

Dakatcha Nature Reserve

2024
First Quarter Report
Jan-Mar



A ROCHA
KENYA

Message from our team



Dear Wonderful Partners,

Thank you for your help in protecting the Dakatcha Woodlands!

2024 began with a bang in the A Rocha Dakatcha Nature Reserve. Heavy rains over December meant that January was full of vibrant green growth, blooming flowers, and busy insect activity. A good agricultural season for the local community has kept everyone busy with harvest and slowed down the sale of land for this quarter. This gave our A Rocha team time to repair roads in the Reserve that had been damaged by the rains, restore Clarke's Weaver habitat, train our Scouts in data collection and begin joint community patrols to reduce illegal grazing.

After years of looking, we finally found a roosting site for the Sokoke Scops Owl! This owl, the smallest in Africa, is the reason A Rocha began purchasing land for conservation in the Dakatcha Woodlands. The Sokoke Scops Owl only lives in a certain type of forest, most of which is unprotected and at risk of being lost. A Rocha is working to protect as much of the forest as possible for this owl and all the other extraordinary species that live there. It is incredibly rewarding to find a roosting site for the Sokoke Scops Owl! Together, our hard work is providing a safe home for these endangered species.

The following report outlines our activities this quarter, we hope you enjoy reading it as much as we enjoyed caring for our Reserve. As always, we are grateful for your support. The protection and restoration of this beautiful Woodlands could not happen without you!

Asante Sana!

Land Purchase

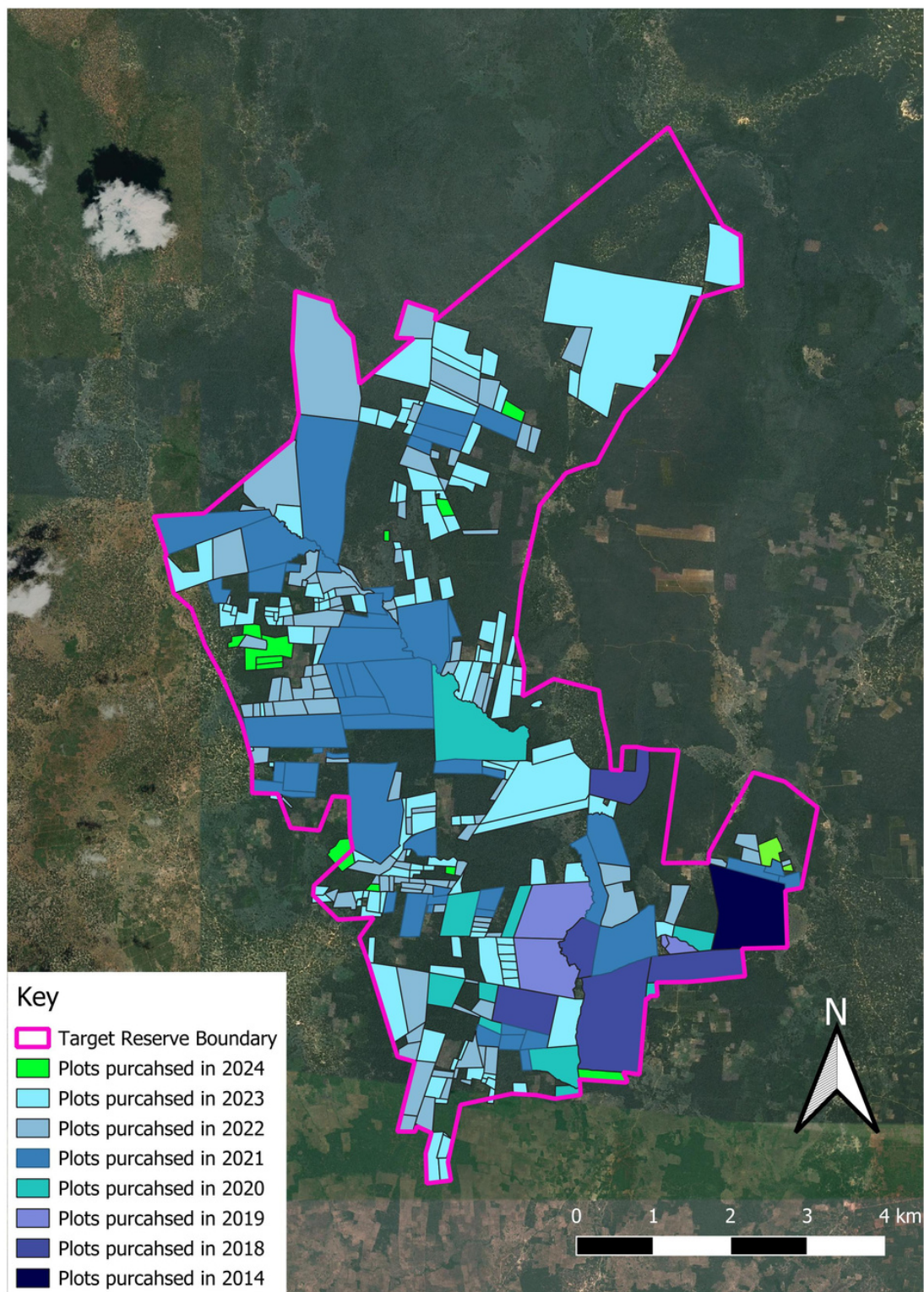
Over the past 10 years, A Rocha has purchased and protected 7,758 acres of the Dakatcha Woodlands

