

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.

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 with 188 species of birds found within the forest and adjacent areas. 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 was synonymous with the illegal charcoal trade in Kenya. Furthermore, over the years, Eburu's wildlife has been decimated by bush meat hunting. Human-wildlife conflict has also been a key challenge facing the forest-adjacent communities, with wildlife invading community farms and causing losses to farmers through crop damage, livestock predation, human injury and in some cases loss of life.

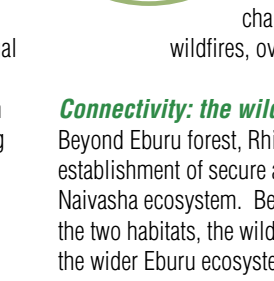
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In light of these threats and the importance of protecting Eburu's rich ecosystem, Rhino Ark committed to support and spearheaded a comprehensive conservation initiative, in partnership with the Kenyan Government, to safeguard the future of the forest.

The fencing project

A core component of the conservation initiative was the construction of a comprehensive game proof electrified fence, to address the human-wildlife conflict challenge. The process commenced with the first project stakeholders briefing in November 2011, and thereafter a survey of the 43.3 km fence alignment along the gazetted forest boundary. 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 construction was carried out by a highly experienced team from the Kenya Wildlife Service, with labour sourced from the forest-adjacent communities. Rhino Ark's commitment to fence Mau Mount Eburu has attracted considerable interest from the Kenyan corporate sector, with key funding support for the project received from the MPESA Foundation and Finlays Horticulture. Finlays (now Flamingo Horticulture) also host the facility that



produces the recycled plastic fence posts used to build the fence. This corporate support, together with funding and technical support from the Government and the critical funding support of the Rhino Charge fraternity made it possible for the project to be successfully completed in record time.

The fence is now acting as an effective management tool for Eburu Forest with regards to mitigating human-wildlife conflict as well as addressing other challenges facing the forest, including charcoal burning, wildfires, overgrazing and illegal logging.

Connectivity: the wildlife corridor initiative

Beyond Eburu forest, Rhino Ark has also undertaken to support the establishment of secure a wildlife corridor between the Eburu forest and Lake Naivasha ecosystem. Beyond enabling mobility of wildlife for water between the two habitats, the wildlife corridor has also enhanced the dispersal areas into the wider Eburu ecosystem. This corridor has been secured by establishing an opening in the Eburu forest electrified fence onto a corridor that links the Forest to the lake. It has been made possible through a collaboration between Rhino Ark, government, partners and landowners in the area between Eburu forest and Lake Naivasha. Current efforts are geared towards mobilizing support for establishment of a wildlife overpass on the Moi North Lake Road, which traverses the corridor. The road, which has been upgraded to tarmac is presenting new challenges to wildlife movement due to increased levels of both volume and speed of vehicular traffic. If successful, the overpass will be the 1st of its kind to be established in Kenya.

Community conservation and livelihood initiatives

Successful completion and long term maintenance of the fence has secured the forest and provided an enabling environment for implementation of various community-based conservation and sustainable livelihood initiatives supported by key funding from the MPESA Foundation. These initiatives include support for: (1) Bio-enterprise (with focus on honey production); (2) Implementation of conservation education curricula in 32 forest-adjacent primary and secondary schools; (3) Capacity building of community groups through linkage with agricultural and other experts; (4) Alternative energy solutions to reduce dependency on forest extracted fuelwood; (5) Development and implementation of a participatory forest management plan; (6) Support to the coordination of forest rehabilitation efforts; (7) Community outreach; and (8) Publishing of a guidebook to raise the profile of the forest and help develop it as a key tourism destination, among others.