

Dakatcha Nature Reserve

2024
Annual Update



A ROCHA
KENYA

Message from our team

Dear Partners,

We've come to the end of another fantastic year in the A Rocha Dakatcha Nature Reserve. There is much to celebrate and look back on with pride.

We are proud to report that this year we have increased the size of our Reserve by 1,229 acres, protected a total of 8,828 acres for conservation, covered more than 1,240 kilometers in scout patrols and recorded a combined 873 different species of bird, butterfly, mammal and plant in our Reserve. Our team has put in a huge effort to create, protect and restore the A Rocha Dakatcha Nature Reserve. It is such a joy to see our hard work pay off in a thriving haven of biodiversity and a refuge for threatened species.

We are so grateful for all of you who have been part of creating and caring for this Reserve. This work is only possible because of your support. We speak on behalf of all the plants and animals that cannot speak for themselves – without you they would not have a home or a future. Thank you for turning the idea of a Reserve into a real place of safety and abundance for all life.





The scouts of the A Rocha Dakatcha Nature Reserve

2024 Highlights and Challenges

A message from Albert Baya, the on-ground Community Officer for the A Rocha Dakatcha Nature Reserve



Under the protection of A Rocha and thanks to your support, our Reserve grows more beautiful every year. Thank you for the privilege of caring for this beautiful place!

2024 Highlights

The accomplishment I am most proud of for the past year is how many acres we have acquired and how we have worked hard as a team to acquire that land. We have had hundreds of conversations with community members and spent hours and hours in lawyers offices – and it was all worth it! Our Reserve is bigger and more connected than it has ever been before. And we've managed that without any conflict within our team or within the community.

I am also very proud of our scouts. They patrolled day and night to protect our Reserve, collecting data with SMART.

I was also very excited to see a Chestnut fronted helmet shrike nesting in a *Brachystigia* tree in our Reserve. It's the first time i've ever seen this species breeding.

2024 Challenges

The biggest challenged we faced in 2024 was the illegal grazing from nomadic herders. The herdsmen come from other parts of Kenya, so they have no connection to the community or the land and their livestock cause a lot of destruction to the whole landscape. Farmers have lost crops to the hungry animals and the young trees, shrubs and grasses of our Reserve have been trampled and eaten.

We also had problems with fire. The herdsmen would set patches of our Reserve on fire to clear the land and encourage the growth of grass for new pasture in future months. Thankfully our diligent scouts were able to notice and respond to the fires quickly and minimise the damage.

However, we have hope! Even the damage caused to the Reserve has opened up paths for wildlife and created space for new species of plant to grow.

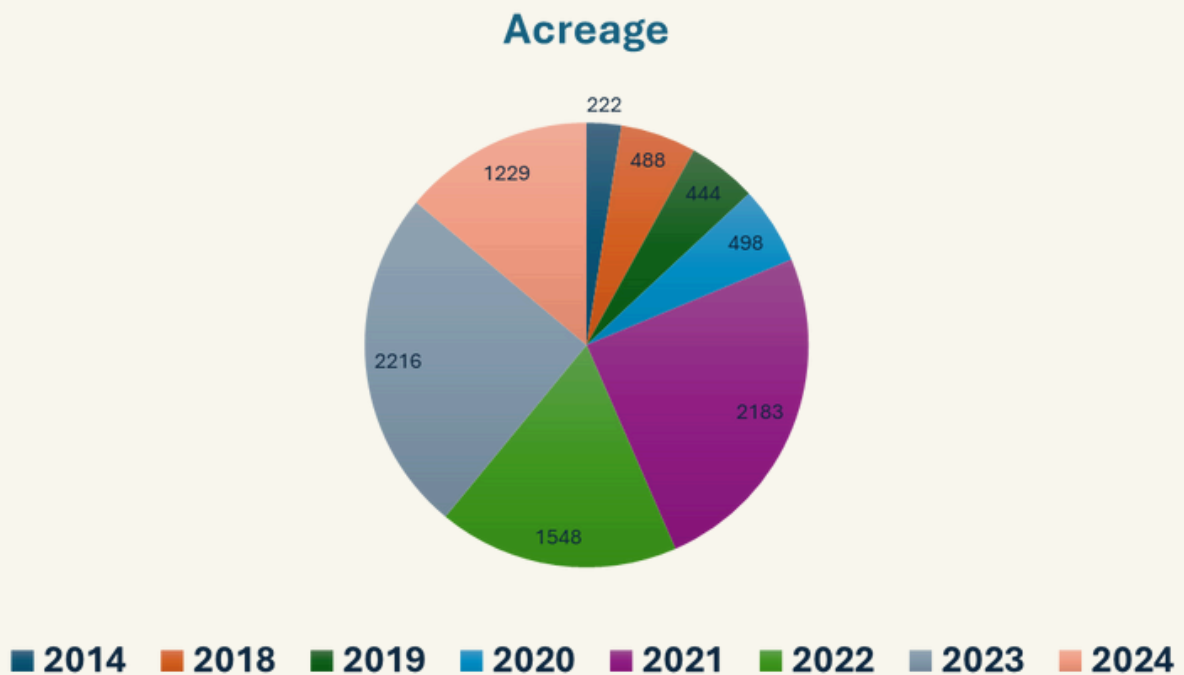


The Dakatcha Nature Reserve offers protection to threatened trees like the
Erythrina saculeuxii

