

# THE Naturalist

NEWSLETTER FOR NATURE LOVERS

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## NU to update Lake Nabugabo Ramsar Site Information

Lake Nabugabo in Masaka district is internationally recognized for hosting rare or extinct fish species and other unique biodiversity including migratory birds (palearctic and intra-African migrants) and endemic plants. The site has got threatened bird species including the Intra African migrant and the Blue Swallow.

Aside from the cultural importance, the lake offers economic benefits to the surrounding communities such as fish for subsistence and commercial use. The wetlands have also traditionally been used as sources of water and handcraft materials. With the increase in population, poverty and need for more agricultural land, crop cultivation and dairy farming has been introduced leading to over exploitation of the resource.

The lake currently has an expired management plan which was never fully implemented and the ecological integrity of the system continues to deteriorate.

Nature Uganda is working with communities around Lake Nabugabo to protect and conserve the lake, its satellite lakes and wetlands as Biologically Significant Areas (BSA) in Uganda with the hope of building strategic and sustainable actions that contribute to strengthening resilient

and sustainable management of the lake. The project code named PREPARED (Planning for Resilience through Policy, Adaptation, Research, and Economic Development), will Support Masaka local government to update the Nabugabo Management Plan, assess the current Ramsar boundaries and demarcate the existing and proposed expanded Ramsar site boundaries.

Nature Uganda will also Update the Ramsar Site Information Sheet (RIS) and site map for the expanded boundaries, develop a BSA guidebook for Nabugabo Ramsar site highlighting the critical resources of the area and document the impacts of activities on the protection of freshwater biodiversity.

This will then result into a new Ramsar plan for the lake and a guidebook or travel guide containing visitor or tourist information about the lake Nabugabo and satellite surrounding lakes.

Other key stakeholders in this project are the Ministry of water and Environment through the lead agency Wetlands Management Department, National Environment management Authority, National Forest Authority, and the Lake Victoria Basin Commission (LVBC).

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# Message from the Chairman

# Nature Uganda holds the 24th Annual General meeting



Dear member!

I take this opportunity to once again present the latest issue of the Naturalist Volume 20 No 1 to you. On the same note, I want to thank you for successfully attending the 24th Annual General Meeting held on April 8th, 2016. During the Annual General Meeting, members elected two new Executive Committee members. Join me to welcome Ms. Charlotte Kanabahita and Ms. Mary Nyamusana who are the new members of the EC. They replace Prof. William Banage and Mr. Deo Nkuzingoma. I would also like to congratulate Dr James Kalema for having been confirmed as the treasurer during the annual meeting.

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**And we are going sporty too! NU is planning a golf tournament to raise funds to conserve the Grey Crowned Crane, whose population has drastically reduced and is a IUCN. So I urge you all to join the 'Save the Last Crane, Plant the next tree' campaign as we tee off on July 8, 2016 at the Kitante Golf Course in Kampala**

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Mary has been a long time teacher and examiner of Geography and Charlotte comes with extensive understanding of private sector especially in tourism. Both bring with them value to the Executive Committee and we have no doubt the EC will benefit from their experience and expertise through their guidance, oversight and leadership.

I want to thank Prof. Banage and Mr. Nkuzingoma for their valuable support to NatureUganda's work and as members of NatureUganda, they will continue to serve and offer their support in many other ways. .

In the first quarter of 2016, we have had a lot going on at the secretariat. In this issue, we share with you highlights of some of the activities that were held. The secretariat has just launched a one year project that aims at conserving the wealth in Lake Nabugabo Ramsar.

The project funded under the “Planning for Resilience in East Africa through Policy , Adaption, Research and Economic Development (PREPARED) aims at ensuring that Lake Nabugabo Ramsar site Management Plan is revised, Ramsar information reviewed and produce an information guide for visitors and managers.

Similarly, NU is taking lessons learnt in the implementation of People Partner with Nature project at Echuya to Kasyoha Kitomi. NatureUganda will continue to engage with stakeholders from these communities, local governments to national agencies through the Collaborative Forest Management approach.

