

ECOLOGICAL CALL

"Sustainability a Must!"

Newsletter: Issue 2: July–Sept 2026



ECOLOGICAL TRENDS
ALLIANCE

Featured Highlights:

- Sustainable Agro-forestry.
- Bwendero sugar and wildfire mitigation
- Ecological Trends Alliance joins Tropenbos Network
- Conferences and trainings
- Empowering local leaders to safeguard Itohya Forest
- Masgal steps up commitment to fireline
- **Unlocking Shoebill secrets**
- African agenda for fire-resilient landscapes

Message from the Director Programmes



The July–September 2026 Periodic Newsletter highlights key progress in biodiversity conservation and sustainable development, including **sustainable agroforestry, Bwendero Sugarcane and dairy communities, Tropenbos partnerships, conferences and trainings, and local leadership in safeguarding Itohya Forest.** It also features strengthened **wildfire management efforts**, including Masgal's commitment to fire-line maintenance, and explores the link between **biodiversity, conservation, livelihoods, and tourism** through the *"Unlocking the Shoebill"* feature.

Together, these stories demonstrate the importance of **community-led solutions, partnerships, sustainable livelihoods, and biodiversity conservation** in addressing environmental and development challenges.

The organization appreciates its partners, communities, leaders, and stakeholders for their continued collaboration in advancing its mission.

Richard Ssemmanda.
Director Programmes

Sustainable Agroforestry Gives Hope For Financial Independence And Conservation In Kaseeta Community



The villages of Rwengabi, Ndongo, Nyayirongo, Nyanseke, and Kyenjojo in Kaseeta Parish come embraced agroforestry initiative from GLA 2 project through their Collaborative Forest Management Group [CFM] Kaseeta Tugende Omumaiso Association, where 35 dedicated members received crucial support in 2024.

As part of agroforestry initiative, each member was provided with indigenous tree species, including Mahogany, *Prunus africana*, and *Grevillea*. Additionally, the community members received coffee and cocoa seedlings, which are already showing great potential for growth. These crops not only promise to enhance household incomes but also offer a path towards sustainable agricultural practices that contribute positively to local ecosystems.

The enthusiasm within the community has been obvious. Many have drawn inspiration from the successes seen in Bundibugyo district, where cocoa farming has transformed lives and landscapes. Members of Kaseeta Tugende Omumaiso Association in Kaseeta Parish committed themselves to ensuring the successful growth of the agroforestry materials provided to them, recognizing the dual benefits of economic empowerment and environmental conservation.

The area covered by these agroforestry materials spans an impressive 36 acres, signifying a significant step forward in our journey for sustainable livelihoods. The commitment to cultivating coffee and cocoa reflects a collective understanding of how agroforestry can contribute to the conservation of Bugoma Forest, a vital resource for both our community and the wider environment.

As the coffee and cocoa continue to thrive, we remain hopeful for a larger harvest that will not only support family incomes but also further solidify commitment to sustainable practices. The benefits of this initiative extend beyond financial gains, they encompass the preservation of the natural surroundings and the fostering of future generations who will learn from dedication to balancing agriculture with environmental stewardship.

Agroforestry will yield lasting benefits for Kaseeta Parish.



36 acres are covered by agroforestry materials



35 dedicated members received crucial support in 2024.

— By Omondi Denis.

Bwendero Sugarcane / surrounding Dairy Farm Takes Action on Wildfire Mitigation

On 24th July 2026, a capacity-building workshop took place at the Bwendero Sugar Factory, marking a pivotal step toward integrating, private-sector early warning systems for wildfire management across commercial landscapes. A group of 24 participants comprising company staff and selected members of neighboring communities were assembled to sharpen their wildfire mitigation strategies and operational readiness in a training of trainers (ToTs) workshop.

This effort to bridge industrial operations and traditional wisdom was facilitated by a team from the Ecological Trends Alliance (ETA). The session emphasized a collaborative learning where the ToTs participants shared traditional insights on regional seasonal shifts, wind patterns, and local fire behavior, which ETA facilitators integrated into modern fire control and prevention frameworks. This hybrid approach allows factory and farm management to leverage existing, tested local knowledge while upgrading site safety standards through structured, modern mechanisms that include enhancing the layout, width, and routine maintenance schedule of existing perimeter fire lines across sugarcane fields.

