Uganda Big Birding Day 2011



Report

By

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Introduction

The Uganda Big Birding Day (BBD) was organized by ***Nature***Uganda in collaboration with Uganda Wildlife Authority, USAID-STAR, the Uganda Bird Guides Club, Uganda Tourism Board, Uganda Community Tourism Association, National Forestry Authority, Association of Tour Operators, Makerere University Tourism Department and the Honorary Wardens. The three-day events that took place from 29th September to 1st October 2011 combined avian conservation with awareness and tourism development initiatives in Uganda.

How the Big Birding Day 2011 Events were organized

The Big Birding Day was a three-day event from the 29th September 2011 to 1st October 2011 under the theme "Connecting Birds to People and Nature". The events included the launch of the Big Birding Day on 29th September, the Birding Day on 30th September and the Big Birding Festival on 1st October 2011.

The events commenced with the launch of the BBD on 29th September at the Uganda Museum, preceded by a public talk and discussion about birds and birding in Uganda. The programme for the subsequent BBD activities was discussed and birders were flagged off to start birding the next day, 30th September. This activity also involved the launch of the **birding-Uganda website** produced by USAID-STAR and the Uganda **Birds Checklist** produced by ***Nature***Uganda. These two products are both aimed at improving the standards of bird watching in Uganda and thus promote avian tourism in the country and the globe.

The second activity was the actual 24-hr birding day on 30th September. It involved teams watching and recording birds seen in various parts of the country. There were 36 teams that recorded birds in 53 sites around the country recording 569 bird species altogether (Table 1). The highest record came from the teams in Queen Elizabeth National Park with 207 species, followed by the Entebbe Peninsula team which scored the highest in the Kampala Area with 189 species and then the Kidepo Valley National Park team with 149 species. The Forest Reserve which recorded the highest number of bird species was Budongo Forest Reserve with 113 species, followed by Kasohya Kitomi FR with 100 species (Table 2). Special teams were sent to key sites like Budongo FR, MFNP and QENP among others.

A tally centre was set up at ***Nature***Uganda to receive all records from all participating sites. It was equipped with computers fully connected with internet, telephone lines and personnel comprising mainly NatureUganda staff. Others were USAID-STAR staff and UBGC members. Results from the birding teams were received at the tally centre starting at 1430hr on Friday evening to Saturday morning. They were compiled and analyzed and because a few sites had not yet submitted their results, preliminary results were announced during the festival.

Generally, the total number of species recorded in 2011 was less than that of 2010 mainly because some key sites like Murchison Falls and Semliki National Parks did not get the expected records and Elgon had no records at all as no one did the birding in that site. Also, the birding was at a time when not all the migrants had arrived in the country and the weather was not good as it rained most part of the day in many parts of the country thus allowing less time for birding.

The third and last event was the Big Birding Festival, which was the climax of the BBD on 1st October. This was at Ndere centre and involved many activities including bird watching, face painting, speeches, awards and performances from schools; Railways P/S, Kalinabiri S.S and St. Joseph's Girls' S.S and also from Ndere Troupe. Awards were given to the bird race winning team, which was the Queen Elizabeth National Park team, some sponsors and also every one who participated was presented with a certificate of participation.

Results

The results from the Uganda Big Birding Day indicate a total of 569 species recorded in the 53 sites done by 36 bird racing teams. The highest score was by the teams in Queen Elizabeth NP with 207 species, followed by the Entebbe Peninsula team with 189 species and then the Kidepo Valley NP team with 149 species (Table 1 & 2).

Amongst the many special birds recorded the Bwindi team recorded the African Green Broadbill, which is globally vulnerable, the pair we have breeding at Ruhija are probably the most accessible in the world and it is Uganda's great fortune that we recorded them on BBD. They also recorded the Ansorge's Greenbul, a species that until 1999 was not on the Uganda list. Kidepo Valley in the far north-east of Uganda recorded some very special birds, indeed quite a few of them like Ostrich, Ring-necked Parakeet and Red-winged Lark are only found there. Murchison Falls were the only site to record African Darter and Lanner Falcon; Lake Mburo recorded the only African Finfoot while Queen Elizabeth records included the only Crested Guinea fowl, Greater Painted Snipe and Icterine Warbler, the latter a scarce winter visitor from the Palearctic.

Table 1: Numbers of bird species recorded and participants for the BBD 2011 Teams

NO.	TEAM	SPECIES RECORDED	PARTICIPANTS
1	QUEEN ELIZABETH NP	207	15
2	ENTEBBE PENINSULA	189	4
3	KIDEPO VALLEY NP	149	3
4	LUTEMBE	132	11
5	BWINDI IMPENETRABLE NP	121	6
6	LAKE MBURO NP	119	4
7	KANYANCHU - KIBALE	118	4
8	BUDONGO FR	113	2
9	MURCHISON FALLS NP	106	8
10	PARK ALEXANDER & BAHAI	103	13
11	MAKANAGA	101	13
12	KASOHYA KITOMI FR	100	8
13	MABAMBA	100	8
14	BIGODI	87	42
15	KAWANDA-NAMULOGE	74	4
16	MGAHINGA GORILLA NP	67	4
17	MUTARA-BUSHENYI	63	1
18	MABIRA FR	58	50
19	ECHUYA FR	57	5
20	NANSANA-MABIRA	57	1
21	MAKERERE UNIVERSITY	41	40
22	BOTANICAL GARDENS	37	8
23	TOORO SEMLIKI WR	36	3
24	OPETA AREA	34	5
25	KIBIMBA	32	13
26	RWENZORI MNP	28	5
27	KANIYO PABIDI	27	6
28	GULU AREA	25	43
29	SEMLIKI NP	20	2

30	MBARARA UNIVERSITY	18	22
31	MOROTO AREA	15	1
32	KAMPALA TWITTER TEAM	14	6
33	KISORO TWITTER TEAM	13	2
34	MUSAMBWA ISLANDS	12	1
35	BUZIGA TWITTER TEAM	5	2
36	LUSANJA	1	1
	TOTAL SPECIES	**569**	**366**

From the forest reserves Budongo recorded the Bat Hawk a species not often seen due to its crepuscular habits, it feeding on bats. For a semi-urban environment, the total from the Entebbe Peninsula was astonishing and just shows how rich and diverse the avifauna of the Lake Victoria Basin is. They managed to see amongst a whole host of passage waders a Ruddy Turnstone while off shore from Nakiwogo beach were a small number of Red-Knobbed Coot. They also recorded House Sparrow, a species which was first recorded in Uganda in 2002.

It can be seen that with a little effort and time a large number of species can be recorded in Uganda, last year's BBD took place on 15th October when we recorded 622 but that total included a good selection of Palearctic migrants. Unfortunately, a lot of them had not arrived by the time this year's event took place but we can still take a lot of pride from our total of 569.

Table 2: Summary for top three teams and their number of species among the National Parks, Forest Reserves and Kampala area

Top 3 National Parks	
1. Queen Elizabeth National Park	207
2. Kidepo Valley National Park	149
3. Bwindi Impenetrable National Park	121

Top 3 Forest Reserves	
1. Budongo Forest Reserve	113
2. Kasohya Kitomi Forest Reserve	100
3. Mabira Forest Reserve	58

Top 3 Kampala Area sites	
1. Entebbe Peninsula	189
2. Lutembe Bay	129
3. Park Alexander & Bahai Temple	103