

## **Manifesto for the Conservation of the Tanoé Swamps Forest, a poorly known High Conservation Value Forest in south-eastern Côte-d'Ivoire**

Deforestation has reached an alarming rate in Côte d'Ivoire, West Africa, due to various human pressures. In addition to the environmental consequences of forest loss, a biodiversity crisis is apparent in most areas of the country where numerous plant and animal species have been exterminated. Indeed, human hunting has caused the decline or the local extinction of some animal populations such as those of the Miss Waldron red colobus (*Piliocolobus badius waldronae*), the diana roloway (*Cercopithecus Diana roloway*), and the white-napped mangabey (*Cercocebus atys lunulatus*), three critically endangered monkeys considered as the most threatened monkeys in West Africa. The country is experiencing an ecological catastrophe in the absence of an appropriate reaction by conservationists and the local authorities.

In this context, the identification of top priority sites for the conservation of critically endangered animal species is urgently required.

After surveying the whole forest area of Côte-d'Ivoire for more than a decade, a group of scientists from the Swiss Centre for Scientific Research in Côte-d'Ivoire (CSRS) concluded that the Tanoé Swamps Forest (also called Ehy forest in the literature), a non protected forest in south-eastern Côte-d'Ivoire, must be considered a High Conservation Value Forest.

The Tanoé Swamps Forest covers approximately 6.000 hectares between the Ehy Lagoon (to the West) and the the Tanoé River (to the South and the East) and is the only relatively large forest block remaining in the South-eastern corner of Côte-d'Ivoire. To date, that forest represents the very last shelter on earth for the Miss Waldron red colobus, and no doubt for the diana roloway and the Geoffroy's colobus (*Colobus vellerosus*). Calls by the Miss Waldron red colobus were heard recently (March 2008) by the CSRS scientists in the Tanoé Swamps Forest, despite having previously been suspected extinct. Additionally, the diana roloway and the Geoffroy's colobus have been found exceptionally abundant in this forest, while these monkeys have been extinct or are on the verge of extinction elsewhere in the country.

In 1999, during a workshop organized in Accra, Ghana by Conservation International to identify Priority Conservation Sites in West Africa, the area comprising the Tanoé Swamps Forest was characterized by an exceptional biological richness and considered as a top priority area for the conservation of mammals, birds and wetlands.

This High Conservation Value Forest, representing a precious asset for the promotion of sustainable development in the region, is currently under an alarming threat posed by PALMCI, a palm oil company which has started the replacement of the whole Ehy forest by a palm oil plantation without any study of environmental impact, and ignoring the disagreement of numerous local peoples.

Feeling concerned by the loss of the unique biodiversity of the Tanoé Swamps Forest and by the fate of the human communities, the future of whom is directly or indirectly linked with that of the forest, we urge the Ivorian authorities to consider the conservation of the Tanoé Swamps Forest as a top priority and to:

1. demand the immediate cessation of any work likely to impact the integrity of the forest and its inhabitants;
2. consider giving the Tanoé Swamps Forest an official protected areas status in a short term.