



1 August 2013

To Whom It May Concern

Letter of Support

Being a specialist for West African amphibians, I have worked in all countries being part of the Upper Guinean Forests ecosystem, from Senegal to Togo. During my extensive field works over the last 12 years, I also worked in Ghana at several occasions and also visited the Atewa range. In addition to my herpetological expertise, which led me to be part of the IUCN Species Survival Commission and the Amphibian Specialist Group as well as to be the IUCN Red List Tier I heading the West Africa Working Group, I am working as a Conservation Scientist for the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds since 2010, being based in the Gola Rainforest National Park in Sierra Leone. This work increased my level of expertise in West African forest ecology and biodiversity, gaining knowledge also in all other relevant taxonomic groups and respective survey techniques. During the last couple of years I have also regularly served as a reviewer, e.g. for the EDGE Fellowship for ZSL or for the Conservation Leadership Programme of BirdLife International.

My PhD thesis focused on the reconstruction of West African rainforest refugia based on the phylogeography of forest dependent frog species. Forest refugia are forest areas that are usually characterized by high species diversity due to the fact that during more unfavorable climatic conditions, i.e. drier and cooler periods, these forests were stable while other forests disappeared or were very much reduced in size and fragmented. Stable forest areas thus served as refuge areas for forest dependent species. Due to more stable climatic conditions, mountainous forest areas and higher plateaus seemed to have played important roles as forest refugia in West Africa, e.g. the Fouta Djallon in Guinea, the Nimba Mountains in Guinea, Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire, and also the Atewa mountain range in southeastern Ghana.

Atewa shows an exceptionally high biodiversity, not only with regard to its amphibian community that includes the Critically Endangered frog *Conraua derooi*, and other threatened species such as *Hyperolius bobirensis* and *Kassina arboricola*. The only other known locations for *Conraua derooi* are in the very much disturbed forest habitats of the Togo-Volta Highlands. The population found in Atewa seems to be genetically distinct from the latter population, thus showing the outstanding importance of Atewa also from an evolutionary aspect.

Furthermore, Atewa's diverse species communities include the highest number of butterflies in Ghana (570 species) which is also the highest number for West Africa West of the Dahomey Gap. Equally, other groups such as dragonflies, katydids, birds, and plants were found to be of very high diversity, with many rare and threatened Upper Guinean endemics (e.g. six black star plant species, six bird species, two primates and 10 other large mammals are of conservation concern).

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Atewa's forests and their outstanding diversity are facing several urgent threats, especially commercial, open-cast bauxite mining, gold mining, hunting, and encroachment. Despite being a Forest Reserve, illegal activities frequently happen in Atewa. Some of these activities are not only having serious consequences for the health status of the forest and its biodiversity, but also for communities around Atewa whose survival depends on the clean forest streams and other services provided by the forest. However, some illegal activities are performed by the local communities themselves. Thus, extensive environmental education activities are needed, as well as an involvement of communities in conservation activities and co-management of Atewa. Without the support of local communities and a basic understanding of its value and provided ecosystem services, a sustainable protection of Atewa will be impossible. Furthermore, ecotourism, involving local communities, can become a significant source of income and also potential carbon projects will not work without the understanding and support from local communities.

The Ghana based NGO A Rocha Ghana (supported by A Rocha International) has proven to have suitable expertise and initiative to successfully implement conservation projects with the involvement of communities. The involvement of A Rocha Ghana in Atewa will certainly be beneficiary to this unique threshold of biodiversity in Ghana. A Rocha Ghana is not only supported by a worldwide network of experienced specialists, but also by numerous local institutions, such as the Kwameh Nkrumah University in Kumasi and the Forestry Commission. These strong links furthermore are contributing to sustainable and successful conservation activities.

I therefore strongly support A Rocha Ghana's involvement in the conservation of the Atewa mountain range – a beautiful and unique but highly threatened place whose outstanding biodiversity will be lost forever if illegal activities and commercial mining go ahead and local communities are not involved in conservation initiatives.

Please do not hesitate to contact me in case of any further questions.

Yours faithfully



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