

PROJECT REPORT

(Compiled by George Ndung'u, bird watching guide)

Project Title: Creating community awareness on biodiversity value of Lake Ol' bolossat: Phase 1

Introduction

Starting November 2012 to January 2013 I engaged myself for an awareness campaign to Create community awareness on biodiversity value of Lake Ol' bolossat phase 1, Kenya's 61st Important Bird Area to the community surrounding this wetland to promote a sense of natural resources conservation among them.

George Ndung'u Muigai

I was brought up in Njunu Farm, Nyandarua County in Kenya's central province, within Lake Ol'bolossat ecosystem. After finishing my high school education, I got an opportunity to learn bird identification and guiding skills. Since then, I have been participating in research activities mostly involving the life of birds including counting to monitor changes in numbers, ringing (marking birds using rings on their legs), awareness programmes, guiding, and research including the role of birds in agricultural land that concluded April 2012. It is out of these participations that have gained me more skills concerning the life of birds and the environment in general, especially for Lake Ol'bolossat. This has led me to write a book titled "Nyoni na Andu" (Birds and people) in my vernacular language (kikuyu) which majority of people within Lake Ol' bolossat ecosystem can clearly understand, with a message on importance of birds in peoples lives, whereby the main objective is to create awareness to cultivate a sense of natural resources conservation.

On this mission i was accompanied by members of Nyahururu Bird Club (NBC) who are a registered club under Nyandarua District Social Development office, Nyandarua County Kenya . NBC is also a registered group member with Nature Kenya (The East African Natural History Society) where they have been recognized as a site support group for Lake Ol' bolossat. It is made up of individuals who are firmly committed to environmental conservation. One of their objectives is to offer conservation education for school's wildlife and environmental clubs and the community at large. They also participate in local decision making and offer guidance to local authorities and government departments.

Back ground information

Lake Ol' bolossat is the only natural lake in Kenya's Central Province. It covers an area of 43.3 km² of which open water is about 4 km². The wetland offers a variety of habitat ranging from open water to the floating marsh/swamps, open grasslands dominated by tussock grass, and riverine forests along rivers and springs that feed it. This lake is the main source of Uaso Narok river that flow through key national conservation areas, among them Samburu National Park and Buffalo Springs, all designated as

Important Bird Areas besides dozens of communities that depend directly on these rivers water for domestic and farming use.

The lake holds an overwhelming wealth of bird species (over 100 species) under some of them in very large numbers, others only known to occur in a restricted area of the world, whereas others are globally recognized as threatened. The lake is therefore one of the 61 sites in Kenya globally recognized as Important Bird Areas (IBAs). Key flagship bird species found here include Maccoa Duck, African Black Duck, Aberdare Cisticola, Sharpe's Long claw, Long-tailed Widowbird, Great White Egret, African Marsh Harrier, Saddle-billed Stork and Great crested grebe among others. The lake is also important for birds that migrate into the country from Europe and Asia (palearctic migrants), and 17 found in this lake are listed as priorities for conservation by UNEP's Africa Eurasian Water bird Agreement (AEWA).

This wetland is facing threat due to human activities in and around it, such as quarrying, uncontrolled grazing, poaching, fire, uncontrolled water obstruction, urban development, poor soil and water management. These have resulted to interference with flora and fauna that rely on the health status of this lake. The potential and sustainability of this natural resource as an Important Bird Area (IBA) deeply depend on the communities around lake's ecosystem. One step to achieve a mind of conservation amongst these communities is empowering them with information about this lake.

Main objective

To create community awareness about the biodiversity value and promote a sense of conservation among the community living around Lake Ol'bolossat, a globally recognized Important Bird Area in Kenya.

Method

To achieve our mission we visited target groups and individuals on the ground as they continue with their daily livelihood schedule and used various method and techniques to pass information depending on the audience which included, lecture, questionnaire, dialogue, demonstrations and donation of environment education materials, these groups are;

1. **Direct lake beneficiaries;** grazers, fishermen, papyrus harvesters, irrigation farmers
2. **Quarry workers;** quarries that are next to lake's shore.
3. **Four Primary schools;** two on each side of the lake (eastern and western) that are not more than 2 km away from the lake.

4. **Land owners** ; that are not more than 500 meters away from the main lake.
5. **Two youth groups**; that are based not more than 2 km away from the lake with one of their focus is conserving Lake Ol' bolossat.

