

School of Biological Sciences  
College of Science

# The Nigerian Montane Forest Project

*Building a Bright Future  
Linking education, ecology and community*



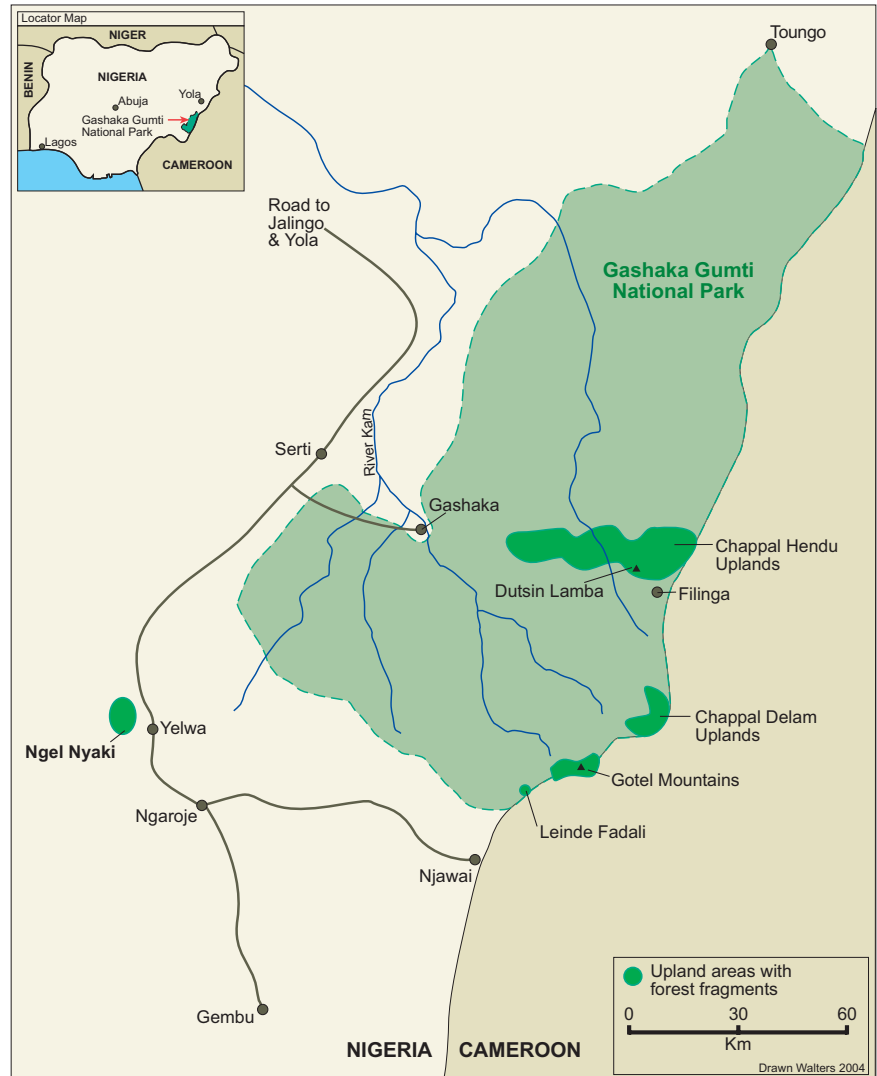
# The Nigerian Montane Forest Project

Nigerian montane forests (forests above +/- 1500 m) are one of the least known habitats in Africa, yet are globally important because they represent one of the most threatened habitats in Africa.

Most of Nigeria's montane forest habitat is in Eastern Nigeria (see map), where forest is mainly confined to steep, relatively inaccessible slopes surrounded by montane grassland. This habitat is home to many rare species of plants and animals found only on African mountains. It harbours at least 24 IUCN Endangered tree species, African wild dogs, the Nigerian chimpanzee, buffalo and klipspringer. The whole area is an RSPB Important Bird Area.

