Title

BirdLife is concerned that one of the most precious forests in Cameroon is threatened by road construction. Bakossi National Park is not only a site of great natural beauty but a globally important site for biodiversity conservation, identified as an Important Bird Area in 2001. The park supports over 200 species of plants, amphibians and birds that are found nowhere else on earth and is hence categorised as an Alliance for Zero Extinction site. Bakossi Mountain Forests are home to the Endangered Mount Kupe Bush-Shrike *Telophorus kupeensis*, which is endemic to Cameroon.

Bakossi Forest Reserve was gazetted as a national Park in 2008, a wise decision by the Government of Cameroon, but the decision to construct a 15-metre wide road now threatens to roll back any conservation gains. Proponents say it will facilitate cultivation of cocoa in the Western part and enable villagers there to reach administrative offices to the northeast. BirdLife recognises the need to improve people?s ability to access services and rural development but this must be carefully balanced with the need to protect finite natural resources. Therefore, the justification of a road for the stated purpose should form part of an assessment as there are concerns that this road clearance is far wider than is needed and has already resulted in forest destruction.

Other concerns are based on the fact that an Environmental and Social Impact Assessment does not seem to have been conducted. Key stakeholders do not seem to be aware of this development.

BirdLife is concerned that such a wide road will permit much larger vehicles to pass through the park and is likely to lead to increased frequency of illegal logging and bush meat trade. It is already clear that the road is cutting through sensitive bird habitat, especially that of Mt Kupe Bush Shrike. These impacts will result in increased management costs to the Government and threaten the growing tourist industry in the area.

BirdLife calls for a temporary stop to the road construction within the national park to allow for a participatory Environmental and Social Impact Assessment to be carried and presented for public scrutiny. Protecting this key National Park will help ensure it remains a growing tourist destination.

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