Advancing Safety at Bwendero sugarcane / Dairy Farm

While Bwendero Dairy Farm already maintains foundational wildfire prevention practices, the workshop highlighted the need to reinforce these efforts with modernized physical structures and systematic monitoring. It was agreed that incorporating elevated observation towers alongside well-maintained firebreaks will provide continuous visual coverage of high-risk sugarcane zones, safeguarding both agricultural yields and ecosystems.

To guarantee long-term operational success, hard copies of the landscape Wildfire Management Strategy and the Training Manual were handed over to the participants and the institution. Armed with these comprehensive manuals, the participants finalized actionable plans during the session. These plans outline specific protocols for routine field inspections, firebreak clearings, watch tower monitoring, and ongoing staff training ensuring the sugarcane plantations and neighboring land remain protected against destructive wildfire outbreaks.

" Integrating modern early warning infrastructure like fire watch towers with traditional local knowledge creates a resilient front line against commercial and environmental fire hazards."

— By Omondi Denis.

Ecological Trends Alliance joins the Tropenbos International Network!

Ecological Trends Alliance (ETA) has been working with Tropenbos International (TBI) since 2017. Together, we have implemented various projects and since then, the relationship has been growing. An invitation was made to ETA in 2022 to consider joining the bigger Tropenbos International Network working across Africa, South America, Asia and Europe. Due diligence was carried out on ETA which ensured ETA met all the criteria required.

In 2025, ETA board reviewed relevant network documents and gave a go-ahead for the organization to join the Tropenbos International Network (TBN). On 22nd Oct 2026, ETA formally signed a commitment dossier (Network Agreement) to join the network. This Agreement therefore confirms ETA as the Tropenbos International Partner in Uganda. We are grateful to all who have made this possible

— *Michael Opige*



Conferences and Trainings

National Conference on Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration (FMNR)

The conference was organized by World Vision Uganda, in collaboration with the FMNR Network and Vi Agroforestry. FMNR is the systematic regrowth and management of native trees and shrubs from felled tree stumps, sprouting root systems, seeds, or woody thickets. The conference observed that this land restoration approach reduces the high costs of tree planting, improves survival rates, and minimizes the need for intensive protection and maintenance. At the same time, it enhances environmental resilience and strengthens livelihoods, offering communities a sustainable pathway to restoration and growth.

The main purpose of the conference was to accelerate awareness, knowledge, and evidence dissemination on the effectiveness of FMNR as a land restoration practice and promote its adoption in all agro-ecological regions of Uganda. The conference strengthened technical capacity for FMNR adoption and quality implementation; enhanced the capacity of practitioners and policy networks to drive FMNR uptake; shared evidence-based outcome of FMNR impacts on livelihoods resilience and ecosystem restoration; and informed policy development required for scaling FMNR in Uganda. It took place on the 8th and 9th Sept 2026 at Hotel Africana, Kampala City.

As ETA we view this as an alternative to other forms of agro-forestry well placed to be promoted as a low cost and effective way of recovering degraded landscapes.

Since the farmer is the one who chooses which tree to regenerate from existing stumps or root systems, or soil seed bank, and for what purpose, the likelihood of survival is higher.

Training on the implementation of the Nagoya Protocol on access to genetic resources and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from their utilization (ABS).

Organized by Department of plant sciences, Makerere University, this training workshop brought together stakeholders involved in research, utilization and conservation activities that concern genetic resources. The workshop shared knowledge on ABS principles, obligations, and procedures relevant to research and institutional practice. The Nagoya Protocol is a critical framework governing the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge. The training took place from 10th to 11th Sept 2026 at Makerere University Main Building.



Empowering practitioners of Environmental and Social Impact Assessments (ESIA) in Uganda to share and use biodiversity data.

The training organized on 25th Sept 2026 by National Agricultural Research Organization (NARO)/ NaFIRRI through the project "Building capacity and upscaling data mobilization and use to the private sector and practitioners of Environmental and Social Impact Assessments (ESIA) in Uganda". This project is funded by the Biodiversity Information for Development (BID) programme through the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF).

The goal of the project is to empower private sector actors and practitioners involved in Environmental and Social Impact Assessments (ESIA) and biodiversity audits in Uganda to effectively share, access and use biodiversity data



to support informed decision-making and sustainable development.

— *Michael Opige*



Empowering Local Leaders to Safeguard Itohya Forest Reserve against wildfires

On 22nd July 2026, at St. Joseph Vocational Training Institute (SJVTI). A total of 26 dedicated participants gathered for a comprehensive training of trainers (ToTs) workshop focused on proactive wildfire management and forest protection around the vital Itohya Forest Reserve ecosystem. The workshop brought together key local stakeholders representing a broad coalition for conservation including, SJVTI Leadership & Staff, Friends of TECO, Local Government Officials, FICCA Local Community Group from the neighboring villages of Munteme, Rwobuhuka, Kajoga, Kinywambeho and Kiryateete.

