



Second half Issue

# THE BOG

## ONDIRI WETLAND NEWSLETTER

### WHAT HOSTING THE WORLD WETLANDS DAY NATIONAL EVENTS MEANS FOR ONDIRI WETLAND.



By David Wakogy—Founder & Coordinator Friends of Ondiri Wetland

**W**orld Wetlands Day is celebrated every 2<sup>nd</sup> day of February under the Ramsar convention; the convention aims at promotion of conservation and sustainable utilization of wetlands. The journey began in a small town called Ramsar on the coast of the Caspian Sea in Iran when an inter-governmental treaty providing a framework for conservation and use of Wetlands and their resources was signed. This was on the 2nd day of February 1971; 50 years later the spirit of this convention lives on though Wetlands continue to disappear ten times faster than forests.

Kenya ratified the convention in 1990, Six Wetland areas in Kenya have been designated as Ramsar Wetlands of International Importance due to the significant habitats encompassed by these Wetlands; Lake Nakuru, Lake Naivasha, Lake Elementaita, Lake Bogoria Lake Baringo and the Tana River Delta. Wetlands occupy approximately three to four percent of the Kenya's landmass.

Each year, just like the rest of the world, Kenya commemorates World Wetlands Day to mark the adoption of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands in Iran like the rest of the World. The convention came in force in Kenya in 1990. Hitherto, the country has been celebrating the event annually on 2nd February. National Environment Management Authority is the agency in charge of organizing WWD's national event in Kenya.

In 2020 the event was celebrated at Enapuiyapui Wetland, Nakuru County in Kiptunga Forest, Eastern Mau, Nakuru County under the theme, "Wetlands and Biodiversity" while in 2021 the event was commemorated at Sabaki Estuary in Kilifi County under the theme, "Wetlands and Water" the next year's event shall be held at Ondiri Wetland in Kikuyu town, Kiambu

County under the theme, "Wetlands action for people and nature."

Ondiri Wetland shall be hosting this national event considering the government's focus on the Athi-Sabaki ecosystem, Ondiri which is the source of Nairobi River forming headwaters for the Athi-Sabaki Ecosystem.

The theme for 2022's WWD instructs mankind to take action on saving these important natural phenomenoms that are also very effective features for climate change mitigation. It is important that the event is hosted at Ondiri Wetland, the biggest peatland in the republic of Kenya.

Ondiri got its name from the 18th century early visitors who toured Kikuyu area and called it "Old Lake" since it was an open Lake which the locals were calling Kihenia, "Something that shines"

For the students of history, you remember that The Imperial British East Africa Company (IBEAC) was a company that was incorporated on 6th September 1888 in the city of London. It mapped out the construction route for the railway line that would help them penetrate the East African Colony in their quest for raw materials.

IBEAC oversaw an area of about half of the modern day Kenya. During this period, Kenya was clustered into 42 nations and chiefdoms and Maasai nation was the Super Power so in the mapping out of the route, IBEAC ensured that it didn't touch the Maasai territory. It therefore passed on the boundary between the Maasai nation and other nations from Chyulu Hills to the plains of Transmara.

When it reached Kikuyu, Maasai Cattle could be seen drinking water from the "Old Lake" which the locals corrupted to "Ondiri". They would bring their cattle from the Kibiku and Suswa Plains to "Ondiri" where they put up temporary sheds on the shores of the Lake.

Due to many years of natural and human activities, Ondiri was covered by peat where vegetation grew on top including floating reeds on this peat such that now it has an extensive reed mat that covers more than 95 percent of the Wetland to

form a quacking bog. A quacking bog is made up of layers of vegetation floating over water. You can walk on the vegetation, but if you jump up and down the whole bog quakes just like a bouncing castle. Ondiri is an interesting natural phenomenon that is shrouded in mystery and myths. For instance, the locals say if you sink in, you will be found at Lake Naivasha. Nevertheless, the locals use the Wetland for recreation, farming and even drawing water for home use. Others go there to enjoy the serenity of the place or for meditation. Ondiri has been a haven for both flora and fauna. The unique biodiversity of this Wetland stands out. For instance; Ondiri has been home to Sitatunga Antelopes, River otters, crested crane birds, Jackson Widow birds among others.