Since 2014, A Rocha Kenya and our partners have purchased and protected 7,758 acres of the Dakatcha woodlands. This year we purchased 159 acres of land for conservation across twelve plots of land. Currently, the reserve is divided into 283 individual plots of land, most of which share a boundary. Once we have completed our target for land purchase, we will consolidate all the plots for the conservation of biodiversity in the Dakatcha Woodlands.

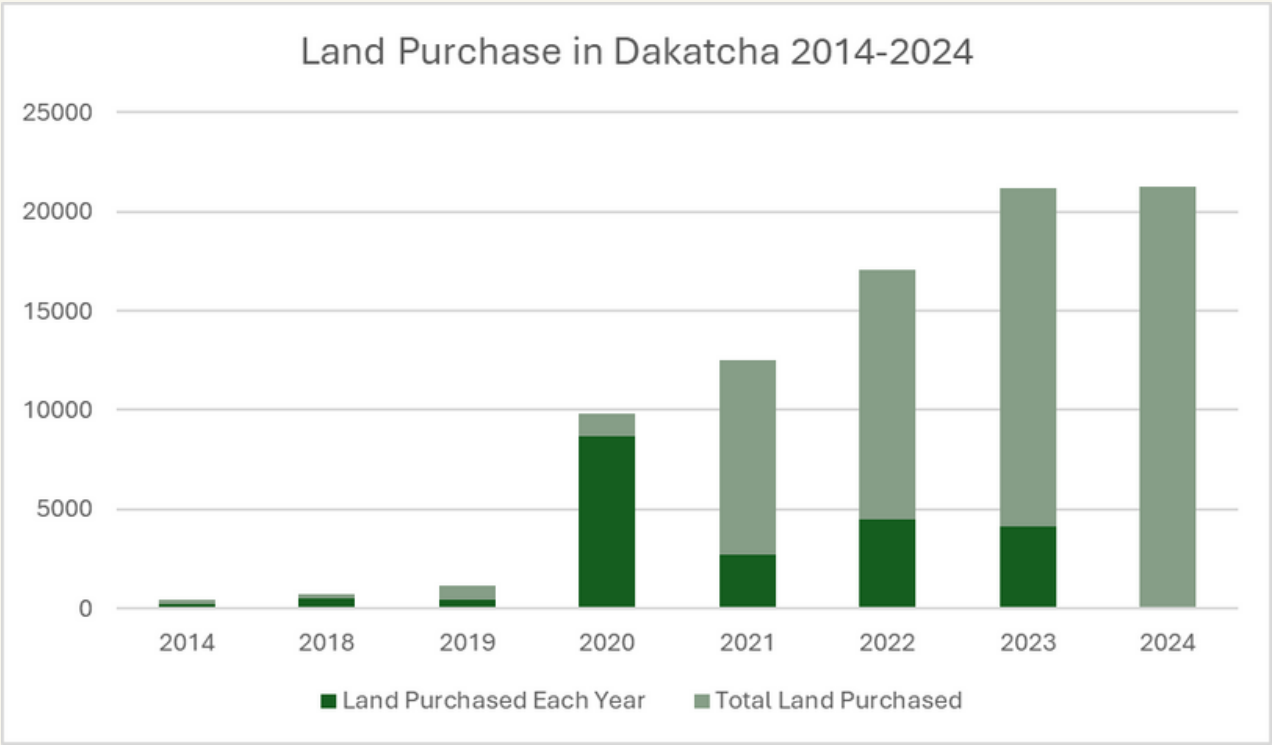
The amount of land we have purchased this year is lower than expected. This is because landowners took advantage of rain in December to grow crops which focused their attention on the harvest, not land sales. In addition, access to resources limited A Rocha's ability to complete land purchase deals.

