49178-B

Project Updates January 2026

Title of the Project: *Mitigating Poaching and Egg Collection of the Grey Crowned Crane in Lutembe Bay Wetland through Apiary Farming, Livestock Seedbanks, and VSLAs.*

Activity 1: *Recruitment and Training of Community Wildlife Monitors for Snare Removal and Breeding Site Monitoring (November 2025)*

In November 2025, the project recruited and trained six Community Wildlife Monitors, with two monitors selected from each of the three target villages (Nganjo, Lutembe, and Bulonde). The selection process was participatory and conducted in collaboration with Village Local Councils and the Lutembe Wetland Users Association, ensuring that monitors were trusted community members with prior knowledge of the wetland and a demonstrated commitment to conservation. All selected monitors were residents of the target villages, enabling consistent presence and long-term engagement in monitoring activities.

The recruited monitors underwent a comprehensive training program focused on the ecology and conservation of the Grey Crowned Crane (*Balearica regulorum*). Training modules covered crane behaviour and habitat use, identification of breeding and roosting sites, habitat quality assessment, disturbance indicators, and key threats such as snaring, egg collection, and illegal human activities. Additional sessions emphasized ethical conduct, safety during patrols, and accurate data collection and reporting.

The primary objective of this activity was to establish a community-led monitoring system to track trends in poaching pressure and crane population indicators. Monitors were tasked with conducting monthly patrols to remove snares and man-made traps, document illegal activities, record crane sightings, and confirm breeding events. These data will be compared against baseline information from the previous Rufford Foundation Project to assess changes in poaching incidence and crane presence over time.

To ensure standardized data collection, a monitoring survey questionnaire was developed using ArcGIS Survey123 for Android devices. A draft version of the tool was introduced during training and pre-tested in the field. Feedback from this process was incorporated into the final survey, which captures GPS coordinates, snare locations, habitat condition indicators, crane sightings, breeding evidence, and human disturbance observations. Built-in skip logic, value constraints, and validation rules were applied to reduce data entry errors. Monitors received hands-on training in downloading, completing, and uploading surveys to a centralized server.

Outputs

- Six trained and equipped Community Wildlife Monitors actively conducting monthly patrols.

- A fully functional, standardized ArcGIS Survey123 monitoring tool for crane and threat monitoring.
- Regular removal of snares and man-made traps from key crane habitats.
- Monthly geo-referenced datasets on crane sightings, breeding events, habitat condition, and illegal activities.
- Improved detection and reporting of poaching incidents within Lutembe Bay Wetland.
- Strengthened community ownership and participation in Grey Crowned Crane conservation.

Photo 1: Recruited community wildlife monitors equipped with safety gear for conducting monthly monitoring and protection activities for the Grey Crowned Crane. © Byron Ssemambo

Activity 2: *Establish crane monitoring transects and record sightings, nesting, and threats (November 2025)*

In November 2025, the project established a network of standardized Grey Crowned Crane monitoring transects within Lutembe Bay Wetland to enable systematic and repeatable data collection on crane presence, breeding activity, and threats. Transect locations were identified through a participatory process involving community wildlife monitors, local wetland users, and

project staff, drawing on local ecological knowledge and findings from the previous Rufford Foundation Project.

Each transect was carefully laid out to cover key crane habitats, including feeding areas, roosting sites, and known or suspected breeding zones, while minimizing disturbance to the birds. The transects were mapped using GPS-enabled smartphones, and all start and end points were recorded with precise geographic coordinates. Transect lengths and distances were measured and documented (1km) to ensure consistency across monitoring periods, as illustrated in the accompanying map.

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Photo 2: Map of Lutembe Bay Wetland illustrating the three established Grey Crowned Crane monitoring transects used to record sightings, nesting activity, and identified threats.

Community wildlife monitors were trained to walk or observe along the established transects during scheduled monitoring sessions, recording crane sightings, group size, age structure (adults and juveniles), nesting activity, and behavioral observations. In addition, monitors will be documenting anthropogenic threats encountered along transects, including snares, human encroachment, egg collections, waste dumping, livestock grazing, and agricultural activities.

