

# **ACTIVITY REPORT FOR 3 DAYS EXCURSION TO LAKE MBURO NATIONAL PARK**

Date; 10<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> March 2023



A Publication of the Avian Conservation Uganda Society.

[www.acusug.org](http://www.acusug.org)

[info@avianconservationugsociety.org](mailto:info@avianconservationugsociety.org)

<b>Report Author</b>	Mukama Joshua Rwakamani
<b>Team leaders</b>	Tumwesigye Godfrey Elasmus
	Matsiko Moses
	Arineitwe Denis Kakwenza
	Kibuga Davis
	Akankunda Susan
	Kenzarwa Allen
<b>Participants/Data collectors</b>	Muhwezi Jerome
	Kaijuka Dean Norman
	Baliganyikya Bonny
	Batireho Demiano
	Tumwesigye Elly
	Taremwa Susan
	Asassira Linda
	Namara Ivan
	Ampeire Precious
	Kamya Kassim
	Kamugisha Brian
	Atuhaire Oliver
	Niyongabo Laban
	Uwimana Noah
	Kabarungi Priscilla
	Kavuuma Patrick
	Ayebare Bright
	Naturinda Edwin
	Ajuna Kasiisi

## Acknowledgments

We thank the following organizations and individuals for providing support and assisting in the success of the excursion and the production of this report. Uganda Wildlife Authority; Nakidde Agnes, Matsiko Moses, Allen Kenzarwa, Ampumuza Ameria. The following individuals were instrumental in the process; Johnnie Kamugisha, Kaijuka Dean Norman, Godfrey Elasmus Tumwesigye, Susan Akankunda, Arineitwe Denis Kakwenza.

On a special note, we thank all the participants who volunteered to take part in the excursion and selflessly contribute knowledge, time and resources and without whom the excursion would not have succeeded.

## Itinerary

Activity	Day
Arrival	10/03/2023
Full day birding	11/03/2023
Half day birding and departure	12/03/2023

## Contents

I.	Introduction .....	4
II.	Study Area .....	4
	Status of bird habitat .....	4
III.	Excursion findings .....	5
	i. Observed birds .....	5
	ii. Threatened species and Data Deficient birds at the site .....	7
	iii. Identified focal species .....	8
IV.	Conservation and impact .....	9
V.	Challenges .....	10
VI.	Recommendations and action points .....	10
VII.	Conclusions .....	11

## I. Introduction

Avian Conservation Uganda Society (ACUS) is a non-profit organization founded in 2022 dedicated to conserving the precious birds of Uganda and their habitat. This is achieved through engaging in activities related to raising awareness of the contribution of birds to sustaining natural ecosystems as well as cultural & economic development, restoring degraded and vulnerable habitats and growing a bird-friendly community. The ACUS vision is a thriving AVIAN LIFE FOR GENERATIONS. At ACUS, we believe in finding the right balance for a harmonious co-existence of birds and people.

Conservation work continues to become ever more critical in the face of threats of climate change, destruction and degradation of key bird habitats such as wetlands and forests in Uganda. Human activities such as agriculture, mining and urban construction continue to alter and cause the loss of vital bird habitat putting their fragile lives in danger.

With Uganda's growing population expected to double by 2030, it is now more important than ever to build a community that readily co-exists with birds and nature in general. ACUS commits to undertaking community engagement projects that target Important Bird Areas to mitigate threats to bird life caused by human activity.

## II. Study Area

The study area was Lake Mburo National Park, an area of about 370 km<sup>2</sup> between 1220m and 1828m above sea level. The park lies within the L. Victoria basin hydrated by the R. Rwzi interlinking a chain of lakes; Mburo, Kigambira, Mutukula, Kazuma and Bwara. By implication, the park is a mosaic of habitats with wetlands covering some 20% of the total area, savanna woodland dominated by *Acacia hockii* and a forest area supporting over 332 reported bird species. Of these species, the park has several species not reported in other parks in Uganda namely; the Rufous-bellied Heron, Black-throated Barbet, Green-capped Eremomela, Southern Red Bishop and the Long-tailed Cisticola.

