

Celebrating the Uluguru watersheds for World Environment Day

Villagers in Tanzania's Uluguru Mountains marked World Environment Day with a celebration of a project which is raising local incomes and protecting the forest that provides vital ecosystem services, including water for some of Tanzania's major cities. The project, run by BirdLife Partner the Wildlife Conservation Society of Tanzania (WCST) and the RSPB (BirdLife in the UK), works with government, civil society, schools, universities and the private sector. The Ulugurus are one of the 13 mountain blocks of the Eastern Arc chain. They support a biologically rich forest with several unique species, including the Critically Endangered Uluguru Bush-shrike *Malaconotus alius*. The forests provide much of the water which supplies Dar es Salaam, and almost all of the supply to Morogoro. The Ulugurus, however, are under threat. The average income of the Uluguru communities is a quarter of the national average. This, along with a growing population is placing increasing demand on the forests, particularly for timber and fuelwood. It is causing unsustainable farming practices to spread up steep slopes, and encroach on the riparian zone, which is resulting in a deterioration of water quality and quantity. It is also causing a decline in agriculture production through increased run-off and soil erosion. Unless action is taken, the situation is likely to worsen, as water demand is expected to rise sharply through the next 30 years, climate change may reduce supplies, and alternative water sources are limited. With funding from the UK's Department for International Development, WCST and the RSPB are implementing a project to enable communities to benefit from the sustainable management of the Uluguru water catchment area through the development of a 'payment for watershed services' scheme. The project will last for four and a half years (July 2010 - December 2015). On Sunday June 5, the project villages in collaboration with government authorities celebrated World Environment Day with the theme: 'Plant Trees and Take Care of Them: Protect the Environment of Watersheds in Uluguru Mountains'. The Celebration was held in Tangeni village, one of the key project sites.



Tangeni Primary school choir gave a memorable performance

The event involved a wide range of entertainments ranging from traditional dance to drama. Recognising the regional importance of the day, the celebration was officiated by the Mvomero District Commissioner who came on behalf of the Morogoro Regional Commissioner. Prior to the event, a competition was held to identify the most environmentally friendly school and project village. It included an audit of schools and villages in the project area to assess their environmental conservation credentials. It also looked at the distribution of water friendly trees which are planted along rivers and streams and farm fields. The school audit and assessment of villages culminated in the selection of the best school and village for Environmental Conservation. Mbete primary school was the winner in the best school category, followed by Mnyanza and Tangeni primary school. In the best village category, Tangeni village was the winner followed by Kilala and Kivaza hamlets. The winners were awarded certificates and cash prizes by the Guest of Honour during the celebration.