The Wetland also provides the ground water recharge to the residents of Kikuyu Constituency, Karen and parts of Dagoretti South who draw their water from boreholes. It is also the recharge for Kikuyu Springs, the oldest source of piped water for the city of Nairobi which was connected in 1906.

The Wetland had in two decades suffered from serious degradation such that it had almost become like "the tragedy of the commons" where every stakeholder was making maximum use/exploitation of the it with little imput.

In 2016, through the assistance of the former Kikuyu DCC Mr. Paul Famba EBS, Friends of Ondiri Wetland Kenya was established as a community based organization that had a primary aim of restoring the Wetland to its past glory.

FOWK has started to provide the locals with education on environmental management, the promotion of indigenous trees and the establishment of sanctuaries for different animal species and plants. FOWK plans to make use of the Wetland's unexploited resources for the benefit of people and the Wildlife,

The organization plans to establish various sanctuaries for different animal species like the Sitatungas, Chameleons and other forms of Wildlife. The organization also hopes to establish botanical gardens, entertainment, information and cultural

centers, a bamboo plantation, bird watching points and hospitality services such as partnering with the local community for the establishment of Eco lodges, mazes, etc.

The organization is also lobbying to have the Wetland designated as Ramsar Wetlands of International Importance due to the significant habitats encompassed in this bog. The gazzetment of the Wetland shall also be a major breakthrough in our work where it shall become a protected area both as a heritage and as a major water source for hundreds of thousands of families.

So far the government's intervention in the conservation and restoration of the Wetland led by NEMA has been very effective. NEMA has helped in the construction of ecotoilet, gazzetment, introduction of a management plan, growing of bamboo trees and the enforcement while construction of park benches and donation of bee hives are the two ongoing projects. Water Resource Authority has fenced the entire wetland which has a circumference of 3.3 kilometers; KEFRI has been the lead agency in tree growing activities at the Wetland where over ten thousand trees have been planted while the County Government has also supported the conservation initiatives through enforcement especially in the pollution control.

WWD 2022 shall be a game changer at Ondiri Wetland especially because many urban wetlands have disappeared or are still facing serious threats of extinction mainly due to encroachment. It shall also create a good platform for the local community to interact and engage with the decision makers and at the same time help them to know the important role that wetlands play both to mankind and nature.



# ONDIRI NEWS

## CONSERVATION OF ONDIRI WETLAND



**W**hen i was a kid aged 9 years i used to pass through Ondiri Wetland. My parents had been leased a one acre piece of land 1 km from it. We used to grow maize, which was my first interaction with the wetland. My friends and I enjoyed playing on the wetland since it's a quacking bog or a natural bouncing castle. We enjoyed seeing the birds, our favorite were the crested crane birds and Jackson widow bird. Our dogs trying chasing the Sitatunga Antelopes in vain since they could not navigate the bog. When i joined high school, I didn't visit it frequently. After high school i passed through it i was shocked to find how it had lost its glory. The Sitatunga Antelopes were missing, the indigenous trees had been replaced with Eucalyptus trees, The bird life had decreased i could no longer see the Crested Crane birds and finally KeNHA had contracted the Chinese to build a bypass next to the

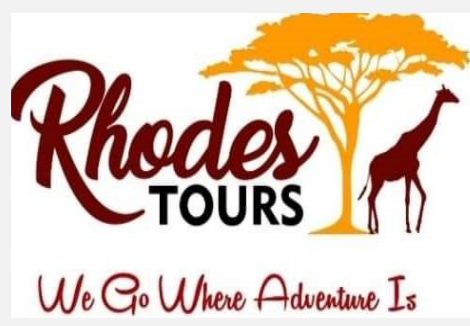
wetland the Chinese were abstracting water from the wetland which built the southern bypass. The riparian were abstracting water from the wetland which they used to water greenhouses which have occupied the riparian reserve.

