COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

Issue #14

KBA

KEY BIODIVERSITY AREAS

Colobus vellerosus © César María Aguilar Gómez

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HIGHLIGHTS FOR THIS ISSUE

GLOBAL

Bezos KBA Project up-date

In the October 2022 issue of the KBA Community Newsletter, we announced the first phase of the project titled *"Key Biodiversity Areas - establishing the blueprint for 30x30"* funded by the Bezos Earth Fund. In the current article, I would like to provide an update about this groundbreaking project aiming to identify KBAs in seven countries in the Tropical Andes and Congo Basin. During the first eight months of 2023, biodiversity experts have been hard at work to reassess existing KBAs and identify new ones. Sixty taxonomic expert groups have been formed with the participation of 600 biodiversity data experts to compile, clean, organise, and analyse information to enable the application of the relevant KBA criteria and to propose KBAs through the KBA Database.

Ikakogi tayrona, Colombia © Sebastián Berrío

Eighty-four of these experts were contracted through their institutions to coordinate the work of the expert groups by organizing almost a hundred meetings and workshops. Data from a staggering 6,000 potential trigger species belonging to 16 taxonomic groups has been analysed for the application of the relevant KBA criteria. All the 574 previously identified KBAs have been re-assessed and 351 new potential KBAs have been identified so far. Data on 403 of these KBAs are now being uploaded to the KBA Database, where they need to be formally proposed.

Although most of the new KBAs are proposed by scientists working with specific taxonomic groups, site proposals have also been received from other organizations. In Colombia, regional environmental corporations in charge of regional protected areas have proposed several KBAs within such protected areas. In Colombia and Ecuador, Indigenous people's groups have also put forward their territories as candidate KBAs. Several NGOs as well as a university have also proposed KBAs in areas where they conduct research or conservation projects.

Images from left to right: 1. *Aotus nancymaae,* Perú © Seig Mond; 2. *Eretmochelys imbricata,* Congo Republic © Luis Pérez; 3. *Hippopotamus amphibius,* Congo Republic © Mathias D'haen

Regarding the promotion and communication of KBAs, awareness-raising events were organised in the DRC and Congo Republic for staff of several key Ministries. In the Congo Basin countries, government entities are strongly represented on the KBA NCGs, and meetings of these are used to inform them about progress with the project. In Bolivia, several of the Bezos grantees work together to present a unified analysis of priority conservation areas to the government, including KBAs. In the Tropical Andes countries, advances have been made to involve regional authorities and indigenous peoples' organizations in the KBA agenda.

KBA identification workshop-June 2023- Gabon.

