

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Critically Endangered primate discovered in bauxite-threatened Atewa Forest, Ghana

SCIENTISTS have discovered the globally threatened **White-naped Mangabey** (*Cercocebus lunulatus*) in Ghana's Atewa Forest. The mangabey – a rare terrestrial monkey - is classified as **Critically Endangered** on the IUCN Redlist of Threatened Species. The primate was known to live in only a handful of sites in western Ghana, eastern Cote d'Ivoire and southern Burkina Faso, but was recently discovered by A Rocha scientists in the Atewa Forest using camera traps.

"Unfortunately, this newly discovered population of this endangered monkey in Atewa is threatened by a bauxite mine being planned for this biologically important forest, as well as by snare traps and hunting for the bush-meat trade," Says Dr Jeremy Lindsay of A Rocha International who led the survey.

Andrea Dempsey of West African Primate Conservation Action which supports a captive breeding programme for White-naped Mangabeys in Accra and Kumasi zoos says: *"White-naped Mangabeys are so rare that I think these may be the first photographs of them in the wild in Ghana. Finding them in Atewa Forest gives hope to our efforts to save them. Protecting critical habitat such as Atewa Forest will be key for their long term survival."*

Atewa Forest harbours a high diversity of threatened and endemic species including birds, mammals, reptiles, butterflies and amphibians. In recent months, the high economic value of the ecosystem services that Atewa Forest provides to many Ghanaians was highlighted in a 2016 report to the Government of Ghana titled *The Economics of the Atewa Forest Range, Ghana*. Chief amongst these services is the clean water supply flowing from the Atewa hills on which over five million Ghanaians depend.

This makes it all the more concerning that the Government of Ghana with the Government of China wants to push ahead with plans to extract bauxite – the ore of aluminium – from the Atewa Hills at Kyebi.

The hill tops of Atewa will be completely removed during mining because the bauxite deposits are only found in the top few metres. This will destroy all vegetation and associated fauna because bauxite cannot be extracted using a low impact method. Re-establishment of the original flora and fauna on areas that have once been mined is virtually impossible especially with highly complex and biologically rich forests like Atewa.

“Extracting bauxite from Atewa Forest is incompatible with biodiversity conservation and the ecosystem services that the forest provides. It will spell the end of the unique and irreplaceable species that the forest contains,” says Jan Kamstra of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Netherlands.

A Rocha, IUCN Netherlands and many other stakeholders including international businesses such as Guinness Breweries have advocated for Atewa Forest reserve to be upgraded to a National Park. The creation of a new National Park at Atewa has substantial local support, including from the Okyenhene of the Akyem Abuakwa, who is the traditional ruler where the forest is located.

In a letter to the President of Ghana dated 15 December, Dr Russ Mittermeier, Chair of the IUCN Primate Specialist Group, writes: *“It is a matter of some urgency that the forest is properly protected both from hunting and from habitat change... I urge that Ghana’s commitments to the Convention on Biological Diversity and to the Sustainable Development Goals take precedence in this case and that Atewa Forest is removed from mining plans once and for all and made into a National Park.”*

Mr Seth Appiah-Kubi, Director of A Rocha Ghana said: *“The discovery of this mangabey confirms that there is more in Atewa Forest that we are yet to discover, but mined today it will be lost forever. The threat of destruction has hung over Atewa Forest for too many years now, so it is time for the Government of Ghana to stand by its commitments to a sustainable future for our people, to honour our international commitments, and to act to protect this forest in perpetuity as a National Park. It would be appalling to see a decision taken that would push so many species that much closer to extinction.”*

A Rocha International is mobilising a petition and letter writing campaign to the President of Ghana and is appealing for support. Further information is available at arocha.org/atewa.

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Notes for editors

1. Atewa Forest is part of the Upper Guinea Forests region stretching from Ghana west to Sierra Leone. Only c 5% of the forest in this region now remains. As a result many of the species that are restricted to this region have now become extremely rare and many are found in only a handful of locations. Ghana's forests make an important contribution to the conservation of this biome and these species. Atewa Forest is particularly distinct because of its high altitude. Atewa Forest was singled out by E.O. Wilson in his recent Pulitzer prize- winning book *Half Earth* as one of 38 places around the world of greatest priority to protect.
2. Atewa Forest is home to 18 threatened (Critically Endangered, Endangered and Vulnerable), 13 near-threatened and 3 data-deficient species (IUCN categories) comprising 9 mammals, 11 birds, 8 amphibians, 1 reptile, 2 insects and 3 plants. The Togo Slippery Frog *Conraua derooi* is a Critically Endangered amphibian known only from Atewa Forest and a handful of sites in eastern Ghana. The high altitude of Atewa Forest causes a distinctive type of vegetation to grow that is extremely rare in Ghana but very rich in species. Over 860 species of plant have been recorded in Atewa. The forest has over 570 species of butterflies recorded and another 138 expected to occur which would make it the richest forest for butterflies in West Africa.
3. A Rocha Ghana, IUCN Netherlands and partners published *The Economics of the Atewa Forest Range, Ghana* in 2016: <http://ghana.arocha.org/resources/download-atewa-teeb-report-policy-brief/>. A Rocha Ghana has been spearheading recent efforts to protect Atewa Forest supported by IUCN Netherlands, the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the A.G. Leventis Foundation, and in partnership with the Coalition of NGOs Against Mining Atewa and A Rocha International amongst many others.
4. Bauxite is the ore from which aluminium is produced. The ground is excavated and the bulk material processed in a first stage called the "Bayer process" to produce alumina. This also produces a waste termed "red mud" which is highly caustic and contains insoluble harmful substances such as silica, iron and titanium oxides. Red mud has to be stored in the landscape which poses a great risk in an environmentally sensitive area such as Atewa. The disaster at the Ajka Alumina Plant in Hungary was caused by red mud from bauxite processing. Aluminium itself is produced from alumina

in a second refinery by a process of electrolysis which requires enormous amounts of electricity. Refineries are often sited next to hydroelectric power stations because the very high electricity demands would otherwise require a large coal or oil fired power station.

5. The government of Ghana has referred, in two budget speeches (2 March 2017, section 881 and 15 November, section 812), to development of an integrated bauxite industry and associated infrastructure at Kyebi (Kibi), which is the main town adjacent to the Atewa Forest. The bauxite deposits at Atewa Forest have been known about for many decades and there have been successive intentions to develop an associated industry but on each occasion, the decision has been deferred, often because of concerns over the ecological sensitivity of the site and the inadequate supply of electricity in Ghana that would be required for the smelting. The recent report *The Economics of the Atewa Forest Range, Ghana* makes clear the cost that will be incurred if the forest is mined.

6. The intensive captive breeding program for White-naped Mangabey at Accra and Kumasi zoos is part of the European Endangered species Programme (EEP) and supported by many European Zoos including Heidelberg Zoo and the Zoological Society of London (ZSL) London Zoo.

7. A Rocha is a global family of Christian organisations that work with communities to undertake conservation work. Their work to protect the Atewa Forest is supported by the A.G. Leventis Foundation and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Netherlands.