Land Purchase in 2024

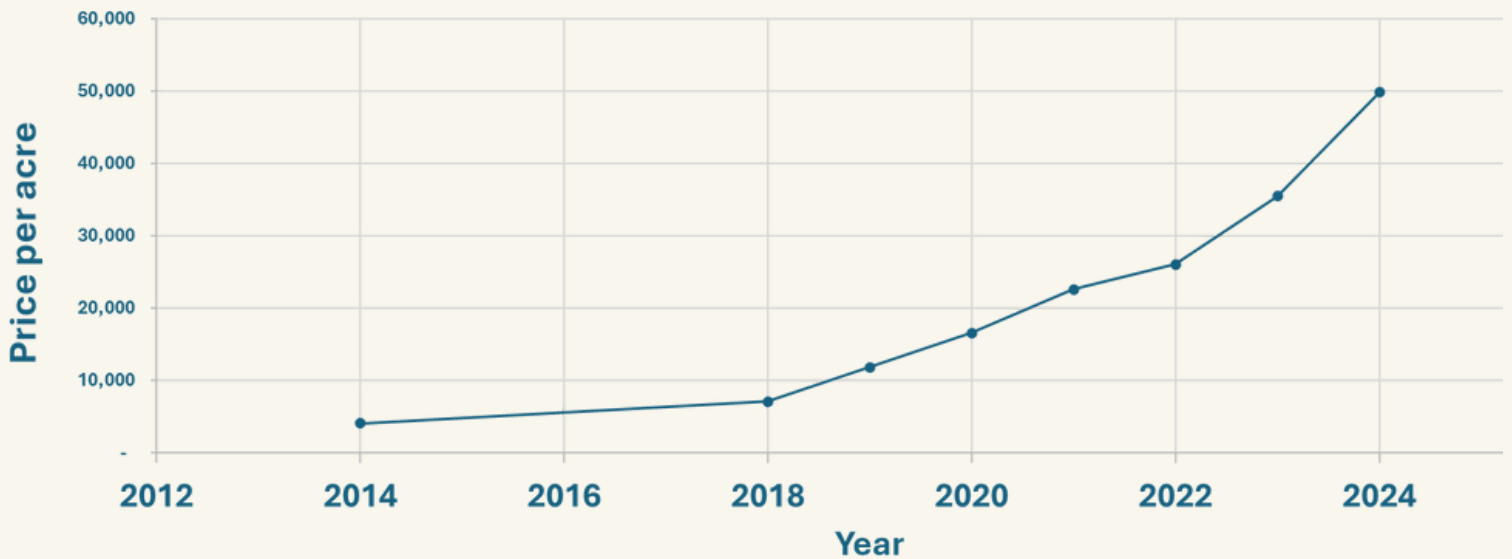
We have successfully secured nearly 9,000 acres of the Dakatcha Woodlands and permanently protected it forever

In December 2024, the total size of the Reserve reached 8,828 acres. This included 1,229 acres acquired that year from 70 different plots of land. The largest single plot purchased measured 84 acres, while the smallest was just 1 acre, reflecting a trend of decreasing plot sizes compared to purchases made in previous years. Additionally, the average price of land saw a significant rise in 2024, reaching nearly 50,000 Kenyan Shillings per acre—an increase of approximately 15,000 KES compared to the average price in 2023. We have recorded a 1150% increase in land price from when A Rocha first purchased land in 2014 for 4,000 ksh per acre. This upward trend in land prices highlights the growing value and competition for land in the region.



Graph showing the total number of acres purchased each year of the project

Land Acquisition Challenges



Some challenges encountered during the year included:

Rising Land Prices

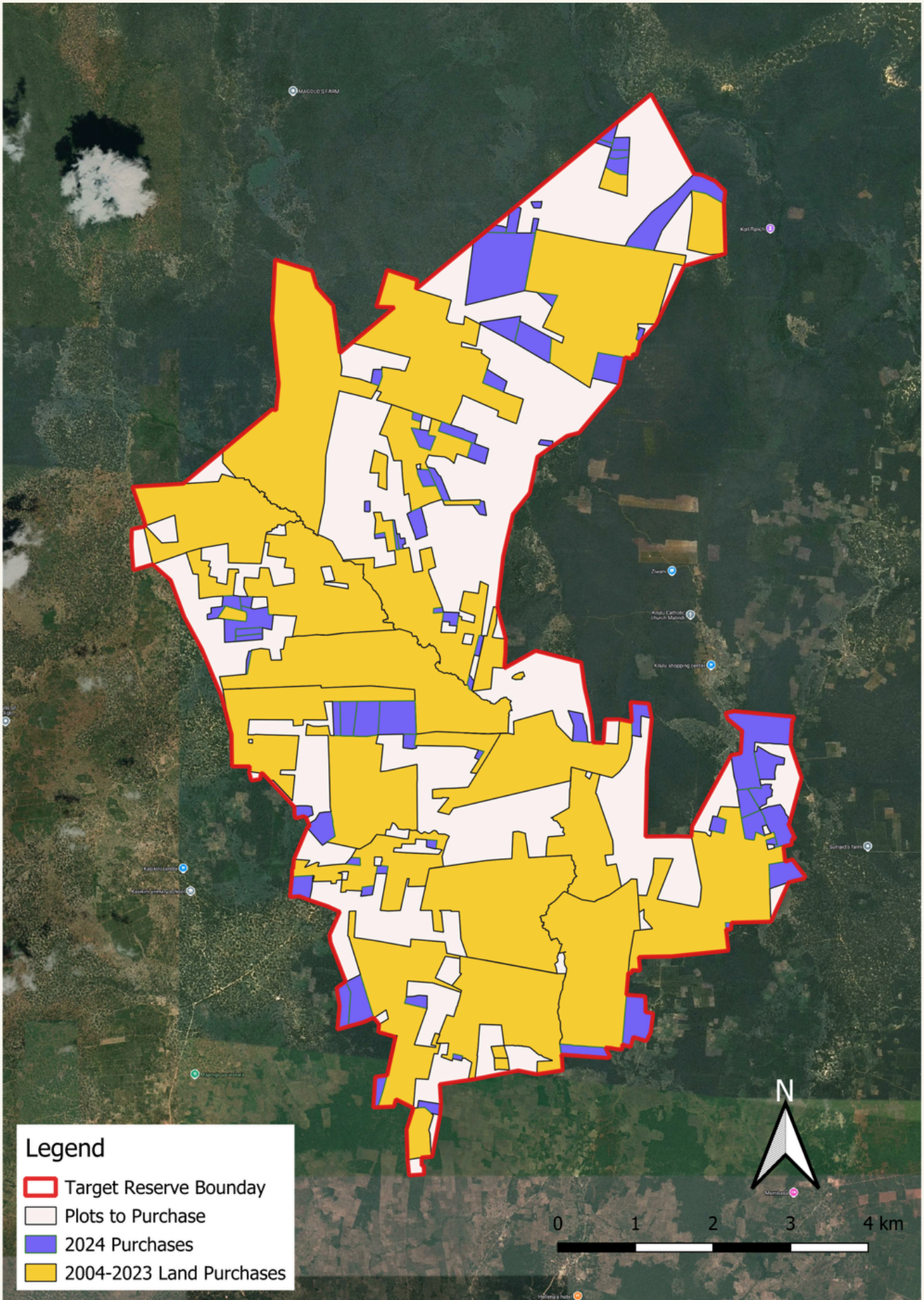
In 2024 the cost of land increased by over KES 15,000 per acre compared to the previous year, a 43% increase, making acquisitions more expensive and reducing the impact of the overall budget for land purchase.

