



Registered Charity No. 1001261



# SECURING DAKATCHA WOODLAND FOR THREATENED BIODIVERSITY

How WLT's Buy an Acre programme is helping  
Nature Kenya and A Rocha Kenya to save some of  
the last 10% of the coastal forests of eastern Africa





## Country

Kenya

## Partner/ Organisation

Nature Kenya and  
A Rocha Kenya (ARK)

## Biome

Tropical and subtropical moist  
broadleaf forests

## Ecoregion

Northern Swahili coastal forest

## Habitats

A haven for endemic life, these habitats 500 km to the southeast of Kenya's capital Nairobi and 50 km to the west of the Indian Ocean are dominated by trees of the *Brachystegia* genus, commonly termed "miombo" and noted for the red hues of new leaves. The woodland also encompasses important tracts of the evergreen forest species *Cynometra webberi* and areas of seasonal wetlands, crucial for the breeding population of an Endangered bird – Clarke's Weaver (*Ploceus golandii*) – not known to nest anywhere else.

## Project summary

Kenya's Dakatcha Woodland is a landscape of remarkable conservation value. These forests lie within a global biodiversity hotspot – the Coastal Forest ecoregion of eastern Africa, of which Dakatcha is the northernmost limit – and are a key area for birds and biodiversity in general. They are a refuge for threatened species only found at a handful of other sites, such as the Golden-rumped Elephant Shrew, an Endangered species, and the sole documented breeding ground for the Endangered Clarke's Weaver birds.

Despite this significance, Dakatcha has historically not been granted any formal protection and faces numerous threats, which include commercial agriculture, illegal charcoal enterprises, poaching, and rapid forest degradation. This is where our partners Nature Kenya and ARK come in.

For 15 years, Nature Kenya has been safeguarding breeding and foraging habitat for Clarke's Weaver and other threatened species in Kenya's Dakatcha Woodland. Similarly, ARK has been protecting endangered species within Kenya for 20 years through scientific research, environmental education, and sustainable community-based conservation programmes.

WLT's Buy an Acre programme will help Nature Kenya and ARK to purchase more land within the precious and threatened Dakatcha Woodland, thus protecting the species here. Your support will help Nature Kenya to purchase 376 ha (930 acres) of 500 ha (1,235 acres) planned between 2022 and 2025, and ARK to purchase 400 hectares (988 acres) of a planned 1,274 ha (3,148 acres) expansion to their A Rocha Dakatcha Nature Reserve. With these land purchases, Nature Kenya and ARK will be able to continue securing a thriving future for the wildlife, habitats, and local communities that make up the Dakatcha Woodland.

## Main threats to the area

Dakatcha's threatened biodiversity remains at risk from land use change and land grab for commercial crop cultivation (pineapples etc.). This is coupled with degradation and overuse of the forest as a source of fuel wood, with charcoal production in particular driving the demand.

## Global prioritisation

Around 90% of the Coastal Forests of eastern Africa has already been lost and within this little-known global biodiversity hotspot, Dakatcha Woodland remains crucial as a Key Biodiversity Area and one of the 277 landscapes included in BirdLife International's 'Important Bird Areas in Danger' list. Dakatcha has been identified as a regional priority by Kilifi County, but this recognition does not confer any level of formal protection.

## Biodiversity

For many resident threatened species, Dakatcha is one of a last handful of homes left on the planet. Clarke's Weavers, for instance, have only been documented in these woodlands and another nearby location (the Arabuko-Sokoke Forest to the south). Dakatcha remains their only confirmed breeding ground and, if lost, would see these birds uplisted by the IUCN from Endangered to Critically Endangered. Dakatcha is also home to the Sokoke Scops Owl and the Golden-rumped Elephant Shrew, both of which are Endangered and highly threatened. This region is also very important for plant life, with 34 of the 314 plants here being Red Listed.

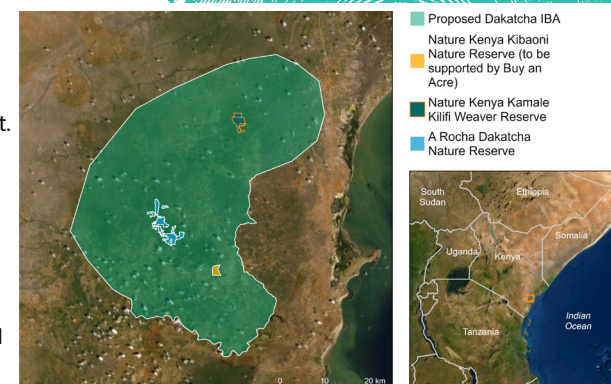
Together, Nature Kenya and ARK's planned land purchases will secure habitat for many bird species within Kenya's East African Coast biome, such as Fischer's Turaco (*Tauraco fischeri*) as well as African elephants and rare plant species such as the evergreen tree *Warburgia stuhlmannii*.

