

5.4 An African information network for protected and conserved areas

5.4.1 West Africa Regional Observatory

The Regional Observatory for Biodiversity and Protected Areas in West Africa (OBAPAO) was established by 16 countries and WAEMU as part of the BIOPAMA II program. It is implemented by a consortium of four sub-regional institutions that provide scientific and technical support on biodiversity issues. Covering a wide range of ecosystems, from the Guinean forests to the Sahara Desert, OBAPAO aims to step up its efforts to support the implementation of the Global Biodiversity Framework in West Africa.

The Regional Observatory for Biodiversity and Protected Areas in West Africa (OBAPAO: *Observatoire Régional de la Biodiversité et des aires protégées en Afrique de l'Ouest*) supports the collection, analysis, monitoring, and reporting of data on West African protected areas. These data are presented to end-users through freely accessible online tools and services. The Observatory develops staff and organisational capacities to manage information to better guide conservation policies and decisions.

As the technical host of the Observatory, the consortium is composed of the Centre for Ecological Monitoring (CSE) of Senegal, the Regional Network of Marine Protected Areas in West Africa (RAMPAO), the Regional of Marine Centre of the University of Ghana, and the AGRHYMET Regional Centre based in Niger. The members share complementary expertise, both thematic and geographic, which has facilitated the successful development of activities in the sub-region.

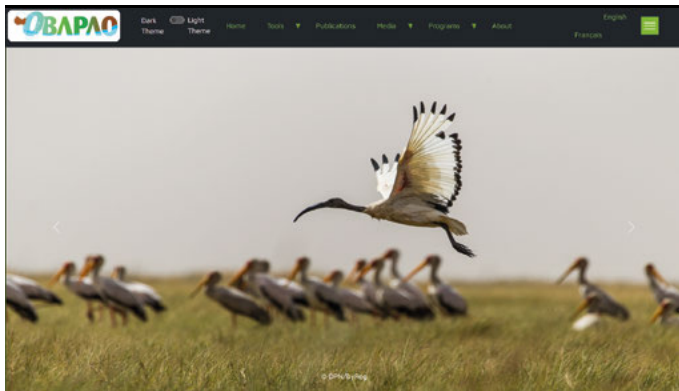
The West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA) serves as the institutional host of OBAPAO on behalf of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

The official launch of OBAPAO took place on November 27, 2019, in Dakar, Senegal. The launch of the Observatory was an important step in strengthening equitable governance of natural resources and promoting sustainable development in the region. The Observatory provides a regional mechanism to compile and analyse data, providing information to support field interventions, public policy dialogue, and decision-making processes at local, national, and regional levels.

West Africa contains globally significant biodiversity. The Guinean Forests of West Africa, a global biodiversity hotspot, are home to 270 endemic vertebrate species and approximately 1800 endemic plants¹. Among these species are the endangered pygmy hippopotamus and the reclusive zebra duiker, which occur nowhere else on earth. The more arid parts of the region provide habitat to desert-adapted species, like the critically endangered addax, which is believed to still occur in isolated parts of Mauritania and Niger. The marine and coastal ecosystems in West Africa provide breeding habitats to migratory birds and sustain economically significant fisheries. Mangroves supply valuable ecosystem services in the form of coastal protection, carbon storage, and nursery grounds for marine fauna.

The significance of marine ecosystems was showcased in the report on the State of West African marine protected areas 2022². This report was a major milestone in the BIOPAMA programme, and consolidated data and analyses on the status of West Africa's marine protected areas. The report promises to become a reference for best practice and innovative approaches to creating, governing, and managing West African marine protected areas. The report, like all of the information produced by OBAPAO, is provided freely through a dedicated geospatial web-platform (<https://www.obapao.org/>).

Participants at the BIOPAMA Inception workshop for West Africa. Pictured here are the attendees of the West Africa Inception Workshop for phase II of the BIOPAMA (Biodiversity and Protected Areas Management) programme, held in Dakar, Senegal, during April 2019.



The homepage of the OBAPAO Regional Reference Information System. As part of the BIOPAMA Programme, OBAPAO developed the Regional Reference Information System (RRIS). The RRIS is a freely accessible web-platform, which provides easy access to data and information relevant to the management of protected areas in West Africa.

Participants at the validation workshop of the Observatory for Biodiversity and Protected Areas in West Africa, held in Dakar, Senegal, during March 2023. The West Africa Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) convened representatives from the 16 countries in the region to discuss past outcomes and future plans for OBAPAO. Consortium partners, national experts on biodiversity and protected areas in West Africa, technical partners, funders, and partner organisations were among the stakeholders who convened in person to review and validate progress since establishing OBAPAO.

