

Conservation of Nyabarongo Wetlands for Sustainable Livelihoods, Rwanda

Title Nyabarongo wetlands are a series of marshes in part of the flood-plain of the Nyanbarongo river, the longest river in Rwanda. This unprotected wetland Important Bird Area (IBA) has benefitted from recent work carried out by Association pour la Conservation de la Nature au Rwanda (ACNR) , The BirdLife Partner in Rwanda. Working with the local community ACNR, has supported the development of a local cooperative, CEDINYA which is benefitting both the community and biodiversity. The project is building the capacity of CEDINYA by raising awareness of relevant legislation, providing training in the production of high-quality products made from materials harvested sustainably from the wetland, and helping to provide access to new markets. Marc Ndimukaga, the project coordinator, comments that "Cranes can now be seen in the wetland, which is a positive result as this species was over hunted in recent years for illegal keeping as an ornamental and for meat. In 2008, CEDINYA members reported two cases of Sitatunga poaching. In collaboration with the local authority and ACNR, poachers were arrested and reported to the police and no poaching case was reported this last year. Burning activities (during the dry season) have also diminished considerably since the cooperative has started operating in the area". To address people's livelihood needs in the area, the project has focused on sustainable harvesting of reeds from the wetland, and production of high-quality handicrafts. Although there was some previous basket weaving carried out, products were generally of low quality and fetched only low prices in local markets. The project provided training to 100 villagers (45 men and 55 women), producing a variety of handicrafts including baskets, plates and ceiling panels from papyrus and other wetland materials. ***"Since the completion of this handcraft training the volume of sales and prices have increased. Before the training baskets were sold for \$2 to \$3 with a low demand (mostly at local markets) as the quality was poor and they could not compete at national markets with baskets from other places. After the training, the price increased to \$10 and the demand increased from handicrafts shops in Kigali city. With this income, the cooperative members have been able to get a loan from the cooperative and invest in other activities for their livelihood improvement such as school fees for children, health insurance to cover medical cost, livestock keeping and improved agriculture"*** writes Marc Ndimukaga. **Biodiversity at Nyabarongo** The Nyabarongo Wetlands IBA are of great importance for biodiversity conservation especially birds, with species such as the endangered Madagascar Pond heron *Aldeora idae*, the Near-threatened Papyrus Gonolek *Laniarius mufumbiri*, the Vulnerable Grey Crowned Crane *Balearica regulorum*, and the Sitatunga *Tragelaphus spekii*. **22 May 2010 - International Day for Biological Diversity** This year's International Day for Biological

Diversity theme of 'Biodiversity for Development and Poverty Alleviation' is a reminder of the unique contribution of biodiversity to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. This is one of a series of projects showcasing the BirdLife Partnerships work around the world to improve livelihoods while conserving biodiversity. This project is part of a small grant programme managed by the BirdLife Secretariat with generous support from the Aage V. Jensen Charity Foundation.