
Itisa Mariyam

Although mainly composed of impenetrable thorny scrub, the Itisa Mariyam woodland has some regionally uncommon species in its more remote parts where little of the original tree cover has been cut. An expanding monastery population and an absence of exotic timber will in due course put pressure on the existing tree resources.



Name: **Itisa Mariyam**

Status: monastery

Site Code: SU06

Floristic Region: SU

Region: 4 (North Shewa)

Altitude: 2220 m

Latitude: 09° 06' N

Longitude: 39° 10' E

Woodland/forest:

Status: relict / secondary

Size: 2 ha

Dominant species:

canopy: *Allophyllus abyssinicus*, *Olea europaea* ssp *cuspidata*,

shrub/ground: *Acyranthus aspera*,

Carissa edulis, *Dodonaea angustifolia*

No of woody species:

No of species with less than 5 individuals:

Threats: wood harvesting, invasive species

Photograph: Itisa Mariyam is located on a steep slope at the base of a tall cliff. Large trees remain mainly in a steep gully (upper right). Church is on bottom left of photo.

This small secluded monastery lies at the base of a tall cliff below the highland plateau. There is very little flat ground and agricultural land is extremely limited. The small church is located on a small promontory. The monastery community is small and often transient. The woodland, now chiefly secondary scrub, is on a steep scree slope that is often pretty unstable. Most of the scrub is extremely prickly and impenetrable. The last patch of uncut forest is up a gully and of very difficult access due to the steepness of the terrain.

At the base of the cliff there is a permanent water source and the vegetation, including fig trees, reflects this. During the rainy season there is a large waterfall nearby, but no water runs for most of the year.

In the region, either on the plateau or in the canyon, there is no natural forest left apart from the few sacred groves, many of which are actually extremely degraded. However, there are large extends of secondary scrub mainly on steeper grounds. The remaining of the land is extensively cultivated.

History

Itisa Mariyam, unlike the neighbouring Itisa Abune Teklehayimanot, has a more limited history. The physical setting, steep slopes below a large cliff precludes the site from having a large community and the difficult access restricts the number of visitors.

According to an old church teacher there has been very little change in the amount of tree and woodland cover throughout his life at the monastery, indicating that deforestation occurred

during the early parts of the 20th century if not earlier.

Conservation status

The patch of uncut forest is relatively species rich and has a few species that are regionally not readily observable. Of interest is a small population of indigenous *Salix*, not observed at any other site in the region. This site could be a good source of planting material for species reintroduction elsewhere in the neighbourhood.



Most of the only remaining large trees are in a gully on the cliff face.



Deacon's huts are very basic and built out of locally available materials.



View across the canyon. There is another sacred grove (centre) with very few native trees.

Threats

The expanding monastery community requires an increasing amount of wood resources and little exotic timber, i.e. eucalypt, is available locally. Thus, there is an increasing threat to the native woodland as the monastery tries to obtain these essential wood resources to meet its requirements.

The introduced *Tagetes minuta* produces pure stands on scree slopes where gaps exist in the canopy. This annual plant grows to great heights (i.e. over 2 m in places) under local conditions and may affect regeneration of woody plants. The introduced cactus *Opuntia ficus-indica* is spreading and forms, locally, monotypic stands.

Management

Limited planting of fast-growing exotics in appropriate sites, to meet local wood requirements for building and firewood, and gap planting of native trees are the two main management options which need to be investigated.