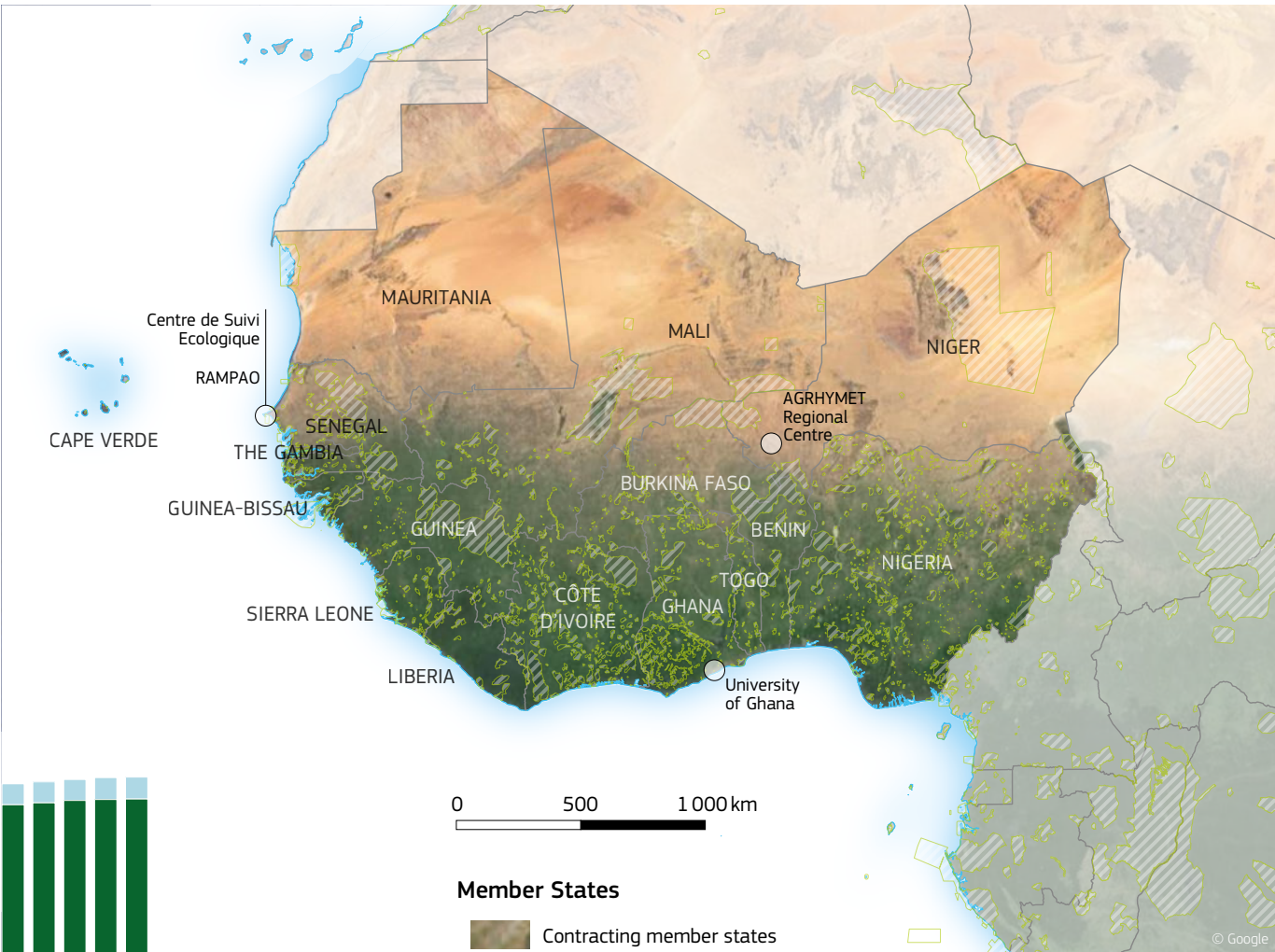
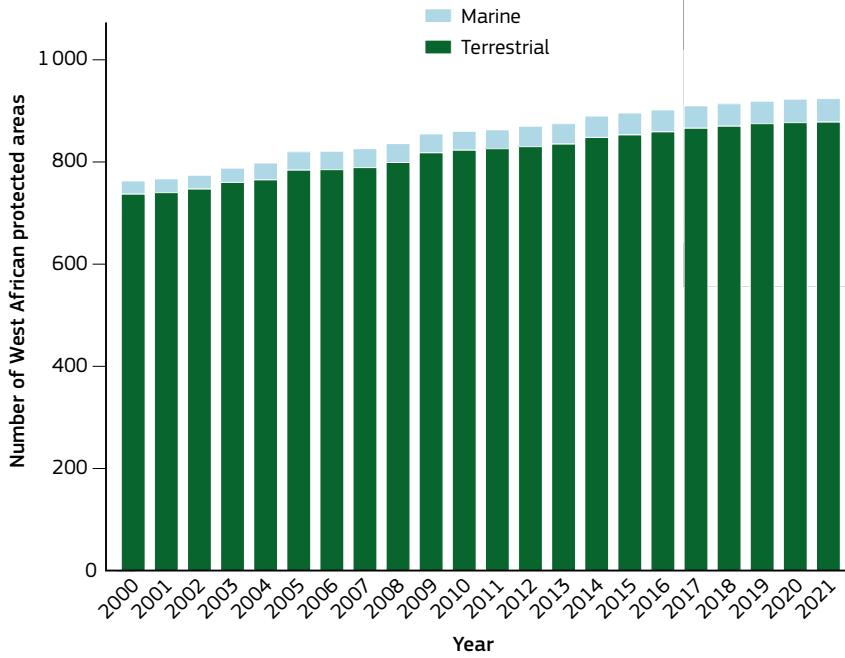


The State of West African marine protected areas 2022 Report. The report on the State of Marine Protected Areas in West Africa 2022 was a significant milestone in the collaboration between the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the Regional Network of Marine Protected Areas in West Africa, and the Observatory for Biodiversity and Protected Areas in West Africa (OBAPAO). This comprehensive assessment consolidated data and analyses on the status of West Africa's marine protected areas, as well as their governance, management, financing, and utilisation. The report covered many of the pressures facing the region, like overfishing, pollution, extractive industries, and climate change. Moreover, the report highlighted best practice and innovative approaches to creating, governing, and managing West African marine protected areas.

