

Progress Report

Project Title: Monitoring Sokoke Scops Owl and Usambara Eagle Owl Population and Range, and Awareness Raising in East Usambara Mountains' Forests

Project Leader: Ezra Mremi

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Background

The East Usambara Mountain forests are home to two rare owl species; the Sokoke scops owl (endangered) and the Usambara eagle-owl (vulnerable) both of which are highly range-restricted and poorly studied. These owls face increasing threats from habitat loss, illegal logging, and persecution driven by superstitions. This conservation project aims to assess their population, habitat use and quality, and nesting behavior while engaging local communities through awareness campaigns, training and habitat restoration. Involving local people is essential to reduce negative perceptions, enhance support for owl conservation, and promote collaborative efforts for sustainable protection of these unique species and their forest habitats.

Project Location

Kambai Forest Reserve and Mgumi Forest Reserve are part of the East Usambara Mountains in northeastern Tanzania, a biodiversity hotspot within the Eastern Arc Mountains. These forests are characterized by unique ecosystems that support a range of endemic and endangered species, including the Sokoke scops owl (*Otus ireneae*) and Usambara eagle owl (*ketupa poensis vosseleri*). The area experiences a tropical climate with high rainfall, fostering rich vegetation that includes both lowland and montane rainforests. Kambai Forest Reserve was previously known for its relatively intact forest cover, which provided essential habitat for diverse bird species. Mgumi Forest Reserve, located nearby, shares similar ecological features, with a mix of dense canopy and secondary growth, making it vital for conservation efforts. Both reserves face threats from agricultural expansion, logging, and human encroachment, which endanger their delicate ecosystems

Summary of Objectives, Activities and Outputs

1. To assess the habitat use of Sokoke scops owl and Usambara eagle-owl by conducting monthly field surveys with the aid of call-playback devices.

Activities	Outputs
1.1 Conducted nocturnal surveys for owls' population and distribution survey, utilizing the call-playback method and randomized opportunistic encounters	A data sheet for observation with coordinates for reference Data sheets with ecological data for the owls' habitat

1.2 Deployed camera traps for potential nesting and roosting sites, and new locations with potential habitat	Photographs captured for the two owl species, for visual confirmation of their presence
1.3 Record ecological data (vegetation structure, tree species, terrain, elevation) on the areas of owl sightings	
1.4 Captured photographs of the study species for further documentation	

2. To reduce harmful cultural beliefs about owls through community education and awareness-raising program
3. To engage local communities in conservation efforts to protect owls and their habitats

Activities	Outputs
3.1 Conducted awareness meetings in villages, churches, and schools to educate communities on the ecological importance of owls and dispel superstitious beliefs.	Over 400 community members reached through awareness sessions, improving local attitudes toward owls.
3.2 Distributed brochures and visual materials explaining owl behavior, anatomy, and conservation value.	200 educational brochures and posters distributed in local language to enhance outreach.
3.3 Training selected local leaders, teachers, and guides to serve as owl conservation ambassadors in their communities.	10 trained local ambassadors actively involved in promoting owl conservation.
3.4 Established a tree nursery and planted 2,000 native tree seedlings for 10 different native plant species, with active participation from local community members for habitat restoration.	A functioning tree nursery and 2,000 native tree seedlings to support long-term owl habitat recovery

4. Collaborating with local government and conservation organizations to protect owls and their habitat

Activities
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Communicated with forest officials for a meeting in the coming month 2. Shared the semi-annual report with the organization of affiliation, for further technical and field assistance

