
Midrekebd Gebre Menfeskidus

At the very top of the last mountain range overlooking the Rift Valley lies Midrekebd Gebre Menfeskidus monastery. Its forest is small but pristine with three species of monkeys. Around the church there is a medium sized but heavily grazed stand of trees, probably planted when the main church was built. The monastery is currently planting native trees.



Name: **Midrekebd Gebre Menfeskidus**

Status: monastery
Site Code: SU13
Floristic Region: SU
Region: 5 (Gurage)
Altitude: 2490 m
Latitude: 08° 16' N
Longitude: 38° 36' E

Woodland/forest:

Status: monastery
Size: 2 ha

Dominant species:

canopy: *Juniperus procera*, *Olea europaea* ssp *cuspidata*, *Podocarpus falcatus*

shrub/ground: *Acokanthera schimperiana*, *Justicia schimperiana*

No of woody species: 30

No of species with less than 5 individuals: 4

Threats: grazing in some parts

Photograph: The monastery forest is situated just below the summit of the mountain chain. Beyond this ridge is the rift valley. Note the extensive uneven-aged regeneration of *Juniperus procera* in the foreground.

Midrekebd Gebre Menfeskidus monastery lies on the top of the last mountain ridge overlooking the Rift Valley. The main church is located on the very summit. The woodland around the church is very open and highly grazed, and has little undergrowth and its physiognomy gives the impression that it has been planted. It does also contain a fair amount of eucalypts.

To the West there is what can be considered as the only piece of relict forest. The slopes vary dramatically in steepness but essentially there are two flatish zone with a very steep slope in between. The vegetation reflects this dichotomy. Trees are tall and there is little evidence to indicate that in the past many large trees were logged from the core this small forest. Around much of the periphery there is an earthbank delimitating the edge of the sacred grove. To the SW of the forest there is a little church in a small forest clearing.

At the upper edge of the forest the monks have recently planted a small area with *Juniperus procera* and *Podocarpus falcatus*. On the main ridge there is a large open eucalypt plantation, whilst the remaining landuse of the ridge is mostly grazing land with some exotic trees planted here and there. In the valley below, the Gurage farming landscape is highlighted by numerous patches of enset established near each farmhouse.

History

This forest has been protected for well over hundred years and it likely that before it became a Orthodox site it would have been a traditional sacred grove like many places in the region. Like other sites in this region, a clear physical delimitation in the form of an earthbank was

erected by the local community, a feature observed no-where else in Ethiopia.

Conservation status

This small woodland has three species of monkeys, black and white colobus, baboons and vervet monkeys. The main of the woodland is free of all herbivory and there is much habitat heterogeneity.



Church forest with high canopy stand behind.



Lower forest margin with traditional dwellings.



Around much of the forest, the boundary is delineated by a ca 1 m high earthbank

Threats

The 'native plantation' around the main church suffers from too much grazing by livestock whereas the relict woodland is essentially free of grazing.

The small size of the relict forest and the lack of other natural forest in the vicinity is probably a threat to the survival of some of the three monkey species.

Grazing from much or all of the 'native plantation' should stopped or reduced to allow the undergrowth to establish itself and natural tree regeneration to take place. It would be important to connect the plantation with the relict woodland as a small gap exists between the two.

Management

The native conifers currently planted by the monks to expand the relict forest are probably not the species required by the monkeys, especially the black and white colobus. Other species should be considered, but these are not available from the Department of Agriculture that supplies the seedlings currently being planted. This effort by the monastery to expand the forest by planting native species is pretty unusual and should be supported.