In November 2018 i attended a workshop organized by Friends of Ondiri. It addressed how the community can manage and restore the wetland to its past glory. I became a member i was chosen to be the head of Monitoring and evaluation committee. We came up with a restoration and management plan. Our first activity was to test the water quality, we organized a public participation forum and we invited the stakeholders. Present were the County Government of Kiambu Officials, Riparian, community members and wetland management experts. During the rainy season of 2019 we partnered with KEFRI who donated 3,000 seedlings and Kiambu County Government has donated 2000 trees which are growing on the riparian reserve. KEFRI advised us to plant vetiva grass near the wetland the grass absorbs impurities and metals before they get into the wetland, next we plant bamboo trees which absorb impurities and water during the dry season and release the water during the dry season. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> row we plant indigenous trees and on the final row fruit trees. We invited nature Kenya who spotted 74 bird species we are looking forward to fence the wetland and continue conserving the wetland.

I have learned Ondiri Wetland is the only highland bog in the Republic Of Kenya, the source of Nairobi and Athi Rivers. It's also the largest water tower in Kikuyu Constituency providing water to over 200,000 people both directly and indirectly. The wetland covers approximately 30 hectares and a circumference of 3.3 kilometers. Long ago it was once an open lake locals called it Kihenia but due to many years of human activities and natural activities the lake was covered by peat and vegetation grew on top. The vegetation once it's withers it's form a mat called peat. The peat is prevents the water below it from evaporating during the dry season. The World Westlands Day National celebration is a token for Friends of Ondiri Wetland, Onkaru WRUA and Government agencies. I look forward for implementation of Ondiri Wetland management plan and scientific research.

**Robert Gacheru aka Bob,**  
**Secretary FOWK.**

## KIKUYU THE CENTER OF TOURISM IN KIAMBU COUNTY



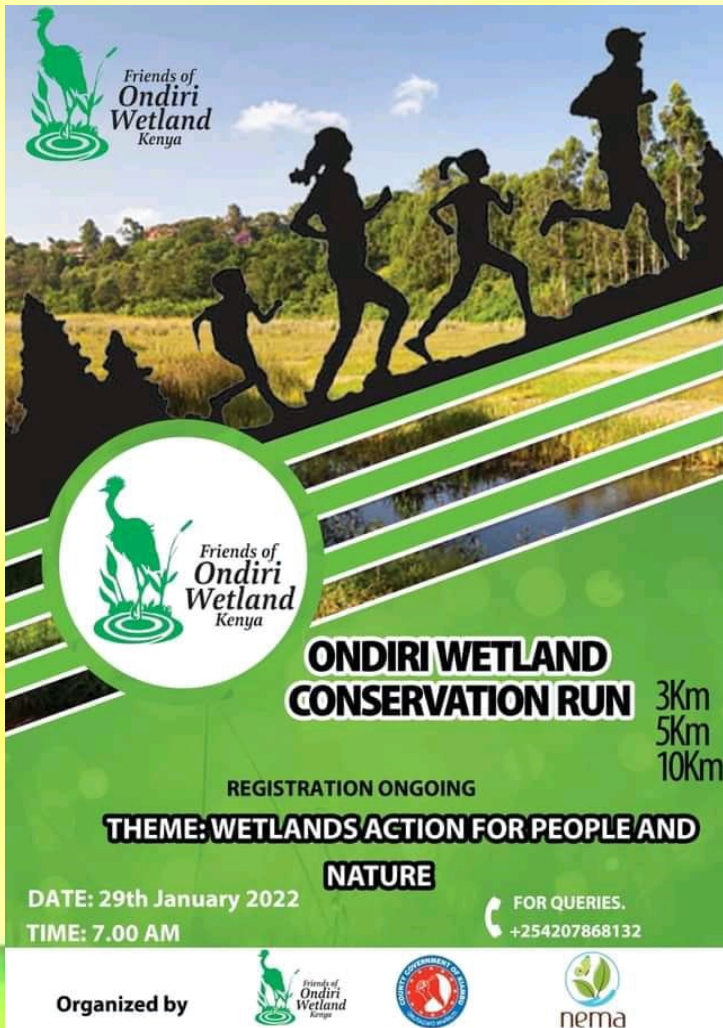
**K**ikuyu town is situated at the start of highlands of Kenya 19.5 km from the city Centre Nairobi, Kenya. The town houses the Kikuyu Municipal Administration and the business Centre in all spheres. As a tourism harbor, Kikuyu town history dates back to 1800 when the first missionaries came to explore habitable settlement and the Thogoto Scottish mission set up the Church of torch, the hospitals and the schools including the maabere (Kikuyu day secondary today).

