

Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands (RIS) – 2006-2008 version

1. Name and address of the compiler of this form:

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Designation date

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Site Reference Number

2. Date this sheet was completed/updated:

November 2007

3. Country:

Nigeria

4. Name of the Ramsar site:

Upper Orashi Forests

5. Designation of new Ramsar site or update of existing site:

This RIS is for (tick one box only):

a) Designation of a new Ramsar site

6. For RIS updates only, changes to the site since its designation or earlier update:

7. Map of site:

a) A map of the site, with clearly delineated boundaries, is included as:

i) a hard copy (required for inclusion of site in the Ramsar List): ;

ii) an electronic format (e.g. a JPEG or ArcView image) ;

b) Describe briefly the type of boundary delineation applied:

The site completely includes the forest reserve of Upper Orashi. The boundary is mainly based on rivers in the south part and on rivers and landsat in the north. On the west side, boundary crosses the villages given in the RIS (such as, Odon, Anyo, Emelego, Adoda, Illogovia, Ekunnga, Amenboko and Okolomaeh). In general, the site boundary follows the main rivers around the Orashi Forest Reserve protected area.

The Upper Orashi Forest Reserve is a gazetted Protected Area with fixed and well-demarcated boundary.

8. Geographical coordinates (latitude/longitude, in degrees and minutes):

4°53'N 6°30'E (Latitude 4,89 and Longitude 6,51 in decimal degrees)

9. General location:

Include in which part of the country and which large administrative region(s) the site lies and the location of the nearest large town.

The site is entirely in Rivers state and a large portion of it in Ahoada Local Government.

Upper Orashi Forest Reserve is located in central Niger Delta, west of the Nun Branch, and south of the section of Nigeria's 'East–West Road' linking Ahoada (5°05' N 6°39' E), Rivers State (population: 5,185,400) and Yenagoa, Bayelsa State (population: 1,703,358). It lies in that area bounded by the Bayelsa State boundary to the west and the Orashi River to the north and east. The northern and southern halves of the Forest Reserve are respectively in the Ahoada West and the Abua-Odual Local Government Areas of Rivers State. It is a Freshwater Swamp Forest.

Some of the villages in the area are Odon, Anyo, Emelego, Adoda, Illogovia, Ekunnga, Amenboko and Okolomaeh.

10. Elevation:

35 m a.s.l.

11. Area: (in hectares)

25164.86 hectares

12. General overview of the site:

Provide a short paragraph giving a summary description of the principal ecological characteristics and importance of the wetland.

Upper Orashi Forest Reserve is located in central Niger Delta, west of the Nun Branch, and south of the section of Nigeria's 'East–West Road' linking Ahoada (5°05' N 6°39' E; population:), Rivers State and Yenagoa, Bayelsa State. It lies in that area bounded by the Bayelsa State border to the west and the Orashi River to the north and east. The northern and southern halves of the Reserve are respectively in the Ahoada West and the Abua-Odual) Local Government Areas of Rivers State. It is within the Freshwater Swamp Forest.

Recent fluvial deposits of the Niger Delta on which peaty hydromorphic soils have developed, underlie the Upper Orashi Forest Reserve. The reserve is inundated from September to November, by floodwaters of the River Orashi, which drains the overflow from the Niger directly to the Delta in the area south of the Reserve (Sombreiro Estuary). The inundation of the Reserve by the floodwaters also results in siltation and soil fertility augmentation. The regular shift in river course in the delta has resulted in a mosaic of soil types. Old levees consist mostly of sand and loam while depressions and back-swamps consist mostly of heavy clay covered by peaty soil. Higher ground consists of silty loam and clay.

The tree species in the Reserve include *Anthostema aubreyanum*, *Macaranga sp.*, *Hexalobus crispiflorus*, *Lophira alata*, *Pycnanthus sp.*, *Ricinodendron heudelotti*, *Sacoglottis gabonensis*, *Uapaca ap.*, *Hallea ledermannii*, *Albizia adianthifolia*, *Irvingia sp.*, *Ficus vogeliana*, oil palm (*Elaeis guineensis*), and rattans (*Calamus deerratus*).

The Reserve is the remnant of a small centre of endemism, particularly primate endemism. Notable animals include the critically endangered Sclater's guenon (*Cercopithecus sclateri*), White-throated guenon (*Cercopithecus erythrogaster*), Delta

red colobus (*Procolobus badius epieni*), Ogilby's duiker (*Cephalophus ogilbyi*), *Crocodylus cataphractus* and Heslop's pygmy hippotamus (*Hexaprotodon liberiensis heslopi*). A number of other species have been recently discovered in the area that are new to Nigeria such as Black-fronted duiker (*Cephalophus nigrifrons*), pygmy scaly-tailed flying squirrel (*Idiurus sp.*) and small green squirrel (*Paraxerus poensis*). The Reserve is the roost of the Grey Parrot (*Psittacus erithacus*) and at the least, 90 other bird species including the rare Congo serpent eagle (*Dryotriorchis spectabilis*).