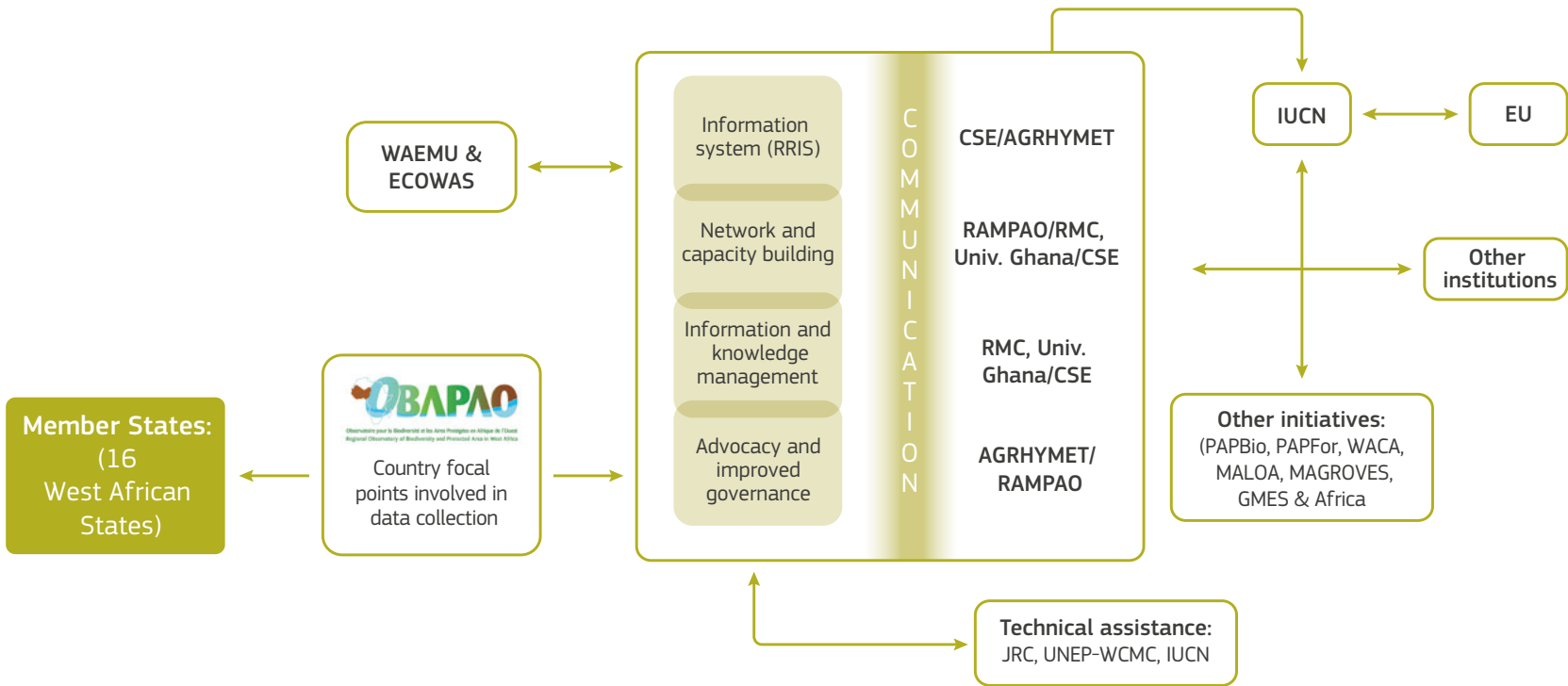
Endemic species in the Guinean Forests of West Africa. As a global biodiversity hotspot, the Guinean Forests of West Africa are home to 270 endemic vertebrate species that occur nowhere else on earth. One of these species is the endangered pygmy hippopotamus (*Choeropsis liberiensis*), which is one-quarter the size of its more common relative, the Nile hippopotamus. Only 2500 pygmy hippopotami are left in the wild, where they are threatened by habitat loss and poaching.

Ilhéu de Cima, Cabo Verde, an important breeding site for seabirds and sea turtles. West Africa's waters are vital for many coastal and pelagic seabirds. The continental coastline from Mauritania to Sierra Leone and the islands of Cabo Verde, support nearly 60 seabird species. Cabo Verde provides critical breeding sites for petrels and shearwaters, while the continental coastline provides sandy habitats, which are important feeding grounds for resident and migratory seabirds.

The growing number of West African protected areas (2000–2020). According to the World Database on Protected Areas (WDPA), the number of protected areas in West Africa has grown considerably, from 763 protected areas two decades ago, to more than 920 in 2020. Although, the number of marine protected areas has grown faster than those on land (77% increase between 2000 and 2020, versus 19% on land), they cover just 1.5% of West Africa's Exclusive Economic Zone compared to 17% of territory on land.



West African countries served by the Regional Observatory for Biodiversity and Protected Areas (OBAPAO). OBAPAO is implemented by the consortium, which serves as its technical host. The consortium is composed of the Centre de Suivi Écologique (CSE, Dakar, Senegal), the Regional Network of Protected Areas in West Africa (RAMPAO, Dakar, Senegal), the Regional Marine Centre (RMC) of the University of Ghana (Accra, Ghana), and the AGRHYMET Regional Centre (Niamey, Niger). Institutionally, the regional observatory is hosted by the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU), on behalf of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the 16 member countries of the Observatory. The vision of OBAPAO is to support 16 West African countries to improve the long-term conservation and sustainable use of natural resources.



The organisational structure and workflow of the Observatory for Biodiversity and Protected Areas in West Africa developed for the BIOPAMA programme. Within the Biodiversity and Protected Areas Management (BIOPAMA) programme, OBAPAO activities were made up of four work packages, which were each led by a pair of consortium member institutions, and cross-cutting communication activities that included all member consortium. As the consortium leader, CSE took responsibility for reporting. The European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC), the UN Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC), and IUCN provided technical assistance to the Consortium. The 16 West African States and the two regional institutions (WAEMU and ECOWAS) benefited from OBAPAO's activities. National focal points supported country-level activities, including collecting, analysing, and sharing data and other relevant information on biodiversity. OBAPAO also created dynamic partnerships with existing initiatives in the region, such as PAPBio, West Africa Coast Areas (WACA), Observatoire Régional du Littoral Ouest Africain (ORLOA), etc.

