A MESSAGE FROM THE REGIONAL DIRECTOR’S DESK

Nature is under siege. From pollution, unprecedented biodiversity loss, climate change and pandemics such as COVID-19, the effects of nature destruction are harming humanity. It is for this reason that the BirdLife Partnership through the 1Planet1Right campaign is calling for the right to a healthy planet.

We hope you will take time to enjoy our partners’ stories from around the continent, and that you will share this newsletter with your friends and supporters. Happy reading and thank you for your continued support.

Ademola Ajagbe
Regional Director. BirdLife Africa

ON THE COVER PHOTO...

Black-browed albatross © Ed Dunens

On June 19 2020 BirdLife celebrated the first ever World Albatross Day!

Launched by ACAP and supported by the conservation community, the day aims to raise awareness of this majestic group of birds and the enormous threats they faced.

Today, 15 of the world’s 22 albatross species are on the brink of extinction. By far the biggest threat to albatrosses is industrial fishing, as thousands of albatrosses meet their end accidentally caught in fishing equipment when diving for bait.

Hope is at hand, however. Discover the BirdLife Albatross Task Force and their pioneering work to save Albatrosses.
Big challenges require big solutions. Our most ambitious campaign ever aims to fundamentally transform humanity’s relationship with nature – for the benefit of all.

Let’s make it a human right to live on a healthy planet.

SIGN THE PETITION
WE NEED A HUMAN RIGHT TO ENSURE THE PLANET’S HEALTH, AND OUR FUTURE

It’s no secret: our natural world is in terrible shape. Our unsustainable system is causing climate chaos, mass extinction of species, pollution and human suffering. As COVID-19 reminds us, the destruction of nature harms people directly. Lest we forget, we are part of nature, and we need a healthy planet to survive together. We, as do all other living beings, deserve the right to a healthy natural world.

Society must build back better after this crisis; governments cannot continue business as usual. We need a Green Recovery that recognises the importance of nature, that tackles the climate and biodiversity crises simultaneously, and kickstarts a decade of systemic change that builds resilient economies, healthy communities and a thriving natural world.

We must completely change the way we treat our home. Human rights movements have a long and successful track record at transforming society and, with governments meeting in September to discuss the fate of our planet at key UN meetings, there has never been a greater need for action.

We call on the UN to add the right to a healthy natural environment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Just as the original Declaration was forged from the ashes of humanity’s last global crisis, World War II, we can emerge from today’s crisis with a symbolic and decisive political change. One that shows to the world that our solutions are in nature, and that systemic change must happen, fast. It’s an ambitious goal, but an achievable one, and here’s how...
What exactly do we want, and when?

A universal human right to a healthy natural environment, guaranteed by public policies and determined by sustainability, science, and traditional indigenous knowledge.

We call on the UN to:
- Vote to include the right to a healthy natural environment at the UN Human Rights Council, in the UN General Assembly and as an urgent topic at the UN Summit on Biodiversity in September 2020.
- Ultimately include the right to a healthy natural environment in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by December 2023 to mark the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration by the UN General Assembly.

Why a human right?

We’re used to talking about saving species and ecosystems, but the twin biodiversity and climate crises facing our planet already violate and jeopardise our human rights. Because of environmental harms, over nine million people die prematurely every year and hundreds of millions of people suffer illnesses. Climate change impacts – more frequent and intense storms, droughts, wildfires and rising sea levels – threaten the health, well-being and dignity of billions of people.

Michele Bachelet, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, warns: “the world has never seen a human rights threat of this scope.” It’s high time the world’s governments woke up to the gravity of the situation and acted accordingly.

Rights-based approaches have a strong history of catalysing change – such as the campaign to abolish slavery, the women’s rights movement, and the recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples.

What will it achieve in practice?

A new human right is far from just a symbolic gesture. Once a human right is ratified for the UN, it’s a catalyst for international and national legal change as member states improve their environmental policies to fulfil the right, which would see sweeping improvements to wildlife, ecosystems and the lives of people. It would also make additional resources available to assist countries in protecting the environment and support environmental human rights defenders.
Why are we focusing on humans?

Human society is pulling itself from the web of life, and breaking strands: we’re losing our connection to the natural world at the same time as we are devastating it. Yet humans are nature, what protects nature, protects humans. So we approach this campaign with a deep recognition that supporting nature’s rights is supporting human rights, and environmental rights defenders are de facto human rights defenders.

As such, this anthropogenic standpoint also completely supports, and is compatible with, an ecocentric viewpoint, including movements to protect inherent rights of nature (such as the Whanganui River in New Zealand, now legally treated as a living entity). With the current gaps in national and international law, a human rights approach has the largest potential for the global, systemic change needed to protect life on Earth.

The COVID-19 response has also shown that change can happen fast, when there is the political will, and when humans are in immediate danger, compared to the slow response to climate and biodiversity crises where threats may seem far off to some.

What’s the wider context?

