

## **2023 Park Summary Annual Report – Nyungwe National Park**

### **Park Manager: Niyigaba Protais**

Achievements are summarized per pillar (i.e. Biodiversity Conservation including conservation law enforcement, Community Development, Park Revenue Generation, Park Management & Infrastructure Development)

### **Introduction**

Nyungwe is one of the oldest rainforests in Africa, and the largest expanse of forest in Rwanda, covering 1,019 km<sup>2</sup> of dense Afromontane forests, bamboo-covered slopes, grasslands and wetlands. It lies on the watershed divide of two of the world's largest rivers, the Congo and the Nile, providing a significant portion of the country's freshwater. Nyungwe is known to be a regional biodiversity hotspot, situated within the Albertine Rift biodiversity hotspot, has incredibly high species diversity and endemism of plants, birds, and mammals. Over 1,068 recorded plant species, 320 bird species and 75 known mammal species, including 13 of Africa's primates – notably, chimpanzee and the elusive Hamlyn's and L'Hoest's monkeys, Nyungwe's rich fauna and flora was exposed to rampant poaching, illegal mining and agricultural encroachment, all endangering the survival of its unique biodiversity. Acknowledging the successful partnership with the Rwanda Development Board (RDB), which saw the ecological and economic revival of Akagera National Park, the Rwandan Government invited African Parks to sign a 20-year agreement in 2020 to manage the Park and ensure its protection for both wildlife and communities. Nyungwe National Park is home to intact forests and peat bogs, moors, thickets and grasslands, providing habitats to a highly diverse flora and fauna and is also internationally recognized as priority site for conservation, and its vital watershed as is further emphasised by its recent classification as a natural UNESCO World Heritage Site.

### **Biodiversity Conservation (*includes conservation law enforcement*)**

Eighty (80) new camera traps have been purchased to increase the detection and monitoring of hard-to-find species without disrupting their behaviour, while also alerting illegal activities. To build capacity amongst local community members, a total of 37 park-wide survey data collectors have been trained on park-wide survey data collection methodology and techniques. Following this training, the team conducted the data collection on mammal, bird and plant species to document the population size, density, and spatial distribution of key species. The field activities of the survey were completed, while data cleaning and analysis are planned to be completed by the second quarter of 2024. Furthermore, the team continued tree phenology monitoring, targeting primates' diet trees and climate change indicators. In total, 2,555 trees from 67 tree species were monitored.

Behavioural data on habituated primates were collected through EarthRanger, on three chimpanzee groups and three Colobus Monkey groups. Fifteen (15) hectares previously affected forest fires have been restored through Assisted Natural Forest Regeneration. At least 422.80Ha were mapped in different sites across the park to be cleared of exotic plant species in 2024.

The park-supported nurseries propagated 40,218 seedlings of indigenous forest tree species, for restoration and indigenous tree proliferation in forestry and agroforestry. At least 28.07Ha of degraded forest around the park were jointly reforested by park staff, eco-rangers and community members.

In collaboration with Bat Conservation International and the Rwanda Wildlife Conservation Association, roosting sites of the Critically Endangered Hill's horseshoe bat (*Rhinolophus hilli*) and the Cameroon leaf-nosed bat (*Doryrhina camerunensis*) were monitored where 9 and 2 individuals were respectively detected as the residents of the sites. The above-mentioned number of species were obtained from filming 2 roosts at Uwinka. Using SM4 sensors, the same species were also identified in different areas of the park. *Rhinolophus hilli* calls were detected at 39 sites while *Doryrhina camerunensis* was recorded in 11 sites within the park.

After long processes of health checks, CITES permits were acquired for 41 African grey parrots to be repatriated to Nyungwe from hosting zoos in the United Kingdom. The birds were confiscated from illegal traders, and their repatriation into Nyungwe is planned by the second quarter of 2024. Road use impact monitoring data (along the 55km Kitabi-Gisakura tarmac road) indicated 225 animals killed by vehicles and 69 vehicle accidents. Moreover, 5,365 kg (i.e. 447kg each month) of litter left behind by road users were collected, separated and disposed-off by the park management. The collected data will be used as a tool to advocate for further road use regulation measures besides the existing speed cameras. Additional measures that will be requested to the relevant institutions include the construction of humps or rumble strips, as well as the reduction of the speed limit from 60 KM/H to 40 KM/H.

In conservation law enforcement efforts, anti-poaching ranger patrols resulted in 199 arrests (including 39 illegal miners, 5 tree cutters, 47 poachers, while the majority were livestock fodder collectors and firewood gatherers), and 11,259 snares removed from the park. The increase in number of removed snares (compared to 10,431 snares in 2022) is largely attributed to the improved patrol effort (ranger patrol days have increased from 12,220 in 2022 to 18,942 i.e. 55% increase) coupled with the engagement of 92 eco-rangers in monthly ranger patrols leading to higher detection rates of snares and carcasses. Eco-rangers are a group of 92 community and law enforcement facilitators mostly recruited as community members who have renounced poaching. Among all the 199 arrests, 86 people were reported to the Rwanda Investigation Bureau, 17 reported to local authorities to pay an administrative/legal fine, while the remaining (96) were educated and released.

All rangers attended refresher training, six primates' trackers completed one-month training in Tanzania (Gombe National Park), and four law enforcement staff were sent to Malawi (Liwonde National Park) for a one-week learning exchange visit.

Two highlights of the collaboration between the park and the communities in 2023 were the handover of a duiker captured by communities in Bweyeye village and reported to the park rangers; and the massive support from local leaders and community members during the firefighting activities in Bweyeye whereby more than 250 people set off the wildfire that had affected 128 hectares.

