

AFRICA

BALE MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK

ETHIOPIA



Bale Mountains National Park © IUCN / John Zulu

WORLD HERITAGE NOMINATION – IUCN TECHNICAL EVALUATION

BALE MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK (ETHIOPIA) – ID N° 111Rev

IUCN RECOMMENDATION TO WORLD HERITAGE COMMITTEE: To inscribe the nominated property under natural criteria (vii) and (x)

Key paragraphs of Operational Guidelines:

Paragraph 77: Nominated property meets World Heritage criteria.

Paragraph 78: Nominated property meets integrity requirements and protection and management requirements.

Background note: Bale Mountains National Park (BMNP) was nominated in 1979 and considered by the Bureau at its 2nd session in UNESCO/Paris, France (CC-79/CONF.005/6). The Bureau deferred its recommendation “in view of the lack of documentation and since IUCN considered it necessary to undertake a more thorough evaluation of the site”. The World Heritage Committee at its 4th session in Paris, France, 1980, adopted a decision to defer the nomination in line with the Bureau recommendation (CONF 016 V.14). The BMNP nomination dossier was subsequently not revised or resubmitted for consideration by the Committee. In 2008, the State Party of Ethiopia placed BMNP on the Tentative List. The present nomination was originally submitted in 2021, but as two additional nominations were also submitted at the same time, the State Party advised by letter of 16 August 2021 that the BMNP nomination shall be considered in 2022. IUCN consequently conducted its evaluation in the 2022/2023 cycle.

1. DOCUMENTATION

a) Date nomination received by IUCN: February 2022

b) Additional information officially requested from and provided by the States Parties: Following the session of the IUCN World Heritage Panel, a progress report was sent to the State Party on 25 January 2023. This letter advised on the status of the evaluation process and requested supplementary information regarding grazing and settlements in relation to the nominated property, and the envisaged relocation of people. The supplementary information was provided by the State Party on 27 February 2023.

c) Additional literature consulted: IUCN's evaluation consulted a wide array of relevant reference material for the biology, ecology, protection and management as well as the comparative values of the nominated property, including: Alem, W. (2007). Assessment of Land use Land cover Dynamics at Bale Mountains National Park Using GIS and Remote Sensing. MSc Thesis, Addis Ababa University; Amare, A. (2015). Wildlife Resources of Ethiopia: Opportunities, Challenges and Future Directions: From Ecotourism Perspective: A Review Paper. Natural Resources, 6, 405-422. Bale Mountain National Park (2018). Bale Eco-Regional Development Framework, SHARE- Bale Eco-Regional Project; Bale Mountain National Park (2022). Draft Fire Management Plan for the Bale Mountain National Park; Bertzky, B., Shi, Y., Hughes, A., Engels, B., Ali, M.K. and Badman, T. (2013). Terrestrial Biodiversity and the World Heritage List: Identifying broad gaps and potential candidate sites for inclusion in the natural World Heritage network. IUCN, Gland, Switzerland and UNESP-WCMC, Cambridge, UK; Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority (2021). Environmental and Social Management Framework; Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority (2022). Draft

Community Grievance Mechanism Guidance Notes; Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority (2022). Draft Law Enforcement Standards; Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority (2022). Draft Security Risk Analysis and Management guidance note; Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority (2022). Draft Vetting, Hiring Management of Ranger guidance notes; Howard, P. C. and Bertzky, B. (2020) Natural World Heritage in Africa: Progress and prospects. BIOPAMA Programme, IUCN Regional Office for Eastern and Southern Africa (ESARO), Nairobi, Kenya and IUCN Regional Office for West and Central Africa (PACO), Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso; Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority (2022) draft weapons, firearm, ammunition management guidance; Friis, I., Sebsebe, D., Breugel, P., (2010). Atlas of the Potential Vegetation of Ethiopia. The Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters;; Stephens, P.A., d'Sa, C.A., Sillero-Zubiri, C. and Leader-Williams, N. (2001). Impact of livestock and settlement on the large mammalian wildlife of Bale Mountains National Park, southern Ethiopia. Biological Conservation, 100, 3, 307–322; Vial F., Sillero-Zubiri, C., Marino, J., Haydon, D.T., Macdonald, D.W. (2011). An analysis of long-term trends in the abundance of domestic livestock and free-roaming dogs in the Bale Mountains National Park, Ethiopia; Williams, S. D., Vivero, J. L., Spawls, S., Shimelis, A. and Kelbessa, E. (2005). Ethiopian Highlands. In: Mittermeier, R. (ed). Hotspots revisited. Conservation International and Cemex; Yalden, D. and Largen, M. (1992). Endemic Mammals of Ethiopia. Mammal Review, 22, 115-150.

d) Consultations: 11 desk reviews received. The mission was able to meet with representatives from the Oromia Regional Government, Dinsho District, Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority, Dinsho community, Goba Noreda and Rira Kebeles

communities, Dalo Mana Nareda community, Zonal Administrative Staff, Ethiopian Heritage Authority, international experts and NGOs, and Federal Tourism Authority.