Difficulty Contacting Landowners

Reaching some landowners within the proposed Reserve boundary proved challenging as many landowners do not reside in the region. We have devoted a lot of effort to tracking down who own which plot so we can complete our Reserve with no internal gaps. However, often the landowners live in another part of Kenya, are not known to the community and do not have readily available contact details.

Smaller Plot Sizes

The size of available plots on the market decreased significantly. The first plots we purchased were all more than 200 acres in size. In comparison, the majority of plots purchased in 2024 were less than 10 acres. Buying many small plots significantly increased the legal work required for each purchase while reducing the overall size of land purchased. We made more sales in 2024 but acquired less land than in 2023.



Map of the land purchased the Dakatcha Nature Reserve



The A Rocha Dakatcha Nature Reserve is a refuge for many species, including the **Little Bee-eater**

*Photo credit Raphael Nussbaumer

Community Conservation

Caring for nature by caring for people



Vincent Onono

Vincent Onono is A Rocha Kenya's Community Officer in Dakatcha. In 2024, he trained and supported 15 farmers to begin beekeeping. Honey sales not only bring much needed income for the farmers, benefiting from the bees encourages farmers to keep indigenous flowering trees and shrubs on their properties. Vincent also supported 7 farmers to use regenerative farming practices, improving yield and reducing the need to clear more land for crops. In partnership with Eden: People + Projects, Vincent attended and presented an opportunity for the community to be involved in biodiversity restoration and protection at six meetings. He also worked with A Rocha's Education Team to teach over 200 students at schools around Dakatcha about conservation.

All A Rocha's work in community conservation is for the purpose of long term thriving of the landscape for people and nature.



15

BEEKEEPERS

A Rocha Kenya trained 15 community members who live around the Dakatcha Nature Reserve in beekeeping as a nature friendly livelihood



7

FARMERS

A Rocha Kenya supported 7 farmers in regenerative farming techniques to improve crop yield and the overall health of the farmland



600

COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Over 600 community member attended meetings about forest protection and restoration of the Dakatcha Woodlands



200

STUDENTS

A Rocha Kenya's environmental education program engaged with about 200 students from 10 different schools around the Dakatcha Woodlands

Beekeeping in Dakatcha

A Rocha Kenya trained Dakatcha farmers in beekeeping as a nature friendly livelihood



Beekeeping on Baraka's farm in the Dakatcha Woodlands



"Haya mavuno yamenipa motisha ya kutia bidii zaidi na kuchochea mapenzi ya mazingira sababu nyuki wanayategemea na zaidi kunipa riziki."

"This harvest has motivated me to work harder and inspired my love for the environment because the bees depend on it and even more it has given me some income."

– Baraka Wanje Kazungu

After a year of dedication, Baraka, a first-time bee farmer in Dakatcha, celebrated his first honey harvest. Though the yield was small, it was a significant stride in the new venture that he was introduced to thanks to A Rocha Kenya and African Beekeepers Limited that worked closely in training the farmers with the support of Slovak Aid.

Baraka started with four hives and navigated the challenges of weather, bee behaviour, and hive management to harvest kilos of honey. He planted pawpaws, mangoes, pumpkin and oranges to complement the natural food sources of the bees. Baraka is eager to grow and expand his newfound passion knowing the bees' contribution to both nature and his community. His persistence and passion for beekeeping is testament to a livelihood that is good for the biodiversity and the community of Dakatcha.

Building Partnerships

Engaging Stakeholder for Effective Governance of Dakatcha Key Biodiversity Area

A Rocha Dakatcha Nature Reserve forms part of the wider Dakatcha Key Biodiversity Area, making stakeholder engagement within the landscape crucial for effective governance. This collaborative approach fosters biodiversity conservation, sustainable development, and the well-being of local communities.

Our efforts culminated in strengthened partnerships and the County Assembly's endorsement of conservation strategies. Despite challenges in organizing meetings and facilitating stakeholder participation, the year saw significant progress in securing the future of Dakatcha Woodland through governance and sustainable management initiatives.



Highlights of Building Partnerships in 2024 include:



Stakeholder Engagement

In partnership with Nature Kenya, ARK successfully engaged the County Government of Kilifi (CGoK) officials, including two pivotal site visits in May. During these visits, the County Executive Committee Member for Water, Environment, Forestry, Climate Change, Natural Resources, and Solid Waste Management expressed strong support for our land purchase strategy, recognizing its importance in supporting both biodiversity conservation and the livelihoods of local communities.

Dakatcha Woodland Management Plan

Dakatcha Woodland Management Plan (DWMP): In the second half of the year, ARK contributed to the finalization and validation of the DWMP, which includes strategies for tackling issues like charcoal burning and livestock invasion. The plan is expected to be gazetted for implementation in 2025.

