

FPS Tour to Kenya

By *N. R. Fuggles-Couchman*

THE fourth FPS tour to East Africa in February of this year, led by Leslie Brown with N.R. Fuggles-Couchman, was designed especially for bird watchers, and its success can be gauged from the fact that 439 bird species were seen in the 21 days.

The tour started in Nairobi with a visit to the famous national park there, and went on to Mount Kenya, with a drive up the mountain track to 10,000 feet to see moorland birds and watch a lammergeier soaring near the peaks. From there by air to the Samburu Game Reserve in northern Kenya – wonderful bird country, with several Somaliland bird species or races and several game species not to be found further south, such as Grèvy's zebra, reticulated giraffe and beisa oryx.

After a night at Treetops the party spent a day on the splendid drive across the Aberdare Mountains, one of the highlights of the tour, climbing up through the forest into the bamboo zone and on to the moorland where the bird species included Jackson's francolin and the slender-billed chestnut-winged starling. Two days on Lakes Naivasha and Nakuru followed with a wealth of water birds, made memorable for Leslie Brown's description of the habits of the flamingos and explanations of the mating behaviour in progress among the half-million or so birds in view. Also memorable was his instruction on stalking flamingos for close-up photographs – for the bystanders the view of elderly persons following him in Indian file must have been quite diverting.

A day in the East Tsavo park brought home the changes being wrought by the elephants, which have cleared vast areas of the thorn bush as effectively as any army of bulldozers to produce open grassland. Here a large variety of raptors were seen as well as two of that elusive species, the woolly-necked stork. Then followed three days at the coast, made particularly notable for Leslie Brown's discovery of a southern banded harrier-eagle's nest, the first record of the species nesting in East Africa. A launch trip up the Mida Creek produced flocks of migrant waders of 13 species, five species of terns and a flock of about 100 crab plover, by far the largest number the author has ever seen at one time. A trip to the Shimba Hills added more bird species and gave good views of three small herds of sable antelope – and also a taste of what bush travel can be like when the party had to pull three mini-buses up a steep hill in loose sand. Steinbok, lesser kudu and the fringe-eared oryx were encountered in the West Tsavo park. In both Tsavo parks and on the road to Mombasa large numbers of European rollers were seen; from counts made in Tsavo Leslie Brown estimated that there was roughly one roller per ten acres, which would mean some 2,000,000 in suitable areas of Kenya at that time.

Altogether this fourth tour was a highly successful one, both ornithologically and photographically. To have seen over a third of the Kenya bird species in three weeks, under the conditions of the tour and without being able to walk freely in the parks, was a remarkable achievement and extremely satisfactory.