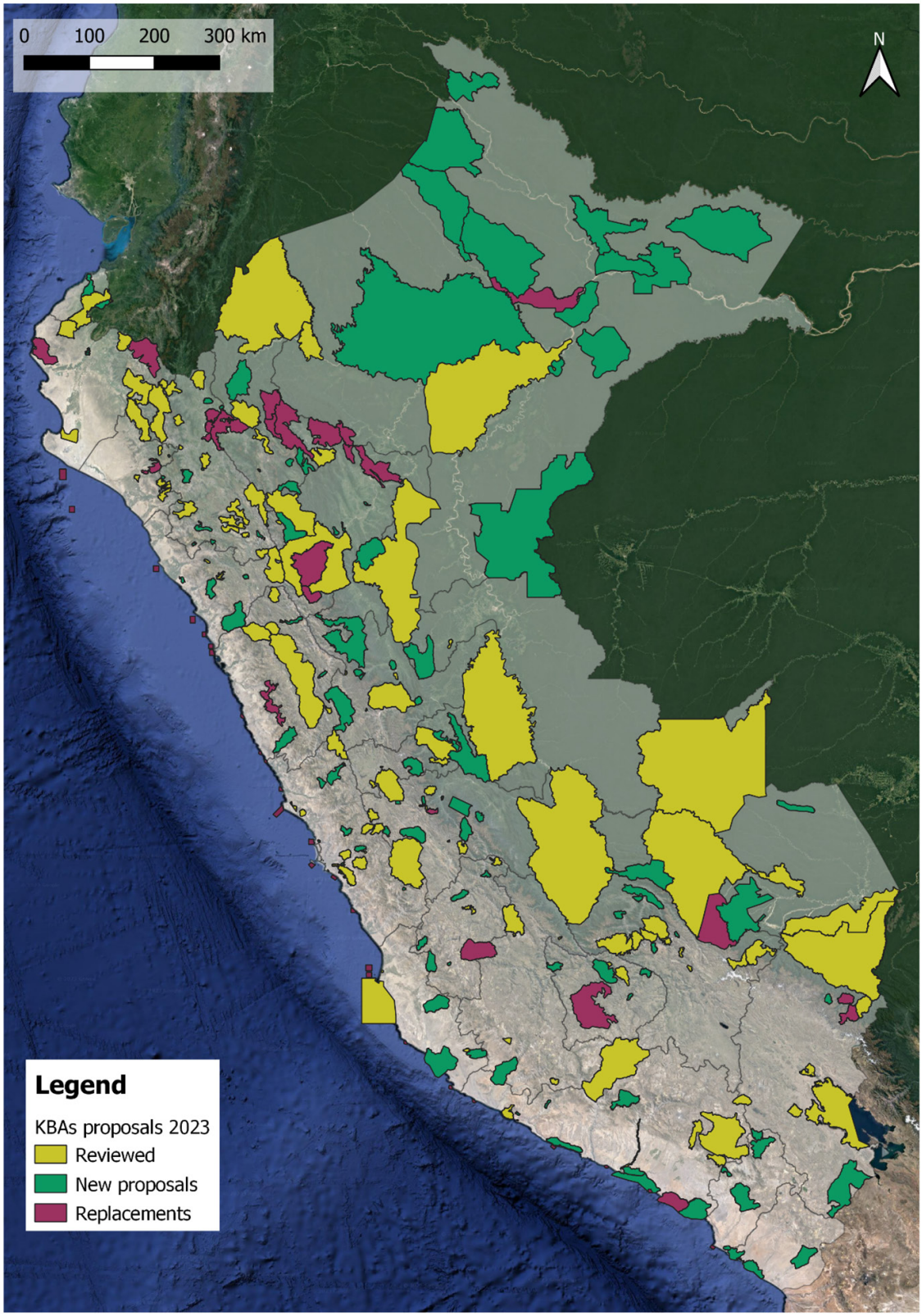
International advocacy work has focused on promoting KBAs in the implementation of the new Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) adopted in December 2022. Two leaflets were recently published, one on the relevance of KBAs to governments and another one on the importance of KBAs to implementing the GBF. KBAs have also been promoted at a variety of events, including the CBD AHTEG on the GBF Monitoring Framework in May and July, the CBD Target 3 Partnership meeting in June, the Global Knowledge Support Service for Biodiversity Co-design Workshop in March, the Sub-regional Workshop of the COMIFAC countries on Target 3 of the GBF in June, and the 2nd International Conference on Biodiversity in the Congo Basin in March.

Sub-regional COMIFAC workshop on implementing GBF target 3, Congo Republic.

In the coming months, the project will focus on finalizing the site assessments and formally proposing all KBAs through the KBA database. Consultations with national and local stakeholders are organised through the National Coordination Groups and regional workshops, where information is presented about all reassessed and new KBAs. Communication and advocacy activities will focus on promoting KBAs as priority areas for meeting the targets of the new Global Biodiversity Framework in the seven project countries and beyond.

