

Last hope for Mulanje Mountain

Mulanje is the highest and most impressive mountain in south-central Africa. Lying close to the Mozambique border in southern Malawi, it rises abruptly from the surrounding plains to a complex of plateaux and basins. These in turn are surmounted by rocky peaks which reach 3000 m above sea level. The mountain is of exceptional importance for the conservation of biodiversity in Africa and there is no lack of documentation to support its candidature for protected area status. It has about 30 endemic plant species and interesting montane vegetation not protected elsewhere in Malawi. Some of the animal species are also endemic, especially among the invertebrates, fishes, reptiles and amphibians, and many others have very restricted distributions. According to IUCN it could justify World Heritage Status.

The mountain is a Forest Reserve, established in 1927, and on paper it is protected under the provisions of the Forests Ordinance and Forest Rules. In practice it is unprotected because the poorly paid guards are readily bribed to allow illegal cutting of stream-bank trees, living Mulanje cedar *Widdringtonia cupressoides* trees, and poles and firewood. Its protection is quite inadequate. The most threatened forests are those on the lower and mid-altitude slopes where they are being burnt to make clearings for subsistence cultivation. The surrounding plains are cultivated or under tea and densely populated. Tea-estate workers and their families, as well as refugees from Mozambique, are desperately short of land and are encroaching further and further up the mountain.

In 1974 Chisongole Forest covered 40 sq km on the south-eastern slopes, extending from 1800 to 900 m, and was the largest tract of forest remaining in Malawi. Today little remains below 1500 m and there are permanent small settlements scattered around the periphery as well as many within the forest reserve. Each dry season new clearings are made, the felled trees and undergrowth ascending in smoke throughout September and October.

The encroachments started in the 1960s and

repeated eviction efforts by the Forestry Department have failed to do more than halt the process briefly. In the past few years the rate of encroachment has accelerated, partly due to the pressures of an increasing population augmented by the refugees and partly due to the unfortunate effects of an afforestation project. In response to the deforestation crisis in the country as a whole the Wood Energy Division of the Forestry Department, with funding from the World Bank, developed a project in the early 1980s to increase the supply of fuelwood and poles by encouraging tree planting on a nationwide scale. At Mulanje this involved the planting of eucalyptus trees on 45 sq km of land illegally cleared in the vicinity of tea estates. As these lands are planted up the displaced cultivators have no choice but to move further up the slopes and clear yet more native forest. In view of the World Bank's stated policies of wishing to promote forest conservation it is ironic that the project is stimulating further forest loss rather than conserving it.

Clearing of the lower slopes, although the most pressing problem on Mulanje, is not the only one. The famous Mulanje cedar forests are threatened by illegal cutting and invasion by introduced species. Poachers' snares threaten the diminishing populations of small game animals and fires set by hunters do much damage. The forests are important not only for themselves but also because they protect vital water supplies on which not only the tea estates depend but also villages far out on the plains.

It is clear the Mulanje must be better protected and that the Forestry Department alone is not equipped to tackle the complex problems. Considerable changes are required if Mulanje Mountain is to be secured. The most promising development yet is the appearance in July 1990 of a project proposal 'Mulanje Mountain: Development of an Integrated Conservation and Management Plan'. This was prepared by the Forestry Department and the National Herbarium of Botanic Gardens of Malawi with the help of Chancellor College and has been approved by the government's Economic Planning and Development

Division for funding consideration.

The project would formulate and implement broad spectrum conservation measures by which plants, animals, water and other resources would be utilized on a sustainable basis. Specifically the goals include: recommending upgrading the Forest Reserve to a Biosphere Reserve; reinstating native forest and reintroducing fauna; curbing encroachment, poaching and illegal felling; developing guidelines for procedures if exploitation of the mountain bauxite deposits is considered; promoting tourism; and involving local people both in the planning and implementation phases. This 8-year project has been planned in two stages. The first, that of study and assessment, would take 3 years and would cost approximately \$US3,198,376. It is to be hoped that the funds can be found, for this is Mulanje's last hope.

Editor.

Tropical Forestry Action Plan in jeopardy

When the Tropical Forestry Action Plan (TFAP) was launched in 1987 many saw it as a promising new initiative to tackle the crisis of tropical deforestation. Under the Plan, tropical countries would be able to prepare national forestry plans and, if these met certain criteria, they would be able to obtain funding for their implementation from major development assistance institutions. It was envisaged that the national plans would embrace the need for forest conservation and sustainable management, that governments would reform national policies that were contributing to forest destruction, and that there would be improved land-use planning and co-ordination with agricultural and other development programmes to help turn the tide against the wasteful depletion of forest resources.

