
Ziqualla - Gebre Menfeskidus Abo

Mt Ziqualla crater is covered by a large forest protected by two indigenous religions. The area is of high conservation value, it is one of the Important Bird Areas of Ethiopia, and has one of the last remaining patches of more or less undisturbed forest in the region. Currently under limited threat from local and religious communities.



Name: **Ziqualla - Gebre Menfeskidus Abo**

Status: monastery

Site Code: SU09

Floristic Region: SU

Region: 4 (East Shewa)

Altitude: 2990 m

Latitude: 08° 32' N

Longitude: 38° 51' E

Woodland/forest:

Status: old and rather pristine

Size: ca 400 ha

Woodland status: relict

Dominant species:

canopy: *Juniperus communis*, *Erica arborea*, *Olea europaea*

shrub/ground: *Apodytes dimidiata*

No of woody species: 34

No of species with less than 5 individuals: 2

Threats: invasive species, (tree cutting)

Photograph: Northern outer and upper slopes of Mt Ziqualla. Steep slopes covered with secondary scrub and teff (light green) in the upper parts.

Mount Ziqualla is a large extinct volcano dominating the western part of the Rift Valley to the East of Addis Ababa. The crater, about 1 km across, is situated about 1000m above the surrounding plain and harbours a lake about 100m below the crater rim. All outer slopes of the volcano are steep and often dissected by deep gullies.

The natural vegetation, mainly forest, only remains inside the crater and in a few deep gullies below the summit, however in former times the whole mountains would have been mainly forested. Now, the remaining vegetation is dominated by secondary scrub with much cultivation to the western and southern upper slopes of the crater. To the North, on the crater rim and the upper slopes, there is a large plantation of *Cupressus lusitanica* established in the 1960s. The zone around the crater lake is open grassland.

The Orthodox monastery has two churches situated on the northern rim of the crater whilst the traditional Oromo sacred site is near the forest edge to the south of the lake. In former times more churches existed around the crater, one site is easily identifiable at the very summit of the crater rim. The monastery community is situated right below the two churches on the outer upper slopes of the crater.

History

Ziqualla has been an important religious site for many centuries including a major destination for pilgrims. Although it is often stated that deforestation mainly occurred at the end of the 20th century, aerial photographs suggest that much of the tree cover had disappeared by the 1960s. Photographs of the crater taken in the 1920s indicate that the tree cover then was not as extensive as it is today.



Inner crater with lake, grassland and south-eastern forested slopes.

Threats

Little cutting of trees is currently taking place, more noticeable is the cutting of branches near the monastery. Much of the area in the vicinity of Oromo traditional site is pristine and contains many tall *Erica arborea*. However, due to the lack of tree resources in the surrounding landscape tree harvesting is a great potential threat, which at the moment is only prevented by the presence of a number of armed guards. Currently, wood harvesting is not a problem but in the long-term this remains the single most important potential threat. The agroforestry project around the base of the volcano should help alleviate this threat.

The *Cupressus lusitanica* is regenerating freely and the plant is spreading into *Juniperus* forest, this process is being facilitated by the steep slopes enabling cones to roll downhill. It establishes

Conservation status

As indicated by the number of scientific studies carried out on Mt Ziqualla, the area is of high conservation value. Over 200 species of plants have been recorded inside the crater. It is one of the Important Bird Areas of Ethiopia.

Both religious communities take an active part in preserving this unique site.



Branch cutting (Juniper) and dense ground vegetation with a small *Erica arborea* in left foreground.

successfully under the semi-open canopy of juniper.

Fire is a serious potential problem. In 2001 a large fire, intentionally lit, raged up the outer slope of the mountain.

Management

In order to reduce future problems, the spread of *Cupressus lusitanica* should be controlled. Mature trees situated on the inner crater slopes should be removed to prevent the fruit from dispersing downhill.

The rapidly increasing monastery population will undoubtedly increase the demand for wood products and thus the need for tree cutting. The use of the exotic timber should be encouraged and the large *Cupressus lusitanica*, if managed properly, could provide the necessary timber resources needed by both religious and local communities.