2. SUMMARY OF NATURAL VALUES

Bale Mountains National Park (BMNP) is nominated under criteria (vii) and (x). It is part of the Bale-Arsi Massif, covering an area of 215,000 ha, and a surrounding buffer zone of 235,121 ha. The boundary of the nominated property fully aligns with Bale Mountains National Park, designated in 1969 and formally gazetted as a national park in 2014. The buffer zone includes areas of native forest and encompasses 29 neighbouring 'kebeles' – Ethiopia's smallest administrative units. Five major rivers originate within BMNP, which is estimated to supply water and support the livelihoods of millions of people in Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia. The rivers also sustain many aquatic and riparian ecosystems. The nominated property includes the largest area of afro-alpine habitat above 3,000 m above sea level (a.s.l.) in Africa, and Tullu Dimtu, the second highest peak in Ethiopia at 4,377 m a.s.l. BMNP demonstrates a diverse range of largely intact ecosystems and habitats such as glacial lakes, wetlands, moorlands, grasslands and forests, including the Haremma Forest, which is the second largest moist tropical forest in Ethiopia. The nominated property features volcanic peaks and ridges, dramatic escarpments, deep gorges, and numerous waterfalls. It is this diverse landscape mosaic that is proposed under criterion (vii), recognising the stunning scenery of emblematic mountains and escarpments, contrasted with the flat Sanetti Plateau and combined with sweeping valleys and lush forests.

The nomination distinguishes three major ecological zones within the nominated property: the Gese Grasslands in the North; the afro-alpine Sanetti Plateau in the central part of the nominated property; and the escarpment housing the moist tropical 'Haremma' Forest in the South. The altitudinal gradient of almost 2,900 m within the nominated property and its associated climatic variations also give rise to the high habitat diversity. Consequently, the nominated property and its surrounding areas harbour large numbers of floral and faunal species including many threatened and endemic species across several taxa, proposed to be recognised under criterion (x). The nominated property also provides significant habitat for endemic species such as the Mountain Nyala (*Tragelaphus buxtoni*, EN), Bale Monkey (*Chlorocebus djamdjamensis*, VU), and the Menelik's Bushbuck (*Tragelaphus scriptus menelikii*), an endemic subspecies. The nominated property houses globally threatened species and conserves important large mammals, such as Lion (*Panthera leo*, VU) and the endangered African Wild Dog (*Lycaon pictus*, EN). The nominated property is also important for 363 recorded bird species, out of which 170 are migratory whilst six are endemic to Ethiopia. Thanks to the abundance of rodents, the nominated area is also important to migratory and resident raptors.

e) Field Visit: John Zulu, 16 to 25 October 2022

f) Date of IUCN approval of this report: April 2023

3. COMPARISONS WITH OTHER AREAS

The nomination dossier provides a comprehensive, complete and detailed comparison under criteria (vii) and (x). The comparative analysis strongly suggests global significance of the nominated property under both criteria.

Regarding criterion (vii), the nomination highlights the nominated property's rugged terrain and extensive altitudinal gradients. In contrast, the almost flat Sanetti Plateau adds to this landscape diversity. The nominated property is interspersed with completely distinct but linked vegetation types, providing for a great landscape diversity and scenic beauty. This landscape mosaic is shaped by the combination of previous glaciation, ancient lava outpourings, and the Great Rift Valley dissection. The relatively intact ecosystems and habitats, such as forests, grasslands, moorlands, wetlands and glacial lakes, including one of the largest afro-alpine and Afromontane forest habitats in the continent add to the spectacular scenery. Desk reviewers and the field evaluation mission unanimously supported the case for criterion (vii), noting the nominated property as area of unparalleled beauty.