### Status of bird habitat

The habitat is a protected area encompassing important habitats; wetland, forest and savannah woodland. This makes the site extremely rich in avian life including the African finfoot, the crested barbet and other vulnerable species. The site is also an Important Bird Area and is therefore of special interest to avian conservation efforts.

The site is historically under conflict with local pastoralists and farmers who were aggrieved due to restriction of their access to prime grazing land within the park. The farmers and pastoralists pose a threat to birdlife as their activities take a toll on bird habitat in and around the protected area.

Fortunately, the Uganda Wildlife Authority has made rewarding interventions to cause harmonious co-existence of local communities surrounding the park and the wildlife following a Uganda government policy to share park earning with the surrounding communities. Additionally, the park has carried out successful community engagement campaigns to educate the public on the benefits of conservation.

### III. Excursion findings



#### i. Observed birds

1. African Dwarf Kingfisher
2. African Fish-Eagle
3. African Green-Pigeon
4. African Grey hornbill
5. African ground thrush
6. African hoopoe
7. African Jacana
8. African Openbill
9. African paradise flycatcher
10. African Pied Wagtail
11. African Pygmy kingfisher
12. African Sacred Ibis
13. African Thrush
14. Angola swallow
15. Arrow-marked Babbler
16. Ashy flycatcher
17. Bare-faced Go-away-bird
18. Barn swallow
19. Bateleur
20. Black collared barbet
21. Black crane
22. Black crowned tchagra
23. Black headed Gonolek
24. Black headed Heron
25. Black headed weaver
26. Black Kite (Yellow-billed)
27. Black-collared Barbet
28. Black-shouldered Nightjar
29. Blue headed kingfisher
30. Blue-naped mousebird

31. Blue spotted wood-dove
32. Blue-breasted Kingfisher
33. Blue-cheeked bee-eater
34. Broad-billed Roller
35. Bronze Mannikin
36. Brown scrub robin
37. Brown snake eagle
38. Brubru
39. Buff-bellied Warbler
40. Burglar fetched weaver
41. Cattle Egret
42. Chinspot Batis
43. Chubb's Cisticola
44. Cinnamon-breasted Bunting
45. Common Bulbul (Dark-capped)
46. Common Buzzard
47. Common Sandpiper
48. Copper Sunbird
49. Crested Barbet
50. Crowned Hornbill
51. Deidric cuckoo
52. Double-toothed Barbet
53. Eastern Plantain-eater
54. Emerald-spotted wood dove
55. European Bee-eater
56. Fan tailed widowbird
57. Fiery-necked Nightjar (Black-shouldered)
58. Fire finch
59. Fork-tailed Drongo
60. Greater honeyguide
61. Green wood-hoopoe
62. Green-backed Camaroptera
63. Grey-backed fiscal
64. Grey heron
65. Grey-capped Warbler
66. Grey-crowned crane
67. Grey-headed kingfisher
68. Grey Kestrel
69. Grosbeak Weaver
70. Hadada Ibis
71. Hamerkop
72. Helmeted Guineafowl
73. Holub's Golden weaver
74. Intermediate Egret
75. Klaas's Cuckoo
76. Knob-billed Duck
77. Laughing dove
78. Leaf-love
79. Lesser masked weaver
80. Lesser Swamp Warbler
81. Levallant's cuckoo
82. Lilac-breasted Roller (Lilac-breasted)
83. Little bee-eater
84. Little grebe
85. Lizard buzzard
86. Long-crested Eagle
87. Malachite Kingfisher
88. Marabou stork
89. Mariqua Sunbird
90. Meyer's Parrot
91. Mourning dove
92. Northern Grey-headed sparrow
93. Nubian Woodpecker
94. Pale-throated Greenbul
95. Papyrus Gonolek
96. Pied Crow
97. Pied Kingfisher
98. Purple-banded sunbird
99. Red-necked spurfowl
100. Red-rumped rufous-swallow
101. Red-backed Scrub-Robin
102. Red-billed Quelea
103. Red-capped Robin-Chat
104. Red-cheeked cordon bleu
105. Red-chested Cuckoo
106. Red-chested sunbird
107. Red-eyed dove
108. Red-faced Barbet
109. Red-headed Lovebird
110. Red-headed weaver
111. Red-necked Spurfowl
112. Ring-necked Dove
113. Ross's Turaco
114. Ruppel's Starling
115. Sand martin
116. Scarlet-chested Sunbird
117. Speckled Mousebird
118. Spectacled Weaver
119. Splendid Starling
120. Spot-flanked Barbet
121. Square-tailed Nightjar
122. Striated Heron
123. Striped Kingfisher

