



Threat to Kenya's Coast Colobus



BY DAN STILES

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Dan Stiles first came to Kenya in 1971 to assist on the Koobi Fora paleoanthropology project at Lake Turkana. He has taught at the University of Nairobi from 1977–1981 then worked for UNEP and other UN agencies for several years. He has researched extensively in

Africa and Asia on forest and drylands natural resource utilisation. Since 1999, he has been carrying out ivory trade studies and currently is co-ordinating an IUCN elephant meat and ivory study in Central Africa.

The Angola black-and-white colobus monkey (*Colobus angolensis palliatus*) is a flagship species for Kenya's south coast. This striking creature once lived far to the north along the coast, but hunting for its colourful skin, used by traditional dancers, and for bushmeat has wiped it out north of Mombasa.

Before the last Ice Age colobus ranged from western Africa across to the east coast. Even today, after geographic separation caused by climate and vegetation changes, the same species lives in Angola and Kenya, though the

subspecies differs. The colobus living in Diani Beach, a fast growing resort town, are becoming seriously threatened by the clearance of forest for development. Hotels, cottage rentals, residences and shopping centres are replacing forest at a blistering pace. Colobus are not the only wildlife affected. Five other primate species and hundreds of other mammal, reptile, bird and invertebrate species, many of them found nowhere else, are losing their homes to human encroachment.

The Diani forest is an important remnant of what has been termed 'coral

rag' forest, as the plant life grows mainly in weathered fossil coral. This rare type of woodland, endemic to Kenya, has been identified by IUCN as an East African Biodiversity Hotspot and by Bird Life International as an Important Bird Area. In addition, it is part of the Eastern Arc and Coastal Forest system, which is one of 25 global biodiversity hotspots and one of 11 priority regions for international conservation attention.

In spite of its great rarity and immense biological value, very little is being done to protect the Diani and other south coast forests. Large-scale development in principle is controlled by Kenya's Environmental Management Co-ordination Act, in which an Environmental Impact Assessment should be undertaken. But developers flout this law, along with provisions of the Forests Act and the Antiques and Monuments Act, to clear forest land with impunity, obliterating rare endemic species and archaeological sites.

The Colobus Trust, a conservation NGO based in Diani, and the South Coast Residents Association have been trying to gain the co-operation of Kenya's National Environmental Management Authority, the Kenya Forestry Service and local administrators to enforce the laws. Unfortunately, with little success. The developers have money and political influence, which count more than the law in Kenya.

Ironically, those in the tourist industry tout Diani as 'an unspoilt tropical paradise... set in one of the last vestiges of virgin coastal rainforest.' Yet it is they who are paying for the bulldozers. ●