The workshop benefited from peer-to-peer learning between local community members and from facilitators from the Ecological Trends Alliance (ETA). The peer-to-peer session shared knowledge regarding seasonal weather indicators, historic fire patterns, and local land clearing practices. While Facilitators from the ETA integrated modern wildfire mitigation frameworks into these existing traditional approaches. Participants were provided copies of the landscape Wildfire Strategy and the Training Manuals. The training manuals will serve as a reference guide as the 26 newly trained ToTs begin stepping into their roles as peer educators across Munteme, Rwobuhuka, Kajoga, Kinywambeho and Kiryateete villages.



Beyond capacity building, the session concluded with concrete commitments. Community action plans were drafted between the community leaders, local government, FICCA, and SJVTI. These joint action plans establish clear rapid-response protocols, seasonal patrol schedules, and community awareness campaigns aimed at actively mitigating wildfire occurrences and safeguarding the ecological integrity of Itohya Forest Reserve for generations to come.

— *Denis Omondi*

Empowering Local Stakeholders For Sustainable Fire Management Through Multinational Dialogue

The Ecological Trends Alliance and its Partners from Uganda participated in the Central and Tropical African Fire dialogue that took place from 14-18 September 2026 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. This significant event, hosted by Tropenbos International, PENHA, and other partners gathered community representatives, policymakers, researchers, and development actors to address the critical challenges and solutions related to wildfire prevention and community fire management.

Uganda's delegation included Mr. Atuha Moses, Tourism and Production Officer from Bunyoro Kitara Kingdom, Mr. Atugonza Robert, Chairperson of the Masindi Sugarcane Out growers Association Limited, Ms. Ainabyona Christine, Assistant Commissioner, Albertine Graben Regional and Field Office, NEMA, who played a pivotal role in the formulation of the regional wildfire management strategy, Ms. Proscovia Annet Mugisa, District Natural Resources Officer of Kikuube District, Mr. Ssemmanda Richard, Director of Programs and Operations at Ecological Trends Alliance, and Mr. Opige Michael, Executive Director of Ecological Trends Alliance. These leaders were instrumental in channeling local knowledge and wisdom into strategies that guide effective wildfire management across the region as they were part of the team in the formulation of the wildfire management strategy from the start.



This continental dialogue was necessary, as fire poses a growing threat to forests, biodiversity, and the livelihoods of local communities. More so factors such as land use change, oil extraction, charcoal production, and the impacts of climate change amplify the vulnerability of ecosystems to wildfires. Despite the wealth of traditional knowledge held by local communities regarding fire management, their contributions often remain unrecognized within formal policy and financial frameworks.

The dialogue aimed to bridge this gap creating a platform for sharing experiences and identifying actionable strategies that strengthen community-led fire prevention efforts. Participants engaged in discussions that connected local fire management experiences to national climate goals and restoration agendas while fostering synergies within regional forest platforms.

This dialogue was more than just a one-time event, it formed part of a larger initiative to foster an African agenda for fire-resilient landscapes.

This agenda will continue to evolve as we move toward COP30 in Belém, COP31 in Antalya, and COP32 in Addis Ababa, enabling local voices to be amplified in the global forum. The event also aligned with the COP30 Call to Action on Integrated Fire Management and initiatives by the FAO Global Fire Management Hub.

— *By Richard Ssemmanda and Denis Omondi*



Masgal Steps Up Commitment To Fire Line Maintenance And Field Boundary Enforcement

Masindi Sugarcane out Growers Association Limited (MASGAL) has reaffirmed its dedication to protecting member investments, improving field management, and safeguarding the district's sugarcane crop. In a recent training in Masindi that involved 40 leaders from the zones that make up MASGAL, association leadership and members outlined decisive measures to enforce standard field boundary maintenance, eliminate boundary disputes, and drastically reduce devastating fire risks across the region.

To establish lasting order and protect out growers' land rights, MASGAL has pledged to advocate for a binding District Ordinance. This proposed local law will make it compulsory for every sugarcane field to undergo a professional survey prior to planting and a mandatory re-survey immediately following harvest.