This umbrella campaign forms part of a wider push to transform international climate and nature policy at the beginning of the UN Decade of Action, including adopting a Post2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, a Green Recovery from COVID-19, tackling illegal wildlife trade, reforming agricultural policy, reversing deforestation, and more. Through calling for a universal right to healthy nature, the campaign also aims to ensure that everyone, from all walks of life and all areas of the world, is able to access and benefit from nature. One Planet One Right is also an open call to the rest of the world’s civil society for support; the inclusion of the right to a healthy natural environment is a push we should all be behind if we are to ensure our survival and wellbeing, and save our planet.

What should I do next?

Spread the word, quickly! Sign and share the petition to make it a UN-recognised human right to live on a healthy planet. It may seem overwhelming, but it’s true; to emerge from these crises, to ensure our future and that of the planet, we need to entirely transform humanity’s relationship with nature. This human right helps make that happen.

16% OF GLOBAL DEATHS
Pollution is responsible for 3X as many deaths as AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria combined, and for nearly 15X as many deaths as war and violence

80% OF UN STATES
have already established some legal recognition of the right to a healthy environment, yet the UN does not yet recognise this as a universal human right

OVER 1 MILLION SPECIES
at risk of extinction globally

#1PLANET 1RIGHT

SIGN THE PETITION
AN ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS UNFOLDS IN MAURITIUS

By Jean Hugues Gardenne and Lewis Kihumba

On July 25th 2020 MV Wakashio a Panama flagged tanker carrying over 40000 tons of heavy oil, lubricants and diesel ran aground off South East Mauritius, a mere two km away from Ile aux Aigrettes, a nature reserve island managed by our partner the Mauritius Wildlife Foundation (MWF). Ile aux Aigrettes is home to populations of Pink Pigeons (Nesoenas mayeri), Olive White-eyes (Zosterops chloronothus), Mauritius Fodies (Foudia rubra), Telfair’s Skinks, Guenther’s Geckos and dozens of endemic plants, most of which IUCN red-listed. The vessel was enroute to Brazil when it hit a coral reef off Pointe d’Esny, in the vicinity of two important Ramsar sites (Blue Bay Marine Park and Pointe d’Esny wetlands), nature reserves and national parks.

On Thursday 6th August, oil started leaking from the tanker, about 800 tons spilled into the ocean, affecting Ile aux Aigrettes, and the fragile marine and terrestrial ecosystems of the region. In the following days, the oil patch spread north, reaching four islets overlooking the Mahebourg bay. Ile de la Passe, Ilot Vacoas, Ile au Fouquets and Ile Marianne, key habitats for endemic reptiles such as Bouton and Bojer skinks - species extinct on mainland Mauritius.

On August 16th, the MV Wakashio broke in two spilling remaining oil - most of which was confined by the booms placed in the lagoon. Mauritius, home to over 1.2 million people heavily relies on fishing and tourism, and had already been adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The oil spill badly impacted on the pristine lagoons, coral reefs, mangrove forests and biodiversity; with shorelines covered with black sludge, in what turned out to be a major environmental disaster for the country.

Dr Vikash Tatayah, Conservation Director at the MWF, shared how his organisation has been at the forefront during this crisis. “As we anticipated an oil spill, we had a 3 step plan but jumped directly to the last step as soon as we learnt of the leak. Precautionary measures to protect threatened unique flora and fauna of Ile aux Aigrettes were completed within days. 12 Mauritius Olive White-eyes and 6 Mauritius Fodies were captured and transferred to the Black River Aviary facilities (also known as the Gerald Durrell Endemic Wildlife Sanctuary) with the agreement of the Mauritius National Parks and Conservation Service (NPCS), to be kept until the conditions on Ile aux Aigrettes improve. Similarly, 4000 endemic plants from the plant nursery - some being very rare plants- have been transferred to mainland and are being kept at the Mauritian Forestry Services in Mahebourg”, he added.

The reptiles’ translocation project initiated by the MWF, the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust and the NPCS has since 2006 monitored and translocated several reptile populations, on islets around Mauritius to increase their chance of survival. Dr Nik Cole, Island Restoration Manager for the MWF and Durrell, feared that the hydrocarbons may adversely affect these populations, putting 14 years of conservation work at stake.
Dr Tatayah shares the same thoughts. "No one today can certify that Ile aux Aigrettes will not be affected in the long term. The coral island reserve has numerous cavities and seawater can mix with underground water and contaminate the soil, which can end up killing the endemic plants there. We may see this Reserve die slowly. It took 36 years and over 300,000 plants to create such unique coastal forest which is today home to the critically endangered species. There is still a long way to go. It's only the beginning of a long cleaning and decontamination process."

Thousands of residents and volunteers used booms fashioned from stretch nets, sugarcane straw and plastic bottles sewed together with nylon thread to channel oil on the water, thus facilitating pumping. Assistance also arrived from the UN, India, South Africa, Russia amongst others in addition to equipment and technical expertise from the neighbouring Reunion Island. Japan also flew across a team of six experts. The cleaning process which is being carried out under the supervision of the Ministry of Environment and French company, Le Floch will last months.

