

Mount Moco project update report: January 2013

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Summary: Very satisfactory progress was made with the reforestation project during the January 2013 field trip to Mount Moco. Eighty six new trees were planted onto the mountain, bringing the total of planted trees to 108, and covering an area of about 100 x 20 m. Two new nursery areas for growing tree saplings in bags were cleared inside a nearby forest patch and more than 300 saplings were planted into bags, to join the ninety trees already in bags and not yet planted back on the mountain. I estimate that 80 of these plants will be ready for planting by the next field visit.



Figure 1. The tree nursery employees and one additional assistant, standing proudly beside the nursery and in the area now planted with 108 trees.

I spent 20-24 January 2013 at Kanjonde, Mount Moco. This was a long overdue visit, with the last project visit in May 2012 when the new nursery was constructed. A short visit in early September 2012 revealed significant structural damage to the nursery built in May, as a result of a wind storm, but I did not have time to fully assess the damage and determine the way forward. My scheduled October 2012 trip during which I had planned to plant a significant number of trees back to the mountain and populate the new nursery with saplings had to be postponed until this visit due to visa issues restricting my travel.

Arriving at Mount Moco during this visit I started by making a more detailed assessment of the new nursery and quickly realised that it would take considerable amount of effort to rebuild it as almost all crossbeams were broken, one upright was uprooted and three uprights were bent. In order to ensure that the project continued to move forward, I devised an alternative plan in the interim and disassembled the damaged nursery at the end of the visit, storing all materials on site. What to do with the materials from this nursery will be discussed with Gerrit Laubscher and Michael Stureson from The Gulf Agency Company, the funders for the new nursery.

The second activity during my visit was to continue to reforest the mountain. This required the clearing of a large area of dense undergrowth adjacent to the area cleared previously and planted with 22 trees. This was done by the three nursery workers and an additional assistant, and the total area now planted with trees from the nursery is about 100 x 20 m (Fig. 1). This selected area was cleared and planted with 86 additional trees, bringing the total to trees planted to 108. I measured most of the trees (newly- and previously-planted) in order to assess growth. Measurements made were maximum stem diameter, height, maximum canopy diameter and canopy diameter perpendicular to maximum canopy diameter. All measured trees were labelled and numbered. Of the 22 trees planted previously, all but one look very healthy.

The final activity was to expand the current nursery, which involved the preparation of further sites where saplings could be grown, the collection of more saplings and the planting off these saplings into growing bags. Two areas of about 5 x 10 m were cleared inside a forest patch adjacent to the shade cloth nursery, to provide shady conditions under which to grow the new trees. We then made a 4-hour excursion to the top of the mountain to a known spring where many of the first saplings had been collected. We collected more than 300 saplings of various sizes and immediately returned to the nursery to plant them into 190 black nursery bags. Two to three smaller saplings were planted per bag, or a single larger sapling. These bags were then watered and placed in the shady areas prepared for them.

To summarise, the current situation in the nursery is as follows: the original shade-cloth nursery holds 90 trees in their own bags planted during previous visits, of which I expect 80 will be ready to plant during the next visit, plus 27 bags with about 30 saplings planted during this visit. The first forest-shaded nursery holds 120 bags with 250-300 saplings. And the second forest-shaded nursery holds 44 bags with about 50 trees. The current total number of trees in the nursery 420-470.

The coming months are expected to be wet, making January an ideal time to plant trees both into the nursery and back onto the mountain. This period has the added advantage that the soil is moist and soft, making it easy to dig holes for planting. I hope to make annual visits in January as the main planting season. Other field trips will concentrate on nursery maintenance and clearing areas for planting and in order to reduce fire risk.

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