124.	Sulphur-breasted bush-shrike	136.	White-winged Warbler
125.	Tambourine Dove	137.	Willow warbler
126.	Tawny Eagle	138.	Winding Cisticola
127.	Trilling Cisticola	139.	Wire-tailed Swallow
128.	Tropical Boubou	140.	Woodland kingfisher
129.	Village weaver	141.	Wooly-necked stork
130.	Violet-backed starling	142.	Yellow-backed weaver
131.	Water thick knee	143.	Yellow-billed duck
132.	Wattled Lapwing	144.	Yellow-breasted Apalis
133.	Western yellow wagtail	145.	Yellow-throated Greenbul
134.	White-browed Coucal	146.	Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird
135.	White-browed Robin-Chat	147.	Yellow-throated Longclaw

## ii. Threatened species and Data Deficient birds at the site

	Species	IUCN Global Status	IUCN National status
1	Shoebill stork	Vulnerable	Vulnerable
2	Papyrus Gonolek	Near Threatened	Vulnerable
3	Papyrus Yellow Warbler	Vulnerable	Vulnerable
4	African finfoot	Least Concern	Vulnerable
5	Crested Barbet	Least Concern	Data Deficient
6	Red-faced Barbet	Near Threatened	Vulnerable
7	Shining-Blue Kingfisher	Least Concern	Vulnerable
8	Egyptian Vulture	Endangered	Critically Endangered
9	Lappet-faced Vulture	Endangered	Critically Endangered
10	White-headed Vulture	Critically Endangered	Critically Endangered
11	Saddle-billed stork	Least Concern	Vulnerable
12	Lesser Kestrel	Least Concern	Vulnerable
13	Pallid harrier	Near Threatened	Critically Endangered

14	White-backed Night Heron	Least Concern	Endangered
15	Madagascar Pond-Heron	Endangered	Endangered
16	African Darter	Least Concern	Vulnerable
17	Rufous-bellied Heron	Least Concern	Vulnerable
18	Goliath Heron	Least Concern	Vulnerable

### iii. Identified focal species

- **Crested barbet:** A number of individuals were sighted at different locations distributed evenly across the trails monitored. The species appears to be abundantly present within its range at the site. However, very limited data about the species in Uganda calls for more monitoring projects to bridge the data gap on the specie's population and behaviour.
- **Papyrus gonolek:** A pair of Papyrus gonolek was sighted on the edges of R. Rwizi at Rubanga forest. The species was reported by site rangers to enjoy little interference from recreational birdwatching in the park and therefore least threatened by human-related activities.
- **Red-faced Barbet:** The species are nearly threatened globally due to loss of habitat to pastoral activities and others. The park has a considerable population of the species. L. Mburo and are of special interest for conservation.



## IV. Conservation and impact



It is the aim of ACUS to acquire data on the status of habitats and how they affect bird populations, especially in Important Bird Areas. In order to carry out its objectives, ACUS seeks to employ a data-driven approach to conservation efforts. Therefore, monitoring excursions must be aimed at;

- identifying present bird species and changes in their populations at specific sites
- assessing changes to the state and function of specific habitats of vulnerable species
- assessing the distribution of species of vulnerable species within the site and the causes of changes if any
- determining whether there are any human-related activities posing a significant threat to bird habitat around and within the site

To achieve these monitoring aims, it is necessary to conduct regular data collection excursions to determine changes in the state of habitat, presence, populations and distribution of species at the site. This data collected is critical in informing conservation approaches and decisions for the organization and other conservation efforts.