On August 19th, the authorities tugged MV Wakashio’s bow 16 nautical miles (30 kms) east of Vieux Grand Port where it sunk on August 24th, laying at a depth of over 3000 m. Despite the fact that the bow was not completely de-polluted, authorities and marine specialists believed sinking it was the best option Marine conservationists also advised on the sinking location, claiming that the chosen site was not a breeding ground for whales. However days after, nearly 50 dolphins were found dead on the south east coast causing a major uproar. Until now, the cause of death remains unknown. Authorities also set up a sound barrier to push other stranded dolphins to the open sea.

Expected to be dismantled before the cyclonic season the MV Wakashio’s stern is still stuck on the reefs at Pointe d’Esny. While Japan has sent five additional experts specialized in reef and mangroves ecosystem, joining specialists from other countries to build capacity of Mauritian institutions. Mitsui OSK is setting up an office in view of helping environmental organisations and impacted communities.

"Economic activities in the region are still on hold and the impact on tourism is expected to last another year. Those residing on the coast line have been exposed to fumes and vapours and this may seriously affect their health. A recent study from Reef Conservation shows first signs of distress on adult mangroves," notes Jean-Hugues Gardenne, Fundraising and Comms Manager at MWF.

"The Mauritian population, diaspora, funders and partners have rallied behind this cause. We hope this support will be sustained in the long run and enable investment in the conservation work needed. Today, nearly four decades of conservation work is at stake, but we will work hard to overcome this," he concludes.
STRONG HIGH SEAS: TOWARDS AN OCEAN GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK

By Lewis Kihumba

In the recent decade, nature is increasingly coming under siege as a result of human activities. World over biodiversity is disappearing at an alarming rate, while climate change is having negative impacts on humanity. The effects of these interactions are not only being felt on land but also in our oceans, especially in the high seas. High seas or Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (ABNJ) fall outside jurisdiction of states and are critical components of our oceans. They account for more than 64% of the world oceans and about 45% of the Earth’s surface.

Additionally, 90% of world trade crosses through these areas, which also hold more than 90% of global fish stocks, and play a key role in climate regulation. High Seas are under threat from human activities including overfishing, emerging deep-sea mining and pollution, which are having an adverse effect on marine biodiversity, with ecological impact of these activities being felt across borders.

Consequently, there is an increasing need to effectively govern and regulate activities our oceans. Globally, the United Nations Convention for the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) governs rights and duties of states within their maritime zones. Beyond these zones, governance remains fragmented, mainly taking the form of sectoral or regional initiatives. Recognizing this gap, the United Nations (UN) began negotiations on a treaty on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity in 2015.

One of the regional approaches to governance is the Abidjan Convention. Ratified in 1984, and covering 22 African countries in the South East Atlantic seaboard. The Abidjan Convention provides a framework for these states to deliberate on critical issues on protection of marine and coastal environments. BirdLife and the International Ocean Institute (IOI) South Africa are partnering with the Abidjan Convention in the STRONG High Seas project to facilitate the development of a regional, cross-sectoral approach for the conservation and sustainable use of Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) and the treaty currently being negotiated.

Since 2017, the project has focussed on supporting deliberations among the convention’s countries to advance local ocean governance. To this end, the project has developed a Working Group, drawn from Abidjan Convention’s member states, to explore areas of mutual interest and co-operation for a coordinated approach to ocean governance in the region.

A key goal of the STRONG High Seas is to carry out scientific assessments and studies, key for decision makers. To this end, the project has undertaken various scientific assessments including baseline ecology focusing on the state of biodiversity in the South East Atlantic region, the existing legal framework and methods for Monitoring, Control and Surveillance (MCS) among others. The project has also began a study on socio-economic connection between national waters and ANBJs in addition to relation of these socio-economic activities with marine biodiversity. As negotiations on ocean governance for Areas Beyond National Jurisdictions continue, states under the Abidjan Convention will continue being a critical cog in these deliberations, which can be linked to other initiatives around the world and hopefully contribute to an all-inclusive ocean governance framework.
ANCHORING A GREEN RECOVERY IN SÃO TOMÉ AND PRÍNCIPE

By Elena Serra Sánchez

In wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, BirdLife is adapting its conservation programmes in São Tomé and Príncipe islands to address the economic and social crisis caused by the pandemic, seeking to herald a green future in this island state.

Located in the Gulf of Guinea, is a small archipelago with dense equatorial forest cover and rich and endemic biodiversity. This is the Republic of São Tomé and Príncipe, Africa’s second smallest country with a population of about 220,000. The islands are a tropical paradise and an Eden for bird lovers, home to 27 bird species found nowhere else on the planet. Travelers swimming on its beaches and hiking in São Tomé and Príncipe’s forests take home the memory of a splendid landscape that seems more out of a Jurassic Park movie than reality.

Against this idyllic scenery, according to the World Bank, São Tomé and Príncipe faces challenges typical of small and insular states, including ability to deal with shocks and achieving a balanced budget. This is due to its remoteness, vulnerability to natural shocks and climate change and limited availability of land and workforce. This has prevented the country from diversifying its economy and generating sustainable and inclusive growth.

