Table S1: The total number of recorded species per habitat (in brackets) and the number of shared species across habitats.

Habitats	**0-year-old**	**3-year-old**	**5-year-old**	**Restored combined**	**Reference**
0-year-old (36 spp.)	-	25 spp.	24 spp.	-	25 spp.
3-year-old (40 spp.)	25 spp.	-	28 spp.	-	30 spp.
5-year-old (44 spp.)	24 spp.	28 spp.	-	-	40 spp.
Restored combined (59 spp.)	-	-	-	-	49 spp.
Reference (70 spp.)	25 spp.	30 spp.	40 spp.	49 spp.	-

Table S2: Checklist of plant species found in the restored and reference habitats.

Species	Family	Upland area				Lowland area			
		0-year-old habitat	3-year-old habitat	5-year-old habitat	Reference habiat	0-year-old habitat	3-year-old habitat	5-year-old habitat	Reference habitat
Harpephyllum caffrum Bernh.	Anacardiaceae	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	-
Protorhus longifolia (Bernh.) Engl.	Anacardiaceae	-	X	X	X	-	-	-	X
Sclerocrya birrea (A.Rich.) Hochst. subsp. *caffra* (Sond.) Kokwaro	Anacardiaceae	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Searsia chirindensis (Baker f.) Moffett	Anacardiaceae	-	-	X	X	-	X	X	X
Searsia dentata (Thunb.) F.A.Barkley	Anacardiaceae	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Searsia lucida (L.) F.A.Barkley	Anacardiaceae	X	-	-	-	-	X	-	-
Searsia pentheri (Zahlbr.) Moffett	Anacardiaceae	-	-	X	-	-	-	-	X
Searsia rehmanniana (Engl.) Moffet	Anacardiaceae	X	-	-	X	-	X	X	-
Annona senegalensi Pers.	Annonaceae	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Rauvolfia caffra Sond.	Apocynaceae	X	X	-	X	-	-	-	X
Tabernaemontana ventricosa Hochst. ex A.DC.	Apocynaceae	X	X	-	X	-	-	-	X
Cussonia spicata Thunb.	Araliaceae	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Cussonia zuluensis Strey	Araliaceae	-	-	-	X	-	-	X	-
Phoenix reclinata Jacq.	Arecaceae	X	X	-	-	-	-	X	X
Aloe ferox Mill.	Asphodelaceae	-	-	X	-	-	-	X	-

Brachylaena discolor DC.	Asteraceae	X	X	X	-	-	X	-	-
Kigelia africana (Lam.) Benth.	Bignoniaceae	-	X	X	-	X	X	-	X
Tecomaria capensis (Thunb.) Lindl.	Bignoniaceae	-	-	X	-	X	X	-	X
Buddleja saligna Wild.	Buddlejaceae	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Commiphora woodii Engl.	Burseraceae	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Gymnosporia buxifolia (L.) Szyszyl.	Celastraceae	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Chaetacme aristata Planch.	Celtidaceae	-	-	-	X	-	-	-	X
Trema orientalis (L.) Blume	Celtidaceae	X	X	-	-	X	X	X	-
Combretum kraussii Hochst.	Combretaceae	-	-	-	X	-	-	-	X
Combretum molle R.Br. ex G.Don	Combretaceae	X	-	-	X	-	-	-	X
Diospyros lycioides Desf.	Ebenaceae	-	-	-	X	-	-	X	-
Diospyros whyteana (Hiern) F.White	Ebenaceae	-	-	-	X	-	X	X	-
Euclea natalensis A.DC. subsp. *natalensis*	Ebenaceae	-	-	-	X	-	X	-	X
Nectaropetalum zuluense (Schönland) Corbishley	Eryrthroxylaceae	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Antidesma venosum E.Mey. ex Tul.	Euphorbiaceae	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bridelia micrantha (Hochst.) Baill.	Euphorbiaceae	X	X	X	X	-	X	X	-
Croton sylvaticus Hochst.	Euphorbiaceae	X	-	-	-	X	-	-	-
Drypetes arguta (Müll.Arg.) Hutch.	Euphorbiaceae	-	-	-	X	-	-	-	-

