

Ramsar sites in Uganda

Uganda boasts of a number of wetlands that have been listed among wetlands of international importance under the Ramsar convention. All these sites are recognized by Birdlife as Important Bird Areas. Much as the sites are well known for their bird life, they are also vital habitat for other threatened plants and animals.

Lake Bisina Wetland System

The wetland is an important Bird area, located in Kumi, Katakwi and Soroti districts. The wetland is a shallow freshwater lake with a thin strip of fringing papyrus swamp. The shallow areas are dominated by water lilies which is important for its diversity of macrophytes. It is used as a feeding ground by wading birds, including the globally vulnerable Shoebill (*Balaeniceps rex*). The system is also important as a refuge for fish species that have gone extinct in the main Ugandan lakes. The lake is very important for the surrounding communities in terms of fishing, transport, and supply of water for domestic use and livestock.

Lake Mburo-Nakivali Wetland System

A system of open and wooded savanna, seasonal and permanent wetlands, and five lakes, of which Lake Mburo is by far the largest. The system is a unique habitat, lying at the convergence of two biological zones, giving it very high biodiversity. It supports globally threatened species of birds such as the *Papyrus Yellow Warbler* and *Shoebill*, and provides refuge to 22 species of Palearctic and Afro-tropical migrant birds during adverse conditions. It supports two of the *endangered cichlid fish* species which have gone extinct in the main lakes, and it is the only area in Uganda in which the Impala is found. The site is also of immense socio-economic value as a source of water for domestic use, livestock and wildlife; pasture for the local herds during droughts; fish; and materials for crafts and thatching. The park is also used for tourism and scientific research.

Lake Nakuwa Wetland System

A permanent wetland associated with a number of satellite lakes and a swamp system dominated by dense papyrus, broken in parts by pools of water-forming sudd (clumps of floating papyrus). In addition to supporting the *Sitatunga* and the *Nile Crocodile*, the system and its satellite lakes contain the most diverse *cichlid species assemblage* and are a haven for a number of *non-cichlid species* no longer found in the large lakes of Kyoga and Victoria. The system provides refuge to *fish taxa* that have been reported extinct in the main lakes, thanks to the protection accorded by the aquatic vegetation around the lakes, which prevented the Nile perch from spreading there. The wetland also plays an important role in flood prevention, water purification and groundwater recharge. It is probably one of the remaining pristine wetland areas in Uganda due to its remoteness and sparse population in the immediate catchment, and it offers employment to a number of fishermen. The papyrus is used for making mats, thatching, and crafts.

Lake Opeta Wetland System

Important Bird Area, One of the remaining intact and probably most important wetland marshes in Uganda. It is predominantly an extensive swamp of *Vossia cuspidata* to the east and south graduating into dry *Hyparrhenia* grassland savannas. The wetland is of great importance for the conservation of birds, and Fox's weaver, Uganda's only endemic bird has been recorded in the swamp breeding. The site is also important as a refuge for fish species that have gone extinct in the main lakes, including Lakes Victoria and Kyoga. Pian-Upe Wildlife Reserve has potential for big game viewing and bird watching.

Lutembe Bay Wetland System

Lutembe Bay is an Important Bird Area, Situated at the mouth of Lake Victoria's Murchison Bay, this shallow area is almost completely cut-off from the main body of Lake Victoria by a *C. papyrus* island. The site supports globally threatened species of birds, endangered *Cichlid fish*, and *over 100 butterfly species*, including three rare ones.

It is a breeding ground for *Clarias* and lungfish, and regularly supports more than 52% of the White-winged Black Terns (*Chlidonias leucopterus*) population.

Mabamba Bay Wetland System

Mabamba is an extensive marsh stretching through a narrow and long bay fringed with papyrus towards the main body of Lake Victoria - the only swamp close to Kampala where one can easily find the globally threatened Shoebill (*Balaeniceps rex*). The site supports an average of close to 190,000 birds and is part of the wetland system which hosts approximately 38% of the global population of the Blue Swallow (*Hirundo atrocaerulea*), as well as the globally-threatened *Papyrus Yellow Warbler* and other birds of global conservation concern. The site supports a lucrative fisheries activity and is a source of fish for home consumption and commercial use, as well as of raw material for local crafts, building materials, water for domestic and livestock use, and non-wood products.

Murchison Falls-Albert Delta Wetland System

The site stretches from the top of Murchison Falls, where the River Nile flows through a rock cleft some 6m wide, to the delta at its confluence with Lake Albert. The convergence between Lake Albert and the delta forms a shallow area that is important for water birds, especially the Shoebill, Pelicans, Darters and various heron species. The delta is an important spawning and breeding ground for Lake Albert fisheries, containing indigenous fish species; the rest of the site is dominated by rolling savannas and tall grass with increasingly thick bush, woodlands and forest patches in the higher and wetter areas to the south and east. It forms a feeding and watering refuge for wildlife in the National Park during dry seasons.

Nabajjuzi Wetland System

Nabajjuzi is a long narrow stretch of swamp from the periphery of Masaka to the major Katonga River system. It provides a spawning ground for mudfish and lungfish, and supports globally threatened bird species and the endangered Sitatunga. The site lies in

traditional Buddu county of Buganda Kingdom, and some of the flora and fauna are closely associated with cultural norms and traditions, especially the totems. There is thus considerable cultural attachment of the surrounding areas to the wetland, which also plays an important role in stabilizing the banks of River Nabajjuzi, groundwater recharge, and flood control and as a natural filter for silt and sediments in the runoff. The wetland is the source of water supply for nearby townships and provides fish, clay, papyrus, medicine and game meat (Sitatunga)

Sango Bay-Musambwa Island-Kagera Wetland System (SAMUKA)

A mosaic of wetland types including the biggest tract of swamp forest in Uganda, papyrus swamps, herbaceous swamps interspersed with palms and seasonally flooded grasslands, sandy, rocky and forest shores, and three rocky islets about 3 km offshore in the Sango Bay. The area lies in the transition between the East and West African vegetation zones and this biogeographical ecotone makes it biodiversity rich. The system supports huge congregations of waterbirds, hosting an average of 16.5% of the population of Grey-headed Gulls (*Larus cirrocephalus*), and hosts globally endangered mammals such as Elephant, Black and White Colobus Monkey and a subspecies of the Blue Monkey. It is a source of fish to the people of the area, of medicinal plants, of grazing and of raw materials for building and making crafts including luxurious sofa chairs and mattresses.