This policy directly addresses the persistent issue of land encroachment and ensures the strict observation of the mandatory 6-meter fireline. Under this agreement, maintaining the fireline remains a shared responsibility of neighbours—requiring each adjacent landholder to contribute 3 meters of cleared space along their shared boundary.

MASGAL further resolved that all firelines must remain completely free of crops, weeds, or vegetation at all times, reinstating critical agricultural guidelines previously issued to ensure field safety.

Why Fire line maintenance matters for Sugarcane Farmers.

- ✓ Maintaining a clear, uncropped 6-meter buffer between fields is not just a regulatory measure but also a vital practice for protecting farmer livelihoods and crop yield.
- ✓ Sugarcane is highly flammable, especially near harvest time. A clean 6-meter strip creates a critical physical break that prevents wild or accidental fires from spreading rapidly from one farm to another.
- ✓ Mandatory post-harvest surveys clear up confusion regarding property lines. Clear firelines provide visible, permanent borders that prevent accidental or intentional crop encroachment.
- ✓ Firelines serve as functional access roads during emergencies, allowing firefighting crews, tractors, and monitoring personnel to reach remote sections of the farm quickly.
- ✓ Clear perimeter corridors provide maneuvering space for heavy field machinery, loader trucks without damaging standing cane.

Protecting our crop means protecting our community's financial future. By committing 3 meters on each side of our boundaries and keeping these firelines clean, we guarantee peace of mind and protect our hard work from avoidable fire damage. We look forward to working hand-in-hand with the district leadership with support from Ecological Trends Alliance to pass this ordinance." Says Atugonza Robert, the Chairman of MASGAL

— By Denis Omondi

Unlocking the Shoebill's Secrets through Telemetry in Uganda.

The Shoebill (*Balaeniceps rex*) is classified as **Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List** and is listed as **Endangered on Uganda's National Red Data List**. Across its range, populations are declining as wetlands face increasing pressure from habitat loss, degradation, human disturbance, and other threats. Effective conservation of the species depends on understanding how Shoebills use and move between different wetlands. The **International Single Species Action Plan for the Shoebill** identifies several important knowledge gaps that continue to hinder effective conservation. These include breeding ecology, distribution, movements, causes of mortality, habitat requirements, and the factors influencing successful breeding.

To address some of these knowledge gaps, an **Argos satellite telemetry tag** was fitted to a juvenile Shoebill in Uganda in November 2025. At the time of tagging, the bird was estimated to be approximately **4.5–5 months old**. Since then, the tag has provided valuable information about the bird's movements and habitat use, producing fascinating insights into the spatial ecology of this globally threatened species.

Data collected so far indicate that the tagged Shoebill has a home range of approximately **1,227 km²**.



The movements recorded by the satellite tag demonstrate that Shoebills depend on a network of wetlands extending well beyond the boundaries of a single protected or recognised site.

The tagged individual has been recorded using several wetlands, some of which currently have **little or no formal protection**, an important implications for Shoebill conservation in Uganda.

Beyond Mabamba: A Landscape-Level Conservation Approach

Mabamba Wetland is internationally recognised as one of Uganda's most important Shoebill sites and has received considerable attention for its conservation and tourism value. However, the telemetry data suggest that protecting Shoebills requires a broader, landscape-level approach.

The tagged bird has moved between different wetland habitats along and around the shores of Lake Victoria, demonstrating the ecological connectivity between these areas. Consequently, conservation efforts cannot focus solely on individual wetlands. There is a growing need for **collaborative management and protection of wetland systems across the Lake Victoria landscape.**

