



# NATURE RWANDA

*Connecting People With Nature*

## Strategic Plan

2026 - 2031



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# Letter from the Executive Director

As we share with you Nature Rwanda's Strategic Plan for 2026–2031, I want to take a moment to thank all of you, our staff, members, partners, supporters, collaborators, and the communities we work with. Your trust, commitment, and belief in our mission have been the backbone of everything we have achieved so far.

*This strategy comes at a special moment in our journey, as we celebrate 10 years since Nature Rwanda was founded. Reaching this milestone is both humbling and inspiring. It has been a decade of growth, learning, and meaningful collaboration with those who share our vision of a future where people and nature thrive together.*

Looking ahead, this new strategic plan reflects not only our ambition, but also the lessons we have learned in the past decade. Over the next five years, we will focus on protecting birds and their habitats, restoring and protecting key landscapes, promoting nature-based solutions that help communities adapt to climate change, supporting livelihoods and deeper community involvement, expanding our efforts in environmental education and advocacy, and building the capacity of our team. These priorities are grounded in what we know works and in what we believe is possible when people and ecosystems are supported together.

We know the challenges are real and evolving. But we also know that progress is possible when we move forward together, with purpose and partnership. This plan is more than a roadmap, it is an invitation to deepen our shared commitment and to shape more resilient, just, and sustainable communities.

Thank you for being part of this journey. We are proud of how far we have come, and even more hopeful about what we can achieve in the years ahead, with you by our side.

**Jean Claude. Dusabimana**  
Executive Director, Nature Rwanda





# Letter from the Board Chair

*As we celebrate 10 years of Nature Rwanda's journey, I am filled with a deep sense of gratitude, for the communities that have trusted us, the partners who have stood beside us, and the team that has grown this vision with heart and determination.*

This new strategic plan is not just about setting goals, it is about staying true to our purpose and making sure our work continues to matter, especially to the people and places we serve.

What makes this plan meaningful is how closely it aligns with Rwanda's development priorities, such as green growth, climate resilience, and community empowerment, and how it contributes to global efforts to tackle climate change, restore biodiversity, and improve community livelihoods. It reflects a clear direction, but also a shared responsibility. As a Board, we are committed to holding ourselves and the organization accountable to act with integrity, remain transparent, and ensure that every step we take leads to real, lasting impact.

We are excited for what lies ahead and thankful to everyone who continues to walk this journey with us.

**Prudence Ndabasanze,**  
Board Chair, Nature Rwanda



# The Story of Nature Rwanda

*It started with a question that few people were asking: What about the places that are not national parks, and the species that are threatened but not considered charismatic?*

At the time, conservation efforts in Rwanda were largely focused on major protected areas. While this work was important and necessary, many forests without formal protection, wetlands undergoing drainage, and rivers experiencing gradual degradation remained overlooked. Little attention was given to these ecosystems, and limited funding and advocacy were available to support their conservation.

Communities living alongside these ecosystems depended on them for water, food, and livelihoods. These landscapes functioned as islands of biodiversity within human-dominated environments, yet their importance received little recognition. The silence surrounding these ecosystems became the catalyst for action.

A small group of university graduates, driven by passion and armed with nothing more than a social media page and a firm belief that conservation should include everyone, decided to address this gap. This marked the beginning of Rwanda Biodiversity Media Group (RBMG).



RBMG faced challenges in establishing itself within the conservation sector and obtaining official registration, as it was often perceived as a traditional media house rather than a conservation NGO. Over time, it became evident that the name RBMG no longer reflected the organization's true identity and mission. Inspired by the clarity and recognition of names such as Nature Kenya and Nature Uganda, the team adopted a new name to better reflect its purpose: Nature Rwanda.



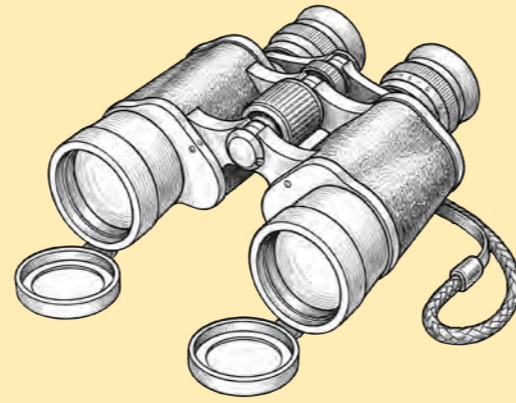
In 2016, the first official meeting was convened, bringing together like-minded individuals to formalize the organization. Without external guidance, the founders developed statutes, a vision, and a mission. In February 2017, an operating certificate was secured.

However, obtaining a name and legal registration was only the beginning. A new challenge emerged: how to initiate operations without funding. At the time, most members of the core team were volunteers employed in unrelated professions. Guidance and opportunities were sought from organizations where internships were being undertaken.