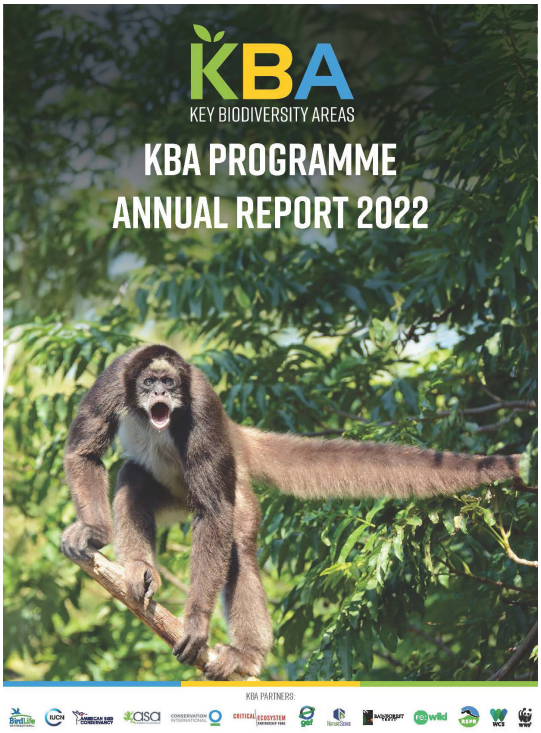
For further information, please contact the global project coordinator Zoltan Waliczky (Zoltan.waliczky@birdlife.org) or Andrew Plumptre (aplumptre@keybiodiversityareas.org).

A new map of KBAs from Peru, where the KBA assessment process is largely finished.



Preserving Biodiversity: A Glimpse into the KBA Programme's 2022 Achievements

The recently released Annual Report 2022 of the Key Biodiversity Areas (KBA) Programme showcases the significant progress made in identifying and conserving globally important sites for biodiversity. Led by 13 conservation organizations, the KBA Programme aims to support countries in their efforts to protect these crucial areas. Let's take a closer look at some of the key topics covered in the report.



Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework

In December 2022, negotiations on the Kunming-Montréal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) concluded with the establishment of four long-term goals for 2050 and 23 targets for 2030, all aimed at urgently addressing and reversing biodiversity loss. Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) play a crucial role in several of these targets, notably in spatial planning, restoration, expanding protected areas to cover 30% of land and seas, and species conservation.

KBAs can guide where 30 x 30 occurs

The Kunming-Montréal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) has set the ambitious Target 3, aiming to conserve at least 30% of terrestrial, inland water, coastal, and marine areas by 2030, especially those of significant importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions. However, the lack of a clear definition for "areas of particular importance for biodiversity" has led to inconsistent application worldwide, hindering effective comparisons and undermining the quality of protected areas. KBAs provide one of the best tools for identifying these areas.

Tools to support KBA identification

Thanks to grants from the Bezos Earth Fund and the Garfield Weston Foundation, BirdLife International has undertaken significant improvements to the World Database of Key Biodiversity Areas (WDKBA). The database has been transitioned to a new platform with enhanced features such as the ability to query and download specific data subsets, facilitating further analysis by the scientific and conservation community. Also, the Key Biodiversity Areas (KBA) training efforts have seen significant expansion and improvement. Training materials have been updated, including specific content for sites of outstanding ecological integrity, and several webinars have been conducted to explain the KBA proposal system and review processes.


© UAE MOCCAE

Identification of Key Biodiversity Areas in the United Arab Emirates

The IUCN Regional Office of West Asia, in collaboration with the UAE Ministry of Climate Change and Environment (MoCCaE), has completed a comprehensive review of the Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) in the UAE. Through consultation with experts and stakeholders, nine sites were identified as Global KBAs, increasing the total number of KBAs in the UAE to 14, with five as Regional KBAs.

Growing numbers of KBA National Coordination Groups

By the end of 2022, 24 countries had established Key Biodiversity Area National Coordination Groups (KBA NCGs), with 10 new countries joining those established in 2021. Another 11 countries are in the process of establishing KBA NCGs, including five in Europe with Biodiversa funding. While the formation of these groups requires time and resources, it proves valuable as they play essential roles in promoting KBAs within their respective countries, contributing to site monitoring and long-term conservation efforts, and advocating for their recognition in national policies and legislation.

Canada's Indigenous peoples supporting KBA identification

The Canadian KBA Coalition, led by organizations like WCS Canada, Birds Canada, and NatureServe Canada, has identified over 950 candidate Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) in Canada, with 80 already on the Canadian KBA registry. Recognizing that all KBAs in Canada are on Indigenous territories, the coalition places great importance on ensuring meaningful engagement and collaboration with Indigenous Peoples in the KBA identification process.