#### • **Community Development**

In total, 171 community environmental awareness meetings were held, reaching 17,883 people, while the Colobus Cup football competition reached 87,761 participants. Overall, 968 children from school environmental clubs and 389 local leaders visited Nyungwe. A total of 268 cases of human-wildlife conflict (HWC) were assessed, and compensation was facilitated by the Special Guarantee Fund of Rwanda. The park continued its work with developing community enterprises. Four new partner cooperatives were created in 2023 bringing the total to 14 cooperatives working with the park. These reported numbers are from across the 5 districts surrounding the park, with each cooperative earning or generating income. Out

of the four new cooperatives, Cyamudongo Community Tourism Promotion Cooperative has started earning income from the coffeeshop and accommodation. The community piggery project has also reproduced 14 piglets that will be adding value as they grow. The remaining two cooperatives' projects (fish and mushroom farming) are currently not earning income from their activities yet, but are anticipated to begin earning reportable income in 2024.

- **Park Revenue Generation**

In total, 22,764 guests including 2,235 free visitors (among whom 968 are educational visitors) and 20,529 are paying visitors, comprised of 31% of Rwandans and 55% Internationals, visited the park in 2023; an increase of 1200 (i.e. 5%) compared to last year's number of visitors (21,564). The generated gross income was \$1,769,916—An achievement of 99.6% (i.e. 1,770,028) of the annual targeted sales (i.e. US \$ 1,778,111 budgeted for 2023). Two campsites that have been completed along Uwinka-Kamiranzovu-Gisakura three-day walk (known as Cynzobe trail), are currently operational and ranked by some as one of the best African destinations to visit in 2024 (<https://www.cntraveler.com/story/best-places-to-go-in-africa-2024>). The park acquired the non-objection from the Ministry of Environment as well as the Environmental Impact Assessment certificate, but the construction permit is still pending for the first park-owned lodge (Munazi Eco-lodge) which is planned to be opened in June 2024.

- **Park Management & Infrastructure Development**

Three board were successfully held meetings as per the agreement, and the company's contribution to the national fiscal service was equivalent to \$902,736 (1\$ = 1,172 RWF) excluding the contribution to the two funds that address immediate needs of the communities around the park (Tourism Revenue Sharing that fund communities' priority projects and the Special Guarantee Fund that compensate losses/damages caused by wildlife). As a result of continued tax compliance, Nyungwe Management Company Ltd (NMC) was recognised as the best taxpayer in Nyamasheke District and third in the Western Province of Rwanda by the Rwanda Revenue Authority.

Nyungwe National Park had estimated annual budget of \$5.9 million, and the achieved overall burn rate was 80.9%; the relatively low burn rate was mainly due delayed construction activities of two main assets: the Zipline and the Munazi lodge not completed. The delays were mainly due to slow and complex construction permit acquisition process (with the involvement of multiple stakeholders) for Munazi and the investment approval and tender process of selecting the right supplier of the zipline.

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The headcount of NMC contracted employees increased from 260 staff in 2022 to 286 in 2023, key recruitments include the Funding and Reporting Manager, the Commercial Development Manager and Accountant. Much of the parks operational work, such as infrastructure construction, road and trail maintenance and the workshop, is done by local community members. This provides employment to over 1,203 casual labourers (through cooperatives) and over 286 permanent local staff members, who (for the majority) reside around the park.

Major infrastructure achievements include the construction of the new park Headquarters (HQ) at Gisakura that has reached 60.3% of completion. Gisakura will be the first proper park Head Office in a better location (than the current temporary Gisovu Office), closer to most tourism operations and

relatively equidistant to all parts of the park. Complete relocation is expected by October 2024. In tourism, two campsites have been fully completed along Uwinka-Kamiranzovu three-day walk (known as Cyinzobe trail) currently operational and ranked among the best African destinations to visit in Africa in 2024 (<https://www.cntraveler.com/story/best-places-to-go-in-africa-2024>). The construction of Munazi Lodge that was planned to start in 2023 has been delayed due to then acquisition of the construction that is still under process—construction works will start upon issuance of the permit by the national mandated authority. Though, the environmental impact assessment certificate has been issued and all architectural designs were completed and approved.

### **Objectives for 2024 (no more than 5 items and keep it to the big picture)**

- Complete the construction of the new HQ at 100% and relocate by October 2024
- Complete and Run Munazi Lodge, complete the first zipline for Nyungwe, and achieve a minimum annual income of US\$2,218,627
- Maintain approved budget expenses
- Achieve clear Audits (statutory, SGF, and AP Law Enforcement SOP audit)
- Publish the results of biennial park-wide mammal census carried out in 2023

***Anchoring Africa's Resilience:*** *What are some of the biggest impacts you believe you and your team are making in (or through) your park— for both people and wildlife? How is your park's effective management contributing to building resilience for both people and nature to be able to thrive long into the future? What was your most hopeful/impactful story from 2023?*

- The targeted biggest impact that we strive to achieve in the daily work as a park is twofold: building the ownership of conservation actions among the neighbouring communities and developing the park into an ecologically healthy and a financially self-sufficient asset. The elimination of threats from the park and the creation of diversified opportunities of employment and tourism-based enterprises to improve community's livelihoods are concrete examples of the priorities that the park management is putting in place to ensure long-lasting resilience of people and nature.
- One of the most impactful stories of 2023 was the achievement of Nyungwe National Park's nomination as the first Rwanda's natural UNESCO World Heritage Site; which is a recognition of its high conservation importance as well as the existence of adequate and sustainable management.