Three years later, the TFAP faces mounting criticism, from environmental groups and from donor governments. It is seen to be failing: there are claims that, far from curbing forest loss, it is accelerating deforestation. The UN Food and Agriculture Organization's Forest Department, which controls the co-

ordination of the Plan, has been accused of channelling aid into commercial schemes to destroy rain forest and there have been calls for a moratorium on funding until reforms have been made.

Under pressure, the FAO commissioned an independent review, which was published in June 1990. It made recommendations proposing the renaming of the TFAP as the Tropical Forestry Action Programme and transforming it into a 'long-term programme aimed at the conservation and sustainable development of tropical forest resources in the interests of the inhabitants of the countries concerned and the global community.' It recommended that the four original co-sponsors—FAO, the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Resources Institute (WRI)—should accept responsibility for reforming the TFAP, that new guidelines should be formulated, that a Tropical Forest Fund should be formed, and that projects should be set up to help tropical countries to cope with their forestry problems. It also proposed initiating an international convention to deal with forests.

At the same time the WRI published its own assessment of the TFAP, *Taking Stock*, by Robert Winterbottom. This concluded that despite some successes, the TFAP is not achieving many of its original objectives and is unlikely ever to be able to achieve some of them given the current planning process. It claims that many of the institutions controlling the TFAP—FAO, donors and national governments—seem to have lost sight of the original aims and have allowed their interest in accelerating investment in the forestry sector to overshadow them. *Taking Stock* recommended convening an international forum on the TFAP with representatives from international and national institutions as well as NGOs to try and achieve a consensus on new approaches. It also stressed that the TFAP's goals and objectives need clarifying, especially those relating to deforestation's root causes, and that the planning process must meet and safeguard the needs and livelihoods of the people who live in or depend on the forests. The WRI also called for making the TFAP

more open and accountable, including involvement of forest peoples and NGOs.

In September the FAO rejected all outside interference in the organization's operation of the Plan, blaming past failures on a cash crisis within the FAO. Edward Saouma, the FAO Director-General, said that his organization has 'sovereign authority' over the implementation of the Plan and that the independent review team showed insufficient familiarity with the structure of the FAO. Meanwhile, although they may differ in how reforms are to be achieved, most individuals and organizations concerned with the fields of environmental conservation and development agree that they are necessary. To date most money channelled through the Plan has been spent on industrial forestry and agro-forestry, with only 9 per cent being spent on conservation, and virtually none on addressing the wider issues behind the destruction of forests, such as the inequitable distribution of wealth and land, and government support for mining, cattle-ranching, roads and dams. This bias in funding reflects FAO's interests as well as those of some of the donor institutions. The co-sponsors of the TFAP, with their contrasting expectations, form an uneasy alliance. Whereas the FAO and various aid agencies viewed the TFAP mainly as a mechanism to harmonize development assistance to forestry, the WRI and others saw it as a way of launching a broadly based programme to address the root causes of deforestation.

The latter is desperately and urgently needed if tropical forests are to survive. The TFAP has been operating for only three years and more than 80 countries have expressed interest in it. There have been some successes and these should be recognized. There have also been failures and these must be addressed. The FAO needs to climb down and face the criticisms with honesty and humility. It would be far better for a reformed TFAP to tackle the crisis than for it to be abandoned in favour of a new initiative—like that of a tropical forest convention—for if the later were pursued, even with urgency, it could mean fatal delays in arresting forest losses.

Editor.

Legislation fails to save turtles

Reports that the use of turtle excluder devices (TEDs) in the USA was reducing the number of turtles killed by shrimp-fishing activities (see, for example *Oryx*, 24, 134, citing the Marine Turtle Newsletter) have been premature, unfortunately. Since the start of the shrimp-fishing season in mid-June, alarming numbers of dead turtles have again been washing ashore.

An unusual cold spell earlier in the year led to the closure of fishing grounds off Georgia and South Carolina to allow shrimp stocks to recover. When the grounds were reopened, on 11 June, dead turtles started to appear on adjacent shores at the rate of 1–2 a day. Post-mortem examinations indicated that the turtles had been healthy and feeding normally prior to their sudden deaths. The Georgia Turtle Strandings Network had reported a total of 51 strandings by the end of June and up to 50 more in July. In June alone another 48 dead turtles were reported from the shores of north-east Florida. Amongst the dead turtles so far recorded are 11 of the critically endangered Kemp's ridley *Lepidochelys kempii*. Strandings continue in both areas. In Texas, where shrimping opened on 8 July, 35 dead turtles had been reported by the end of the month. These included 17 Kemp's ridleys.