## Local Communities

Dakatcha is part of an area with some of Kenya's highest poverty rates (71% against a national average of 46%), which is largely driven by poor agricultural land, deficient livestock husbandry practices, low uptake of modern agricultural systems, and lack of access to financial support. This is compounded by Dakatcha's harsh climate of long dry spells and its history of high food prices, which combine to force local communities to turn to the production of charcoal – one of the main threats facing this forest – as a source of income. The communities around Dakatcha comprise around 50,000 people who currently rely on the forests for timber, fuelwood, water, medicine, and other vital ecosystem services.

Nature Kenya have engaged with Dakatcha's communities for over 10 years. Throughout their work, Nature Kenya will ensure that local people take part in – and benefit from – the protection of the woodland, unlocking sustainable livelihoods and boosting the resilience of climate-vulnerable agricultural communities. For instance, Nature Kenya is working – separately to WLT's Buy an Acre programme – to create another 5000 ha (12,355 acres) of Community Conservation Areas (CCAs). These CCAs will be governed following evidence-based, inclusive communal management guidelines set out under CCA committees, site support groups and other bodies, with Nature Kenya supporting capacity-building and providing livelihood incentives to encourage conservation efforts.

ARK is also working with key stakeholders in the wider area to develop policies and practices that will preserve a significant portion of forest cover across the whole area. In so doing, the ecological integrity and resilience of the wider area will be preserved. In addition, ARK employ nine rangers from the local community to patrol the reserve and carry out awareness raising efforts at the A Rocha Dakatcha Nature Reserve.



## Key species<sup>1</sup>

Clarke's Weaver (*Ploceus golandii*, EN), Sokoke Scops Owl (*Otus ireneae*, EN), Sokoke Pipit (*Anthus sokokensis*, EN) Fischer's Turaco (*Tauraco fischeri*, NT), Southern Banded Snake-eagle (*Circaetus fasciolatus*, NT), Golden-rumped Elephant Shrew (*Rhynchocyon chrysopygus*, EN), African Savanna Elephant (*Loxodonta africana*, VU).

<sup>1</sup>The Red List of Threatened Species, maintained by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), includes categories of Critically Endangered (CR), Endangered (EN), Vulnerable (VU), Near Threatened (NT), Least Concern (LC) and Data Deficient (DD).



### Partner/Organisation

Founded in 1909, Nature Kenya works nationwide and strives to advance knowledge of Kenya's biodiversity; promote conservation of key species, sites, and habitats; encourage community participation in conservation through capacity building and promotion of sustainable benefits; and advocate policies favourable to biodiversity conservation. The organisation – the Kenyan branch of the East Africa Natural History Society, itself Africa's oldest conservation organisation – became a WLT partner in 2009. WLT-backed Nature Kenya projects since that year include land purchase in the Kinangop highlands

and Dakatcha Woodland; a land lease in the Taita Hills; and various reforestation projects at Mount Kenya, Kikuyu Escarpment and South Nandi.

Founded in 1999, A Rocha Kenya (ARK) is the Kenyan branch of the wider A Rocha conservation network, which has a presence in more than 20 countries around the world. Since being founded, ARK have worked closely with local authorities, communities, and conservation organisations in Kenya, studying and restoring threatened habitats and protecting endangered species within two coastal seascapes (Mida Creek and Watamu Marine National Park) and two landscapes

(Arabuko-Sokoke Forest and Dakatcha Woodland). In 2001, ARK discovered the only population of the Sokoke Scops Owl (Endangered) outside of Arabuko-Sokoke Forest in Kenya within Dakatcha Woodland. WLT have been working with ARK since 2021, helping fund land purchase in the Dakatcha Woodland through the Action Fund. Together with a group of other organisations, WLT helped ARK to expand the size of their A Rocha Kenya Dakatcha Reserve by almost two and a half times in 2021. More broadly, ARK's advice on avian conservation issues has been sought by the Kenya Wildlife Service, Kenya Forest Service, Kenya Airports Authority and the National Museums of Kenya.

### UN Sustainable Development Goals directly advanced by this project:



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