

# THE Naturalist

NEWSLETTER FOR NATURE LOVERS

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NatureUganda



## NATIONAL WILDLIFE CONSERVATION CONFERENCE

"Connecting people & planet: Exploring Digital Innovation in wildlife Conservation"

Date: Thursday 22nd Feb 2024 | @Uganda Museum | Time: 9:00Am-4:00Pm



## Connecting People and the Planet: Exploring Digital Innovations for Wildlife Conservation Conference

In this  
issue



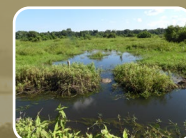
### CONSERVATION

Conservation efforts yield tangible benefits for local communities...Pg6



### NEWS

NatureUganda promotes wise use of wetlands...Pg4



### RESEARCH

The ecological transition of Maramagambo grassland...Pg8

# CONTENTS

- 3 Chairman's Message

## NEWS

- 4 Connecting People and the Planet: Exploring Digital Innovations for Wildlife Conservation
- 5 NatureUganda promotes wise-use of Wetlands
- 6 Conservation Efforts Yield Tangible Benefits for Local Communities
- 7 Beekeeping: A Catalyst for Environmental Conservation

## RESEARCH

- 8 The Ecological Transition of Maramagambo Grassland
- 9 Assessing Biodiversity in Lubigi Wetland: Insights and Challenges

## MEMBERSHIP

- 10 Crocodile Chronicles: A Wildlife Adventure in Uganda with NatureUganda

## FROM THE WILD

- 11 Unusual Sightings



## CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE



**Dear Members,**

As we reflect on the recent endeavors and accomplishments in the field of conservation, I am reminded of the profound impact that our collective efforts have had on both the environment and the communities. The articles featured in our quarterly newsletter showcase the diverse range of initiatives and partnerships that have propelled us forward in our mission to protect and conserve Uganda's rich biodiversity.

The National Wildlife Conservation Conference held in February was a momentous occasion, bringing together stakeholders from various sectors to explore the intersection of technology and conservation. The conference highlighted the potential of digital solutions in conserving wildlife. From space technologies to citizen science initiatives, the presentations and discussions highlighted the crucial role of technology in enhancing efficiency and effectiveness in wildlife management. As we continue to integrate digital innovations into our conservation efforts, we must remain steadfast in our commitment to collaboration and inclusivity, ensuring that all stakeholders are actively engaged in

**The success stories shared by the community members demonstrate the transformative impact on both individuals and ecosystems.**

achieving our shared conservation goals.

Our commitment to the wise use of wetlands remains unwavering, as we recognize the vital role these ecosystems play in supporting both human life and the environment. Through initiatives such as demarcation exercises and community education campaigns, we are working tirelessly to ensure the sustainability of wetlands. By promoting holistic approaches and fostering community ownership of conservation efforts, we are making significant strides in preserving these invaluable habitats.

We continue to support communities where we work by providing sustainable livelihoods options like beekeeping while safeguarding natural resources. The success stories shared by the community members demonstrate the transformative impact on both individuals and ecosystems. As we continue to support such initiatives, we are not only enhancing incomes but also nurturing a culture of environmental stewardship among communities.

We track habitat shifts through our research and monitoring programme, so that we can better understand the challenges posed by climate change and develop targeted conservation interventions to mitigate its effects.

Lastly, our monthly nature walks highlight the importance of ecotourism in promoting conservation awareness and generating support for our cause. Through experiences like the excursions, we are able to engage with individuals from around the world and inspire them to become stewards of nature. I welcome you to our monthly public talks and nature walks.

As members of NatureUganda, your dedication and support are invaluable in our shared mission of conservation, drawing inspiration from the successes of the past and embracing the challenges of the future with optimism and determination. Together, let us strive for a future where people and nature thrive in harmony.