While TEDs appear to have been fitted to most nets, many seem to have been altered. In Texas, the first examination of 16 TEDs by law enforcement agents found 15 had their trap doors, through which the turtles are meant to escape, sewn shut. In this region, the 50–60 boardings carried out in July resulted in 24 citations for TED violations. There have also been nine citations in the Georgia and Florida area. One Florida trawler was found to have four nets each with an altered TED, another vessel with modified TEDs had three turtles in its nets and yet another vessel had no TEDs installed at all. The shrimpers seem to have altered the devices (or more rarely simply not used them) despite recent research showing that fitting TEDs results in a negligible loss of shrimp catch but achieves a 97 per cent exclusion rate for turtles.

Kemp's ridley turtles are known to nest only in the Gulf of Mexico and an estimated nesting population of 40,000 in 1947 is now thought to be not more than 400–600. This year the Gulf has also been subject to two massive oil spills (4 million gallons from the *Mega Borg* in June and some 500,000 gallons following a collision off Galveston at the end of July) and a little earlier, a still unexplained large mortality of its bottlenose dolphin population (some 300 animals were found dead).

For the turtles, it seems that the simple legal requirement to install TEDs is not enough protection. The US National Marine Fisheries Service is now considering criminal prosecutions and increasing the number of enforcement agents employed, but will this come soon enough for the Kemp's ridleys?

Jan Johnson and Mark Simmonds, Greenpeace International.

Update on Zakynthos turtles

The tourist reason finished on Zakynthos, Greece, after a year of mixed fortunes for the turtles that nest there. As reported in *Oryx* (24, 188) turtle conservation efforts were severely hampered by vocal and physical opposition from the newly formed landowners' turtle protection society, ZEMELDIKA. This prevented the international volunteers of the Athens-based Sea Turtle Protection Society (STPS) using the information stations on Herakas and Kalamaki beaches, whereas the one on Laganas was opened one month late. Volunteers based there ran a public awareness campaign on the beach and gave slide shows in hotels and on cruise boats. In the latter part of the season they found that many tourists were already aware of the turtle's predicament though media coverage in their home countries. The Greek members of the STPS also ran a public information programme.

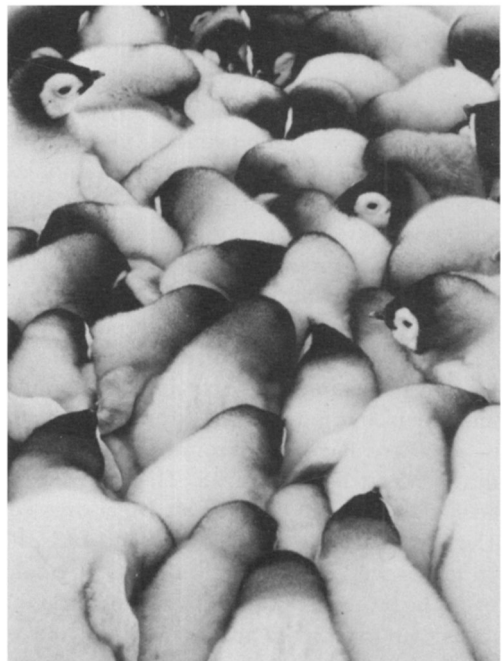
Threats by ZEMELDIKA disrupted the scientific programme and it proved impossible to tell whether the lower numbers of nests recorded represented a real decline. Restrictions on boating activities in Laganas Bay lapsed and were not renewed, resulting in

many adult turtles being injured.

Illegal development continued on protected beaches and seems likely to continue through the winter. The natural vegetation was burnt on hillsides behind the beaches of Dafni and Sekania in the winter of 1989/90 in an attempt to convert 'forestry' land to 'agricultural' land, which is more likely to be given official clearance for tourist development. The late summer rains washed soil from the cleared hills on to the beaches in some places, rendering them unsuitable for nesting turtles.

Some of the British STPS volunteers have formed Sea Turtle Survival to further the conservation of marine turtles by action both in Britain and Greece. They will liaise with STPS in Zakynthos and aim to give the conservation of turtles a high profile in Britain. Their address is Sea Turtle Survival, PO Box 790, London SW16 3NJ.

Andrew Routh.



Graham Robertson's photograph of emperor penguin chicks in Antarctica was Runner-up in the Composition and Form category of the Wildlife Photographer of the Year 1990 Competition. See page 60 for more details of the results.