Policy Development

Discussions with CGoK officials revealed the necessity of convening all relevant departments and other key stakeholders to address policy gaps such as developing a land use plan for the landscape and amending the County Spatial Plan, aiming to enhance conservation efforts that benefit biodiversity and the communities relying on this ecosystem for their livelihoods.



The A Rocha Dakatcha Nature Reserve is a refuge for many species, including the **Morning Glory**

*Photo credit Raphael Nussbaumer

Reserve Management

A Rocha's Reserve thrives thanks to the commitment of twelve scouts who patrol the woodland every day, safeguarding it from illegal activities, conducting repairs, and recording its remarkable biodiversity.



Year at a glance

8,369

KILOMETERS PATROLED

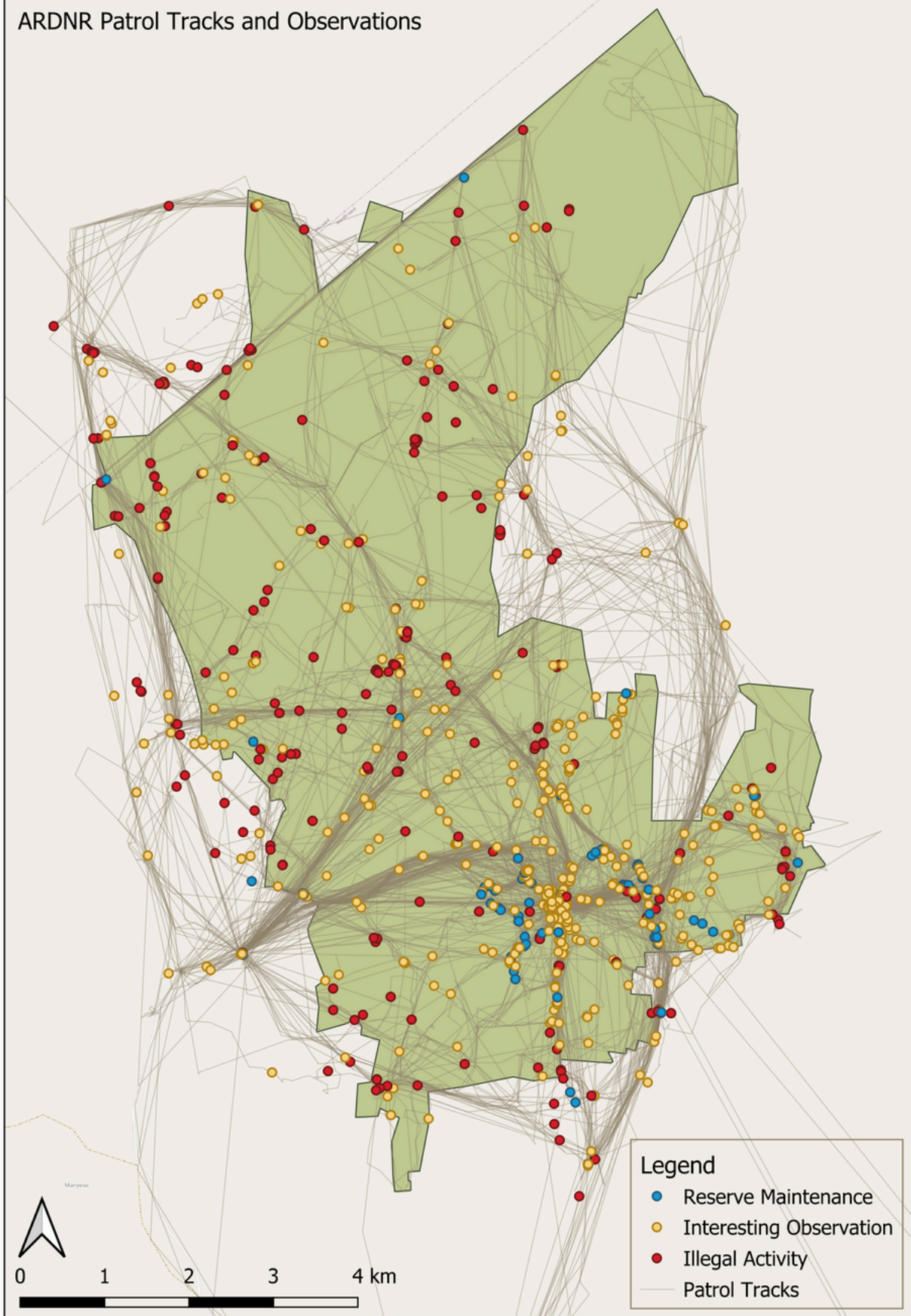
658

PATROLS PERFORMED

8

POACHERS CAUGHT

ARDNR Patrol Tracks and Observations



130
RESERVE
MAINTENANCE

638
INTERESTING
OBSERVATIONS

293
ILLEGAL ACTIVITIES

SMART in Reserve Management

As we close the year, SMART has become an indispensable tool in the effective management of our nature reserve. Over the course of the year, our scouts have demonstrated determination in collecting data and utilizing SMART for daily patrols which has been supported by the strong work ethic cultivated by the team.

While we know this, our data shows this too! The map showing the yearly visual for each geo-tagged observation and individual track puts into perspective truly how hardworking our scouts have been.

