



Kinangop Grasslands



The World Land Trust (WLT) works with local partner organisations to fund the purchase and protection of threatened habitats across the world, creating safe havens for wildlife. WLT has been saving habitats since 1989 and has a proven track record.

In Kenya, WLT is working with Nature Kenya and raising funds to help protect the Kinangop grasslands, which are disappearing before our eyes. This is a crucial habitat for hundreds of thousands of European migratory birds, as well as the global stronghold for the Sharpe's Longclaw, an endangered bird species that is endemic to Kenya and can only survive in these grasslands.

Please consider making a donation today. All funds to this Special Appeal are used to help protect vital grasslands and their wildlife.

www.worldlandtrust.org/projects/kenya.htm

Local Partner Organisation

Nature Kenya was founded in 1909. This well-established NGO is actively involved in a range of conservation-related priorities in Kenya. WLT is working with them to help save the tussock grasslands of the Kinangop Plateau.

www.naturekenya.org

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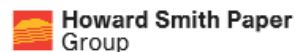
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Project Brief: Kenya

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The threats facing some of the last tussock grasslands of Kenya



Cover image: The endangered Sharpe's Longclaw has been likened to the Skylark: an icon of European grasslands.

It is endemic to Kenya and can only be found in the country's surviving tussock grasslands.

This makes the Kinangop grasslands (pictured right) a critical habitat to protect, as it offers a small haven for this endangered species.



To address the critical loss of grasslands in Kenya, the World Land Trust (WLT) is working with local project partner, Nature Kenya, to extend their wildlife reserve in the Kinangop grasslands. Nature Kenya have already protected areas of this critically threatened habitat and urgently need to extend the protected land to 500 acres.

Nature Kenya believe that protecting 500 acres of tussock grassland will be sufficient to maintain a viable population of Sharpe's Longclaw in the area, an endemic bird species that is only found in restricted ranges where their tussock grassland habitat survives. These grasslands also provide a crucial habitat for familiar European birds that migrate to Africa every winter – from Swallows, Swifts and House Martins, to Northern Wheatears and Quails.

Why the Kinangop Grasslands?

The Kinangop grasslands in central Kenya encompass 190,200 acres (77,000 ha) of largely unprotected habitat. Originally the entire Kinangop Plateau was almost treeless, covered with tussock grasslands and bogs. Yet a combination of demographic, environmental and economic factors has led to fragmentation and destruction of these natural grasslands. It is estimated that between one-third and a half of the original grassland has been lost.

Since the 1960s the number of people settling in the Kinangop Plateau has significantly increased and many rely on small scale farming, resulting in the loss of grassland to cultivation of crops. More recently huge areas have been ploughed up for wheat by private developers and this is seriously endangering the survival of grassland species. Plantations of non-native tree species, such as Eucalyptus, Acacia and Pine, also mean that the natural wetlands are being drained and lost as well.

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About the Kinangop Grasslands project

A key challenge for Nature Kenya is to halt the fragmentation and loss of grassland habitat to extensive cultivation of crops by encouraging alternative methods of farming. They plan to develop economic incentives to encourage the long-term security of the grasslands, and hope to be able to influence the government and decision makers especially in relation to land use changes and agricultural practices. The project will be run by Nature Kenya in collaboration with Friends of Kinangop Plateau (FoKP), an independent group of volunteers who promote conservation and sustainable development of the Kinangop grasslands. FoKP are vital to the success of the project; they are deeply committed and have been influential in raising awareness among farmers and the local community about the importance of this habitat. They also play an important role in data collection and monitoring of the grasslands. Nature Kenya believe that the planned 500 acre reserve area will be large enough to demonstrate good management practices of grasslands that protect rare and endemic species, while supporting education and ecotourism.



John Burton, WLT CEO (left), with members of the Friends of Kinangop Plateau, a group of volunteers who promote conservation of the grasslands



Jackson's Widowbird is one of many spectacular bird species found in the Kinangop grasslands.

During the breeding season, males develop glossy black plumage and a bright blue-grey bill. They also grow a beautiful down-curved tail, about 20 centimetres long, and a glossy black collar.

He uses his new, showy plumage in a bizarre and elaborate jumping display to attract females.

A Great Biodiversity of Species

The Kinangop grasslands is recognised as one of Kenya's 60 Important Bird Areas. Although birds are being studied and monitored in the area, relatively little research into wildlife has been carried out. This is urgently needed since it is believed that many of the species present – especially butterflies, reptiles and amphibians – are likely to be highly specialised and restricted in range.

To date 12 species of frog have been recorded in the grasslands, including two endemic species *Hyperolius montanus* and *Phrynobatrachus kinangopensis* and in 2009 a frog species new to science was discovered. A number of snakes have also been recorded, including the Kenya Horned Viper that is threatened by illegal trade. These species are all under threat from loss of habitat and the draining of wetlands.

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