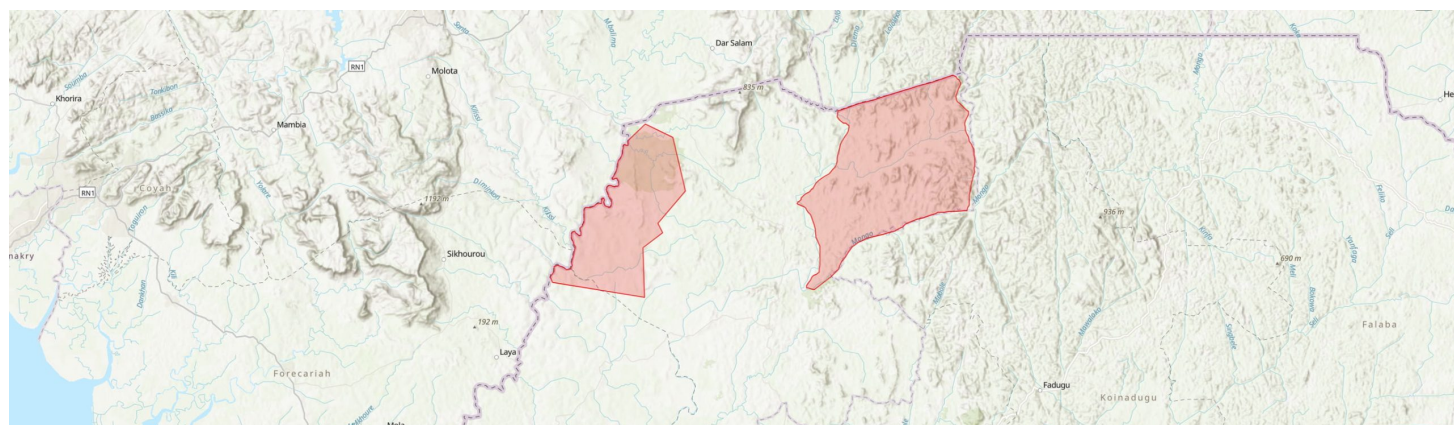


# Outamba Kilimi National Park

SIETIPA11



Country: **Sierra Leone**

Administrative region: **Northern (Province)**

Central co-ordinates: **9.75000 N, -12.15000 E**

Area: **1147.7km<sup>2</sup>**

## Qualifying IPA criteria

A(i), C(iii)

## IPA assessment rationale

The Outamba-Kilimi National Park IPA site has diverse habitats with six globally threatened species triggering criterion A(i) and is the best site nationally for threatened *Pterocarpus erinaceus*. The site is also the only extensive area of savanna woodlands (>10% ) and grassland savanna with protection in Sierra Leone supporting a high primate population in Sierra Leone and therefore triggers criterion C(iii).

## Site description

The Outamba-Kilimi National Park important plant area (IPA) is in north-western Sierra Leone along the border with Guinea and covers approximately 1148 Km<sup>2</sup>. The site lies within the Sudan–Guinea

Savanna biome and it's characterized by a heterogeneous landscape of mostly savanna with isolated patches of forest, including gallery forests and dry semi-deciduous forests formations (KBA, 2026). The Outamba-Kilimi National Park is situated within the Tambakha Chiefdom, Karene District.

The Outamba-Kilimi National Park is the largest of three protected areas within Sierra Leone's savanna ecosystem and is administratively split into two areas, Outamba (74,100 ha) and Kilimi (36,800 ha). These areas are separated by an unprotected corridor of about 25 km long by 40 km wide, which fragments the IPA and is critical for proper conservation management. Several settlements are found within and outside the park. The site was initially designated as a game reserve in 1974 and was formerly declared a national park in 1995. The IPA site is recognized as a significant bio hotspot and a critical conservation landmark in Sierra Leone.

