BIG BIRDING DAY

Connecting Birds to People and Nature

The Uganda Big Birding Day 2012

Report

By

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ABSTRACT
The Uganda Big Birding Festival is a birding activity organized by ***Nature***Uganda in collaboration with Uganda Wildlife Authority and with support from other partners. The BBD activity combines avian conservation with awareness and tourism development. The aims of this event is to use birds conservation to help promote tourism as a global birding destination and also bridge the information gap by linking up all bird watchers, tourism promoters and conservationists with each other and the rest of the world in an exciting event. The BBD is an annual activity organized under the theme "Connecting Birds to People and Nature" with three events; the Launch day to flag off birding teams, the birding day, which is the day for the bird watching race and the festival day where results from the birding race are announced. The subtheme for this year was "Birding @50: Saving the Crested Crane, Our national symbol".

BBD 2012
The theme for the Big Birding Day 2012 is connecting birds to people and nature. However the organizing committee also decided to develop a subtheme; **birding @50 saving the Crested Crane, Uganda's national symbol**. This was to refocus attention on the plight of the crane in Uganda. The numbers of the crane have plummeted by nearly 60% in the last 30 years and the species is now categorized as globally endangered i.e. it could get extinct in the next 20 years if good conservation measures are not undertaken to save the species. We call upon government to put in place a species action plan, develop species specific policy and declare the Grey-Crowned Crane a protected species in order to save it from extinction in Uganda.

HOW WAS THE BIG BIRDING DAY ORGANIZED?
The Big Birding Day was organized as a three-day event with the Launch, the birding day and the birding festival day;

The Launch on Friday 19th October 2012
This was an event to introduce members to the scheduled BBD activities and to brief them on the value of birds, birding and conservation in Uganda. It involved a public talk followed by a discussion under the topic "**the role of birds as indicators, conservation tool and tourism product**'. It was presented by Mr. Moses Mapesa (Former UWA, ED) and discussed by Dr. Chris Bakuneta from Makerere University. Registration of birders and birding teams was also done, followed by the official launch of the birding exercise that started at midnight of that day. The tally centre was also set up at the secretariat ready to receive results the following day.

The Birding Day on Saturday 20th 2012
This involved a birding race by all registered groups and individuals across the country recording the number of species they saw on that day. All groups were led by experienced birders but were joined by interested persons. The groups were organized by NatureUganda together with lead agencies such as UWA, NFA and other tourism groups including UCOTA, AUTO, UBGC and individual tour operators or bird guides. Results were received at the tally centre as soon as the birding groups were ready to send them soon after birding that day. They were sent in form of emails, hand written hard copies or

through phone calls. Results were then compiled at the tally centre ready to be announced during the festival.

The Birding Festival on Saturday 27th 2012

The festival is the event on which the results from the birding race were announced. It is a festival because we were celebrating a big achievement but also an opportunity to raise awareness with decision makers on the need to prioritize tourism, in particular birding, as a key development sector in the country. The activities included a nature walk to introduce participants to what we were celebrating 'bird watching'. This was followed by exhibitions from partners and other members including NatureUganda, UCOTA, Visit Uganda and Fresh cuts. Performances from Railways Primary School, St. Joseph's S.S. Nsambya and Kalinabiri S.S were part of the day's entertainment, in addition to the Udungu cultural group. The results were announced and the winning teams were given awards presented by the French ambassador to Uganda who was the Guest of Honour for this function. The winners plus the first and second runners up were all given plaques for recognition. The winning team also got a lunch coupon to any of the GeoLodges hotels, sponsored by GeoLodges Uganda.

Results from the Birding Race

Over 290 birders in 58 teams were involved in the 2012 birding exercise. These teams covered 35 general areas and recorded 657 species. This accounts for 63% of the total species of Uganda recorded and an increase of 82 species from the 2011 record. We recorded 386 in 2009, 622 in 2010, 569 in 2011 and 657 in 2012.

Queen Elizabeth National Park recorded the highest number of species with 246 (40% of the total species of the park) the highest for any site since the BBD started. It was followed by Murchison Falls National park with 205 species (44% of total species for the park) and then Mabamba bay (Ramsar site) with 187 species (65% of total known for the site). This was followed by Lake Mburo National Park with 173 (55% of total for the park), Bwindi Impenetrable National Park with 170, Kibale Forest National Park with 142 and then Kidepo Valley National Park with 138 species (Table 1).

This year, we have had very good counts with most teams recording species numbers higher than the previous BBDs. We had 26 sites recording 198 species not recorded in any other site (Table 2). Notably are Kidepo Valley NP, Murchison Falls NP, Bwindi Impenetrable NP, Queen Elizabethe NP, Semliki NP and Lake Mburo NP, all with records of between 39 and 11 species recorded only in those sites (Table 2).

