

Biodiversity Express Survey in Mozambique

- by Merlijn Jocque

Surveys of an under-researched Eastern Afromontane IBA produced interesting new results.

The [Njesi Plateau](#) is an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area in Mozambique, identified on the basis of a single visit in 1945. In fact, most of the mountains of northern Mozambique - archipelagos of scattered inselbergs, topped with evergreen forests - remain poorly known, biologically. But not because they are not of interest. Recent efforts have focused on the mountains in north-central Mozambique such as [Mt Mabu](#) and [Mt Namuli](#), and showcased their unique biological value through landmark discoveries of previously undocumented montane forests and multiple new species to science. [Watch the Mt Namuli movie [here!](#)]

Results from this work indicate that Mozambique's mountains may be distinct biogeographically from those to the North or West, but also highlighted the need for further exploratory work elsewhere in Mozambique's mountains.

An international team of scientists, coordinated by

BINCO, undertook fieldwork at study sites on each peak between 5-25 November 2016, with the specific aim of crossing the dry-wet season divide. They sampled intensively for birds, mammals, amphibians, reptiles, botany and selected invertebrate groups.

A video about the survey was shown on Canvas (Belgian tv) and can be watched here: <https://www.canvas.be/video/expeditie-mozambique>.



Filling the gap

To address this knowledge gap, the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF), through BirdLife International, gave a small grant to Biodiversity Inventory for Conservation (BINCO npo from Belgium) to undertake a rapid multi-disciplinary biological expedition of the Njesi Plateau, Mt Chitagal and Mt Sanga, three distinct highland peaks that harbour 'Afromontane' habitats of likely high biological value in Niassa province. Specifically, the inventory was aimed to compile as much information as possible on the biological assemblages of flora and fauna present of the mountains, in order to understand their conservation value.



What did they find?

The team conducted specific research on the [Long-billed Tailorbird \(*Artisornis moreaui*\)](#), an Endangered bird known only from these, and the Usambara mountains in North-eastern Tanzania. Few ornithologists have ever seen this species in Mozambique, but the team found it in relative abundance. They also documented several avian range extensions, most notably for the

Vulnerable [Dapplethroat \(*Modulatrix orostruthus*\)](#). Mammal surveys yielded at least two significant range extensions, including for the [Smith's Red Rock Hare \(*Pronolagus rupestris*\)](#) and [Syke's monkey \(*Cercopithecus albogularis*\)](#).

Amphibian and reptile surveys

led to the second recorded locality for the [Mecula Girdled Lizard \(*Cordylus meculae*\)](#), although the full results are awaiting more analytical work.





Some invertebrate groups still require identification but spiders and dragonflies revealed several new species to science (7 from the 37 spider species recorded, still to be described) and 2 new country records from 12 dragonfly species (the Critically Endangered *Allocnemis macleeryi* and the *Gynacantha immaculifrons*). Identification of the collected invertebrate samples is an ongoing process, and results will be added to the full BINCO report (download [here](#)) as they become available.

“It was a very smooth survey, a dream team, and a gorgeous region” said Merlijn Jocque, the expedition leader.

And then what?

The findings from this expedition illustrate the biological value and importance of these little-known highlands in Mozambique. By extension, they further provide evidence of the need for



conservation and sustainable management of these areas. BINCO, in collaboration with a recently started NGO ACNN (<http://niassanatural.com/>), is now looking into the possibility to set up a pop-up research station in Niassa Province. This station will focus on documenting in more detail the biodiversity in this region, and will help protect the natural resources through

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community engagement in sustainable management of the forests and the agricultural lands, and in the conservation of biodiversity in wilderness areas.



All images by Mac Stone www.macstonephoto.com/njesiplateau

BirdLife International runs the Regional Implementation Team (RIT) for the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) investment in the Eastern Afromontane Hotspot (2012 -2019). See the interactive map of all projects implemented under the CEPF Eastern Afromontane Hotspot programme [here](#).

The Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund is a joint initiative of l'Agence Française de Développement, Conservation International, the European Union, the Global Environment Facility, the Government of Japan, the MacArthur Foundation and the World Bank. A fundamental goal is to ensure civil society is engaged in biodiversity conservation. More information on the CEPF can be found at www.cepf.net.