## Botanical significance

The Outamba-Kilimi National Park IPA is of high botanical significance as it represents the largest protected savanna ecosystem in Sierra Leone. It is part of the Sudan-Guinean zone. The site supports diverse savanna flora mixed with forest patches. The IPA has several threatened plant species. Particularly, the endangered tree *Pterocarpus erinaceus* (African Rosewood), one of the most threatened timber species in West Africa, occurs within the

IPA in significant populations and is a key element for conservation focus for this site (Fayiah et al., 2024).

Recent botanical surveys suggest that Outamba-Kilimi National Park supports a few vascular plants of conservation interest, although existing studies have documented only a subset of commonly occurring taxa, denoting limited sampling effort and flora research across the IPA (Febrianti et al., 2023; Tsvetkova et al., 2023; Fayiah et al., 2024). This under-representation highlights the need for more comprehensive research to document the flora diversity, as there is a likelihood of additional undocumented threatened species.

In addition to *Pterocarpus erinaceus*, several species of conservation concern have been recorded within the IPA, including eight Vulnerable species such as *Milicia regia*, *Garcinia afzelii*, *Nesogordonia papaverifera*, *Khaya senegalensis*, and *Dilophotricha occidentalis*, and Near Threatened species such as *Albizia ferruginea* and *Milicia excelsa*. These species occurrences highlight the relevance of this site under the IPA criteria.

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## Habitat and geology

The vegetation of the Outamba-Kilimi National Park IPA is a mosaic of grasslands, closed and open savanna woodland, secondary forests, farm bush, and gallery forest (Fayiah et al., 2024). Additional habitats include seasonally flooded grasslands, areas of *Raphia* palm swamps, and riverine grasslands. Notable ecological differences occur between the two area components of the IPA: Outamba primarily supports tall-grass savanna and moist woodland with small areas of closed-canopy forest, whereas Killimi supports more open savanna woodland with shorter grasses.

The site experiences a tropical humid climate, with mean annual rainfall reaching about 3,000 mm in the northern parts of the park (Norman et al., 2022). Changes in hydrology and soil conditions significantly influence habitat distribution, resulting in moist savanna in seasonally wet areas, tree savanna in dry areas, and shrub-grass savanna on hilly terrain.

The dominant vegetation type is moist savanna woodland, that contains fire-resistant trees with gnarled bark and flat-topped canopies that can be open or closed. *Daniellia oliveri*, *Lophira lanceolata*, *Borassus aethiopum*, *Pterocarpus erinaceus*, *Parkia biglobosa*, *Cassia sieberiana*, *Terminalia albida*, and *Crossopteryx febrifuga* are the most dominant woody species (Martin 1938). Grass species include *Chasmopodium caudatum*, *Hyparrhenia rufa*, *Andropogon tectorum*, *Andropogon gabonensis*, and *Pennisetum purpureum*. Grasses can grow up to seven meters high (Cole 1968). A significant portion of the savanna area is seasonally converted annually for small-scale cultivation of rice, millet, maize, cassava, and peppers (Fayiah et al., 2024).

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## Conservation issues

The Outamba-Kilimi National Park IPA was designated a National Park in 1995. It is under the purview of the National Protected Area Authority (NPAA) and has been assessed under category ii by IUCN but continues to face significant pressures. Illegal logging at high rate, particularly targeting *Pterocarpus erinaceus*, remains a concern and results in large scale habitat destruction within the park (Fayiah et al., 2024; F. Massally, pers.obs., 2021). Other threats include illegal settlements within the park, cattle rearing slash and burn agricultural practices, charcoal production, wildlife hunting, and artisanal mining (Fayiah et al.,2024). The park's management is strained by significant logistical constraints, declining surveillance capacity and weak law enforcement (KBA, 2026).

Wildfires form a major recurring threat across the IPA, driven largely by subsistence farming practices and nomadic herding activities, where deliberate burning is used to stimulate grass regrowth for livestock. These fires, in combination with seasonal land conversion and mining extractions pose significant threats to the conservation of this IPA (Fayiah et al 2024, Munro, 2020). The periodic occurrence of bush fires is largely from subsistence farming and nomadic herding activities where herders are frequently setting fires to the grass to promote regrowth for their animals. According to WFP in 2025, Outamba has a significant amount of fire occurrences with high prevalence within the boundaries. A total of approximately 1447 ha of forest cover is currently lost or degraded in addition to the approximately 3,483 ha lost since 2020. Outamba- Killimi has about 4768 fire hotspots between May 2024 to April 2025 according to WFP (2025). Collaborative management is urgently needed for the protection of this IPA.