Since the 19th century, the economy of São Tomé and Príncipe has been primarily dependent on plantation agriculture, with cocoa being the main export crop. While domestic food-crop production remains inadequate. As a result, the country imports most of its food, such as rice, cereals, oil and meat in addition to fuel for its electricity needs. In 2018, the island exported goods worth 23 million dollars, against imports worth 161 million dollars, according to the Observatory of Economic Complexity. In addition to agriculture, tourism is the country’s second largest economic sector, accounting for over 20% of employment.

With such an economy, São Tomé and Príncipe is prone to endogenous shocks. According to the African Union, the COVID-19 pandemic, wreaking havoc globally, has greatly impacted São Tomé and Príncipe’s economy,
where the vast majority of the population has to work daily to meet their basic needs. Declining economic activity in the agricultural and tourism sectors has directly affected many households.

Consequently, social groups such as eco-guides, artisans, merchants, restaurateurs and rural populations, among others, are facing an unprecedented economic and social crisis, which will inevitably lead to greater dependence on natural resources.

**An urgent collaborative response**

Under the lead of BirdLife International, the world’s largest nature conservation partnership, partners including local and international organisations, such as the Portuguese NGO Oikos, the Gulf Of Guinea Biodiversity Center, the Tatô Programme, Microland association, local authorities and Sao Tomean civil society groups are focussing on addressing the urgent health and economic situation. The response also aims at developing a plan to promote a greener, more resilient and sustainable future.

Remote rural populations living on the edge of the natural parks do not have access to state aid or information. BirdLife is focussing efforts in these critical areas. “Eco-guides, artisans and young people in search of employment, among others, have the opportunity to reinvent their activities to overcome this crisis”, explains Jean-Baptiste Deffontaines, Head of BirdLife Projects Office in the country.

The first step in this intervention was to develop and implement a Covid-19 awareness and prevention campaign. To this end, BirdLife trained community promoters who spread the message among local people on how to prevent the transmission of the disease while highlighting the importance of maintaining healthy environment to avoid zoonotic diseases.

At the same time, women from the association Queremos ter um futuro com destino, an association of former sea turtle meat vendors converted a few years ago to the production of souvenirs for tourists, received funding to manufacture reusable cloth masks; including equipment, raw materials and capacity building. BirdLife made an initial order of 3,000 reusable cloth masks which were distributed among the population in São Tomé. “We feel very cherished and lucky because making these masks, not only allowed us to improve our family income in this period without tourism, but also increase production in the future, due to the two additional machines that we received”, said Maria Antónia Barros and Nilza Diogo two women from the association. An additional 1,000 reusable cloth masks were made and distributed on Principe Island.

“These initiatives were very welcome by the population, and represent collaborative effort by our young people to improve living conditions in our communities”, noted Benvindo Pereira a community promoter who took part in the Covid-19 awareness and prevention training. Recognizing these efforts, BirdLife received recognition from the government representatives of the Principe’s Regional Health Delegation.

The halt in tourism activities has provided an opportunity to carry out maintenance and cleaning work on the paths of the Obô Natural Park of São Tomé. Supported by BirdLife, eco-guides of Associação Monte Pico (AMP) are responsible for this works. “This support makes up for the stagnation of tourist services in the country. Tourism is the only means of subsistence and family income we have. Hence, this support couldn’t have come at a better time”, says Gabriel Oquiongo, an ecoguide and AMP member.
Reshaping the tourism model

In the long term, BirdLife is working together with civil society organisations and the government to facilitate the professional re-orientation of 15 eco-guides for the surveillance, awareness raising and monitoring of the Obô Natural Park. This is part of a strategy responding to the significant increase in illegal logging for construction purposes. In order to strengthen the monitoring, BirdLife is supporting an initiative of the Ministry of Agriculture, in charge of forests and biodiversity to build five surveillance posts along the main wood trafficking routes, ensuring that the construction is environmentally friendly.

These efforts are in line with diversifying São Tomé’s economy and making it less dependent on international tourism. The Platform for Responsible and Sustainable Tourism (PRST), with BirdLife support, is planning on developing a national action plan to reorganize the sector and modernize the tourist offerings at the parks, focusing on their surveillance and sustainable management.

According to Eugénio Neves from the PRST, “The new ecotourism model will provide global benefits in terms of biodiversity conservation and ecosystems services, as well as providing socio-economic benefits to communities in the buffer zone, through co-management and sustainable production of raw materials.”

In addition, BirdLife is working towards the development of a sustainable finance plan for protected areas and biodiversity and ‘within this framework tourism will certainly no longer be given the same priority’, adds Jean-Baptiste.

In the context of the Covid-19 crisis, BirdLife has reinforced its São Tomé and Príncipe strategy, over the next decade aiming at extending its impact to wider areas, improving livelihoods, creating job stability and promoting a sustainable economy based on climate change resilient ecosystem services. With this strategy, BirdLife is leading the way in championing a resilient green future model for biodiversity conservation.