References

- Myers, N., et al. (2000) Biodiversity hotspots for conservation priorities. Nature, 403, 853-858.
- Merceron, T., et al. (Eds.) (2024). State of West African marine protected areas 2022. IUCN, Gland, Switzerland



5.4.2 Central Africa Regional Observatory

The Central Africa Forest Observatory (OFAC) of the Commission of Forests of Central Africa (COMIFAC) supports 11 member states in Central Africa. These states mostly cover the tropical forests of the Congo Basin, home to exceptional biodiversity and relatively intact landscapes. OFAC has demonstrated continuous growth over more than a decade, which stands it in good stead to continue supporting Central African countries deliver on the Global Biodiversity Framework.

Central Africa is home to the world's second-largest tropical forest spanning over 240 million hectares. The tropical forests of the Congo Basin and Gulf of Guinea provide habitat for some of the highest levels of terrestrial and aquatic biodiversity in the world. The vast expanses of contiguous forest contain populations of large charismatic mammals, including the endangered forest elephant, two species of gorilla, chimpanzees, bonobos, the bongo, and the reclusive okapi.

Unlike other tropical forests globally, Central African forests have not yet experienced widespread conversions. However, in spite of conservation efforts, these forests are declining by approximately 0.5% each year. Nature is mostly threatened by demographic (i.e. population increases, migration, and displacement) and economic factors (i.e. forest exploitation, poaching, mining), as well by political instability. Conserving and managing the rich natural diversity of this region depends on the highest standards of evidence-backed policy and implementation. As a consequence, the global significance of Central African forests has attracted considerable support from the European Union and other international organisations.

Created in 2007, the Central African Forest Observatory (OFAC) is a specialised technical organ of the Central African Forest Commission (COMIFAC), which provides up-to-date and relevant data on the region's forests and ecosystems. OFAC's mandate is to inform scientific knowledge and political decision-making in view of promoting better governance and sustainable management of natural resources.

In 2014, OFAC, including the German Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH and the International Tropical Timber Organisation (ITTO), was identified as the Regional Observatory for Central Africa in the frame of the first phase of the EU's BIOPAMA program. This was a natural choice due to OFAC's mandate and years of accumulated experience in forest management. Under the auspices of COMIFAC, OFAC also benefitted from the support of the European Union through the RIOFAC project (*Renforcement et Institutionnalisation de l'OFAC*), as well as several partnerships with international organisations, including the FAO, UNEP-WCMC, and the International Tropical Timber Technical Association. It also engages with national and regional government organisations to ensure the reliable sharing of information.

The OFAC portal (https://www.observatoire-comifac.net/analytical_platform) is an interactive web-mapping platform, which brings together digital monitoring tools and information products. Designed to be visually attractive and interactive, the OFAC portal guides users to a wealth of information for monitoring the environment, conserving biodiversity, and managing natural and production forests. Monitoring indicators are endorsed and updated by COMIFAC member countries in collaboration with their technical and financial partners. These partners operate within the frame of the Congo Basin Forest Partnership (CBFP), which was established in 2004 as the main regional initiative with broad political, scientific, and environmental objectives.

Produced alongside the OFAC portal are several high-level scientific synthesis reports for policy. The earliest of these appeared in 2005 in the form of a preliminary assessment outlining the state of Forests of the Congo Basin. The latest version of this output is the 7th edition of Forests of the Congo Basin – State of the Forest 2021 report¹. A new output focusing on protected areas was introduced in 2015, and the 2nd edition of *State of Protected Areas in Central Africa*² was released five years later.

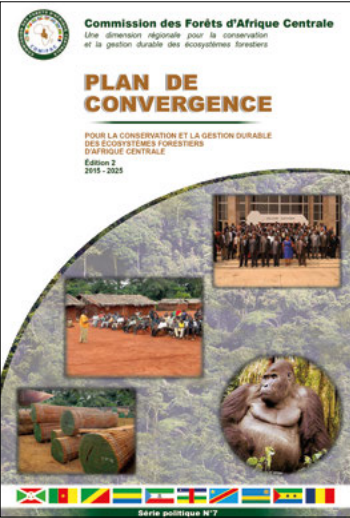


The Central Africa Forests Observatory (OFAC) is the heartbeat of the BIOPAMA programme in Central Africa.

Pictured here are the attendees of the Central Africa Inception Workshop for phase II of the BIOPAMA (Biodiversity and Protected Areas Management) programme, which was held in Douala, Cameroon, in September 2018.

Source: BIOPAMA Programme with permission, all rights reserved.

The upcoming decade is full of promise for OFAC, which now takes on its new role as the EU funded Regional Centre of Excellence for biodiversity and forest in Central Africa. Moreover, COMIFAC was recognised by the Convention on Biological Diversity when it was ranked first in Africa in the report of the Informal Advisory Group on Technical and Scientific Cooperation³, which assessed organisations to host regional technical and scientific cooperation support centres. This means that OFAC and COMIFAC will be at the forefront of supporting Central African nations to deliver on the ambitious goals of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.



COMIFAC's Convergence Plan.

COMIFAC has a sub-regional Convergence Plan, which is the reference and coordination framework for all conservation and sustainable management interventions in the forest ecosystems of Central Africa. This Plan aligns the actions of COMIFAC member states and other development actors. Priority interventions outlined by the Plan include: (i) harmonising forestry and environmental policies; (ii) managing forest resources sustainably; (iii) conserving and using biological diversity sustainably; (iv) combatting climate change and desertification; (v) encouraging socioeconomic development and stakeholder participation; and (vi) mobilising sustainable financing. The Plan also supports implementation by prioritising training and capacity building; research and development; and communication, awareness, information and education.