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## Site assessor(s)

Fanny Massally, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew

### Date of first assessment:

9th Jan 2026

### Reviewed by:

Aiah Lebbie, The University of Sierra Leone

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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 |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------|
| <i>Pterocarpus erinaceus</i> Poir.                            | A(i)                     | ✓                         | ✓                           | ✓                            | —                        | —                            | Abundant          |
| <i>Milicia regia</i> (A.Chev.) C.C.Berg                       | A(i)                     | ✓                         | —                           | —                            | —                        | —                            | Scarce            |
| <i>Garcinia afzelii</i> Engl.                                 | A(i)                     | ✓                         | —                           | —                            | —                        | —                            | Scarce            |
| <i>Nesogordonia papaverifera</i> (A.Chev.) Capuron ex N.Hallé | A(i)                     | ✓                         | —                           | —                            | —                        | —                            | Scarce            |
| <i>Khaya senegalensis</i> A.Juss.                             | A(i)                     | ✓                         | —                           | —                            | —                        | —                            | Common            |
| <i>Dilophotriche occidentalis</i> Jacq.-Fél.                  | A(i)                     | ✓                         | —                           | —                            | —                        | —                            |                   |

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 |
|---------|--------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------|
|---------|--------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------|

General site habitats

| GENERAL SITE HABITAT                                   | PERCENT COVERAGE | IMPORTANCE |
|--------------------------------------------------------|------------------|------------|
| Savanna - Dry Savanna                                  | —                | Major      |
| Grassland - Subtropical/Tropical Dry Lowland Grassland | —                | Major      |
| Forest - Subtropical/Tropical Moist Lowland Forest     | —                | Major      |
| Forest - Subtropical/Tropical Moist Lowland Forest     | —                | Major      |

Land use types

| LAND USE TYPE         | PERCENT COVERAGE | IMPORTANCE |
|-----------------------|------------------|------------|
| Agriculture (aquatic) | —                | Unknown    |
| Tourism / Recreation  | —                | Unknown    |
| Agriculture (arable)  | —                | Unknown    |
| Nature conservation   | 56               | Major      |

| LAND USE TYPE | PERCENT COVERAGE | IMPORTANCE |
|---------------|------------------|------------|
|---------------|------------------|------------|

### Threats

| THREAT                                                                                                                                                    | SEVERITY | TIMING               |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|----------------------|
| Agriculture & aquaculture - Annual & perennial non-timber crops - Small-holder farming                                                                    | Medium   | Ongoing - stable     |
| Natural system modifications - Fire & fire suppression - Increase in fire frequency/intensity                                                             | Medium   | Ongoing - increasing |
| Biological resource use - Logging & wood harvesting - Unintentional effects: subsistence/small scale (species being assessed is not the target) [harvest] | Medium   | Ongoing - stable     |
| Biological resource use - Gathering terrestrial plants - Intentional use (species being assessed is the target)                                           | Medium   | Ongoing - increasing |

### Protected areas

| PROTECTED AREA NAME          | PROTECTED AREA TYPE | RELATIONSHIP WITH IPA                   | AREAL OVERLAP |
|------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------------------|---------------|
| Outamba-Kilimi National Park | National Park       | protected/conservation area matches IPA | —             |

### Conservation designation

| DESIGNATION NAME             | PROTECTED AREA        | RELATIONSHIP WITH IPA                       | AREAL OVERLAP |
|------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------------------|---------------|
| Outamba-Kilimi National Park | Key Biodiversity Area | protected/conservation area encompasses IPA | 1349          |

### Management type

| MANAGEMENT TYPE                         | DESCRIPTION | YEAR STARTED | YEAR FINISHED |
|-----------------------------------------|-------------|--------------|---------------|
| Protected Area management plan in place |             | —            | —             |

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