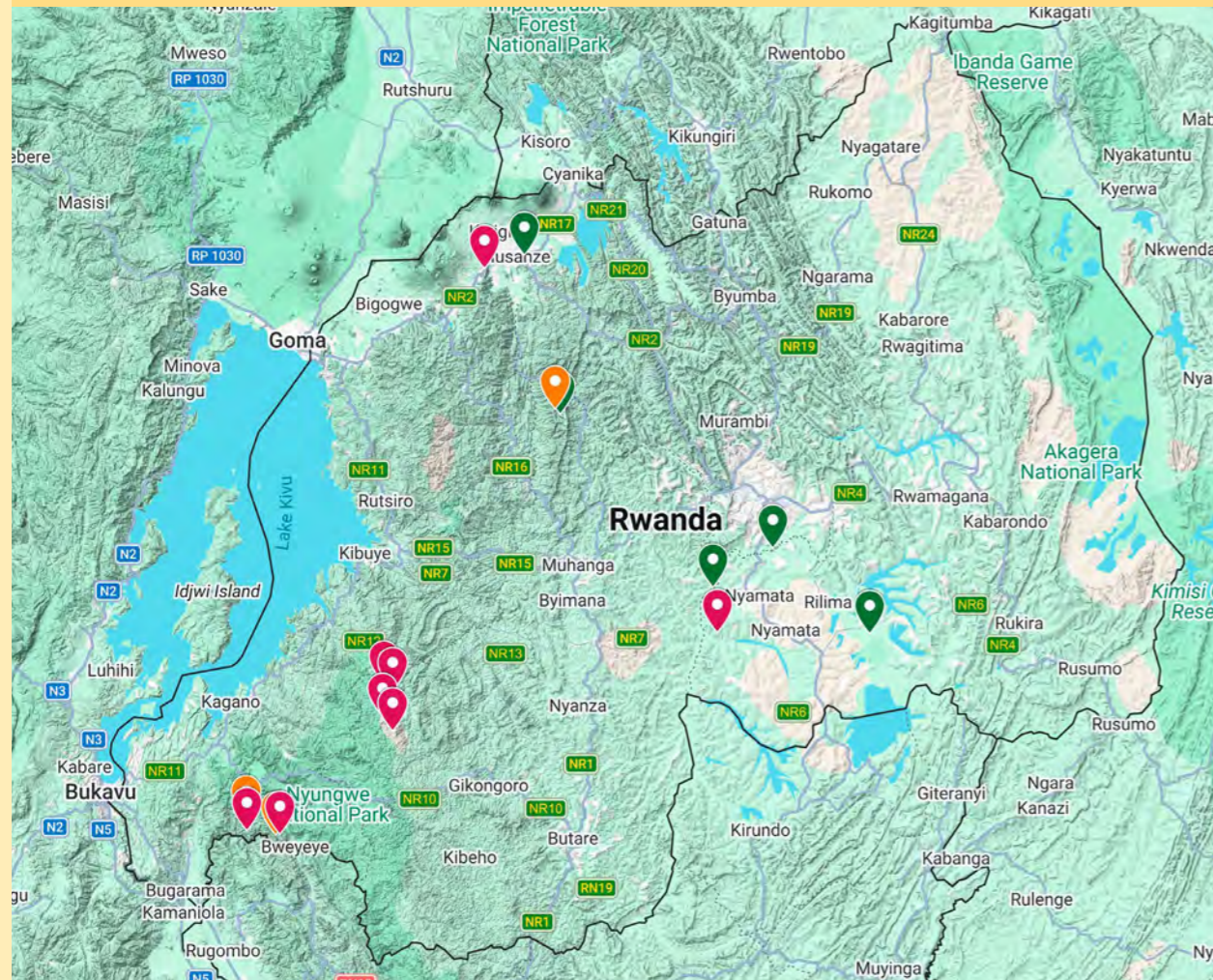
Small grants were subsequently secured and successfully implemented, increasing the organization's visibility and credibility. As its reputation grew, new opportunities emerged. More regular funding was obtained, enabling the founders, particularly Jean Claude, the current Executive Director, to leave their previous jobs and dedicate themselves fully to Nature Rwanda.

*Opportunities for collaboration soon followed, with organizations such as BirdLife International establishing partnerships. What began as a small volunteer-driven initiative gradually evolved into a recognized conservation organization committed to ensuring that every ecosystem, every species, and every community has a place in Rwanda's conservation story.*

# Geographic Coverage



*Nature Rwanda operates across key ecological landscapes in Rwanda that are critical for biodiversity conservation, wetland restoration, and community-based natural resource management.*



## Eastern Province

**Districts: Bugesera, Kirehe, Ngoma**

This region hosts extensive and ecologically valuable wetlands, including the Lake Rweru–Mugesera Wetland Complex, Akagera Wetland, and Akanyaru Wetland. These systems are among the most important sites for migratory birds in Rwanda. The area also contains Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs), making it a priority for wetland conservation. Nature Rwanda will focus on wetland restoration, biodiversity protection, and building community capacity for sustainable wetland management.

## Southern Province

**District: Muhanga, Nyamagabe**

Nature Rwanda works in Muhanga district, where the Nyabarongo Wetland IBA and the Ndiza landscape are located, including the Busaga Forest also recently recognized as a new IBA in Rwanda. This area also has fragile and degraded ecosystems that play a critical role in water catchment and biodiversity conservation. Strategic efforts here will target ecosystem restoration, catchment protection, and forest conservation, with a strong emphasis on participatory community engagement.

## Western Province

**Districts: Rusizi, Nyabihu**

In Rusizi and Nyamagabe, Nature Rwanda will work closely with communities around Nyungwe National Park, who are highly vulnerable to climate change due to their reliance on rain-fed agriculture, limited livelihood options, and frequent exposure to environmental shocks such as soil erosion, land degradation, and erratic rainfall. These challenges not only affect community wellbeing but also intensify pressure on the park's ecological integrity. In Nyabihu district, Karago Lake is a key site for migratory birds and an ecosystem under increasing pressure from human activities, including sedimentation, encroachment, and other forms of environmental degradation. This area represents a strategic opportunity to combine community-based conservation with landscape restoration in degraded adjacent hillsides.



## Northern Province

### Musanze and Burera Districts

At the twin lakes, Burera and Ruhondo, waterbird populations will be monitored alongside efforts to engage local communities in protecting these valuable habitats, which face pressure from encroachment, pollution and unsustainable land use. In Musanze, attention will focus on monitoring vultures and supporting the restored Mpenge River and its wetland, now serving as a practical learning site for riparian restoration and urban biodiversity conservation.

## Our Target Groups

### Women

**The custodians of natural resources:** Women play a crucial role in the management of natural resources at both household and community levels. They are responsible for essential activities such as collecting water, sourcing firewood, and ensuring food security, all of which are directly linked to the sustainable use of the environment. Due to their reliance on these resources, women are disproportionately affected by climate change, facing increased challenges as water sources dry up, forests shrink, and agricultural productivity declines. By prioritizing women in conservation and climate resilience efforts, Nature Rwanda aims to strengthen them to develop sustainable solutions, alternative livelihoods, and leadership opportunities in environmental decision-making.

### Young People

**The stewards of the future:** Young people are at the forefront of securing a sustainable future, yet they are the least responsible for the current environmental crisis. As climate change accelerates and biodiversity loss worsens, their future is increasingly compromised. Without urgent action, they will inherit a degraded country with limited resources and greater risks to health, food security, and economic stability. Recognizing this, Nature Rwanda seeks to engage and empower young people to become conservation champions and take an active role in shaping environmental policies and sustainable practices. With 78 percent of Rwandans under the age of 35, it is essential to place youth at the center of environmental and socio-economic recovery.

