

BOOK REVIEWS

The Forests of Taraba and Adamawa States, Nigeria. An Ecological Account and Plant Species Checklist

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xiv + 146 pp, with 75 pp of Checklist and indexes, 44 figures (including 31 photographs) and 29 Tables

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This book describes in detail the forests of the Taraba and Adamawa States of northeastern Nigeria. It is based principally on the extensive surveys made by Jim Chapman as a forest officer in the 1970's, but also includes reports on their more recent status. Forest covers scarcely one percent of Taraba and even less of Adamawa, but the remaining forests and fragments comprise elements of lowland high forest, intermediate, submontane and montane forest with important components linking the floras characteristic of West and East Africa.

The introduction in Chapter 1 starts with a consideration of the conservation values of these forests and the associated fringing bushland and grassland, which at higher altitudes support a significant number of endemic species. Some of the forests have statutory protection as forest reserves, others are within the Gashaka Gumpti National Park, but a number have no protection other than inaccessibility or local taboo. All are vulnerable to increasing pressures from logging and farming, but inspection of some as recently as last year gives hope that long-term funding could still provide a chance for the preservation of some of these remote and fascinating forests. The chapter continues with a record of exploration by the relatively few botanists who have trekked there, the methods used in the 1970's surveys and the criteria for assessing rare species using the IUCN Red Data List. A list of the most endangered species is followed by an introduction to the checklist of species included at the end of the book.

Chapters two to eight describe the forests and associated vegetation for each of the principal upland areas, followed by the escarpment forests and lowland outliers, overall from 2300 m down to c. 230 m. In order these are the Mambilla Plateau, the Gotel Mountains, Cabbal Hendu, the Shebshi Mountains, the transitional and high forest of the western escarpment of the Mambilla Plateau, the high forest outliers in the Middle Donga Valley and finally the outliers in lowland Gashaka. Each chapter begins with a short summary of the vegetation types, the altitude, approximate size and a mention of species from the Red Data List. There follows a general consideration of the extent, landscape and geology of the area, the soils, climate and ecological notes. The individual forest patches are considered in terms of their

diversity, location, conservation status and composition. Permanent plots were laid out for representative samples of the forest types. All trees above 6 m were numbered and botanical specimens collected. Their height and girth were measured, their outlines sketched and recorded in a diagram for the ten profile strips, and in a further six sample plots all trees over 30 cm girth were enumerated. Together these provide a detailed description of the forest structure, physiognomy and floristic composition, to which are added notes on aspects of the ecology, including phenology, regeneration and succession. For the highlands, further consideration is given to the fringe of bushland and the grassland, where many elements are related to the afro-montane flora of East Africa, with a significant number of endemic species. The effects of more intense burning and the deleterious effect of overgrazing and trampling are assessed.

On the Mambilla Plateau, the remote Ngel Nyaki Forest Reserve of mid-altitude submontane forest is 46 km² in extent towards the western escarpment at 1400–1500 m. It is gazetted as a Local Authority Forest Reserve and has been recommended by the Nigerian Conservation Foundation for inclusion in the Gashaka Gumti National Park. Recent surveys indicate it still has a rich wildlife, including several primate species, buffalo and red river hog. Leinde Fadali is similar and still had primate populations in the late 1980's. Although unprotected it has survived because it is so inaccessible high on the slopes overlooking Mayo Sabere at c. 1300–1680 m. Other fragmentary forests are described, associated with existing or former villages and in patches along the streams.

On the Gotel Mountains quite extensive forests exist on the west-facing slopes, running from the Cabbal Wade escarpment to the northern end of Gangirwal, from 910 to c. 2290 m. There is inaccessible forest on the eastern side of Gangirwal and other small patches. Considerable wildlife has persisted because the prominent Dutsin Dodo rock was considered sacred and because the local muslim people do not hunt, but is vulnerable to incursions from Cameroon. There are small patches of montane forest in protected spots above 2130 m with similarities to the Cameroon highlands. Interesting plants occur in the montane grassland, with microhabitats around rock outcrops and in depressions on rock pavements, although such sites are threatened by overgrazing and trampling. Gangirwal was made a Game Sanctuary in the 1970's and is now included in the Gashaka Gumti National Park.

Cabbal Hendu is 32 km north of Gangirwal on the uplands north of the Mambilla Plateau and the Gotel Mountains. It is a grazing enclave within the Gashaka Gumti National Park, but formerly somewhat protected by tsetse fly infestation in the vicinity. There is forest on stream banks and on the steep west-facing scarp and a submontane/montane forest with rich grassland has persisted on the higher slopes above c. 1900m.

The Shebshi Mountains, still further north, include the Kiri Plateau, Vogel Peak and the Tiba Plateau. The Gangoro Forest Reserve, about 47 km² on the scarp at the south-south-west end of the Tiba Plateau, has fragmented but impressive intermediate forest that is gradually being

whittled away by fire. Otherwise the plateaux are largely covered by woodland and wooded grassland with only small patches of forest along streams and in rocky places. The montane communities are notable for numerous species not found elsewhere in West Africa.