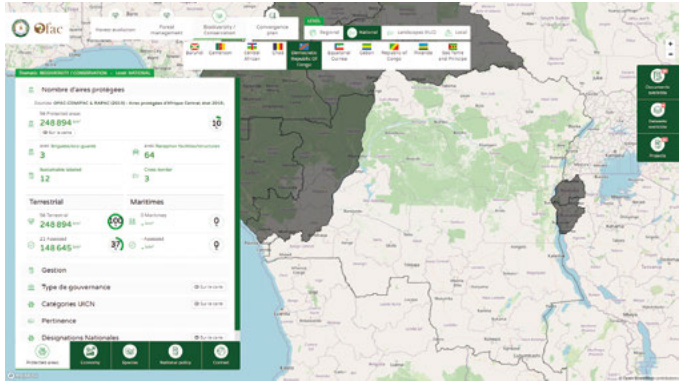
Source: Commission des Forêts d'Afrique Centrale (2015) *Plan de Convergence. Pour la conservation et la gestion durable des écosystèmes forestiers d'Afrique Centrale*. Edition 2, 2015 – 2025. Série politique N°7. Commission des Forêts d'Afrique Centrale. Yaoundé, Cameroon.



State of the Forests report.

State of the Forest reports provide members of the Congo Basin Forest Partnership with scientifically recognised and nationally endorsed information to support decision-making. These reports provide both political and technical information on the management of African forest habitat to preserve their biodiversity and to improve living conditions of local populations. OFAC has coordinated the production and publication of these report since the first edition in 2005 until the most recent 7th edition in 2022.

Source: Eba'a Atyi R, et al. (2022) *Les forêts du bassin du Congo : état des forêts 2021*. CIFOR, Bogor, Indonésie.



The Central Africa Forest Observatory OFAC Portal.

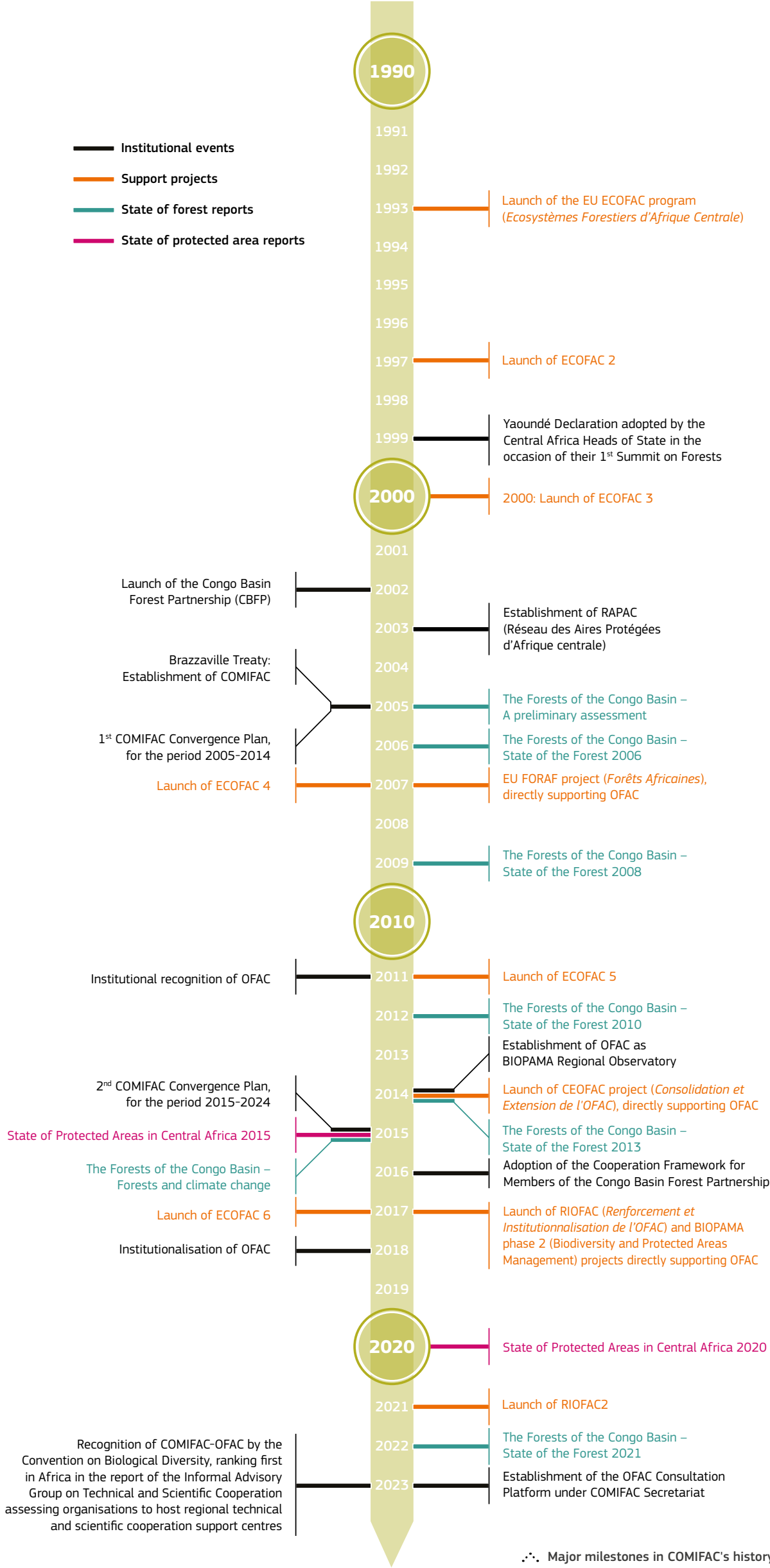
The OFAC portal is an interactive web platform, which brings together online monitoring and information tools on Central Africa ecosystems, protected areas, and their interrelated dynamics. The portal supports decision-makers on how to manage and conserve nature sustainably. It provides information at local, national and regional scales, and is powered by data that have been collected over more than fifteen years in conjunction with national administrators.