However, A Rocha has a good reputation around Dakatcha; people know they will get a fair deal and paid on time when they sell us their land. Our land purchase team are currently negotiating several offers from landowners.

One challenge when purchasing land is the quality of remnant habitat on the land being sold. Sometimes, before selling their land, landowners will remove large trees and sell them for charcoal. To discourage this behaviour, or any damage to the original habitat, we offer higher prices for intact habitat with large old trees and lower prices for cleared land that has been farmed. By increasing the value of remnant habitat in this way we are influencing the market for land and encouraging landowners to retain woodland on their land before selling.



Map of the land purchased each year for the Dakatcha Nature Reserve



Camping in the A Rocha Dakatcha Nature Reserve

Reserve Management

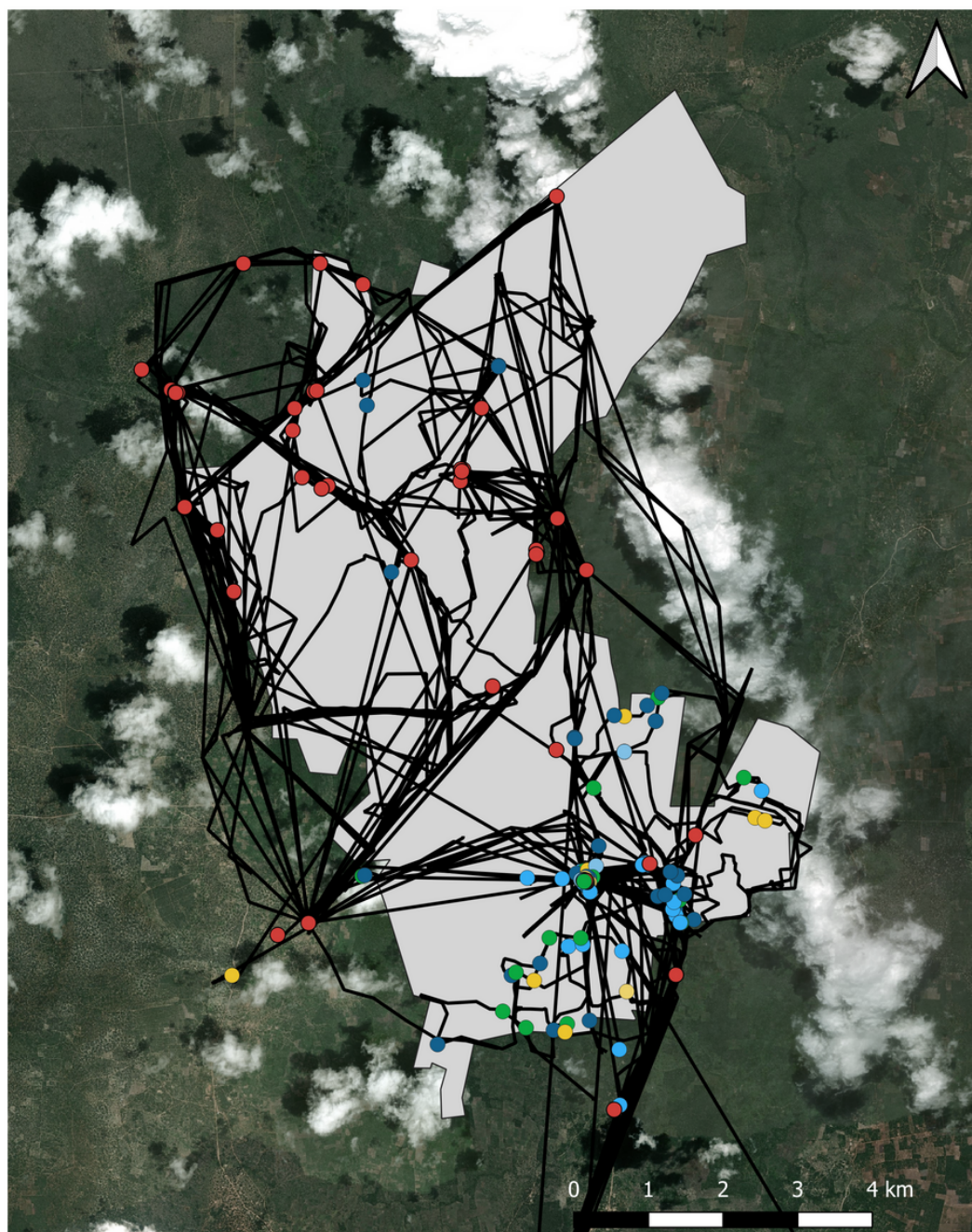
A Rocha has nine scouts caring for our Reserve. Every day they patrol the woodland, preventing illegal activities, repairing damages and reporting on the incredible biodiversity.