And we are going sporty too! NU is planning a golf tournament to raise funds to conserve the Grey Crowned Crane, whose population has drastically reduced and is now red listed as an endangered species by IUCN. So I urge you all to join the 'Save the Last Crane, Plant the next tree' campaign as we tee off on July 8, 2016 at the Kitante Golf Course in Kampala. It is my humble appeal to all the members to support this campaign as we work towards saving our treasured national symbol.

Not forgetting, we have continued to have our monthly public talks, nature walks and excursions. To take part in any of the activities, visit the website as well as the secretariat for more information or booking.

I want to thank the selfless team at the secretariat as well as the field staff in Kabale, Masaka and Rubirizi/Bushenyi for being at the forefront of ensuring that we continue to promote the understanding, appreciation and conservation of nature in this country.

**Dr Robert Nabanyumya**  
Chairman, Executive Committee

Two new members recently joined the NU Executive Committee. Charlotte Kanabahita and Mary Nyamusana were elected unopposed as committee members at the 24th Annual General Meeting at the Uganda Museum on April 8th, 2016. They replace Prof William Banage and Mr Deo Nkuzingoma.

The honorary treasurer Dr James Kalema was confirmed as the treasurer. This happened during the NU 24th Annual General meeting that was held on April 8th, 2016. NatureUganda is a membership organization with over 3000 members.

During the meeting, the Chairman of the Executive Committee Dr Robert Nabanyumya elaborated the achievements of the organisation. He said the organization has continued to work around sites with rich biodiversity such as Echuya Forest in Kabale.

He added that the membership of the organisation has continued to grow over the years but there was need to grow a vibrant membership.

During the meeting, members challenged NU to always show impact for their work if they have to show cause for the existence of the organisation.

Dr Nabanyumya encouraged members to always visit the secretariat to get details of the impact that NatureUganda is making in the communities where it works in.



## NU replicates lessons learnt in Echuya in Kasyoha Kitomi



Having successfully worked in Echuya forest since 2004, NatureUganda is now replicating the lessons learnt in Echuya in Kasyoha Kitomi. According to Zeneb Musiimire, a programme officer at NatureUganda, the work in Echuya is guided by three objectives; increasing capacity to integrate poverty reduction and nature protection, participatory forest management to improve livelihoods of poor communities, and reduce pressure on ecosystems and biodiversity. The third objective is to empower local civil society groups to engage in rights based advocacy and political processes.

Echuya is surrounded by one of the highest population densities in Uganda. It has four Community Forest Management groups that already work with the National Forestry Authority.

Echuya plays a significant role in stabilizing soils, protection against strong winds, and is an important water catchment area. The area surrounding Echuya is hilly and steep. Land degradation is acute due to soil erosion arising from poor land management and planning. Cultivation covers most hilltops and wetlands have been drained while there is complete deforestation outside the protected area. The land shortage in the area, coupled

with intensive use for subsistence agriculture has led to soil degradation, poor yields and poverty.

NatureUganda through the Integrating Livelihoods and conservation – People partner with nature (PPN) has been able to implement collaborative Forest Management (CFM) as a means of encouraging community participation and responsibility towards the conservation of Echuya. This has resulted into positive attitudes towards the forest thus reducing threats on the forest like wild fires and irresponsible harvesting of forest resources.

The community around Echuya was encouraged to focus on enterprises of high value products that provide both short term and long term benefits such as fruit growing, mushroom growing sustainable organic farming, and bee keeping. This has contributed to biodiversity conservation and sustainable livelihood improvement.

Musiimire further shares that the project has changed the attitude of the community. She says, “They feel they own the forest and have been motivated to take part in joint forest protection activities like putting off forest fires.”

