

Redeeming the Lost Conservation Pearl of Adamawa highlands Cameroon- Tchabal Mbabo

By

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The montane-savannah ecosystems of Tchabal Mbabo are globally recognised for their conservation importance due to their richness in birds, reptiles, amphibians and large mammals. The mammalian species include large predators such as the threatened golden cat *Felis aurata*, leopard *Panthera pardus* and spotted hyena *Crocuta crocuta*. Following biological reconnaissance surveys conducted by a team of CWCS scientists, the African wild dog *Lycaon pictus* reported extinct in the area by IUCN was recently confirmed by local hunters to still be present.

Since 2019, Cameroon Wildlife Conservation Society, CWCS a lead national environmental NGO in Cameroon has been conducting reconnaissance biological and socio economic surveys in the area to gauge the conservation potentials of Tchabal Mbabo and assess existing threats to biodiversity. The biodiversity of the area has suffered severe losses through a combination of human driven factors notably hunting and bush meat trade, overgrazing, unsustainable harvesting of resources, wild fires for farming and grazing pastures etc. However, recent field findings by CWCS scientists indicate all is not lost of this conservation pearl located in the Adamawa highland region of Cameroon. Urgent conservation therapy is needed to redeem the glorious past of Tchabal Mbabo.



Figure 1 Tchabal Mbabo highly threatened biological rich gallery forest formations @CWCS

These major findings have rekindled hopes of the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife (MINFOF) to proceed with gazettelement of the area as a national park. Giving Tchabal Mbabo the highest protection status will go a long way to redress the significant losses of its biodiversity as a result of numerous threats and therefore safeguard one of the country's last remaining rich savannah-montane forest ecosystems.

The trans-boundary context of Tchabal Mbabo, next to neighbouring Gashaka Gumti National Park in Nigeria further articulates its great conservation dimension and importance. The contiguous nature of large tracts of savannah-montane trans-boundary landscape spanning across border regions of Cameroon and Nigeria necessitates urgent conservation actions from the global conservation community.

Tchabal Mbabo was designated by Birdlife International as an Important Bird Area (IBA) harbouring more than 86 species of birds including six species of endemic to montane areas of western Cameroon and Nigeria such as *Ploceus bannermanii* and *Andropadus montanus*. It hosts 294 bird species, 22 species restricted to the afro-montane ecosystem, 10 of which are endemic to the mountain chain (including the contiguous ecosystems of the Gashaka Gumti National Park in northeast of Nigeria).

The area is also known to harbour some Critically Endangered and Endangered reptiles and amphibians such as *Cardioglossa alsco* (Also Long Fingered frog), *Astylosternus nganhanus* (Nganha Night Frog), *Leptodactylodon perreti* (Perret's egg frog) *Mecistops cataphractus* (Slender-snouted crocodile) just to name few.



Figure 2 *Leptodactylodon perreti* (EN)@CWCS

The human population of the area comprises diverse ethnic groups (Mbororos, Foulbes, Nyem Nyems and Hauossas) divided into traditional chiefdoms or Lamada and different native languages. The people are mostly traditional herdsman living at base of the mountains, others of Bantu ethnic groups predominantly cultivators, farming mainly maize, millet and vegetable crops. The mountain plateaus are inhabited by sedentary pastoralists, the Fulbes and Mboros.

During high level technical meetings held last June between CWCS and MINFOF, a Road Map to gazette Tchabal Mbabo as National Park was approved by the Minister. This major milestone marks a turning point for future conservation efforts in the area.

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