Bezos Earth Fund Support to the KBA Programme

The Bezos Earth Fund's $5 million USD grant to BirdLife International for the KBA Partnership in 2022 is supporting comprehensive assessments of Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) in the Andean nations of Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru, as well as in the Congo Basin countries of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Gabon, and Republic of Congo. This support has facilitated the establishment of KBA National Coordination Groups in these seven countries, involving governmental representatives, protected area authorities, scientific institutions, and conservation organizations. They are working to complete assessments of their KBAs by the end of 2023.


© C. Weiss/Unsplash

Increasing use of KBAs by the Private Sector

Private sector companies are facing increasing pressure to disclose their impacts on nature, aligning with Target 15 of the Kunming-Montréal Global Biodiversity Framework. This target urges companies to regularly monitor, assess, and transparently disclose their risks, dependencies, and impacts on biodiversity throughout their operations, supply chains, and portfolios. To aid in this, services leveraging Key Biodiversity Area (KBA) data are offered through the Integrated Biodiversity Assessment Tool (IBAT), enabling companies to assess their biodiversity-related exposure and risks.

Conserving threatened KBAs

The KBA Programme's 'Red Flag Working Group' plays a crucial role in responding to major threats facing Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs). In 2022, the group addressed 10 significant threats to KBAs, prioritizing cases with active local partners seeking international support where such assistance could substantially contribute to local efforts.

The Annual Report 2022 of the KBA Programme provides valuable insights into the progress made in identifying and conserving globally important sites for biodiversity. The webinars conducted on the Global Biodiversity Framework and the review of numerous KBA proposals demonstrate the ongoing efforts to promote knowledge sharing and ensure the accuracy of the identified KBAs. The report serves as a testament to the dedication and collaborative spirit of the KBA Programme in safeguarding our planet's biodiversity.

ASIA

Key Biodiversity Areas to be identified in Pakistan

Workshop to raise awareness of Key Biodiversity Areas, Pakistan.

A workshop was hosted by WWF in Lahore, Pakistan with the support of Engro Foundation and Darwin Innovation Fund to raise awareness of Key Biodiversity Areas and build consensus for a comprehensive KBA assessment with government, conservation, and the scientific community. Members of the wildlife and fisheries departments from four provinces and two territories were present, representing chief conservators, directors and deputy conservators along with the Federal Ministry of Climate Change. The workshop also attended by IUCN Pakistan and involved leading universities. Pakistan has a very decentralised approach to its environmental laws with different legislation at provincial and territory level.

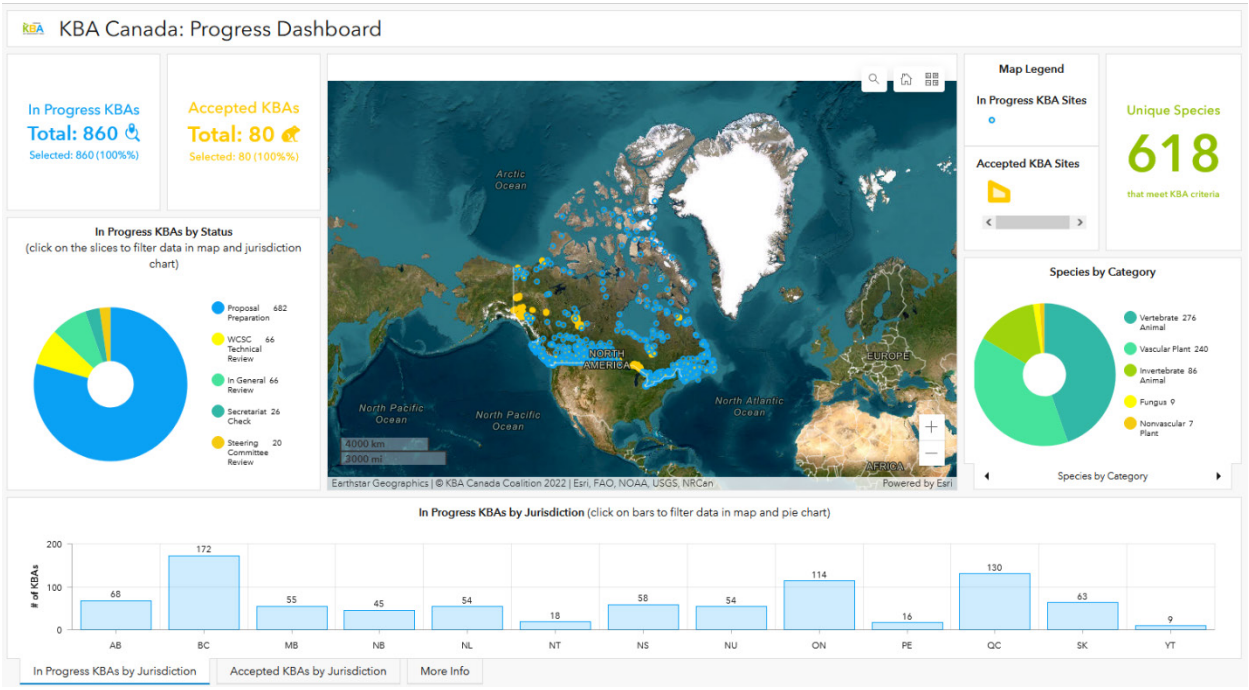
The head of the KBA Secretariat, Andy Plumptre, provided an overview of what KBAs are and how they are being used globally together with the criteria for their identification. Explaining the process by which countries around the world are making comprehensive assessments of their KBAs, he described how the formation of KBA National Coordination Groups are important in making sure the process is managed at a national level. Uzma Khan and Hamera Aisha led participants through an identification process for KBAs for the Indus River Dolphin (*Platanista minor*), an endangered species mostly confined to Pakistan, and working groups deliberated on the best ways to designate KBAs for this species. This exercise highlighted the issues when deciding what boundaries of KBAs can be considered manageable as a single site.

