

Buy One, Get One Free: Leveraging Conservation Investments in Africa

- By Obaka Torto



Jorgen Thomsen (MacArthur Foundation) speaking at the side event (Photo: Mandy DeVine)

“Buy One Get, One Free” is a phrase often used during sales’ season around the world. In this particular context, it is the title of a side event that was held at the Sixth International Union for Conservation of Nature’s (IUCN’s) World Parks Congress that took place in Sydney, Australia, from 12-19 November.

This side event aimed to profile two important conservation strategies: the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund’s (CEPF’s) Eastern Afromontane Hotspot [Ecosystem Profile](#)(or strategy) and the [conservation strategy](#) for the Great Lakes in East and Central Africa funded by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. Both strategies were developed in the past four years by BirdLife International in collaboration with key stakeholders, including national and regional government institutions, civil society organisations, international non-government organisations and research institutions.

The main purpose of these strategies was to identify priority Key Biodiversity Areas ([KBAs](#)) and ecosystem services, in the case of Great Lakes strategy, that require urgent conservation interventions. Furthermore, the strategies gave high consideration to biodiversity mainstreaming and reducing pressure from development and climates; thereby addressing one of the developmental obstacles commonly faced by governments of the developing countries, that is, how to make development sustainable.

According to Pierre Carret, Grant Director for CEPF, “The profiling exercise in the Eastern Afromontane biodiversity hotspot made it clear that development is a key issue for long term, sustainable protection of biodiversity in the hotspot. CEPF’s investment in the hotspot will

enable civil society to have a more prominent role into driving development in a more biodiversity-friendly direction.”

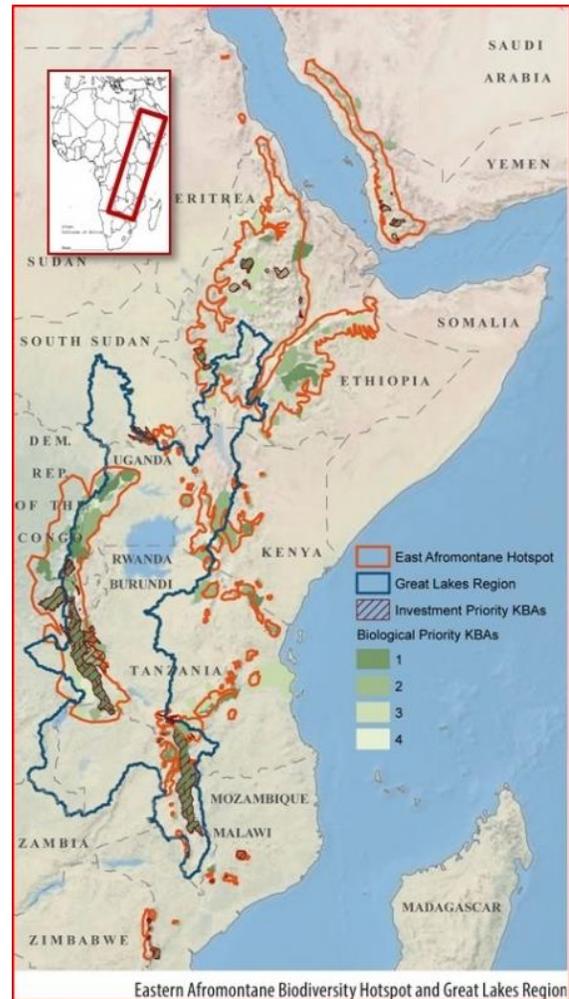
The side event also featured the launch of the Great Lakes of East and Central Africa summary strategy brochure ([English](#) and [French](#) versions) by Dr. Jorgen Thomsen, MacArthur Foundation’s Director of Conservation and Sustainable Development.

“The Great Lakes is increasingly threatened by unsustainable exploitation of its natural resources for energy, commercial farming, and the overuse of wetlands resources for subsistent agriculture,” Thomsen said. “There are also more than 50 hydro-dams in the region, and many more planned. Future development should consider environmental impacts and includes safeguards for the ecosystem services that support the livelihoods of more than 60 million people.”

Another highlight of the event was a call to potential donors and partners to invest in the implementation of the two strategies given their low risk and guaranteed 200 percent return on investment. In other words, the stakeholders in the region and priority actions and sites have been identified, capacity of local civil society networks is progressively strengthened, CEPF has committed almost \$6 million and MacArthur Foundation \$14 million in small and large grants for conservation actions. As such, additional funding will leverage financial commitments by these two donors to deliver the much needed impacts on the ground.

The World Parks Congress was attended by more than 6,000 participants, representing governments and public agencies, international organizations, the private sector, academic and research institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and community and indigenous organizations. More than 50 BirdLife delegates from 26 countries attended WPC; and in the “[Promise of Sydney](#)”, BirdLife pledged to put its considerable IBA network data at the disposal of conservationists worldwide.

IUCN organizes the Congress once each decade to take stock of the state of protected areas (PAs) worldwide, appraise progress and setbacks, and define the agenda for PAs for the next decade. The theme of the WPC 2014 was “Parks, people, planet: inspiring solutions.”



Map of Great Lakes and Eastern Afromontane