

# The Accidental Birder: A Journey of Discovery

Finding Beauty, Mindfulness, and Adventure  
in the World of Birds.



STORY &  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY  
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**LEFT**

Common Bulbul. It is a medium-sized songbird found across sub-Saharan Africa and parts of the Middle East. It is known for its cheerful calls and adaptability to various habitats.

**A**s a child, going on safari in Kenya was all about the big game. My family and I would drive through the savannah, scanning the horizon for the tell-tale silhouette of a lion lounging under an acacia tree or the graceful sprint of a cheetah. If we saw a car pulled over and a group of tourists pointing binoculars at a bird, we would roll our eyes and drive on. Birds? Really? Who had time for that when there were elephants and leopards to find?

And yet, here I am today – the person who stops the car on a game drive to admire a Lilac-breasted Roller in perfect morning light or a Black-chested Snake Eagle soaring high above us. My younger self would never have believed it. But birding can sneak up on you, slowly weaving into your awareness until you can no longer look at a tree or a patch of sky without wondering what feathered creature might be hidden there.





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My love affair with birding began unexpectedly late last year when my partner, Amar, gifted me a small Nikon Z30 mirrorless camera with a Nikkor Z DX 50-250mm lens. Neither is known for wildlife photography, but they were more than enough for an amateur birder and wildlife enthusiast like me. At first, I did what I had always done – pointed my camera at elephants, cheetahs, and lions, thrilled to capture their magnificence in Samburu National Reserve over Christmas. But when I returned to my small shamba in Nanyuki, I turned my lens towards something smaller, something I had previously overlooked: the birds in my backyard.

What I discovered amazed me. Every day, my garden was visited by an array of colourful

and fascinating birds – Baglafaecht and Village Weavers, Kenyan Rufous Sparrows, Red-cheeked Cordon-bleus, Ring-necked and Red-eyed Doves, and the shimmering Marico Sunbird. And then there were the surprises: the striking Violet-backed Starlings, the quirky Blue-naped Mousebirds, the vocal Black-headed Oriole and the shy Slate-coloured Boubous - all unexpected visitors who graced my little patch of green with their fleeting presence. In less than a month, I had photographed and identified 40 species, all without leaving the comfort of my armchair on my small verandah.

Birding has transformed the way I see the world. It has taught me patience – birds rarely sit still for a photo, darting from branch to branch just as I press the shutter. It has deepened my appreciation for the delicate ecosystems that sustain them, from the indigenous trees they nest on to the insects they feed on. It has given me a newfound respect for the sheer diversity of avian life in Kenya, a country that boasts over 1,100 species, making it one of the most exciting birding destinations in the world.

Birding has also become an adventure

**TOP LEFT**

Violet-backed Starling is well known for its vibrant plumage and is a favourite among birdwatchers.

**TOP RIGHT**

Bronze Sunbird is known for its metallic bronze plumage and long, curved bill.

**BELOW LEFT**

Spotted Thick-knee is a nocturnal bird found in dry, rocky scrub and bush country.

**BELOW MIDDLE**

Kenya Rufous Sparrow, seen here building a nest, is known for its adaptability and bold nature.

**BELOW RIGHT**

Slate-coloured Boubous is known for its dark plumage.



beyond my garden. On recent trips to Ol Pejeta and Mutara Conservancies, I've discovered even more species to admire and photograph. Hearing the White-bellied Go-away Bird's distinctive call, spotting the iridescent shimmer of Greater Blue-eared Starlings perched in the treetops, watching a pair of Grey Crowned Cranes gracefully forage nearby, or glimpsing a Spotted Thick-knee frozen still under a bush all give me a surprisingly satisfying thrill. Unlike searching for the Big Five, which focuses on a handful of species, birding offers an endless variety of encounters at each location and habitat, bringing the possibility of discovering something new. Even in Nairobi, in places like Karura Forest and the Arboretum, you can find an astonishing diversity of birds if you take the time to look.

Perhaps most importantly, birding has been a gateway to mindfulness — perfect for me as a mindfulness teacher. In a fast-paced world filled with constant noise and digital distractions, birding demands presence. It asks you to slow down, observe, and listen. Sitting quietly in my garden, watching a sunbird flit from flower to flower or listening to the incessant chatter of the weavers has

**TOP LEFT**

Blue-naped Mousebird is a unique, long-tailed bird.

**TOP RIGHT**

Grey Crowned Cranes are known for their striking golden crowns of feathers.

**BELOW LEFT**

Marico Sunbird is known for its iridescent plumage and energetic behaviour.

**BELOW MIDDLE**

Black-headed Oriole is known for its beautiful, flute-like calls.

**BELOW RIGHT**

Northern White-crowned Shrike is known for its social nature.

**BOTTOM**

Lilac-breasted Roller is known for its vibrant colours and acrobatic flight displays.



become a form of meditation. It is a moment of stillness, a pause that brings clarity and calm.

Nature has always been a healer, but birding has revealed this to me in a new way. In the quiet companionship of birds, I have found solace. Their songs remind me that life goes on and that beauty exists in the smallest moments. Engaging with the rhythms of nature is a deeply grounding experience. Whether I am in a national park or just sipping my morning tea on the verandah, birding has become a source of joy, a way to reconnect not just with nature but with myself.

The best part? Anyone can do it. You don't need expensive gear – a decent camera or even a good phone will do. A bird book or apps like PictureBird, Merlin Bird ID or eBird can help with identification. And, most importantly, you need patience. Birds won't always pose for you, but if you sit quietly, watch, and listen, they will reveal themselves in ways you never imagined.

So, next time you're out in nature, take a moment to notice the birds around you. That flash of colour, that distant call, that subtle movement in the trees – a whole world waiting to be discovered. And who knows? You might just become the person who stops the car, camera in hand, completely mesmerised by the sight of a Northern White-crowned Shrike perched elegantly in a tree. ●

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#### TOP

Weavers at garden feeder. They are known for their intricately woven nests, which they construct using grasses, leaves, and twigs. Males build elaborate nests to attract females. Many species display bright colours, particularly yellow and black, and are highly social, often forming large flocks.

#### BELOW

Rüppell's Starling is a strikingly iridescent bird found in eastern and central Africa. Known for its glossy plumage and social behaviour. Highly adaptable and thrives in both natural and human-altered environments.