Undiri swamp marks the biggest land mark for Kikuyu as a tourism spot that has unique eco-system for tourism including the more than 76 species of birds, the first pipes water for Nairobi city and still the headwaters for Kikuyu springs that form the larger Nairobi River and Athi River basin. With organized tours by the local guides coordinated by Rhodes tours a leading and pioneer for eco-tourism in Kikuyu you can arrange for day hikes, camping, tours, vast hospitality and entertainment as well as a connected transport system that includes the railway line from Mombasa to Kisumu.

Come see the beauty of Kiambu County.

**Samuel Njoroge,**  
**CO-Founder FOWK.**

# JANUARY AND FEBRUARY EVENTS



Friends of Ondiri Wetland Kenya

**ONDIRI WETLAND CONSERVATION RUN** 3Km, 5Km, 10Km

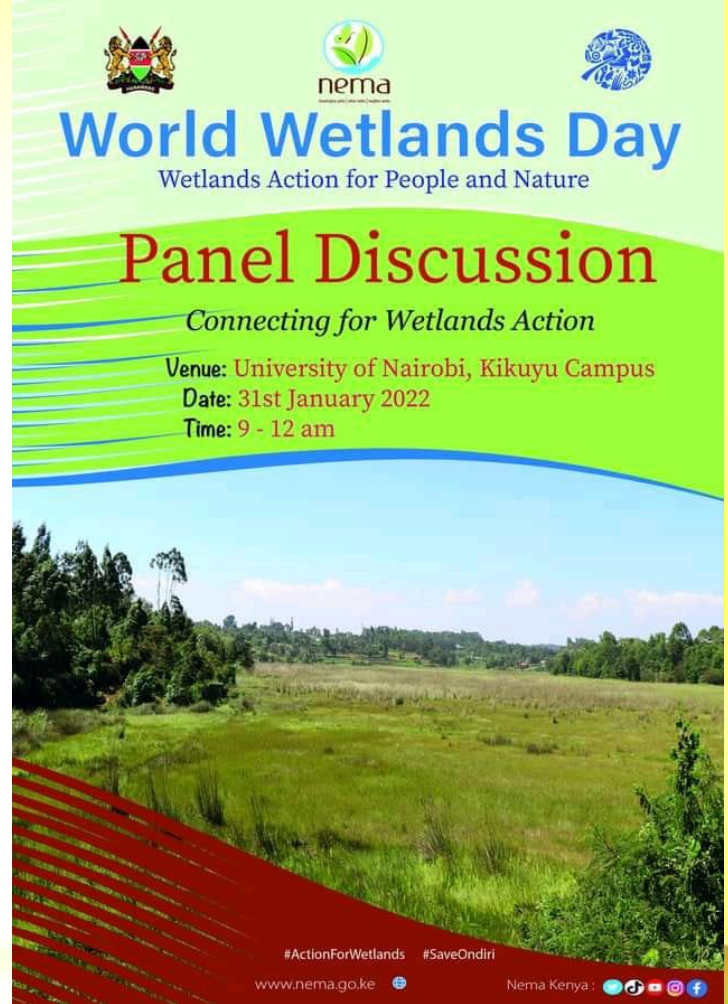
REGISTRATION ONGOING

**THEME: WETLANDS ACTION FOR PEOPLE AND NATURE**

DATE: 29th January 2022  
TIME: 7.00 AM

FOR QUERIES: +254207868132

Organized by Friends of Ondiri Wetland Kenya, NEMA, and other partners.