Kasyoha Kitomi CFM on the other hand is located within Bushenyi, Ibanda, Kamwenge and Rubirizi. Around this site, majority of the larger trees have been exploited for timber, fuelwood, herbs and grazing. Besides, the area has experienced population growth. NatureUganda will be looking towards delivering the same interventions it has delivered in Echuya at Kasyoha Kitomi. Recent assessments in the area classify the region as one of those with international importance in terms of global diversity values.

The PPN program focuses on participatory forest management with a strong emphasis on promoting equality of women and their access to the program benefits and participation, addressing inclusion of indigenous and marginalized groups.

The aim is long term protection of biodiversity around the sites based on participatory management of forested IBAs to secure legal, equitable and sustainably managed access to natural resources by local communities.

### Activities in the PPN project

- Fruit growing,
- Mushroom growing
- Organic farming,
- Bee keeping
- Tree nurseries for easy access to tree seedlings.
- 358 households supported to make improved wood saving stoves
- A revolving fund for implementation of income generating and conservation related activities.
- Environmental Education in 16 primary schools
- Formation of community based organizations and farmer groups has helped in consolidating, scaling up and sustaining different community led and project supported conservation and livelihood improvement interventions.
- Community sensitization meetings and radio talk shows



# Celebrating World Bird Migratory Day



*World Migratory Bird Day: Saturday 14, May 2016 ushered me into my first birding day at the Mabamba wetland in Mpigi. I travelled with staff and members of NatureUganda to celebrate the World Bird Migratory Day which usually falls on May 10. Mabamba I am told is a spot for migratory and a home of the famous shoe bill.*

This trip was one of the three activities organized by NatureUganda to celebrate the World Bird Migratory Day. Others include a nature walk by a Young Explorers club and a public talk at the NatureUganda branch in Gulu.

Before leaving Kampala, I had read a lot of literature about migratory birds and the theme for this year, "When the skies go silent" got me thinking about a world without birds, one where the skies are silent. It surely must be one world you do

not want to live in if you cherish the refreshing sound of birds. According to the official WBMD website, migratory birds fly hundreds and thousands of kilo meters to find the best ecological conditions and habitats for feeding, breeding and raising their young. This usually happens when conditions at breeding sites become unfavorable and they have to find where conditions are better.

## **MABAMBA**

### **THE HOME OF THE SHOEBILL**

During the trip, I sat next to a passionate birder, Gaddaffi Kiberu Mamba who was very helpful in giving insights of Mabamba and the wealth in there.

"This is the home of the Shoebill. You will have 80% chances of seeing the Shoebill

in Mabamba." Gaddafi informed members in the vehicle. I must say, that percentage raised my hopes of seeing the Shoebill.

When we got onto the boats that took us around the Mabamba swamp, I shared my expectations with Dr Dianah Nalwanga and Irene Namutebi the tour guide who took us around. Dianah gave me a cheeky look while Irene responded, "We shall see the Shoebill God willing." Hmm, God willing! I wondered. At 80% I thought it was definite I would come back to Kampala celebrating seeing the Shoebill for the very first time. Nevertheless, I hang in there thinking I will see the Shoebill.

In the meantime, I had been tasked to take note of the different birds that we came a cross. There were many namely



“ So even with the disappointment I had I am supposed to be happy for having come close to viewing the Shoebill! The whole experience left me feeling like I was reading stories of people chasing the treasure hunts.

was in just failed to give us this spot that would make me see the Shoebill. Dianah and Irene shared with me that many birders come to Mabamba and go back without seeing this famous bird.

“Consider yourself lucky that on day one, you could actually ‘see’ a Shoebill. Many people get disappointed like you because they never get to see the whole bird or see it nearby,” Dianah told me.

So even with the disappointment I had, I was supposed to be happy for having come close to viewing the Shoebill! The whole experience left me feeling like I was on a treasure hunt.

On my way back from Mabamba, I sat next to Lillian Twanza from NatureUganda. She helped me understand my frustration with the facts about the Shoebill.

The Shoebill is a shy endangered species that lays one or two eggs after every five years. These take 48 days to hatch. Most times, the first egg to hatch is stronger and the second bird to be hatched is weaker. The stronger bird usually eats the weaker one. This brings challenges in multiplying the Shoebill.

