

Community-based management improves forest condition in an East African biodiversity hotspot? as more species continue to be discovered.

Title

BirdLife and its Partners have compiled a report on the status and trends of biodiversity in the Eastern Arc Mountains and Coastal Forests of Tanzania and Kenya (EACF) between 2008 and 2012. The report is the second of its kind; the first ever EACF status and trends report was published in 2008. The new report is based on bringing together of data and information contributed from a wide range of sources. This process is particularly important for building strong cases for REDD+ projects at Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs).

What happened between 2008 and 2012?

Researchers assessing the effectiveness of the Participatory Forest Management (PFM) approach provided evidence for improving forest condition due to PFM. This was confirmed for Arabuko-Sokoke forest in Kenya, and in a study conducted in Udzungwa Mountains, Tanzania, PFM was also credited with a 79% reduction in the number of active hunters in the PFM zone.

Some new forest areas were gazetted for protection; the 968 ha Derema Forest Reserve was gazetted in Tanzania's East Usambara mountains in 2010 and over 120,000 ha of village forest reserves were established across the Tanzanian part of the Eastern Arc Mountains and coastal forest hotspot. However, indications are that large tracts of forest continue to be lost through charcoal extraction and conversion to agriculture in some coastal forests, e.g. through pineapple farming in Dakatcha Woodlands in Kenya.

Although there have been assessments of carbon storage in a few forests, this only provides

partial knowledge, and further assessments need to be undertaken especially for purposes of establishing REDD+ projects.

An increase in illegal hunting for subsistence continues to be recorded each year since 2009 in the Kenyan coastal forests and is blamed for the localised disappearance of the Golden-rumped Elephant Shrew *Rhynchocyon chrysopygus* and the critically endangered Ader's Duiker *Cephalophus adersi* in some sites e.g. in the Dakatcha Woodlands, Kenya. In addition, bans on commercial timber extraction appear to be ineffective.

New information on species occurrence continued to be available in the Eastern Arc Mountains of Tanzania. About 300 new distribution records and approximately 70 undescribed endemic amphibian and reptile species were reported in the Eastern Arc Mountains of Tanzania. Also, a total of 17 species were up-listed to higher threat categories in the IUCN Red List between 2008 and 2012, while only six were down-listed to lower threat categories.

The report also highlights that invasive alien species are a more serious problem in the EACF than had previously been realized. In Kenya *Prosopis juliflora*, a small tree native to South America is reported to have invaded the Tana River Delta. In Tanzania, 20 invasive plant species are recorded in the Eastern Arc Mountains; the Umbrella tree *Maesopsis eminii*, a large African tropical forest tree introduced to various parts of the tropics for timber production or as a shade tree is one of the three species considered as the most serious. The others are a genus of berry plants (*Rubus sp.*) and *Cedrela odorata*, a cedar grown for timber.

African Violet in Nguru, one of the forests in the Eastern Arc Mountains of Tanzania

Image not found

<http://www.birdlife.org/community/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/African-Violet-from-Nguru-Mtns.-by-N.-Doggart-300x200.jpg>

African Violet in Nguru, one of the forests
in the Eastern Arc Mountains of Tanzania
(Credit: Nike Doggart)

Although some protected areas (e.g. Irunda, Ngongwa-Busangi, Kibao, Mninga, Gulosilo, Sao Hill, Kigogo and Muhezangulu Forest Reserves in Tanzania) had 'top' management effectiveness scores, many sites faced management challenges. Chronic underfunding for conservation is identified as one of the drawbacks for effective management of protected areas in the Eastern Arc Mountains.

The report also highlights some positive developments regarding policy. These include: formation of the Tanzania Forest Service (TFS) in 2010, and development of the conservation strategy for the Eastern Arc Mountain Forests in Tanzania. In Kenya, the Kenya Constitution

2010 and the Land Policy 2009 came into operation, empowering local communities to take charge of land use decisions and contributing to communities being able to oppose the proposed biofuel projects in Tana River Delta and Dakatcha Woodland.

Several pilot REDD+ projects were initiated in Tanzania (by Mpingo Conservation and Development Initiative, WWF, Care Zanzibar, Tanzania Traditional Energy Development Organisation –TaTEDO, and the TFCG/MJUMITA) that are bound to benefit communities. In Kenya, the Kasigau Corridor REDD project that lies just outside the Taita Hills became the first ever REDD+ project to be issued Voluntary Carbon Units (VCUs) under the Voluntary Carbon Standard (VCS).

About the EACF

The Eastern Arc Mountains and Coastal Forests (EACF) hotspot runs 900 km along the Kenya-Tanzania coasts and includes Zanzibar, Pemba and Mafia Islands off the Tanzanian mainland. The region is very important due to its biological diversity and richness. It is characterized by a high level of species endemism, a severe degree of threat and exceptional diversity of its plant and animal communities. It was previously classified as a global biodiversity hotspot by itself, but now lies within two hotspots (the Eastern Afromontane Hotspot and the Coastal Forests of Eastern Africa Hotspot). In the beginning of the year 2004, the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) made a five-year investment of US\$7 million in the EACF, which was allocated to 103 projects in this region. The investment focused on improving human wellbeing and scientific knowledge and reducing the extinction risk for 333 globally threatened species through improved protection for the sites where these species are found.

The Project

This report is a result of a project that aims at availing biodiversity and forest change data to among other things, leverage REDD+ and REDD Readiness for the EACF. The project is implemented by the BirdLife Africa Partnership Secretariat and BirdLife partner NGOs in Kenya (Nature Kenya) and Tanzania (Wildlife Conservation Society of Tanzania – WCST). The project is funded by the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF), which is a joint initiative of l'Agence Française de Développement, Conservation International, the European Union, the Global Environment Facility, the Government of Japan, the MacArthur Foundation, and the World Bank. A fundamental goal is to ensure civil society is engaged in biodiversity conservation.

For more information and copy of the full report, please visit:

<http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/info/EAMHome>