The BirdLife International Africa Secretariat has been active in São Tomé and Príncipe for more than 10 years, working with park management authorities, ministries and local communities on research, conservation of endangered birds and local empowerment. Since 2017, through the EU-funded regional ECOFAC6 programme, BirdLife has secured a grant for the protection of the Natural Parks coordinating a consortium of NGOs, including Oikos, SPEA (BirdLife in Portugal) and RSPB (BirdLife in England). We thank the technical and financial partners involved in the implementation of the programme, including the CE3C - Centre for Ecology, Evolution and Environmental Changes (University of Lisbon), the Rainforest Trust and the Waterloo Foundation. You can follow the BirdLife São Tomé and Príncipe initiative through the Obô Ôvyô facebook page.
RESTORING THE LUKANGA: TACKLING INVASIVE WEED SPECIES IN ZAMBIA

By Chaona Phiri, Clara Nanja & Lewis Kihumba

In two decades of fishing, Boyd Kayombo has witnessed a steady decline in his catch. Kayombo sighs as he tugs at his nets. “The fish catch is poorer and the water has turned pale and green”, he remarks wiping sweat from his brow on a hot fishing day.

Kayombo is part of the fishing community living around the Lukanga Swamp, one of Zambia’s eight major wetlands and a Ramsar site. Lukanga Swamp is located in Central Zambia about 55 km west from the town of Kabwe. The site is an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA) covering approximately 3300 km², and hosts over 350 residents and migratory bird species including some globally threatened species such as the Wattled Crane (Bugoranus carunculatus), African Skimmer (Rynchops flavirostris), and African Finfoot (Podica senegalensis).

Lukanga Swamp is also home to a variety of other species including semi-aquatic antelopes such as Sitatunga, (Tragelaphus spekei), Oribi (Ourebia ourebi), and Red Lechwe (Kobus leche leche).

Reptiles such as the Nile crocodile, (Crocodylus niloticus), African Rock Python (Python sebae), and Monitor Lizard species are also common in isolated portions of the swamp. Fishing is a major economic activity in the swamp, hosting a fishing community of approximately 22,500 and contributing at least 10% of Zambia’s national fish supply.

Over the years, Zambia’s wetlands have increasingly come under threat from land use change, poor land management, damming, mining and encroachment. Additionally, invasive species - species that are not native to a specific location and spread extensively damaging ecosystems, are having a toll on the country’s wetlands.

Invasive species establish breeding populations, and thrive fast, and in the absence of natural predators, these species thrive and successfully colonize ecosystems. Human activities is the most common ways through which invasive species including plants and animals colonize new habitats.

The invasive Kariba Weed (Salvinia molesta) has infested the Lukanga swamp ecosystem since 2009. Over the years, the invasive weed has grown to cover more than 50% of the swamp’s surface area. Kariba weed forms a mat on the water, reducing sunlight and oxygen, ultimately leading to death of fish.

Since 2013, BirdWatch Zambia (BirdLife Partner) has been involved in controlling the weed. Initially, this was done manually where community members used sickles, rakes and pitchforks to remove the weed. However, this method proved unsuccessful due to its spread, with spores quickly dispersing and germinating leading to regrowth of the weed.

In 2017, BirdWatch Zambia, through BirdLife International secured funding from the UK Government’s Darwin Initiative for a multi-year project to control the invasive weed naturally. The project seeks to control the weed by introducing an effective and host specific weevil biological agent. Cyrtobagous salviniae, that exclusively feeds on the Kariba weed. The weevils cause damage
to the leaves by perforating them and sucking their chlorophyll thereby causing the plants to turn brown, decompose and sink. Depending on climate and extent of the weevil’s infestation, weed mats sink within one to three years.

After a successful importation of the weevils, most of them were introduced in various Salvinia infested points in the swamp, while a few were retained for mass rearing, prior to further introduction at more points within the swamp. Since October 2018, when they were first introduced into the swamp, the weevils have spread to over 650km² resulting in clearing some canals, thereby enabling fishing and swimming activities in the cleared areas.

“I heard there is a weevil that BirdWatch Zambia introduced in the Lukanga to feed on this weed, and have seen it before. It is small but powerful. Some canals are clear and easier to navigate through now”, says Patrick Ndemena a local fisherman.

“I decided to attend one of the community meetings were they explained how the weevil works, because I was worried that it could harm both the fishermen and the fish. They explained everything. The weevil has not harmed any fish or swamp plants, it is a good weevil, it minds its business”, he notes with a laugh. “There is hope for restoration of the Lukanga”, he adds with a wide smile on his face.

“It is such a delight to see the Lukanga habitat improve from when I first saw it in 2017”, notes Clara Nanja, BirdWatch Zambia’s wetlands project officer. “The unfolding success story of the Lukanga, serves as an example of a well implemented biological control project. The weevils have proven their resilient, self-sustaining and highly adaptive behaviour in the Lukanga, at present covering an area of about 662 km², based on recent weevil monitoring surveys.