With gratitude,

**Robert Kityo**  
Chairman, NatureUganda

## Connecting People and the Planet: Exploring Digital Innovations for Wildlife Conservation - Insights from the National Conservation Conference



*Minister of ICT and National Guidance, Dr. Chris Baryomunsi, addressing members at the wildlife conservation conference*

In a world where digital connectivity shapes every facet of our lives, it's imperative that we extend this connectivity to the realm of wildlife conservation. This was the central focus of the National Wildlife Conservation Conference, held in Uganda on February 22nd, 2024, as part of the events to celebrate World Wildlife Day 2024. Under the theme "Connecting People and the Planet: Exploring Digital Innovations for Wildlife Conservation," stakeholders from various sectors converged at the Uganda Museum to explore the transformative potential of technology in safeguarding biodiversity and preserving our natural heritage.

The conference was organized by NatureUganda in collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities, World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), and the Uganda Wildlife Research and Training Institute (UWRTI). The conference aimed to foster dialogue, share insights, and catalyze action towards integrating digital solutions into wildlife conservation efforts.

The conference featured a diverse array of presentations and discussions, each shedding light on different aspects of digital innovations in conservation. One of the key objectives was to showcase the latest applications of digital technologies, including space technologies, data analytics, and citizen science initiatives, in wildlife management and biodiversity conservation. Presenters highlighted the role of digital tracking devices, such as SMART technologies, in monitoring and combating illegal wildlife trade and trafficking. They also emphasized the importance of capacity building and collaboration in implementing such solutions effectively.

Dr. Chris Baryomunsi, Minister of ICT and National Guidance graced the day as the Guest of Honor. In his remarks, he underscored the indispensable role of technology in en-

hancing efficiency in wildlife conservation and natural resource management. He reiterated the government's commitment to promoting accessibility to technology across all segments of society to support conservation efforts recognizing its pivotal role in advancing conservation efforts. 'We must do everything possible to integrate technology and make technology central in the management of wildlife conservation and other natural resources,' he noted.

Mr. Achilles Byaruhanga, Executive Director of NatureUganda, emphasized the significance of collaboration and inclusivity in conservation initiatives, stressing the need for multi-stakeholder engagement to achieve common conservation goals. Similarly, Mr. Sam Mwandha, Executive Director of the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA), outlined UWA's strategic plan to leverage technology for real-time monitoring and data management to protect endangered species and their habitats. Mr Mwandha presented a plenary on combating Illegal Wildlife trade and Trafficking.

Presentations covered diverse areas such as combating illegal wildlife trade and trafficking, showcasing the efficacy of Zoohackthons in conservation efforts, and highlighting the utilization of digital tracking devices like SMART technologies for enhanced conservation practices. Discussions also delved into the significance of data analytics and predictive modeling in informing conservation strategies, as well as leveraging modern Information and Communication Technologies to streamline compliant trade and counter illegal activities, with a notable case study on the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). Furthermore, the conference explored the vital role of citizen science facilitated by mobile applications in generating wildlife data at the local level, emphasizing the importance of grassroots involvement. Addi-

tionally, the importance of data sharing and collaboration platforms was highlighted, with a focus on best practices in conservation networks to foster collective efforts towards wildlife conservation.

The National Wildlife Conservation Conference served as a rallying point for stakeholders to unite around the common goal of leveraging digital innovations for wildlife con-

servation. It is imperative that we continue to harness the power of technology to protect and preserve our planet's rich biodiversity for generations to come.

*Compiled by Phionah Mwesige*

## NatureUganda promotes wise-use of Wetlands

Wetlands are globally recognized as crucial ecosystems, providing vital support to both human life and the environment. In Uganda, they hold significant socio-economic importance, serving as sources of water for various purposes such as domestic and industrial use, irrigation, and hydropower generation, as well as supporting fisheries, recreation, and waste water filtration. Despite their immense value, a considerable portion of Uganda's wetlands, approximately 50%, are utilized by humans either directly for sustenance or for income generation through the sale of wetland products. Unfortunately, this has led to ongoing degradation and loss of wetlands, undermining their essential functions.