However, of more concern is the love that Shoebills have for un tampered wetlands. Considering the rate at which wetlands in this country are being tampered with, I have no doubt it will be harder to see a Shoebill.

There are also some people who take Shoebills as pets and cage them. Lillian added, “There are only about 8000 Shoebills worldwide. And the world now has about six billion people. Imagine how scarce the Shoebill is if you only have about 8000. You are very lucky to have come close to seeing it today. It is better than those who have not even seen its shadow,” Lillian told me.

Mabamba boasts of over 300 bird species. Some of which are endemic to Uganda. The wetland supports approximately 38% of the global population of the Blue Swallow. Other globally threatened species found on the wetland include the Papyrus Gonolek and the Papyrus Yellow Wabler. No wonder, it is an internationally recognised conservation site.

the Hammer kop, Black headed weaver, Cattle Igrey, Little Igrey among others. But don't think getting the names the very first time was easy. The one I sympathized with most was the Fan Tailed widow bird. I thought that is such a sad name to carry along even for a bird all your life. Dr Nalwanga explained that it was probably because of its colour (black) that it has had to carry the word 'widow' with it.

Suddenly Irene the tour guide points to a far off point saying, 'There it is! The Shoebill!' I got excited, but I could not see anything. For over 30 minutes, I tried to catch a glimpse of the Shoebill in vain.

Not even with the binoculars! It was even more frustrating to see members on the other boats enjoying the site of the Shoebill from the different spots. The boat I



# NU moves to save the Grey Crowned Crane



The Crested Crane is a bird we all love. Our sports teams like the football team and some corporates use it as a brand. But how much do we know about this bird. Perhaps not much!

NatureUganda has been researching on the Cranes for over 30 years and now the records show that the Crested crane population in Uganda has reduced in the last four decades by over 80%. The population of the Cranes in Uganda was estimated at 100,000 in 1970s but today the number has reduced to 10,000. This has led to the Crane being listed as an endangered species by IUCN.

For this reason NatureUganda is running a five year campaign to conserve the Crane. The campaign was launched on April 29th, 2016 at the Kitante Golf Course. The flagship event for the campaign is a golf tournament to be held at Kampala Golf Club Kitante on 8th July 2016 under the theme "Save the last Crane. Plant the next Tree."

## The Economics

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## Tree Planting.

On the same occasion NU launched a tree planting initiative with the aim of restoring habitats for the different bird species in the country. NU expects to plant 1m trees over a period of five years.

The Director for plantations at National Forestry Authority David Mununuzi said, this was a good initiative that would improve on the tree coverage in the country. He regretted that the tree coverage in the country had reduced further from 13% to 9% which affects habitats of different bird species. On behalf of NFA he pledged to support NUs efforts in tree planting.

**80** | Percentage by which the Crested Crane population in Uganda has reduced.

**30** | Years that NatureUganda has been researching on the Crested Cranes

**9** | Percentage to which the tree coverage has dropped, from 13%.

**10,000** | Estimated number of Crested Cranes in Uganda, down from 100,000

## Why golfing!

Golfing is linked with conservation with most of the golf courses/clubs boasting of lush green and cool environments dominated by trees which are a habitat to many bird species.

Golf courses are roosting and feeding grounds for many species including cranes. At the same time golfers and the golf game are historically closely linked with conservation of birds including scoring of points in the game. For example a score will be called a birdie, an Eagle, an Albatross or a Condor.

These are all names of birds. Therefore this tournament will not only strengthen golf game and conservation of nature but will provide golfers and general public through sport to contribute to saving our national bird that is now faced with extinction



# UNUSUAL SIGHTINGS



Normal morph of the Malachite Kingfisher 📍



📍 Leucistic Malachite Kingfisher

During the Common Bird Counts and Waterfowl Counts between January and March this year, we had some rare sightings. With a lot of color variations coming up, one wonders whether we are getting a new species or race of birds, or is it a question of Genetic Mutations?