## Smallholder Farmers

**The most vulnerable:** Rwanda's population is largely agrarian, with 70% smallholder farmers who on average rely on small plots of land less than 0.5 hectares for their livelihoods. They are the most vulnerable to climate change, as unpredictable weather patterns, soil degradation, and water scarcity threaten their productivity and food security. Additionally, some unsustainable farming practices contribute to land degradation, deforestation, wetland degradation, and biodiversity loss, further exacerbating the crisis. Nature Rwanda's strategy focuses on equipping smallholder farmers with climate-smart agriculture techniques, sustainable land management practices, and alternative income-generating activities to reduce environmental impact while enhancing resilience against climate change.



# Understanding Nature Rwanda's Context



## Strengths and Achievements

### 1. Building stronger and responsible communities

Nature Rwanda has successfully built a vibrant conservation movement by establishing 25 environmental clubs in schools and 10 eco-groups in churches, creating a dedicated network of 565 members. Training programs have been conducted for 2,920 individuals, while 30,000 people have been reached through community campaigns, shaping positive attitudes, commitment, and participation in conservation. Nature Rwanda has also trained 30 conservation professionals through internships, who now contribute as specialists in NGOs and government institutions. Notably, partnerships with eight child-led Eco Clubs empower 240 children annually to lead impactful conservation projects, directly benefiting over 3,000 community members through initiatives such as rainwater harvesting, waste management, and sustainable farming practices. These efforts highlight Nature Rwanda's role in nurturing current and future conservation leaders.

### 2. Landscape and habitat restoration

Nature Rwanda has restored ecosystems by planting 865,725 trees across 2,803 hectares, creating habitats for numerous species. A standout success is the Mpenge River Restoration Project, which revitalized 22 hectares of riparian zones, bringing back over 80 bird species, and transformed the area into an eco-tourism destination and educational hub for learners.

Our conservation efforts for Hooded Vultures have included protecting nesting and breeding sites, advancing research on their movement, and training 30 vulture guardians across Rwanda. Additionally, Nature Rwanda has supported 248 former poachers around Nyungwe National Park with alternative livelihoods, reducing threats to the park and showing the potential for harmony between conservation and human well-being.

### 3. Building community climate resilience

In Bugesera District, we have introduced conservation farming to 160 smallholder farmers to address climate change and food insecurity. We have also established community seed banks which have helped communities to preserve climate-resistant crop seeds, ensuring farmers' access to quality seeds amid climate unpredictability. Additionally, our initiative to enhance community capacity for climate resilience in the Lake Kivu/Rusizi River Basin engaged 7,500 households in agroforestry.

## 4. Transforming lives; strengthening livelihoods

Nature Rwanda has achieved significant milestones in environmental restoration and community empowerment reflecting our commitment to balancing environmental conservation with sustainable development and improved community well-being.

### Over the past year:

- **Job creation:** Generated 1,521 conservation-related jobs, such as tree nursery and reforestation roles, providing both environmental and economic benefits to local communities.
- **Livelihood support:** Supported 1,040 households with sustainable livestock and farming practices, fostering financial security and climate resilience.
- **Clean water access:** Improved access to clean water for 1,500 households in Musanze District, enhancing health and quality of life while reducing pressure on the Mpenge River.
- **Micro-finance initiatives:** Empowered 250 individuals in Rusizi District through 10 savings and micro-financing groups, enabling economic growth and financial independence.

## 5. Science, advocacy and policy influence

- **Scientific Contributions:** Coordinated annual water bird counts across 10 national locations since 2022, providing crucial data to guide conservation strategies. We also worked hard to have Busaga Forest (the only breeding site for Hooded Vultures in Rwanda) recognized as an Important Bird Area (IBA), a major achievement for the forest's protection, and we have developed a management plan to ensure it is cared for in the long term. We continue to monitor four IBAs, ensuring that these special places remain protected and thrive.
- **Advocacy Milestones:** Advocated successfully for vultures to be added to Rwanda's protected species list, ensuring their preservation. We also worked with Musanze city to integrate the protection of the Mpenge River and its wetland into the city's master plan, safeguarding these ecosystems from urban development.
- **Policy Influence:** Amplified children's voices on climate issues by organizing the Children's Walk for Climate Justice in Musanze District, attracting 5,000 participants. We held consultation meetings between children and leaders discussing children's rights in the face of climate change. These recommendations were included in Rwanda's negotiation files for COP28 and COP29, ensuring global representation of youth perspectives.

## Restoration of Mpenge River – Reviving ecosystems through community-led action

*The Mpenge River, an urban river located in Musanze District, Rwanda, was once a vital waterway serving local communities and biodiversity. However, years of degradation due to unchecked agricultural encroachment, poor land use practices, and municipal waste disposal led to severe ecological decline. Riverbanks were cultivated up to the water's edge, riparian vegetation was stripped, and pollution reduced water quantity, quality and biodiversity. In 2020, Nature Rwanda launched a restoration initiative aimed at reversing this decline through a nature-based and community-centered approach.*



## Restoration approach

- **Community engagement:** The initiative began with community sensitization, building local understanding of the ecological and economic value of the river. Farmers were supported to transition away from destructive agricultural practices near the riverbanks.
- **Indigenous tree planting:** Unlike previous efforts in Rwanda that relied heavily on exotic species, Nature Rwanda focused on restoring the riverbanks using indigenous tree species. These were selected for their compatibility with the local ecosystem and their role in stabilizing soils, and supporting biodiversity.
- **Awareness and behavior change:** Awareness campaigns included school programs, community clean-ups, and training sessions on sustainable land management and conservation farming techniques.
- **Monitoring and evaluation:** Regular ecological assessments were conducted to track changes in water flow, vegetation recovery, and species diversity.

## Impact and outcomes

- **Improved hydrology:** Water flow volume increased from 1.5 m<sup>3</sup>/sec in 2020 to 3.4m<sup>3</sup>/sec in 2024, indicating improved watershed health and groundwater recharge due to restored vegetation and reduced soil erosion.
- **Biodiversity recovery:** There was a significant increase from 15 recorded bird species in 2020 to 102 species in 2024. The presence of indicator species and native pollinators reflects a significant ecological recovery.
- **Community resilience:** Local communities have adopted conservation-friendly farming practices, reduced pressure on riverbanks, and now participate in ongoing monitoring and protection of the site.

