

WORLD HERITAGE NOMINATION – IUCN COMMENTS TO ICOMOS

KOUTAMMAKOU, LE PAYS DES BATAMMARIBA (BENIN)

The IUCN World Heritage Panel considered this cultural landscape nomination based on a desk review of the nomination dossier and a wide range of studies to provide these comments to ICOMOS on the natural values of this nominated property.

The boundaries of the nominated property extend the already inscribed World Heritage property in Togo, inscribed in 2004, and correspond to the boundaries of the territory of the Batammariba. The nominated property is located ten kilometres from the buffer zone of La Pendjari Hunting zone (IUCN category VI), which is part of the World Heritage Site W-Arly-Pendjari Complex. There does not appear to be any other protected area or conserved area (OECM - Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures) overlapping within the nominated property.

The nominated property is a living and evolving cultural landscape. According to the nomination dossier, the natural environment of Koutammakou is an example of the inter-relationship between humans and nature, and crucial for understanding the synergetic life that the Batammariba have designed around the Atacora massif. IUCN notes that nature and natural resources form a very important basis of the Batammariba livelihoods. Their livelihoods are based on hunting, fishing, basketry, harvesting and collecting honey, fruits and nuts, as well as herbs, leaves, barks, roots and seeds for traditional medicine. IUCN also notes that the area includes sacred forests; however, the dossier does not include the number, extent, and location of such forests.

According to the nomination dossier, the cultural landscape hosts many species of flora and fauna. These include carnivores such as Lion (*Panthera leo*) and Leopard (*Panthera pardus*), which have migrated to conservation areas such as the W-Arly-Pendjari Complex. Critically Endangered species include the Slender-snouted Crocodile (*Mecistops cataphractus*), various vultures (*Gyps africanus*; *Trigonoceps occipitalis*; *Necrosyrtes monachus*; *Gyps rueppelli*), African Forest Elephant (*Loxodonta cyclotis*) and the Nubian Flapshell Turtle (*Cyclanorbis elegans*). The Black Rhino (*Diceros bicornis*) is now believed to be extinct in the area. Other species are Endangered, such as Kosso (*Pterocarpus erinaceus*), Bateleur (*Terathopius ecaudatus*), Martial Eagle (*Polemaetus bellicosus*), Secretary Bird (*Sagittarius serpentarius*), Lappet-faced Vulture (*Torgos tracheliotos*) as well as the Egyptian Vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*). Major threats to the fauna include residential and commercial developments, agriculture and aquaculture, invasive species, and climate change, among others. Concerning the flora of the area, the nomination dossier notes deforestation as one of the main threats, which has been accentuated as a result of several threats principally the charcoal trade, and the sale of planks. The nomination dossier also notes the resurgence of transhumance activity, bringing thousands of oxen from the Sahel every year in search of pasture.

In terms of the protection and management of the nominated property, IUCN notes the Communal Development Plans (CDP), the 2021-2025 management plan as well as the 2012 national law for the sustainable management, legal recognition, and integration of sacred forests as protected areas that collectively support the conservation and management of the landscape and its natural values. The Batammariba are the owners of their land, which they manage traditionally through inter-clan land use and management ensuring the fair distribution of the harvested products, thereby avoiding conflicts and overuse.

IUCN recommends ICOMOS consider in its evaluation the possibility of establishing an integrated management structure covering both the cultural and natural values of the nominated property and ensuring the inclusion of suitably qualified staff dedicated to conserving the natural values. This would ensure attention is given to inventorying, monitoring and protecting important biodiversity values, notably to ensure adequate conservation measures for endangered species, whilst fostering appropriate fire regimes and fishing practices that maintain the nominated property's natural values.