

THIRD QUARTER UPDATE

DAKATCHA NATURE RESERVE

JULY – SEPTEMBER 2025



Message from our team

Dear Partners,

The Dakatcha landscape is defined by rain. This quarter we watched as our green, rain-soaked Reserve became dry and brown almost overnight. The sandy soils do not hold moisture well, so as soon as it stops raining things dry out very quickly. It is fascinating to watch the landscape respond to these changes. Some plants flower in the wet, some in the dry. Insects and animals and people change how they move through the landscape in the different seasons. During the rains, life is abundant and is scattered wherever the rain falls. During the dry, everyone congregates around streams and pools of water, bunkers down until the rains come back or leaves the landscape completely seeking out greener pastures.

It is a joy to know that our Reserve sits in this landscape, protected throughout every season, so that those that favour the wet can flourish and those that prefer the dry can flourish.

Thank you for making it possible for our A Rocha Dakatcha Nature Reserve to support life in abundance throughout the seasons for years to come. This special place exists because of you.



Halua and Agnes, camp cooks for our research camp in Dakatcha



Vincent , A Rocha Kenya's Community Officer in Dakatcha

Land Purchase this Quarter

This quarter saw a notable decline in land purchases compared to the previous period. While we had acquired 239 acres from 21 individual plots in the last quarter, this quarter we managed to secure 118 acres from 10 different plots. A decline of this nature had been anticipated, largely due to the limited availability of landowners, many of whom do not reside within the local communities, making negotiations slower and more complex.

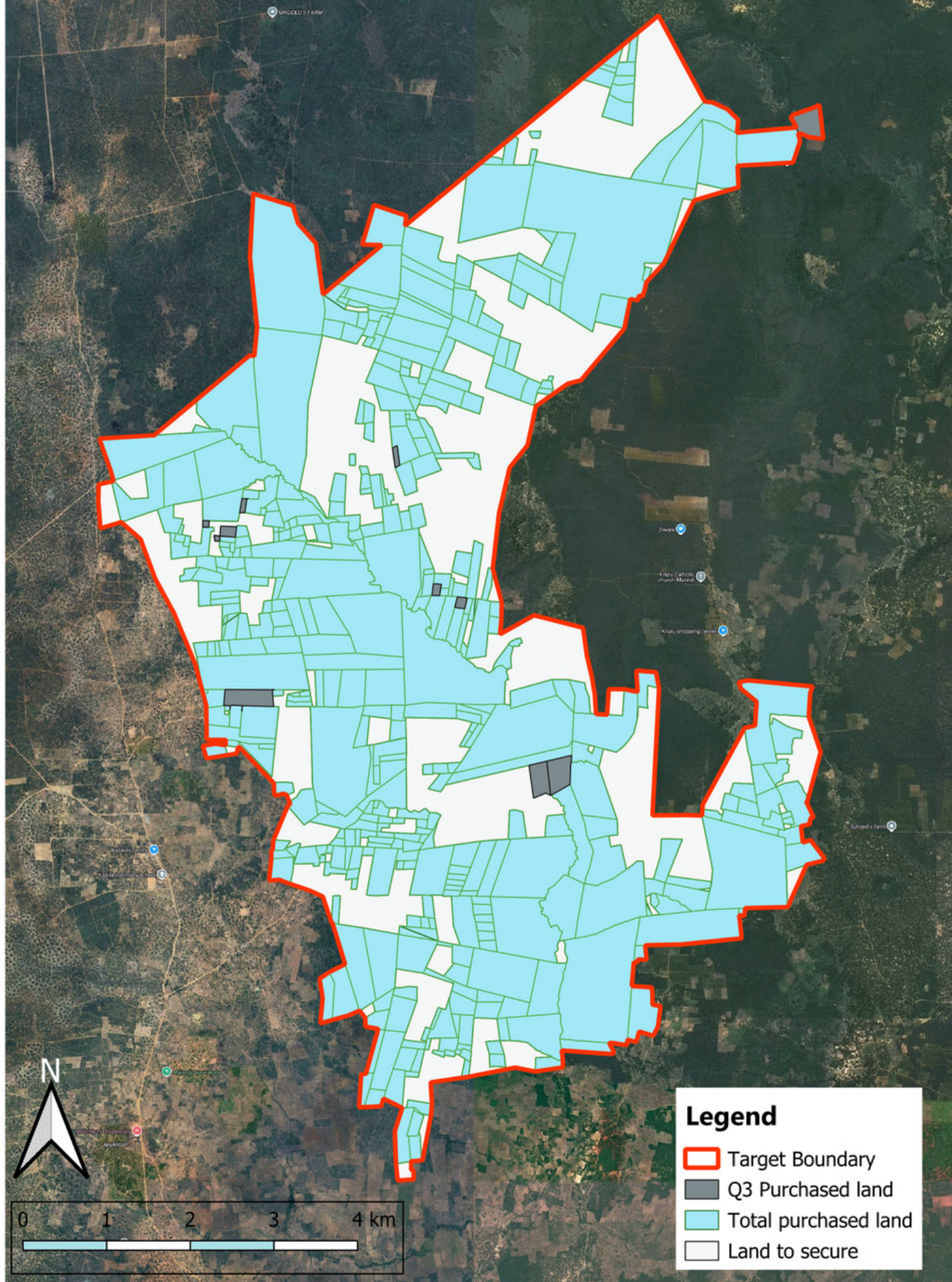
On pricing, most plots were acquired at KES 40,000 per acre, which was encouraging. However, in a few cases, we were compelled to purchase land at KES 80,000 per acre. These situations arose where Somali herders had already reached advanced agreements with landowners. To prevent the risk of permanent settlements by the herders within the reserve, we intervened and finalized the purchases at the higher price. This was seen as a necessary step, given the ongoing challenges of keeping the herders from encroaching into the reserve.