Participants agreed to work together to establish a KBA National Coordination Group, with likely Provincial branches, and workshop working groups identified a series of next steps on how this would be realised, the capacity needs met, and the funding raised to make a comprehensive assessment of KBAs across all taxonomic groups for which data exist.

NORTH AMERICA

KBA Canada enters the final push to identify KBAs for species, and announces their KBA iNaturalist project

Canada is entering into the final stretch of an intensive effort to comprehensively identify KBAs across the country. While the KBA Canada team started the work in 2019 with a plan to apply all KBA criteria, some criteria have been more challenging to apply than others (ecosystem criteria!). The KBA Canada initiative has been able to support and participate in national processes to classify and map ecosystems – work that will resolve the current lack of underlying ecosystem data and information and eventually lead to the identification of ecosystem KBAs. In the meantime, the identification of KBAs for species has progressed rapidly. The dashboard below allows stakeholders and partners to follow our progress and shows the diversity and distribution of KBAs identified to date. About half of these sites were already identified as KBAs for birds, and are now being reassessed by Birds Canada with additional KBA triggers identified by WCS Canada. Proposals for all of the In Progress KBAs shown below should be completed, reviewed and submitted by the end of 2024.



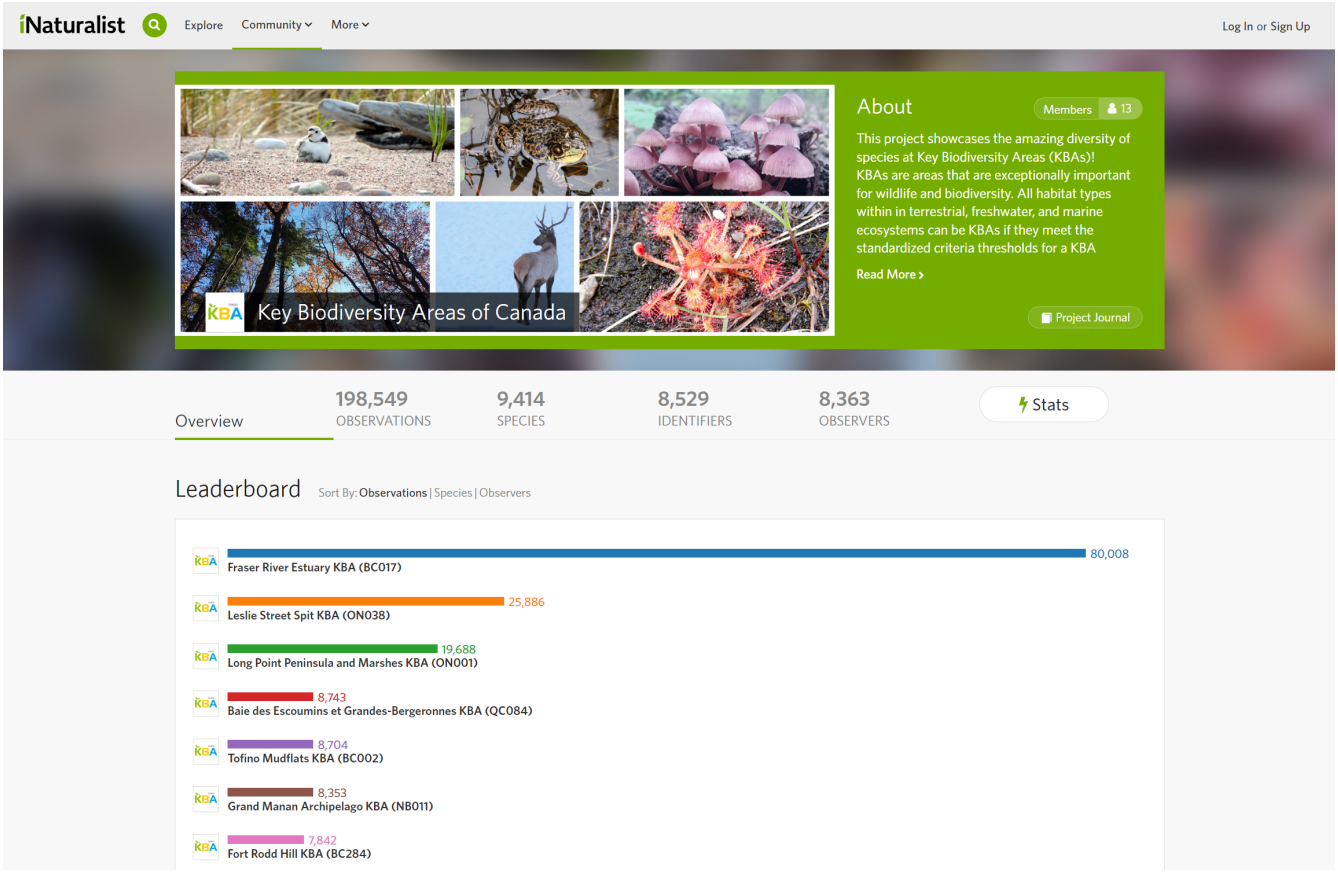
