

Dunga Swamp and its Conservation in Kenya

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Dunga swamp (KE 037), one of the 60 Endemic Bird Areas in Kenya is located on the South Eastern shores of lake Victoria at (01° 10'S, 34° 47'E). The swamp is predominantly Papyrus (*Cyperus papyrus*) which forms distinctive habitat type for papyrus specialist birds. The birds include the restricted range endemics like the globally threatened Papyrus Yellow Warbler (*Chloropeta gracilirostris*), the near threatened Papyrus Gonolek (*Linarius mufumbiri*), White Winged Warbler (*Bradypterus carpalis*), Carruthers's Cisticola (*Cisticola carruther*) and Papyrus Canary (*Serinus koliensis*) (IUCN RED-DATA LIST and the Kenya IBA directory). The swamp is also a filter to sediment entering lake Victoria, it controls flooding in the area among others. The major threats to Dunga swamp and associated biodiversity include:

- Pressure caused by high population densities on its edges
- Over-harvesting of Papyrus for thatching and making products such as mats and baskets
- Clearing of Papyrus beds for agriculture by the local people rendering them less suitable for birds.
- Grazing ground for cattle at times of drought

Lake Victoria Sunset Birders (LVSB)

This is one of the Site Support Groups in Lake Victoria Important Biodiversity Area (IBA) working under the Birdlife IBA programme to promote the conservation of these wetlands at community level. Some of these major wetlands include Dunga Yala, Koguta and Kusa swamps - all classified as IBAs. The group works with the support of Nature Kenya, a Birdlife partner in Kenya to enhance the conservation of these wetlands through lobbying and advocacy, research, promotion of sustainable livelihoods and organizing trainings for grass root wetland custodians. More specifically LVSB promotes the conservation of these wetlands through the following means:

- Public awareness forums like school and community outreaches
- Periodic site monitoring for conservation action
- Promotion of avitourism in the sites as a sustainable resource use alternative
- Offering trainings relevant to wetland conservation and micro enterprise development to the local community groups.

The above activities have been enabled by the support of various donors such as the Rufford Small Grants Foundation, the Wildlife Conservation Society, IUCN- Netherlands and the United Nations Development Programme.

Challenges Encountered

LVSB has faced various challenges in the attempt to conserve Lake Victoria wetlands. Inadequate field equipment makes it difficult to carry out intensive research in parts of the wetlands because of their inaccessibility. However, various organizations have been supporting research initiatives in the wetland through donations in both equipment and funds. Quite often conflicts between our research teams and wetland adjacent communities arise because of misinformation. This has however, reduced after vigorous public education forums organized by the Public Education Department of LVSB. There is also urgent need to train more members of LVSB on various aspects of natural resource conservation so as to build LVSB's knowledge resource base to meet the increasing need for more community awareness facilitators. This will be enabled through the support of well wishers.

Achievements

Through LVSB programs, 20 schools are already actively involved in advocating for Dunga swamp conservation. This has been enabled by the many school awareness programs supported in the past by Nature Kenya and the Rufford Small Grants Foundation. Data collected through periodic site monitoring in Dunga and Yala swamp has facilitated the development of on going conservation actions in the site. The findings to these researches have been published in the Kenya annual IBA status reports. LVSB membership base has risen from six to fifty two in 10 years which has complemented conservation efforts at community level in four lake Victoria wetlands.