Current rates of species and habitat loss, and increasing human demands on natural resources, require that sites are prioritised for action. BirdLife's IBA programme represents the most extensive attempt to identify global priorities for conservation at the scale of individual sites. Whilst bird-based, the intention is that IBAs conserve biodiversity other than just birds; however, their ability to do this has not been tested quantitatively.

In Uganda, we were able to test how well forest IBAs ‘capture’ diversity in other groups, using a remarkable fine-scale dataset on the distribution of five different taxonomic groups across 50 of Uganda’s forest reserves, 13 of which are also IBAs. We found that the 13 forests selected as IBAs contained as many species of forest birds, small mammals, butterflies, large moths and woody plants, as did a priority set of forests (of equal total area) selected using detailed inventory data on each group.

These results encouraged our participation in a project funded by Danida (Danish Government – the ENRECA project) and the RSPB to collect and collate biodiversity data from a broader range of sites across Uganda, including 29 of Uganda’s 30 IBAs, and incorporating savannah and wetland as well as forest sites.

Other collaborators in this project included the Makerere University Institute of Environment and Natural Resources, NatureUganda, Copenhagen and Cambridge Universities, The Wildlife Conservation Society and the Natural History Museum (London).

Data collected were used to assess the conservation value of Uganda’s IBAs for taxonomic groups other than birds. Results showed that a minimum of 70% of the country’s butterfly and woody plant species, 86% of its dragonflies and 97% of its bird species were represented in Uganda’s IBAs. They also included 21 of Uganda’s 22 major vegetation types, and showed high representation of butterflies and dragonflies of conservation concern. Whilst the IBA network does not capture all of Uganda’s biodiversity, it represents an extremely important component, and provides a central core of sites on which to build.

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Below: Achilles Byaruhanga, Executive Officer for NatureUganda, in the field.

Cumulative capture of species in forests picked by choosing first the forest with the highest number of species, then the forest with the most as yet unrepresented species, and so on, until all species were represented once (open squares). Solid triangle represents species captured in 13 forest IBAs.
Shoebill – widely, but very locally, distributed in large wetlands throughout Uganda.


