

Gabal Elba (Arabic: جَبَل عِلْبَة Gabal ‘Elba Egyptian Arabic pronunciation: [ˈɡæbæl ˈʕelbæ], ), or Elba Mountain, is a peak and, in general, includes the associated mountainous area in the Halaib Triangle of Northeast Africa. Despite being claimed by both Egypt and Sudan, the area is currently under Egyptian control.

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Geography[edit]

The higher peaks in the area are Gabal Elba itself (1,435 m (4,708 ft)), Gabal Shellal (1,409 m (4,623 ft)), Gabal Shendib (1,910 m (6,270 ft)) and Gabal Shendodai (1,526 m (5,007 ft)).[1]

Average annual rainfall in the region is less than 50 mm (2.0 in), but orographic precipitation in and around Gabal Elba itself amounts to as much as 400 mm (16 in). in the upper areas.[2]

This phenomenon owes to the vicinity of the Red Sea coast (some 15–30 km (9.3–18.6 mi) east of the mountains) and also to the fact that the coast, slightly curved to the east at this point, presents an unusually broad front to the sea across a 20–25 km (12–16 mi) strip of relatively flat land,[2] which facilitates interception of moisture-laden north-east sea winds. This phenomenon is registered at its best in the northeast of the region, where Gabal Elba is located, which explains the fact that Gabal Elba receives higher precipitation than other coastal mountains in the range, including higher ones. Aridity gradually increases to the southwest of the area.[1]

Ecology[edit]

Gabal Elba's summit is a "mist oasis" where much of the precipitation is contributed in the form of dew, mist and clouds, creating a unique ecosystem not found anywhere else in the country. Indeed, Gabal Elba is a "biodiversity hotspot",[3] with a biological diversity unparalleled in any terrestrial environment in Egypt proper. The relative abundance of moisture supports a diverse flora of some 458 plant species – almost 25% of plant species recorded for the entire country. Many Afrotropical elements have their northern limits at Gabal Elba,[2] and the dense cover of acacias and other scrubs represents the only natural woodland in Egypt. There is at least one endemic species of plant (*Biscutella elbensis*).

National park[edit]

The Gabal Elba National Park (22°54′N 35°20′E / 22.90°N 35.34°E),[4] declared by Egyptian Prime Minister Ahmed Nazif in 1986,[5] covers some 3,560,000 ha (8,800,000 acres),[1] including most of the disputed Halaib Triangle (except its westernmost corner), and an area of comparable size just north of it. It is also known to potentially hold the last population of the Nubian wild ass. However, the purity of these animals is questionable.

On December 16, 2014 an adult male leopard was killed by a group of shepherds after it attacked their camel in Wadi Shalal, within in the region of Halaib in the extreme southeast of Egypt.[6] This was the first sighting of a leopard in Egypt since the 1950s.