To ensure the sustainability of wetlands, it is imperative to embrace the principle of "wise use," as advocated by the

Ramsar Convention. This principle emphasizes maintaining the ecological integrity of wetlands while implementing ecosystem-based approaches within the framework of sustainable development. By adhering to this principle, wetlands can retain their natural functions, biodiversity, and overall health, while also meeting human needs and benefiting communities.

Uganda, as a contracting party to the Ramsar Convention, has committed to promoting the wise use of wetlands within its borders. This commitment involves the development and implementation of national strategies, legislation, management actions, and public education initiatives aimed at ensuring the wise use of wetlands. NatureUganda, under the EU-funded project dubbed "Restoring and conserving the degraded fragile ecosystems for improved community livelihoods among the refugee and Host communities of West Nile Region and the Mid-Albertine Rift, has been actively supporting the restoration and conservation of degraded wetland ecosystems in the Kamwenge and Kyegegwa districts. This includes the development and implementation of restoration plans for specific wetlands, as well as activities such as demarcation to define wetland boundaries.



*Kamwenge Senior Environment Officer sensitising communities in Kyempango in Kamwenge District*

Clear demarcation of wetland boundaries is essential for effective conservation and management. It helps prevent encroachment and degradation, thus safeguarding habitats for diverse flora and fauna. Demarcation activities involve community sensitization, raising awareness about wetland importance as well as physically marking boundaries. NatureUganda has supported the demarcation of several wetlands in the Kamwenge and Kyegegwa districts, providing permanent reinforced concrete markers to define buffer zones and regulate activities within wetland areas.

Community education plays a vital role in promoting environmental conservation and sustainable natural resource management. Prior to demarcation exercises, NatureUganda conducts sensitization campaigns in collaboration with local authorities and relevant departments. These campaigns aim to educate communities about wetland significance, relevant laws, demarcation procedures, and the importance of their active involvement in conservation efforts.

During sensitization meetings, communities discuss the ecological and socio-economic functions of wetlands, as

well as the drivers of degradation and existing management laws. They are encouraged to adopt wise use approaches for wetland sustainability and improvement of community livelihoods. Additionally, they are guided on their active participation during demarcation exercises, with support from district technical teams.

To ensure the effectiveness of these initiatives, NatureUganda collaborates with various stakeholders, including local government officials, environmental experts, and community leaders. Their expertise and involvement are crucial in addressing environmental concerns, resolving potential conflicts, and ensuring the smooth implementation of conservation efforts.

Through collaborative efforts and community empowerment, NatureUganda continues to make significant strides in wetland conservation, promoting holistic approaches and community ownership of conservation efforts. By fostering the wise use of wetlands at the grassroots level, they aim to conserve natural resources for current and future generations.

*Compiled by Anke Barahukwa*

## Conservation Efforts Yield Tangible Benefits for Local Communities

In the landscapes of Rubirizi district lies Buzenga Primary School, nestled amidst the tranquility of Kasyoha-Kitomi Central Forest Reserve. This remote area, rich in biodiversity, has long been a sanctuary for wildlife and a vital resource for neighboring communities. However, its conservation has faced challenges over the years due to various pressures, including the need for resources like water and firewood.

NatureUganda has been working hand in hand with local communities to conserve and sustainably manage this natural resource through a range of initiatives, focus has been supporting community members adjacent to the forest with alternative projects, fostering a harmonious relationship between conservation and livelihoods.

One such project is the transformational support extended to Buzenga Primary School. The school is one of the community projects being transformed with Climate Smart Demonstration to embrace climate-smart methodologies and foster environmentally sustainable practices. The school is situated atop a hill and consequently had struggled with accessing gravity water, it has been supported with two 10,000-liter rainwater harvesting tank which now provides access to safe and clean water for both learners and staff.

Furthermore, the school was supported with the construction of energy-saving cook stoves which have not only enhanced fuelwood efficiency but also reduced the environmental footprint of the school.

