

Using low key monitoring to promote community conservation of the Blue Swallow, *Hirundo atrocaerulea* in Mabamba Bay, a Key Biodiversity Area, North of Lake Victoria, in Uganda.



Progress Report II

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Introduction

This project targets the conservation of the Blue Swallow *Hirundo atrocaerulea* at Mabamba bay, an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area in Uganda. The project team including the community at Mabamba Bay through this Rufford-funded project is dedicated to continue monitoring the Blue Swallow population so as to promote its conservation in the country. This project is aimed at promoting community conservation of the Blue Swallow, by empowering the community to obtain reliable information on the species as well as monitoring the state of its population and threats to its habitat. This is a one year project from June 2016 ending in May 2017

The monitoring of the Blue Swallow in Mabamba kicked off with the setting up of transects at the sites that were previously monitored by *Nature*Uganda in 2004 and 2010 in July 2016. These sites include; Bubebere, Buyege, Mako and the Landing Site. Monitoring by the project team headed by Dr. Dianah and Judith Mirembe commenced in the same month to check on the presence of the Blue Swallows in the sites. The first survey did not record any blue swallows but they were recorded in the next survey conducted in August. After confirming the presence of the swallows, training of the community members was planned.

Training of Community Members

The community bird guides in Mabamba Wetland Ecotourism Association (MWETA) were trained on how to identify the Blue Swallow in the sites selected and how to conduct the Blue Swallow monitoring surveys along the transects previously set. The members trained were led by the Blue Swallow community focal persons selected during the stakeholders workshop held earlier. These were in charge of the weekly Blue Swallow monitoring using standard monitoring protocols by NatureUganda.

Based on how the monitoring goes and how the community members interpret the monitoring protocol currently used, a low key monitoring protocol will be developed that will suit the community.

Monitoring surveys

After training, the community members commenced their weekly monitoring of the Blue Swallow in the selected sites and other neighbouring sites that are suspected to have the species. Through this strategy, a new Blue Swallow site was discovered by the community members and it was added to the list of monitored sites making the number of sites monitored come to five (5) sites. The community members

conduct monitoring in the nearby sites and are later joined by the project team from *Nature*Uganda once a week to provide them with guidance as well as follow up.

Results obtained will be shared at the end of the survey period which ends in November 2016.

Observations from other sites in Uganda

The NatureUganda team while conducting Bird Population Monitoring and Waterbird Census in Sangobay surveyed some of the sites that were previously monitored for the Blue Swallow and 23 Blue Swallow were recorded in Mirigwe. Bush burning is very evident in the Sangobay sites.

Challenges

We have set up transects in the above sites, and one of the challenges is that the majority of land in the previously monitored sites has been converted into agriculture (potatoes, cabbages, pineapples, maize, pine trees) as well as settlement. In Buyege, part of the land has been fenced off thus cutting off access to some of the transects, in which case, current transects have been diverted some meters off the original route, but in the same landscape. Burning of grass and grazing continues to be very common in many of the places.

There seems to be a low number of Blue Swallows in the sites and efforts to find other sites with Blue Swallows seem futile at the moment. However, the search is still going on and more sites will be added if discovered.

Way forward

- Monitoring surveys will continue every week by the community members and NatureUganda team
- A Blue Swallow Poster should be produced to promote awareness of the Blue Swallow and its threats.

The project in Photos



Blue Swallow Monitoring team in Mabamba during surveys on the Landing site transect



Adult male Blue Swallow in flight taken during the monitoring visit by NatureUganda team



The Monitoring team training community members how to use the GPS and record the GPS points



This is one of the sites that were previously monitored but had been cleared for Pineapple growing. In the sky is a Blue Swallow seen at the site.