Regarding criterion (x), the nomination highlights the nominated property as the site with one of the highest incidences of terrestrial animal endemism in the world, with numerous species that cannot be found elsewhere. The Sanetti Plateau within the nominated property contains the largest area of afro-alpine vegetation in the world, according to the nomination dossier. More than 80% of all species found in the afro-montane habitat are reported to be endemic. The property also stands out due to the presence of the Haremma Shrew (*Crocidura haremma*, CR); the Giant Mole Rat (*Tachyoryctes macrocephalus*, EN); Malcolm's Ethiopian Toad (*Altiphrynoides malcolmi*, EN); the Bale Mountains Tree Frog (*Balebreviceps hillmani*, CR) and the Bale Mountains Frog (*Ericabatrachus baleensis*, CR), which are only found in the Bale Mountains, leading to the recognition as an Alliance for Zero Extinction site. The property also hosts an estimated two-thirds of the global population of the endemic and endangered Mountain Nyala (*Tragelaphus buxtoni*, EN). Furthermore, the nominated property scores highly on the irreplaceability index for all species, but particularly high for threatened species. It overlaps with two terrestrial ecoregions: the Ethiopian montane moorlands (57.4%) and the Ethiopian montane forests (39.2%), the latter of which is not yet represented on the World Heritage List. The Ethiopian montane moorland is only represented on the World Heritage List by Simien National Park (Ethiopia) and inscribed under the biodiversity criteria.

IUCN notes that according to the Centre for Plant Diversity, the nominated property is home to 1,660 species of flowering plants, 177 of which are endemic to Ethiopia, and of which 31 are exclusively found in the Bale Mountains. Of the 79 mammalian species recorded in BMNP, 23 are endemic. These include the endangered Mountain Nyala (*Tragelaphus buxtoni*, EN), which occurs only in Ethiopia, the Bale Monkey (*Chlorocebus djamdjamensis*, VU), which is also restricted to the highlands of Ethiopia, and the endangered Ethiopian Wolf (*Canis simensis*, EN), which is restricted to seven isolated mountain enclaves in the highlands of Ethiopia. An endemic Shrew (*Crocidura afeworkbekelei*, DD) discovered as recently as 2017 in BMNP demonstrates that further discoveries may await. Bird species richness includes approximately 363 bird species, 18 of which are endemic to Ethiopia. The Park houses globally threatened and important large mammals, such as Lion (*Panthera leo*, VU) and the endangered African Wild Dog (*Lycaon pictus*, EN) with a population living in the moist tropical forest of Harena.

IUCN, in collaboration with UNEP-WCMC, has undertaken supplementary comparative analysis with regards to criteria (ix) and (x), based on spatial analyses and literature review. The UNEP-WCMC comparative analysis concluded that the nominated property appears to be of global significance, mainly with regard to criterion (x). The nominated property shows a very high level of biodiversity compared to other World Heritage properties and Tentative List sites found in the same Eastern Afromontane terrestrial biodiversity hotspot. Based on reported numbers, BMNP appears to have one of the highest numbers of plant species, high level of mammal diversity comparable to other existing sites in this biodiversity hotspots and one of the highest numbers of bird species. Endemism occurs at a particularly high rate, including some strict endemics to the Bale Mountains. Important mammal species include six primate species, as well as several carnivore species, and some endemic and/or globally threatened. In particular, it contains over half of the global population of the Ethiopian Wolf, one of the rarest and most endangered canids in the world, and of the Mountain Nyala, a rare antelope species. The site also hosts several endemic bird, amphibian, and reptile species. The nominated property overlaps with an Important Bird Area, a Key Biodiversity Area, and an Alliance for Zero Extinction site which are not currently represented on the World Heritage List. Most importantly, the nominated property is considered to be amongst the top 0.05% most irreplaceable protected area in the world for mammal, bird and amphibian conservation, especially for threatened species.

Furthermore, the nominated property has been subject to long-standing and extensive research and noted as a possible priority for new nominations to the World Heritage List, including in IUCN thematic studies for Africa. IUCN's 2013 global gap analysis noted the Bale Mountains as one of the 78 most irreplaceable protected areas for the conservation of the world's amphibian, bird and mammal species. A more recent

analysis of 2020 specifically explored potential natural World Heritage candidate sites in Africa and BMNP emerged as one of the 16 priority candidate sites under natural criteria.

In conclusion, IUCN considers that the nominated property demonstrates global significance under both criteria (vii) and (x).

4. INTEGRITY, PROTECTION AND MANAGEMENT

4.1. Protection

The nominated property is protected under Proclamation No. 541/2007, which mandates the Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority (EWCA) as the management authority to enforce laws concerning wildlife protection and human encroachment. Designated as a National Park in 1969, the nominated property is intended to conserve the exceptionally diverse and abundant wildlife, including rare and endemic species, such as the Mountain Nyala (*Tragelaphus buxtoni*) and the Ethiopian Wolf (*Canis simensis*). The nominated property is in line with IUCN Protected Area Category II. The National Park is also recognised for its important hydrological services for the region, especially in the context of climate change. The formal gazettelement of the National Park only took place in 2014, which defined the National Park's current configuration.