The head teacher of Buzenga Primary school, Ms. NantaleJesca, noted that 'The decrease in wood consumption



has saved the school some money that would be spent on buying firewood and now the children concentrate more on studies rather than spending hours collecting water'.

Initiatives such as school signage with environmental conservation messages, tree nurseries are fostering a culture of environmental stewardship among pupils and the broader community. The effects of these programs are evident in raised awareness and a collective call to action to protect and conserve the forest.

The partnership between NatureUganda and local groups like Collaborative Forest Management (CFM) groups is

symbolic of collective action for conservation. Tumuhangwire Laban, a member of one of the CFM groups, acknowledges the transformative benefits of projects like rainwater harvesting tanks.

Ndangaro Environmental Conservation Association (NECA) is one of the CFM groups supported with apiary enterprise, beekeeping equipment, tree seedlings and energy-saving stoves. NatureUganda provided 400 Kenyan Top Bar hives, 220 movable/shielded energy saving stoves, 420 Rocket Iorena stoves constructed and 50,000 sorted tree seedlings at KK Landscape. The chairperson, Barungi Sarah, expressed her gratitude for the support received from NatureUganda. She said 'Beyond mere convenience, these interventions

are indicating tangible improvements in household incomes and overall well-being of the people. The forest itself is experiencing rejuvenation, with reduced pressure and enhanced biodiversity.'

As our communities adopt these sustainable practices, the rewards of conservation are becoming more evident. We are grateful to our donors, partners, and the unwavering support of local government and departments, whose collaboration has been instrumental in advancing these initiatives and our shared commitment to conservation.

*Compiled by Bonny Komuhangi*

## Beekeeping: A Catalyst for Environmental Conservation



Under the People Partner with Nature (PPN) Programme, an assessment of the sustainability potential of various income generating activities was conducted and results indicated that apiary is an economically viable enterprise, socially acceptable and environmentally friendly and was ranked highest by the community members.

Apiary emerges as a pivotal venture in our endeavor to restore and protect the natural environment. This practice not only nurtures the rejuvenation of ecosystems but also contributes to the conservation of indigenous vegetation. Beekeeping encourages the cultivation of trees, particularly fruit-bearing varieties and those that offer shelter to beehives and food to bees. It is with this significance that apiary has been recognized as one of the income-generating activities for communities residing near the Kashoha-Kitomi (KK) Central Forest Reserve.

The beekeeping enterprise presents an exceptional avenue for both rural communities and commercial farmers due to its modest demands in terms of land, labor, equipment, and capital investment. Beekeeping, being a non-destructive activity, holds promise as a conservation tool for biodiversity in protected areas. Households residing adjacent to these protected zones can boost conservation initiatives by establishing apiaries within or along the perimeters of these areas.

Farmers who recognize the vital role of vegetation as a source of forage for bees are inclined to safeguard natural resources and are motivated to plant more trees, including herbs and shrubs, to enhance pollen and nectar production. Consequently, this process leads to the preservation of numerous plant species, shielding them from destruction.

The Magambo Beekeepers Association, a primary Community-Based Organization (CBO), comprises twenty members who collectively manage 1,182 beehives. Byamukama Ventino, a member of this association, attested to the transformative impact of beekeeping in his life. With initial support from NatureUganda, under the People Partner with Nature (PPN) project, he expanded his beekeeping venture from 25 to 148 hives. He said, 'my income had significantly increased as I recently bought land for agricultural purposes.' At KK Landscape, 125 beekeepers, (96 males and 29 females) from four CFM groups, have flourished with a total of 4,536 beehives. The group collectively harvests over 5,910kg of honey per season, valued at Ugx 59,100,000. This highlights the substantial economic contribution of beekeeping to local communities.

The beekeeping project has not only elevated income levels among group members but has also instilled a culture of saving, provided a source of nutritious and medicinal products, and reduced reliance on forest resources. This

progress is greatly attributed to the technical guidance offered by NatureUganda, local government authorities, and the National Forestry Authority (NFA).