We encountered some bird species that one would commonly refer to as “Albino Birds” relating to a similar condition in human beings. These birds are pale and lack the normal coloration of feathers, known as melanin.

There is a rise in the number of bird species with strange coloration. Albinos are known to have red or pink eyes. This brings us to another condition known as “Leucism”. Leucism in birds is a condition where a bird is pale-feathered normally with colored eyes.

The Albinos lack the melanin while the leucistic produce melanin but can’t deposit it in their feathers. Melanin is important in birds’ bodies as it protects the bird from Ultra violet. Those that are heavily

pigmented are referred to as “melanistic” due to too much melanin.

The leucistic birds encountered were; the Malachite Kingfisher seen at the Kazinga Channel now becoming a common sighting at the channel and the other was an African Thrush that was seen during a BPM at Park Alexander in Entebbe. The African Thrush was easily identified by its general body shape and size as well as the coloring of the bill; otherwise the bird was generally whitish to light cream.

## WELL..WE’VE BEEN BUSY!!

Early in the year, members visited Mt Rwenzori and Ngamba Island (Chimpanzee Sanctuary)  
We bring you pictures of the excursions!



## WHERE WE WORK



### Branches

**Eastern Uganda**  
 Islamic University in Uganda,  
 and Busitema University

**Western Uganda**  
 Mbarara University of Science & Technology

**Northern Uganda**  
 Gulu University

## NU MEMBERS - 2016

### CORPORATE

- Accolade Explorers
- Adroit Consult International
- African Crane Safaris
- Avian Safaris
- Bic Tours LTD
- Bunyonyi Safaris Ltd
- Bwindi Mgahinga Conservation Trust (BMCT)
- Drywood Safaris
- Global Woods AG
- Gorilla Trek Africa
- Insight Birding Holidays
- Jane Goodall Institute Uganda
- Jubilee Tours LTD
- Kombi Nation Tours
- Pearl Africa Safaris
- Range Land Safaris
- Rwenzori Trekking services
- Sseese Islands Beach Hotel
- Ssezibwa Falls Resort
- Uganda Wildlife Authority
- Venture Uganda Limited
- Bird Uganda Safaris

### INSTITUTIONAL

- Focused Community SACCO
- Kitante Primary School
- Kalinabiri Secondary School
- Rubaga Girls Secondary school
- Mabamba Wetland Users Association (MWETA)
- Makerere University Conservation Biology Association (MUCOBA)
- Green Hill Academy
- Balibaseka Secondary School
- Bwindi Bird Club
- Neul Tours
- Kasheregenyi Friends Group
- Kampala International University
- Birdlife Uganda
- Uganda Wildlife Research and Training Institute

### WORKING GROUPS

- Plants Working Group
- Herps Working Group
- Mammal Conservation Group
- Friends of Dudu
- Microbial Resources Group
- Birdlife working Group



### MEET OUR MEMBERS

'Being a member of NatureUganda has enabled me travel across the country to rich conservation priority sites and National parks at very subsidized rates. Please become a member and invite your friends too to join NatureUganda. And when you join please stay a member always!' – Hon Kigyaji John Arimpa, the Presidential Advisor on Environment.

*Hon Kigyaji has been a member of Nature Uganda since 2000 (16 years and currently serves on the Nature Uganda Executive Committee*

**NatureUganda** Membership is open to all nature enthusiasts. Join by paying membership fees at the secretariat in Naguru or at any of our upcountry branches. You can also send membership fees through our **MTN mobile number 0777 147 367**. Join us in Promoting the Understanding, Appreciation & Conservation of Nature

### MEMBERSHIP FEES

Category	Locals	
Life membership	100,000	
Sponsor	500,000 +	
Corporate	200,000	\$350
Institutional	70,000	\$90
Family	25,000	\$30
Full members	20,000	\$20
Student	5,000	\$15

The  partner in Uganda and a member of 



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