This project is being conducted in partnership with the Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries, Zambia Agriculture Research Institute (ZARI), Zambia Environmental Management Agency (ZEMA) and Centre for Agriculture and Bioscience International (CABI) and the Local Site Support group.

“I am leading an enthusiastic and hardworking team that is working to see the project outcome achieved and ultimately creating a good habitat that benefits both swamp biodiversity and the local community. Once the weed is controlled, it is expected that there will be improved fish catch, restored habitat and an increase in the population of the globally threatened species and other water birds, thus benefiting biodiversity and improving the livelihoods of more than 2500 fishermen by the end of the project in 2021”, concludes Clara.
THE INGULA PARTNERSHIP IN SOUTH AFRICA: INDUSTRY AND CONSERVATION WORKING AS ONE

By Carina Pienaar

Electricity generation and environmental conservation are often regarded as two opposing sides to a coin, with one of the parties always left behind. However, in South Africa, the local power producer and two environmental NGOs have developed a successful partnership that shows how conservation and industry can work together towards a mutual goal.

In 2002 South Africa’s power producer, Eskom Holdings SOC Ltd. (Eskom), proposed to expand its network of power generation facilities to include the construction of the Ingula Pumped Storage Scheme (PSS). However, Eskom faced a dilemma when the Environmental Authorisation for the proposed project was withdrawn following opposition from non-governmental organisations (NGOs), including BirdLife South Africa and Middelpunt Wetland Trust, highlighting the presence of several threatened species, including the Critically Endangered White-winged Flufftail (Sarothrura ayresi). The environmental impact assessment also showed that the ecosystem within the proposed site, i.e. high-altitude grasslands and palustrine wetlands, was vulnerable to over utilisation and degradation.

Eskom proposed a solution in the form of a partnership, i.e. the Ingula Partnership, allowing these NGOs to work together with Eskom throughout the planning, construction and operation of the PSS, thus prompting the reauthorization of the development. The Partnership has a single shared objective, i.e. to monitor and minimize the environmental impacts throughout the project construction and beyond, with a focus on the sensitive wetlands and their biodiversity.

During construction (2005-2016) regular input from the Partnership raised environmental awareness among all personnel on site (~4500 construction contractors and supervisors). Regular monitoring of the biodiversity across the site’s grasslands, wetlands and forests by BirdLife South Africa’s Project Managers and Eskom’s environmental staff provided important baseline data to monitor the impacts of the construction on the natural environment.

This monitoring facilitated the development of important innovative monitoring techniques through remote sensing and camera traps, leading to successful conservation discoveries, including the discovery of the local breeding behaviour and the call of the elusive White-winged Flufftail in South Africa.
Other successful projects included the development of local remote sensing monitoring methods for veld condition and alien invasive species, and long term breeding assessments for threatened species on the reserve, and the development of a National Species Action Plan for the Vulnerable Southern Bald Ibis (*Geronticus calvus*). Work on the Southern Bald Ibis was triggered through the realisation that construction of the Bedford Dam would inundate a successful breeding colony and prompted Eskom to construct the first ever artificial breeding ledges for the species. The recolonization project has proven more than successful, with the colony expanding since 2016.

BirdLife South Africa has been an integral partner in ensuring that consistent monitoring of avian biodiversity has taken place throughout the construction of the Ingula PSS. Carina Pienaar, Ingula Project Manager for BirdLife South Africa commented on the invaluable opportunities provided through the Ingula Partnership, including “valuable discoveries in terms of the habitat management and climatic requirements for threatened and endemic grassland species through consistent monitoring”.

The reserve currently has a recorded bird list of 341, with 24 regionally threatened and several using the grassland and wetland habitats to breed in. The results of a study investigating the habitat and climatic drivers of breeding for threatened bird species is currently in preparation to be published.
Partnership has been the environment and CEO, Mark Anderson, positive way for the ultimate benefit of a constructive and conservation NGOs communities and biodiversity.”

The Ingula Partnership has been a perfect example of how the corporate and conservation NGO communities can work together in a constructive and positive way for the ultimate benefit of the environment and biodiversity.”

– BirdLife South Africa CEO, Mark Anderson

Peter Nelson, Senior Eskom Environmental Consultant and previously Environmental Manager at the Ingula PSS, stated that, “Working together as partners has allowed initially opposing organisations to combine resources and focus on a common goal. This cooperation has resulted in the conservation of a significant wetland system and the establishment of an internationally recognised sustainable conservation area”.

Malcolm Drummond of the Middelpunt Wetland Trust shared his pride in the work carried out through this collaboration stating that, “Working with the Partnership has been a truly rewarding experience, resulting in many environmental benefits. Not least of these have been the application of techniques developed by BirdLife South Africa and Eskom staff at Ingula and other sites, resulting in significant advances in our knowledge of the White-winged Flufftail, advising our conservation practices.”

