

The Grey Crowned Crane



There is a bird that does not merely fly over wetlands — it crowns them. The Grey Crowned Crane, with its halo of golden feathers, scarlet throat pouch, and graceful, deliberate dance, is one of Africa's most striking and iconic birds. Yet beyond its elegance lies something even more powerful: it is a living signature of healthy wetlands. Where this crane lives, water is clean, biodiversity is thriving, and ecosystems are balanced. Where it disappears, something is wrong.





This is the bird that Uganda chose as its national symbol, placing it proudly on its flag and coat of arms to represent grace and resilience. It is the bird that the founders of Nairobi selected over a century ago as the city's emblem. When Nairobi became a city in 1954, the crane was retained. When Kenya promulgated a new Constitution decades later, the symbol endured. Across nations and institutions, the Grey Crowned Crane has become more than an image — it is a declaration of identity, dignity, and ecological pride.

The bird of Ondiri

At Ondiri Wetland, Kenya's largest natural peat bog and the source of the Nairobi River, our journey with this bird tells a deeper story. When we began restoration work in 2016, our logo carried the Black-headed Heron, a bird then common at Ondiri. The wetland was degraded, encroached, and struggling. But as the Friends of Ondiri mobilized communities, fenced the wetland, removed invasive species, and restored its integrity, nature began to respond. And then, something remarkable happened — the Grey Crowned Cranes returned.

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THEY DID NOT RETURN BECAUSE WE INVITED THEM. THEY RETURNED BECAUSE THE WETLAND HEALED. THE GREY CROWNED CRANE IS AN ENDANGERED SPECIES, HIGHLY SENSITIVE TO DISTURBANCE, DEPENDENT ON INTACT WETLANDS FOR NESTING AND BREEDING. IT IS ONE OF THE FEW CRANE SPECIES THAT CAN PERCH IN TREES, THANKS TO A SPECIALIZED HIND TOE. IT FORMS LIFELONG PAIR BONDS AND PERFORMS ELABORATE COURTSHIP DANCES OF BOWING, LEAPING, AND TRUMPETING CALLS THAT ECHO ACROSS THE MARSH. WHEN SUCH A BIRD CHOOSES TO BREED IN YOUR WETLAND, IT IS NOT A COINCIDENCE; IT IS AN ECOLOGICAL VERDICT.

Today, we proudly host breeding pairs at Ondiri. Their return is not just a conservation milestone — it is proof that restoration works. It tells us that when communities unite to protect wetlands, biodiversity rebounds, water sources are safeguarded, carbon is stored in peat soils, and hope is restored.



Securing Ondiri Wetland



Protecting Ondiri is not about saving one beautiful bird. It is about securing water for Nairobi, preserving nearly 200 bird species, sustaining livelihoods, and defending the quiet systems that sustain human life. The Grey Crowned Crane reminds us that conservation is not abstract; it is visible, audible, and breathtaking.

Impact

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The Logo

So as organizations that have chosen this magnificent bird as your logo, remember that it is not just a design. It is a responsibility. It is a promise that wherever this crane appears, wetlands must live, communities must care, and nature must be respected.





At Ondiri, the crown has returned. And with it, the assurance that when we heal nature, nature crowns us in return.



thank you

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WWW.FRIENDSOFOINDIRIWETLANDKENYA.ORG

