NATURE RWANDA
Connecting People With Nature

BIRD & POLLINATOR FRIENDLY SPACES

Certification Program

A Citizen Science-Based Path to Protect Rwanda's Birds and Pollinators

I. INTRODUCTION

Across Rwanda, a quiet but urgent change is taking place. Our skies are less likely than they were a generation ago. Birds, and pollinators face mounting pressure from habitat loss, pesticide use, glass window collisions, artificial night lighting, and the disappearance of native flowering plants.

Yet there is cause for hope. Every household, school, business, clinic, hotel, and public space has the power to help reverse this decline. A single garden, a window properly marked, one native tree planted, these actions multiply when communities act together.

Nature Rwanda has adapted the internationally recognised Bird Friendly City model, pioneered by Nature Canada, to suit Rwanda's unique ecology and communities. This certification provides a transparent, science-based pathway that empowers any space, large or small, to become a genuine refuge for birds and pollinators.

II. WHAT IS A BIRD & POLLINATOR FRIENDLY SPACE?

A certified space is any place, a home garden, school ground, hotel courtyard, government compound, or community park, that meets three core commitments consistently and demonstrably. Certification recognises the real effort made by individuals and institutions to create safer, richer environments for Rwanda's wildlife.

THE THREE CORE COMMITMENTS

1. THREATS ARE MINIMISED

Every certified space takes concrete steps to remove or reduce the most significant dangers to birds and pollinators:

- No toxic pesticides or glue traps are used on the premises
- Windows are marked with patterns, stickers, or screens to prevent fatal bird strikes
- Outdoor lighting is reduced, shielded downward, or switched off during night hours to avoid disorienting migratory and nocturnal wildlife
- Pets are kept under control during nesting seasons to protect ground-nesting birds
- Capture or disturbance of wild birds is strictly avoided
- Vehicle speeds within the space are managed to reduce road casualties

2. NATURE IS RESTORED

Certified spaces actively rebuild the habitat that birds and pollinators depend upon:

- Native plant species are established, including nectar-rich and fruit-bearing trees and shrubs. Priority species include:
- Clean water is made available and changed every two days to prevent mosquito breeding
- A small wild corner is maintained with leaf litter, fallen branches, or unmown grass
- Chemical fertilizers are avoided in favour of compost and natural soil management

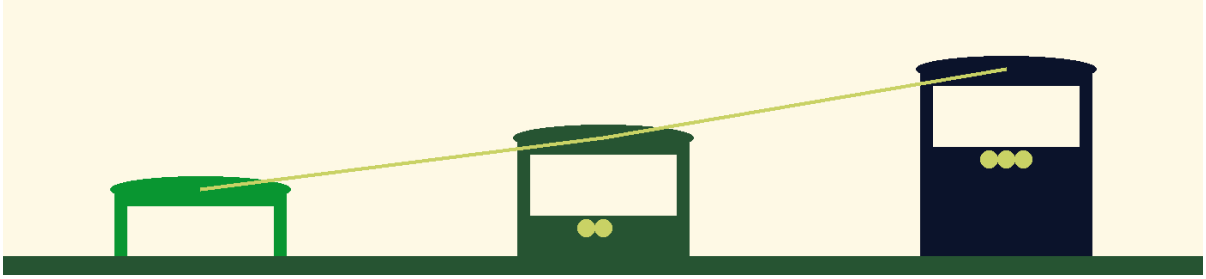
3. PEOPLE ARE ENGAGED

A certified space is also a learning and community space:

- Residents, students, or staff are trained to identify and record birds and pollinators
- Observations are shared via WhatsApp groups and iNaturalist, contributing to national biodiversity data
- Certification is proudly displayed to inspire neighbours and visitors
- Spaces host nature walks and awareness activities to grow the network

III. THREE LEVELS OF CERTIFICATION

Certification is structured across three progressive levels. Each level builds on the last, encouraging continuous improvement. Spaces are recognised wherever they are on their journey — starting well is more important than starting perfectly.