The acquisitions during this reporting period bring the total reserve size to 9,435 acres. Looking ahead, and with God’s grace, our goal is to secure an additional 165 acres in the next quarter. Achieving this target will enable us to reach the milestone of 10,000 acres by the end of the year.



Community members ready to sell land to us

A ROCHA DAKATCHA NATURE RESERVE



Land Acquisition Challenges

During the third quarter of 2025, one of the major challenges we faced in land purchase was the issue of funds availability. The prevailing inflation rates significantly affected pricing, leading to unexpected cost escalations. For instance, towards the end of the quarter, we were compelled to acquire one plot at nearly double its initial market value, paying 80,000 KES. Such financial strain limited our ability to expand at the pace we had initially projected.

Another challenge arose from external pressures, particularly from Somali herders who persistently attempted to encroach into the reserve. Their efforts were not limited to grazing but extended to attempts at establishing permanent settlements. In some cases, they even tried persuading landowners within the reserve to sell them plots, creating tension and posing a potential threat to the conservation and management objectives of the land.

Finally, negotiations with some landowners within the reserve proved difficult, as a few of them openly expressed their unwillingness to sell their plots to us. While this slowed down our progress, we have not abandoned the efforts. Instead, we are closely monitoring the situation and are planning more serious negotiations to address these concerns. Our commitment remains strong, and we continue to seek opportunities to expand the reserve despite these setbacks.





Medium-wing Kitespider | *Gasterncantha versicolor*

Reserve Management

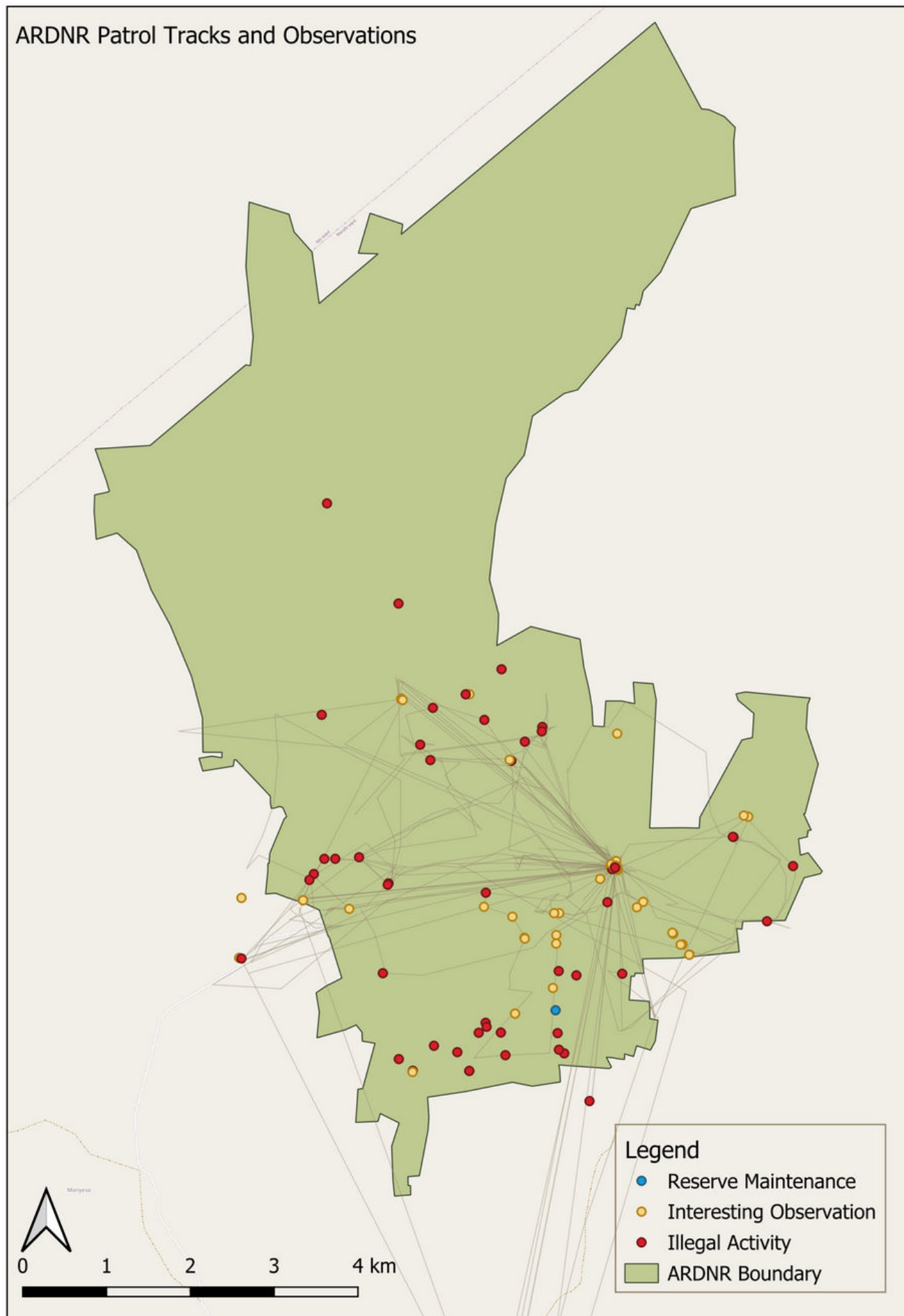
Our team are on the ground everyday, patrolling and protecting our Reserve



