

Creating the A Rocha Dakatcha Nature Reserve – status update

7th September 2020

The Dakatcha Woodland inland of Malindi is a critical area for the conservation of globally endangered birds and mammals. It is a patchwork of forest types and until the past few years has been considered too out of the way to be easily exploited and as a result, has survived. However, recently improved access roads have led to intense logging for timber and charcoal and total clearance of forest on the richer red soils for agriculture, particularly pineapple farming.

With the threat of the forest being cleared and the subsequent immediate loss of major populations of the threatened wildlife, A Rocha decided to purchase forested land to create the A Rocha Dakatcha Nature Reserve to protect particularly the Sokoke Scops Owl and Golden-rumped Sengi.

To date, with the help of the Bob Scott Memorial Fund, AG Leventis Foundation and generous supporters, A Rocha has secured 1,517 acres of forest which equals c.40% of the last remaining intact habitat for the endangered species. The plan is to extend this to include the remaining blocks of forest that hold particularly the owl which is far more selective in its habitat requirements than the sengi. The area targeted for this is c. 10,500 acres – which would include significant areas of highly damaged forest which would require a long-term strategy of forest restoration. A Rocha is hoping to partner with Cassinia Environmental and Eden Reforestation Projects to implement this restoration. The vision is that as the forest regrows, additional habitat will be created for the owl and sengi to expand back into.



Credit: Mustafa Adamjee

Adjudication of the community land in this area began in Sept 2020. This has resulted in a frenzy of land purchasing by prospective farmers from far and wide – and an unprecedented level of widespread destruction of this unique forest and its wildlife.

There is an *urgent need* to secure what remaining intact forest there is before it is destroyed.

Some parts of the area already acquired are almost untouched original forest and are magnificent. Much of the area, however, has been damaged by charcoal burners and for timber. A Rocha's survey work has revealed a yet rich and diverse wildlife population with good numbers of the endemic Golden-rumped Sengi among 24 species of mammals, 200 birds and over 90 butterfly species – and counting.

A Rocha has been working with the local communities to not only purchase land off them, but also assist them to learn new improved ways of farming and generating income in sustainable ways.

As a result, we have built strong relationships with many people and therefore as land is being sold, we are being offered first refusal. This is a great advantage in the effort to secure the forest before it is destroyed.

A Rocha has acquired land sale agreements signed and witnessed by the local Area Chief together with a lawyer and the neighbours to the plot being sold. Under this arrangement, as the land is adjudicated the title will be issued to A Rocha Kenya.



With the commencement of adjudication, pressure on the forest has multiplied exponentially the last few weeks. Land is being brokered far



Above: common scenes across the Dakatcha Woodlands – rampant charcoal burning now with power saws and using motorbikes to remove the charcoal.

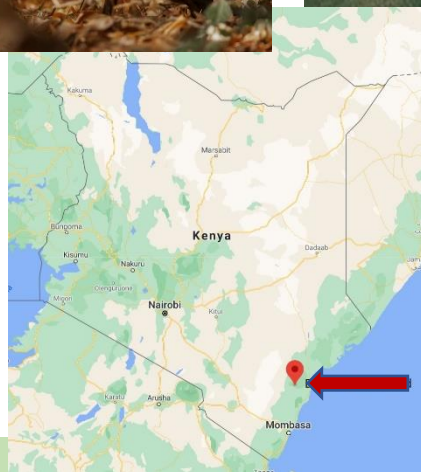
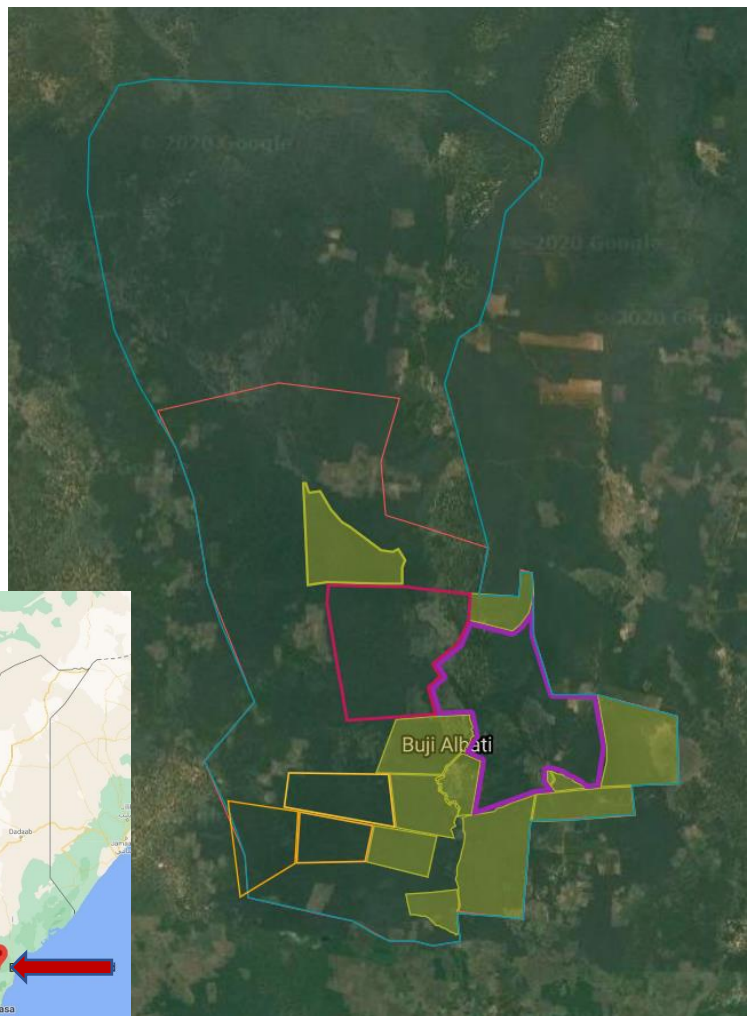
and wide – and with the use of social media, enquiries are even coming from the far side of Kenya. Many are being told outright lies to persuade them to purchase (e.g. ‘the plots are right next to the beach’) – but the result is going to be the rapid destruction of large swathes of forest. A Rocha has submitted proposals for funding to donors for land purchase, but these often take months to come through and we don’t have that luxury now. We are looking for **Ksh 10 million (US\$100,000)** immediately to secure an area of thankfully less damaged forest which we know holds pairs of the Sokoke Scops Owl together with the sengi. Join us in saving this precious forest by donating either through [A Rocha International](#) (ref. *Dakatcha*), [GoFundMe](#) or our [local crowd-funding platform](#). With adjudication happening, an acre now costs US\$350 (up from \$170 in August) – and is likely to increase.

Below left: ...but there is *hope!* Left: Katisho holds a regenerating *Mkulu* tree (*Diospyros bussei*) – the same as cut up in the top left image – and other species are re-growing from cut stumps. Our vision is for a renewed Dakatcha Woodlands with thriving populations of the rare and beautiful wildlife in them.

This is just a part of working towards developing a landscape-wide management strategy for the Dakatcha Woodlands Key Biodiversity Area in partnership with other conservation and development organisations (e.g. NatureKenya, World Vision). This will preserve the core area of the nature reserve and aim to preserve a level of ecological integrity for the wider habitat and develop long-term sustainable solutions for the resident communities.



Credit:
Federico
Veronesi



Map showing the area already secured (yellow blocks), the long-term vision for 10,500 acres (blue outline), an important area to ‘join the blocks’ (red and purple outlines) and the blocks we **urgently need to secure this month** (golden blocks)