CRITERIA	ENTRY	MEDIUM	HIGH
Threat Reductions	At least 2 actions	4+ incl. water & pet control	All threats managed; annual audit
Native Plants	1 tree/shrub + 2 nectar plants	3+ trees; continuous bloom	Full seasonal bloom; breeding evidence
Training & People	1 trained person	Annual awareness talk	Community leader; mentor 2 others
Observations	Monthly	Twice per week	Continuous systematic monitoring
Verification	Self-assessed	Nature Rwanda verified	Annual field audit

LEVEL DESCRIPTIONS

ENTRY LEVEL — GETTING STARTED

The Entry Level is designed to be accessible to every household, school, and organisation in Rwanda. It acknowledges early, meaningful action and motivates further progress.

Requirements: At least two threat-reduction actions implemented; one native tree or shrub plus two nectar-rich plants established; one person trained in basic identification; monthly wildlife observations recorded and submitted. Self-assessed, no site visit required.

MEDIUM LEVEL — GROWING YOUR IMPACT

The Medium Level recognises spaces that have moved beyond the basics to create genuinely improved habitat and a culture of ongoing engagement.

Requirements: Four or more threat reductions including clean water and pet control during nesting seasons; at least three native trees with continuous bloom across seasons; observations at least twice per week; and at least one awareness talk hosted per year. Verification by a trained Nature Rwanda verifier is required.

HIGH LEVEL — LEADING THE WAY

The High Level represents a model site that demonstrates full, sustained commitment and actively supports the wider conservation community in Rwanda.

Requirements: All major threats managed with an annual field audit; documented evidence of breeding activity or full pollinator lifecycle support; leadership in community monitoring; active mentoring of at least two other spaces toward certification. Mandatory annual audit by Nature Rwanda.

IV. WHAT COUNTS AS A QUALIFYING ACTION?

Every certified space earns its status through a combination of actions across three categories. The reference list below helps applicants understand what qualifies under each category.

THREAT REDUCTION ACTIONS

- Stopping the use of chemical pesticides, insecticides, and rodenticides
- Removing or never deploying glue traps for insects or rodents
- Applying window collision deterrents, stickers, external screens, or UV-reflective films at appropriate intervals
- Reducing or eliminating unnecessary outdoor lighting at night, or fitting shields to direct light downward
- Keeping cats and dogs indoors or on leads during known nesting seasons
- Ensuring no live-trapping, netting, or caging of wild birds or pollinators occurs on the property
- Implementing low-speed zones or barriers to reduce vehicle strike risk

HABITAT RESTORATION ACTIONS

- Planting native tree, shrub, or herbaceous species from the Nature Rwanda recommended list
- Establishing and maintaining a bird bath or water feature with water refreshed every two days
- Designating and protecting a wild garden corner with natural ground cover and minimal disturbance
- Replacing chemical fertilisers with compost, mulch, or other organic matter
- Removing invasive exotic plant species and replacing them with native alternatives
- Installing nest boxes or insect hotels appropriate to local species

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ACTIONS

- Formally registering the space with Nature Rwanda
- Submitting regular wildlife observations via iNaturalist or the Nature Rwanda WhatsApp network
- Displaying the Nature Rwanda certification sign, badge, or digital certification at the space
- Sharing updates and photos on social media using designated hashtags
- Hosting or co-hosting guided nature walks or wildlife awareness events
- Encouraging and supporting neighbours or partners to begin the certification process

V. CERTIFIED SPACES: INSPIRING EXAMPLES

The following spaces have already achieved certification under the Nature Rwanda programme. They demonstrate that impactful conservation is possible at every scale — from urban gardens to rural schools.

CERTIFIED SPACE	LEVEL	HIGHLIGHTS
Mpenge River Birds' Paradise	HIGH	102+ bird species recorded; model for sustained monitoring and habitat restoration and management.
None	MEDIUM	
None	ENTRY	

These spaces prove that certification is neither remote nor difficult. Their journeys offer practical lessons for any space beginning the process today. Nature Rwanda regularly publishes case studies and site-visit reports to share their experiences.

VI. HOW TO APPLY

The application process is designed to be simple, supported, and accessible. Nature Rwanda provides guidance at every stage. The six steps below take most spaces between one and three months to complete.

