

A Rocha Dakatcha Nature Reserve

- an update: April 2022

The Dakatcha Woodlands Key Biodiversity Area is recognised internationally as a mosaic of forest, scrubland and wetlands which holds a rich diversity of species of plants and animals many of which are globally Threatened and restricted to the East African coast. It is also an area with no government protection and as a result rapid low grade agricultural expansion coupled with rampant, uncontrolled, and often illegal charcoal burning, are removing large swathes of ancient forest growth with subsequent loss of biodiversity.

A Rocha works closely with local communities to encourage sustainable living and protection of the surrounding habitats and environment. However, in the Dakatcha context we recognised that the already high but also significantly intensifying pressure on land in Dakatcha meant that purchase of forest and protection of it through ownership was the only viable way to ensure it remains for the long term.

To date, with support from numerous generous individuals together with key donors (see text box) we have managed to increase the area of forest secured by almost two and a half times since the end of 2020 to a total of **4,276 acres / 1,726 ha**. This is forest that is known to be home for the Endangered [Sokoke Scops Owl](#), [Sokoke Pipit](#) and [Golden-rumped Sengi](#) among much other wildlife. So far, the secured area is a series of forest blocks that are spread across the target area of forest which is known to hold these species forming two main sections with smaller outlier plots secured where forested land has been offered us for purchase by landowners (see map below). Our strategy is to push to secure the gaps between blocks and create a single block of forest. This will invariably include areas of abandoned farmland where forest has already been cleared, however we are already seeing signs of hope through natural regeneration of forest trees.

The frenzy for land purchasing has continued unabated across the Dakatcha landscape coupled with relentless cutting of trees for charcoal. The urgency of raising further funds to secure the remaining sections of standing forest holding the Sokoke Scops Owl remains a priority. Land prices have rocketed to 2-3 times what it was a year ago – and continue to rise thus adding to the urgency. **Please join us to raise a further US\$ 500,000** which is generously being matched by the Rainforest Trust with \$2 for every \$1 donated.

With increasing pressure on the reserve due to widespread clearance of trees to make charcoal in the wider landscape, we have employed six scouts from the local community to patrol the reserve. They work to inform and enthuse community members about protecting what is an incredibly unique forest on their doorstep and to stop any illegal cutting and snaring of wildlife. So, while charcoal burning is still rampant in the area, it has



thankfully stopped within the blocks of forest making up the reserve. The scouts have further reported an increase in the number of sightings of larger mammals such as Bushbuck as well as the Golden-rumped Sengi – and in January 2022 a Lion was reported from within the reserve boundaries.

We are grateful to all donors with recognition of: The many individuals who have given; A.G. Leventis Foundation; A.P. Leventis Foundation; Bob Scott Memorial Fund; CARU Containers; Eden Wildlife Trust; IUCN Netherlands; Lordship Africa; Rainforest Trust; World Land Trust

Biodiversity surveys have been carried out monthly over the past two years across the reserve area and camera traps have been deployed full time. From this we have so far identified 28 species of mammal, 176 bird, 151 butterfly and 299 tree species – confirming the rich biodiversity present in this unique landscape. Data are being prepared for publishing on the [Global Biodiversity Information Facility](#) online database; the camera trap images are also being uploaded on [Wildlife Insights](#) and an [interactive online map](#) has been created for the camera trap data.



Photo: Raph Nusumbao

The species that catalysed the creation of the reserve, the Sokoke Scops Owl, has been recently re-surveyed and found to occur in good numbers across the reserve as well as in areas yet to be secured. Furthermore, the sengi has been found to be relatively common across the whole area of the reserve and Sokoke Pipit also occur in good numbers within the right habitat type – again including areas yet to be secured. **These sites are a critical priority for purchasing and protecting** from the widespread and intense charcoal burning and conversion to low grade agricultural land that is happening across the Dakatcha landscape.



Once purchased, it has been important to make it clear that the land is owned and part of a reserve. To this end we are installing concrete beacons labelled 'ARDNR' at key plot corners and border points around the edge of the reserve to mark it (see image). These go hand in hand with raising further awareness about the reserve and why it is being created.

A key characteristic of how A Rocha works is building long-term relationships with those we engage with. We work with churches located around the reserve as a gateway to build these relationships with the adjacent community. As such, we have taught in the churches on our role to care for God's creation together with teaching farming methods based on biblical principles. This has been warmly welcomed and we are grateful for an overall very positive response from the communities regarding the reserve. We are also grateful for good relationships with the local authorities and government who have been supportive of the reserve initiative.

The Reserve aims to protect the core of the Sokoke Scops Owl and Golden-rumped Sengi habitat and range in Dakatcha. There is a large area outside of this which also needs protection as it is being heavily and rapidly degraded. We are seeking to work in partnership with other concerned entities to engage with the wider community and help them to use it sustainably.

Please join us further in this rewarding journey to both fully secure the core reserve area and work to protect the wider Dakatcha Woodlands landscape.



The A Rocha Dakatcha Nature Reserve as at February 2022. Red plots are those secured in 2022



Photo: Mustafa Adamjee



Violet Dropping *Trithemis annulata*
– one of Dakatcha's dragonflies