

Empowering Local Champions for Africa's Great Lakes

Title

BirdLife Partners from Kenya (Nature Kenya), Uganda (Nature Uganda), Rwanda (Association pour la Conservation de la Nature au Rwanda) and Burundi (Association Burundaise pour la Protection des Oiseaux) met in Kampala, Uganda last week for the launch of a 3 year project ' *Empowering local communities for the conservation and sustainable development of the birds and biodiversity of the Lake Victoria Basin, the Greatest of Africa's 'Great Lakes'* '. The project is being funded by the Aage V. Jensen Foundation.

"The project will create greater momentum in our desire to further develop the BirdLife Local Empowerment Programme in the region and what is beautiful about this project , is that it is the implementing partners and the local people who will make it work" remarked Dr. David Thomas, BirdLife's Head of Communities and Livelihoods.

Through this project BirdLife Partners will implement a coordinated programme of activities to address biodiversity conservation and livelihoods development at priority sites for birds and biodiversity (Important Bird Areas) in the Lake Victoria Basin.

Speaking on behalf of the implementing partners, Mr. Achilles Byaruhanga, the Executive Director of the BirdLife Partner in Uganda - Nature Uganda gave assurance that they will support the implementation of this project. Regional networking and coordination of local organizations will help increase grassroots influence over policy makers whose decisions affect them and the resources on which they depend, and will facilitate effective transfer of experience and good practice from one community to another.

Lake Victoria is Africa's largest lake, and the largest tropical lake in the world. The swamps, forests and islands in and around Lake Victoria are important for a diversity of wildlife. They provide habitat for species such as the Papyrus Gonolek *Laniarius mufumbiri* (NT), the Shoebill *Balaeniceps rex* (Vu) as well as important congregations of water birds such as Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*. The resources of the lake and its basin are also economically very important. Lake Victoria supports Africa's largest inland fishery and resources and ecosystem services from the area support the livelihoods of millions of people.

However, the Lake Victoria Basin is one of the most densely populated rural areas in the world, and high levels of poverty are a major hindrance to sustainable biodiversity management. The lake, the lakeshore and the lake basin are regarded as engines of economic growth in countries where poverty alleviation is of the highest priority.

‘As a result of these pressures the biodiversity and ecological integrity of IBAs around Lake Victoria are threatened by a number of factors including pollution, invasive species, habitat degradation and overharvesting of resources’ said the Chairman of Nature Uganda - Mr. Paul Mafabi.

Dr. Julius Alexander Arinaitwe - Regional Director for Africa expressed his gratitude to the Aage V. Jensen Foundation for their continued support in the region.