

Mount Zulia

UGATIPA22

Country: **Uganda**

Administrative region: **Northern (Region)**

Central co-ordinates: **4.03769 N, 33.94883 E**

Area: **929.7km²**

Qualifying IPA criteria

A(i), C(iii)

IPA assessment rationale

Zulia qualifies as an IPA under sub-criterion A(i), due to the presence of threatened taxa *Tricalysia bagshawei* subsp. *bagshawei* (VU) and *Coffea neoleroyi* (EN), the latter species limited only to this IPA nationally.

Site description

Zulia IPA is located in the most northeasterly corner of Uganda, bordering both Kenya and South Sudan in Karamoja District. The IPA includes the extinct volcano Mount Zulia, the surrounding hills and areas of dry Combretum savannah in the Kidepo Valley. Altitudes vary from the ### towards the valley bottom and 2149 m at the peak of Mount Zulia. The hills southeast of Mount Zulia are continuous with the Didinga Hills extend through Eastern Equatoria in South Sudan and includes Mount Lotukei which lies adjacent to Mount Zulia across the border.

Botanical significance

Zulia IPA is of botanical significance as it hosts the only Ugandan population of the Endangered coffee species *Coffea neoleroyi*. This species was previously placed within the genus *Psilotrichium* and was recognised as a coffee species in 2010 (A. P. Davis 2010). Elsewhere, this species is known only from southwest Ethiopia and southeast South Sudan (A. Davis et al. 2023). Although several of these other localities are within protected areas, Boma National Park in South Sudan and in Ethiopia Maze and Omo National Parks, this species is threatened by habitat degradation through encroachment, burning and overgrazing. Threats around Zulia are not well documented and as such this *C. neoleroyi* was preliminarily assessed as Data Deficient nationally (A. Davis et al. 2023). Further research is urgently needed around Mount Zulia to identify the precise location and threats to the population at this site. Another threatened taxon, the Vulnerable subspecies *Tricalysia bagshawei* subsp. *bagshawei*, has been recorded from this IPA.

Collected at high altitude on Mount Zulia (Wilson #920), this is the northernmost known locality of this Ugandan near-endemic. Mount Zulia and the surrounding hills have received little survey effort, with the only records from Mount Zulia appearing to be from the Wilson 1960 expedition. Unrest in the Karamoja Region and its position at both the South Sudan and Kenya borders, where cattle raids are common, may have limited access to the site (Cole 2015). With further survey effort, we may expect to find taxa such as the range restricted herb *Euphorbia depauperata* var. *laevicarpa* and the Vulnerable tree *Prunus africana* both of which have been recorded on neighbouring Mount Lotukei (Friis and Vollesen 1998), only 10 km northwest of Mount Zulia.

Alongside species of conservation importance, Mount Zulia hosts important areas of Afromontane undifferentiated forest. Although this habitat is largely limited to the highest ridges of Mount Zulia, Afromontane undifferentiated forest is nationally limited to drier mountain slopes and so Mount Zulia is one of only a few sites for this habitat nationally.

Habitat and geology

Mount Zulia is a large quartz-syenite intrusion in the surrounding plateau of granitic gneiss (Champion 1937; Scoon 2022). Much of the IPA is dominated by Combretum-Terminalia savannah-woodland mosaic, with more dense tree cover around the in sheltered, hilly areas and on the slopes of Mount Zulia (World Resources Institute 2023). Riverbanks within this habitat, particular among boulders, provide habitat for the rare and Endangered *Coffea neoleroyi* (A. Davis et al. 2023). At higher altitudes of Mount Zulia, above around 1800 m, are areas of Afromontane undifferentiated forest, amounting to 92,281 ha (NEMA, UWA, and NFA 2018). Langdale-Brown (1964) characterise this forest as *Juniperus-Podocarpus* forest, due to the presence of valuable timber species *Juniperus procera* and *Podocarpus*, likely *P. milanjanus* or *Afrocarpus* (formerly *Podocarpus*) *gracilior*. *Syzygium guineense* is common in the forests of neighbouring Mount Lotukei and nearby mountains in Uganda such as Mount Kadam (Friis and Vollesen 1998; Lwanga 1996) and may therefore be common in the forests of Mount Zulia. More survey effort is urgently needed to document the species within the entirety of this IPA.

Interestingly, there are records of brackish springs in the vicinity of Mount Zulia (Leeke 1917). We may therefore expect the presence of salt tolerant species in these areas.

Conservation issues

Zulia was established as a central forest reserve in 1950 while

Kidepo Valley National Park, which covers much of the west of the IPA, was initially gazetted as game reserve in 1958 and subsequently upgraded to national park status in 1962 (Achieve Global Safaris 2024). Zulia CFR and Kidepo National Park both fall within the Kidepo Critical Landscape which is subject to UWA management plan (NEMA, UWA, and NFA 2018). Although there are no specific measures for the Zulia area, one of the measures within this plan is to “conduct inventories/assessment of key fauna and flora”. Botanical surveys of Mount Zulia and the surrounding hills would be particularly informative to better inform any conservation actions needed within this IPA.

Although Zulia is poorly studied, they host bird species including Brown Warbler (*Curruca lugens*) and Little Rock-thrush (*Monticola rufocinereus*) IBA and KBA based on bird species both of which are nationally limited to northeast Uganda only (BirdLife International 2024). Kidepo National Park has been recognised as an IBA and subsequently a KBA, based on the presence of Vulnerable species Karamoja Apalis (*Apalis karamojae*) (BirdLife International 2024; Plumptre et al. 2019).

Little is known about the threats to this site. Tree cover appears stable (World Resources Institute 2023) and although people live within this IPA, most notably Himaan village at the South Sudan border and Toposa communities on the slopes of Mount Zulia, the site appears to be sparsely populated and there does not appear to be much, if any, further expansion of homesteads or agricultural land (Google Earth 2023). The position of this IPA at the border of two other countries may make migration to this area, particularly of refugees, more likely in the future.

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>Coffea neoleroyi</i> <i>A.P.Davis</i>	A(i)	✓	✓	✓	—	✓	Unknown
<i>Tricalysia bagshawei</i> <i>S.Moore subsp. bagshawei</i>	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
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General site habitats

GENERAL SITE HABITAT	PERCENT COVERAGE	IMPORTANCE
Forest	—	Major
Savanna - Moist Savanna	—	Minor
Savanna - Dry Savanna	—	Major

Land use types

LAND USE TYPE	PERCENT COVERAGE	IMPORTANCE
Nature conservation	—	Major

Threats

THREAT	SEVERITY	TIMING
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Conservation designation

DESIGNATION NAME	PROTECTED AREA	RELATIONSHIP WITH IPA	AREAL OVERLAP
Kidepo Valley National Park	Key Biodiversity Area	protected/conservation area overlaps with IPA	—
Kidepo Valley National Park	Important Bird Area	protected/conservation area overlaps with IPA	—

DESIGNATION NAME	PROTECTED AREA	RELATIONSHIP WITH IPA	AREAL OVERLAP
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Management type

MANAGEMENT TYPE	DESCRIPTION	YEAR STARTED	YEAR FINISHED
Site management plan in place	Management plan for the wildlife dispersal corridors in the Kidepo critical landscape (Uganda)	2018	2027

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