
Anchucho Medihanealem

Although this hilly plain is has an extensive tree cover Anchucho Medihanealem forest is the largest single remnant of the original forest, the remaining tree cover being essentially eucalypts. This site is species rich but many of the species have very few individuals. The area is heavily populated and there is some degree of conflict between the religious communities with trees being uprooted from graves. This grave tree planting slowly increases the forested area.



Name: **Anchucho Medihanealem**

Status: church

Site Code: SD01

Floristic Region: SD

Region: 5 (Walaita Dawuro)

Altitude: 1990 m

Latitude: 06° 57' N

Longitude: 37° 41' E

Woodland/forest:

Status: relict and plantation (graveyard)

Size: 2 ha

Dominant species:

canopy: *Celtis africana*, *Podocarpus falcatus*

shrub/ground: *Calpurnia aurea*,
Hypoestes trifolia, *Solanum incanum*

No of woody species: 50

No of species with less than 5 individuals: 9

Threats: human pressure, religious conflict

Photograph: The church forest is situated in the centre background whilst the 'holy water' is the small stand of trees in the valley to the right. With the exception of the immature *Podocarpus falcatus* (left foreground) most trees outside the two sacred groves are eucalypts.

The gently undulating plain to the NW of Soddo is densely inhabited and now consists essentially in a vast agroforestry system planted with eucalypts. Anchucho Medihanealem church forest is situated on the top of a small North-South ridge. In fact the site consists of three distinct areas. The relict forest mainly to the South of the church, a new woodland where graves have been established over the past two to three decades, and a very small stand of native trees by the stream at the bottom of the hill. This site is the location of the 'holy water', a permanent water source.

In the relict stand some trees (e.g. *Podocarpus falcatus*) reach a height of around 30 m but because of the small forested area (½ ha) few in fact remain and many are diseased. At the edge of the forest there are some large *Acacia abyssinica*. The graveyard plantation has more than doubled the wooded area to the South of the church. Generally graves are planted with *Euphorbia tiraculli* although there appears to be a trend to plant more economically valuable species, and in the older parts of the graveyard natural regeneration of bird-dispersed species occur. As the trees are not cut, slowly a secondary forest is establishing itself.

The surrounding countryside is densely wooded and this is the result of the extensive planting of eucalypts in the latter part of the 20th century.

History

In a region where most orthodox churches have been founded within the past half-century Anchucho Medihanealem was established much earlier and is thought to be about 120 years old. It was certainly founded before the whole region was deforested as the many of the large original forest trees still exist. The region is now very densely populated but human pressure on native timber resource is now probably much less severe than prior to the Derg regime. A massive afforestation programme using eucalypts was carried out then and this resource is now available to people.



The small 'holy water' tree stand by the stream side. Behind (right) there is a large NGO tree nursery.

Conservation status

Nearly 20% of the species recorded in this forest have very small populations. Considering that this is the only natural stand of trees in this area, clearly some of these species must be considered as locally threatened with extinction. The greatest importance of this relict forest is that of a seed source of bird-dispersed species. More recently established churches of the region (see site accounts for Gununo Kidus Georgis and Bolola Baleweld) have eucalypt stands where a large number of native tree species are regenerating and thus re-establishing native forests.



Inside the holy water tree stand with its permanent water source by the rock (bottom centre).

Threats

Grazing in the new graveyard can only hinder the establishment of native trees. Believers in the area belong to two separate strands of Christianity and relations between them have often been tense. There have been a number of reported instances where trees planted on graves have been removed to be planted in people's compounds.

Management

The rapid expansion of the graveyard provides a great opportunity to increase the size of this small relict forest. As the local tradition of planting trees

on new graves is commonly observed but largely focuses on species that can be vegetatively propagated (e.g. *Euphorbia* spp.) or are easily available as seedlings (e.g. eucalypts). These seedlings are grown in the extensive local NGO tree nursery and the propagation of uncommon tree species should be promoted.