

Conservation Map Helps Protect Important Habitats In South Africa

A conservation map produced by scientists at the Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology (DICE) at the University of Kent has been used to help protect one of the world's most important conservation areas.

Funded by the British Government's Darwin Initiative, the map focuses on Maputaland in South Africa, a region that also covers part of Mozambique and Swaziland.

Maputaland has recently been named as one of the 30 global conservation hotspots, as it contains large numbers of species that are found nowhere else, but many of these plants and animals are threatened by the unplanned spread of agriculture. The new map shows which areas are most important for conserving the region's vegetation types and has just been used by Ezemvelo KwaZulu-Natal Wildlife (EKZNW), the provincial conservation body, to guide the development of proposed eucalyptus plantations in the area.

Dr Bob Smith of DICE said, 'We are really pleased that Ezemvelo KwaZulu-Natal Wildlife has used our information when advising on the location of these proposed plantations. Successful conservation depends on balancing the needs of wildlife with those of agriculture and we hope that our map will make these decisions easier'.

Jenny Longmore from EKZNW's Planning Division commented, 'Many poor people live in Maputaland and so there is a great need to provide income-generating schemes. However, planting eucalyptus trees dries out neighbouring wetlands and pastures, damages important habitats and prevents many other land-use options, so we work closely with the forestry industry to minimise these impacts. This is difficult without knowing the location of the important conservation sites so this new map has proved to be very useful in identifying sensitive areas where forestry should be avoided'.

Petros Ngwenya from the Biodiversity Division of EKZNW added, 'new plantations tend to be located in the grassland areas of Maputaland and some of these contain large numbers of unique species. It is hoped that these important conservation areas will make up part of the proposed Lubombo Transfrontier Conservation Area, which aims to link reserves in Mozambique, South Africa and Swaziland. This large area will protect important wildlife and also act as a major ecotourism destination, helping to create more long-term jobs. This process will be helped by the next stage of the Darwin Initiative project, which will involve producing a conservation map for the whole of Maputaland'.

- ends -

Notes to editors:

- 1) DICE is part of the Department of Anthropology at the University of Kent (www.kent.ac.uk/anthropology/dice). Its staff and students have developed

an international reputation for their research into biodiversity conservation throughout the world.

- 2) The Darwin Initiative for the Survival of Species is funded by the UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (www.darwin.gov.uk). DICE has received several Darwin Initiative grants in the past to fund work in Kenya, Madagascar, Mexico and Namibia.
- 3) Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife (EKZNW) is the authority mandated to conserve biodiversity in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. It has the statutory duty to provide professional comments on land-use changes outside of protected areas, where such changes may have a detrimental effect on ecological processes and biodiversity (www.kznwildlife.com).
- 4) Further information on this topic is available from the project web site (www.kent.ac.uk/anthropology/dice/research/maputaland.html).