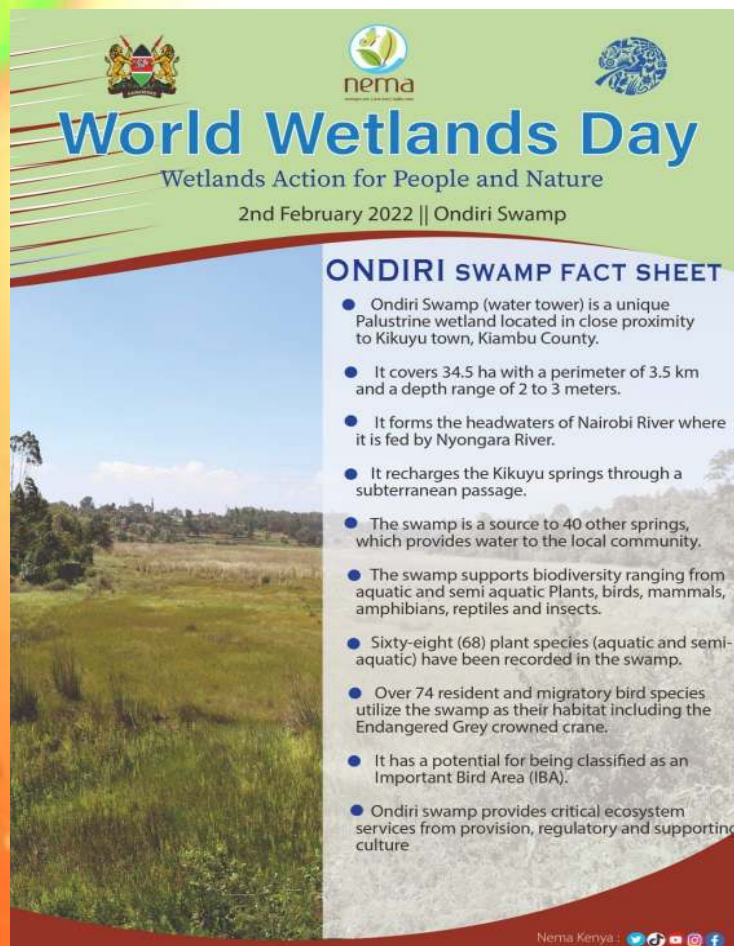


World Wetlands Day  
Wetlands Action for People and Nature

**Panel Discussion**  
Connecting for Wetlands Action

Venue: University of Nairobi, Kikuyu Campus  
Date: 31st January 2022  
Time: 9 - 12 am

#ActionForWetlands #SaveOndiri  
www.nema.go.ke



World Wetlands Day  
Wetlands Action for People and Nature  
2nd February 2022 || Ondiri Swamp

**ONDIRI SWAMP FACT SHEET**

- Ondiri Swamp (water tower) is a unique Palustrine wetland located in close proximity to Kikuyu town, Kiambu County.
- It covers 34.5 ha with a perimeter of 3.5 km and a depth range of 2 to 3 meters.
- It forms the headwaters of Nairobi River where it is fed by Nyongara River.
- It recharges the Kikuyu springs through a subterranean passage.
- The swamp is a source to 40 other springs, which provides water to the local community.
- The swamp supports biodiversity ranging from aquatic and semi aquatic Plants, birds, mammals, amphibians, reptiles and insects.
- Sixty-eight (68) plant species (aquatic and semi-aquatic) have been recorded in the swamp.
- Over 74 resident and migratory bird species utilize the swamp as their habitat including the Endangered Grey crowned crane.
- It has a potential for being classified as an Important Bird Area (IBA).
- Ondiri swamp provides critical ecosystem services from provision, regulatory and supporting culture.

Nema Kenya

- ◆ 29th January 2022  
Ondiri Wetland Half Marathon
- ◆ 02nd February 2022  
World Wetlands Day

## Ondiri Wetland



Crested Bird



# Our Partners

## SUPPORT

With the assistance of the various stakeholders, permanent conservation of Ondiri is a reality. Furthermore, with the guidelines and support from Kiambu County Government, Water Resource Authority (WRA), Kenya Forest Research Institute (KEFRI), the probability of success is even higher. FOWK has the capacity and the will to conserve Ondiri; to make Ondiri a major revenue earner of Kiambu County Government; and to make Ondiri a major employer of women and the youth. Ondiri has the resources that have not been exploited including: birds, trees, reeds, leisure walks and cultural activities among others. With proper planning, FOWK is sure that Ondiri wetland could also become a first class world eco-tourist destination.



UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI

## Contact Us

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