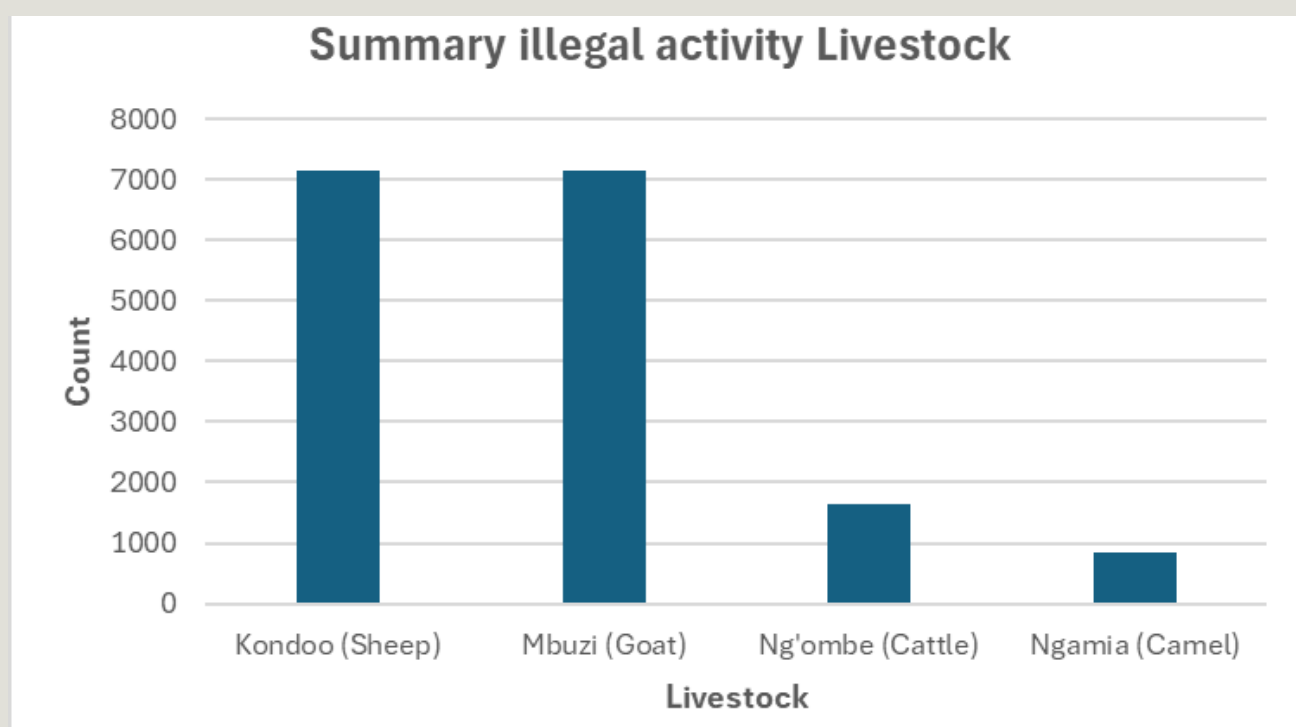
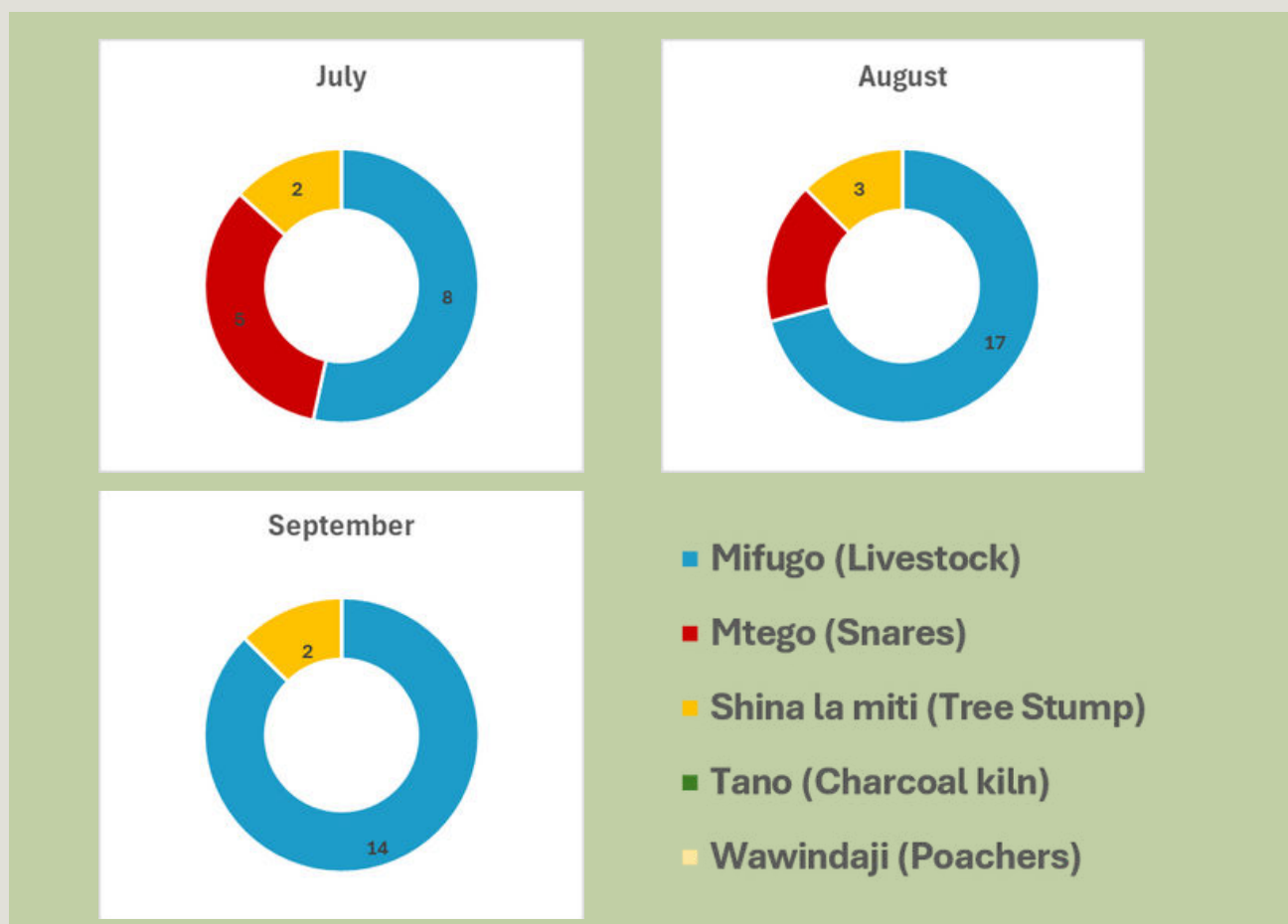
Our scouts have tirelessly patrolled the reserve throughout the quarter, and their efforts are evident in the reduction of illegal activities. Notably, there has been a significant decline in cattle intrusion, although herders remain present around the area. This progress has been achieved through continuous engagement with local administration. While our reserve has seen fewer disruptions compared to previous periods, surrounding communities continue to experience challenges, particularly with Somali cattle encroaching and destroying crops. Despite this, our organization remains committed to promoting peace and coexistence within the region.