The moist tropical rainforest in the Bale region is not restricted to the nominated property but covers more than 560,000 ha in the wider Bale Mountains. Much of the wider forested areas is reported to be subject to Participatory Forest Management schemes, which permits human habitation but does not allow conversion of forests to agricultural land, though enforcement is currently faced with challenges. Some of the areas surrounding the nominated property are also classed as Controlled Hunting Areas (CHAs) contributing to local benefit sharing mechanisms to support regulated hunting. Two CHAs are within the buffer zone of the nominated property.

In 2020, a functional buffer zone, delineated by the administrative boundaries of the kebeles surrounding the Park, was agreed between EWCA, the Oromia Environment, Forest and Climate Change Authority (OERCCA), Oromia Forest and Wildlife Enterprise (OFWE) and the local authorities and communities. Community-based natural resource management is reported by the State Party to be taking place in the buffer zone.

IUCN considers that the protection status of the nominated property meets the requirements of the Operational Guidelines.

4.2 Boundaries

The boundaries of the nominated property are congruent with the Bale Mountains National Park (BMNP). The nominated property captures the key

values proposed under criteria (vii) and (x) and discussed in sections 2 and 3. At 215,000 ha, the nominated property provides a sufficiently large area to effectively conserve its biodiversity value. The boundaries also fully cover key habitats for species survival. For instance, BMNP includes the highland bamboo forests serving as the only home in the world for the Endangered and range-restricted Bale Monkey (*Chlorocebus djamdjamensis*), which has specialized habitat requirements. The boundaries of the nominated property also include all elements of the landscape mosaic put forward under criterion (vii), with the peak of Tullu Dimtu and the high-mountain plain of Sanetti at the centre of the nominated property. Therefore, the nominated property is considered to be of adequate size to protect its values and attributes.

The buffer zone completely surrounds the nominated property, ranging between approximately 5 to 20 km from the boundary of the nominated property. The buffer zone creates a protective mechanism for the BMNP from pressures arising from outside the Park, though these threats remain (see section 4.5). The boundaries of BMNP and the buffer zone are reported to have been designed following a series of consultative meetings and careful planning by different key stakeholders including the communities living in and around the immediate areas of BMNP. Whilst threats remain (see section 4.5), the boundaries of the nominated property and the buffer zone can be considered to be adequate in size and configuration and appear to have been designated following appropriate procedures.

IUCN considers that the boundaries of the nominated property and buffer zones meet the requirements of the Operational Guidelines.

4.3 Management

The nominated property is managed by the Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority (EWCA) using a Participatory Governance System, currently guided by the 2017-2027 General Management Plan (GMP). The GMP is split into five management programmes: park operations; tourism management; interim settlement and grazing management; outreach; and ecological management. A separate Tourism Development Plan aims to improve community benefits whilst also managing impacts from tourism. The nomination dossier states that the staff of BMNP have the necessary qualification, training and experience to carry out the wide range of tasks and duties, including wildlife management, park operations, law enforcement, research, education, monitoring and evaluation, protection and management.

However, capacity gaps remain and the field evaluation report highlights the need for more ranger posts to effectively manage the Park. Recent management effectiveness assessments of the National Park show average results. The nomination dossier states that efforts are underway to improve the critically important dialogue and cooperation with local communities, resource users and all levels of

government. Mechanisms are emerging to more effectively incorporate park protection into local development strategies with an emphasis on addressing unsustainable practices putting pressure on the nature conservation values and ecosystem services of the nominated property, while fully taking into account local needs. For example, participatory agreements with communities on no-grazing zones and transitional grazing areas are currently being established as a strategy to reduce the livestock grazing pressure in the Park.

While these gaps remain, the State Party has reported considerable progress in advancing the development and implementation of relevant strategies and plans, which will strengthen the protection of the nominated property to and address pressures related to increasing human settlement within and around the park, including expansion of livestock grazing and agriculture. In spite of the existing threats (see section 4.5), the nominated property has retained a high degree of endemism across various taxa, intact assemblage of species as well as continuing to demonstrate large areas of intact ecosystems and habitats.

IUCN considers that the management of the nominated property meets the requirements of the Operational Guidelines.