All observations will be recorded using the ArcGIS Survey123 mobile data collection platform, allowing real-time capture of GPS-referenced data, photographs, and standardized threat indicators. This approach will ensure data accuracy, spatial consistency, and ease of comparison over time.

The transect-based monitoring system provides a robust framework for detecting temporal and spatial trends in crane distribution, breeding success, and threat intensity. Data generated from this activity will inform adaptive management decisions, guide targeted snare-removal patrols, and support evidence-based advocacy for improved wetland protection. Furthermore, the established transects will serve as a long-term monitoring infrastructure that can be used by community monitors and partner institutions beyond the project period.

Outputs

- Established and geo-referenced Grey Crowned Crane monitoring transects (1km) covering key habitats within Lutembe Bay Wetland
- Accurately mapped transect routes with recorded GPS coordinates and measured distances (1km)
- Standardized dataset on crane sightings, group size, nesting activity, and behaviour along each transect

- Spatially explicit records of threats, including snares, egg collections, habitat disturbance, and human activities
- Improved capacity of community wildlife monitors to conduct systematic, repeatable ecological monitoring
- Baseline and comparative data to assess changes in crane distribution and breeding success over time

Activity 3*: Conduct awareness campaigns targeting local leaders, youth, reformed poachers, and households (December 2025)*

The project conducted *awareness* session with 50 community members (30 men and 20 women) from villages surrounding Lutembe Bay Wetland, including local leaders, reformed poachers, youth, and long-term residents. This session explored the historical use of the wetland, drivers of degradation, impacts of poaching and egg collection on the Grey Crowned Crane, and community-identified sustainable livelihood alternatives such as beekeeping, livestock seedbanks, and Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs). The activity provided critical socio-economic and historical context that strengthened community ownership of conservation interventions.

A historical timeline exercise, led primarily by community elders aged 50 years and above, revealed a rich ecological past. Participants recalled the 1970s as a period of high biodiversity, when the wetland supported crocodiles, hippos, abundant fish stocks, and large numbers of Grey Crowned Cranes ("Ngali"), which were deeply embedded in local cultural identity. The shooting of Lutembe's only known crocodile was repeatedly cited as a symbolic turning point marking the onset of wildlife decline.

Discussions highlighted how economic hardship in the 1980s increased reliance on wildlife exploitation, including hunting cranes and shoebills for food and trade. The 1990s introduction and expansion of flower farming was identified as a major driver of habitat loss, despite subsequent government efforts to gazette wetlands in 1995 and Lutembe's designation as a Ramsar site in 2006. Participants emphasized that weak enforcement, expanding settlements, sand mining, agriculture, and waste dumping continue to undermine conservation efforts.

Most importantly, the awareness session revealed strong community willingness to adopt alternative livelihoods, particularly beekeeping, livestock seedbanks with a pass-on system of a female offspring to the neighbor, and VSLAs offering low-interest loans. These insights directly informed the project's livelihood-focused conservation strategy and reinforced the need to address poverty and protein insecurity as root causes of poaching.

Photo 3: Community members participating in an awareness meeting, engaging in discussions on wetland conservation, Grey Crowned Crane protection, and sustainable livelihood alternatives. © Chris.

Outputs

- Conducted awareness meeting with 50 community members (30 men and 20 women) from villages surrounding Lutembe Bay Wetland
- Documented community perceptions on historical wetland use, biodiversity changes, and drivers of degradation
- Identified key threats to the Grey Crowned Crane, including poaching, egg collection, habitat loss, and wetland encroachment
- Generated community-informed recommendations for sustainable livelihood alternatives, including beekeeping, livestock seedbanks, and VSLAs
- Strengthened community awareness, ownership, and willingness to participate in conservation actions for the Grey Crowned Crane and Lutembe Wetland

Upcoming activities

1. *Identify and train 30 households (especially youth and reformed poachers) in beekeeping and animal husbandry (February 2026).*
2. *Distribute livestock (depending on their preference) and apiary equipment to 30 households (February 2026).*
3. *Form and train Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) on governance, savings, loan management, and record keeping (March 2026).*