*Compiled by Bonny Komuhangi*

## The Ecological Transition of Maramagambo Grassland: A Shift from Grassland to Wetland Habitat and its Implications on Avian Communities

**“...particularly land birds, with 182 species documented since its initial survey.”**

The Maramagambo Grassland, located within Kakuuto Sub-County in Kyotera District - Uganda, stands as an integral part of Sango Bay Important Bird Area. The site has continuously been monitored by NatureUganda bi-annually since 2009. The area was known for its rich avian diversity, particularly land birds, with 182 species documented since its initial survey. Originally characterized by expansive grasslands, the habitat provided a sanctuary for an abundance of grassland avifauna, including whydahs, cisticolas, and longclaws, alongside various other terrestrial species.

However, in recent years, a notable transformation has taken place within the site's ecosystem, transitioning from grassland to flooded grassland and subsequently to a fully-fledged wetland habitat. This ecological conversion has caused a notable alteration in the composition of bird species, with a pronounced increase in water-associated avifauna compared to the previous predominantly land bird species.

A comprehensive survey conducted on March 8th, 2024, underscored this shift, revealing a total of 40 avian species, including ten distinct water specialists such as the Pied Kingfisher, Long-tailed Cormorant, Purple Heron, Malachite Kingfisher, and Black Crake. Moreover, additional species observed exhibited an affinity towards water, exemplified by the Northern Brown-Throated Weaver, Yellow-Backed Weaver, and Red-Chested Sunbird.



The implications of climate change, manifesting in changed seasons and an increased frequency of rainfall, implies a future where the Maramagambo grassland site, previously dry, may change into a permanent wetland habitat, ultimately affecting the bird population in the area.

Continuous research and biodiversity monitoring is recommended to determine the impact of habitat changes on diversity of species in the short and longterm.

*Compiled by Percy Ahabwe*





# Assessing Biodiversity in Lubigi Wetland: Insights and Challenges



*NU Research team conducting biodiversity assessments in Lubigi Wetland together with environmental police*

Lubigi Wetland serves as a crucial buffer for the Kampala and Wakiso areas, absorbing floodwaters from neighbouring drainage systems. However, its proximity to urban areas renders it susceptible to the degradation and loss of biodiversity, spurred by activities like settlement, farming, and infrastructure development. NatureUganda, supported by the French Development Agency through the SURE-WET project, undertook a comprehensive baseline biodiversity assessment from April 3rd to 13th, 2024. This assessment, facilitated by NatureUganda's specialist working groups, focused on evaluating five key biodiversity components: birds, plants, insects, herps, and mammals, considering their richness, abundance, and distribution within the wetland.

**“Lubigi Wetland comprises a diverse ecosystem, exhibiting distinct features as one explores deeper into its expanse.”**

While some areas have been converted into gardens and settlements, others remain vegetated, owing to the restoration efforts spearheaded by NEMA and the Wetland Management Department. The specialists sampled these varied clusters to conduct the assessment.

Initial findings from the BirdLife working group indicate that the wetland continues to harbor a high diversity of bird species, including several under threat. Notably, it serves as a crucial foraging ground for Grey crowned Cranes in Kampala and stands as one of the few habitats where the papyrus Gonolek can be spotted in the central region. Cer-

tain pockets within Lubigi provide sanctuary for rare papyrus endemic species such as the Blue-Headed Coucal, Carruthers Cisticola, and swamp warblers. Additionally, the wetland remains a vital habitat for large waterbirds like the Great Egret and Grey Heron.

However, our observations during the baseline biodiversity assessments highlighted the various threats facing Lubigi Wetland. These include the construction of the Northern Bypass Highway, which encroaches upon approximately half of the wetland's area, the high-tension electric cables traversing the wetland from Kawanda to Mutundwe substation, and the National Water and Sewerage Corporation sewage treatment plant established within the wetland. Human encroachment further worsens the situation, as houses and plantations are set up in the wetland. Some households have even resettled in sections that were restored and this endangers the integrity of the remaining wetland, necessitating urgent mitigation measures.