13. Ramsar Criteria:

Tick the box under each Criterion applied to the designation of the Ramsar site. See Annex II of the *Explanatory Notes and Guidelines* for the Criteria and guidelines for their application (adopted by Resolution VII.11). All Criteria which apply should be ticked.

1 • 2 • 3 • 4 • 5 • 6 • 7 • 8 • 9

14. Justification for the application of each Criterion listed in 13 above:

Criterion 1:

Its freshwater swamp is typical of the coastal freshwater swamp ecosystem of the Niger Delta. It is among the most important biodiversity hotspots in the great Niger Delta, and one of the few remaining deltaic swamp forest of the Niger Delta. It has been classified as an important Bird Area. Ikodi Parrot Roost, the remaining nestling ground for the Grey Parrot (*Psittacus erithacus*), is also located in Upper Orashi Forests.

The site is one of the few small remnant forests in the Freshwater Swamp Forest of southern Nigeria. The Reserve is the remnant of a small centre of endemism, particularly primate endemism.

Criterion 2:

The Reserve supports a viable population of the endangered and endemic Sclater's guenon (*Cercopithecus sclateri*), Endangered White-throated guenon (*Cercopithecus erythrogaster*), Delta red colobus (*Procolobus badius epieni*), endangered Heslop's pygmy hippotamus (*Hexaprotodon liberiensis heslopi*).

It is also a potential site for endemic and endangered Anambra Waxbill *Estrilda poliopareia*

Criterion 3:

It supports populations of plants and or animal species important for maintaining the biological diversity of coastal freshwater swamp ecosystem as the site is one of the few remaining deltaic swamp forest in the Niger Delta. Upper Orashi Forest Reserve supports 91 species of birds in 34 families, including nationally uncommon species such as *Pteronetta hartlaubi* (Hartlaub's duck) Congo Serpent Eagle (*Dryotriorchis spectabilis*), Guinea turaco (*Tauraco persa*), *Spizaetus africanus*, *Turtur brehmeri*, *Indicator conirostris*, *Dendropicos gabonensis*, *Apalis nigriceps*, *Anthreptes rectirostris* and *Nigrita fusconota*.

It is the remnant of a small centre of endemism, particularly primate endemism, and supports recently discovered species that are new to Nigeria such as Black-fronted

duiker (*Cephalophus nigrifrons*), Pygmy scaly-tailed flying squirrel (*Idiurus* sp.) and Small green squirrel (*Paraxerus poensis*).

Sixty five of the 187 bird species whose distribution is largely or wholly confined to the Guinea-Congo Forest biome and which occur in Nigeria have been recorded at this site. Examples include: *Halcyon badia*, *Tockus albosristatus*, *T. camurus*, *T. fasciatus*, *Ceratogymna fistulator*, *Ixonotus guttatus*, *Chlorocichla simplex*, etc. (Augustine U. Ezealor, 2001)

It is also home to the grey parrot (*Psittacus erithacus*) and the Anambra Waxbill *Estrilda poliopareia*.

15. Biogeography (required when Criteria 1 and/or 3 and /or certain applications of Criterion 2 are applied to the designation):

a) biogeographic region:
Freshwater Swamp Forest

b) biogeographic regionalisation scheme (include reference citation):
Keay, R.W.J. (1959a). An outline of Nigerian vegetation. Lagos: Government Printer
Keay, R.W.J. (1959b). Derived savanna: derived from what? *Bulletin de l'Ifan* 21: 427-438

16. Physical features of the site:

Recent fluvial deposits of the Niger Delta on which peaty hydromorphic soils have developed, underlie the Upper Orashi Reserve. The reserve is inundated from September to November, by floodwaters of the River Orashi, which drains the overflow from the Niger directly to the Delta in the area south of the Reserve. The inundation of the Reserve by the floodwaters also results in siltation and soil fertility augmentation. The regular shift in river course in the delta has resulted in a mosaic of soil types. Old levees consist mostly of sand and loam while depressions and back-swamps consist mostly of waterlogged heavy clay covered by peaty soil. Higher ground consists of silty loam and clay.

The climate is the Koppen's A_f (i.e. humid tropical rain forest). There is no dry season in this area. For any month to qualify as a dry season month, the criterion stipulates that monthly rainfall must be less than 60 mm. There is no month when rainfall in the area (as determined by rainfall at Brass, south of Orashi) is less than 60 mm. Mean annual rainfall is 3789 mm with a bimodal distribution. The peaks are in June (670 mm) and September (516 mm) separated by an August low of 318 mm. The sky is overcast skies almost all the time. Mean temperatures range from 24°C in August to 27°C in April.