SMART Training



This year, our team has done an amazing job managing our Reserve. Our nine A Rocha scouts have been trained and are using SMART, a conservation monitoring app, with great results. SMART (Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool) is a software that allows us to monitor, evaluate and improve conservation management. A Rocha has developed a program specific to our Dakatcha project, with data collection options in English, Swahili and Giriama (the local languages). We spent eight weeks with our scouts, teaching them to use the app, receiving feedback, making improvements and showing the results back to the scouts. Our scouts now use this app every day in our Reserve to collect data and report on illegal activities (like poaching), management actions (like road repairs) and interesting observations (like Golden-rumped Sengi nests). Using SMART effectively will change the way our Nature Reserve is managed.

SMART training in the field



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|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Dakatcha patrols | ● Shina la miti (Tree Stump) |
| Observations | ● Tano (Charcoal kiln) |
| ● Barabara (Tracks, Paths and Roads) | ● Wawindaji (Poachers) |
| ● Magugu (Weeds) | — Tracks |
| ● Mifugo (Livestock) | ▭ Dakatcha Nature Reserve Boundary |
| ● Mtego (Snares) | |

A map showing data collected by our scouts on patrols with SMART during March. Patrol trails are shown in black. Observations shown as coloured points. Clearly, illegal livestock has been a major problem this month.

Road Repair

Heavy rains in December damaged to our roads and extensive repairs were required. A team spent two weeks repairing the road into our campsite. They are now repairing the road to where we hope to build a field study centre. The repairs have improved access to the Reserve and opened up more opportunities for management activities, environmental education and visitors.