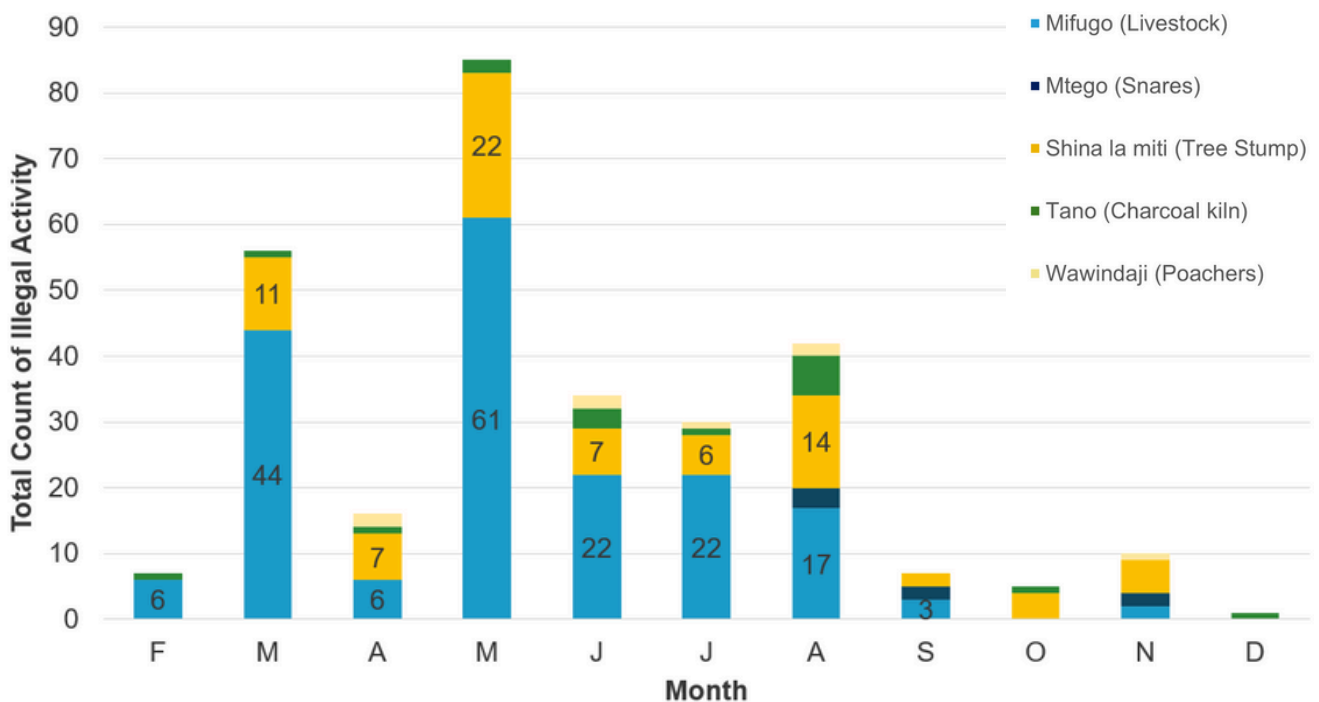
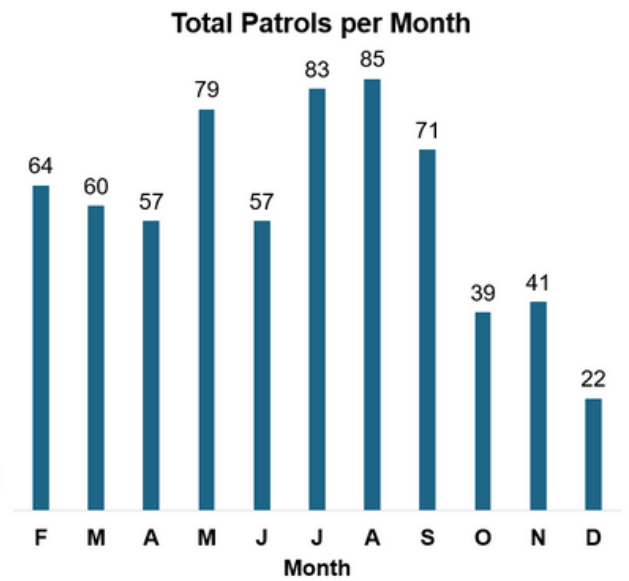
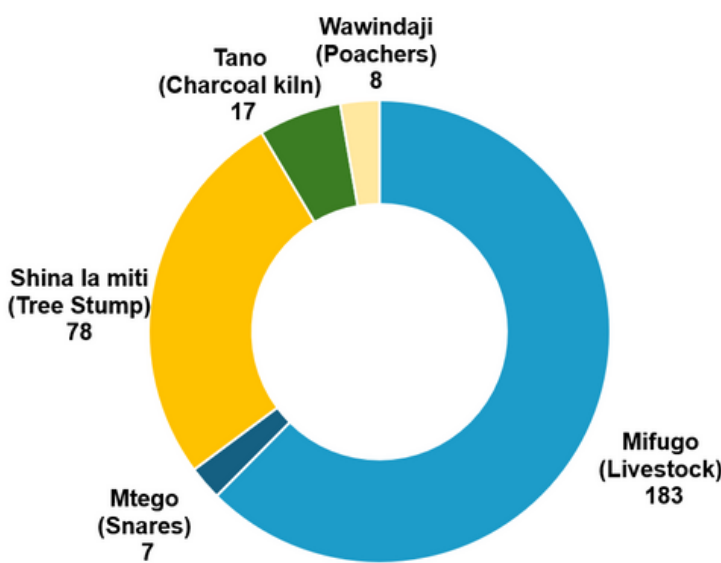
SMART will continue to drive data-driven decision-making, empower our scouts, and ensure the sustainable management of our reserve.