*The Mpenge River is now recognized nationally as a demonstration site for riparian restoration using indigenous species for future restoration efforts in Rwanda.*

## Weaknesses

*Despite its strengths, Nature Rwanda faces several internal challenges that limit its growth and effectiveness.*

### 1. Limited financial resources and fundraising capacity

Nature Rwanda faces financial constraints due to its reliance on restricted project-based funding, which limits flexibility and long-term sustainability. The organization lacks a diversified revenue stream and a structured fundraising strategy, making it challenging to secure unrestricted funds that could support operational growth, innovation, and resilience.

### 2. Insufficient human resources and capacity gaps

Nature Rwanda operates with a small team, with many staff members overstretched across multiple roles, which impacts efficiency and productivity. Key areas such as Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning, communications, and species conservation lack dedicated personnel, limiting our ability to track impact and effectively share results. Additionally, gaps in skills and capacity development, particularly in project management, communications, development of training manuals and data management, further hinder operational efficiency and strategic growth.

### 3. High staff attrition

Nature Rwanda faces challenges with staff retention due to limited incentives and growth opportunities - related to insufficient financial resources, resulting in trained staff leaving for better prospects. This high turnover affects our stability, institutional memory and continuity.

### 4. Weak data management and communication of impact

Inadequate data collection and analysis limit Nature Rwanda's ability to effectively showcase its success stories, progress and impact. Additionally, the lack of a clear communications strategy impedes our visibility, which reduces the extent of engagement with stakeholders including donors and partners.

### 5. Limited assets and operational infrastructure

Nature Rwanda's impact, effectiveness and operational efficiency is reduced by lack of essential assets such as vehicles, office equipment, and branding materials. Such shortages stifle our ability to carry out our programs and additionally, without strong branding materials outreach efforts are hampered, creating gaps in expertise and program implementation.

## Areas for improvement - Community voices

While the community and local leaders appreciate the work of Nature Rwanda, they also identified areas where we can improve. One of the key concerns raised was the scale of our interventions. **Many people felt that our projects, although impactful, are too small in comparison to the number of people who need to be engaged.** They emphasized the need for expansion so that more community members can benefit from our conservation efforts.

The community members raised the importance of deeper community involvement during the design phase of our interventions. While our initiatives address crucial environmental issues, some community members felt that they were not sufficiently consulted at the beginning of projects. They stressed that involving them from the planning stage would ensure that interventions are more aligned with their needs and realities.

*“We want to feel like we own the conservation initiatives rather than have projects brought to us.”*

The link between conservation and livelihoods was another critical aspect raised by communities. Many people highlighted that climate change and environmental degradation directly impact their ability to sustain themselves. They suggested that Nature Rwanda integrate livelihood components into its programs to ensure that environmental sustainability goes hand in hand with economic stability.

*“We know that when conservation supports our livelihoods, we will be more engaged and invested in protecting the environment.”*

Local leaders also noted that short-term projects might not be enough to create lasting change. They emphasised that shifting mindsets and behaviors takes time and that longer-term interventions are necessary for a true transformation.

*“Conservation requires continuous education and reinforcement,”*

And they suggested that Nature Rwanda consider structuring projects to allow for more sustained engagement.



# Opportunities

*The external environment presents numerous opportunities that Nature Rwanda can leverage to scale its impact:*

## 1. A national push for restoration and biodiversity

Rwanda is demonstrating strong leadership in restoring degraded lands and protecting biodiversity. With national commitments such as AFR100, the Green Growth and Climate Resilience Strategy, National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan, Nationally Determined Contributions, National Strategy for Transformation II, and Vision 2050, there is real momentum behind biodiversity conservation, landscape restoration, climate action, and community development. These frameworks give Nature Rwanda a supportive policy environment to expand our work, access new funding, and contribute meaningfully to national goals.

## 2. Strength in partnerships and networks

We are part of a growing regional and global community working for a sustainable future. As the BirdLife International partner in Rwanda, and through our involvement in networks such as the Alliance for Zero Extinction, the African CSOs Biodiversity Alliance, the Africa NGOs Alliance for Environmental Sustainability, and the Rwanda Climate Change and Development Network, we connect with others who share our mission. These connections strengthen our ability to share lessons, mobilize resources, and contribute to broader conservation efforts across Africa.

## 3. Alignment with global priorities

Our work speaks directly to global agendas including the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, the Sustainable Development Goals, and the Global Biodiversity Framework, UNFCCC, RAMSAR, CMS, and AEWAs among others. This alignment makes us an ideal partner for international funders and institutions looking to support grassroots, high-impact work that addresses climate change, biodiversity loss, and community resilience.



## 4. Supportive government and engaged communities

We benefit from strong relationships with local and central government institutions, as well as deep-rooted connections in the communities we serve. Local authorities and community members have shown consistent interest in co-designing and sustaining conservation projects. Their support creates a strong foundation for long-term impact and locally owned solutions.

## 5. A public that cares more than ever

Environmental awareness is on the rise in Rwanda. People are more informed and increasingly motivated to protect nature, especially young people and community leaders. This presents a valuable opportunity for Nature Rwanda to expand environmental education, foster stewardship, and mobilize collective action.

## 6. A solid foundation of trust and impact

Over the years, Nature Rwanda has built a reputation for integrity, reliability, and results. Our work has already improved livelihoods, restored ecosystems, and built community resilience. This trust gives us a unique platform to grow by attracting new partners, scaling our programs, and showing what's possible when people and nature thrive together.

## Protecting the Hooded Vulture

Busaga Forest is a 152-hectare national forest located in Muhanga District, in the southern part of Rwanda. It holds exceptional ecological significance as the only known breeding site of the Critically Endangered Hooded Vulture (*Necrosyrtes monachus*) in the country. However, increasing human pressure, particularly tree cutting for firewood and agriculture, posed a serious threat to both the forest ecosystem and this critical vulture population. Nest destruction and habitat fragmentation placed the Hooded Vulture at risk of local extinction. In response, Nature Rwanda initiated a multi-phased conservation program focused on habitat protection, community engagement, and species monitoring, with the ultimate goal of securing long-term conservation outcomes for both the Busaga Forest and the species it supports.

