
Itisa Abune Teklehayimanot

Itisa Abune Teklehayimanot is an ancient monastery situated just below the highland plateau at the base of the upper cliff on a small plateau. The original forest, probably dominated by *Juniperus procera*, is long gone, but large areas of secondary forest and scrub remain. The monastery woodland is now totally protected and the religious community is extremely keen to re-establish large native timber trees.



Name: **Itisa Abune Teklehayimanot**

Status: monastery

Site Code: SU05

Floristic Region: SU

Region: 4 (North Shewa)

Altitude: 2220 m

Latitude: 09° 07' N

Longitude: 39° 10' E

Woodland/forest:

Status: relict / secondary

Size: ca 5 ha

Dominant species:

canopy: *Croton macrostachyus*,

Juniperus procera

shrub/ground: *Euclea schimperi*,

Hypoestes trifolia, *Rhus glutinosa*,

Solanum incanum

No of woody species: 41

No of species with less than 5 individuals: 8

Threats: invasive plants

Photograph: The monastery is situated at the base of the cliff/scree slope. The scree slopes are mainly covered by secondary woodland with few large trees remaining. Cliff vegetation is mainly composed of clumps of invasive *Opuntia ficus-indica*.

The large Itisa Abune Teklehayimanot monastery is situated at the base of a multiple cliff 300m below the highland plateau. The church is positioned on a small hill amidst the monastery habitations and fields. Downhill from the church there is a small stand of mature *Juniperus procera*, the only trees of this species remaining in the canyon landscape. Below the junipers the ground vegetation is very open and with a limited number of species.

The main part of the woodland covers the scree slopes below the vertical cliffs. Few large trees remain but no trees or big shrubs have been cut in recent years. This woodland covers a wide area. The canopy is usually no higher than 10 m with little shrubby vegetation below or it is no more than 5 m high and impenetrable.

Near the settlement and fields, and on deforested slopes large quantities of eucalypts were planted a decade or so ago. Scant vegetation is observed under these stands and on steeper slopes erosion occurs. In the surrounding area, both on the plateau or in the canyon, no natural forest remains, but there are large tracks of scrubland mainly on steeper slopes. There are a number of churches in the vicinity with highly degraded woodlands.

History

Itisa Abune Teklehayimanot is an ancient monastery that has much importance to the Orthodox Church. Being in the relatively close vicinity of Addis Ababa and with good road access many visitors come to the site.



To the right of the church there is the only stand of *Juniperus procera* left in the whole landscape. These junipers are now fully protected being of prime importance for angels.

Threats

Since the arrival of Aba Haile Meskel in 1989 no tree cutting has taken place and at the moment this activity is not a threat. Goats graze readily in the woodland and this probably hinders regeneration of native trees. The introduced cactus *Opuntia ficus-indica* is prevalent on the cliffs but it is unknown whether it has any impact on the cliff flora, however it does appear to favour monkeys.

Management

Because this site does not suffer from the threat observable at many other sites, it has a great potential for tree conservation. Both the clergy and the local community are not allowed to cut trees from the protected woodland. As there is keen interest in replanting some of the areas, there is great opportunity to plant species that are low in number and even re-establish species now absent from the monastery ground. There is an abandoned tree nursery that could be readily rehabilitated and

Conservation status

The stand of junipers is obviously rather unique for the region and the only one left for some distance. The site species richness is average, i.e. typical of the majority of the investigated church/monastery yards. For this region the size of the protected area is substantial and protection of the woodland is strictly enforced.



The scree woodland has long been logged and mostly small trees remain with a ground layer dominated by *Hypoestes trifolia*.

a good supply of water. In July 2002 trees from a dozen species were planted in the inner churchyard currently dominated by exotics.

The importance of goat grazing should be assessed and some parts of the woodland could have access to herbivores restricted for a number of years to encourage natural regeneration.