4.4 Community

There are three settlements located within the nominated property: Rira Keble village, and Cheffadhera and Geremba Goro sub-villages. The human population of these settlements as well as settlements outside of the nominated property is increasing. There is also an expansion of farming land through clearing of land within the nominated property. The nomination dossier referred to a plan to implement 'collaborative resettlement initiatives' that are guided by a task force comprising of all relevant actors including local communities, and through the implementation of a Livelihood Improvement Strategy. A relocation scheme is also under consideration. The overarching consideration for the relocation scheme is reported to be in view of safeguarding the significant ecosystem service provided by the nominated property to the people living in the downstream areas in Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia.

According to supplementary information, the Federal Government and the Oromia National Regional Government are committed to ensuring social safeguards and human rights are protected in line with international best practices and applicable standards that go beyond Ethiopian Law. The development of a Relocation Action Plan is stated to include community consultation from the outset, with particular attention paid to under-represented groups such as women and youth. It is reported that the plan is informed by socioeconomic assessments, identifying relocation options with the affected communities, and clear planning of actions and resourcing with relevant partners and actors. The State Party in its

supplementary information also noted that free, effective, meaningful, and informed participation of individuals of the affected communities will be followed as part of this long-term relocation plan which will extend beyond the 10-year timeframe of the current GMP.

IUCN sought additional desk reviews from experts on rights-based approach specifically to review the material on the relocation scheme, including the supplementary information. Based on the conclusions of the expert desk reviewers, the State Party's commitments meet applicable standards, noting also that the implementation of the scheme will take many years. In this context, IUCN recalls five essential conditions which must be met and verified to consider a relocation acceptable: 1) all forced relocation is excluded; 2) relocation should be properly justified; 3) all communities concerned should agree in full to the relocation and its conditions, through proper consultative and fair process; 4) the communities should be better off after the relocation; and 5) all the above should be demonstrable, transparent and accountable.

According to the nomination dossier reconciling local needs and conservation objectives is creating a major dilemma. It appears however that the establishment of a buffer zone in 2020 through agreements between the various stakeholders including communities, contributes to the mutual understanding to safeguard the nominated property through community-based natural resource management schemes, including Participatory Forest Management, Participatory Rangeland Management and Community Hunting Areas.

4.5 Threats

The nominated property is faced with several threats, which the nomination dossier presents as having a declining trend on the attributes and integrity of the site. The major threats are from unsustainable practices linked to overgrazing by livestock, expansion of agriculture associated with the expansion of human settlements, which are described in the nomination dossier and the GMP as having arisen during a management vacuum in the past.

Livestock grazing is both a traditional local livelihood and a growing threat to the ecosystem and biodiversity of the nominated property due to its expansion. The nomination dossier reports the National Park to have recorded in 2017, an estimated 725,000 livestock which graze on the afro-alpine habitats and 25,000 livestock in the Harennna Forest in the peak seasons. The GMP's Interim Settlement and Grazing Management (ISGM) Programme and the Grazing Pressure Reduction Strategy (GPRS) for the nominated property aim to address the threats through reducing livestock to sustainable levels and gradually expanding no-grazing zones through a participatory process of relevant communities, collaborative resettlement initiatives for inhabitants within the Park involving a Livelihood Improvement Strategy. The

supplementary information notes that to date, around a third of Community Based Organisations in the surrounding kebeles have entered into agreements with Bale Mountains National Park to implement the GPRS through a community-led approach.

The expansion of agriculture is accompanied by clearing of vegetation and afro-alpine forests, leading to habitat loss and habitat fragmentation. This is also in conjunction with unsustainable resource use, which is being addressed through the GMP. While ecosystem integrity through the above activities may be affecting the Ethiopian Wolf, the main factor affecting their population viability is reportedly from disease outbreak transmitted from domestic dogs. As unsustainable practices are being addressed, this threat may decline over time.

Other threats to the ecological integrity of the nominated property are reported in the nomination dossier to include the construction of roads, transmission lines and fires – either deliberate or wildfire –, which is preventing the natural regeneration of forests. Furthermore, most of the above factors will be further compounded by the effects of climate change, emphasizing the need to strengthen natural ecosystem resilience by reducing these other threats and efforts to address these multiple pressures will require long-term strategies, plans and actions beyond the lifetime of the current GMP.

The nominated property is therefore faced with a number of threats and integrity issues primarily driven through the factors explained above. The State Party has however demonstrated firm commitments and has made considerable progress in developing plans and strategies to address the pressures on the nominated property. In conclusion, while concerns remain, the nominated property does demonstrate a high level of integrity, and an intact assemblage of species. The State Party makes clear and firm commitments to continue addressing the threats whilst ensuring social safeguards and protection of human rights, in line with international best practices and applicable standards.