KBA Canada's Progress Dashboard shows all the Confirmed and Candidate KBAs in the country, along with details on what stage the proposals are at and what KBAs are being identified for. © KBA Canada
Image hyperlink: https://gis.natureserve.ca/portal/apps/dashboards/ad84def2aef04ecabb3b38982764f59e

As the identification of species-based KBAs drives towards its conclusion, KBA Canada recently developed the KBA Canada iNaturalist project to help better connect people with KBAs and better showcase the broad diversity of species within sites.

The Key Biodiversity Areas of Canada iNaturalist project groups together individual site-level iNaturalist projects for all national and globally accepted KBAs in Canada. These site-level projects automatically

collect all observations that iNaturalist users submit within the KBA boundaries, and summarize the information from these sightings. For example, any iNaturalist observations submitted within the Leslie Street Spit KBA are automatically pulled into its corresponding KBA project page. This gives users another way to discover the varied species in this KBA, from the Double-crested Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) that aggregate here in globally-significant numbers, to the American Mink (*Neogale vison*), Hump-backed Beewolf (*Philanthus gibbosus*), Silver-haired Bat (*Lasionycteris noctivagans*), Great Plains Ladies' Tresses (*Spiranthes magnicamporum*) and 2256 other species that have also been spotted at this KBA in downtown Toronto.

Explore more of the biodiversity within Canada's 80 Accepted KBAs through the KBA Canada iNaturalist project below. (Pro tip: click on the "Stats" button to see all the most commented and liked iNaturalist observations within a project!)



