Of Kenyan Crab-Plovers and Terek Sandpipers — Colin Jackson

It has to be one of my favourite sights – standing at neap high tide on the bird hide platform at Mida Creek, Kenya. The hide is 3m above the sand and just tucked into the edge of the mangroves 260m from the main shore and only 60-80m from the high tide roost site of up to 10,000 waders and terns. It's particularly stunning when the tide is in the late afternoon and you have that magical golden evening sunlight behind you that seems unique to the Kenyan coast at the end of a hot day and as temperatures are cooling. The tide is pouring in but, being a neap tide, isn't going to reach very far and the Crab-Plovers (*Dromas ardeola*) , Terek Sandpipers (*Xenus cinereus*), and sandplovers, stints etc. all know it and are not in a hurry to go anywhere but rather to chill out over high tide while their food source is being replenished by the incoming tide. The Lesser Crested Terns (*Thalasseus bengalensis*) with their scraggy black caps contrasting with their glowing golden bills just add to the splendour of the mass of trilling and peeping waders mostly in delicate shades of grey and brown. Better still in March or April when the rusty brick reds of Curlew Sandpipers (*Calidris ferruginea*) in breeding plumage and bold black and chestnut face masks and breast bands of the sand plovers are smouldering among the drabber non-breeders who will wait another year before adorning themselves in the same way. It really is just stunning.

Wader counting Mida — Colin Jackson

Mida Creek… one of the legendary wader watching sites in East Africa and my 'local patch' where I together with others in A Rocha Kenya have been watching, counting, catching, ringing and studying waders for coming up to 18 years. Prior to that David Pearson, the ground breaker of East African wader research would travel the 700+ kms from Nairobi on the overnight train followed by a two-hour drive just for the weekend to mist net and ring waders at Mida – and through the 70s and 80s ringed several thousand of them. These data sets are currently forming the basis of my PhD thesis looking specifically at the moult and migration strategies of Greater (*Charadrius lecschenaultii*) and Lesser Sandplovers (*C. atrifrons*) and Terek Sandpipers. From all of David's ringing there was just one recovery – a Lesser Sandplover to south-western Pakistan. Then in 2008 we had a real surprise of a Terek Sandpiper we'd ringed in November 2003 being caught breeding in north-west Finland – a tiny outlier population and very unexpected. At the start of the PhD one of the things we did was to start

Mida waders — Steffen Foerster

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Of Kenyan Crab-Plovers and Terek Sandpipers — cont'd

Ringing a Terek Sandpiper at Mida — Craig Mercer

Wader ringing — Matt Brandon

to colour-flag the three study species. Over a thousand birds later we finally had our first (and only so far) recovery of a flagged bird – a Greater Sandplover in April 2015 on the and north-western coast of India no doubt en route to the breeding grounds in Kazakhstan or western Mongolia. There is still a vast amount to learn about our Kenyan wader populations.

Counts have been carried out annually in January as part of the National Museum coordinated waterbird counts that are done all over the country on major wetlands. On the north coast A Rocha Kenya coordinates and runs the counts that take in seven wetland sites around Watamu / Malindi and the Tana River Delta including the other legendary wader site for Kenya, Sabaki River Mouth (which we have been counting almost

Crab Plovers — Tasso Leventis

monthly for several years now also). Supported by Turtle Bay Beach Club and Tana Delta Dunes Lodge a group of 10-20 volunteers carry out counts of all the sites and submit the data to the museum for passing on to Wetlands International. Up to 60 to 70 volunteers can help with the other inland counts which include world famous sites such as Nakuru National Park (where a healthy buffalo population always adds 'fun' to the wader counts along some stretches of the lake shoreline…) and Lake Naivasha.

Greater Sandplover WH (inset enlargement of leg flag) — A Rocha Kenya

In 2013 the Kenya Bird Map project was initiated that, whilst is much more than just waders, because of the stimulating and motivating birding protocol based on an atlas grid system that challenges atlassers to find as many species as possible, invariably it will mean that in order to increase their species list, atlassers will hunt down wetland sites so as to find waders to record. This can only add to broadening our knowledge of distribution, status and migration timing of our waders and wetland birds.

Wader conservation is definitely alive and well in Kenya – there are huge amounts needed to be done for sure, but we are working on it. If visiting Kenya please get involved and contribute to the Kenya Bird Map project at the very least – or time your visit to coincide with the January waterbird counts. Skilled wader watching volunteers are always a blessing. (And if anyone is watching waders in the Middle East or north and east of that, please keep an eye out for Greater Sandplovers with orange flags, Lesser Sandplovers and Terek Sandpipers with white flags – and let us know about it).

A Rocha Kenya is a Christian conservation organisation that is one of 20 national A Rocha Organisations around the world. Its main activities focus around scientific research, community conservation and environmental education; more information at http://www.arocha.org/en/a-rocha-kenya/

Terek Sandpipers — Tasso Leventis

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