01	**DOWNLOAD CHECKLIST** Assess your current space using the Nature Rwanda self-assessment checklist. Identify which threats exist and what habitat features are already in place.
02	**REGISTER ONLINE** Sign up as a household or institution on the Nature Rwanda portal. Registration is free and takes only a few minutes.
03	**TAKE ACTION (1–3 MONTHS)** Plant native species, mark windows to prevent bird collisions, establish clean water sources, and begin recording wildlife. Document your progress with photos.
04	**SUBMIT EVIDENCE** Upload photos, observation records, and your completed checklist via the portal or the Nature Rwanda WhatsApp group.
05	**RECEIVE VERIFICATION** Entry level is self-certified. Medium and High levels require a field verification visit from a trained Nature Rwanda verifier.
06	**DISPLAY YOUR CERTIFICATION** Receive your certificate, badge, and signage — and display it proudly to inspire your community.

VII. WHY GET CERTIFIED?

Certification is a commitment to Rwanda's natural world, a community connection, and a practical contribution to national conservation goals. The table below summarises the specific benefits for each type of participant.

STAKEHOLDER	BENEFITS
HOUSEHOLDS	Enhanced biodiversity and beauty in your garden. A personal contribution to Rwanda's natural heritage. Greater family connection with nature.
SCHOOLS	Real-world science and environmental learning linked to national green education goals. Recognition for the school's sustainability commitment.
BUSINESSES & HOTELS	Strengthened ESG credentials and positive reputation. Staff and visitor wellbeing enhanced by a greener environment.
RWANDA	Direct contribution to national biodiversity strategies. A growing ecological network. Data for science and conservation policy.

VIII. HOW YOU CAN HELP BEYOND YOUR SPACE

Your impact does not end at your fence line. Nature Rwanda welcomes wider support in several important ways:

- **Donate** — Financial contributions directly support low-income households and schools to access certification, cover native plant costs, and fund community education events.
- **Become a Verifier** — After completing Nature Rwanda verifier training, you can support Medium and High-level assessments in your region, extending the programme's reach.
- **Partner with Nature Rwanda** — Businesses, foundations, embassies, and government bodies can sponsor certification drives for communities, schools, or entire districts.
- **Spread Awareness** — Share the programme on social media, talk about it in your networks, and nominate spaces in your community that could benefit.

IX. RECOMMENDED NATIVE PLANT SPECIES

Choosing the right plants is central to creating a productive habitat. The following species are particularly effective in Rwanda's varied climates and have been prioritised in the certification checklist.

SPECIES	COMMON NAME	WILDLIFE VALUE
Cyperus papyrus	Papyrus	Highly ornamental wetland plant ideal for artificial ponds and water features; provides nesting habitat for birds and natural water filtration.
Typha domingensis	Southern Cattail	Attractive emergent wetland species suitable for pond edges; supports dragonflies, birds, and amphibians.
Nymphaea nouchali	African Water Lily	Decorative floating flowers ideal for artificial ponds; supports aquatic insects and pollinators.
Cyperus alternifolius	Umbrella Papyrus	Elegant ornamental sedge suitable for pond margins and landscaped wetlands.
Juncus effusus	Soft Rush	Dense ornamental wetland grass useful for pond edges and habitat for amphibians.
Canna indica	Indian Shot	Bright ornamental flowers suitable for wetland gardens and artificial pond borders; attracts pollinators.
Colocasia esculenta	Elephant Ear	Large decorative foliage ideal for pond landscaping and moisture-retaining areas.
Miscanthidium violaceum	Silver Grass	Attractive tall grass creating natural wetland scenery and shelter for birds.
Phragmites mauritianus	African Reed	Suitable for natural-looking artificial ponds and wetland restoration; supports bird nesting and water purification.

Sesbania sesban	Umunyegenyege	Fast-growing flowering shrub useful near wetlands and ponds for pollinator support and soil improvement.
Aeschynomene elaphroxylon	Ambatch	Semi-aquatic ornamental shrub/tree suitable for pond edges and wetland habitat enhancement.
Hibiscus diversifolius	Swamp Hibiscus	Showy flowers suitable for wetland gardens and pond margins; attractive to pollinators.
Crinum macowanii	River Lily	Large fragrant flowers ideal for beautifying pond surroundings and moist landscapes.

TAKE ACTION TODAY

Join the growing community of certified spaces across Rwanda.

Sign up for updates — receive your free assessment checklist

Register your space at www.naturerwanda.org

Donate to support households and schools joining the program

Together, we can give Rwanda's birds and pollinators the spaces they need to thrive.