

Preface

In 1995 the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), of the United Nations estimated that African forests accounted for some 15 percent of the world total and that half of the continent's potential forest cover had been converted to other forms of land use. Over the period 1980 to 1995, Africa experienced a greater percentage of forest loss than any other region in the world, and in the decade from 1980 some 40 million hectares of natural forest were cleared or degraded.

Against this background the protection and conservation of forest land has become a global issue and is beginning to attract the political will at national and international levels necessary to slow and reverse the trend of forest removal. However conservation is both an emotive and complex issue. The former approach of simply locking up vast tracts of land for 'preservation' is no longer an option. Tropical forests have long been a source of livelihood for millions of people and there is no reason why this should not continue. The question then becomes one of making informed decisions on the appropriate balance between utilisation and protection. This is the essence of conservation.

This book aims to bring the ideas and science that underlie nature conservation to the attention of those whose professional remit is to manage tropical forests for a range of users. The book grew from a series of notes prepared for a training course developed for the Forest Department of Uganda in the early 1990s and therefore many of the examples and all the illustrations are from Uganda. Other reports in this series also deal with Uganda including, *The Uganda Timber Users' Handbook. A Guide to Better Timber Use*, by P. W. Kityo and R. A. Plumptre, published in 1997.

It is hoped that this book will be a useful source of information for all those with a concern for the well being of forests and an interest in the African landscape and its wildlife. The intention is not to provide a training manual as such and neither is it envisaged that its use be restricted to Africa or to foresters alone. The chapters follow a natural progression but the structure of the book is such that it is possible for general readers to dip into the text at will. It is also hoped that those engaged in forestry and conservation education will adopt this book as a basis for developing their own courses especially in the training of guides, wardens and rangers to be employed in the growing eco-tourism market, and for those involved in the management of protected areas.

Finally the views contained in this book are the responsibility of the author alone and do not necessarily reflect the opinions or policy of the Commonwealth Secretariat or the Uganda Forest Department. However both the Commonwealth Secretariat and the author would be pleased to receive comments on content and style with a view to producing a second edition.