17. Physical features of the catchment area:

The catchment area comprises the drainage area of the River Orashi upstream of the Reserve. River Orashi takes its source in the east bank floodplain of the Niger in the area southeast of Onitsha and conveys R. Niger's floodwaters directly to the Niger delta. A significant portion of this floodwater inundates the Reserve for approximately

three months of the year (September – November). The inundation of the Reserve by the floodwaters results in siltation and soil fertility augmentation. The regular shift in river course in the delta has resulted in a mosaic of soil types. Old levees consist mostly of sand and loam while depressions and back-swamps consist mostly of waterlogged heavy clay covered by peaty soil. Higher ground consists of silty loam and clay. Recent fluvial deposits of the Niger Delta on which peaty hydromorphic soils have developed, underlie the Upper Orashi Reserve.

The climate in the upper catchment is the Koppen's A_f (i.e. humid tropical rain forest) with a short dry season extending from December to February and a long rainy season during the remainder of the year. Mean annual rainfall is 2120 mm with a unimodal distribution with the peak in September. The period between July and August is characterized by overcast skies and milder temperatures (mean: 25°C). Mean temperatures range from 25°C to 28°C (April). The dry season is dominated by dusty, Harmattan winds.

18. Hydrological values:

The alluvium underlying the area is a good aquifer that is annually recharged by rainfall and floodwaters. The inundation of the Reserve by floodwaters and consequent siltation augments soil fertility.

The swamp forest is the spawning ground for a number of fin- and shell-fish species.

19. Wetland Types

a) presence:

Inland: L • M • N • O • P • Q • R • Sp • Ss • Tp Ts • U •
 Va •
 Vt • W • Xf • Xp • Y • Zg • Zk(b)

b) dominance:

Xf, Tp, Xp

20. General ecological features:

The Upper Orashi Forest Reserve supports the critically endangered Sclater's guenon (*Cercopithecus sclateri*), White-throated guenon (*Cercopithecus erythrogaster*), Penant's red colobus (*Procolobus badius epieni*), Ogilby's duiker (*Cephalophus ogilbyi*), *Crocodylus cataphractus* and Heslop's pygmy hippotamus (*Hexaprotodon liberiensis heslopi*). A number of other species have been recently discovered in the area that are new to Nigeria such as Black-fronted duiker (*Cephalophus nigrifrons*), pygmy scaly-tailed flying squirrel (*Idiurus sp.*) and small green squirrel (*Paraxerus poensis*). The Reserve is a remnant of a small centre of endemism.

The Reserve is the roost of the Grey Parrot (*Psittacus erithacus*) and also supports 90 other so far recorded species including *Pteronetta hartlaubi* (Hartlaub's duck) Congo Serpent Eagle (*Dryotriorchis spectabilis*), Guinea turaco (*Tauraco*

persa), and Blue-headed Wood dove (*Turtur brehmeri*) (see BirdLife IBA Factsheet NG015, 2007).

The tree species in the Reserve include *Macaranga sp.*, *Hexalobus crispiflorus*, *Lophira alata*, *Pycnanthus sp.*, *Ricinodendron heudelottii*, *Sacoglottis gabonensis*, *Uapaca ap.*, *Hallea ledermannii*, *Albizia adianthifolia*, *Irvingia sp.*, and *Ficus vogeliana*. The oil palm (*Elaeis guineensis*) is common, and the understory is dominated by rattans (*Calamus deerratus*). Nigeria's second most important timber species, abura (*Hallea ledermannii*), once common in the area, has been removed by extensive logging since the late 1950s.

21. Noteworthy flora:

The tree species in the Reserve include *Macaranga sp.*, *Hexalobus crispiflorus*, *Lophira alata*, *Pycnanthus sp.*, *Ricinodendron heudelottii*, *Sacoglottis gabonensis*, *Uapaca ap.*, *Hallea ledermannii*, *Albizia adianthifolia*, *Irvingia sp.*, and *Ficus vogeliana*, *Raphia hookeri*, oil palm (*Elaeis guineensis*) and rattans (*Calamus deerratus*).

22. Noteworthy fauna:

The Upper Orashi Forest Reserve supports the critically endangered Sclater's guenon (*Cercopithecus sclateri*), White-throated guenon (*Cercopithecus erythrogaster*), Penant's red colobus (*Procolobus badius epieni*), Ogilby's duiker (*Cephalophus ogilbyi*), *Crocodylus cataphractus* and Heslop's pygmy hippotamus (*Hexaprotodon liberiensis heslopi*). A number of other species have been recently discovered in the area that are new to Nigeria such as Black-fronted duiker (*Cephalophus nigrifrons*), pygmy scaly-tailed flying squirrel (*Idiurus sp.*) and small green squirrel (*Paraxerus poensis*). The Reserve is a remnant of a small centre of endemism.

