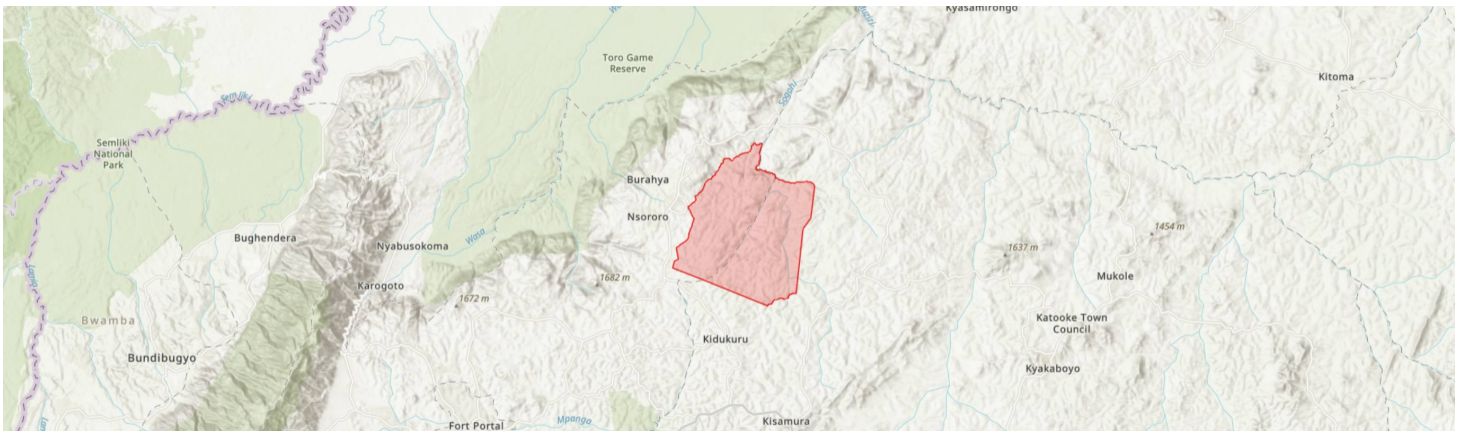
Itwara

Central Forest Reserve (Test version)

UGATIPA8



Country: **Uganda**
Administrative region: **Western (Region)**
Central co-ordinates: **0.79857 N, 30.47115 E**
Area: **86.8km²**

Qualifying IPA criteria

A(i), C(iii)

IPA assessment rationale

Itwara qualifies as an IPA under sub-criterion A(i) triggered by eight threatened species including three Endangered and five Vulnerable species. This site also triggers criterion C(iii), as one of the five best sites for nationally for Vulnerable medium altitude evergreen forest.

Site description

Itwara Central Forest Reserve (CFR) is located within the Albertine Rift area, on the rift escarpment around 25 km south of Lake Albert, across the districts of Kabarole and Kyenjojo in Western Uganda. The site is known to be important for a number of threatened plant species. Fieldwork was undertaken at this site in 2023 as part of the Uganda TIPAs project, with some of the following information being derived from t observations and collections made.

Botanical significance

Eight plant species that are threatened with extinction are known from Itwara CFR. The Endangered species Tiliacora latifolia, is of particular importance as a Ugandan endemic known from only five sites nationally. Two other Endangered species are known from this site, Eggelingia ligulifolia and Vepris eggelingii, both of which are thought to be threatened at this site by disturbance caused by tree felling (Amani et al. 2022; Fischer et al. 2019). This could have a significant impact on E. ligulifolia as an epiphytic orchid. This species is only known at this site from one collection made in 1943 and therefore, more research is required to better understand the population of E. ligulifolia at Itwara.

In addition to these Endangered species, five Vulnerable species are known from this IPA. One of these, Turraeanthus africana, differs from the other four in that it is widespread across central and western Africa. But as a valuable timber species, it has been overexploited, and populations have been depleted in parts of its range (Barstow 2020). The Ugandan Albertine Rift represents the easternmost limit of this species' range, and as such, Itwara is an important site for conserving this species both nationally and globally. Other Vulnerable species of note include Rhipidoglossum bilobatum, a second threatened epiphytic orchid species, and Brachystephanus glaberrimus, an understorey herb or shrub, both of which are cross-border Albertine Rift endemics. The latter species was last collected at Itwara in 1950, but many Brachystephanus species display periodic, monocarpic mass-flowering, with life cycles of several years to a decade, and so can be easily overlooked or under-collected if botanical expeditions do not coincide with flowering events. Good habitat for this species remains and so it is likely still extant at this site but under collected due to this reproduction strategy.

Rytigynia bagshawei var. lebrunii was collected during fieldwork by the Uganda TIPAs project in 2023. This taxon was previously only known from the Central Africa floral region (D.R. Congo, Rwanda and Burundi), although it was subsequently collected at Kalinzu during the same fieldwork. Further surveying will likely reveal additional interesting species from this site.

Alongside species of conservation importance, this site is one of the five best nationally for the medium altitude evergreen forest, a Vulnerable habitat in Uganda, spanning 64 km2 and encompassing 4.6% of the national resource. This habitat type is limited to higher altitudes and other high moisture areas influenced by Lake Victoria. Note that while Itwara has a lower mapped area of medium altitude evergreen forest than the Ssese Islands (79 km2), it was assessed that this habitat is likely more intact within Itwara, superseeding Ssese as the 5th best site nationally.

