
Geja Georgis

This small volcanic hill in the vicinity of Addis Ababa is topped by a small and decaying church woodland in a landscape largely denuded of native tree. The local population is keen to see much of the hill replanted with native tree species but the area is very dry and confronted with severe water shortage.



Name: **Geja Georgis**

Status: church

Site Code: SU08

Floristic Region: SU

Region: 4 (West Shewa)

Altitude: 2200 m

Latitude: 08° 50' N

Longitude: 38° 38' E

Woodland/forest:

Status: relict

Size: < 1 ha

Dominant species:

canopy: *Euphorbia abyssinica*, *Olea europaea ssp cuspidata*

shrub/ground: *Echinops macrochae*,
Laggera tomentosa, *Sida cuneifolia*

No of woody species: 36

No of species with less than 5 individuals: 6

Threats: grazing, tree death, soil erosion

Photograph: The small Geja Georgis hill (behind the small settlement) is a distinct physical of the largely deforested region. In the background the high Wuchacha Mountain dominates the landscape. The rounded summit to the left is a sacred grove protected by traditional Oromo religion.

Despite being very close to Addis Ababa along one of the main roads heading out of the capital, Geja Georgis is the church of a poor rural and agrarian community confronted with major water shortages. This is reflected by the extreme dryness of some of the site's steep slopes. The church is on the top of the only small hill protruding about 50 m above the surrounding gently undulating plain.

The native woody vegetation is restricted to some parts of the hill and the summit in particular. In the inner churchyard there is an open woodland constituted mainly of *Olea europaea ssp cuspidata* whereas elsewhere *Euphorbia abyssinica* dominates the skyline. The shrub layer and ground vegetation is either mostly limited or absent.

Geologically the site is interesting by the presence of a number of semi-collapsed volcanic bubbles scattered around the hillside.

The surrounding plain is extensively cultivated but few native trees remain. The *Acacia* woodland on the site of the nearby radio transmitter station suggest that the all area would have previously been dominated by acacias.

History

Little is known about the history of this site, but it would appear that deforestation occurred long ago and that the church has been established for some time.

Conservation status

Six out of the 36 recorded species have less than five individuals in our field survey in a landscape rather devoid of any natural woody vegetation. Locally this site has an important conservation status. For instance, the wild olive trees are an important roosting place for local birds.



Geja Georgis woodland is limited in extent and restricted to the top of the hill. On the left slopes there is some natural regeneration of *Euphorbia abyssinica*. To the front

of the hill there are a few of natural 'caves', i.e. partly collapsed volcanic bubbles. A portion of the church community lives at the base of the hill.

Threats

Apart from some limited recruitment of *Euphorbia abyssinica* there is no natural regeneration of any tree species. In most areas shrub layer is nearly non-existent. Heavy grazing pressure by livestock is one factor, but it is likely that the site dryness and poor and shallow soil are compounding factors. Exotic species present at the site are not currently a problem.

Management

The local community is extremely keen to see much of the hillside (photograph above) to be planted with native trees. Because the site is so dry and as much of the soil has been washed away, in order to establish a variety of tree species it is recommended that these trees should be watered regularly during the first one to three years after planting. However, water is a key problem, indeed the local community has a chronic shortage of water. Only the construction of a small reservoir allowing the storage of the church's roof water could make planting possible. This should also provide some essential water resource to the local community.