Source: https://www.observatoire-comifac.net/analytical_platform

The Congo Basin Forest Partnership.

The Congo Basin Forest Partnership (CBFP) is a multi-stakeholder partnership to promote the conservation and responsible management of the Congo Basin's tropical forests. It was launched in September 2002 at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg and its first meeting took place the following year in Paris. COMIFAC is a Regional College for CBFP, which currently counts 137 members, including 11 Central African countries. This photo shows the high-level launch of the Fair Deal Taskforce for the protection of Central African forests at COP 27, which was hosted by COMIFAC and moderated by CBFP.

Source: Congo Basin Forest Partnership (CBFP) under Creative Commons CC BY-NC.



Major milestones in COMIFAC's history.

A generalised timeline of COMIFAC's development as the leading organisation for biodiversity and forest conservation in Central Africa.

Source: Own design based on a compilation of events.



State of Protected Areas in Central Africa.

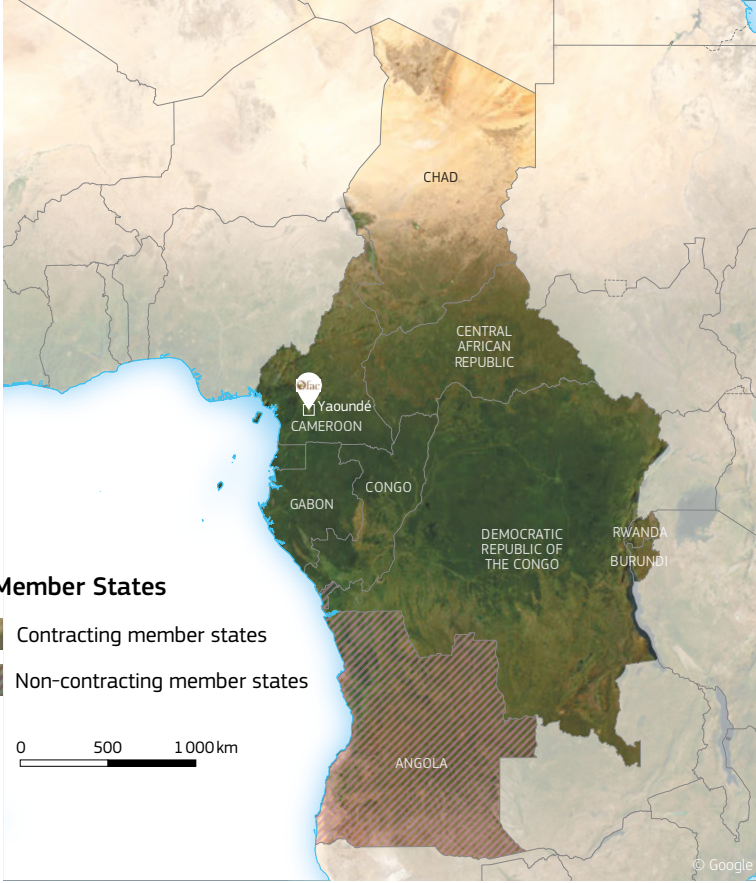
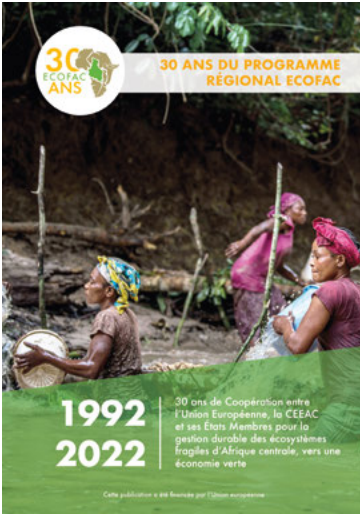
Along with its partners, OFAC coordinated the production of the first two editions of the State of Protected Areas in Central Africa. The report, which is published in both French and English, provides a comprehensive overview of the contributions of Central African protected areas to local, national, and regional policy goals for protected areas.

Source: Doumenge C., et al. (Eds.), 2021. *Aires protégées d'Afrique centrale – Etat 2020*. OFAC-COMIFAC, Yaoundé, Cameroon & UICN, Gland, Switzerland.

EU ECOFAC program (Ecosystèmes Forestiers d'Afrique Centrale).

From 1992 to 2024, the EU, through the European Development Fund (EDF), funded six subsequent phases of the ECOFAC program. ECOFAC sustained national services and key protected areas in the region and, through the establishment of an inter-governmental platform, enhanced coordination, collaboration and harmonisation. ECOFAC served as testing ground for a series of actions intended to reconcile the protection and sustainable use of forest ecosystems.

Source: ECOFAC 6 (2022) *30 ans de Coopération entre l'Union Européenne, la CEEAC et ses Etats Membres pour la gestion durable des écosystèmes fragiles d'Afrique centrale, vers une économie verte*. Publication funded by the European Union.



OFAC Member States

Contracting member states
Non-contracting member states

The Central Africa Forest Observatory (OFAC): a regional hub for environmental monitoring and biodiversity conservation.

Based in Yaoundé, Cameroon, OFAC is a technical organ of the Commission of Forests of Central Africa (COMIFAC). OFAC serves 11 Member States, which cover unique ecosystems of exceptional global significance, particularly the tropical forests of the Congo Basin.

