

# Protecting Atewa Forest in Ghana

*Conservation of Ghana's upland treasure*

## A jewel amongst Ghana's rich forest heritage

Atewa Range Forest Reserve, in the eastern region of Ghana, is internationally recognized as one of the highest priority ecosystems in West Africa for its high species diversity, high levels of endemism and great hydrological importance. The forest was gazetted as a National Forest Reserve in 1926, then subsequently a Special Biological Protection Area in 1994, a Hill Sanctuary in 1995 and as one of Ghana's 30 Globally Significant Biodiversity Areas (GSBAs) in 1999.

The forest rises from 300 to 800metres. The highest parts are often shrouded in mist and clouds resulting in a distinct flora, trees richly festooned with mosses and lichens.

## A forest of great wealth

Atewa forest is a centre of significant plant diversity with at least 1100 plant species including 56 that area threatened with extinction and many that are endemic to the Upper Guinea ecoregion (humid forests west of Togo/Benin) with highly localised distributions. Butterfly diversity is also high – the highest of any site in West Africa – with over 700 species thought to occur including two that are known only from this forest (*Mylothris atewa* and *Anthene helpsi*). Amphibians are represented by 40 species, a third of which are threatened. The newly discovered Atewa Slippery Frog, *Conraua derooi*, has a stronghold in the forest. Thirteen threatened and near-threatened birds have been recorded including Brown-cheeked Hornbills and Blue-moustached Bee-eaters.

Atewa forest is a production forest and was heavily logged in the past but there has been no permitted felling for many years now. Unfortunately, illegal logging still occurs, posing a grave threat to the integrity of the forest. The government is also considering permits for bauxite mining by Chinese companies which would further threaten the area.

Significantly, the work undertaken by A Rocha under ACCAP has leveraged support, participation and funding from other agencies for the conservation of Atewa Forest in particular in working with IUCN Netherlands in a major Dutch-funded programme entitled Living Waters from the Mountain: protecting the Atewa Water Resources. Support from the Dutch Government has enabled A Rocha run a substantial public campaign for the protection of Atewa, urging the government to set the forest aside from bauxite mining plans and instead make it a National Park.