The original forests of the western foothills and escarpment valleys of the Mambilla Plateau are mostly cleared for shifting cultivation, but two fragments persist at Akwaizantar and Kop Nti. Akwaizantar Forest is about halfway down the western escarpment in the deep valley of the Zonyo stream at c. 760–1170 m. The forest is still preserved by the local people as a hunting reserve and was found largely intact in 1996. The transitional forest is in a late seral stage with some huge trees that were probably left on farms in a previous era. Kop Nti Forest, about 6.5 km² at c. 760 m, is below the south-western escarpment of the plateau and forms part of the River Nwum Forest reserve (20.5 km² in all) in a deep defile. It resembles the high forest of western Nigeria and seems to have persisted as a 'juju' forest but encroachment was evident in the mid-1970's dwindling wildlife. The high forest outliers described in the Middle Donga Valley are further threatened. The Baissa Forest at 230 m on the Donga River has been logged out. The River Amboi Forest Reserve, a few km east of Baissa, and the Bissaula River Forest Reserve, about 32 km south-south-west of Baissa, are relatively unharmed though the wildlife has been decimated.

Finally, north of the Mambilla Plateau in the Gashaka District, just outside the Gashaka Gumpti National Park, two lowland high forests are described at about 230 m altitude. The Gangumi Forest Reserve, some 26 km east-north-east of Bali, was about 28.5 km² and the Wurkum River Forest Reserve, about 12 km further north-north-west, comprised c. 20.5 km². They seem to be supported by groundwater conditions and have survived in areas with relatively low population due to the former prevalence of river blindness and sleeping sickness. Their present condition is uncertain.

The Checklist that follows runs to over 60 pages of small print and includes not only the plant records of the 1970's surveys, but as far as possible other collections made in the area. It is emphasised that this is only a first edition, but is nonetheless a notably comprehensive listing. It includes at least 16 trees new to Nigeria. Ferns, mosses and lichens are included in addition to the flowering plants and gymnosperms. Information is included on the collector, date of collection, altitude, location, habitat type, Red Data listing and phenology.

Overall the book is a masterpiece of detailed and conscientious descriptive ecology. It follows the precepts of Paul Richards, Frank White and other colleagues in the Oxford Forestry Institute, the Forestry and Wildlife Division of Nigeria and the Land Resources Division of the former Overseas Development Administration. The checklist has been prepared in conjunction with colleagues at the Forest Herbarium Oxford and the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. It involved an enormous amount of labour, undertaking the comprehensive field surveys in remote places, recording and analysing so much data. Hazel Chapman, who first helped in school holidays, has made a major contribution in transcribing

and editing the original reports, working up the checklist and preparing texts for publication. This was financed in part by the Leverhulme Foundation. The book has been nicely produced by the Department of Plant and Microbial Sciences, University of Canterbury, New Zealand. The 31 photographs give a good impression of the forests, even if (judging by details included in the captions) there may have been a little loss of quality in the reproduction. The cost of publication has been subsidised by the Department for International Development, the World Wide Fund for Nature and the Stanfield Memorial Fund to give a price of \$NZ 50.00 (US\$ 20.00), little more than twice the additional cost of NZ\$ 18 for international postage. Orders can be made at www.pams.canterbury.ac.nz/gashaka.htm. With the support of the Nigerian Conservation Foundation, WWF and other international organisations the authors express considerable hope that efforts will continue to conserve at least some of these valuable forests for the future.

Roger Polhill

Ama: A Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade
by **Manu Herbstein**

Paperback - 450 pages; published by [e-reads]; ISBN: 1585869325

The novel follows Ama from her capture and enslavement in northern Ghana in the late eighteenth century, through Yendi, Kafaba, Kumase, Elmina and the Middle Passage to a sugar estate in the Reconcavo of Bahia in Brazil. It includes historical characters such as Osei Kwadwo and Osei Kwame, fourth and fifth occupants of the Golden Stool, the Rev. Philip Quaque and the slave trader Richard Brew.

An African view:

Never has the story of the Atlantic slave trade been so captured in its total complexity, never have its tragic implications been laid out so fully, with all the scattered details brought together in one magnificent narrative of awesome and humbling imaginative impact – a long story that seems to have barely begun even as you reach the final page.

Kofi Anyidoho,

Professor and Head of Department of English, University of Ghana

An American View:

Ama is a deeply engrossing novel. After completing it I understood, on a level I had never before experienced, the heart and soul and tragedy of the African-American. Ama is the archetypal story of an African woman's journey, not just from Africa to the Americas, but also from innocence to sophistication and ignorance to wisdom. Despite horrors that break almost all who experience them, Ama becomes more rebellious as she survives terror after terror.

Richard Curtis, Publisher, e-reads. See <http://www.ama.africatoday.com>.