

CEPF Eastern Afromontane Hotspot launched in Arabian Peninsula

Title

During a well-attended international event in January 2013, hosted by the Saudi Wildlife Authority at the King Khalid University in Abha, Saudi Arabia, the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) launched its plan to invest \$9.8 million over five years in conserving the Eastern Afromontane biodiversity hotspot.

The hotspot is made up of natural areas stretching from Saudi Arabia to Mozambique and Zimbabwe. In the Arabian Peninsula portion of the hotspot, located along the coast of western Yemen and southwestern Saudi Arabia, 110 species of plants are known to be found only in this region, including the *Centaurothamnus maximus*, a member of the daisy family. Seven bird species are also unique to this part of the hotspot, such as the Yemen linnnet, a species of finch. The area also is important for migratory birds, with an estimated 1.5 million storks and birds of prey using the highlands of the Arabian Peninsula and Ethiopia as a flyway each year.

“The Arabian Peninsula is incredibly important for its unique natural attributes and culture,” said Patricia Zurita, executive director of CEPF. “We are eager to work with regional universities, foundations and other partners to provide grants that support local civil society groups in their efforts to protect nature and improve livelihoods.”

In the Arabian Peninsula, biodiversity is closely associated with agricultural landscapes such as the traditional terrace agriculture, which creates micro-climates that are favorable to plants and reptiles.

“The decline of traditional agricultural techniques is one of the main threats to biodiversity, together with unsustainable use of water resources and urbanization,” said Ibrahim Khader, regional director for BirdLife International’s Middle East Division, which will administer the CEPF investment in the Arabian Peninsula. “The conservation of biodiversity in the region will also result in the protection of important cultural heritage and traditions.”

There is a substantial gap in terms of natural resources conservation between Saudi Arabia and Yemen. Protected areas and conservation efforts are strong in Saudi Arabia, and have yielded positive results, such as the reintroduction to the wild of the Arabian oryx (*Oryx leucoryx*). On the other hand, Yemen has only six formal protected areas, and only three on the mainland. CEPF’s strategy seeks to act on the opportunity that regional cooperation could

provide to improve conservation and human well-being.

“The Saudi Wildlife Authority is proud to host the launch of CEPF’s portfolio for the Eastern Afromontane biodiversity hotspot. This is a reflection of the SAWA’s strong commitment to protecting the unique biodiversity of Saudi Arabia and the region,” said Prince Bandar bin Saud bin Mohammad Al-Saud, President of the Board of the Saudi Wildlife Authority.

The Saudi Wildlife Authority, Yemen’s Ministry of the Environment, biologists and other stakeholders from the peninsula provided data and helped guide CEPF’s investment strategy. CEPF will target its funding in the Arabian Peninsula to supporting civil society organizations working in Yemen. A first call for proposals was launched in September 2012, and a second call will be launched very soon.

Please follow the Eastern Afromontane Regional Implementation Team (consisting of BirdLife International, IUCN and the Ethiopian Wildlife and Natural History Society) on Facebook at www.facebook.com/CEPF.EAM to stay updated about calls for proposals and events in the region.

About the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund - *The Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund 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, see www.cepf.net*