We are also encouraged by the noticeable decline poaching activities within the reserve, which reflects the positive impact of ongoing conservation efforts and heightened vigilance by our team.

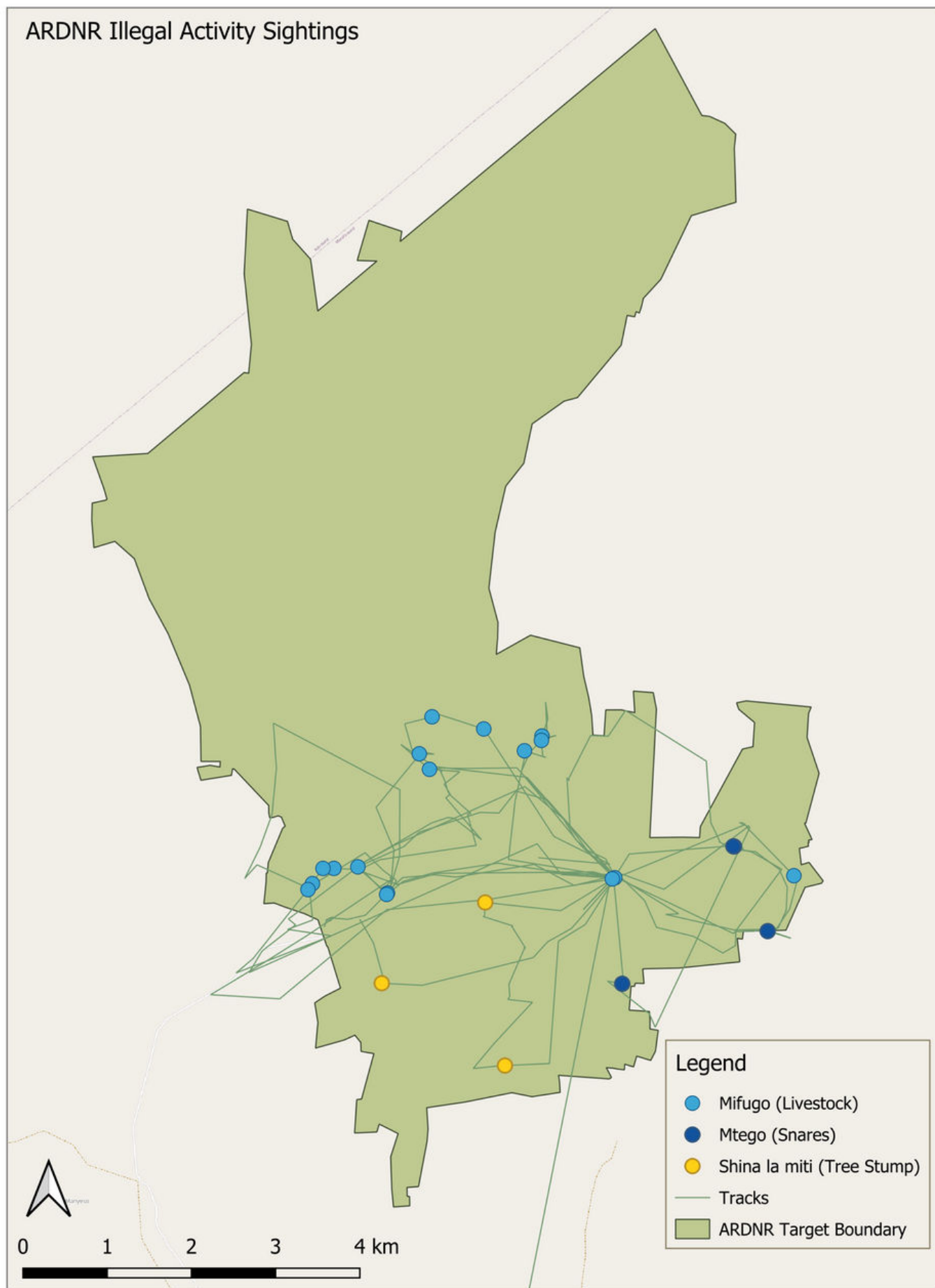
ARDNR Patrol Tracks and Observations



Illegal activities



ARDNR Illegal Activity Sightings





Pastoralists with their livestock

Biodiversity Research

All creatures great and small

The biodiversity of Dakatcha is what drew A Rocha to these woodlands many years ago. So many species live in the dense cynametra trees, the open brachystegia forest, the grasslands and the diaspyros dominated thickets. Our reserve is home to sun squirrels and honey badgers, porcupine and mongoose, Euphorbia and aloe, Amani Buff butterflies and Fiery-necked Nightjars. We are proud and privileged to create a safe space for all these species and more, and to get to study some of them in depth.

This quarter we dedicated three weeks of field work to surveying Sokoke Scops owl. We continued surveying for threatened trees and the habitat of the reserve. Butterfly work also continued, as did our common bird surveys.

We also finished a habitat condition map by combining different data sets to create a picture of the habitat condition. This map will help us to measure the results of our management activities as we work to improve the habitat of the Reserve.



Baseline Habitat Condition Map

We aim to repeat this survey every year and improve the condition of the habitat through A Rocha’s management



Data compiled from:

- Habitat assessment (2022)
- Plot habitat quality from land purchase data (2025)

Basemap: Google Satellite
Authors: A Rocha Kenya, 2025

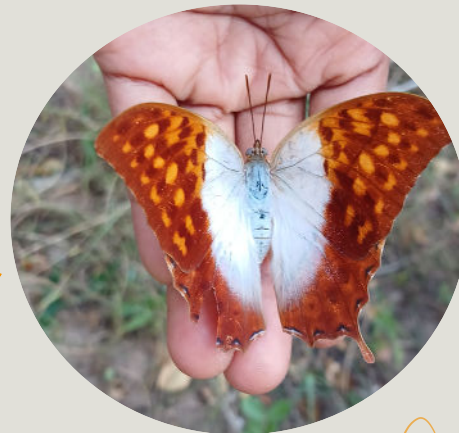
Legend

- Intact Forest
- Moderately Degraded
- Highly Degraded
- Forest Remnant
- No Data
- ARDNR Boundary

Butterflies of Dakatcha

One week of surveys every month | 419 butterflies recorded |
51 species identified

Pearl charaxes - (*Charaxes varanes vologes*) Highest observed species with 39 records. It is seen zooming all over the reserve with a very fast flight. It also likes pearching on twigs.



