Project Updates October 2024

Title of the Project: *Ecology, anthropogenic threats, people's perception and Conservation status of Grey Crowned Crane (Balearica regulorum) in Lutembe Bay Wetland, Wakiso district.*

Activity 1: Pre-visit of the Study Area (July 2024)

In July 2024, the project team conducted an initial visit to the study area, aiming to foster community engagement and establish a foundation for wildlife monitoring efforts. During this visit, the team met with the local area chairperson to formally introduce the project and outline the data collection and monitoring methods. The purpose of this engagement was to ensure that the local leadership understood the project objectives, particularly the importance of conserving local biodiversity, and to foster community collaboration from the outset.



Photo 1: Shows team members meet with the chairperson and his executive team to discuss project goals, data collection, and community involvement for biodiversity monitoring, provided by © Byron Ssemambo.

To facilitate effective data collection, the team discussed a plan through a Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), outlining its objectives and the roles community members would play in wildlife monitoring. The chairperson, appreciating the relevance of the project, recommended three Community Monitors to serve as field assistants. These individuals received training focused on wildlife data collection, with special attention given to the Grey Crowned Crane (*Balearica regulorum*) species, as this bird is critical to the area's ecosystem.

Outcome:

As a result of the pre-visit and engagement with the chairperson, the project team successfully introduced the initiative to the community, achieving both understanding and cooperation from local leadership. The three selected field assistants are now conducting bi-weekly wildlife monitoring sessions, effectively supporting data collection efforts. This engagement has also led to greater local awareness of biodiversity conservation and strengthened the groundwork for sustainable monitoring practices within the community.

Activity 2: Identification of Resource Groups (August 2024)

Following the pre-visit, in August 2024, the project team focused on building a support network by identifying and engaging key resource groups essential to the project's success. Recognizing the importance of a collaborative approach, the team connected with ecologists, bird specialists (birdologists), natural resource managers from local government, and local community tourism guides. Each of these stakeholders brought valuable expertise to the project, from ecological insight to community outreach, enhancing the knowledge base and credibility of the conservation efforts. This phase aimed to establish a strong, coordinated system of support, setting a foundation for environmental education and awareness within the community.



Photo 2: Shows meeting for engaging key resource groups, including ecologists, bird specialists, natural resource managers, and community guides, to create a coordinated support system for the project, provided by © Byron Ssemambo.

Outcome:

Through these efforts, a robust network of resource groups has been formed, creating a collaborative framework that supports the project's goals in environmental education and conservation. The involvement of these stakeholders has facilitated information exchange and provided technical guidance to community members and field assistants. This network has not only strengthened the technical capabilities of the project team but has also increased local interest in conservation activities. This collaborative system is expected to enhance the sustainability of the project by fostering a committed and well-informed community around environmental protection and biodiversity monitoring.

Activity 3: Training Community-based Field Assistants (September 2024):

In September 2024, a comprehensive 5-day training session was held for the three communitybased field assistants (Community monitors) previously identified to support the project's wildlife monitoring efforts. Led by an experienced birdologist/ecologist, this training was designed to equip the assistants with the knowledge and skills needed to effectively monitor and conserve the Grey Crowned Crane population. Training topics included crane behavior, ecology, distribution patterns, preferred habitats, and diet. The goal was to deepen the monitors' understanding of these birds, enabling them to collect meaningful data and observe changes in the crane population over time.



Photo 3: Show the birdologist facilitates an in-depth training session, equipping community field assistants with essential knowledge on the behavior and ecology of the Grey Crowned Crane, provided by © Byron Ssemambo.

To prioritize safety during field activities, each Community monitor was also provided with essential protective gear, ensuring they were well-prepared to conduct fieldwork in various terrains and conditions. This addition not only safeguarded the assistants but also reinforced the project's commitment to responsible and sustainable wildlife monitoring practices.



Photo 4: Shows Community monitors wearing protective gear to ensure their safety as they embark on wildlife monitoring activities twice a week, provided by © Byron Ssemambo.

<u>Outcome:</u>

By the end of the 5-day training, the field assistants (Community monitors) had developed a solid foundation in crane biology and habitat requirements, enhancing their ability to identify behavioral patterns and environmental factors critical to the species' survival. With both knowledge and protective gear in hand, the monitors are now well-equipped to conduct safe and accurate monitoring, contributing valuable data to the project. This training has also empowered them to act as conservation ambassadors within their community, promoting awareness of the Grey Crowned Crane's ecological importance and advocating for continued local involvement in biodiversity protection.

Upcoming activities

- 1. Data Collection (October-December 2024): Conducting field surveys.
- 2. Pre-visit Evaluation (December 2024): Engaging local community members above 50 years old to share their experiences and historical knowledge.