
Mehur Eyesus

Mehur Eyesus has a tall canopy forest dominated by *Podocarpus falcatus* and *Juniperus procera*. The latter species is being logged out to provide the necessary timber for the construction of buildings for an expanding monastery community. After deforestation the local soils are readily eroded and massive areas nearly totally devoid of vegetation are easily observable.



Name: **Mehur Eyesus**

Status: monastery
Site Code: SU10
Floristic Region: SU
Region: 5 (Welkite)
Altitude: 2050 m
Latitude: 08° 05' N
Longitude: 37° 55' E

Woodland/forest:

Status: relict

Size: 2 ha

Dominant species:

canopy: *Juniperus procera*, *Podocarpus falcatus*

shrub/ground: *Acanthus eminens*

No of woody species: 31

No of species with less than 5 individuals: 1

Threats: timber harvesting

Photograph: The forest edge, with trees bearing low branches, clearly indicates that the area was deforested some time ago. The widespread severe erosion point at the highly erodable soils of this region. The planted eucalypts have little or no impact in hindering erosion.

Mehur Eyesus forest is situated on flatish ridge and the gentle slopes leading to a small stream. The church is located on the ridge and the monastic community on the opposite slopes. The forest is delimited by the stream on one side and on another two by substantial areas of severe erosion. The forest has a high canopy dominated by large *Podocarpus falcatus* and *Juniperus procera*, and the ground layer is usually dense (about 2 m high) mainly composed of the prickly *Acanthus eminens*. This forest has very few infrequently used small paths indicating that monks hardly ever venture inside the stand.

Located on the gentle slopes leading up to an escarpment, Mehur Eyesus forest is amidst an agricultural landscape dotted with a few church forests (see site account for Emmanuel for a nearby example). The heavily populated countryside is composed of fields and grasslands, and the timber resource is chiefly composed of eucalypts with a limited resource of native trees. Extensive eroded valleys exist and these do have a certain amount of natural regeneration of *Juniperus procera*. Eucalypts are commonly planted on this bare soil to control erosion but it does not appear to be terribly effective.

History

The monastery was established over a century ago. In recent years it has been expanding fast with many new buildings being erected, this of course requires many resources and timber in particular. This is supplied by the forest where trees are cut by local tree cutters. Their logging technique is exemplary and when a tree is felled very little damage is done to the surrounding standing trees. Trees harvested are chosen by one of the monks

and the amount of crown dieback is the key criteria in the selection process.

Conservation status

This is the best stand of high forest visited during the whole survey. It would appear that until relatively recently no logging would have been carried out in this forest. Probably this near pristine stand is one of the last few examples of its kind in the region.



Due to the expanding monastery community there is a large need for timber to construct new buildings. *Juniperus procera* is the species sought and cut and processed by highly skilled local foresters. This species will in due course be logged out of the stand. *Acanthus eminens* (right) produces a very dense prickly layer.



The slopes across from the forest have some deep eroded gullies but *Juniperus procera* is regenerating well with a varied size class structure.

Threats

The current rate of logging of *Juniperus procera*, although expertly carried out, is not sustainable. The juniper is rapidly going to be logged out.

Management

Because of the uniqueness of this forest, logging of junipers should be curtailed. Alternative sources of timber should be sought and focus should be put on utilising exotics and eucalypts in particular. Although eucalypts are present,

more could be planted to provide necessary timber resources to the expanding monastery. Much regeneration of juniper is observable in eroded areas adjacent to the forest, and this regeneration should be favoured and even enhanced. Control of grazing may be an essential part of this strategy.