A sentiment that was echoed by BirdLife South Africa CEO, Mark Anderson who commented “The Ingula Partnership has been a perfect example of how the corporate and conservation NGO communities can work together in a constructive and positive way for the ultimate benefit of the environment and biodiversity.”

BirdLife South Africa is also the lead in a Biodiversity Stewardship initiative – a mechanism to formally protect privately owned land for conservation – surrounding the Ingula Nature Reserve and supported by the Ingula Partnership. A further 24 000 ha of pristine grassland around the Ingula Nature Reserve has been identified and the process to declare it as a Protected Environment is currently underway.

When finalised, this will ensure sustainable management of the grasslands for larger, more widely foraging species including Secretarybird Sagittarius serpentarius (VU), Wattled Crane Grus carunculata (VU, regionally CR), Grey Crowned Crane Balearica regulorum (EN), Blue Crane Grus paradisea (VU), and Denham’s Bustard Neotis denhami (NT, regionally VU), while also securing land for smaller, high-altitude endemics such as the Vulnerable Yellow-breasted Pipit Anthus chloris.

In recognition of the stewardship shown by The Ingula Partnership to protect the important wetlands of the Ingula Nature Reserve, the Partnership received the 2019 Stewardship Category award at the South African Wetland Society’s annual National Wetland Awards. The successes achieved by The Ingula Partnership on several fronts is a testament towards the fact that continuous collaborative efforts between industry and conservation NGOs can lead to more pronounced conservation efforts, without compromising industry goals.
SAVING THE CRITICALLY ENDANGERED LIBEN LARK IN ETHIOPIA

By Lewis Kihumba

Forming part of the Ethiopian Highlands in Southern Ethiopia is the Liben Plain, an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area. These plains hold one of only two known populations of the Critically Endangered Liben Lark (Heteromirafra archer), one of the oldest species of lark in the world, with only 50 to 100 individuals surviving today. Over the years, the Liben Plain has seen numerous human pressures. Population growth, overgrazing, in addition to drought and soil erosion among others, has meant that only a small fraction of the grasslands remain, much of it degraded. In turn, this has led to the fragmentation of the Liben Lark's habitat, splitting populations from each other and putting additional pressure on this bird.

In 2015, Birdlife International, RSPB, Ethiopia Wildlife and Natural History Society (BirdLife Partner) and SOS Sahel Ethiopia, embarked on a three year project to save the Liben Lark. The Darwin funded project helped local communities create four communally managed grasslands reserves known as kallos across the plain. The kallos managed by local pastoralists’ communities, would serve as fodder for livestock during the dry season. Most importantly, the kallos would provide suitable breeding and foraging for the lark during the two wet seasons locally known as Ganna and Hagaya.

In addition to supporting the pastoralism activities, the project was also designed to help vulnerable households to diversify their livelihoods from extensive pastoralism and therefore reduce their needs and pressure on grasslands. A savings and credit co-operative was formed with four village level Community Based Organizations (CBOs). Currently, the co-operative has over 100 members and training is being provided.

The project had mixed results at the start. Between 2015 and 2017, severe drought in southern Ethiopia coupled with political instability negatively impacted the kallos. In 2018, when the project was due to come to an end, the reserves experienced an upturn following good rains in the region. A field trip undertaken by the project partners in the same year, found out that although the kallos were full of lush grass, the number of Liben Lark territories were fewer than envisaged.

There’s still hope though. The birds could have been wiped out due to the drought, but have held on. In 2019, a second survey yielded positive results and found that the number of Liben Larks had increased from 11 to 21 territories, although in a declining range on the plain.

The kallos have also been instrumental in supporting local pastoralists, providing 70% of fodder during the drought.
period to more than 900 households. After the good weather in 2018, two of the existing kallo were extended. "We got relatively good season for grasses and we recommend that kallo maintenance and new kallo establishments continue," said one community elder.

Thankfully, the project has continued beyond 2019 with emergency response funding from RSPB and a grant from the IUCN Save Our Species, co-funded by the European Union. This means that maintenance of these vital kallas protecting both bird and livelihoods, can continue. While sustainable land management of the Liben Plains has been initiated, focus is now on long term solutions which will build on these conservation efforts to halt degradation of the Liben Plain and thus save mainland Africa's first bird threatened with extinction.

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For centuries, man has depended on forests for survival. From the air we breathe, to provision of livelihoods, habitats for animals and mitigating effects of climate change, forests play a critical role. In spite of this significance, statistics indicate that although forests cover about 30% of the world’s land area, they are disappearing at an alarming rate. This scenario is being replicated across Africa, particularly in Uganda where forest cover has declined drastically. Since the 1990s, forest cover in the country has dropped from 24% to 8% today, and is still declining.

However, efforts are being made to halt this decline. NatureUganda (BirdLife partner) is leading the way in conservation of Uganda’s forest Important Bird Areas (IBAs) through a variety of conservation initiatives. In Kasyoha-Kitomi Central Forest Reserve, Nature Uganda is working with local communities and local governments on several initiatives to build sustainability and climate change resilience in the region.

