Kenya?s Tana River Delta Designated as newest Ramsar Site in Africa

Title

Conservationists have a reason to celebrate as Kenya’s Tana River Delta becomes one of the newest Ramsar sites in Africa and indeed the world. In a statement from the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands Secretariat, the Assistant Advisor for Africa, Ms. Ako Charlotte Eyong described the delta as the second most important estuarine and deltaic ecosystem in Eastern Africa, which permits diverse hydrological functions and a rich biodiversity. “This is a milestone in conservation efforts in Kenya and we are hoping that many other wetlands get listed as they provide vital environmental services”, says Ms. Serah Munguti, the Advocacy and Communication Manager at Nature Kenya. Nature Kenya is the BirdLife Partner in Kenya and has been involved in campaigns to promote the listing of the Tana Delta as a Ramsar site. The Tana River Delta is one of the most neglected regions in Kenya, where the majority of people live below the poverty line, but the area is rich in biodiversity and natural resources. In addition to being an internationally important area for birds and wildlife, the Tana Delta is vital for the herders who depend on the water and grasslands during the dry season, the farmers who cultivate rice, mangoes and other crops and the fishermen who fish from its lakes and watercourses. Nature Kenya has worked with communities for six years to promote ecological sustainability in the Tana Delta and is currently running a humanitarian campaign at the Tana Delta to assist the victims of recent ethnic violence through provision of basic food items. The Ramsar Convention on wetlands, adopted in the Iranian city of Ramsar in 1971, is an intergovernmental treaty that embodies the commitments of its member countries to maintain the ecological character of their wetlands by providing a framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of these fragile ecosystems and their resources.

African pygmy goose and African Jacana at Lake Mnuji, Tana Delta (credit: P.Usher)

Acknowledging the importance of deltas for the economy as well as ecological services, Nature Kenya is collaborating with the Office of the Prime Minister to come up with a land use plan leading to the long-term sustainable management of the Tana River Delta in ways that will provide for economic prosperity, stable social conditions and lasting environmental quality. The designation of the Tana River Delta as a wetland of international importance had stalled in the past years. In 2008 Nature Kenya supported the Kenya Wildlife Service to jumpstart the process. In the following years Nature Kenya played a major role in creating awareness to local communities on the importance of getting the Delta into the Ramsar list. Other wetlands in Kenya designated as Ramsar sites are Lakes Nakuru, Naivasha, Bogoria, Baringo, and Elementaita. The overall goal of the Ramsar Convention is related to effective conservation and wise use of wetlands globally as a basis of biodiversity conservation and sustainable development.