Project Goal: To strengthen local capacity and improve the knowledge base of lake management institutions for sustainable management of critical wetlands in the Lake Victoria Basin.

Project Countries & Sites: Burundi (Ruvubu National Park), Kenya (Yala Delta), Tanzania (Mara Bay & Masirori Swamp), Uganda (Lutembe Bay).

Lake Victoria is Africa’s largest lake, and the largest tropical lake in the world, rich in biodiversity and natural resources. However, the biodiversity and ecological integrity of the Lake Victoria basin are threatened by pollution, invasive species, habitat degradation and overharvesting of resources.

Local communities are the chief stewards of the world’s ecosystems, and the vast majority of daily environmental management decisions depend on local knowledge and are determined by local people’s use of land and natural resources.

This project is empowering local community organisations by equipping them with the skills and expertise they need to protect and improve their livelihoods and wellbeing, to be heard by decision-makers, achieve political recognition, and to secure land rights which give them the confidence to plan for the future.

Why the Lake Victoria basin?

Lake Victoria is one of the most endowed freshwater lakes of the world with extraordinary geophysical features, highly diverse biodiversity and significant socio-economic values. It is the largest tropical lake and the second largest freshwater lake in the world with surface area of 68,800 km² and a basin area of 194,000 km² that straddles Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda.

The wetlands provide diverse ecosystem services, regulates water supply and supports fisheries that sustain the livelihoods of more than 500,000 people with annual landed fish value of about $400 million. The basin also supports cottage industry based on extraction of sand, clay and papyrus. The basin supports more than 30 million livelihoods, with the Nile waters supporting extensive irrigated agriculture, tourism ventures, and transport throughout the Lake and its tributaries.

Lake Victoria and its Basin (LVB) comprise an ecosystem with extraordinary biodiversity. It contains 41 terrestrial and 11 freshwater Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs), four of which are Alliance for Zero Extinction sites (AZEs) meaning that a group of biodiversity conservation organizations from around the world aim to prevent extinctions at these key sites by identifying and safeguarding them, each one which is the last remaining refuge of one or more Endangered or Critically Endangered species. These freshwater KBAs alone have an estimated total numbers of at least 223 fish, 263 odonate, 81 mollusc and 15 crab species and are host to at least 66 globally threatened species (51 fish, 3 odonates, and 12 crabs).

What are the challenges facing this ecosystem?

The population of LVB has steadily increased since 1930 from 3 – 30 million and with it associated environmental degradation necessitated by encroachment, unsuitable land use, agricultural expansion, pollution and
Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs)

Overexploitation of wetland resources for fish, papyrus, clay and sand has diminished its ability to support local livelihoods sustainably.

An upsurge of pollution within these wetlands has been necessitated by increased waste disposal from large firms and industries operating in critical wetlands and increased chemical runoff from agriculture.

Low awareness and little appreciation of the ecosystem services and ecological values coupled with inadequate capacity of local stakeholders to meaningfully engage in sustainable resource management are evident at multiple levels. There is poor information available for effective resource management.

How is the project addressing the issues and challenges?

This project will strengthen governance structures for sustainable and equitable management of wetlands, improve understanding and appreciation of their values, and facilitate knowledge exchange to enhance wetland policies and their implementation in the LVB.

1) Increased awareness of wetlands values: by providing training in wetlands’ valuation to enhance local understanding of biodiversity and ecosystem values of the basin’s wetlands and increasing awareness of wetland values regionally to inform wetland policies across.

2) Improved local governance of wetlands: the project will identify critical habitats for biodiversity and ecosystem services at KBAs and establish community led governance and management structures at site level that supports active local engagement and empowerment.

3) Increased capacity to manage wetlands: the project will enhance the capacity of local communities for the sustainable management of wetlands and support establishment of sustainable agriculture and green enterprise including ecotourism.

4) Informing policy/legislative frameworks and the private sector: the project will improve the knowledge-base of decision makers, policy formulators/implementers, and the private sector on options for the sustainable management of wetlands and their ecosystem values and encourage the adoption of appropriate environment and social safeguard measures.

Project duration: January 2015 – December 2017

Project Partners:
BirdLife is leading on the project working together with our national BirdLife Partners
Association Burundaise pour la Conservation de la Nature (ABN) in Burundi
Nature Uganda (NU) in Uganda
BirdLife Africa Secretariat Office in Tanzania
UNESCO-IHE
Ramsar Centre for Eastern Africa (RAMCEA)

Key stakeholders:
UNEP – World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP – WCMC)
IUCN Biodiversity and Fresh Water and Florida International University (FIU)
Rare Species Conservatory Foundation and East African Plant Red List Authority.

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BirdLife Contacts

Chris Magero
Project Manager,
BirdLife International
E: chris.magero@birdlife.org

Charles Rugerinyange
Executive Director,
Association Burundaise pour la Conservation de la Nature (ABN)
E: ruguecharles@yahoo.fr

Achilles Byaruhanga
Executive Director,
Nature Uganda
E: achilles.byaruhanga@natureuganda.org

Kenneth Irvine
WWF Chair of Aquatic Ecosystems, UNESCO-IHE
E: k.irvine@unesco-ihe.org