Red-tab policeman caterpillar, (*Coeliades keithloa kenya*)
There are a total of 16 species of the *Coeliades*, 8 of which are found in Kenya



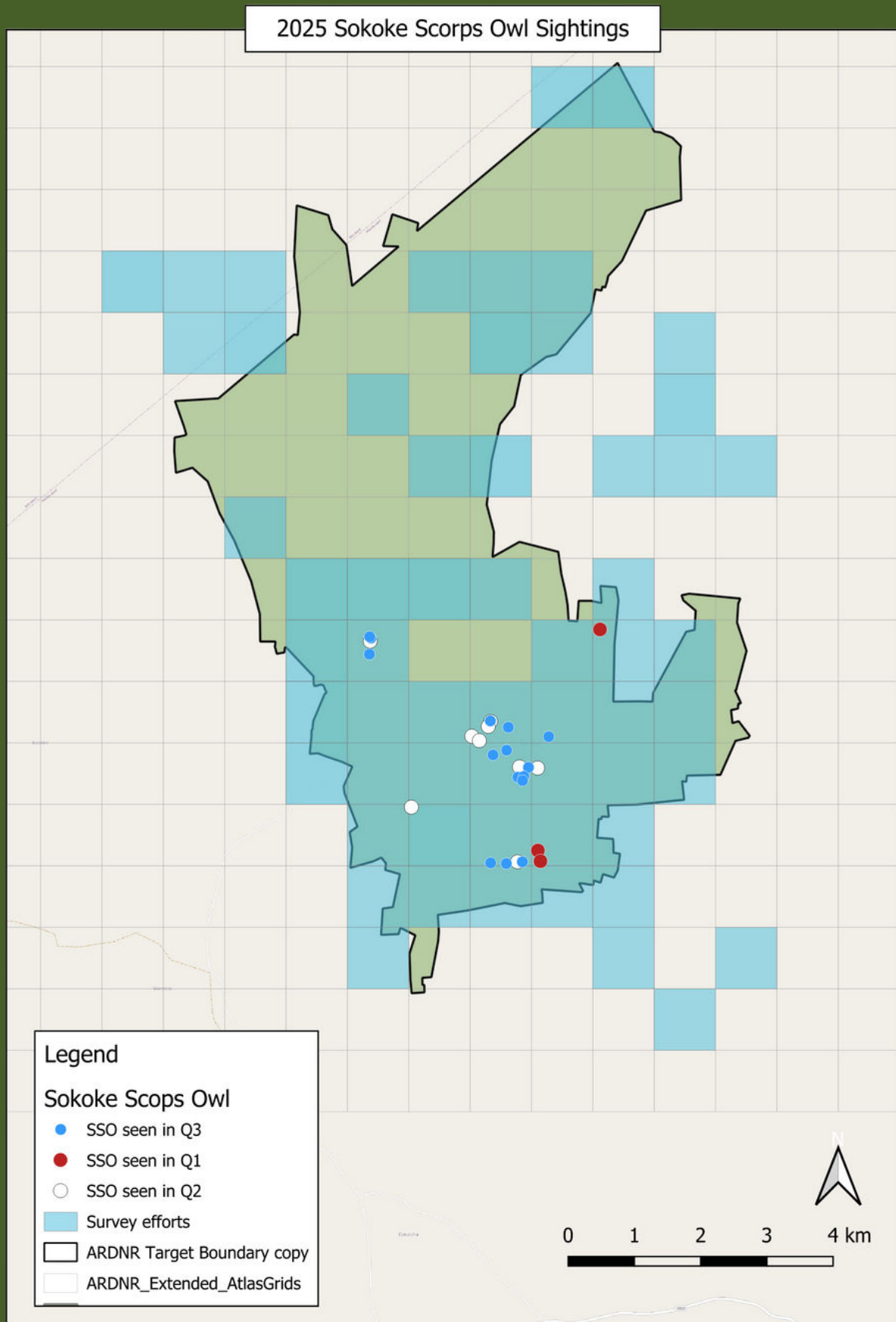
Club-tailed Charaxes- (*Charaxes zoolina zoolina*)
This is the wet season form. The dry season form is orange-brown. The males have 1 tail and females 2 tails. Guess the gender of this one!



African monarch (*Danaus chrysippus chrysippus*)
These are mating! This is among the most interesting butterflies, being the model of several mimicry complexes, having four distinct forms.