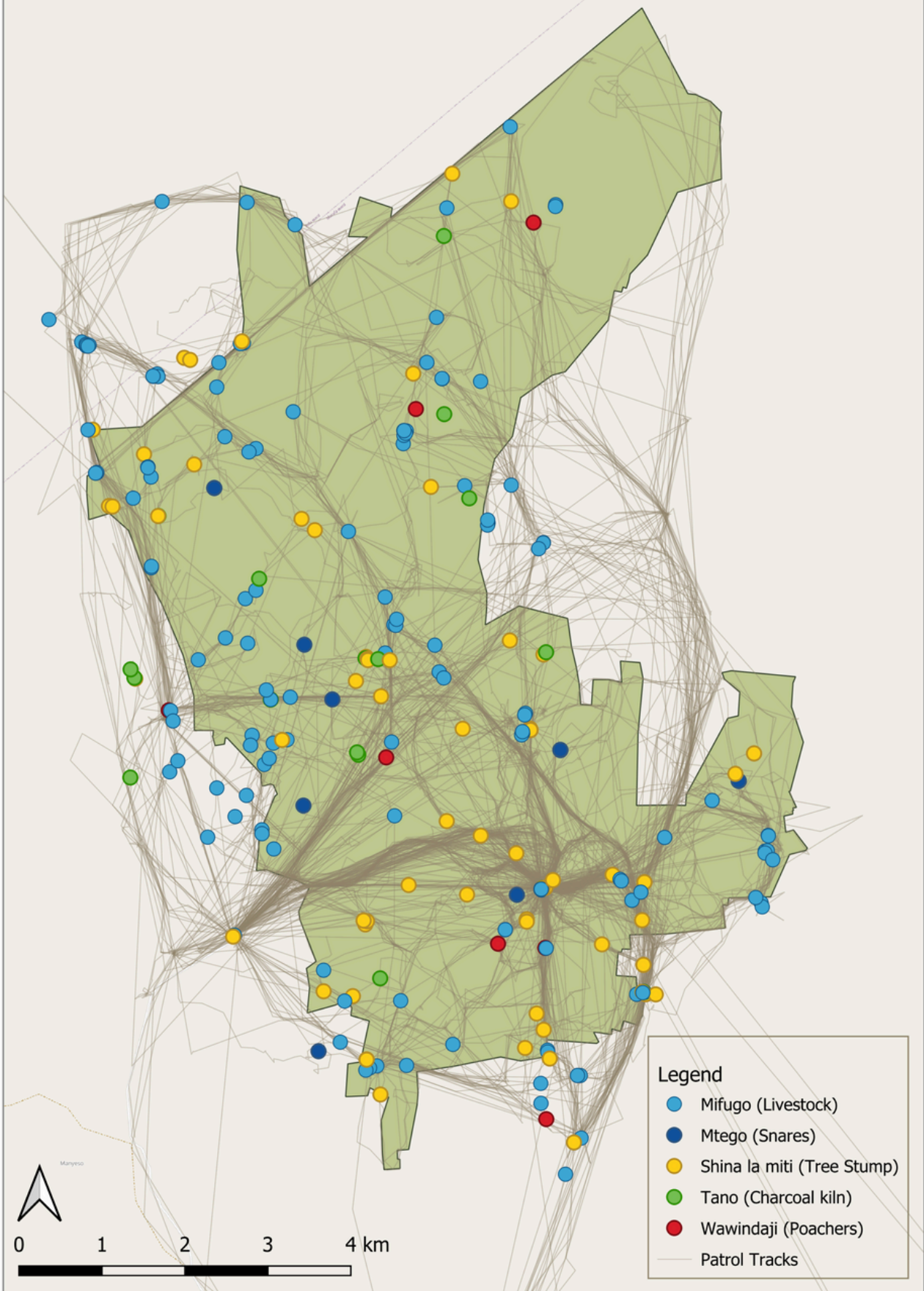
Illegal Activities

Throughout the year, our scouts recorded a total of 293 incidents of illegal activity within the reserve. The majority of these were related to livestock encroachment, accounting for 183 cases. This was followed by the discovery of 78 tree stumps, highlighting the ongoing challenge of illegal logging. While charcoal kilns (17), poachers (8), and snares (7) were found less frequently, they still pose a significant threat when encountered and are addressed with urgency to mitigate their impact in our reserve.

2024 Illegal Activity Breakdown



ARDNR Illegal Activity Sightings





The A Rocha Dakatcha Nature Reserve is a refuge for many species, including the **Sokoke Scops Owl**

*Photo credit Raphael Nussbaumer

Biodiversity Research

On the hunt for birds and butterflies



187

BIRD SPECIES

187 species of birds recorded, to date, including five globally endangered IUCN red listed species



28

MAMMAL SPECIES

28 mammal species recorded including evidence of lions, elephants, leopards and four IUCN redlisted species



538

PLANT SPECIES

538 recorded species of plant with 1 Endangered, 10 globally vulnerable trees and 35 IUCN redlisted plant species



