

# Into the Clouds: Surveying the Sky Islands of Mozambique (Part 3)

- By Krystal Tolley, SANBI

***Researchers from the South African National Biodiversity Institute, SANBI, travelled to Mozambique to survey three mountains for reptiles and amphibians. They received a small grant from the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund through the Regional Implementation Team led by BirdLife International. Their aim was to gather data to update the information about an already identified Key Biodiversity Area (Mt Chiperone) and to identify two potentially new Key Biodiversity Areas (Ribáuè and Inago mountains). The survey team leader, Krystal Tolley, wrote the following story about their adventures, successes, and worries. This is the third, and last, article in this series.***

## Part 3: Inago

We knew the next stop would be challenging. Mount Inago was close by, but the long bush-road took half a day of slow travel. That wasn't the real challenge though. The forest itself is nearly lost. Most of the forest has been replaced by machamba already, although a small intact patch persists in the southeast at elevation. Again enlisting the help of the village at the base, we trekked up through not just mature machamba, but newly cleared areas. In fact, our entire hike was through agriculture. We found a campsite in disturbed patch of forest that was somehow left standing when all other sides around it were cut. In fact, as I stood in the machamba just outside our camp looking at the Google Earth satellite image on my phone... I was supposed to be in forest. Yet I was standing in a young machamba. Forest clearing was happening at a rapid pace obviously, and it isn't stopping.



*Beautiful panorama of the survey area.*

Just the other side of this machamba were the 'real forest' seemed to start, was a large clearing of newly felled trees, waiting to be set alight once dry, to make way for yet another machamba. I was glad we had come before this forest is completely lost, but I was crestfallen by what I saw. As with the other mountains, we were most keen on finding *Nothophryne* frogs and *Nadzikambia* chameleons, especially the latter because nobody had ever found the *Nadzikambia* here before. The *Nothophryne* were again easy. We made our way to the granite dome base and up the slippery slope to find dozens of adults and tadpoles. In the meantime, we recorded several other frogs and lizards but we again struggled to find the *Nadzikambia*. Nights of searching in what we thought were the best areas of the forest produced nothing.



Part of the forest

On the very last night at Inago, we headed into the forest one last time. Hours went by, we were

scratched, bitten, muddy and tired so we had to admit defeat and we turned back to camp. Crossing the newly felled but unburnt machamba area, I continued to scan anyway. At least 3m high on a lone vine that was tangled in the partly downed trees I saw a bright green glimmer. It was a *Nadzikambia*. There alone, with its home chopped away, it clung. There was no hope for this chameleon. The area would soon be burned. This time there was no shouts of joy and dancing around. The sight of this little creature desperately hanging there is something that will stay with me forever.

The conflict between humans and nature takes many forms, but this moment is the one that reaches me the most. I ask myself now if we can save what is left of the forest on Inago. If we cannot, we lose this species - and the ones we haven't yet discovered.

BirdLife International runs the Regional Implementation Team (RIT) for the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) investment in the Eastern Afromontane Hotspot (2012 -2019). See the interactive map of all projects implemented under the CEPF Eastern Afromontane Hotspot programme [here](#).

*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. More information on the CEPF can be found at [www.cepf.net](http://www.cepf.net).*