbird	<i>Anthreptes reichenowi</i>
White-throated Bee-eater	<i>M. albicollis</i>	Collared Sunbird	<i>A. collaris</i>
Eurasian Roller	<i>Coracias garrulus</i>	Olive Sunbird	<i>Cyanomitra olivacea</i>
Lilac-breasted Roller	<i>C. caudata</i>	Mouse-coloured Sunbird	<i>C. verocxii</i>
Trumpeter Hornbill	<i>Bycanistes bucinator</i>	Amethyst Sunbird	<i>C. amethystina</i>
Green Barbet	<i>Stactolaema olivacea</i>	Purple-banded Sunbird	<i>Cynniris bifasciata</i>
Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird	<i>Pogoninlus bilineatus</i>	Grosbeak Weaver	<i>Amblyospiza albifrons</i>
Red-fronted Tinkerbird	<i>P. pusillus</i>	Eastern Golden Weaver	<i>Plocens subaureus</i>
Scaly-throated Honeyguide	<i>Indicator variegatus</i>	Golden Palm Weaver	<i>P. bojeri</i>
Wire-tailed Swallow	<i>Hirundo smithii</i>	Lesser Masked Weaver	<i>P. intermedius</i>
Barn Swallow	<i>H. rustica</i>	Black-headed Weaver	<i>P. cucullatus</i>
Ethiopian Swallow	<i>H. aethiopica</i>	Red-billed Quelea	<i>Quelea quelea</i>
Mosque Swallow	<i>H. senegalensis</i>	Peter's Twinspot	<i>Hypargos niveoguttatus</i>
Lesser Striped Swallow	<i>H. abyssinica</i>	Red-billed Firefinch	<i>Lagonosticta senegala</i>
African Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla aguimp</i>	Bronze Mannikin	<i>Lonchura cucullata</i>
Yellow Wagtail	<i>M. flava</i>	Black-and-white Mannikin	<i>L. bicolor</i>
Grassland Pipit	<i>Anthus cinnamomeus</i>	Pin-tailed Whydah	<i>Vidua macroura</i>
#Sokoke Pipit	<i>A. sokokensis</i>	Eastern Paradise Whydah	<i>V. paradisaea</i>
Yellow-throated Longclaw	<i>Macronyx croceus</i>	Yellow-fronted Canary	<i>Serinus mozambicus</i>
Zanzibar Sombre Greenbul	<i>Andropadus importunus</i>		
Fischer's Greenbul	<i>Phyllastrephus fischeri</i>		
Northern Brownbul	<i>P. strepitans</i>		
Yellow-bellied Greenbul	<i>Chlorocichla flaviventris</i>		

Key:

- # – Globally Threatened species  
 \* – Regionally Threatened species  
 + – Regionally Near-threatened species

[124 species]

## Whale Island and coastline of Watamu Marine Park

Whale Island and the coastline to the north and south of Mida Creek support significant feeding, roosting and nesting populations of terns. Roseate Terns nest on Whale Island between June and October every two to three years with counts reaching 1,500 pairs. 30-40 pairs of Sooty Terns also breed amongst the Roseates. Until 2006 one or two pairs of Brown Noddy found on the island during the Roseate breeding season and possibly at least attempted to breed but in 2007 an estimated 1,000 were present and similar numbers each year since – though no nests have been found or real evidence of breeding. Saunders' Tern occurs in internationally important numbers along the coastline (c.500,000 birds were recorded roosting at night at Sabaki River Mouth c.25kms to the north in February 2010 which were probably mostly this species). These and other terns usually feed beyond the reef but can be seen sometimes roosting on the exposed beach at low tide together with waders.

The waders feeding in Mida Creek will roost in Mida over neap high tides when sand around the edge of the creek is left exposed. Over high tides of anything over 2.6m however, many of them and especially the larger species such as Crab-plovers, Eurasian Curlew and Whimbrel, leave the creek and roost on small isolated beaches and rocky islands to the north and south of the creek mouth. The smaller birds either also roost on the beaches or find perches on mangroves around the edge of the creek.

## Bird conservation issues

There are few direct problems for the birds on and around Mida Creek other than disturbance. There is a certain amount of illegal trapping and hunting of particularly the larger water birds on the marshes just behind the mangroves — a Great White Egret *Ardea alba*, a Regionally-threatened species, was found trapped in a local snare — but as far as is known, this is relatively restricted. Children are known to shoot birds including waders with catapults, but this is an age-old problem to be solved by better environmental education in the schools. Disturbance of feeding and roosting birds on the mud-flats and beach is the other major potential problem. In Mida Creek this may not be such an issue as the number of fishermen and other users who disturb the birds are possibly relatively small – though research is being carried out to ascertain this. The major problems in the creek will be the negative knock-on effects within the ecosystem of over-fishing and exploitation of the marine environment and mangrove forests. Mangrove roots are frequently cut and mud dug up in order to reach fishing bait which clearly destabilises the mangroves and threatens their survival.

On Watamu beach disturbance is more of an issue. There is regularly a roost of sometimes over two thousand waders on the beach at high tide during the northern winter and these are frequently disturbed by people walking along the beach. Disturbance from walkers is relatively small during the tourism low season, but in the high season numbers of people using the beach are increasing; some also walk dogs which can be no more disturbance than the walkers. Sometimes, however, dogs are not controlled by their owners which have then been seen to persistently chase roosting birds thus not allowing them to settle and rest while they are unable to feed over the high tide. Disturbance of breeding birds on Whale Island has been a problem in the past but since visiting the island has been banned without prior arrangement with the KWS Warden, this has been successfully controlled. The presence of rats on the island in the past has caused the probable failure of the terns to breed successfully, but this too was successfully dealt with through the distribution of rat poison over the island. This is clearly important to monitor for the continued breeding success of the terns.

## References

- Bennun, L & Njoroge P., 1996, *Birds to watch in East Africa: A preliminary Red Data list*, Centre for Biodiversity Research Reports: Ornithology, National Museums of Kenya  
Bennun, L & Njoroge P., 1999, *Important Bird Areas in Kenya*, Nature Kenya, East Africa Natural History Society

Colin Jackson  
A Rocha Kenya  
✉ Dept of Ornithology, National Museums of Kenya  
Updated October 2010