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Kilombero sugar relinquishes land to create a forest reserve

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THE Kilombero Sugar Company has decided to relinquish part of its estate to allow it to become part of the globally unique Magombera forest ecosystem.



KILOMBERO SUGAR COMPANY

This is the result of government's declaration to establish the Magombera Nature Forest Reserve —the home to many endangered species, plants and animals that are not found anywhere else in the world.

Managing director of Kilombero, Guy Williams said in a statement released yesterday that since the existence of the forest was under threat from poachers and illegal tree cutters who used the wood to make charcoal, the company decided to play its part by agreeing to relinquish a section of its estate to allow it to become part of the forest ecosystem.

Williams noted that the formal establishment of the reserve has followed discussions over many years, culminating in the negotiations in 2016 between Kilombero, local communities, representatives of the Tanzania government and the TFCG.

He said it was decided that the land would be declared as a nature forest reserve (a protected

of this ecologically valuable land, said Williams.

Speaking earlier this month upon declaration of the Magombera forest as a nature forest reserve, TFCG Executive Director, Charles Meshack said, "This is a major achievement for forest conservation that will help both wildlife and people in a way that differs from any other reserve that I know of."

The 26,151-hectare reserve - originally known as the Magombera Forest - incorporates 1,226 hectares of land that formed part of Kilombero's Msolwa Estate, occupied by Kilombero and leased from the government for sugar cane agriculture. Recognising that local and international conservationists regarded the Magombera Forest as a threatened area of tropical lowland forest, high in biodiversity value with unique flora and fauna, Kilombero has never used that area of its land for large-scale agriculture.

The conservation value of the Magombera Forest first became known in the 1970s, but received international news attention through the scientific finding of a new chameleon species, the "Kinyongia Magombera", a discovery which through global news coverage, became a major incentive for increased donor support and interest in the protection of the forest, along with endangered populations of Udzungwa red colobus monkeys, verdcourt's polyalthia tree and the large-leaved memecylon tree, among others.

The continued existence of the forest was given impetus in 2007 by Flamingo Land, a UK theme park and conservation zoo, through the establishment of the Udzungwa Forest Project (UFP) in partnership with the University of York and the TFCG) - their collective goal was to protect the forest and to conduct research on the unique wildlife and people of the region.

The Magombera Forest is also a vitally important place for local communities who depend on the adjacent land for rice and sugar farming. Without the invaluable ecological services provided by the adjacent forest, this important agricultural region would be under serious threat from floods and soil erosion.

The Magombera Nature Forest Reserve is set to break boundaries in forest conservation in Tanzania, by ensuring that tourist entrance fees will go both to local communities and to the government's managing authority.