The local people include Mambilla subsistence farmers and Fulani cattle grazers. Most live in extreme poverty, the land unsuited to farming and extremely overgrazed. As the human population grows, people are increasingly venturing into the forests for wood and food. Biodiversity survives today because of the remoteness and inaccessibility of the area, muslim traditions and because much of the area lies within Gashaka Gumti National Park.

The situation is untenable; both habitat and livelihood is threatened.



## The Nigerian Montane Forest Project

The Nigerian Montane Forest Project (NMFP) aims to create a win-win situation for environment and community by:

- Combining scientific research on montane forest ecosystems with education to develop long term sustainable management of Nigeria's montane forests and grasslands.
- Negotiating agreements regarding forest conservation that all stakeholders view as legitimate and feasible.
- Helping develop community run eco-tourism ventures.
- Eventually handing over forest management to the local communities and government agencies.

The NMFP has Memoranda of Understanding and works closely with, the Nigerian Conservation Foundation (NCF), the Nigerian National Parks and The Federal University of Technology, Yola. These partners offer logistic support, collaboration with research projects and student exchange.

## Ngel Nyaki Forest Reserve

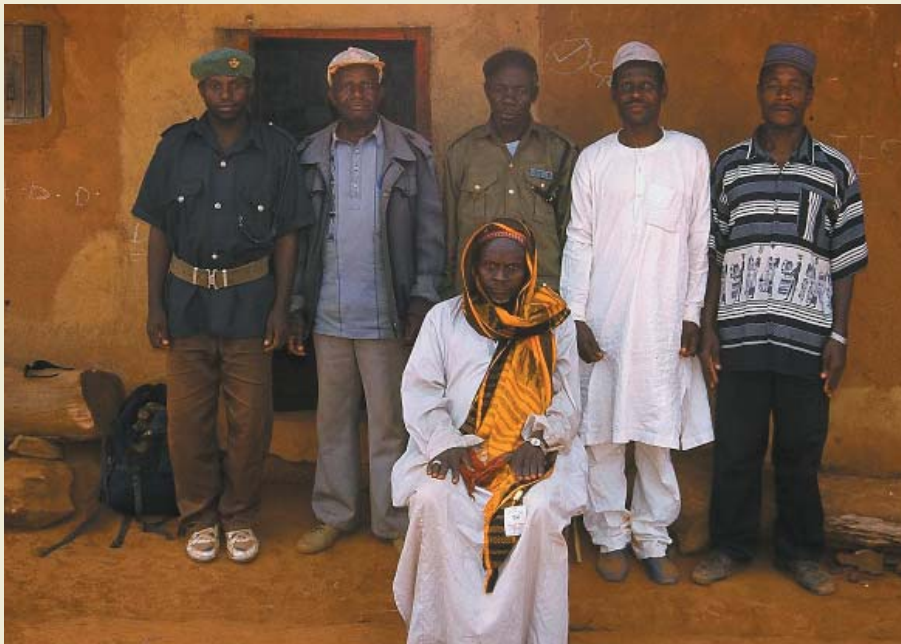
The flagship project of the NMFP is based around Ngel Nyaki Forest Reserve, near the western escarpment of the Mambilla plateau and 40 minutes walk from Yelwa village. Ngel Nyaki harbours many rare plant, animal and bird species. The forest is unique in Nigeria by offering visitors and researchers the opportunity to observe chimpanzees within an easy walk from the main road.

Yelwa village chief, Jauro Petel realises the potential of the forest to attract visitors and income. Villager Misa Zubaru is similarly far sighted and calls the forest his 'farm and cows'. He and others are convinced that they and their children will benefit from jobs created by researchers and tourists visiting Ngel Nyaki. Misa has learnt the names of most of the trees in the forest.



# Vision

*To promote the long-term survival of Nigeria's unique montane forest ecosystem by education and research aimed at the development of effective community based management strategies.*



*Yelwa village chief Jauro Petel and local field assistants.*



*Putty-nosed monkey and speckled mousebird.*

## Objectives

1. To investigate the evolution and ecology of Nigeria's unique montane forests.
2. To educate tertiary students and local community through these studies.
3. To apply the results through participatory consultation and planning and develop a sustainable management strategy for Nigeria's montane ecosystem and communities.
4. To assist in the development of a community run eco-tourism venture based on Ngel Nyaki Forest Reserve.