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23. Social and cultural values:

a) Describe if the site has any general social and/or cultural values e.g., fisheries production, forestry, religious importance, archaeological sites, social relations with the wetland, etc. Distinguish between historical/archaeological/religious significance and current socio-economic values:

The site offers opportunities for tourism, continuing education and scientific research (though this has been hampered by the current ethnic militancy and insecurity in the area), swamp and pond fishing, and as spawning grounds for fish. It is a poachers delight, given the very poor policing of the Reserve.

b) Is the site considered of international importance for holding, in addition to relevant ecological values, examples of significant cultural values, whether material or non-material, linked to its origin, conservation and/or ecological functioning?

If Yes, tick the box and describe this importance under one or more of the following categories:

- i) sites which provide a model of wetland wise use, demonstrating the application of traditional knowledge and methods of management and use that maintain the ecological character of the wetland:
 - ii) sites which have exceptional cultural traditions or records of former civilizations that have influenced the ecological character of the wetland:
 - iii) sites where the ecological character of the wetland depends on the interaction with local communities or indigenous peoples:
 - iv) sites where relevant non-material values such as sacred sites are present and their existence is strongly linked with the maintenance of the ecological character of the wetland:
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24. Land tenure/ownership:

a) within the Ramsar site:

This is a gazetted Forest Reserve and is owned by the Rivers State Government. However, government being far away and the local people having full access to the resource, *de facto* ownership resides with the surrounding communities, who in view of the agitation for 'resource control' by the people of the Niger Delta, collect wild resources as deemed fit.

b) in the surrounding area:

Federal Government of Nigeria, Rivers State Government, Ahoada West Local Government, Abua/Odual Local Government Area, and customary and institutional ownership where property and structures precede the current debilitating land use laws.

25. Current land (including water) use:

a) within the Ramsar site:

Forest Reserve, tourism, education and scientific research, and poaching.

b) in the surroundings/catchment:

Farming (cassava, yams, legumes and vegetables), fishing, sand dredging, agro-forestry (oil palm, banana), collection of wild resources (e.g. *Irvingia* fruits are gathered seasonally), cottage industry, and tourism.

26. Factors (past, present or potential) adversely affecting the site's ecological character, including changes in land (including water) use and development projects:

a) within the Ramsar site:

Uncontrolled logging is the most significant threat to the site. Other threats include construction of access road for oil exploration, which opens up the area for secondary attack by poachers. Forest clearing for farming is also a threat.

b) in the surrounding area:

A large portion of the area was surveyed as part of the development of the Lowlands Oil Palm Plantation, Yenagoa (LOPPY). The project was abandoned during the

European Union withdrawal from Nigeria (mid-1990s), but may now be resuscitated given international efforts aimed at jump-starting social and economic development of the Niger Delta. This is expected to further threaten the protection status of the area and heighten adverse effects on biodiversity.

27. Conservation measures taken:

a) List national and/or international category and legal status of protected areas, including boundary relationships with the Ramsar site:

Upper Orashi River is a gazetted Forest Reserve of the Rivers State government, has a surface area of 9 696 ha and was designated in 30 December 1899. It has also been extensively surveyed.

b) If appropriate, list the IUCN (1994) protected areas category/ies which apply to the site (tick the box or boxes as appropriate):

Ia ; Ib ; II ; III ; IV ; V ; VI

c) Does an officially approved management plan exist; and is it being implemented?

Yes an official management plan exists. No, it is not being implemented

d) Describe any other current management practices:

None

28. Conservation measures proposed but not yet implemented:

Ikodi Parrot Roost is already being proposed for specified protection of the African Grey parrot. The whole Forest Reserve is recommended for a more articulate management plan and management structure. A community conservation project has also been recommended for Upper Orashi Forest Reserve.

29. Current scientific research and facilities:

Continuing education and scientific research has been hampered by the ethnic militancy and insecurity in the area. The swamps of Niger Delta are currently a no-go area for the prudent.

30. Current communications, education and public awareness (CEPA) activities related to or benefiting the site:

None.

31. Current recreation and tourism:

Very limited.

32. Jurisdiction:

Rivers State Government, Port Harcourt
Abua/Odual Local Government, Abua
Ahoada West Local Government, Ahoada

33. Management authority:

Rivers State Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Port Harcourt

34. Bibliographical references:

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- Oates, J.F.** (1996). African Primates status survey and Conservation Action Plan. IUCN/SSC Primate Specialist Group.
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