

THE SHEER THRILL OF WATCHING THE RAW WILDERNESS THAT ABOUNDS AT THE LAKE NAIVASHA IN KENYA NEEDS TO BE EXPERIENCED TO BE BELIEVED

LAKE PLACID

● HEMA NARAYANAN



I knew that a visit to Africa would be like nothing else. Still, nothing could have prepared me for the raw wilderness of the sub-Saharan country of Kenya. Among the places we visited there was Lake Naivasha, a freshwater lake to the northwest of Nairobi.

Of the many lakes in Africa, some are alkaline while some are fresh water. The Naivasha, which has freshwater springs supplying water to it apart from some transient streams, is home to an impressive amount of biological diversity.

Our journey to Naivasha was through the unusual landscape of the Great Rift Valley. Situated in a complex, geological combination of volcanic rocks and sedimentary deposits, Lake Naivasha can stun even the most widely travelled aficionados. Setting foot on the Great Rift Valley (also called the “Cradle of Mankind” since it is considered to be the point of origin for all human migration around Earth) was an indescribable feeling. At the Rift’s viewpoint, stood a colourful map showing how the valley is a long geographical trench, running from the Red Sea to Mozambique (9,600 km). From the top of the escarpment of the Great Rift, we could spot

Naivasha sparkling in the sun, thousands of feet below.

Soon, we were sailing a motorboat into the waters of the Naivasha. A vast part of the lake is fringed by thick papyrus and other water plants. It is almost 13 km wide, but the water is shallow. So rich in natural beauty, the lake and its surroundings have such fertile soil and abundant water supply that it is considered one of Kenya’s prime agricultural regions.

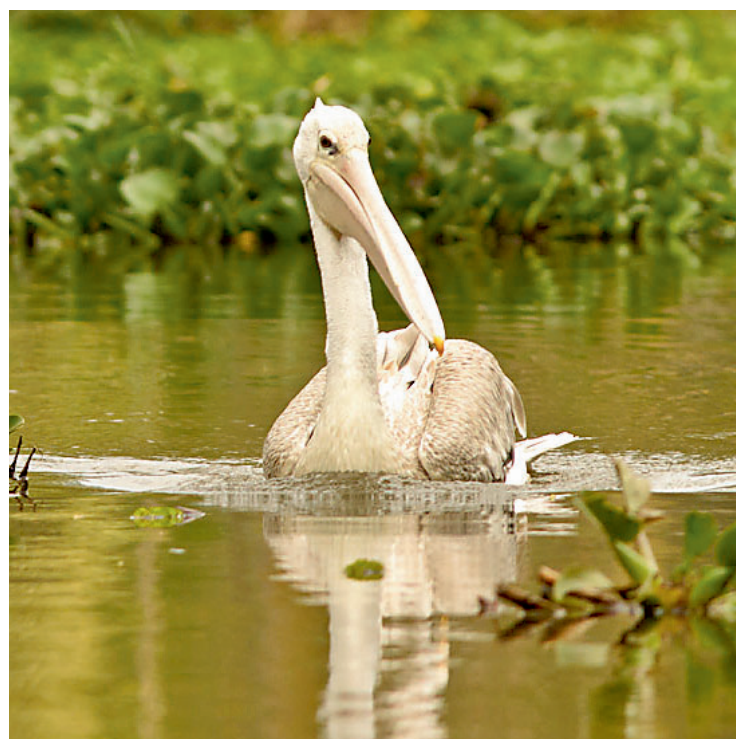
In the midst of our ride, a great hippopotamus emerged! The boat slowed down and we passed close to the hippos. Thankfully, they decided not to overturn our boat, sparing us a swim in the wild lake! Naivasha is home to a sizeable population of hippos. But then, it was unbelievable to see just how much game Naivasha draws to its shores. Giraffe and deer are often seen wandering among the acacia, while wild buffaloes wallow in the swamps and Colobus monkeys call from the treetops.

Our ride on the lake also showed us many species of birds — some perched on tree branches, others on submerged plants. Still others flew towards us. Over 400 species of birds can be spotted here over the seasons. We played a game of who-is-who and identified quite a few, including white pelicans, yellow-billed storks, fish eagles, cormorants, white-throated bee-eater, lilac-breasted roller. As if the thrill was not enough, a great African eagle swooped down in front of us from a great height to catch

its prey with precision!

No amount of animal documentaries on TV can match the real experience of racing heartbeats and photographing animals and birds in the real wilderness. As the clouds took on a blackish-blue hue, and we started our ride back from Naivasha. What our boatman had told us seemed so pertinent — Naivasha got its name from *nai posha* or “rough water”, because sudden storms can arise here any time!

The writer is an engineer/technology consultant-turned-photographer and writer



(From top) Wildlife abounds in and around the Lake Naivasha area; (inset) the writer