

To the Reader

The purpose of this volume is to draw attention to the special biological diversity found in the forests of the Bight of Biafra region in the Gulf of Guinea, West Africa, and to consider how well existing protected areas conserve this biodiversity. Despite the great biological richness of this region, and the high level of endemism it contains, it has been relatively neglected in international conservation planning. The region is located between two areas that have recently attracted more attention: the forests of Upper Guinea to the west, and those of the Congo Basin to the east and south. One factor contributing to the relative neglect of the Gulf of Guinea forests has been the absence of a unified account of their biodiversity, leading to a lack of appreciation of their importance. A major objective of this report is to remedy this lack. We map patterns of species richness and endemism in this region in relation to other parts of Africa, we collate information from published sources on the total number of species present in different taxonomic groups, and we plot the geographical distributions of many individual endemic species. Using a Geographic Information System (GIS), we relate species distributions to land elevation and to the location of protected areas; through this analysis we identify gaps both in knowledge of the geographical distribution of species, and in the extent to which protected areas conserve the region's special biodiversity. Combining information gathered from fieldwork with our GIS analysis, we also draw attention to the problems posed by a dense human population and a rampant trade in bushmeat. We hope that this publication will nurture a better appreciation of the Gulf of Guinea forest region as a biodiversity hotspot of global importance, and thus lead to further research and better conservation. We stress the need for new inventory surveys and more ecological monitoring, and we make recommendations for increasing the coverage of protected areas—especially in montane forests—and for improving the effectiveness of the protected areas that already exist.