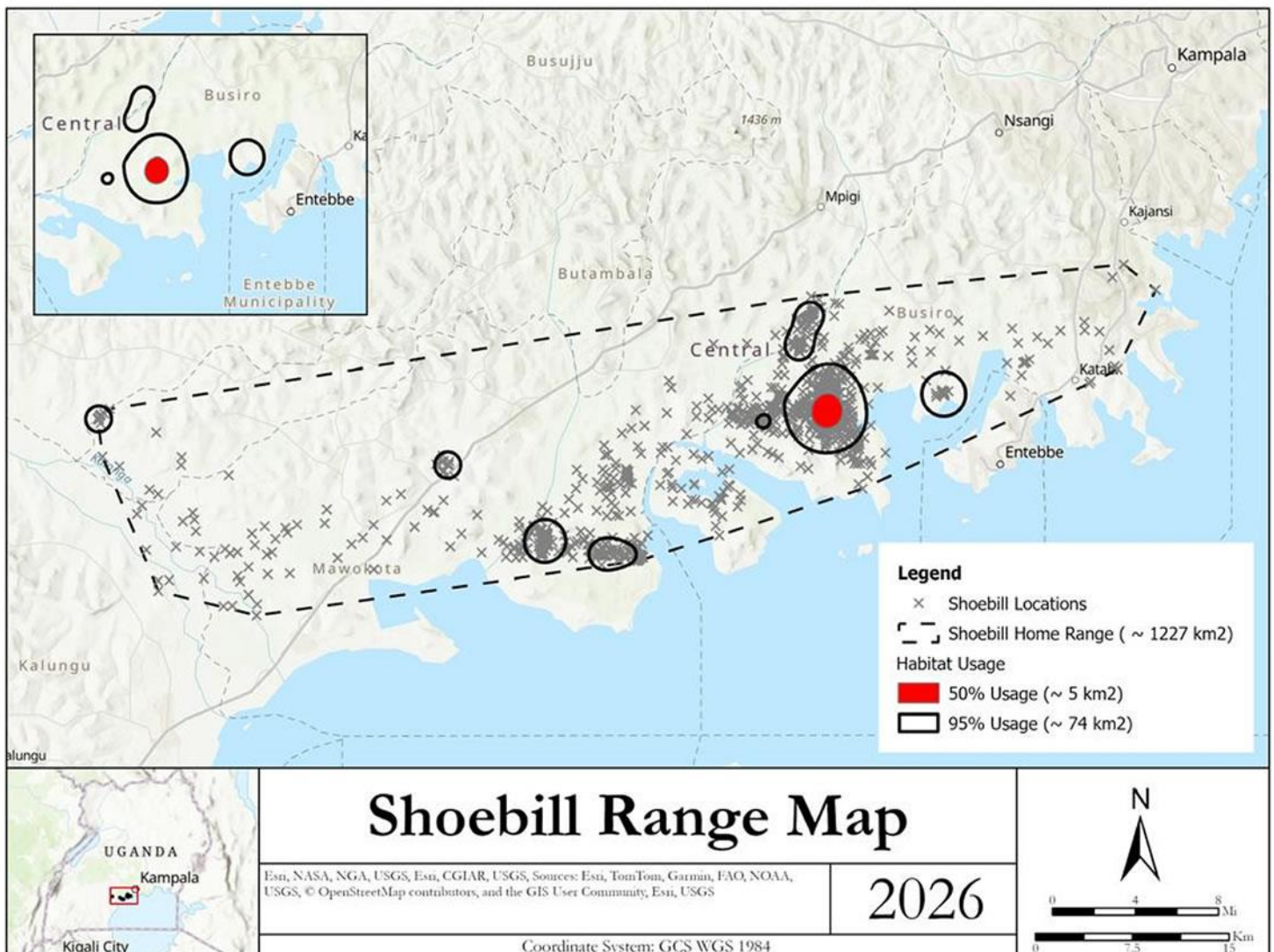
Protecting these interconnected habitats will be essential to ensuring that Shoebills have access to suitable feeding, roosting, dispersal, and potentially breeding sites throughout their range.

The project has been possible with financial support from the Rufford Grants Foundation

<https://www.rufford.org/>, Satellite tags from the Swiss Ornithological Institute

<https://www.vogelwarte.ch/en/> and Camera Traps from WorthWild Africa <https://www.worthwildafrica.org/>

— By Judith Mirembe



Wildfire Management:

Mapping burnt areas across North, Northeastern and Southwestern Uganda using Satellite technology.

To extend the wildfire discussions from the current landscape of Hoima, Masindi, Kikuube, Buliisa (West), Ecological Trends Alliance (ETA) has been mapping burnt areas across Amuru, Adjumani, Kitgum (North); Kotido, Napak, Nakapiripirit (North East) and Ntungamo, Mbarara, Kiruhura (South West). Using Landsat and Sentinel imagery from 2010 to 2026, GIS and remote sensing is being used to identify and map fire-affected landscapes, generating spatial data that helps track patterns over time and inform wildfire management, conservation planning, and land restoration strategies.

The mapping spans agricultural zones, grasslands, woodlands, and other ecosystems, supporting stakeholders in identifying fire-prone areas and developing targeted interventions. By transforming satellite imagery into usable information, ETA is helping strengthen wildfire monitoring, conservation planning and evidence-based decision making.

— By Kamugisha Derrick





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Together, we can make a difference for our planet and its people.