

Community Conservation Engagement and Bird Survey in Mitooma District, Maramagambo Forest Landscape

Date: 11th - 14th March 2025

Location: Kiyanga, Ruhinda North, Mitooma District

Conducted by: Avian Conservation Uganda Society (ACUS)

Introduction

As part of our mission to conserve Uganda's rich avian diversity and foster harmonious coexistence between people and nature, Avian Conservation Uganda Society (ACUS) carried out a community conservation awareness campaign and bird diversity survey in the villages surrounding **Maramagambo Forest**, within **Mitooma District**, Queen Elizabeth National Park landscape.

This activity, held from 11th to 14th March 2025, was designed to:

- Document bird species diversity in this ecologically important area.
- Address human-wildlife interactions, specifically human-bird conflicts.
- Strengthen community awareness and participation in sustainable conservation practices.

Activity Summary

Our team engaged communities from **Rwaburunga**, **Rwempungu**, and **Kiyanga** villages in interactive dialogues and sensitization sessions. These communities are the stewards of the land surrounding Maramagambo Forest and have a profound, direct impact on the integrity of this vital ecosystem.

Through **structured interviews**, **group discussions**, and **community walks**, we sought to understand local perceptions of birds and their role in the environment. In parallel, we conducted a **scientific bird survey**, employing birdwatching techniques including **transect walks**, **binocular observations**, **high-resolution photography**, and **vocalization recordings**.

Key Findings

We recorded **over 100 bird species**, including **four rare and ecotourism-significant species**:

- **Blue-breasted Kingfisher**
- **Black-faced Rufous Warbler**
- **Black Bee-eater**
- **Cassin's flycatcher**

These findings reaffirm the **ecological significance of Maramagambo Forest** as a key bird habitat and a potential site for **research and bird-based tourism** initiatives.

The local communities shared remarkable **Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK)** about birds. They described birds as:

- **Natural pest controllers**, regulating insect populations.
- **Pollinators and seed dispersers**, aiding crop productivity and forest regeneration.
- **Indicators of time and weather patterns**, integrated into their cultural practices.

Despite these positive roles, the communities also cited challenges, such as **crop damage** caused by certain bird species. In response, we introduced **bird-friendly agriculture** and **sustainable land-use practices** as solutions and also discussed the potential of mushroom growing, bee keeping and ecotourism as sustainable livelihood alternatives.

Outcomes and Community Commitment

Following our sensitization sessions, community members expressed:

- **Increased awareness** of the ecological and economic importance of bird conservation.
- **Willingness to adopt sustainable agricultural practices** that are compatible with bird conservation.
- **Interest in developing community-led ecotourism initiatives**, leveraging their unique biodiversity assets.

Three areas of **Rwaburunga, Rwempungu, and Kiyanga** are now actively engaged and committed to partnering with ACUS in future conservation efforts.

Conclusion

The Mitooma District community engagement and bird survey were a resounding success. By **combining scientific research with local knowledge and community participation**, ACUS is fostering a **holistic and inclusive conservation approach**. Together with these communities, we aim to **secure the future of Maramagambo Forest's avian diversity while enhancing local livelihoods**.