In summary, IUCN considers that the integrity requirements and protection and management requirements of the *Operational Guidelines* are met.

5. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

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6. APPLICATION OF CRITERIA

The **Bale Mountains National Park (Ethiopia)** has been nominated under natural criteria (vii) and (x).

Criterion (vii): Superlative natural phenomena or natural beauty or aesthetic importance

The nominated property hosts the largest contiguous area of afro-alpine habitat above 3,000 m a.s.l. in all of Africa, and includes mountain peaks up to 4,377 m a.s.l. that are shaped by volcanic activity, glaciation

and erosion. The National Park includes a mosaic of diverse ecosystems and habitats across its impressive altitudinal gradient including northern grasslands and woodlands, afro-montane ericaceous forest, afro-alpine moorland and grassland, Harennna Forest, in addition to numerous lakes, wetlands and watercourses. The combination of completely distinct but linked vegetation types with dramatic escarpments, deep gorges, and numerous waterfalls provide for a highly significant landscape diversity and scenic beauty. The harsh, high altitude environment is aesthetically remarkable: amongst scattered wetlands and rocky outcrops, Giant Lobelias (*Lobelia rynchopetalum*) break the skyline above the otherwise stunted plant. The stunning scenery of emblematic mountains is contrasted with the flat Sanetti Plateau, sweeping valleys and lush forests.

IUCN considers that the nominated property meets this criterion.

Criterion (x): Biodiversity and threatened species

The nominated property contains a very high level of species richness and endemism across numerous taxonomic groups. 1,660 species of flowering plants have been recorded, 177 of which are endemic to Ethiopia, and of which 31 are exclusively found in the Bale Mountains. 23 of the 79 recorded mammalian species are endemic. The nominated property is also important for 363 recorded bird species, out of which 170 are migratory whilst six are endemic to Ethiopia. Thanks to the abundance of rodents, the nominated area is also important to migratory and resident raptors. According to the nomination dossier, the Sanetti Plateau within the nominated property contains the largest area of afro-alpine vegetation in the world, and more than 80% of all species found in the afro-montane habitat are endemic. The property is also distinguished by the presence of the Harennna Shrew (*Crocidura harennna*); the Giant Mole Rat (*Tachyoryctes macrocephalus*); Malcolm's Ethiopian Toad (*Altiphrynoides malcolmi*); the Bale Mountains Tree Frog (*Balebreviceps hillmani*) and the Bale Mountains Frog (*Ericabatrachus baleensis*), which are only found in the Bale Mountains, and which have led to the recognition as an Alliance for Zero Extinction site. The property also hosts an estimated two-thirds of the global population of the endemic and endangered Mountain Nyala (*Tragelaphus buxtoni*).

Furthermore, the nominated property houses globally threatened species and conserves important large mammals, such as Lion (*Panthera leo*, VU) and the endangered African Wild Dog (*Lycaon pictus*, EN) as well as the endangered Mountain Nyala (*Tragelaphus buxtoni*, EN), which occurs only in Ethiopia, the Bale Monkey (*Chlorocebus djamdjamensis*, VU), which is also restricted to the highlands of Ethiopia, and the endangered Ethiopian Wolf (*Canis simensis*, EN), which is restricted to seven isolated mountain enclaves in the highlands of Ethiopia.

IUCN considers that the nominated property meets this criterion.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

IUCN recommends that the World Heritage Committee adopts the following draft decision:

The World Heritage Committee,

1. Having examined Documents WHC/23/45.COM/8B and WHC/23/45.COM/INF.8B2;
2. Inscribes **Bale Mountains National Park (Ethiopia)** on the World Heritage List under criteria (vii) and (x);
3. Adopts the following Statement of Outstanding Universal Value of the property:

Brief synthesis

Bale Mountains National Park (BMNP) boasts a spectacularly diverse landscape mosaic comprised of distinct ecosystems and habitats and associated biodiversity. The property covers an area of 215,000 ha in the heart of the Bale-Arsi Massif in the south-eastern Ethiopian Highlands in Oromia National Regional State. Building upon much earlier efforts, the National Park has been legally protected and demarcated since 2014. The property includes the Africa's largest area of afro-alpine habitat above 3,000 m above sea level (a.s.l.) with numerous glacial lakes, wetlands and moorlands. Volcanic ridges and peaks tower above the plateau, most prominently Tullu Dimtu, Ethiopia's second highest peak 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, the southern slopes of the Bale Mountains descend dramatically into the famous Harennna Forest, the second largest moist tropical forest in Ethiopia, including patches of cloud forest.

