



A flock of cattle egrets on a boat



Eastern Grey plantain eater (top), a long-crested Eagle (bottom)



KAMPALA: A BIRDING MIRROR OF UGANDA

By Sam Ndindi

Uganda is home to over 1,000 species of birds and Kampala is lucky to host a number of them. Perched on top of a 20-metre Mvule tree, a bird can be seen scanning Kampala city in search of prey and a mate. The bird has a long crest on its head. The long-crested eagle is a majestic raptor with black plumage, a long crest of feathers on its head and yellow legs.

BIRD SPECIES IN KAMPALA

In the midst of this urban jungle, Kampala has nearly nine wetlands, while patches of indigenous trees can be found in both public spaces and private homes. Some majestic trees include *Markhamia lutea*

(*Musambya*) and *Milicia excels* (*Luguru*) that can tower up to 30 metres.

These pockets of natural vegetation host a plethora of bird species, including the Hadada ibis with its 'hahaha' call, which wakes up Kampala residents every morning.

This bird and the African open-billed stork prefer wetlands to forage for food and their abundance can be used to assess how healthy a wetland ecosystem is.

The noisy Eastern grey plantain eaters, which are usually in pairs, can be seen around fruit trees like avocado and bananas. Homes that have fruit trees are privileged to have this bird as a frequent visitor, emphasising the need to plant more fruit trees.

A visitor to Mulago and Makerere suburbs would not fail to notice

a bird with one of the longest wingspans in the avian kingdom – the marabou stork. This bird is deemed to be dirty, but it actually reflects the impact of urbanisation vis-à-vis the improper waste disposal in the city.

It acts as a biological cleaner of organic waste disposed around homes, roads and slaughterhouses. Other scavenging birds include the pied crow and black kites.

INDUSTRIOUS NATURE OF UGANDANS
Kampala kuyitya is a common Luganda slang among city residents, to mean to survive in Kampala, one has to think outside the box.

The black-headed weaver bird brings out the industriousness and entrepreneurial culture of downtown Kampala. This bird can be found in large tree species busy building their

nests that I reckon no machine or algorithm can replicate.

On any blue skyline of Kampala, a flock of white birds will be flying back and forth. These cattle egrets, I reckon, remind the Kampala urbanites of their roots of livestock keeping.

The birds are usually found around cattle grazing in the fields and they feed on insects that are disturbed by the livestock's movements.

The availability of such insects shows Kampala, to some extent, is still green and needs to maintain those green spaces.

Many homes have ornamental plants like the hibiscus *rosa sinensis* flower and *Plumeria rubra*, which attract nectar-seeking birds like the beautiful bronzy sunbird.

The lovely reflection of the sunbird's plumage in the sun's rays

is reflected in the natural beauty of the Ugandan people.

ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

From an ecological perspective, the birds indicate that Kampala city can go back to its glory of a green city in the Pearl of Africa.

City planners and residents ought to derive inspiration from the birds and make Kampala the cleanest and greenest city in Africa; a representation of the avi-fauna gem found in Uganda's countryside, national parks and game reserves.

So as you go to work, shopping, or for prayers, always appreciate the birds around you and take good care of the environment because the birds depend on you to survive. Do not hesitate to inquire about a bird safari from a local tour company near you. Happy birding.