Habitat and geology

Itwara CFR is dominated by moist evergreen forest, categorised as Parinari Forest by Langdale-Brown et al. (1964). Dominant species include Olea welwitschii and Parinari excelsa (Howard 1991). In the areas to the south of the site that were surveyed during 2023 fieldwork, common forest taxa included Trema orientalis, Albizia, Celtis and Tabernaemontana, possibly associated with past disturbance and regeneration.

The site has a gently undulating topology and is underlaid by sedimentary geology strongly folded and metamorphosed, with the most common features being the quartzite ridges and forming most of the ridges. These are usually fringed by schist, and most of the low ground is probably underlain by gneiss and similar rocks. Wamisu and Sogahi Rivers that drain northwards into River Muzizi dissect Itwara (Ministry of Water and Environment 2008).

Conservation issues

Itwara is surrounded by tea plantations and it is suspected that the scarcity of land in turn increases pressure on Itwara (CUPTD Workshop, pers. comm. 2023). Threats at this site include charcoal production, pit sawing and agricultural encroachment (Mugume et al. 2015). In addition, the invasive species Senna spectabilis and Broussonetia papyrifera have been observed at this site (CUPTD Workshop, pers. comm. 2023).

Large areas of the northwest of the site are under forestry plantation, in line with the 2008-2018 Management Plan for the site (Ministry of Water and Environment 2008; Google Earth 2023). Satellite imagery and the Langdale-Brown et al. (1964) vegetation classification suggest this area was previously a savannah – forest mosaic. While the known species of conservation importance at this site are all forest species, without ecological impact surveys before the establishment of these forests, it is not clear whether any species of conservation importance were lost through this habitat transformation. In addition, there may be ongoing impacts on ecosystem function and services caused by the establishment of forest here, particularly related to watershed regulation. However, the provision of productive forests in this area likely mitigates against disturbance elsewhere in the reserve, helping to conserve the important resident species. The management plan also called for the restoration of degraded areas of forest and the demarcation of forest stands of high conservation value. This was based mostly on landscape features, such as proximity to rivers and slope inclines, and could be further informed by the distribution of threatened and endemic species within this site.

Alongside this work, the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) Uganda partnered with NFA for forest restoration work at the site to help protect forests and the Lake Albert Water Management Zone (WCS 2021).

Site assessor(s)

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Date of first assessment:
27th Aug 2024

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IPA criterion A species

SPECIES	QUALIFYING SUB-CRITERION	≥ 1% OF GLOBAL POPULATION	≥ 5% OF NATIONAL POPULATION	1 OF 5 BEST SITES NATIONALLY	ENTIRE GLOBAL POPULATION	SOCIO-ECONOMICALLY IMPORTANT	ABUNDANCE AT SITE
Microcos ugandensis (Sprague) Burret	A(i)	–	✓	✓	–	✓	Unknown
Turraeanthus africana (Welw. ex C.DC.) Pellegr.	A(i)	–	–	✓	–	–	Unknown
Tiliacora latifolia Troupin	A(i)	✓	✓	✓	–	–	Unknown
Eggelingia ligulifolia Summerh.	A(i)	–	✓	✓	–	–	Unknown
Rhipidoglossum bilobatum (Summerh.) Szlach. & Olszewski	A(i)	–	–	✓	–	–	Unknown
Vepris eggelingii (Kokwaro) Mziray	A(i)	✓	✓	✓	–	–	Unknown
Zanthoxylum mildbraedii (Engl.) P.G.Waterman	A(i)	✓	–	✓	–	✓	Unknown
Brachystephanus glaberrimus Champl.	A(i)	✓	✓	✓	–	✓	Unknown

IPA criterion C qualifying habitats

HABITAT	QUALIFYING SUB-CRITERION	≥ 5% OF NATIONAL RESOURCE	≥ 10% OF NATIONAL RESOURCE	1 OF 5 BEST SITES NATIONALLY	AREAL COVERAGE AT SITE
Medium Altitude Evergreen Forest (VU)	C(iii)	–	–	✓	64

General site habitats

GENERAL SITE HABITAT	PERCENT COVERAGE	IMPORTANCE
Forest - Subtropical/Tropical Moist Lowland Forest	–	Major
Artificial - Terrestrial - Arable Land	–	Minor
Artificial - Terrestrial - Plantations	–	Minor

Land use types

LAND USE TYPE	PERCENT COVERAGE	IMPORTANCE
Nature conservation	–	Major
Forestry	–	Major
Agriculture (arable)	–	Minor

Threats

THREAT	SEVERITY	TIMING
Agriculture & aquaculture - Wood & pulp plantations - Small-holder plantations	Unknown	Ongoing - increasing
Agriculture & aquaculture - Annual & perennial non-timber crops - Small-holder farming	Medium	Ongoing - stable
Biological resource use - Gathering terrestrial plants	Medium	Ongoing - stable

Protected areas

PROTECTED AREA NAME	PROTECTED AREA TYPE	RELATIONSHIP WITH IPA	AREAL OVERLAP
Itwara Central Forest Reserve	Forest Reserve (conservation)	protected/conservation area matches IPA	87

Conservation designation

DESIGNATION NAME	PROTECTED AREA	RELATIONSHIP WITH IPA	AREAL OVERLAP
Itwara Forest Reserve	Key Biodiversity Area	protected/conservation area matches IPA	87

Management type

MANAGEMENT TYPE	DESCRIPTION	YEAR STARTED	YEAR FINISHED
Site management plan in place	Ministry of Water and Environment Forest Management Plan for Itwara Group of Central Forest Reserves	2008	2018

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