As the origin of several important rivers, the ecosystems and habitats within BMNP and its surroundings regulate the supply of water for millions of people in and beyond Ethiopia. The park and its surroundings are home to an extraordinary fauna and flora with an exceptional degree of endemism and in several cases the only remaining populations of globally threatened species across numerous taxonomic groups. For example, 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. It is important to understand, however, that at the time of inscription, the property's exceptional conservation values coincide with very high pressure on the ecosystems. Despite several threats and a continuing need to better reconcile local livelihoods with the conservation of biodiversity and ecosystem services, longstanding conservation efforts, partnerships and the natural protection granted by the rugged terrain have maintained a favourable conservation status and outlook by the standards of the afro-alpine and East Africa's moist tropical forests.

Criterion (vii)

The property protects a landscape mosaic of extraordinary beauty that is shaped by the combined

forces of ancient lava outpourings, glaciation and the dissection by the Great Rift Valley. It features volcanic peaks and ridges, dramatic escarpments, sweeping valleys, glacial lakes, lush forests, deep gorges and numerous waterfalls, creating an exceptional natural beauty. The altitudinal gradient of the park spans almost 2,900 metres from the highest peak standing at 4,377 m a.s.l. (Tullu Dimtu) down to approximately 1,500 m a.s.l. in the Hareenna Forest. The altitudinal gradient not only creates vibrant changes in topography, soil, vegetation and species assemblages but constantly changing, breath-taking vistas. Amongst scattered wetlands and rocky outcrops, the iconic Giant Lobelias break the skyline above the otherwise stunted afro-alpine vegetation of the Sanetti Plateau, a harsh and aesthetically stunning high altitude environment. Unusual striations, or boulder grooves, mark the shallow hillsides, a natural phenomenon, which remains an enigma to geologists and glaciologists. Dropping from the plateau, the Hareenna and the adjacent Mena Angetu form the second largest moist tropical forest in Ethiopia, transitioning in some areas into the country's only remaining patches of cloud forest. This, combined with the plateaus complete a unique, majestic landscape with an extraordinary natural aesthetic.

Criterion (x)

The property harbours diverse and unique biodiversity at ecosystem, species and genetic levels. The Sanetti Plateau and the slopes of the Bale Mountains National Park above 3,500 m a.s.l. encompass the largest intact and contiguous expanse of afro-alpine habitat in the world further adding to the importance of the property as a rare large-scale remnant of this habitat. Uniquely, the afro-alpine of the Bale Mountains continues to be intricately linked to intact and large-scale expanses of forest, wetland and grassland ecosystems and habitats. More than 80% of all species found in the afro-montane habitat are endemic.

Bale Mountains National Park is home to 1,660 documented species of flowering plants, 177 of which are endemic to Ethiopia and 31 exclusively to the Bale Mountains. The forests of the Bale Mountains serve as a genetic reservoir for Wild Forest Coffee and countless medicinal plant species. 79 mammal species have been recorded in the park; 23 of these are endemic, including eight rodent species. There are 363 documented bird species, including over 170 recorded migratory bird species, such as wintering and passing raptors, including the Greater Spotted Eagle. While the afro-alpine habitats are not conspicuously rich in terms of plant species, more than 80 % of all species found in this type of habitat are endemic, an extreme degree of endemism by any standard. The afro-alpine has been recognized as a globally significant place in literally all major global conservation priority-setting exercises.

At the time of inscription, the Hareenna Shrew, the Giant Mole Rat the Malcolm's Ethiopian Toad, the Bale Mountains Tree Frog and the Bale Mountains Frog can only be found in the Bale Mountains. The property hosts an estimated two-thirds of the global population of the endemic Mountain Nyala, the most important

population of the endemic Ethiopian Wolf and it is home to the Menelik's Bushbuck, an endemic subspecies. The Bale Monkey is endemic to the Ethiopia Highlands, east of the Rift Valley and is restricted to the bamboo belt of the Bale Mountains and the Sidamo Highlands.

Integrity

Covering 215,000 ha, the property serves as a meaningful and viable representation of afro-alpine and associated forests. The afro-alpine Sanetti Plateau is situated within the property in its entirety. At the foot of the southern escarpment lies the tropical moist Hareenna Forest, one of Ethiopia's largest natural forests, granted protection in the national law with about 100,000 ha within BMNP and the adjacent areas. The forest cover in the park is almost continuous with a low level of fragmentation and degradation. The dense, green, misty jungle contains huge trees, moss draped branches, and impenetrable undergrowth wrapped in a tangle of creepers among which wild coffee and medicinal plants grow. Unlike most of the wider ecoregion, the land and resources protected by the national park are still in a relatively good state of conservation due to the longstanding conservation efforts, the remote location and the rugged terrain.

