

## Conservation of nature since 1909

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NatureUganda celebrates 100 years since its parent society the East Africa Natural History Society (EANHS) was established. In or around 1909, some scientists, naturalists, professional hunters and others with interest in the natural world living in what was then called British East Africa got together and founded the East Africa and Uganda Natural History Society.

The main object of the society was to document the diversity of wildlife in East Africa. NatureUganda, the EANHS in Uganda is membership-based organization. We invite all of you who are not members to join today and be part of a strong participatory and voluntary tradition where members actively participate in the study of nature and implementation of conservation activities.

NatureUganda implements the Society's aims through the headline mission "promoting understanding, appreciation and conservation nature"; to take action for biodiversity conservation. Nature Uganda strives to:

- Create a nature-friendly public
- Enhance knowledge of Uganda's natural history
- Advocate for policies favourable to the environment
- Take action to conserve priority species, sites and habitats

NatureUganda delivers its conservation actions through strategic interventions including; advocacy for conservation, monitoring important sites, environmental education, action and management planning, documentation and information dissemination and encouraging community participation in conservation through promotion of sustainable benefits.

NatureUganda is implementing conservation actions at over 20 sites including Forests (Echuya Forest, Kashoha-Kitomi, Mabira Forest Reserves); wetlands (Nabajuzi wetland in Masaka, Musambwa Wetlands in Raki, Mabamba and Lutembe Wetlands in Wakiso District, Lakes Opeta and Bisina in Teso region, Nyamuriro wetland in Kabale and various sites in Masaka and Bushenyi districts) NatureUganda also works with local communities and local governments for the conservation of the sites particularly outside protected areas and progress has been made. In Rakai, local government and local communities developed a byelaw for Musambwa IBA settings aside for research and conservation, In Nyamuriro, the local government and communities developed a management plan for the wetland and have launched a massive effort to restore the degraded wetland. In Lutembe bay communities have been at the forefront to stop the invention of flower farms and pollution of the wetland and Mabamba Community have developed one of the few successful community tourism programmes. Local communities have been engaged in activities that link biodiversity, conservation and livelihood improvements including Mushroom growing, fruit growing, Bee keeping, Eco-tourism, tree planting and other capacity building initiatives for conservation and development.

In forest sector, we have worked with partners, local governments and communities on collaborative forest management, advocacy for protection of key forests such as Mabira and Echuya Forest Reserve, landscape approach to conservation of forests estate, national parks and reserves and conservation of catchments for rivers and lakes. With communities NU has;

- increased community participation in forest management through collaboration forest management arrangement with 10 CFM agreements signed between NFA and communities and benefiting about 20,000 community members
- increased environmental management knowledge, skill and information,
- increased tree cover through Agro forestry and tree growing practices with a total of 500,000 trees planted
- promotion of energy efficient technologies with 1,500 energy saving stoves constructed in over 1,000 households,
- increased alternative sources of income at household through forestry related enterprises support such as Bee keeping, Passion fruits growing, coffee, poultry, mushroom growing, piggy and others.

These examples provide hope for conservation of biodiversity in Uganda and that communities have a big role to play.

NatureUganda identified Important Bird Areas in 2001 and these sites have become priority areas for conservation in Uganda. Subsequent studies have shown that that Important Bird Areas contain over 87% of Uganda's biodiversity. In 2005 Uganda government recognizes 10 of these sites as wetlands of international importance ie. Ramsar sites.

Despite all this work, Uganda's biodiversity is faced with overwhelming challenges: climate change; food insecurity; energy insecurity; and burgeoning population growth. Uganda's conservation and development work is faced with key barriers: lack of resources at local and national level, lack of thoughtful leadership and governance; poor enforcement of existing legislation and regulations; and lack of long-term vision that links conservation with development. These barriers and limitations pose a major challenge for conservation of Uganda's biodiversity.

As the Society celebrates 100 years, the next 100 years look as gloomy as the past. Man seems determined to finish mankind. Take the proposal to convert Mabira Forest into a sugarcane plantation – the dangerous proposal purportedly to increase income and combat global warming by cutting down natural forest and posing enormous threat to

biodiversity. Key question arise: Will food be put in rich people's cars when poor rural communities are dying of hunger? What space do wildlife and natural habitats have if land is cleared to grow sugarcane, palm oils, and bio-fuels?

Uganda needs to consider innovative technology options that will bring about development and conserve our rich biodiversity and national heritage. We must keep in mind the danger of only being the supplier of raw materials to more developed economies. These and many other issues will definitely keep Nature Uganda busy for next 100 years.