

# Many more threatened species in an East African biodiversity hotspot than thought

- By Mercy Kariuki, Kariuki Ndang'ang'a and Obaka Torto



*Several reptiles are endemic to the EACF (Photo: Kariuki Ndang'ang'a)*

[The Eastern Arc Mountains and Coastal Forests of Tanzania and Kenya \(EACF\)](#) are currently understood to host over 750 globally threatened species of plants and animals, more than double the 333 species listed in an assessment undertaken in 2003. This is according to the newly released 2008-2013 biodiversity status and trends report for the EACF, a region that now forms parts of both the "[Eastern Afrotropics](#)" and "Coastal Forests of Eastern Africa" global biodiversity hotspots.

In addition to 26 species now listed as more threatened than 10 years ago, the increase is mostly attributed to a comprehensive assessment of plants, which was not available in the previous assessment. New species descriptions for the region are also highlighted, including 20 amphibians and reptiles, one mammal and one plant species. The report recommends consideration of a further 17 sites for recognition as Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs), owing to the presence of globally threatened taxa within them.

Threats that are reported as facing biodiversity in the EACF include unsustainable charcoal production, which is a major driver of the decline in forest cover and habitat fragmentation in Dakatcha Woodlands in Kenya, important for the endangered [Clarke's Weaver](#) *Ploceus golandi* and [Sokoke Scops-owl](#) *Otus ireneae*. Other threats include conversion of forest for

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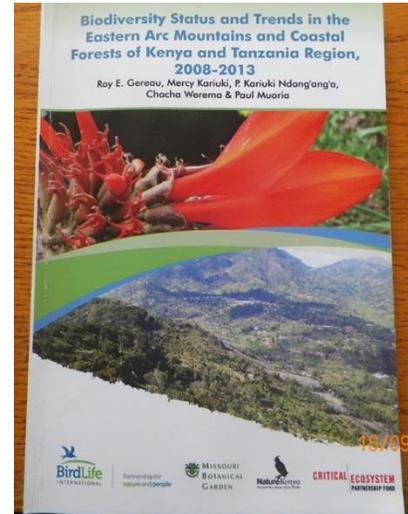
agriculture, human population increase and forest fires. Invasive species are underscored as probably a more serious problem in the region than had previously been realised. At least 22 invasive plant species are considered problematic, with *Maesopsis eminii*, *Rubus sp.* and *Cedrela odorata* being probably the most serious. In Kenya, *Prosopis juliflora* is reported to have invaded the [Tana River Delta](#).

On a positive note, improved forest management resulting from improved protection status is observed at some sites. Among these are three forest blocks in Amani Nature Reserve, Tanzania, which changed from private to state tenure. Evidence also continues to emerge supporting the effectiveness of a Participatory Forest Management (PFM) approach; this is demonstrated by increased populations of wild game species in some sites, such as West Usambara, where PFM is implemented.

Further good news for the region follows implementation of new Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD) projects, especially in Tanzania: for example, Piloting REDD in Zanzibar through community forest management project and Making REDD work for communities and forest conservation in Eastern Arc Mountains and Coastal Forests of Tanzania project". These projects are designed to reduce carbon dioxide emissions and to improve livelihoods in local communities by making them beneficiaries of REDD financing. However, the report recommends that successful REDD projects must have a strong focus on strengthening village institutions to ensure high levels of compliance and enforcement of forest user rules within project boundaries.

The report finally highlights some recent positive policy developments. Among these is the development of the conservation strategy for the Eastern Arc Mountain Forests in Tanzania. Also highlighted is the development of an action plan for conservation in Arabuko-Sokoke Forest which emphasizes enhancement of connectivity and quality of habitat and security of elephants while safeguarding against human-wildlife conflict. The enactment of the Kenya Wildlife Conservation and Management Act 2013, as well as the Tourism Act and policy in Tanzania are also highlighted.

The EACF runs 900 km along the Kenya-Tanzania coasts and includes Zanzibar, Pemba and Mafia Islands off the Tanzanian mainland. The region is very important for its biological diversity and richness. It is characterized by a high level of species endemism, exceptional diversity of its plant and animal communities and a severe degree of threat. This report is a result of a recently concluded BirdLife project that aimed at consolidating and presenting biodiversity data for the region in order, among other objectives, to increase leverage of REDD+ and REDD Readiness for the EACF. The report mostly relies on collating published information from a variety of sources, including direct contributions by the researchers in the region.



The report (Photo: Mercy Kariuki)

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*A copy of this and previous reports for the region can be downloaded from <http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/info/EAMHome>.*