Nevertheless, pressures on the property's nature conservation values at the time of inscription are related to unsustainable practices linked to increasing human settlement within and around the park, including expansion of livestock grazing and agriculture. Although localized degradation has occurred, the full array of ecosystem and habitat diversity, hosting complete native species assemblages, continues to exist. Other threats to the integrity of BMNP requiring long-term attention include the existing road crossing the park's vulnerable key habitats. The road generates some direct disturbance and facilitates access to otherwise remote areas.

The property, with its clear, legally defined boundary, is of sufficient size to protect a large, particularly valuable and still remarkably intact example of the linked ecosystems and habitat mosaic of this area. The property has a recognized buffer zone comprising all 29 neighbouring kebeles (the smallest administrative unit in Ethiopia) surrounding the legally gazetted and demarcated park boundary as a key investment in the future integrity of the property. The buffer zone itself harbours very important conservation values, as well as securing landscape connectivity beyond the property.

Protection and management requirements

Bale Mountains National Park is managed by the Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority (EWCA). EWCA is a self-governed body, created by Proclamation No. 575/2008 of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and regulated by National Law of Wildlife Development, Conservation and Utilization (Proclamation No. 541/2007). The entire surface area of the property of 215,000 ha enjoys a high level of legal protection in line with IUCN Protected Area Category II. The national park is surrounded by an

officially recognized buffer zone of 235,121 ha, ranging between approximately 5 to 20 km from the boundaries of the park. The Oromia National Regional State acting through the local woreda (district authorities) and kebele committees are critically important partners in the management of the property and its buffer zone. Regulation 338/2014 includes the establishment of a statutory Park Advisory Committee (PAC) with representation of the park adjacent woredas. In each woreda, a Park Community Dialogue Forum (PCDF) has been established with representation from each of the park adjacent kebele. The PAC reports to the Bale Regional-Federal Coordination Committee which provides the policy direction with regard to addressing threats to the park.

In the buffer zone, Oromia National Regional State, the local government bodies and Oromia Forest and Wildlife Enterprise (OFWE) support more integrated and landscape scale governance of the Bale eco-region through Participatory Forest Management (PFM) cooperatives, Community Conservancies (CC) and Controlled Hunting Areas (CHA) linking to the park through bodies such as the PCDF. The Governance of the buffer zone promotes sustainable natural resource use by the park adjacent communities without compromising conservation and the ecosystem services of the property.

Managed by EWCA, the park has its own park administration office with additional ranger outposts and mobile camps. Park staff includes around 80 rangers at the time of inscription. The property's strategic and operational management is guided by a 10-year General Management Plans (GMP), which includes management programmes on Park Operations; Tourism Management; Interim Settlement & Grazing Management; Outreach and Ecological Management. In addition, a Tourism Development Plan guides the management actions to improve community benefits from tourism whilst managing the impact of visitors on the property. Threats to the property are actively being addressed through the General Management Plan's Interim Settlement Grazing Management Programme, a Grazing Pressure Reduction Strategy and a linked Livelihood

Improvement Strategy, which include measures to reduce livestock to sustainable levels and gradually expand no-grazing zones through a participatory process with relevant communities. Strict adherence to a rights-based approach and to the principle of free, prior and informed consent of the affected communities are key requirements for the management of the property.

One challenge beyond the scope of EWCA and park management has been sporadic civil unrest but the situation is improving. Nonetheless, there is progress in terms of enhancing communication and collaboration with all stakeholders and rights-holders, a crucial long-term task. Efforts are underway to improve the critically important dialogue and cooperation with local communities, resource users and all levels of government. Mechanisms are emerging to more effectively incorporate park protection into local development strategies with an emphasis on addressing the issues of settlement and livestock grazing in the park, while fully taking into account local needs.

4. Requests the State Party to:

- a) continue to address the threats to the OUV of the property through the appropriate implementation of the General Management Plan, including regarding unsustainable practices, such as overgrazing by livestock,
- b) ensure that, in line with the State Party's continued commitments made in the nomination, any proposed relocation of people and communities from within the property follows a rights-based approach, ensuring the free, prior and informed consent of the affected communities and applying international best practices and applicable norms and standards;

5. Also requests the State Party to provide an update on the implementation of the above by 1 December 2024.

Map 1: Nominated property and buffer zone.