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## NEWS RELEASE

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## **Innovative Partnership Serves Communities, Supports Wetlands, Saves Cranes *Darwin Initiative Grant Funds Family Planning Services & Climate Smart Agriculture Action***

*Rukiga, Uganda – Aug. 25, 2023* – An innovative partnership to serve communities, support conservation, and save cranes has been extended to provide further training in climate-smart sustainable livelihoods and deliver the improved health services requested by the people of Rukiga, Uganda. The partnership, funded by the UK Government through “The Darwin Initiative”, was formed in 2021. The Darwin Initiative has recently extended its funding for an additional three years. Partners include Margaret Pyke Trust, Rugarama Hospital, the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, the International Crane Foundation (ICF), and the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT).

The partnership was formed to address barriers to family planning services and respond to community members’ requests for sustainable incomes that would help ease pressures on their families, their communities and local environment. While the healthcare partners focus on the healthcare service provision, including contraception and other family health services; the conservation organizations deliver innovative conservation interventions, including training on climate-smart agricultural practices that not only help with wetland conservation, but also provide local farmers with the opportunity for greater crop yields and better incomes to help combat poverty.

The wetlands of Uganda are rich in biodiversity and are important for both people and animals. The Endangered Grey Crown Crane, which is Uganda’s national bird, uses these wetlands as a critical nesting habitat.

Restoring degraded ecosystems, including wetlands, is not only critical to prevent the extinction of Endangered species, but also necessary for the health and well-being of the people who live in and rely on the wetland for food and water security, livelihoods, and to slow the increasing number and scale of floods, a further impact of climate change.

“This integrated project is complex, but these issues are overlapping,” said Uwimbabazi Sarah, Uganda Manager, Margaret Pyke Trust. “By supporting the community members’ ability to choose the size of their families, providing better health care overall, and teaching better ways to farm, we believe this project will lead to improved wetland, crane and human health.”

“The ICF/EWT Partnership joined this partnership because we’ve seen the Rushebeya-Kanyabaha wetland in southwest Uganda reduce in size by 33% between 1986 and 2020, which significantly decreased the habitat for the Grey Crowned Cranes,” said Dr. Adalbert Aine-omucunguzi, ICF’s East Africa Regional Manager. “This reduction is largely driven by expanding agriculture required to meet the needs of the local community, who have limited alternatives. The ICF/EWT Partnership knew we had the tools to train community members to use more sustainable options.”

For the past two years, this innovative approach has enabled the partnership to effectively and sustainably respond to these issues and produce tangible benefits for the wetland, cranes, and more than 13,500 people in Rwamucucu Sub-county of Rukiga district. To date, this project has achieved the following significant gains:

- Delivered more than 6,400 healthcare services, including almost 2,000 family planning services;
- Trained 248 households in climate-smart sustainable agricultural practices;
- Established Conservation and Health Agreements covering 200 hectares of wetland;
- Planted Napier Grass on hillslopes and established nurseries to reduce soil erosion and improve water clarity (which has increased visibility from 19cm to 55.6cm based on turbidity tests);
- Increased the number of breeding pairs of cranes in the project site by 200% (from 11 to 33); and
- Increased the number of crane chicks fledging by 146% (from 13 to 32).

“Before starting this project we undertook extensive research, to help shape the project activities, and found the community have a deep understanding of the connections between their own health and the health of their local environment,” said Professor Susannah Mayhew, London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine. “People spoke about how wetlands slow floods, provide clean water and food, like mudfish, and provide materials needed for baskets and mats.”

The partners also learned how climate change is affecting the community with unpredictable seasons and rainfall patterns leading to crop failures, and that the floods and heavy rains are destroying crops, leading to malnutrition. Relatedly, many people spoke about the challenges of large families, which diminish available farmland over time as parents subdivide land for their children’s inheritance, make it harder to feed everyone. This is exacerbated by the lack of quality family planning information and services, leading to larger families than desired.

Additionally, soil erosion, tree felling, and a lack of anti-erosion measures further reduce soil quality and crop yields, increasing the need to convert remaining fragments of the wetland into agricultural land. Communities also reported how low incomes and poverty lead to gender-based violence (which puts women at greater risk of unintended pregnancy).

“It was clear that an integrated approach to address both conservation and health needs was required to successfully resolve the challenges facing the communities living in and around Rukiga’s wetlands,” said Dr Esther Rutaremwa, Medical Superintendent, Rugarama Hospital.