Highlights

At the commencement of our sensitization, immediately after introducing ourself and our mission, we asked our audience two questions as follows

1. Are there any benefit you gain from Lake Ol' bolossat and if yes which are they?
2. What are the loss that you get resulting from Lake Ol' bolossat

These helped us to gauge and know:

1. Their attitude toward this wet land
2. The knowledge within them about this wetland
3. Acquire extra information about environment in general
4. Have more information concerning the state of Lake Ol bolossat and it's environs at past especially from the aged.
5. Our sensitization starting point and the method to apply

EMPOWERING POINTS

To empower our audience with information on this wetland, we picked only points that are very open and obvious to our audience for them to understand and prove right at this stage (Phase 1) as follows:

- (a) It is an open natural water reservoir which generate the following;
 - (i) Stores and manage water naturally
 - (ii) Source of water for livestock and domestic use
 - (iii) Control floods through holding running water from highlands during rainy seasons
 - (iv) Improve farm produce around through increasing the amount of water in the air through evaporation
 - (v) Regulate heat within it's ecosystem by increasing humidity
 - (vi) Help and sustain hydrophytes which are used as food for live stork and other animals
 - (vii) Sustains biome in and around it that are used for building by human beings and other creatures
 - (viii) It is a home of aquatic creatures like fish which are human food

- (ix) Reduce and control human wildlife conflict by providing home and hide out for marine creature like hippopotamuses thus reducing human wildlife conflict
- (x) Beautifies the landscape
- (xi) It is ultimately the source of piped water used in Nyahururu town and other villages around besides over 90% residents of Laikipia county that Uaso Narok river flow through that depend directly on river's water

(b) It is a free grazing area thus (free pasture)

- (i) Increase livestock produce profit
- (ii) Source of free naturally sustained pasture
- (iii) Saves time for other daily livelihood schedule
- (iv) Less to not at all restrictions
- (v) Sustainability is on the users hands

(c) Has a unique biome in and around it :

- (i) Used by animals for; building nest, food, camouflage, hide out, shade, breeding
- (ii) Source of building materials such as reeds and papyrus
- (iii) Source of income e.g .sale of hay grass especially in dry seasons
- (iv) Holds the soil firm thus reducing soil erosion
- (v) Sieves and purifies water
- (vi) Reduce the speed of water in and around the Lake
- (vii) Reduce evaporation
- (viii) It is a home of two Kenyan endemics birds
- (ix) Source of food for aquatic and terrestrial organisms

(d) Highly promote tourism;

- (i) The only source of water that flows into the famous Thompson's Falls which is a tourist destination internationally and locally thus highly depended by the government for revenue collection
- (ii) The only source of Uaso Narok river, one of the major tributary of Ewaso Nyiro river that flows through various areas that are tourist destinations among them Samburu national park and buffalo springs game reserve all designated as IBA

- (iii) It is a home of two Kenyan endemic birds
- (iv) It is one of Kenya's hot spot for hippopotamus viewing

Outcome

At the end of this phase one campaign, we were able to empower Kenya's 61st IBA surrounding community with information through individuals, groups and activities at different locations around this wetland;

1. More than 52 grazers
2. 78 land owners
3. 23 youths
4. 8 irrigation farmers
5. 5 quarry workers
6. 11 fisher men
7. Planted 100 indigenous trees seedlings in four primary schools
8. Donated one bird watching guide book and environment education stationeries to each four primary schools we visited
9. Gave out 200 copies of Nyoni na Andu (Birds and people) book.

Conclusion

At the end of this awareness activity the community neighboring Kenya's 61st IBA are now equipped with more information and facts about this wetland and hence more understanding as to why this natural resource and environment in general should be handled well and wisely, but more has to be done especially to promote income generating activities that will be achieved as a feed back of their conservation efforts.

Acknowledgement

It is through immense effort from various people and organizations that this activity was successful who include African Bird Club who funded this campaign, Nature Kenya (East Africa natural history), National Museums of Kenya, Nyahururu Bird Club, Wanyoike Wamiti, Kariuki Ndang'ang'a, local administration and the community around lake Ol' bolossat. Actually your efforts will be felt locally nationally and globally for the benefit of all lives "*the feature is today*".



Picture profile

1. IMG-0118,JPG –Lecture session in Karandi primary school
2. IMG-0128,JPG- Karandi primary school students receiving environment education materials on behalf of their school
3. IMG-0021,JPG- Justus Macharia one of Nyahururu Bird Club member talking to a group of youths as they harvest maize
4. IMG-0362,JPG – One of the land owners neighboring Kenya's 61st IBA listening attentively to George
5. IMG-0360,JPG - George in dialogue with one of the grazers
6. IMG-0338,JPG – George passing information to quarry workers
7. IMG-0105,JPG – Tree planting demonstration in Ngurumo primary school
8. IMG-0121,JPG – A parent participating in a tree planting session in Kiaduba primary school and Lake Ol' bolossat open waters seen behind the trees in the background
9. IMG-,0309,JPG – One of the quarries at the shores of Lake olbolossat and abardare ranges in the background