Lubigi Wetland's strategic urban location, coupled with its rich biodiversity, presents promising ecotourism prospects. To harness these opportunities, it is imperative to explore sustainable ecotourism development initiatives that not only generate revenue for the community but also foster awareness about biodiversity conservation. Establishing nature trails, birdwatching sites, and other ecotourism attractions within or adjacent to Lubigi Wetland emerges as potential solutions to leverage its ecological wealth for the benefit of both conservation and community.

**Compiled by Micheal Kibuule**

# Crocodile Chronicles: A Wildlife Adventure in Uganda with NatureUganda

When we arrived in Uganda, we did not expect to have such a great experience. We were invited by the membership team at NatureUganda to join them on an excursion to Camp Crocs. En route to the crocodile farm, we were greeted by some glimpses of lush Ugandan nature. As we approached the enormous lake, which is bigger than our countries combined, anticipation heightened as we neared our destination.

Upon arrival, a delightful surprise awaited us in the form of a hearty breakfast and a fresh rain shower, momentarily threatening to dampen our spirits! Luckily it soon stopped, granting us the chance to explore the crocodile facilities under the guidance of Carol, the business' owner. Venturing into the crocodile facilities, our nerves tingled with excitement and apprehension as we were introduced to the young reptiles. One particularly audacious croc even dared to test the limits, sending a shiver down our spines. Yet, witnessing the caretakers' fearless resolve left us in awe.

Throughout the tour, we were not only entertained but also enlightened about the lives of these fascinating creatures, and how the camp contributes to the conservation of the crocodiles in the wild, a very hopeful message in the face of ecological challenges! In addition to the fascinating crocodiles, our journey blessed us with encounters with avian wonders, from the Wattled Lapwing to the vibrant Crimson-rumped Waxbill.

As the tour drew to a close, we were presented with a unique food experience: tasting authentic crocodile meat, surprisingly reminiscent of a blend between chicken and fish, it left us with a lasting impression, we recommend.

We are very grateful to NatureUganda for the invitation to join the group for the excursion, and promising to carry the spirit of the organization's mission back to our respective countries in Denmark and the Netherlands. Eagerly, we anticipate the opportunity to reunite and further contribute to its noble endeavors.

*Compiled by Tim Jansen*



# Unusual Sightings



Papyrus Gonolek - Rufuha wetland



Little Bittern - Lake Opeta



Spotted Eagle - Owl *Bubo Africanus*, along Rufuha wetland edge in Ntungamo



Melanist hippo - R. Nile in Murchison Falls National Park

## UPCOMING EVENTS

- 20th May: Nature Walk at The Great Outdoors, Kalanama, Gayaza
- 15th June: Naturewalk to the source of the Nile
- 25th July: Annual General Meeting
- 1st - 31st July: Waterfowl Counts and Bird Population Monitoring



## CORPORATE MEMBERS

- African Crane Safaris
- Avian Safaris
- AA Safaris & Tours Ltd
- 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
- Katwe Tourism Destination
- Pearl Africa Safaris
- Parl Africa Tours & Travel
- Range Land Safaris
- Rwenzori Trekking services
- Ssezibwa Falls Resort
- Uganda Wildlife Authority
- Venture Uganda Limited

## INSTITUTIONAL

- Focused Community SACCO
- Kintante 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
- Hill Preparatory School

## MEMBERSHIP FEES

Category	Locals	
Sponsor	500,000	\$1000
Life Membership	500,000	\$500
Corporate	500,000	\$350
Institutional	100,000	\$90
Family	50,000	\$30
Full members	50,000	\$20
Students	5,000	\$15

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

## WORKING GROUPS

- Plants Working Group
- Herps Working Group
- Mammal Conservation Groups
- Friends of Dudus
- Microbial Resources Groups
- Birdlife Working Groups



The partner in Uganda and a member of



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