Kasyoha-Kitomi Central Forest Reserve (CFR) is a mid-altitude moist forest in the central part of the Albertine Rift Biodiversity Hotspot. The reserve is an IBA and home to over 300 bird species including Albertine Rift Endemics such the Blue-headed Sunbird (Cyanomitra alinae) and a host of other biome restricted species such as the Afep Pigeon (Columba unicincta) and Blue-throated Brown Sunbird (Cyanomitra cyanolaema) among others.

The 40,264 ha Forest Reserve lies within the administrative boundaries of five districts of Bushenyi, Buhweju, Rubirizi, Ibanda and Kamwenge, in South-western Uganda. The forest is the key source of fuel wood for more than 10,000 households in 29 parishes adjacent to the forest.

According to Immaculate Mugisa, a local community member from Buzenga Parish, one of the several parishes, the Forest is their only source of medicinal herbs. “We also get our mushrooms and firewood for cooking from the forest”, she adds.
According to Justus Tukahirwa, Nature Uganda Project officer in the Kasyoha-Kitomi projects site, the average household of about eight people uses two head loads of firewood weighing about 45 Kilograms a week for cooking. Consequently, over 450 tonnes of fuel wood are consumed weekly totalling to over 21,600 tonnes annually “Coupled with increasing population and expanding agriculture, the sustainability of the forest is increasingly being put into jeopardy. adds Justus.

One of the Nature Uganda initiatives in building sustainability and climate change resilience in the Kasyoha-Kitomi landscape is through the climate change component of "Their People Partner with Nature (PPN) Programme". This eight year programme is being implemented by Dansk Ornithologist Forening (DOF-BirdLife Denmark) together with three BirdLife Partners including Bird Conservation Nepal, Nature Kenya, and Nature Uganda at seven Forest IBAs including Kasyoha-Kitomi CFR, with the aim of “reducing the destruction of forested IBAs and contributing to the realisation of the best Participatory Forest Management practices for the benefit of all”.

The climate change component of the Program will support the adoption of energy saving technologies aimed at decreasing use and dependency on forest resources. Additionally, the intervention seeks to enhance resilience through water conservation solutions to improve agricultural production and food security among farmers in the region.

Currently only about 10% of the households use Energy Saving Stoves while the rest use traditional 3-stone cook stoves due lack of knowledge or skills to construct the Energy Saving Stoves. Through this programme, tree nurseries will be established at selected Climate Smart Demonstration Schools to support local planting of Household woodlots. trainings in the construction of Energy Saving Stoves for households and Climate Smart Demonstration Schools will be established at Mugogo Primary School and Buzenga Primary School in Buzenga Parish, Rubirizi District.

The programme will also address water conservation issues through the installation of rain water harvesting technologies in the Climate Smart Demonstration Schools and the community for irrigation as mitigation against erratic weather patterns that impact agricultural output.

The programme’s long-term goal is to develop a model to address climate change that can be up-scaled to all major forest reserves and Important Bird Areas in Uganda thus ensuring sustainability.

The intervention will impact over 50% of the 800 households as direct beneficiaries, equipped with knowledge on construction of energy saving stoves and other climate smart initiatives. These will be empowered to act as change agents by training members of other households so as to promote Buzenga as the first “climate smart village” in Uganda.
THE GREAT ETHIOPIAN RUN 2020 TO SUPPORT BIRD CONSERVATION EFFORTS

By Iordanka Goranova

The Great Ethiopian Run (GER) is one of the world’s most famous marathon initiatives. Since its inception in 2000, GER has staged over 100 races in different parts of Ethiopia, with thousands of participants and an audience base of another five million.

In 2020, the Egyptian Vulture New LIFE project began supporting GER in the frame of the Mile for the Egyptian Vulture campaign, to lobby for bird-safe energy infrastructure in Ethiopia. Electrocution and collision with powerlines have been identified as major bird mortality causes, killing millions of individuals every year. In Ethiopia, many powerlines have a dangerous design that puts birds at risk. Every year, more than 2000 globally endangered Egyptian Vultures gather in Eastern Ethiopia to roost. Consequently, the power line infrastructure in this region may have a devastating impact on their global population. Under the National Electrification Program, Ethiopia will build thousands of new power lines in the next 5 years which could wipe out vultures in the country. The risk of electrocution can be completely eliminated if a bird-safe pole design is used. Safe powerlines will inevitably result in direct benefits to energy suppliers and consumers too.

Owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, the 20th edition of the GER scheduled for Sunday 15th November 2020 was postponed to January 10th, 2021. However, GER organizers held a smaller event on 15th November to commemorate the GER’s 20th anniversary. About 200 people, including 120 bikers congregated at the newly opened Entoto Natural Park in Addis Ababa for the first-ever Run-Bike Relay, BirdLife International, through its local partner the Ethiopian Wildlife and Natural History Society (EWNHS), was one of the sponsors and VIP attendees at the event within the framework of the “Egyptian Vulture New LIFE” project. The main event in January 2021 is expected to have more than 12,000 participants, running 10 km wearing t-shirts with messages on bird conservation.