Sokoke Scops Owl Sightings



Sokoke Scops Owl Surveys

Mateo Lewis, a volunteer with A Rocha Kenya, reflects on his time surveying Sokoke Scops Owls with the team



Mateo Lewis and Katisho



A pair of roosting Sokoke Scops Owls

One morning, during the last day of Sokoke Scops Owl Surveys, we saw something that encapsulates the struggles faced by this woodland and this bird we are protecting. Having finished a transect survey, we were walking back to the motorbike when we hear the feather-light call of a Sokoke Scops Owl, surprisingly close to the path. Moving through the bush as quietly as we can, the track we take suddenly opens up into a clearing, at the centre of which is a pile of freshly cut logs.

What we see is a kiln, ready for burning for charcoal. Charcoal from Dakatcha is sold as far away as Nairobi. Diospyros (Mkulu) and Commiphora trees make good charcoal and the oldest and largest trees are targeted. Unfortunately, these trees are also the favoured habitat of the Sokoke Scops Owl.



**Mkulu | *Diospyros bussei* | cut for charcoal
near a Sokoke Scops Owl roost**

Mateo's reflections continued...

Even as we look at the damage of the charcoal logging, we hear the call of the owl. It is even closer now. We continue past the kiln, using the slashed paths of the loggers to navigate a way through what should be dense forest. Stumbling into another clearing, my companion Kirao lets out a heavy breath at what we see: a huge, mature *Diospyros* tree, felled but not yet chopped up, lying as it would have stood. The heartwood at the stump of the tree is black, the cambium is red as Dakatcha soil. These trees are among the tallest in Dakatcha and with time they develop a complexity in structure, rot holes and cracks and crevices and hollows, that provide habitat for a range of bird, mammal and invertebrate life.

Ten metres from this fresh destruction we see our owl. She is perched at eye level under a shadowy mass of branches, watching us silently. In the pre-dawn light she is a miniature silhouette only, but unmistakably owl-shaped. As the light improves, slowly we make out her quizzical expression, brought about by the thick raised eyebrows and pointed sideways ears which frame enormous eyes. We have five minutes together before she swoops away.

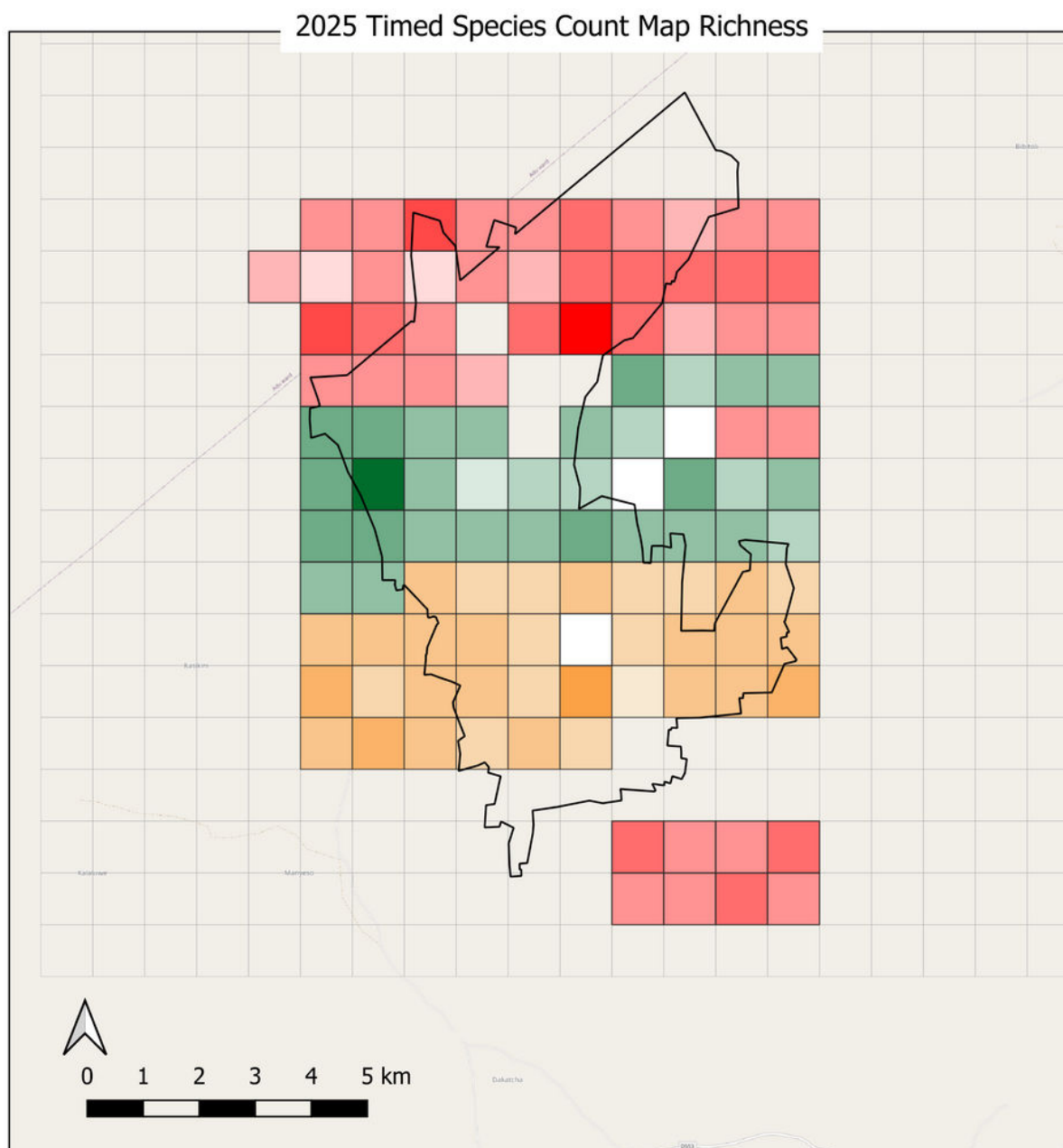
The feeling is one of confusion. The sighting of the elusive owl that we are here to study brings euphoria, but only moments ago my colleagues were close to tears at sight of the logging. This felled *Diospyros* could well have been our owl's nesting tree. Perched as we saw her, she symbolises the plight of this ecosystem – a species clinging on in a patch of habitat growing ever smaller through logging, unsustainable grazing pressure and a growing regional human population looking to turn more land over to agriculture.

