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# The Chimpanzee Motorway - Connecting Forest Habitats in Western Tanzania

- By Magnus Mosha and Kathryn Doody



*A young chimpanzee in Mahale National Park ©Daniel Rosengren/FZS*

Mpanda District Council in Katavi Region in Western Tanzania has recently approved the boundaries of the new proposed Tongwe West Local Authority Forest Reserve. This Forest Reserve is part of the Greater Mahale KBA (Key Biodiversity Area) which, in turn, is part of the [Eastern Afromontane biodiversity hotspot](#).

“It is a rare opportunity to be able to set aside such a large stretch of intact forest and woodland for conservation. We congratulate Mpanda District Council on recognizing the long-term value of Tongwe West Forest and on their forward-thinking decision to protect these natural resources,” says Kathryn Doody who is Community Conservation Advisor for [Frankfurt Zoological Society \(FZS\)](#) in Mahale.



## Collaboration for success

Joining with the [Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund \(CEPF\)](#) and other conservation partners such as the [Jane Goodall Institute](#), FZS has supported Mpanda District Council in identifying, assessing and approving the protection of Tongwe West Forest Reserve.

The designated boundaries encompass an area of 3650 square kilometres. The new reserve is contiguous with existing protected forest areas including both government forest reserves and community owned Village Land Forest Reserves. “It is quite remarkable that the reserve falls on land that lies entirely outside of existing village land boundaries,” says Magnus Mosha, FZS Mahale Project Leader.

The forest reserve will protect vital water sheds, safeguarding water supply for the adjacent communities and helping to maintain clean water flows into Lake Tanganyika. In addition, Tongwe West Forest Reserve will protect the watershed of the Katuma River which is a life line for agriculture in Tanganyika District and Lake Katavi in Katavi National Park.



*Nkondwe waterfall in the Tongwe West Local Authority Forest Reserve in western Tanzania. Photo: Magnus Mosha/FZS*

It is expected that sustainable timber harvesting will be permitted in specific areas and carefully monitored providing much needed income for forest management, local communities and the local government.

Visually striking geological features in the area, such as Nkondwe Waterfall and Magorofani Rocks will provide future opportunities for eco-tourism, particularly as the road networks in western Tanzania are developed allowing easier access to these sites.

## Connectivity

The large stretch of forest and miombo woodland connects previously disparate forest reserves. This connectivity allows the movement of animal species across the wider ecosystem that includes [Katavi National Park](#) and [Mahale Mountains National Park](#) (both IBAs).

The protection of Tongwe West Forest will secure the habitat of a significant proportion of Tanzania’s chimpanzee population that resides outside of protected areas. This is an important step forward in safeguarding this endangered species in Tanzania.

Whilst research efforts continue to shed light on chimpanzee populations in the area there is still much to learn about other key species. It is known that Red Colobus, elephants, buffalo,

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roan, and other large mammals are resident in the Tongwe West area. Local community elders tell us this area is historically important for the movement of elephants between other large protected areas in the ecosystem. However, more efforts are needed to fully understand the movements of the elephant population and other species and how they utilize the designated Tongwe West Forest Reserve.

## Long-term management

The management of the Tongwe West Forest Reserve will be the responsibility of the new Tanganyika District council in conjunction with 10 forest adjacent village communities under the auspices of a newly formed Forest Management Council.

“Approving the protection of the site is only the first step, there is a long road to sustainable protection of Tongwe West Forest,” says Josephina Rupia of the Mpanda District Natural Resources Office. CEPF and FZS will contribute to the preparation of a general management plan that combines expertise from the Forest and Beekeeping Division with local knowledge from community representatives in the Forest Management Council.

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*[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.*

See the interactive map of all projects implemented under the CEPF Eastern Afromontane hotspot programme [here](#).