## Activities

### Scientific Research (Examples)

1. Forest fragmentation and its effect on bird and animal seed dispersers.
2. Phenology of montane forest flora.
3. Chimpanzee population survey.
4. Putty-nosed monkey study to determine the role of guenons in the functioning of the forest ecosystem.
5. Monitor and restore the depleted forest within the Reserve, specifically to understand the role of seed dispersal in forest regeneration.

### Education

1. Provide and organise supervision for University students from both Nigerian and International universities.
2. Train local research assistants in the collection of data associated with the research projects.

3. Introduce an environmental awareness education programme into the community.

### Conservation

1. Establish a steering committee, with representation of all stakeholders, including the local communities, the local and State governments and the NCF.
2. Prepare and adopt a management plan for the reserve, including regulations to manage the sustainable utilisation of resources and the protection of biodiversity within the reserve.
3. Employ four rangers to patrol the reserve alongside the informants and the local forestry officer.
4. Build four ranger posts around the reserve boundary to enable patrollers to stay on patrol overnight.
5. Promote and support the development of ecotourism initiatives within the local communities.



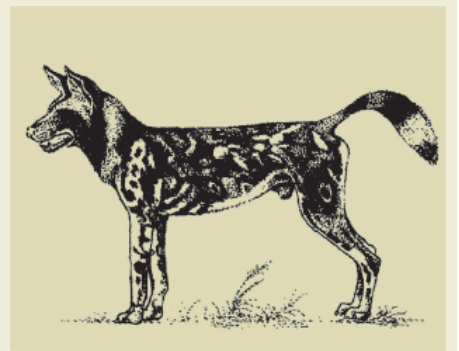
# Expected Outputs

1. Scientific publications which contribute globally to the understanding of West African Montane forests.
2. An appreciation by the local people, community stakeholder groups and government staff of the environmental and socio-economic importance of Ngel Nyaki.
3. Community stakeholder groups and government staff have the knowledge and capacity to collaboratively manage and protect the natural resources and the biodiversity within the forest.
4. A participatory management plan, adopted by all stakeholders to guide the wise utilisation and conservation of the reserve. In collaboration with NCF and the State Forestry Department.
5. The beginnings of an eco-tourism business for Yelwa based around Ngel Nyaki Forest.

The project is long-term, with the idea that the forest management component will eventually be handed over to the local communities and government agencies. The research element will remain a collaboration between Nigerian and International researchers and students.



*Well camouflaged chimpanzee at Ngel Nyaki.*



*The elusive wild dog, drawing by G. B. Ejebare.*



*Ornithologist Tony Disley with MSc student Jerome Ihuma and field assistant Misa Zubaru from Yelwa.*



The MNFP is under the Directorship of Dr Hazel Chapman, a Senior Lecturer in evolutionary ecology at the University of Canterbury (UC), New Zealand. Hazel has strong links with Nigeria, having grown up in Taraba State where her father worked as a Forest Officer. Since then she has co-authored a book on the forests of Taraba and Adamawa States (Chapman & Chapman 2001), and in 2002 led a combined UC / NCF expedition to re-survey all the montane forests in the area (Plant Talk, 2003; Oryx, 2004).

For more information contact us on the web at [www.biol.canterbury.ac.nz](http://www.biol.canterbury.ac.nz) or email Hazel at [hazel.chapman.canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:hazel.chapman.canterbury.ac.nz)

Chapman, H. and S. Olson (2004). "A report on the montane forests of Taraba State Nigeria, and an assessment of how have they changed over the past thirty years." *Oryx* 38(3): 282-290.

Chapman, J. D. and H. M. Chapman (2001). The forests of Taraba and Adamawa States, Nigeria. An ecological account and Plant Species Checklist. Christchurch, University of Canterbury.