



**A BID TO SAVE THE POPYRUS ENDEMIC BIRDS IN THE SWAMPS ON THE
SHORES OF LAKE VICTORIA**

PROJECT REPORT

Implemented By

ONYANGO RONIANCE ADHIAMBO

Supported By

ERIC HOSKING CHARITABLE TRUST

INTRODUCTION

Lake Victoria (also known in local dialects as Nam Lolwe in Luo and “Nalubaale” in Luganda) is the largest lake in Africa and the eighth in the world. It is the largest tropical lake in the world and the second largest fresh water lake in the world. It is shared between Kenya Uganda and Tanzania and it’s ecosystem services serve a population of 30 million people. On the shores of this great Lake, there lies once very productive wetland ecosystems, which are the Dunga, Kusa, Koguta, Yala and Sio Siteko wetland. These wetlands are endowed with very charismatic wildlife and a magnificent bird’s population among them the Papyrus Endemics, The Vulnerable White Winged Warbler, the near threatened Papyrus Gonolek, the Vulnerable Papyrus Yellow Warbler and the Papyrus Canary.

Despite being an important part of the ecosystem, these birds are also tourist attractions but due to massive habitat destruction, their population has greatly declined over the last decades and is continuing to decline, putting them on the threshold of species concern. Dual Pressures of poverty and over population have seen people living in proximity to these wetlands; depend on the resources they provide for their survival. They use the Fish for food and trade, Water for home use, boats for Transportation of people and goods, Papyrus Reeds for commercial craft making, Wild animals for trade and game meat, land for farming and settlement. This has over the years exerted so much pressure on the wetlands and coupled with ignorance and unappreciation, the wetlands areas have been cut down to over half over time.

PROJECTS ACTIVITIES

The field activities leading to the production of a documentary started off by taking field visits to the specific wetlands and engaging 2 community members per wetland in surveying the wetland. We then took photos and videos of all the anthropogenic activities in the wetland and held discussions with the community members on their perceptions and attitude towards the wetlands in the context of the value they see as a result of the ecosystem services provided by the wetlands. We then narrowed down the discussion to their awareness of the papyrus endemic bird species in the respective wetlands.

The focus group discussions were made up of 6 people from the different functional groups in the wetlands (Farmers, Craftsmen, Fishermen, Fish mongers, Traders and representatives from local community based organizations – Conservationists) who outlined that they are not aware of the ecological benefits of the bird species. They are not aware of the conservation status of the papyrus endemic birds. However they say that over the last couple of years, it had become very difficult to spot the birds which they think could be an indication of a decline in their population.

They iterated that there has been a lot of destruction of the wetlands and that the rate of encroachment has significantly increased over the last couple of years. For instance, more people have built homes and social amenities in the wetland.



Figure 1: A church and Business Premises Encroaching in Dunga Wetland

The rate of wetlands clearing for farming activities has increased by up to 70%. In a wetland like Yala, there is a foreign company which has converted a very large part of the wetland into a large scale agricultural farm.



Figure 2: A part of Yala Wetland Being Cleared for Farming

There are also numerous economic activities like fishing and fish mongering, sand harvesting, boat riding and tourism being conducted at a highly unsustainable rate in the wetland



Figure 3: Economic Activities in a Part of Dunga Wetland

One of the most destructive activities to the habitat of these papyrus endemic bird species is overharvesting of the Wetlands vegetation which are used for making crafts, building of local houses and thatching roofs and production of fuel for cooking.



Figure 4: Papyrus Harvesting in Sio Siteko Wetland

We then proceeded to producing the short documentary (About 5 minutes long) which highlighted the anthropogenic activities in the lake Victoria Wetlands and how these activities

are contributing to the destruction of the habitats of the papyrus endemic bird species. The documentary was then concluded with a call to action to community members and stakeholders, to come together in the fight against continued wetlands destruction.

The documentary was then shared in 3 local schools which have Environmental Programmes running and it also featured in the celebration of their World Wetlands Day as a means of raising awareness on the effects of community members' activities on the biodiversity of the wetland. We also called upon community members and stakeholders, a total of 20 people per wetland representing the different functional groups in the wetlands and showcased the video to them to highlight the associated issues. This was done across all the wetlands.

Finally the documentary was shared across our social media platforms and uploaded on YouTube as a means of communicating the message and sharing the knowledge with like-minded conservationists looking to invest in the conservation of the papyrus endemic bird species through restoration and rehabilitation of their habitats

IMPORTANT LINKS

Facebook: Ecofinder Kenya and Kenya Lake Victoria Waterkeeper

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oDUK2TycjE&t=27s>

WAY FORWARD

1. Creating more community wide awareness and capacity building in the five wetlands on the importance of conserving the birds habitats and improving their abundance in the wetland.
2. Recruitment of voluntary wetland keepers for a wetlands monitoring and education scheme throughout the 5 lake Victoria Papyrus Wetlands.
3. Resource mobilization for conducting habitat restoration activities in the wetland
4. Resource Mobilization for facilitation of Alternative livelihoods in the wetlands to reduce the pressure exerted on the wetlands by the anthropogenic activities carried out.