KBA Canada's iNaturalist Project page summarizes the number of observations and species seen across all accepted KBAs in the country. © KBA Canada
Image hyperlink: https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/key-biodiversity-areas-of-canada

AFRICA

Capacity Building towards Delineation of New Key Biodiversity Areas in Kenya

By: Joshua Sese


Loxodonta africana © Gertraud Seiser

Embracing the KBA program is pre-eminent to safeguarding nature's most critical sites. In Kenya, we have made several strides towards building capacity of key organizations and individuals so as to ensure that the KBA dream remains alive. The capacity building ensures that people know what KBAs are, propose new sites to be screened through the KBA criteria, then presented to the National Coordinating Group (NCG) for further scrutiny.

In June 2022, a team of seven taxonomic specialist groups from the Botany and Zoology departments (entomology, ichthyology, herpetology, and mammalogy sections) of the National Museums of Kenya (NMK) convened to consolidate data on Kenyan endemic species from their respective fields. The team was trained to assess species through the IUCN red listing process. 79 species distribution data was consolidated and assessed through the IUCN's Species Information Service (SIS) toolkit. Data from the process brought to our realization of 30 new potential KBAs. The sites are now assessed through the global standard for the identification of KBAs to be presented to the KBA NCG.

In March 2023, a KBA training was successfully conducted targeting key government agencies working directly in the KBAs and Protected areas. These included Kenya forest service (KFS), Kenya wildlife service (KWS), and Wildlife Research and Training Institute (WRTI). The team was trained on KBA identification, delineation, documentation, and monitoring. The training presented the opportunity to have KBA monitoring forms duly filled to enable production of the Kenya's KBAs Status and Trends Report of 2022. The report has been on print since 2004. The team identified 9 new potential KBAs under their jurisdiction to be reviewed through the KBA criteria.

During the same month, a new KBA was confirmed, Kirisia Forest Reserve a gazetted forest located in the arid and semi-arid land on the western end of Samburu County in the northern parts of Kenya. The KBA is under the management of KFS, in collaboration with the Kirisia Community Forest Association (CFA) and KWS. The KBA horsts 11 globally threatened species falling under criterion A1 among them being the Critically Endangered Rüppell's vulture. The local community and stakeholders promised to work in harmony and ensure that the site remains intact.


Gyps rueppelli © Steve Garvie

Project applying the KBA approach to select the most significant highland papyrus wetlands in the Albertine Rift of Uganda

Images from left to right: 1. Presenting Conceptual model; 2. SEBU team participating in KBA training session

The JRS Biodiversity Foundation is supporting a consortium led by Kabale University to select the most important highland papyrus wetlands in the Ugandan portion of the Albertine Rift. The other consortium members are the University of Exeter, Makerere University College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences (CAES), Uganda KBA National Coordination Group, National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) and the Albertine Rift Conservation Society (ARCOS).

The three-year project, named SEBU (www.sebu.kab.ac.ug) commenced in April 2023 and aims to apply the Key Biodiversity Areas (KBA) process to select globally significant sites for biodiversity conservation in this rapidly declining habitat type. This is a contribution to Uganda's commitment to the 30 by 30 biodiversity target. Fieldwork commenced in June 2023 involving staff and students from Kabale University and the University of Exeter. It focused on the papyrus wetlands fringing Lakes Bunyonyi, Mutanda and Mulehe in the Kigezi region.

SEBU collects data on papyrus endemic birds, reptiles and amphibians from papyrus wetlands over 1,300m above sea level. Five papyrus endemic birds, including the Papyrus Yellow Warbler (*Calamonastides gracilirostris*) listed as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List, were recorded and their relative abundance in papyrus patches was estimated. The fieldwork season will continue until November with surveys in the large wetlands in the region.