As we walk away from the scene, the new day's sun rises above the trees and we hear a fresh chorus of daytime birds: greenbuls, boubous, hoopoes and starlings all making themselves known. In the direction of the fallen tree our owl can just about be heard continuing her faint, repetitive call, persistent despite what she is facing.



Mkulu | *Diospyros mespiliformis* | cut for charcoal near a Sokoke Scops Owl roost

Species Richness Map of Common Birds in Dakatcha



Species count

Q1 Species Richness	Q2 Species Richness	Q3 Species Richness	ARDNR Research Grids	ARDNR Boundary
0 - 10	0 - 10	0 - 10		
10 - 20	10 - 20	10 - 20		
20 - 30	20 - 30	20 - 30		
30 - 40	30 - 40	30 - 40		
40 - 50	40 - 50	40 - 50		
50 - 60	50 - 60	50 - 60		
60 - 70	60 - 70	60 - 70		
>70	>70	>70		



Landscapes include people

Many people live and work in the landscape around our Reserve

Community Conservation

Conservation beyond the Reserve

At Rocha Kenya, we believe an empowered community armed with right ecological knowledge is vital in carrying out practical conservation. We want our work to function like an ecosystem. We want our work to be diverse for a healthy landscape. Therefore, our conservation efforts are not limited to the boundaries of our A Rocha Dakatcha Nature Reserve. A Rocha staff are actively living and working in the Dakatcha community, teaching conservation, talking conservation, practicing conservation and living conservation.

To help us with our community work, A Rocha Kenya purchased a plot close to town where we could demonstrate ecologically beneficial land management. A tree nursery is being created and a site has been chosen for a small plot for regenerative agriculture. When the plot was first purchased it was completely cleared of all trees. A Rocha has now owned the plot for two years and has allowed the cut trees to regenerate from their stumps. Some of them are now a meter or two tall! We have begun pruning them, according to the practice of Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration (FMNR) to encourage them to grow strong and flourish as trees, adding essential ecosystem services back into the land.



Volunteers pruning *Brachystegia* trees on A Rocha Kenya's demonstration plot in Sosoni

Attacking Aliens

Removing invasive weeds from the Dakatcha landscape



Removing Prickly Pear

In parts of Dakatcha, the prickly pear cactus has spread quickly, forming dense thickets that block grazing land for locals, injure livestock, and push out native plants. This alien species threatens the biodiversity and livelihoods that communities depend on. However, we have also seen people restore balance to nature. The young and old are learning how to remove prickly pear, while church communities are replacing the cleared areas with indigenous trees and fruit trees.

When managed carefully, prickly pear can be turned into a resource: its flowers provide forage for bees, its fruits serve as food and it helps to protect soils in dry areas. Left unchecked, it becomes destructive. Communities, therefore, hold a lot of power over how this plant shapes the landscape. A Rocha works alongside schools, churches and families in the Dakatcha landscape to restore ecological balance and promote sustainable livelihoods. We believe all life is valuable and worth caring for: young and old, big and small, people, plants and animals alike. By removing the invasive prickly pear and encouraging natural regeneration, communities are protecting biodiversity and ensuring that people and nature thrive together.



**The A Rocha Dakatcha Nature Reserve
is protecting the forests of Dakatcha forever**

Thank You!

Thank you for helping create the A Rocha Dakatcha Nature Reserve and for supporting the ongoing care of one of the last patches of East African Coastal Forest left in the world. We could not protect this habitat without you! Ecosystems are communities of living things interacting with their environment – we are grateful to be in this Dakatcha ecosystem with you, fighting for a future full of flourishing life.



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