

Tanzanian Conservationists propose ways of securing the Eastern Arc Mountain forests

Title

Tanzanian conservationists drawn from government and civil society have drafted a set of six policy and management recommendations on how to reduce threats currently facing biodiversity in the Eastern Arc Mountain forests of Tanzania (EAM), part of a global biodiversity hotspot. This was accomplished during a workshop held on 16th July 2014 in Morogoro, Tanzania, at the foot of Uluguru Mountains.

The Eastern Arc Mountain forests of Tanzania consist of a complex of ranges and peaks that are among the oldest in Africa, as they are the forest communities of the region. They cover about 5,350 km² and host large numbers of endemic plants and animals. Many locally endemic species of plants and animals are restricted to single mountain ranges, for e.g. the Usambara Mountains of northeast Tanzania alone have some 50 endemic tree species. Two Critically Endangered bird species, the [Uluguru Bush-shrike](#) and the [Long-billed Tailorbird](#) are found in these forests. They also provide water for industrial, agriculture and domestic use to the main towns as well as a rich site of biodiversity attracting both local and international tourists.

The participants, including Nature Reserve Conservators, Regional Agricultural Advisors, [Tanzania Forestry Service \(TFS\)](#) zonal managers, Mining Officers as well as [Tanzania Forest Conservation Group \(TFCG\)](#), Tanzania Biodiversity Facility (TanBIF), [World Wildlife Fund \(WWF\)](#), Wildlife Conservation Society of Tanzania (WCST) and [Eastern Arc Mountains Conservation Endowment Fund \(EAMCEF\)](#) analysed threats facing the forests. They identified major threats to the forests as illegal harvesting of trees/poles, forest fires, encroachment for agriculture and illegal mining.



For some time, degradation in the Eastern Arc Mountain Forests has been driven by poor law enforcement arising from differing forest ownership and management structures; over-reliance on forests for livelihoods; and limited participation of communities in forest management. Moreover, the fact that institutions mandated to conserve and protect these precious forests pulled in different directions only helped to worsen degradation and amplify the threats.

“We have resolved that the Tanzania Forest Service (TFS) and Local Government Authorities need to work in greater harmony in order to address these challenges,” concluded Mr. Bruno Mallya, TFS Southern Highland Zonal Manager. “Key forests that have never been fully protected also require attention as well as implementing Participatory Forest Management (PFM) across all forest reserves. Forest fires will be better addressed if forest authorities work with land owners and forest boundaries respected,” added Mr. Rwamugira Sosthenes, the Conservator for the Uluguru Nature Reserve.



The recommendations from the meeting will be documented in a policy brief that will be shared with policy makers, including Permanent Secretaries in relevant line ministries, and forest and local government officers at district level. We will support in delivering these recommendations to the relevant authorities through producing the policy brief and meeting the relevant authorities in Tanzania? committed Festo Semanini, the Head of Conservation Programmes in the BirdLife Tanzania Project Office.

In her closing remarks, Ms. Anna Lawuo, the TFS Coordinator of the Coastal Forest Project, representing the TFS Director of Resources Management at the event, challenged conservation workers to make local communities even more aware of the values of these unique forests. We need to halt the key threats mentioned today, especially illegal logging of timber, since these have huge negative implications for ecosystem services provided by the forests?, she said. We must also reduce the pressures these forests are facing externally? she added.

The workshop was facilitated by a team from BirdLife International supported by Mr. Chacha Werema of University of Dar es Salaam. This was part of a BirdLife project entitled ?Consolidating biodiversity data and information in Eastern Arc Mountains and Coastal Forests of Tanzania and Kenya? and funded by the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF).

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