### Key Interventions

#### Baseline vulture census

With funding from the African Bird Club, Nature Rwanda conducted the first Hooded Vulture census in 2022, establishing a critical population baseline. The census recorded 128 individual birds, confirming the importance of Busaga as a nationally significant breeding site. Nature Rwanda would like to repeat the census every three years to track population trends and guide conservation action.

#### Community engagement and forest surveillance

Supported by the Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences and the Rufford Foundation, Nature Rwanda led community sensitization campaigns to raise awareness of the forest's importance. In parallel, a Site Support Team composed of local community members was established and trained to monitor and report illegal activities such as tree cutting and nest destruction. This has improved forest protection and strengthened community stewardship of natural resources.

#### Participatory forest management planning

A forest management plan was developed in partnership with local communities and government stakeholders. The plan includes targeted removal of invasive plant species and measures to encourage natural regeneration of native forest cover which is an essential condition for the survival of the Hooded Vulture and other biodiversity, demarcation of the buffers zone, supporting local communities through livelihood interventions, and using the forest as an Environmental Education and Visitor Center.

### Impact

- 1. Species conservation:** Safeguarding the only breeding site of the Hooded Vulture in Rwanda, a globally endangered species.
- 2. Habitat Restoration:** Removal of invasive species is enabling the recovery of indigenous forest vegetation.
- 3. Community Empowerment:** Site Support Teams and community-led initiatives are driving grassroots forest protection.
- 4. Policy Influence:** Progress is being made toward formal recognition and legal co-management of the forest, with long-term implications for conservation governance in Rwanda.

*An ecological assessment has been completed to support the designation of Busaga Forest as an Important Bird Area (IBA). Nature Rwanda is currently in the process of acquiring a formal co-management permit to oversee the forest's protection and to implement the forest management plan in collaboration with local authorities and communities.*

# Threats

*Several external challenges pose risks to Nature Rwanda's ability to achieve its mission:*

## 1. Limited donor confidence in local NGOs

For a number of years, there has been limited donor confidence in local NGOs, as some donors tend to favor larger international organizations over local ones. This preference restricts funding opportunities and could potentially make it challenging for Nature Rwanda to secure consistent financial support. Additionally, restricted donor funding often focuses on specific programmatic areas, leaving core funding gaps which hinder our ability to maintain operational stability and growth.

## 2. Mismatch between immediate community needs vs long-term conservation outcomes

There is a growing negative community mindset and attitude towards conservation, as some local communities expect immediate financial and social benefits rather than long-term environmental benefits of conservation. This expectation complicates efforts to promote sustainable practices and gain support for conservation initiatives. Additionally, a growing disconnect between people and nature is fueling unsustainable resource use, as communities prioritize short-term gains over the preservation of natural ecosystems. This challenge could potentially undermine the effectiveness of conservation strategies and the long-term sustainability of Nature Rwanda's programs.

## 3. Competition for limited resources

In Rwanda, there is competition for limited resources within the conservation sector. With numerous NGOs vying for the same funding and partnerships, Nature Rwanda must contend with a crowded landscape which reduces the availability of financial support and strategic collaborations. This can limit Nature Rwanda's ability to secure necessary unrestricted funding, hindering our capacity to scale our impact and achieve our conservation goals.

## 4. Regulatory and bureaucratic challenges

There are some regulatory and bureaucratic challenges that could potentially stifle Nature Rwanda's programs. Delays in government approvals and inconsistencies in regulations (e.g. agriculture vs conservation policies) often disrupt project implementation timelines, not only creating uncertainty, but also slowing down implementation of key conservation initiatives. For bird conservation in particular, agriculture occupies a large landscape that conservation awareness should also target. So, there is a need to harmonize both policies. These bureaucratic barriers can increase operational costs, limit efficiency, and create obstacles to achieving project goals and objectives in a timely manner.

*"The challenge is not really the legal or regulatory framework, which generally provides space for NGOs to operate. It's more about how some local leaders perceive the role of NGOs. At the district level, NGOs are sometimes viewed as external actors rather than development partners, particularly when working directly with communities. That can create misunderstandings about our intentions, roles, and approaches, and those relationships can be challenging to navigate."*

## 5. High dependence on natural resources

A key threat to Nature Rwanda's interventions is the high dependence on natural resources, as local communities rely heavily on forests and ecosystems for their livelihoods. This dependence places continuous pressure on biodiversity, leading to overuse and unsustainable use of natural resources, habitat destruction, and degradation of ecosystems. This further complicates conservation efforts and threatens the long-term health and sustainability of the natural environments Nature Rwanda aims to protect.

## Alignment with national and global conservation priorities

This strategic plan aligns closely with Rwanda's national priorities and international conservation frameworks. It supports the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) by promoting nature-based solutions for climate resilience and contributes to the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) through habitat restoration and species protection. The plan also advances the National Strategy for Transformation (NST1 and NST2) by reinforcing environmental sustainability and community-led natural resource management, in line with Rwanda's Environment and Climate Change Policy.

At the global level, the plan supports key targets of the Global Biodiversity Framework, contributes to Rwanda's pledge under the Bonn Challenge to restore two million hectares, and aligns with the AFR100 initiative. It also reflects the goals of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration and the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goals 13, 14, and 15. Its strong connection to BirdLife International's strategy ensures that national actions contribute directly to global efforts to conserve species, protect habitats, and build resilient ecosystems.

