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Birding: The under exploited tourism product

By Faridah Kulabako

Although Uganda has potential to be a leading birders' destination in the world because of its rare species, birders feel the product is currently operating below potential because of limited marketing.

Statistics in the tourism industry circles indicate that Uganda has over 1,047 bird species, making up 50% of the bird species in Africa and 10% globally, but it has not been well marketed in key source markets.

Uganda's tourism marketing efforts over the years have mainly focused on wildlife, especially gorilla tracking, neglecting birding tourism despite its huge potential to bring in extra foreign exchange earnings.

However, Herbert Byaruhanga, the managing director of Bird Uganda Safaris Limited and also the president of Uganda Tourism



Herbert Byaruhanga

Association, said there is need to put more resources in marketing and promoting bird-watching because it is a niche product with potential to turn around Uganda's fortunes.

He observed that thousands of birders flock to Western Europe to search for birds yet the UK has less bird species than Uganda, adding that there is need to market Uganda's untapped potential.

According to Byaruhanga, over 1,500 birders come to Uganda annually, contributing about \$10.5m (about sh38b) in tourism revenue. If well

marketed, he said, birding has potential to attract 200,000 over the next 10 years, contributing \$1.4b (sh5.1 trillion), to the economy.

He added that Uganda has high number of the shoebill, one of Africa's endemic bird species that birders want to see.

Byaruhanga noted that Uganda has over 100 trained bird guides, improved infrastructure, good roads and hotels which are evenly distributed in key birding spots, to support birding as a niche tourism product.

The Uganda Bird Club president, Johnnie Kamugisha also alluded to the need to market birding as a product, saying 98% of the birders who visit the country also do gorilla and chimpanzee tracking.

"It is better you market bird watching because tourists will still see other tourism products and also buy crafts and sleep in hotels," Kamugisha said.

They were speaking during a

media briefing on Wednesday to announce the second international annual birding expo, slated for December 7-9, 2018 at the Botanical Gardens.

The expo is organised by the African Birding Expo Limited with support from other stakeholders including the Uganda Hotel Owners Association.

The Uganda Hotel Owners Association executive director, Jean Byamugisha assured tourists that Uganda is safe despite the recent deaths of tourists in some hotels.

"We have reached out to the management of these hotels but what we have found out is that most of those cases were mere accidents and not negligence of hotel management," she said.

The expo is expected to bring together a spectrum of bird-watching community from within and outside Africa, Europe, United States of America, Canada, Australia, South America and Asia.