

Glancing back over my shoulder, I am reminded by the darkening burnt-orange sky that the sun has already dropped below the edge of the plateau. Venus appears brightly, surrounded by the orange glow. Ahead of me, a full moon sprinkles its light along my path, at the same time revealing a solitary roan antelope just next to the road. Its dark form and backwards-arching horns are barely discernable against the darkening skyline. For once I am relieved it is not a leopard and I can feel my racing heart gradually slowing to its normal speed!

Suddenly, almost too soon, my destination is reached. A meal of cooked beans and nsima (a thick porridge-like mixture made from ground maize - the staple diet of most Africans) awaits me. A blazing fire, enclosed in a make-shift metal drum stove, relaxes my tired muscles and fills the small cabin with the smoky smell of burning pine. As I sit close to the crackling fire, that still unseen leopard darts across my mind. But it fades in importance as I reflect back on all the other spectacular sights and sounds I have experienced in this one day on Nyika.

COLOURS AT NYIKA, WINTER

by P.A.Ford, from Poems About Malawi

Where the burnt spaces	Shapes made darker
Blend into the brown	By the strips
There is a marriage	Of forest; and as
Of colour: the short	Though these shades
Green tufts with	Had been plucked
Their black edges	By a rhythmic hand
Undulate into the browns	The grey and black
With the contours	Roan jumps
Of the land, and	Lifting in one stretch
Stark is the dead	The colours of
Bracken in spikey	The Land.

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS

Christmas Bird Counts have become an enjoyable tradition for many of us. What could be a happier way to spend a few days of your Christmas season than with your family or friends, enjoying the crisp December air, the challenge of tracking down birds, and the excellent cuisine of a pot-luck supper to top it all off? Beginning birders, as well as old hands are welcome. The cost for participation of \$2.00 per person. This helps to defray the expenses of publishing our count results in American Birds, the journal which coordinates and prints count results from across the continent.

For each count day, counters are assigned to teams and asked to spend as many hours as possible recording numbers and species of all birds seen within a designated area. In addition records are kept of hours and miles walked or driven in the various habitat types covered. Mammals and their sign are also noted.

This year's count dates have been established as follows: P.E.I. National Park - Sat., Dec. 17; Hillsborough - Tue., Dec. 27; and Montague - Mon., Jan. 2. The Hillsborough pot-luck supper will be held at Paul and Arlene MacGuigan's on Stratford Road. Volunteers are still needed to host the National Park and Montague suppers. For more information about getting involved in count day activities, contact Winnie Cairns at 838-2663 (or 894-4095) or Sid Watts in Kilmuir.