

# Albertine Rift Conservation Society

*A Champion of Collaborative Conservation and Sustainable Development*

Kampala, Uganda and Kigali, Rwanda

*ARCOS is fighting for the survival of the Albertine Rift biodiversity and its people*

The Albertine Rift touches six countries in Africa and is home to thousands of unique species, including more than half of continental Africa's bird species and nearly 40 percent of its mammal species making it one of the world's most important biodiversity and bio ecological areas. Yet, poverty and population pressures—exacerbated by armed conflict in the 1990's—is putting enormous pressure on its rich natural resources and has accelerated environmental degradation impacting hundreds of unique species of fish, wildlife, and birds as well as rich forest, river, and lake ecosystems.

Encroachment, illegal logging, pollution and soil erosion and other threats put at risk the Albertine Rift's ability to regulate a stable climate and provide a livelihood to communities across the region. The Albertine Rift Conservation Society (ARCOS) works to mitigate these threats by championing collaborative conservation and sustainable development in the region. ARCOS's staff engages in biodiversity monitoring, information exchange, networking, capacity building, conservation action and policy work, to enhance conservation of critical ecosystems and promote sustainable development for people living in the Albertine Rift through collaborative action between partners in the region.

Established in 1995, ARCOS was founded to address critical factors derailing conservation efforts in the Rift including the lack of public awareness and effective policies on the conservation and sustainable management of natural resources, and the limited capacity and collaborative action of local institutions to address these problems. In response, ARCOS currently prioritizes three areas:

- Enhancing integrated management of biodiversity and ecosystem services
- Facilitating mechanisms for assessing and addressing climate change
- Empowering grassroots organizations to participate in environmental governance and threat reduction

ARCOS works to achieve these goals by collaborating with others in its programs, supporting informed decisions through regional information systems, and empowering and networking with local NGOs. From 2001-2003, ARCOS led a planning process in the Albertine Rift region involving a range of national and international players who led to a broad consensus on the geographical boundaries and conservation priorities for the entire region—a major accomplishment considering the diversity of institutions, conservation management regimes and political contexts across the six countries. ARCOS has also initiated collaboration between national data centers for five countries in the region to develop a monitoring and sharing framework for information such as trends in status of species, habitats, ecosystems and threats to be used by stakeholders for biodiversity conservation and sustainable development, currently being upgraded to a regional biodiversity portal.

The MacArthur Award for Creative and Effective Institutions arrives at a critical time in ARCOS's development. ARCOS recently expanded to include implementation of pilot programs for ecosystem services in Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda, and support for community-based organizations located in remote areas of eastern DRC. In order to build on its tremendous progress and create capacity among its partners, ARCOS badly needs a new space to conduct training for and share information to the NGOs and community-based organizations in its network, especially in areas ill-served by its office in Kampala, Uganda.

The \$350,000 award will help ARCOS establish a new regional information and training center located in Kigali, Rwanda, which will improve access to NGOs and community-based organizations supported by ARCOS, particularly in difficult to reach areas in Burundi and DRC, while modern infrastructure for information technology will improve the quality of services provided to these target organizations to better protect this part of the Rift.