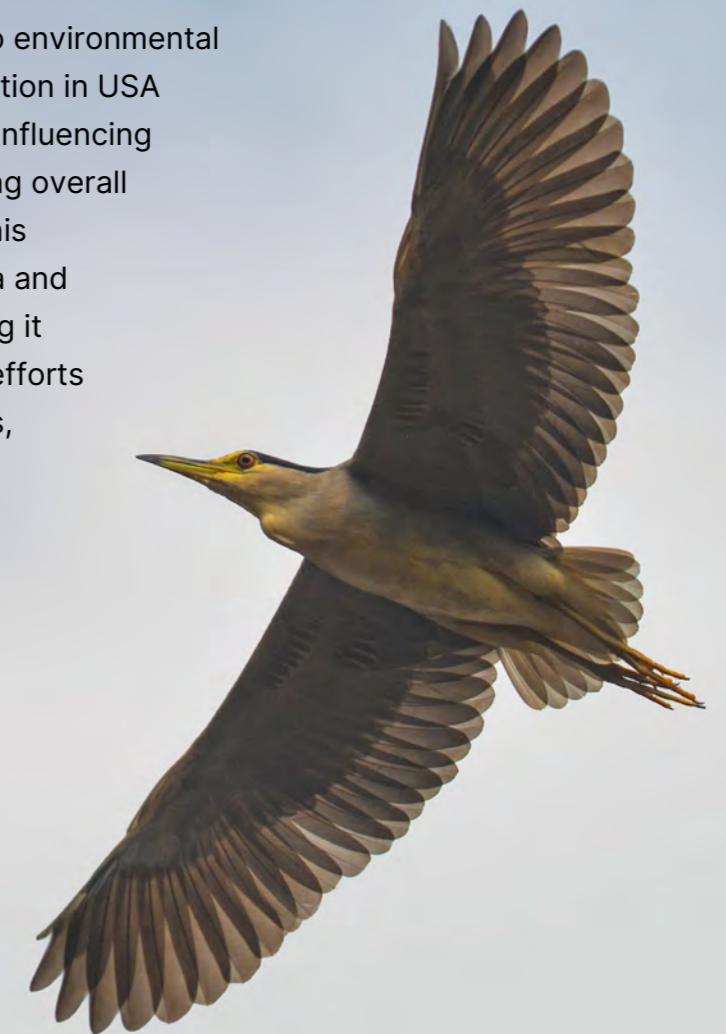
## Strategic partnership with BirdLife

The partnership with BirdLife International is key to making this plan a success because it fits well with BirdLife's own goals. The plan's focus on protecting threatened birds, key habitats, and promoting sustainable land use matches BirdLife's priorities. It also emphasises involving communities and embedding conservation in national policies, which aligns with BirdLife's approach. This close alignment means our work will be well coordinated, effective, and contribute to both local and global conservation efforts.

## The shifting global funding landscape

*Shifts in the US political economy regarding global development funding including the withdrawal of USAID funding has had a significant impact on Nature Rwanda and the availability of funding for conservation programs in Rwanda and globally.*

As one of the world's largest donors to environmental and development programs, the reduction in USA support has also led to a ripple effect influencing other donors and behaviors, decreasing overall funding for development programs. This could potentially strain Nature Rwanda and other NGOs' financial resources making it challenging to continue conservation efforts and maintain biodiversity. Beyond this, the shift in donor priorities will push Nature Rwanda to diversify funding sources, strengthen local partnerships and explore alternative funding mechanisms to mitigate the impact of reduced USAID and other donor support. Nature Rwanda will need to strengthen its advocacy and communication strategies to attract new donors.





# Strategic Framework

## Problem Statement

*Rwanda faces a critical challenge of loss of biodiversity and degradation of fragile ecosystems, threatening both the environment and the livelihoods of communities. Ecosystem degradation is driven by unsustainable practices, including deforestation, encroachment on protected areas, and overexploitation of natural resources.*

The impacts of climate change, including extreme weather events, erratic rainfall, flooding, and landslides, exacerbate these challenges, leaving both ecosystems and communities increasingly vulnerable and reducing their resilience.

Furthermore, limited community awareness - gaps in knowledge, attitudes, skills, and ownership of conservation initiatives, undermine efforts to protect natural resources and drive community participation in sustainable natural resource management. Additionally, conservation efforts tend to focus heavily on legally protected areas such as national parks while other critical habitats such as wetlands, private forests, and riverbanks are often forgotten. These areas still support important biodiversity and ecosystem services but they receive less funding and enforcement.

Weak enforcement of environmental laws and limited coordination among stakeholders also pose challenges to Nature Rwanda conservation efforts.



**Thriving Communities in Biodiverse and Resilient Landscapes**

**To conserve ecosystems and strengthen community-led conservation efforts to promote sustainable socio-economic transformation in Rwanda**



## **Purpose - Why We Exist**

**Nature Rwanda exists to conserve ecosystems while fostering a sustainable future that drives social and economic transformation in communities. We are committed to addressing the challenges that threaten the coexistence of humans and nature. This connects people to nature and enables a balanced and thriving environment for people and nature.**



## **Value proposition**

- **Community-led and community-driven:** We strengthen communities at the grassroots to take charge of their conservation efforts, ensuring that solutions come from within and are tailored to their unique needs and circumstances.
- **We focus on underserved areas and under-recognized species:** We focus on underlooked and forgotten conservation priorities. We ensure that critical ecosystems and biodiversity receive the attention they deserve.
- **Lasting and sustainable impact:** The heart of our mission is a commitment to creating long-term outcomes, fostering resilience and adaptability within communities and ecosystems to meet both present and future challenges.
- **Inspiring and nurturing young talent in conservation:** Young people are catalysts for change. We are building a generation of committed conservation leaders who will champion environmental conservation for decades to come.

## **Values**

**Holism:** We recognize the strong connection between people and nature. Healthy ecosystems sustain livelihoods, while people’s actions shape the health of the environment. We work with communities to care for nature in ways that support both people and the planet.

**Trustworthy:** We take responsibility for our actions and outcomes, uphold transparency and deliver on our commitments. Trust is the foundation of the relationships with people we work with.

**Agility:** The world is changing as well as the nature of the challenges we face. We remain open-minded, flexible and responsive, essential to staying relevant and impactful in a rapidly changing world while being true to our mission.

**Impact:** Everything we do is driven by the desire to make a difference. Whether it is conservation or strengthening communities, we ensure that our efforts are allocated to where they are highly needed, and measure our success by the positive change we bring to people and nature.

**Resilience:** Conservation takes time and it is not always easy. We know that our efforts today will shape a better tomorrow; therefore we never give up.



# Theory of Change

*Nature Rwanda envisions thriving communities living in harmony with nature by integrating community livelihoods with ecosystem and landscape restoration.*

This approach begins with community engagement and environmental awareness raising, empowering people with the knowledge and motivation to adopt improved agricultural practices and sustainable use of natural resources. By promoting and strengthening nature-based livelihoods and supporting the sustainable use of natural resources, communities build secure and resilient livelihoods while contributing to environmental restoration.