Three members of the SEBU team, Assoc. Prof. Sarah Nachuha, the Principle Investigator, Dr Fiona Mutekanga, GIS Expert and Dr Julius Arinaitwe, Coordinator of field programmes participated in the 31st International Congress for Conservation Biology (ICCB 2023) held at the Kigali Convention Centre in Rwanda. They presented a conceptual framework for the project and received valuable feedback from an international community of conservation biology experts. The ICCB also provided an opportunity for in-depth training on the application of the KBA criteria, convened by Simeon Bezeng (Regional KBA focal point for West and South Africa based at BirdLife South Africa) and Daniele Baisero of the KBA Secretariat. The SEBU team met with the Uganda National KBA Coordination Group Chair, Dr Simon Nampindo. He expressed interest in engaging with the project and NEMA to ensure that the project contributes to the national 30 by 30 planning process.

SEBU team with ARCOS founder and CEO, Dr Sam Kanyamibwa

In order to learn from previous work, and to contribute to ARBMIS, the SEBU team arranged meetings with project partners including the CEO, Director of Development and Partnerships, Director of Conservation Programmes and other staff at ARCOS, who have implemented a related project in Rwanda and the manager of ARBMIS, one of the target repositories of the data generated by this project. The main outcome of this meeting was the strengthening of partnerships through sharing data and publications and experiences.

The SEBU team also met with representatives of GBIF, including Laban Musinguzi, one of regional GBIF representatives based at the Uganda National Fisheries Research Institute. They took the SEBU team through the procedures for accessing and contributing to GBIF. This will enable the project to fulfil its aim of making all records readily available for conservation purposes through GBIF. This collaboration will ensure data records of birds and amphibian species in the study areas are securely stored and accessible for scientific research.

SEBU team meeting with GBIF regional representative, Laban Musinguzi

Contact: Assoc. Prof. Sarah Nachuha snachuha@kab.ac.ug; sebu@kab.ac.ug

Government technicians from the environment sector of southern and northern region of Mozambique were trained on mainstreaming Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) into provincial and district plans

Training of technicians from the Provincial Environment Services and Directorates and the Technical Commission for Environmental Impact Assessment of the southern region (Maputo, Gaza, and Inhambane)

and the northern region (Niassa, Cabo-Delgado, Nampula and Zambézia) on the importance of integrating Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) into, spatial planning, and environmental impact assessment of the country took place on June and August 2023 in Maputo City (Southern region) and Nampula (Northern Region).

The training was led by Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) in coordination with the National Directorate of Environment (DINAB) through the project *"Mainstreaming Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs), piloting Blue Carbon, and Strengthening Coral Reef Fisheries in Mozambique"*. The training offered 72 participants the opportunity to strengthen their capabilities in mainstreaming KBAs into provincial and district spatial and land use plans. The event covered topics on (i) definition of KBAs, their delineation, and role in biodiversity conservation, (ii) existing KBAs in Southern and Northern of Mozambique and their legal framework, (iv) the role of the Provincial Directorates and Services of Environment in monitoring and protecting KBAs. (Additional information here and here).

Members of the National Coordination Group for KBAs were trained in the KBA identification process through the Free online course, now available in Portuguese

A two-day training was conducted in Maputo for 24 participants between June 15 and 16, 2023, in order to enhance the NCG's capacity for the identification and delineation of KBAs. The training was in person but used the official online training material developed by the KBA Secretariat, which was translated into Portuguese by WCS in collaboration with the course editors from the Conservation Training and the KBA Secretariat (KBA Partnership) (Additional information here and here).

WCS Mozambique shares internationally its experience in the process of Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) assessment

On March 21st, 2023, Eleutério Duarte, a Mozambican biologist and a WCS project assistant with experience in conducting KBA assessments, led the fourth webinar entitled "Identifying and proposing KBAs / Relevance of the IUCN Red List on the KBA identification process: the Mozambique example". The webinar was attended by 101 participants from 51 countries across all continents including representatives from public and private organizations with interests in biodiversity issues.

Mr. Duarte described the main steps that led to the identification of KBAs in Mozambique including the creation of a National Coordination Group, and how to conduct species red list assessments. He also demonstrated in practical terms how KBAs are being used in the decision-making process in Mozambique as (i) tools to help mitigate the impacts of development projects, (ii) inform national spatial plans, (iii) strengthen the conservation policy/legal framework, and (iv) support strategic expansion of the national network of Protected Areas. (Additional information here).

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