



the Mpingo Conservation Project

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The Mpingo Conservation Project and Fauna & Flora International win Darwin Initiative Grant

Press Release 12/09/05

A partnership between the Mpingo Conservation Project in Tanzania, and Fauna & Flora International in the UK, has been awarded a grant from the British government via the Darwin Initiative. The grant will principally fund the Mpingo Conservation Project's innovative work in Kilwa District, southern Tanzania, developing community management and sustainable harvesting of mpingo (*Dalbergia melanoxylon*, East African Blackwood). Mpingo, the project's flagship species, is exported to make musical instruments including clarinets and oboes, and is the wood preferred by the region's renowned Makonde wood-carvers, as well as having a variety of domestic uses. It is one of the most expensive timbers in the world; billets of top quality heartwood may fetch up to \$18,000 per cubic metre.

The Mpingo Conservation Project is working along side the national programme of Participatory Forest Management (PFM) to develop community forest management, under which rural communities get to own and manage their local forests, benefiting from licence fees paid by loggers and other forest users. The Project provides general technical support to the District Forestry Office in implementing PFM activities in Kilwa District as well as a specific focus on management of mpingo and other high value timber stocks.

The grant of £144,268 will be spread over 3 years, with over 80% of the funds being spent in Tanzania. It will support the setting aside of community forest areas in at least 6 villages in Kilwa District in which sustainable harvesting regimes will be implemented. The grant will additionally support a programme of applied research addressing critical issues for mpingo conservation, and raise awareness about mpingo and its conservation locally, nationally and internationally. Project outputs will include some national guidelines for best management of mpingo and other high value timber species under PFM in Tanzania, and a monitoring programme to determine timber growth rates.

Additional technical expertise will come from Fauna & Flora International (FFI), based in Cambridge, UK. Founded in 1903, FFI is the world's oldest international conservation charity, with over 150 field-based projects in more than 40 countries. Conserving threatened species and ecosystems is FFI's fundamental mission, but the organisation believes this can only be done by taking account of the livelihoods of those rural people who depend on the species and ecosystems for their survival. FFI's Biodiversity and Human Needs programme seeks to ensure that each project addresses the issues of rural livelihoods, and that the conservation activities do not increase poverty. In many cases, FFI helps communities to develop alternative methods of generating income, providing an incentive to conserve biodiversity.

The Mpingo Conservation Project was founded in November 1995, and started off as a series of joint British-Tanzanian student expeditions which investigated the distribution, ecology and exploitation of mpingo in southern Tanzania, thereby filling a key information gap identified by FFI and the SoundWood Programme. In 2004 the Project won one of the top awards in the BP Conservation Awards Programme with a proposal to turn the previous field research into on-the-ground conservation action, and under which the current programme in Kilwa District was inaugurated.

The Mpingo Conservation Project is closely linked to FFI's SoundWood Programme, which works with educators, scientists, the music and timber industries and local communities to develop practical solutions for tree and forest habitat conservation, focusing on the highly valued – but often endangered – tree species used in the musical instrument manufacturing industry.

The Darwin Initiative seeks to help safeguard the world's biodiversity by drawing on UK expertise to work with local partners in countries that are rich in biodiversity but poor in financial resources. In

particular grants are made to projects which assist developing countries meet their obligations under the 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) through collaborative initiatives that will have lasting impact. The fund is supported by the UK Government's Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, (Defra).

For more information please see the respective web-sites of the Mpingo Conservation Project (www.mpingoconservation.org), Fauna & Flora International (www.fauna-flora.org), and the Darwin Initiative (www.darwin.gov.uk), or contact Steve Ball, Project Coordinator at the Mpingo Conservation Project (steve.ball@mpingoconservation.org) or Matt Walpole, Programme Coordinator: Biodiversity & Human Needs, FFI (matt.walpole@fauna-flora.org).