

PRESS RELEASE



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Bale Mountains National Park (Ethiopia) becomes a World Heritage Site

Frankfurt Zoological Society congratulates Ethiopia and specifically our partner, the National Parks Authority of the country, on receiving "World Heritage Site" status for two new sites in the country. As a long-standing supporter of Bale Mountains National Park, we are happy that the park is now listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

(Frankfurt, 18 September 2023) Today, the UNESCO World Heritage Committee granted the Bale Mountains National Park in Ethiopia the status of a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The decision was made during the 45th session of the Committee in Saudi Arabia's capital Riyadh. As a long-standing partner and supporter of the Bale Mountains National Park, we at the Frankfurt Zoological Society (FZS) are particularly pleased about this recognition.

"Achieving World Heritage Site status is an important signal that this property and the surrounding areas are crucial for society now and should be sustained for the well-being of future generations," says Justin Irvine, former FZS country director for Ethiopia, who worked with his team and our Ethiopian partners to prepare this nomination.

"Bale Mountains not only has outstanding landscapes and unique diversity, but the vast high-altitude Afro-alpine areas are the source of water for the majestic Haremma forest and regulate the rivers that support the ecosystems and livelihoods of southeast Ethiopia and beyond to Somalia and Kenya," says Justin Irvine.

The Bale Mountains are the jewel in the crown of Ethiopia's protected areas

Protected areas cover 17% of Ethiopia's land area. There are 10 national parks under the protection of the federal government and 12 more managed by regional authorities. In addition, there are large areas of wildlife, forest, and biosphere reserves. Before the September meeting of the World Heritage Committee, there was only one natural World Heritage property in Ethiopia – the majestic and dramatic Simien Mountains National Park established back in 1978.

Bale Mountains National Park is an irreplaceable biodiversity gem and home to an extraordinary fauna and flora with one of the highest incidences of terrestrial animal endemism in the world. It is therefore long overdue that it should join this prestigious list.

"Achieving World Heritage Status will help to harness support for the sustainable development of the natural resources in and around the Bale Mountains National Park and facilitate the development of conservation-compatible livelihoods and well-being among park adjacent communities," says Ambassador Nasise Challi Jira, Ethiopia's Minister of Tourism.

The Bale Mountains are the jewel in the crown of Ethiopia's protected areas and the potential for a sustainable tourism industry based on benefits-sharing with the communities is huge. Safeguarding the Bale Mountains National Park for nature-based tourism will also safeguard the water and climate regulation services Bale provides to downstream users and wider society.

WEB LINKS

Website of UNESCO World Heritage Convention with new inscribed properties

whc.unesco.org/en/newproperties

FZS Bale Mountains Conservation Project

fzs.org/en/projects/ethiopia/bale-mountains-national-park

Press Photos of Bale Mountains Conservation Project and the Park

photos.fzs.org/Press-Photos/AFRICA/Ethiopia/Bale-Mountains

BACKGROUND

Bale Mountains National Park

Bale Mountains National Park in Ethiopia's southeastern highlands, boasts a spectacularly diverse landscape mosaic ranging from 1,500 m to 4,377 m in altitude, with markedly distinct ecosystems and habitats and associated biodiversity. Bale Mountains National Park includes the largest area of Afro-alpine habitat above 3,000 m a.s.l. in Africa with numerous glacial lakes, wetlands, and moorlands. Volcanic ridges and peaks tower above the plateau, most prominently Tullu Dimtuu, the highest peak south of the Rift Valley, at 4,377 m a.s.l. Elsewhere in the park, extensive grasslands thrive next to various types of forests including tree heath, bamboo, and juniper forests. Significantly, at the foot of the southern escarpment lies the beautiful tropical moist Haremma Forest, Ethiopia's second largest natural forests which even includes patches of cloud forest and is protected in national law. Important parts of this forest are situated within the park with other parts in the surrounding functional buffer zone. The forest cover is almost continuous with a low level of fragmentation and degradation. Dense, green, misty jungle contains huge trees, moss draped

branches, and impenetrable undergrowth wrapped in a tangle of creepers among which wild coffee grows.

The mountain massif of the park is a crucial water tower and the origin of several important rivers regulating the supply of water that supports the livelihoods of 30 million people in two main river catchments in southeastern Ethiopia and northern Kenya as well as the only perennial rivers in Somalia. Safeguarding Bale Mountains National Park is crucially important to mitigate the effect of droughts in the region.

Biodiversity Gem and home to an extraordinary Fauna and Flora

The park and its surroundings are an irreplaceable biodiversity gem and home to an extraordinary fauna and flora with one of the highest incidences of terrestrial animal endemism in the world and in several cases the only remaining populations of globally threatened species across numerous taxonomic groups. The Afro-Alpine habitat has been recognized as globally significant in literally all major global conservation priority-setting exercises. The park is the heart of a Centre of Plant Diversity (CPD), an Important Bird (and Biodiversity) Area (IBA), a Key Biodiversity Area (KBA) and an integral and particularly valuable part of both the Eastern Afro-montane Biodiversity Hotspot, as well as being part of the Ethiopian Highlands, one of the WWF Global 200 Ecoregions.

For example, 79 mammal species have been recorded in the park; 23 of these are endemic, including 8 rodent species. The park has been recognized as an Alliance for Zero Extinction site because of five species that are only found in the Bale Mountains. The mountain nyala and Bale monkey are both endemic to this area, along with numerous endemic rodents and amphibians, as well as the most important remaining population of Ethiopian wolf. The Ethiopian wolf is Africa's rarest and the world's most endangered canid species. Lion and African Wild Dog are still occasionally reported.

The high bird species richness includes six of Ethiopia's 18 endemic species and 11 of the additional 14 species endemic to Ethiopia and Eritrea, are similarly impressive. The most recent data suggests a total of 363 bird species. The amazing tropical moist forests of the Bale Mountains serve as a genetic reservoir for wild forest coffee (*Coffea arabica*) and countless medicinal plant species.

The Bale Mountains National Park was designated in 1969 and legally recognized in 2014. The National Park covers some 215,000 ha and falls within Oromia National Regional State, as well as the buffer zone of some 235,121 ha, which includes all the 29 villages adjacent to the Bale Mountains National Park boundary.