Source: Own mapping.

References

- Eba'a Atyi R, et al. (2022) *Les forêts du bassin du Congo : état des forêts 2021*. CIFOR, Bogor, Indonésie.
- Doumenge C., et al. (Eds.), 2021. *Aires protégées d'Afrique centrale – Etat 2020*. OFAC-COMIFAC, Yaoundé, Cameroon & UICN, Gland, Switzerland.
- Convention on Biological Diversity (2024) *Report of the Informal Advisory Group on Technical and Scientific Cooperation on the assessment of entities and organizations under consideration to host the regional and/or subregional technical and scientific cooperation support centres*. Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, Montreal, Canada.



5.4.3 Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Observatory

The Regional Centre for Mapping of Resources for Development (RCMRD) based in Nairobi, Kenya, serves 20 Member States in Eastern and Southern Africa and the Western Indian Ocean Islands. These countries are home to unique ecosystems and species, which require tailored conservation policies and interventions. This is a daunting challenge, but RCMRD is steadily growing its reputation as a regional hub of knowledge synthesis and capacity building.

A key outcome of the Biodiversity and Protected Areas Management (BIOPAMA) programme was establishing regional observatories. The purpose of these observatories was to provide a link between the types of continent-wide information presented in this Atlas, and local actors at the national or protect area level. This role is bidirectional. Observatories support local stakeholders in using global knowledge, while also enriching global data sources with locally validated information.

The Regional Centre for Mapping of Resources for Development (RCMRD) based in Nairobi, Kenya, was installed as the regional observatory for Eastern and Southern Africa in 2019. RCMRD was originally established in 1975 under the auspices of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa and the then Organization of African Unity, the precursor to today's African Union. With more than four decades of geographical and cartographical experience, RCMRD was well positioned to support 20 contracting and 4 non-contracting member states in the region.

Serving such a vast area is a daunting challenge. Not only does RCMRD have to navigate an array of national and regional political priorities, it also needs to accommodate diverse habitats and species with distinct evolutionary histories, biological characteristics, and human pressures. The other pages of this Atlas showcase much of the region's ecological diversity, which includes snow-capped mountains, bone-dry deserts, humid tropical forests, lively savannahs, and rich coral reefs. The consequence of ecological diversity is that RCMRD cannot recycle the same advice for the whole region. Instead, information must be tailored to specific contexts, which is always challenging.

Despite its relatively recent entry into the international conservation arena, RCMRD has reached several significant milestones. One key milestone is the release of the Regional Resource Hub for Eastern and Southern Africa, an online resource of freely available information (<https://rcoe-geoportal.rcmr.org/>). This is an ever-improving website that aims to provide conservation stakeholders with easy access to scientific information relevant to protected area management. To improve the use of scientific information, RCMRD also offers training and capacity building to technical and policy officials from national departments. The first annual training event was hosted in 2022, and the third iteration in 2024 reached more than 110 participants from 24 countries. While this is a laudable achievement, the region contains many more stakeholders than can be accommodated at a single training event. Therefore, RCMRD supported its BIOPAMA partners (the International Union for Conservation of Nature, the European Commission Joint Research Centre, and the UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre) to produce the 1st edition of the *State of Protected and Conserved areas in Eastern and Southern Africa*¹. The 2nd edition of this report was released in 2024, at the culmination of the BIOPAMA program.

RCMRD regularly engages with policy stakeholders. A major example of this was the Regional Resource Hub Pavilion, at the IUCN Africa Protected Areas Congress (APAC) held in Kigali in July 2022. This event was the first ever continent-wide event on the role of protected areas, which involved African leaders, citizens, and interest groups. It culminated in the Kigali Call to Action for People and Nature, a collective position statement on African protected areas². Over five days, the Regional Resource Hub Pavilion hosted multiple interactive sessions on earth observation tools and technologies, methods for assessing the governance and management effectiveness of protected areas, the economic value of protected areas, and best-practices in sharing information.

IUCN Africa Protected and Conserved Areas Congress.

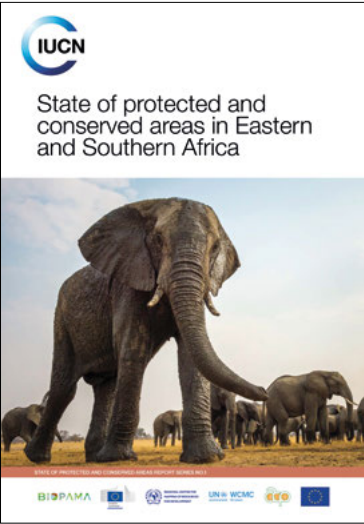
RCMRD hosted the Regional Resource Hub Pavilion at the IUCN Africa Protected Areas Congress (APAC) held in Kigali in July 2022. This continent-wide event highlighted the role of protected areas to participating African leaders, citizens, and interest groups.

Source: Maria Fernanda Araes, with permission, all rights reserved.

Participants in the BIOPAMA Data Training Workshop 2023.

RCMRD has hosted an annual data training workshop on improving biodiversity conservation and management in the region. This event was first held in 2022 and the 3rd edition was attended by more than 110 science and policy officials from 24 countries in Eastern and Southern Africa.

Source: Falko Buschke with permission, all rights reserved.



The 1st edition of the State of Protected and Conserved areas in Eastern and Southern Africa.

Along with its partners, RCMRD contributed to the 1st edition of the *State of Protected and Conserved areas in Eastern and Southern Africa* report. An updated 2nd edition was published in 2024.

Source: IUCN Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office (2020) *The State of Protected and Conserved areas in Eastern and Southern Africa*. IUCN, International Union for Conservation of Nature. <https://doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.CH.2020.15.en>

The Regional Resource Hub for Eastern and Southern Africa.

