

CONSERVATIONISTS RESTORE WAKISO'S NAKINDIBA FOREST

By Gerald Tenywa

Nakindiba forest reserve is as busy as a beehive. The birds sing as they welcome us into Nakindiba, which is an urban forest sitting on 142 hectares in Kakiri town council, Wakiso district.

On the morning of July 22, Swaibu Mutaya, the acting LCI chairperson of Kiteredde village in Wakiso, leads us deep into Nakindiba, watching every step we take.

Mutaya advises that we need to be careful to avoid stepping on any creepy creatures. This is because Nakindiba is also a sanctuary for snakes.

The bright rays of the sunlight are seemingly timeless and the beauty of Nakindiba still stands, even after taking repeated blows from illegal loggers and charcoal burners.

As the melodious birds feed on small seeds of some plants, they take turns to sing. They were calling their mates to come for the party. Is it? I wonder.

Jonathan Onongo, an ornithologist from Nature Uganda, assures me that birds are very active in the morning

and that later, they take a rest in the tall trees that have survived the chop.

Onongo is on a mission with a team from Nature Uganda, a partner of BirdLife International, to save Nakindiba from total destruction.

For three days, Onongo's team, with the support of staff from the National Forestry Authority (NFA), retraced the boundary of Nakindiba and erected concrete pillars to separate the forest from private land.

"We want to restore this forest, but this could not happen without securing its boundary," says Onongo, adding; "The good times have come to breathe new life into Nakindiba."

Part of Nakindiba has been planted with indigenous trees by the local community, supported by the private sector, mobilised by NFA. They have also teamed up with the private sector and Platinum Credit to restore Nakindiba.

Last year, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the United Nations in Uganda planted trees as part of the restoration drive. Parts of the forest have



PHOTO BY GERALD TENYWA

Byaruhanga inspecting one of the pillars erected along the boundary of Nakindiba forest reserve at Kiteredde village in Wakiso district recently

been left to recover on their own (natural restoration).

"We used to get rain in good amounts in the right time, but we have destroyed the forest that used to feed this place with rain," Mutaya said.

Mutaya, who also doubles

as the defense secretary for Kiteredde, added: "We had kept this forest for a long time until hell broke loose and it was gone in three years (2019-2021)."

Like many urban forests, Nakindiba, which purifies air

Some forest officers, who are supposed to protect the forest, end up working with illegal loggers to destroy it.

lives in the neighbourhood, says he put his life on the line for decades by fighting waves of encroachment on Nakindiba.

He blames some of the forest officers, who are supposed to protect the forest, of working with illegal loggers to destroy it.

"The people who cut down Nakindiba are well-known to the staff of NFA on the ground. When I realised this, I pulled out because I was putting my life at risk," Lutaya says.

Achilles Byaruhanga, the executive director of Nature Uganda, says Nakindiba is one of the 21 forest reserves in Lwamunda that should be protected.

He says forests are important stopovers for birds, including parrots.

Douglas Lukwago, NFA's market development manager, recently assured residents that they were dealing with errant officers and that they risk facing harsh punishments.

Albert Abaasa, the executive director Platinum Credit, says: "Our clarion call is to contribute to forest restoration. Forests are important for the climate and medicinal values."

for the urban population in Kakiri and its neighbourhood, is also a source of drinking water.

The loggers cleared about 80% of the forest before the Uganda People's Defence Forces soldiers camped at the edge of Nakindiba to stop massive intrusion.

The Rev. Felix Lutaya, who