129

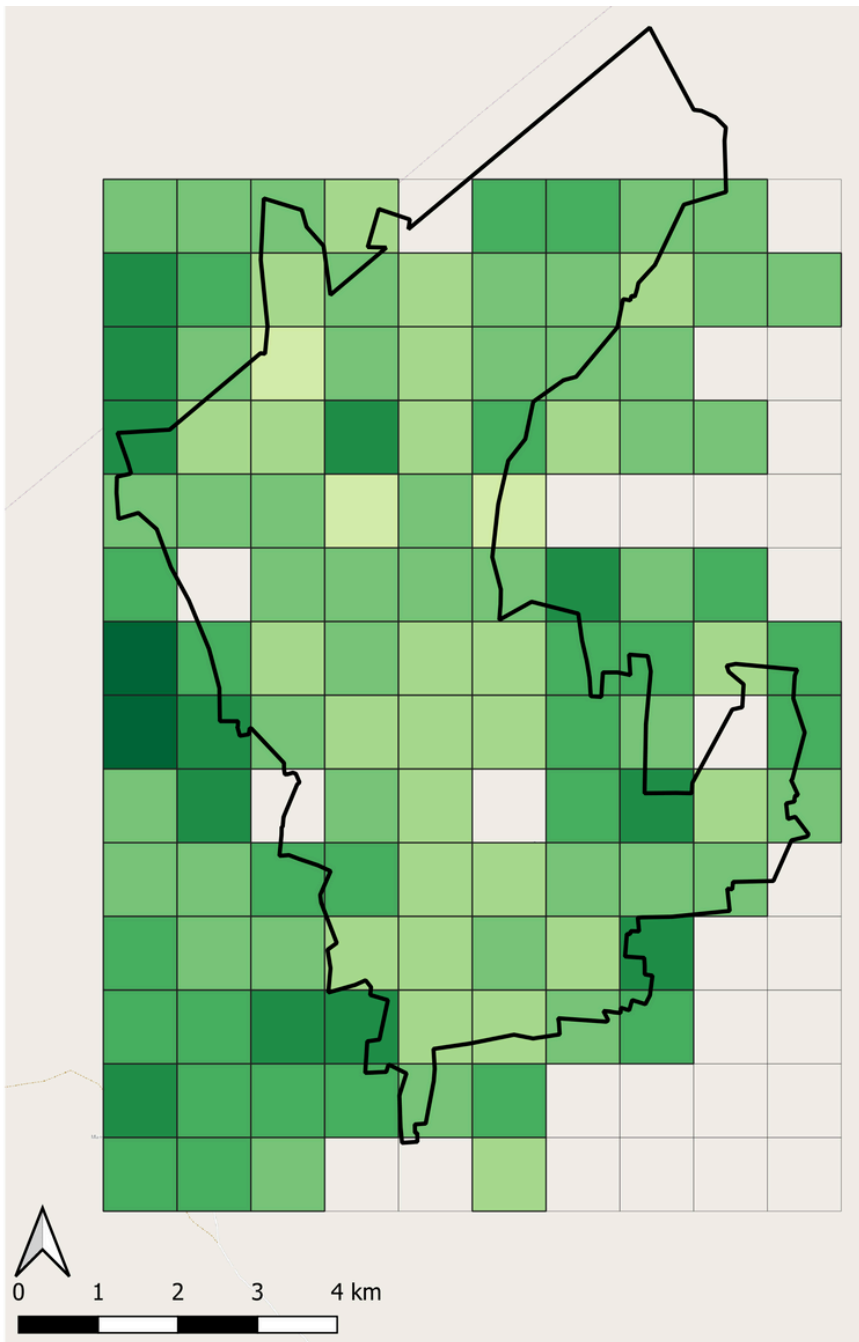
BUTTERFLY SPECIES

129 butterfly species recorded including the northernmost record of charaxas guderiana rabaiensis which is found in Miombo woodlands

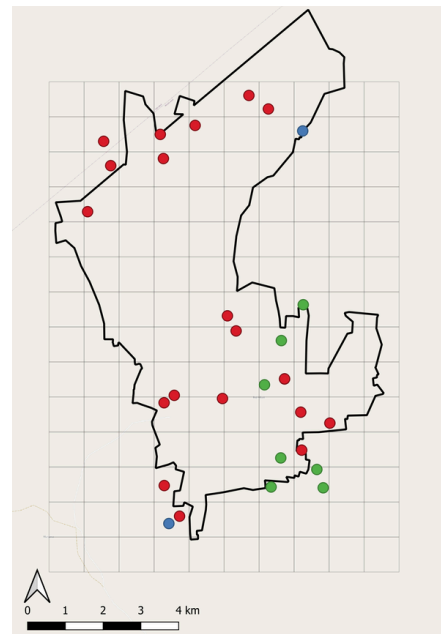


A Rocha Kenya's ecologist, Kirao, looking for birds in Dakatcha

Common Bird Mapping



Map 1



Map 2

Legend

Total Unique Species Counted per Grid

- 10 - 20
- 20 - 30
- 30 - 40
- 40 - 50
- 50 - 60
- 60 - 75

Key Bird Species Observation

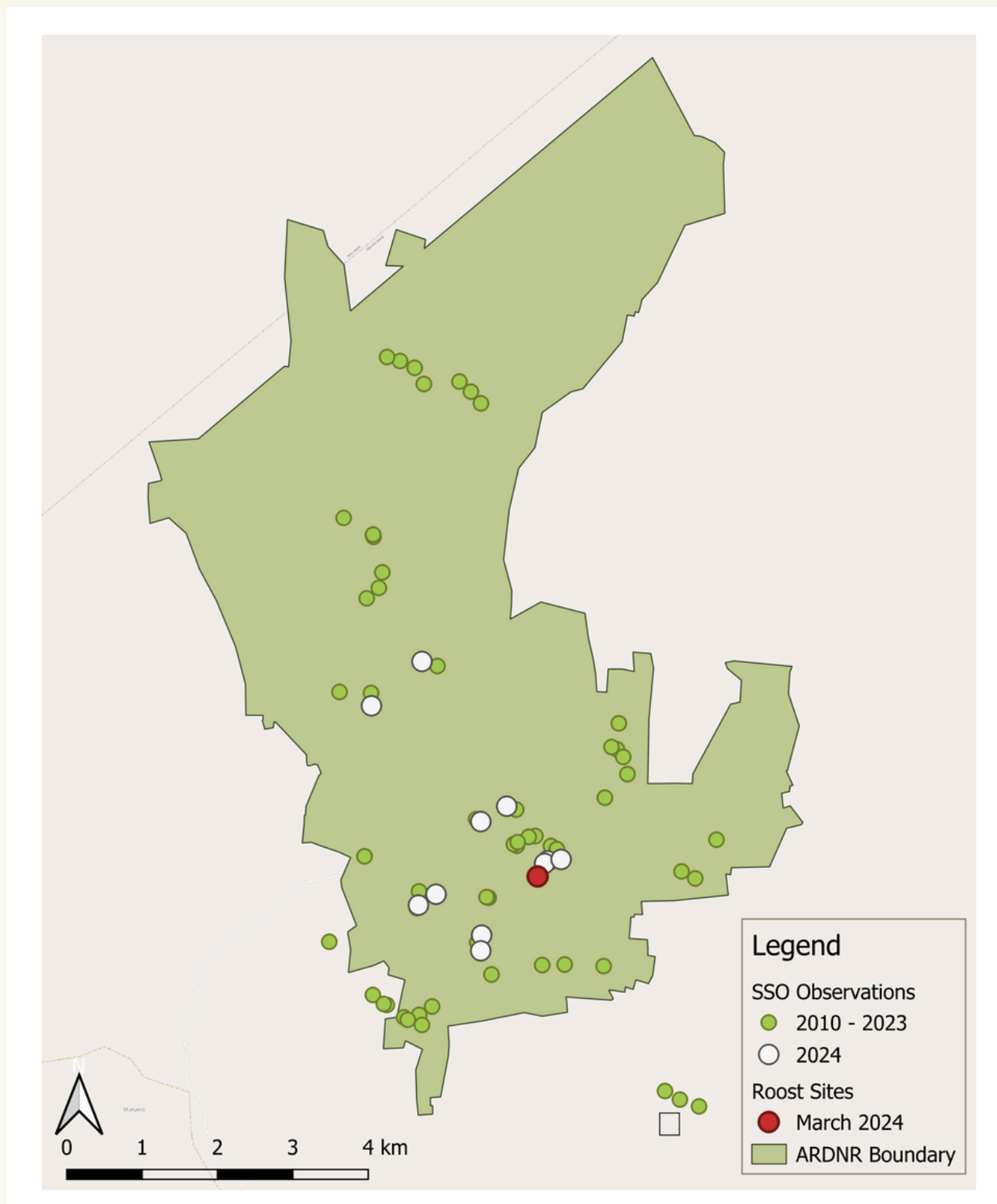
- Martial Eagle
- Sokoke Pipit
- Southern Banded Snake Eagle
- ARNDR Atlas Grids
- ARNDR Boundary

