LAKE BUNYONYI’S TOURISM POTENTIAL

BIODIVERSITY ASSESSMENTS SHOW THAT LAKE BUNYONYI AND ASSOCIATED WETLANDS HAVE GREAT TOURISM POTENTIAL

Through a project on “Securing Wetland Ecosystems to improve livelihoods through Community Conservation Agreements in western Uganda”, NatureUganda commissioned a biodiversity study of three wetlands of Lake Nyamuriro, Kiruruma and Lake Bunyonyi. The results indicate that the Lake Bunyonyi and its associated systems are wetlands of international importance. The wetlands contain globally threatened species of birds such as Grey Crowned Cranes, Papyrus Yellow Warblers and many other ecosystem endemic species.

The wetlands contain red listed amphibians, small mammals, insects and plants. In addition to the biodiversity assessments, the project also conducted a study on peat stocks to understand the role of wetlands in mitigating climate change and an assessment on upland carbon stocks to understand the needs to improve agricultural productivity in Kigezi hills.

The project goal is to conserve the lake and its associated wetlands for perpetual ecosystem service provision to the communities in the catchment and to conserve threatened species contained within these wetlands. The assessments of biodiversity, Ecosystem services and Peat stock in these wetlands were conducted to provide a baseline against which project interventions towards biodiversity conservation, livelihood support to communities and mitigation of the effects of climate change can be evaluated. The assessments will also support NatureUganda and its stakeholders in undertaking the profiling of Lake Bunyonyi for potential designation as a Ramsar site, a wetland of international importance. The data and information resulting from the studies clearly show that Lake Bunyonyi should be listed among the most important ecosystems in the world.

Based on the criteria of detectability, indicative of ecosystem functioning and ability to function as indicators, NatureUganda selected six taxa (groups of animals and plants) to be assessed, namely Plants, Birds, Mammals, Amphibia & Reptiles, Insects and Fish. These assessments were conducted between November 2019 and March 2020 by independent consultants and renowned scientists using international standard assessment protocols.

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Below is a summary of results from the studies.

**PLANTS**
The Flora assessment was led by Dr. Mary Namaganda and 312 plant species belonging to 75 families were recorded, of which none is globally red-listed. However, one species of national conservation importance was recorded (Water lily Nymphaea nouchali). The highest number of species was recorded from Nyamuriro swamp followed by Lake Bunyonyi areas. However, there is evidence that 10 aquatic species recorded in the last 2 decades on Lake Bunyonyi were not encountered in this survey.

**MAMMALS**
The mammal assessment was led by Dr. Robert Kityo and 21 species of small mammals were recorded, with three species (Kahuzi Swamp Shrew Crocidura stenocephala, Tarella Shrew Crocidura tarella and Montane Shaggy Dasymys montanus) being listed as globally endangered. Additionally, five species are nationally red-listed. The swamps around Lake Bunyonyi had the highest species records and the lowest were Kiruruma and Nyombe swamps.

**INSECTS**
The entomological assessment was led by Dr. Perpetra Akite and 37 species of butterflies and 19 species of dragonflies were recorded. The area around Nyombe swamp was the richest both in terms of butterflies and dragonflies. The least number of records was Kiruruma for butterflies and Mujja hill for dragon flies. No species of global conservation concern was recorded both for butterflies and dragonflies.

However, six species of butterfly species are nationally red-listed. There was also one species of butterfly (Aloeides sp) that was recorded for the first time in Uganda. In addition, one species (Harpendyreus reginaldi) of Albertine endemism was recorded and rated vulnerable on the Ugandan red-list.
The study was conducted with technical and financial support from Darwin Initiative.

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