These interconnected outcomes create a positive cycle where ecological balance is maintained - ecosystems regain their health, communities benefit from secure and resilient livelihoods supported by nature's resources.

Ultimately, this interconnected system enables a balance where communities thrive while protecting and benefitting from their natural environment - sustainable development and environmental conservation.

## Nature Rwanda believes all of these will be possible if:

- 1 Raising community environmental knowledge and awareness leads to behavior change and increased participation in conservation activities including the adoption of sustainable land use practices.
- 2 Nature-based livelihoods provide sufficient economic benefits to incentivize and catalyze communities to proactively and directly engage in conservation, and that natural resources are used in a way that does not lead to further degradation.
- 3 Similarly, integrating ecosystem restoration with livelihoods creates a cycle where both environmental and economic benefits continue to grow.
- 4 Restoration efforts lead to successful recovery of degraded ecosystems and improved biodiversity.
- 5 There are sufficient resources and a conducive policy environment is maintained to support conservation efforts.



**NATURE  
RWANDA**  
*Connecting People With Nature*

**Stronger well  
resourced  
organization**

Conserve  
threatened  
species and their  
habitats

Restore and  
protect degraded  
ecosystems and  
landscapes

Strengthen  
community  
capacity and  
participation

Improved  
practices and  
sustainable use of  
natural resources

Improved and  
diversified nature  
based livelihoods

Landscapes  
are restored

Species and  
their habitats are  
protected

Communities have  
secure and resilient  
livelihoods from  
healthy natural  
resources

Ecosystems are  
restored and  
conserved

**BIODIVERSITY IS  
IMPROVED**

**Thriving  
communities  
living in  
harmony with  
nature**

# Goals, Objectives and Targets

## Goal 1: Conserve threatened species and their habitats

### *What success looks like:*

Populations of threatened species including the Hooded Vultures show measurable growth, water quality improves, and environmental threats diminish. Restored habitats provide sustainable environments for wildlife and communities, ensuring ecological health for future generations.

### By 2031

#### Objectives

1. Rehabilitate and restore degraded habitats - forests and wetlands to increase species populations.
2. Maintain the integrity of forests and wetlands to support biodiversity recovery.
3. Increase the awareness and participation of communities in conservation efforts.

#### Targets

1. Achieve a 30% increase in populations of species of conservation concern
2. Rehabilitate 50% (or 15,000 hectares) of Lake Rweru-Mugesera wetland complex through assisted natural regeneration and removal of invasive species.
3. Restore and manage Busaga forests in collaboration with local communities and government.
4. Ensure 90% of households in target areas are informed about sustainable use of wetlands and forests.
5. Recruit and train 150 site support team members to lead conservation efforts around IBAs.

## Goal 2: Restore and protect degraded ecosystems and landscapes

### *What success looks like*

Degraded ecosystems are restored to vibrant, functional states with thriving biodiversity. Fragile landscapes are rehabilitated, sustainable land use practices are adopted, and communities are empowered to adapt to and mitigate climate challenges.

### By 2031

#### Objectives

1. Promote landscape restoration, catchment protection and soil erosion control in Ndiza landscapes and Ruhwa River catchment to stabilize land and protect against degradation.
2. Increase the availability of high-quality indigenous tree seeds and seedlings to support restoration and biodiversity conservation.

#### Targets

1. Construct ditches across 1,000 hectares in target landscapes to reduce soil erosion and improve land stability.
2. Implement community-led reforestation initiatives across 4,000 hectares, planting 1.5 million trees to restore degraded lands.
3. Establish a Tree Lab-Center for indigenous seed management, seedling production, and distribution to restoration projects.
4. Develop and disseminate climate resilience materials (e.g. guides, radio programs) to reach 10,000 people annually with practical adaptation and mitigation strategies.
5. Form and support 10 community tree steward groups in target areas to lead and sustain restoration efforts.
6. Support 10,000 households to adopt climate-resilient land use practices and mitigation strategies, building their capacity to withstand climate impacts.



## Goal 3: Promote sustainable livelihoods for economic development and environmental conservation

### *What success looks like*

Communities thrive economically while preserving and restoring natural resources. Nature Rwanda and communities co-create initiatives that support sustainable livelihoods, reduce over-reliance on natural resources, and strengthen community resilience against climate and environmental challenges. Communities benefit from natural resources and in turn are committed to conservation.

### By 2031

#### Objectives

1. Educate community members on climate change impacts, fostering understanding and the development of local mitigation and adaptation strategies.
2. Promote environmentally friendly livelihood opportunities and value chains to reduce the reliance on natural resources.

#### Targets

1. Support 180 households with income generating activities and developing value chains to ensure market for key products including bee keeping, fruit farming and tree nurseries.
2. Support 80 households around Important Bird Areas (IBAs) with rainwater harvesting systems to improve access to clean water and reduce reliance on wetlands.
3. Support 1,500 farmers to access funding through community-led revolving funds, to promote sustainable farming.



# Goal 4: Strengthen policy influence for conservation and restoration

**Influence and contribute to the development, implementation, and enforcement of policies that support environmental conservation, ecosystem restoration, and sustainable natural resource management in Rwanda.**

## *What Success Looks Like*

Key policies, strategies, and plans reflect nature-based solutions and community-inclusive conservation approaches, while local community voices and evidence from the field inform policy decisions and implementation. Strong partnerships exist between Nature Rwanda, government agencies, civil society, and research institutions on policy advocacy.

## By 2031

**Objective 1: Increase Nature Rwanda's engagement in relevant policy processes.**

### Targets

1. Achieve active participation on at least six national and district-level policy platforms and technical working groups annually.
2. Establish and formalize strategic partnerships with a minimum of 15 government agencies, civil society organizations, and academic institutions.
3. Convene at least 10 policy dialogues, roundtables, or learning events over five years, reaching a combined audience of no fewer than 500 stakeholders to elevate awareness on priority conservation issues.

**Objective 2: Promote evidence-based policy advocacy using field data and research.**

### Targets:

1. Produce and disseminate a minimum of 10 policy briefs, position papers, and case studies derived from program data and field research by the end of the five-year period.
2. Collect and analyze ecosystem and community well-being data annually to demonstrate the nexus between ecosystem health and climate resilience.
3. Secure at least three media features or press releases per year that amplify conservation messages and policy priorities.