Map 1 (left) illustrates the total number of unique bird species recorded within each grid. Map 2 (top right) highlights the locations where IUCN-listed threatened bird species were observed.

Our research team surveyed birds in 113 of our Dakatcha Biodiversity grids (each grid measure 1km by km), recording a total of 187 different species. Each grid was observed for one hour in the early morning and another hour in the late afternoon when birds are most active. The leading grid recorded 71 species while the least had 17 species. Sokoke Pipit was the most common IUCN-listed threatened bird with 19 observations, followed by the Southern Banded Snake Eagle (7) and the Martial Eagle (2). Birds are a helpful indicator of biodiversity health and this information builds a map where our key species are found. This helps our research team in understanding which species prefer which areas and adds to our knowledge of our Reserve.

Sokoke Scops Owl Sightings

Sokoke Scops Owl sightings in our reserve highlight the importance of acquiring this land for their protection. A key moment was discovering a roost site in March during a routine night survey, when the team spotted an owl perched in the trees. Confirming the roost within our land reassures us that the owls use the reserve both for activity and rest, ensuring their critical habitats are protected.



Fluttering Wonders

Unveiling the Wonders of Butterflies and Moths

The last three months of 2024 were a blessing as Dakatcha received short rains. I saw a complete change in the number of butterflies and moths and was able to record butterflies that I hadn't seen since I started the surveys. This also cemented my desire to see this reserve protected, this was their home and seeing them around meant that there was still hope for it. This is because lepidoptera (butterflies and moths) are important bio indicators. They are sensitive to an environment and if Dakatcha was degraded there would be little to no evidence of them. Seeing them also didn't take away from the fact that as we were heading to the campsite we crossed paths with seven motorbikes hurling charcoal. This shows there is a need to protect this area for the future of insects like these. That was a wonderful way of ending 2024. I had collected 167 specimen out of which I got 60 species of butterflies.

I also witnessed the migration of *Agoma trimenii* (Trimen's False Tiger). I made the most of the hours before the moon rose and was fortunate to encounter a swarm of these moths. After counting to 100, I realized it would be impossible to tally the exact number, as they fluttered everywhere —some on my sheet, others on the ground. In total, I estimated over 400 of these moths on my sheet!

By Cynthia Ng'ang'a Mwihaki



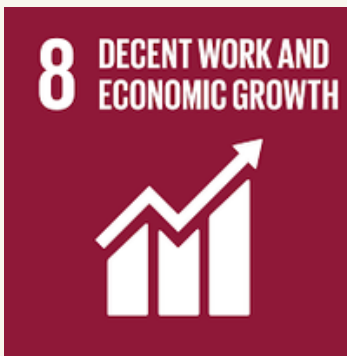


The A Rocha Dakatcha Nature Reserve is a refuge for many species, including
Skippers

*Photo credit Raphael Nussbaumer

Sustainable Development Goals

Our activities in Dakatcha contribute to 10 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals



Our Partners

This Reserve would not exist without all our partners and stakeholders

Farmers



**RAINFOREST
TRUST®**

Land owners



**WORLD
LAND
TRUST**

Churches

Schools



**CASSINIA
ENVIRONMENTAL**

Businesses



**Dakatcha Woodland
Conservation Group**

Kilifi County



Kenya Wildlife Service



**LORDSHIP
AFRICA**

Kenya Forestry Service

Nature Kenya



**Eden:
People+
Planet**

World Vision

Thank You!

Without you, there would be no A Rocha Dakatcha Nature Reserve. Without your support, this patch of incredible, vulnerable, unique Kenyan Coastal Forest might be lost forever. On behalf of all the Cynometra trees, Sokoke Scops Owls and Golden Rumped Sengi, who cannot speak for themselves, we at A Rocha thank you! We are grateful to be part of this journey to protect, restore and care for the Dakatcha Woodlands.

Thank you for caring for the Dakatcha Woodlands and for making the A Rocha Dakatcha Nature Reserve a reality.

A Rocha Kenya is working hard as caretakers of this landscape to honour your support.

We would love to hear from you if you would like to visit or talk more about how you can partner with us further in this work.



