

Conserving Mount Eburu

Eburu Forest Reserve comprises 8,715.3 hectares of prime indigenous forest area contained within the steep hills, deep valleys and rolling foothills of Mount Eburu. In December 2010, Rhino Ark made a formal commitment to support the conservation of the Eburu ecosystem, with the construction of a comprehensive electric fence around the entire protected forest at the core of this support.

Overlooking Lake Naivasha to the south east, Lake Elementaita to the North and Lake Nakuru to the North West, the Mau Eburu forest is nestled within the folds of a geologically active volcanic mountain, whose highest peak, Ol Doinyo Eburu, stands 2,820 metres above sea level. The forest which covers 8,715.3 hectares, is fully demarcated with formal title held by the Kenya Forest Service. It is one of the 22 gazetted forest blocks that comprise the Mau Forests Complex water tower.

A precious mountain forest ecosystem

The natural features of Eburu forest, including its diverse forest types, steep valleys, springs and waterfalls make it a precious ecosystem, rich in biodiversity. The forest features a broad variety of indigenous tree species, such as *Prunus africana* (African cherry) and *Juniperus procera* (African pencil cedar), among others. The forest is recognized as a hotspot for birdlife within the greater Mau Forests Complex. It is home to over 40 species of mammals, including the critically endangered mountain bongo antelope, of which about 12 animals, representing 10% of its population known to exist in the wild, are thought to survive in this forest. The Bongo Surveillance Programme is a Rhino Ark supported community wildlife conservation initiative which seeks to protect the precious few bongo that remain in Eburu, giving them a fighting chance to survive in their home.

The threats

The Mau Eburu ecosystem is essentially an island, surrounded on all sides by human settlement. Illegal logging and charcoal burning are long-standing and ongoing challenges that, together with wildfires, have critically depleted the forest cover. Indeed, for many years Eburu has been synonymous with the illegal charcoal trade in Kenya. Furthermore, over the years, Eburu's wildlife has been decimated by bush meat hunting.

The fencing project

In light of these threats and the importance of protecting Eburu's rich ecosystem, a comprehensive fencing project is underway in partnership with the Kenyan Government to safeguard the future of the forest. Fence construction is carried out by a highly experienced team from the Kenya Wildlife Service, with labour sourced from the forest-adjacent local communities. Rhino Ark's commitment to fence Mau Mount Eburu has attracted considerable interest from the Kenyan corporate sector, with support for the project so far received from the MPESA Foundation and Finlays Horticulture. This corporate support, together with funding from the Government and the critical support of the Rhino Charge fraternity have enabled this project to get off the ground.

Following the first project stakeholders briefing in November 2011, the survey of the 43.3 km fence alignment along the gazetted forest boundary was carried out. A comprehensive Environmental Impact Assessment study was then conducted in 2012 which included extensive sensitization meetings with leaders and communities across the entire ecosystem. Following fulfilment of all necessary processes and the approval of the project by the National Environment Management Authority, the construction of the fence commenced on 20 March 2013 and was completed on 24 November 2014.



The fence is now providing the management of Eburu Forest with an effective tool to mitigate human wildlife conflict as well as help address the challenges facing the forest, in particular charcoal burning, wildfires, overgrazing and illegal logging. This project has received notable support from the private sector. Key funding has been provided by the MPESA Foundation under a comprehensive package for fencing and development of community sustainable initiatives around Mau Eburu. Finlays Horticulture have provided funding support as well as hosting of the facility that produces the recycled plastic fence posts used to build the fence. This private sector support, coupled with complementary funding and technical support from the government has greatly facilitated project implementation. Other key project activities, including community conservation and livelihood initiatives and support for forest rehabilitation are now ongoing, building upon the security provided by the fence. Beyond Eburu forest, Rhino Ark has also undertaken to support the establishment of secure wildlife corridors and dispersal areas for the wider Eburu ecosystem.