The homepage of the Regional Resource Hub for Eastern and Southern Africa, an online resource of freely available information that supports better decision making for fair and effective management and governance of protected and conserved areas.

Source: <https://rcoe-geoportal.rcmr.org/>



References

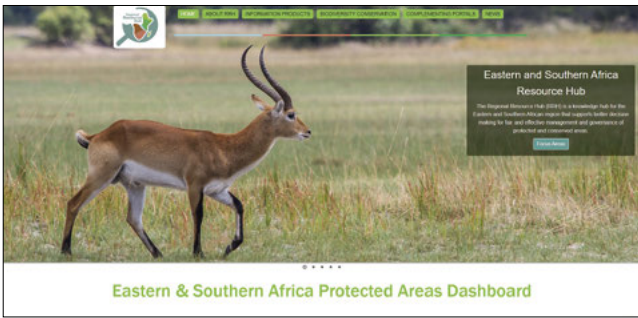
- [1] IUCN Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office (2020) *The State of Protected and Conserved areas in Eastern and Southern Africa*. IUCN, International Union for Conservation of Nature. <https://doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.CH.2020.15.en>
- [2] IUCN (2022) *Kigali Call to Action for People and Nature*. IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas, Republic of Rwanda, African Wildlife Foundation, Kigali, Rwanda.



The Regional Centre for Mapping of Resources for Development offices.

The facilities at RCMRD's offices in Nairobi, Kenya, include conference rooms, computer labs, and meeting rooms that are well-suited for hosting events with regional partners.

Source: Falko Buschke with permission, all rights reserved.



Common warthog, Lake Abhe, Djibouti.

The Horn of Africa includes some of the most poorly studied ecosystems in Africa. Despite its arid conditions, the region is recognised as a global biodiversity hotspot due to its high endemism. Political instability is considered the most serious barrier to conservation in the region.

Source: Grégoire Dubois, with permission, all rights reserved.



Schmidt's Red-tailed Monkey, Kibale forest, Uganda.

The tropical forests of equatorial Africa provide habitat to many distinct species, including primates who disperse the seeds of many plants used and valued by humans. Despite this importance, these habitats are under pressure from forest conversion for agriculture.

Source: Grégoire Dubois, with permission, all rights reserved.

Mahé Island, Seychelles.

Islands in the Western Indian Ocean uniquely combine diverse marine ecosystems with tropical vegetation with high levels of endemism. These islands are heavily reliant on nature-based tourism, but are disproportionately vulnerable to global pressures, like alien species and climate change.

Source: Nina R on Flickr CC SA 2.0.



RCMRD Member States

- Contracting member states
- Non-contracting member states

The biological diversity of Regional Centre for Mapping of Resources for Development member states.

The Regional Centre for Mapping of Resources for Development (RCMRD) supports 24 countries in Eastern and Southern Africa and the Western Indian Ocean Islands. These include 20 contracting and 4 non-contracting member states, which cover a rich variety of ecosystems, from the tropic coral reefs of Seychelles to the snow-capped mountains of Lesotho.

Source: Own mapping.



Lion, Okavango Delta, Botswana.

Large parts of southern Africa contain high levels of biodiversity despite being semi-arid. These ecosystems are adapted to rainfall cycles and life aggregates around surface water, like the Okavango Delta. This aridity means that the region is particularly susceptible to land degradation, which is worsened by climate and land use change.

Source: Grégoire Dubois, with permission, all rights reserved.

Moteng Pass, Lesotho.

While snowfall is generally not associated with Africa, the Kingdom of Lesotho regularly experiences sub-zero temperatures. The highland grasslands of the region are important water production landscapes, but are increasingly vulnerable to the combined effects of climate change and land-degradation due to over-grazing.

Source: Willem Erasmus on Wikimedia Commons CC BY-SA 4.0.



Black-and-white ruffed lemur, Andasibe-Mantadia National Park, Madagascar.

Due to its unique evolutionary history, Madagascar, a global biodiversity hotspot, contains more than 9700 plants and 770 vertebrates (including more than 100 iconic lemur species) found nowhere else on earth. Overexploitation (in the form of logging hunting and fishing), agriculture, and ecosystem modification (particularly changing fire regimes) are the main pressures on biodiversity on the island.

Source: Grégoire Dubois, with permission, all rights reserved.



“

You cannot protect the environment unless you empower people, you inform them, and you help them understand that these resources are their own, that they must protect them.

”

Wangari Maathai (1940 – 2011)



📷 Burchell's zebra in Etosha National Park, Namibia.
Source: Yathin S Krishnappa on Wikimedia Commons CC BY-SA 3.0.



Why is it important to contribute to the scientific understanding of African protected areas?

What is the current state of African protected areas?

How do human societies benefit from African protected areas?

What are the main pressures on African protected areas, and what can we do about it?

What lessons and which opportunities can be drawn from current trends inspiring protected areas management and governance?

African protected areas are not all the same. Each represents a long history shaped by the way humans interact with one another and with plants and animals in their natural habitats. The maps produced for this atlas portray these unique histories by drawing from more than a decade of scientific exploration and collaboration. With this atlas, the European Commission Joint Research Centre compiles a comprehensive catalogue of geospatial information to showcase the defining attributes of more than 8800 protected areas in Africa.

As part of a narrative spanning 17 chapters nested within five thematic parts, this atlas shows how effective protected areas can be an opportunity for, not an obstacle to, development. By taking advantage of the latest geographical information, protected and conserved areas can form part of a portfolio of sustainable land planning, which provides opportunities to protect nature, build sustainable livelihoods, and preserve cultural identities.