Early indications from the academic partners highlight the partnership is working: “This program is generating greater conservation, health and gender outcomes than has been possible from more traditional single sector projects,” said Kerry Morrison, ICF VP International: Director of Africa / EWT Head of Africa Conservation. “To date the growth in crane numbers in this project area is higher than in other sites in Uganda.”

Further details of these developments will be published in the next few months.

“We are thrilled the Darwin Initiative has provided us with a second grant, enabling us to expand and scale up our work for the next three years,” said David Johnson, Chief Executive of the Margaret Pyke Trust.

Identified as a “Population, Health & Environment”, or PHE project, this multi-sectoral partnership approach to biodiversity conservation, human health, and sustainable livelihoods will allow the partnership to provide detailed data of the greater conservation, health and gender outcomes from this approach. The evaluation framework has been developed by the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine. The partnership plans to share this evidence, as this project has significance far beyond Uganda.

## **About Darwin Initiative**

The Darwin Initiative is a UK government grants scheme that helps protect biodiversity, the natural environment and the local communities that live alongside it in developing countries. Since 1992, the Darwin Initiative has awarded over £164m to more than 1,143 projects across 159 countries.

## **About the Margaret Pyke Trust**

Founded in 1968, the Margaret Pyke Trust is unique global non-governmental organisation embedded in the human health, biodiversity and climate sectors. The Trust trains healthcare professionals in sexual and reproductive health, establishes partnerships with other conservation and health organisations to develop projects simultaneously improving health services, providing livelihoods and supporting the conservation of biodiversity and uses its unique status and expertise to change biodiversity and climate policy to support reproductive choice. Find out more at [www.margaretpyke.org](http://www.margaretpyke.org).

## **About Rugarama Hospital**

Rugarama Hospital is a 250-bed hospital serving an area of around 140,000 people in the town of Kabale in south-west Uganda, close to the Rwandan border. The hospital provides quality care to local communities at an affordable cost, through curative and preventative medicine, operating under the Diocese of Kigezi and within the Uganda Protestant Medical Bureau. The hospital is particularly well regarded for its work in paediatric care, dental, eyecare and maternal and child health.

## **About London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine**

The London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) is renowned for its research, postgraduate studies and continuing education in public and global health. LSHTM has an annual research income of more than £190 million and is one of the highest-rated research institutions in the UK. LSHTM has an international presence and collaborative ethos, and is uniquely placed to help shape health policy and translate research findings into tangible impact. LSHTM has around 3,500 staff conducting research in over 100 countries, and around 4,700 students — all working with a collective purpose to improve health worldwide.

## **About International Crane Foundation**

The International Crane Foundation (ICF) works worldwide to conserve cranes and the ecosystems, watersheds, and flyways on which they depend. We provide knowledge, leadership, and inspiration to engage people in resolving threats to cranes and their diverse landscapes. From its nearly 300-acre headquarters in Baraboo, Wisconsin, the ICF reach extends across the globe, with offices and staff in China, Uganda, Kenya, Zambia and South Africa, as well as Texas. It works through strong partnerships with local organizations, governments, universities, businesses and others in these regions. More than 125 ICF staff and associates work with a network of hundreds of specialists in 50 countries on five continents. The Foundation is committed to a future where all 15 of the world's crane species are secure. Through the charisma of cranes, ICF envisions a future where people work together for wild crane populations and the landscapes they depend on – and by doing so, find new pathways to sustain our water, land, and livelihoods. Visit [savingcranes.org](http://savingcranes.org) for more information and to support the work of ICF.

## **About the Endangered Wildlife Trust**

Founded in 1973, the Endangered Wildlife Trust is dedicated to conserving threatened species and ecosystems in southern and East Africa to the benefit of all. We are driven by a team of passionate and dedicated conservationists working through 13 specialised programmes across southern and East Africa, each falling under one of our three key strategic pillars: Saving species, conserving habitats, and benefitting people. Our critical work includes conducting applied research, supporting community-led conservation, training and building capacity, addressing human-wildlife conflict, monitoring threatened species, and establishing safe spaces for wildlife range expansion. The EWT works with key partners, including communities, businesses, landowners, academic institutions, and governments, to create a sustainable future for wildlife and people. Find out more at [www.ewt.org.za](http://www.ewt.org.za).