

# Tanzanian forests in near crisis due to bushmeat hunting, habitat degradation

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The populations of several animal species in southern Tanzania are suffering alarming declines due to bushmeat hunting and habitat degradation, and urgent action is needed to prevent the collapse of local biodiversity, [a new report](#) by Tanzanian and international scientists and conservation organizations revealed today.

The report describes the results of three separate research projects focused on the threats to biodiversity in Uzungwa Scarp Forest Reserve in southern [Tanzania](#) since 2004. Although biodiversity is critical to the health of the ecosystem—which many Tanzanians rely on for water, soil fertility and other services—the report shows that Tanzania’s wildlife has been hugely impacted by human activities and recommends that action be taken urgently to protect it.

“Some species in this region are on the brink of extinction from one of their last remaining strongholds, especially the Udzungwa red colobus, a monkey species found only in these mountains and nowhere else in the world,” said Arafat Mtui, coordinator of the Udzungwa Ecological Monitoring Center.

“The declining trend is so sharp that without urgent action Tanzania will lose a biodiversity treasure,” states Francesco Rovero of Italy’s Trento Museum of Natural Sciences, who led the preparation of the report.

“Similar declining trends were also detected for the small forest antelopes such as the duikers, and wildlife abundance is generally lower than in forests that are better protected,” added Trevor Jones, a biologist of the team affiliated to Anglia Ruskin University, UK.

“Human threats, especially [hunting](#) for bushmeat, but also forest degradation through selective removal of trees, are behind these declining trends,” continues Amani Kitegile, a lecturer at Tanzania’s Sokoine University of Agriculture and Ph.D. student with Anglia Ruskin University.

Martin Nielsen of the University of Copenhagen, Denmark, contributed with a study on bushmeat hunting in the Udzungwa forests. “From interviews with hunters living in the villages bordering the reserve it emerged that hunting is common, representing the main extractive use

and threat to the area's unique biodiversity," he stated.

The report highlights the need for greater attention to be paid to the impact of bushmeat hunting in Tanzania's forest reserves. "The Udzungwas are the pearl of the Eastern Arc Mountains because they contain the largest forests and have extraordinary numbers of plant and animal species found nowhere else on earth, including two species of monkeys," stated Rovero. "Unfortunately, while some of the forests are protected by the Udzungwa Mountains National Park, there are important forests such as Uzungwa Scarp Forest Reserve that have not been granted adequate protection."

The scientists and conservation organizations associated with the report are calling for urgent action to be taken to halt bushmeat hunting in the reserve and to boost the management of the forest. Whilst recognizing the government's efforts to upgrade the Uzungwa Scarp Forest Reserve to become a Nature Reserve, the report highlights the need to invest more resources and effort into the forest's protection and into community development projects and environmental awareness amongst the adjacent communities.

"Action is needed now if we are to reverse the trends of biodiversity and forest loss before it is too late. The government needs to allocate the resources that are required to manage this national treasure and to address the needs of the adjacent communities," said Charles Meshack, Executive Director of the Tanzania Forest Conservation Group, Tanzania's leading NGO in [forest](#) conservation.

Provided by Conservation International

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