Among the interesting species recorded for the day is the Shoebill; an important species for tourist attraction, recorded in five sites. Species of conservation concern (Appendix II) include the Ruddy Turnstone (QENP), White bellied Robin-Chat (BINP), Denham's Bustard (MFNP), Jackson's Hornbill and Lesser Kestrel (KVNP). We also had species that are yet to be confirmed on the Uganda list like the Black-faced Sandgrouse (KVNP), Bennet's Bustard (Mpanga CFR) and Southern Black Flycatcher in Katonga WR (yet to be approved for the Uganda Checklist by the EARC). Other interesting species include Amethyst Sunbird and Hartlaub's Turaco (MENP), which are rarely recorded in other parts of the country.

The organizing Committee

The organizing of the BBD events is done by a National committee made of ***Nature***Uganda partners that come together to plan and fundraise for the BBD events. NatureUganda would like to thank all the members of the BBD 2012 organizing committee especially UWA, Diary of a Muzungu and Guide2Uganda for their exclusive commitment and support rendered towards the success of this BBD 2012.

Over the years members of the BBD organizing committee have increased in number to the 2012 list below.

1. Uganda Tourism Board (UTB)
2. Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA and respective national parks and wildlife Reserves)
3. National Forest Authority (NFA) and all forest reserves where eco-tourism is established
4. Uganda Tourism Association (UTA)
5. Sustainable Tourism in the Albertine Rift project (USAID-STAR)
6. Association of Uganda Tour Operators (AUTO)
7. Uganda Hotels and Hotel Owners Association (UHOA)
8. Uganda Community Tourism Association (UCOTA)
9. Honorary Wardens
10. Uganda Bird Guides Association (UBGC)
11. Makerere University Tourism Department and student Associations
12. GeoLodges Uganda
13. Pearls of Uganda Safaris
14. Diary of a Muzungu
15. Guide2Uganda
16. Venture Uganda
17. Other tour operators etc.

Table 1: Number of bird species recorded and participants in the BBD 2012 sites

RANK	SITE NAME	TOTAL SPECIES	PARTICIPANTS
1	Queen Elizabeth National Park	246	16
2	Murchison Falls National Park	205	8
3	Mabamba bay	187	14
4	Lake Mburo National Park	173	8
5	Bwindi Impenetrable National Park	170	13
6	MUBFS (Kibale Forest National Park)	142	3
7	Kidepo Valley National Park	138	2
8	Bujjagali-Jinja Area	133	8
9	Makanaga Bay	129	12
10	Bigodi-Kibale Forest National Park	118	6
11	Lutembe Bay	101	9
12	Semliki National Park	100	3
13	KATIC (Kasese)	94	5
14	Mgahinga Gorilla National Park	87	2
15	Mt. Elgon National Park	86	4
16	Mbarara Area	84	33
17	Mabira Central Forest Reserve	80	9
18	Kasohya Kitomi Central Forest Reserve	79	5
19	Echuya & Kabale Area	77	19
20	Hassan Lake Mburo National Park	74	1
21	Tooro Semliki Wildlife Reserve	70	3
22	Gulu Area	69	30
23	Namulonge-Bahai Route	63	4
24	Rwenzori Mountains National Park	61	7
25	Masaka Area	60	21
26	Botanic Gardens	54	1
27	Mpanga Forest Reserve	48	17
28	Lake Bisina and Kumi Area	47	2
29	Bushenyi Area	43	2
30	Kibimba Route	42	14
31	Makerere University Campus	39	3
32	Budongo Royal Mile	29	2
33	Wagtail Eco-tourism Centre	26	6
34	Katonga Wildlife Reserve	20	1
35	Musambwa Islands	13	3
36	Anyefio-Arua region	8	1
	Total	**657**	**297**

Table 2: Number of Unique species recorded in only one site during the BBD 2012

1	Site	Unique Species
2	Echuya & Kabale Area	2
3	Hassan Lake Mburo NP	1
4	Mabira Central Forest Reserve	2
5	Lake Mburo National Park	11
6	Mabamba bay	6
7	Makanaga Bay	1
8	Bwindi Impenetrable National Park	25
9	Bigodi-Kibale Forest National Park	2
10	Kasohya Kitomi Central Forest Reserve	1
11	Lake Bisina and Kumi Area	6
12	Murchison Falls National Park	25
13	Rwenzori Mountains National Park	8
14	Budongo Royal Mile	3
15	Bushenyi Area	1
16	Mpanga Forest Reserve	3
17	Kibimba Route	1
18	Mt. Elgon National Park	6
19	Kidepo Valley National Park	39
20	Katonga Wildlife Reserve	1
21	Semliki National Park	13
22	KATIC (Kasese)	3
23	Tooro Semliki Wildlife Reserve	1
24	MUBFS (Kibale Forest National Park)	9
25	Queen Elizabeth National Park	20
26	Mgahinga Gorilla National Park	8
	Total	**198**