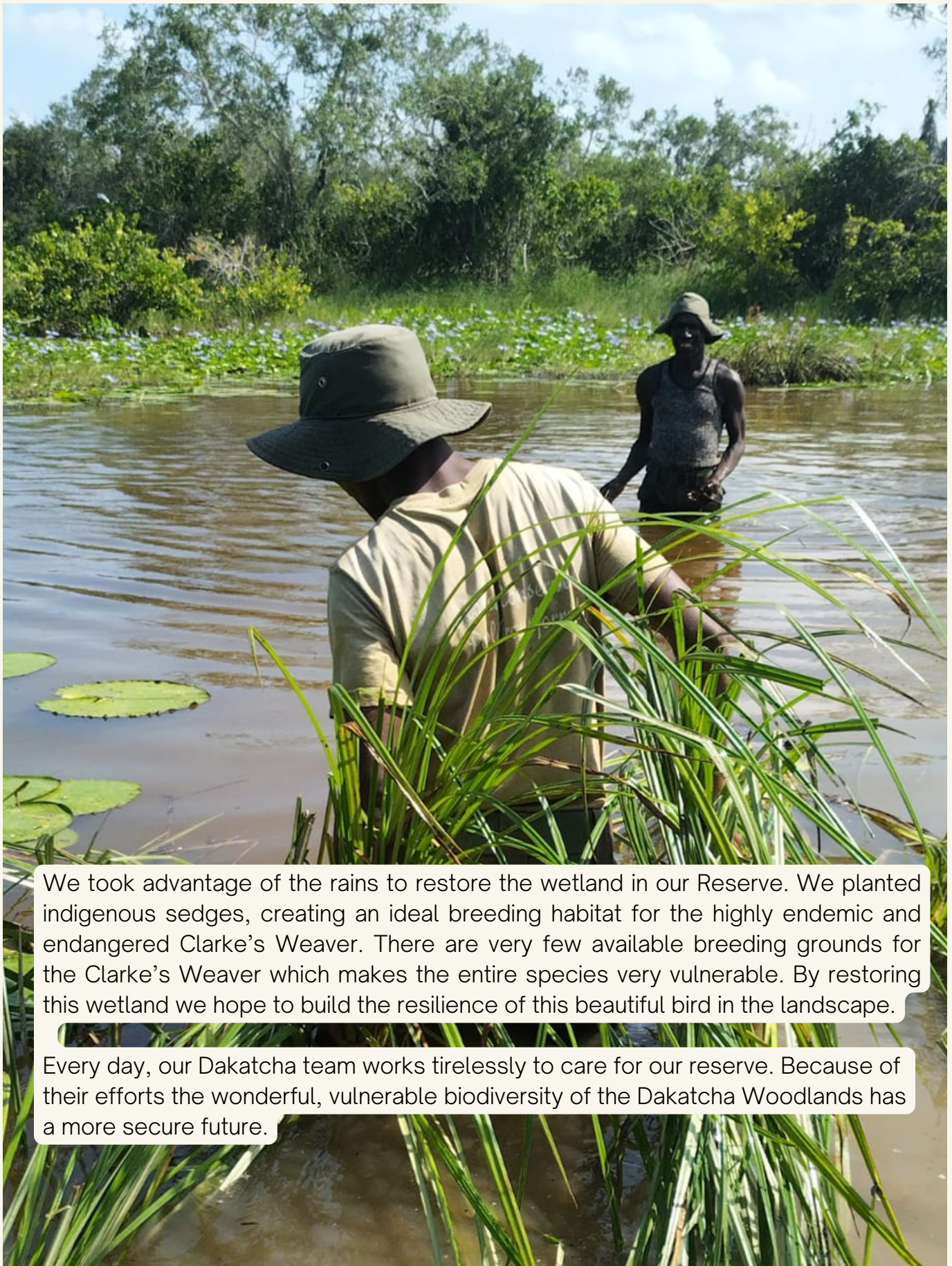


Our team repairing the rain-damaged roads in our reserve.

Joint Community Patrols

For the first time ever, we have partnered with the community to conduct joint patrols of the Reserve. This is in response to the large herds of cattle, camels and goats that have begun to regularly visit the area. These animals are managed by herders from outside the community and cause a lot of damage to local crops and the vegetation of our Reserve. Partnering with the community to address these herds is a huge step forward in managing the damage they cause and has created a lot of community goodwill towards our scouts and our Nature Reserve.

Wetland Restoration



We took advantage of the rains to restore the wetland in our Reserve. We planted indigenous sedges, creating an ideal breeding habitat for the highly endemic and endangered Clarke's Weaver. There are very few available breeding grounds for the Clarke's Weaver which makes the entire species very vulnerable. By restoring this wetland we hope to build the resilience of this beautiful bird in the landscape.

Every day, our Dakatcha team works tirelessly to care for our reserve. Because of their efforts the wonderful, vulnerable biodiversity of the Dakatcha Woodlands has a more secure future.

Biodiversity Research

For the first time ever, a roosting site for the Sokoke Scops Owl has been recorded in the Dakatcha Woodlands



A Sokoke Scops Owl

As of this week, we have the first ever recorded roosting site for the Sokoke Scops Owl in the Dakatcha Woodlands. A Rocha Kenya were the first ecologists to ever find this tiny bird in the Dakatcha landscape and it was precisely this discovery that led to the purchase of land for conservation. The pressures from destructive land use change were growing too strong and it was clear that, unless someone did something, soon there would be no owls – or any other vulnerable biodiversity – in this landscape. So A Rocha began purchasing land. Specifically, land with trees that the Sokoke Scops Owl loves. Today, more than a decade after the initial discovery, a roosting site has been found. The purchase and protection of land for conservation has saved this owl from the brink of localised extinction and has provided it with a safe, healthy home where it feels happy enough to roost.

Ecological Surveys

Bird surveys continue across the Reserve. We are creating a map of birds found in the different habitats. This information helps us understand who is living in our Reserve and monitor the health of populations.

We have also seen evidence of the endangered Golden Rumped Sengi across the reserve. We plan to monitor populations with trail cameras.

Monitoring and data collection of the vegetation continue, as we map the habitat types of every piece of land purchased. Understanding the habitat types helps us restore the degraded areas back to their original habitat and full ecological thriving.

A Rocha is committed to monitoring all the biodiversity of our Reserve so that we can manage and care for the ecosystem to our best possible ability with data-informed decisions, for the flourishing of all life in our ecosystem.



Surveying the habitat of the Dakatcha Woodlands from the air, with thanks to our friends at Eden Restoration.

Thank You!

The Dakatcha Woodland would not be protected without you. Our Reserve is a mosaic of habitat types and ecosystem functions and it takes a mosaic of partnerships to protect it and care for it. We are grateful for all our partners, whatever shape or size or nature of partnership you share with us.

It is together that we are able to purchase and protect land in the Dakatcha Woodlands for conservation. Together we collect data with SMART, repair our roads, prevent illegal grazing, restore habitat for endangered birds and learn more about the incredible biodiversity of our Reserve through ecological surveys.

Thank you, for caring for this beautiful patch of the world and for helping the communities and the biodiversity of the Dakatcha Woodlands landscape thrive.

We at A Rocha will continue to be caretakers of the A Rocha Dakatcha Nature Reserve on behalf of us all.

Please do reach out if you want to chat about all the ways you can join us in caring for the Dakatcha Woodlands.

