
Kondality Bale Weld

Kondality Bale Weld has a limited area of high forest, containing a group of black and white colobus monkeys, however there are large areas of scrub in and around the church site that could be planted for both timber production as well as increasing native tree cover.



Name: **Kondality Bale Weld**

Status: church/monastery

Site Code: SU12

Floristic Region: SU

Region: 5 (Gurage)

Altitude: 2490 m

Latitude: 08° 24' N

Longitude: 38° 38' E

Woodland/forest:

Status: relict

Size: ca 2 ha

Dominant species:

canopy: *Euphorbia candelabrum*,
Juniperus procera

shrub/ground: *Carissa edulis*, *Cyathula uncinulata*, *Ocimum lamifolium*

No of woody species: 33

No of species with less than 5 individuals: 6

Threats: tree cutting, planting of exotics

Photograph: Tya prehistoric stone alignment with Kondality flat wooded hill top in the background.

Bale Weld church and its surrounding forest are situated on top of a high point or hill that punctuates a ridge which runs approximately North South. The church and forest are approximately 100 m above the valleys to either side. The church land occupies about 11 ha of which around 2 ha is comprised of the relict forest. The remaining church land mostly on the hilltop is almost completely proscribed by a short, steep, rocky, escarpment, and is a fairly long, flat plateau mostly given over to secondary scrub dominated by *Dodonaea angustifolia* and *Carissa edulis* with some mature *Juniperus procera*. The escarpment, also owned by the church, has a few remaining Junipers and some mature *Podocarpus falcatus* and eucalypts. The surrounding slopes (probably once dominated by wild olive and juniper) are owned by the Mikaeli-Semero Peasants association and grazing and cutting access is currently unrestricted, there are a few mature junipers remaining in the least accessible areas. There is a degraded plantation of eucalypts and *Cupressus lusitanica* on the southern slopes, and low down on the south-eastern slope is another church site - Chibchiba holy water (ca 1 ha), which is characterised by a variety of mature and elegant native trees and recently planted exotic *Schinus molle*. Native vegetation in the surrounding landscape, which is intensively farmed and highly gullied and degraded, is limited to older gullies and sacred sites of the indigenous Gurage religion.

History

Aerial photography shows that most of the deforestation of the surrounding slopes occurred before the early 1970s, that the boundaries of the relict forest have remained constant since this time, and that much of the secondary scrub on the plateau and surrounding slopes has grown up during this period. The plantation on the southern slopes occurred during the Derg and a guard was present at this time to protect the PA and the church land. Open access to PA land for grazing and cutting and church land for grazing is a more recent state of affairs and there is evidence of recent cutting of junipers. There are a number of mature eucalypts directly surrounding the church some of which are interspersed in the relict forest; it is unclear how the probable change of status of the church to monastery will affect land use.



Much of the eastern slopes of Kondality Hill consists in secondary scrub with a few forest trees (mainly *Juniperus procera*). Mt Ziqualla looms in the background.

Conservation status

The relict forest supports a group of Black and White Colobus monkeys, which are popular amongst the local community. The beauty of the biodiversity of the forest and its sacred status are held in very high regard by the community.

Management

The size of the church site means that there is considerable scope for planting of the desired economically superior exotic species away from the relict forest and focus the planting on non-invasive species. Whilst it is currently unclear as to

Threats

The declining economic status of the church means that holy land and its biodiversity, especially Juniper, has by necessity increasingly been viewed as an exploitable resource by its guardians, and there is considerable interest in planting of economically superior exotic species such as eucalypts and cypress both adjacent to and within the relict forest. Recent availability of potentially invasive agroforestry exotics may disrupt or threaten remaining indigenous biodiversity in the long term.

The fashion for constructed graves threatens to encroach upon the relict forest. Open access for grazing on church land, and cutting and grazing on surrounding land threatens the whole hill with erosion. The Chibchiba holy water site is currently under extreme threat from a deep gully.



The flat summit of the hill is clearly evident from this view taken from the North. The taller trees are eucalypts and the native forest occupies much of the right of the hill top.

what land use changes may be entailed through the proposed status change to monastery, there is clearly scope for long-term economic and conservation planning. PA and government officials, NGO staff and many community members were interested in curtailing unrestricted access to the surrounding slopes where regeneration and/or ecologically informed planting may occur. Many of the above stakeholders felt that the re-institution of a guard for both church and PA land would be of great benefit. Gully prevention measures and resolution of conflicting use (sacred and non sacred) of the holy water site is urgently required.