

Thirst for biofuels still threatening Kenya's Dakatcha Woodlands - By Andre Farrar (RSPB - BirdLife in the UK)

Title In a move that buys a little time for the Dakatcha Woodlands, Kenya's National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) has refused a licence to a 50,000ha biofuels plantation. At headline level, this looks like good [news](#) ? and it certainly is a significant outcome of the campaign led by Nature Kenya and the local community. We've been following the [story](#) on this blog ? and you can read more [here](#). But lets not be under any illusion ? this is, at the moment, just a stay of execution as NEMA has told the developer to consider scaling down the application to a pilot project to prove sustainability before a licence for the full 50,000 ha is issued. Nature Kenya is convinced the project is fundamentally unsustainable and is calling for the project to be scrapped. Given the developer, Kenya Jatropha Energy Ltd, stands accused of starting forest clearance before the licensing process was complete ? indeed before the Environmental Impact Assessment had been made available for comment ? the future for this Important Bird Area is looking distinctly uncertain. Kenya Jatropha Energy Ltd is owned by an Italian company, Nuove Iniziative Industriali Srl, and aim to export 70% of the biofuel to Europe. The insatiable thirst for biofuels is the reason that Kenya's natural environment is under immediate threat. We've criticised the UK's Renewable Transport Fuel Obligation (RTFO) as one of the policies that is driving demand for biofuels. But the UK is not alone in having biofuel support policies, and the real driving force is the target set in the [Renewable Energy Directive](#). This legislation contains environmental safeguards that are meant to prevent damaging projects such as this being supported by European policies and government support. However, we know that this particular proposal will be selling to the EU market despite these rules. The Dakatcha Woodlands looks certain to test the effectiveness of these safeguards. Waving the shroud of climate change as a reason for pursuing unsustainable land use in Africa (and the threat goes way beyond Kenya) is an unworthy excuse to threaten the way of life of nearly 60,000 people and an important habitat with its complement of wildlife. For Clarke's weaver the Dakatcha woodlands are its last chance for survival. By Andre Farrar (RSPB - BirdLife in the UK). To read more blogs by Andre, please [click here](#).