

Five years' success for African mountain hotspot - bring on phase two!

- By Jude Fuhnwi

Five years ago, Birdlife International was granted the funding to manage the rich but highly threatened biodiversity of the Eastern Afromontane Hotspot. As the first five-year phase comes to a close, we reflect on the successes, lessons learned, and how to make this amazing work last long into the future.



Mount Mabu is famous for its old-growth rainforest © Julian Bayliss

Rocky mountain peaks push up out of a lush green carpet of forest, shaded by scuttling clouds. Many of these mountains were born from fire, breaking into the world as volcanoes, but now their appearance couldn't be more tranquil. This is the Eastern Afromontane Hotspot, a site of incredible importance for over 10,000 species of animal and plant – almost a third of which are endemic to this one area.

In October 2012, BirdLife International started managing an investment programme, financed by the [Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund \(CEPF\)](#), to conserve this beautiful and important area.

Five years later, the first investment cycle has come to an end. Throughout this time, the Regional Implementation Team (RIT) (a collaboration between BirdLife International, [IUCN](#) and [EWNHS \(BirdLife in Ethiopia\)](#)), has made a huge impact. They have worked with 104 conservation groups throughout the region. They have supported 135 productive projects in 76 Key Biodiversity Areas, spanning 13 countries across the

hotspot. From the highlands of Ethiopia to the cross-border mountains of Zimbabwe and Mozambique, the tale has largely been one of success.

The last five years have been challenging, but also very exciting

The RIT assembled for a meeting in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, to discuss how they could make these successes last in the long term. Maaïke Manten, BirdLife's RIT Units Coordinator and Team Leader for the RIT, summed up the last five years as challenging, but also very exciting.

Plans have now been made to roll out a second phase of the programme, funded by the [Global Environment Facility \(GEF\)](#). Maaïke was confident that the RIT would do more to protect what has been achieved so far, while grabbing even more wins for nature:

“We are currently preparing for a new interim phase of two years. We have recently issued our [17th call for proposals](#), and we are now looking forward to working with a small set of grantees to continue the work in four countries,” said Maaïke.

Lessons learned

The future of the investment will build on lessons learned from the last five years. This includes focusing on prioritized areas, ensuring that local communities are increasingly involved in the grantees' projects, and bringing together high-capacity and low-capacity grantees to work together. The next phase in the coming two years will focus on Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda. Ian Gordon, member of the CEPF RIT Advisory Board for the Eastern Afromontane Hotspot, explains why:

“The concentration of biodiversity and basic competencies in these four countries is greater than in others.

Investment in these countries to date has been sufficient to build a core of competences on which something much more substantial can be done to achieve graduation of civil societies from our hotspot, so they no longer depend on CEPF funding,”



Mount Kilimanjaro, a dormant volcano in Tanzania, forms part of the Eastern Afromontane Hotspot © Chris17 / Wikimedia Commons

The second phase

The last five years saw the CEPF programme building the ability of individual NGOs to identify, manage and monitor [Key Biodiversity Areas](#) in countries across the hotspot. The second phase of the programme will focus on mainstreaming conservation goals into the policy and private sectors in the four focal countries.

The next step will be encouraging private companies to adopt environmentally friendly practices

In Rwanda and Uganda, where mining companies operate next to or in protected areas, the CEPF RIT will be making grants to organisations who will work with private companies and encourage them to change their behavior, to adopt a practice that is more environmentally friendly, such as less destructive oil and gas extraction.

“If they do that, it means the private company has absorbed the notion of conservation and made it part of the way they operate,” said Dan Rothberg, CEPF Grant Director for the Eastern Afromontane Hotspot.

In Tanzania and Kenya, the focus is on changing policies: funding projects that push for national legislation that encourages sustainable land use, extraction of coal and water management. Emphasis will be on energy, forestry and water management policies.

CEPF will also continue to finance three projects setting up Payment for Ecosystem Services schemes – incentives offered to farmers to manage their land more sustainably – in Kenya and Uganda. All these projects will be supported by the Regional Implementation Team based in Kigali (Rwanda) and Nairobi (Kenya).

“There is so much to be done, there is no way to stop”

“The team is absolutely fantastic! We go out on monitoring trips to these far out places that are not easily accessible, but when you are there, you see what is being done, you see the nature around you, you see some of these key species like chimpanzees, or birds, butterflies and many more. That just makes you smile. There is so much to be done, there is no way to stop,” said Maaïke.

BirdLife International, together with the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the Ethiopian Wildlife and Natural History Society (BirdLife in Ethiopia) form the Regional Implementation Team (RIT) for the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) investment in the Eastern Afromontane Hotspot (2012 -2017). The investment will support civil society in applying innovative approaches to conservation in under-capacitated and underfunded protected areas, Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) and priority corridors in the region.

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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.