The Avian Conservation Uganda Society approach to excursions, however, is twofold and goes beyond scientific data collection purposes. The excursions are also aimed at sparking public interest in birdlife so as to grow the bird-friendly community. This is achieved by targeting and encouraging members of the general public to participate in excursions as a strategy for raising awareness about the necessity of bird conservation. Excursion activities aim at bringing to light the holistic contributions of birds to the environment including;

- emphasizing the aesthetics and colour birds add to the environment

- appreciating bird songs and calls that augment the melodic experience of nature since birds are nature's musicians
- learning about cultural significance of birds
- emphasizing the benefits of birds to the economy
- learning about the contribution of birds to natural ecosystems

## **V. Challenges**

- Inadequate data collection and management system: The survey lacked a standardized data collection and management system to collect and manage useful data to support conservation efforts. The excursion activity mainly included bird identification, habitat identification and bird behaviour identification, however, limited information about populations, conservation status and general data on the national status of species was known and disseminated by monitoring teams.
- Inadequate current data on birds: The data publicly available on the birds of Uganda is limited; including data on reported species, populations and behaviour in specific sites. This presents a challenge to conservation efforts causing difficulty in determining approaches to intervention and prioritizing species of most concern.
- Inadequate monitoring tools: The teams had a challenge of inadequate monitoring tools such as binoculars, telescopes and data collection tools to effectively store, retrieve and process collected data. This poses a threat to the effectiveness of monitoring excursions to conservation efforts.
- Inadequate knowledge resources on birds: Knowledge resources on birds of Uganda and their conservation status cripple conservation efforts. There are limited resources available at the site and most important bird areas for monitoring teams to access for reference purposes.
- High costs incurred to undertake the activity: The organization incurred high park entrance fees for monitoring teams to carry out the activity. These costs took a heavy toll on team morale and pose a threat to conservation efforts.

## **VI. Recommendations and action points**

- Build the capacity of monitoring teams with skills training and monitoring tools: There is a need to train and equip monitoring teams with tools and knowledge to adequately carry out the process with skills such as bird identification techniques and using monitoring tools.
- Build strategic partnership with stakeholders: Conservation is a collective effort and public-private partnerships to achieve shared interests are critical in delivering the desired objectives of conservation. Conservation efforts in developing countries struggle with limited budgets, however, strategic partnerships with stakeholders can augment collaboration and cause concerted efforts which bridge the budget gap to achieve conservation goals.
- Improve data collection and management system: There is a strong need to establish a monitoring framework with specific aims in terms of data collected and its management to focus on conservation. There is a danger that excursions are limited to bird identification and determining the state of the habitat. A focus on practical conservation data such as changes in population and

distribution of threatened species, changes in breeding behaviour and losses of habitat to direct conservation policies and approaches must be emphasized to produce meaningful results.

- Strengthen local community bird clubs to carry out regular monitoring: It is part of the ACUS strategy to engage communities and build bird clubs that carry out regular monitoring and community engagement campaigns to raise awareness on the necessity of bird conservation, therefore, local bird club of L. Mburu National Park needs to be supported with skills training of members, knowledge resources and monitoring tools to enhance their ability to effectively carry out club activities. The club needs a formal structure to access the support it needs to carry out its mandate.

## **VII. Conclusions**

The aim of the excursion was to test the idea of monitoring bird species and habitats performed by local communities supported by bird guides and this was successfully achieved. The excursion included 8 local community members, 7 professional bird guides, 9 aspiring ornithologists and 2 members of the general public. The presence of two members of the general public was a significant success as one of the aims of excursions is to awaken the public interest in birds in a bid to grow the bird-friendly community.

There were no incidents of diversion from the subject matter and the participants generally adhered to the site's rules and regulations.

ACUS especially appreciates the collaborative efforts of the Uganda Wildlife Authority to render support to make the excursion successful. ACUS looks forward to further collaboration with the Authority to achieve conservation goals.