**Objective 3: Strengthen community voice and participation in environmental governance.**

### Targets

1. Train and support at least 30 community leaders and local groups to effectively participate in environmental decision-making forums per year.
2. Conduct a minimum of one training and awareness session per year on environmental rights and policy processes in each target district or community cluster.
3. Document and disseminate at least 30 local success stories that demonstrate the impact of community-led conservation efforts by the end of the strategic plan period.

# Strategy Resourcing and Implementation

## *What success looks like*

Nature Rwanda will consistently deliver impactful and scalable projects and programs. Nature Rwanda will have strong financial and human resource systems, enabling organizational growth and effectiveness in delivery.



## Team

With a well-equipped and cohesive team operating under a clear and organized structure, with strengthened internal systems and strategic partnerships, Nature Rwanda will have the capacity to implement its strategy. This, supported by robust management practices, enhanced core functions, and a conducive work environment and culture will ensure that the right people are in place to grow the organization and achieve impact.

## Objectives

1. Develop and implement a clear human resource recruitment and management plan to ensure that the structure of the organization is sufficient to implement the strategy to realize the mission and achieve impact by 2027.
2. Recruit and fill key gaps in the structure with the right skills and competencies to implement the strategy by 2027.
3. Strengthen core organizational functions by strengthening staff capacity and professional development to improve competencies, productivity and impact by 2031.
4. Develop and implement a staff retention strategy to reduce attrition rates and create a supportive, motivating, and rewarding work environment by 2027.

## Targets

- Enhance capacity in communications, monitoring, and evaluation to improve outreach, impact measurement, and transparency.
- Recruit key positions, including Communications, Fundraising, M&E, Logistics and Procurement, Admin and HR, and two program managers to address current capacity gaps.
- Foster staff development through regular training and mentorship programs to keep staff engaged and skilled and establish clear career progression paths with opportunities for professional growth and development.

- Introduce competitive remuneration packages, including benefits such as health insurance, training opportunities, and performance-based incentives.
- Foster a positive organizational culture that emphasizes recognition, teamwork, and work-life balance.
- Create a clear organizational structure with defined roles and responsibilities.

## Fundraising and communication

Nature Rwanda is a growing organization with a growing team. As our operations expand to address the increasing environmental challenges, there is need for focused and targeted resources to meet this growth. Nature Rwanda will focus on strengthening its core long-term partnerships, adequately communicating its impact, diversify its sources of funding, and increase the amount of unrestricted funding in its budget to provide greater flexibility and internal investment in staff capacity.

### Objectives

1. Increase unrestricted funding to enable Nature Rwanda to strengthen core functions and build a strong team.
2. Diversify and expand Nature Rwanda's income by increasing revenue by 10% annually, ensuring stability and flexibility in program implementation.
3. Strengthen and grow partnerships with funding partners.
4. Establish a contingency fund that can sustain Nature Rwanda's operations for 18 months.
5. Strengthen Nature Rwanda's communication capacity to enhance brand visibility, support fundraising efforts, and effectively share knowledge and impact with stakeholders.

### Targets

- Develop a clear fundraising strategy to inform Nature Rwanda's fundraising efforts and interventions
- Increase Nature Rwanda's income by 10% annually through targeted fundraising campaigns, cultivating donor relationships, and diversifying revenue streams.
- Build and maintain a contingency or reserve fund capable of sustaining Nature Rwanda's operational needs for 18 months in the absence of new revenue.
- Cultivate at least three new relationships with donors.
- Ensure that 30% of Nature Rwanda's total annual budget is covered by unrestricted funding to support organizational flexibility and long-term sustainability.
- Develop and implement a communications strategy with clear goals and objectives to increase visibility through social media, the website, and other digital platforms, ensuring consistent and impactful engagement with stakeholders.

## Knowledge management

Create a Robust Knowledge Management System: Increase our monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) capacity for knowledge development and to share insights, best practices, and research with partners and the wider conservation community.

# Partnerships

Develop new and strengthen existing partnerships that facilitate and enhance Nature Rwanda's impact, support conservation, and drive long-term organizational growth.

## Objective 1

Establish and nurture partnerships with key stakeholders, including government offices, NGOs, universities, and private sector actors, to advance conservation and sustainable development goals.

### Targets

- Formalize at least 20 new strategic partnerships with government agencies, NGOs, universities, and private sector actors within five years.
- Maintain active engagement with all existing partners through annual meetings and joint activities, ensuring 90% participation rate.
- Facilitate the co-development of at least 20 collaborative events, conservation initiatives by year five.

## Objective 2

Strengthen collaborations with local communities and community-based organizations for inclusive conservation and ensure ownership and sustainable natural resource management.

### Targets

- Engage a minimum of 50 community groups in partnership agreements within five years.
- Support community partners in leading at least 50 locally driven conservation initiatives by the end of the strategic period.
- Conduct annual capacity-building workshops for community partners, reaching at least 50 community representatives annually.

## Objective 3

Build relationships with corporate organizations and funders to secure diverse and sustainable financial support for Nature Rwanda.

### Targets

- Secure funding commitments from at least 10 new corporate partners or donors over five years, contributing a minimum of 30% of the annual organizational budget by year five.
- Develop and implement a corporate engagement strategy by the end of year one, reviewed and updated annually.
- Organize annual corporate partnership forums or events to foster relationship-building, with participation of at least 20 companies or funding entities each year.
- Achieve at least 80% satisfaction rate among partners in annual feedback surveys by year five.

# Budget

*This budget in USD incorporates a 5% annual increase to account for inflation and growing operational needs, while maintaining a 30% allocation for operations and management.*

Goal	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031
1 Conserve threatened species and their habitats	140,000	147,000	154,350	162,068	170,171
2 Restore and protect degraded ecosystems and landscapes	168,000	176,400	185,220	194,481	204,205
3 Promote sustainable livelihoods for economic development and environmental conservation	196,000	205,800	216,090	226,894	238,239
4 Strengthen policy influence for conservation and restoration	56,000	58,800	61,740	64,827	68,068
Team and operations	240,000	252,000	264,600	277,830	291,722
<b>Total Annual Budget</b>	<b>800,000</b>	<b>840,000</b>	<b>882,000</b>	<b>926,100</b>	<b>972,405</b>





**NATURE  
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