Drypetes natalensis (Harv.) Hutch.	Euphorbiaceae	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	X
Euphorbia tirucalli L.	Euphorbiaceae	X	-	-	-	X	-	-	X
Macaranga capensis (Baill.) Benth. ex Sim	Euphorbiaceae	-	-	-	X	-	X	X	-
Sclerocroton integerrimus Hochst.	Euphorbiaceae	-	-	X	-	-	X	-	-
Shirakiopsis elliptica (Hochst.) Esser	Euphorbiaceae	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Spirostachys africana Sond.	Euphorbiaceae	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Acacia ataxacantha DC.	Fabaceae	-	-	-	X	-	-	-	X
Albizia adianthifolia (Schumach.) W.Wight	Fabaceae	X	-	X	X	-	-	X	-
Baphia racemosa (Hochst.) Baker	Fabaceae	-	-	X	X	-	-	X	-
Bauhinia tomentosa L.	Fabaceae	X	-	-	-	X	-	X	X
Dalbergia armata E.Mey.	Fabaceae	-	-	X	X	-	-	-	X
Dalbergia obovata E.Mey.	Fabaceae	X	X	X	X	X	-	-	X
Dichrostachys cinerea (L.) Wight & Arn.	Fabaceae	-	-	X	-	-	-	-	X
Erythrina caffra Thunb.	Fabaceae	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Erythrina lysistemon Hutch.	Fabaceae	X	X	X	-	-	-	-	-
Erythrina latissima E.Mey.	Fabaceae	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Millettia grandis (E.Mey.) Skeels	Fabaceae	X	X	X	X	-	X	X	-
Schotia brachypetala Sond.	Fabaceae	-	-	-	X	-	-	-	X
Senegalia caffra (Thunb.) Willd.	Fabaceae	-	X	X	X	X	X	X	-

Vachellia natalitia E. Mey.	Fabaceae	X	X	X	-	-	X	X	-
Vachellia nilotica (L.) Wild. ex Delile	Fabaceae	-	X	-	X	-	X	-	-
Vachellia sieberiana DC.	Fabaceae	-	X	-	X	-	-	-	X
Vachellia xanthophloea Benth. P.J.H. Hurter	Fabaceae	X	X	X	-	-	-	-	X
Xylotheca kraussiana Hochst.	Flacourtiaceae	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Heteropyxis natalensis Harv.	Heteropyxidaceae	X	-	X	X	-	-	X	-
Apodytes dimidiata E.Mey. ex Arn.	Icacinaceae	-	-	X	X	-	-	-	X
Cryptocarya latifolia Sond.	Lauraceae	-	-	-	X	-	-	X	X
Cryptocarya woodii Engl.	Lauraceae	-	-	-	X	X	X	X	X
Ekebergia capensis Sparrm.	Meliaceae	X	-	-	-	-	X	-	-
Ekebergia pterophylla (C.DC.) Hofmeyr	Meliaceae	X	-	X	-	X	X	X	-
Trichilia emetica Vahl	Meliaceae	X	X	-	-	X	X	X	X
Ficus natalensis Hochst.	Moraceae	-	X	-	-	-	X	X	
Ficus sur Forssk.	Moraceae	-	-	X	-	-	-	-	-
Syzygium cordatum Hochst. ex C.Krauss	Myrtaceae	X	X	X	X	-	-	X	-
Syzygium guineense (Willd.) DC.	Myrtaceae	-	-	X	X	-	X	-	X
Ochna arborea Burch. ex DC.	Ochnaceae	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Schrebera alata (Hochst.) Welw.	Oleaceae	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ziziphus mucronata Wild.	Rhamnaceae	-	-	-	X	X	X	X	X
Burchellia bubalina (L.f.) Sims	Rubiaceae	-	-	-	X	X	X	X	-

Canthium inerme (L.f.) Kuntze	Rubiaceae	-	-	-	X	-	-	X	X
Canthium spinosum (Klotzsch) Kuntze	Rubiaceae	-	-	-	X	X	-	-	-
Coddia rudis (E.Mey. ex Harv.) Verdc.	Rubiaceae	-	-	-	X	-	-	X	X
Kraussia floribunda Harv.	Rubiaceae	-	-	-	X	-	-	-	X
Psychotria capensis (Eckl.) Vatke subsp. *capensis*	Rubiaceae	-	-	-	X	-	-	-	X
Psydrax obovata(Eckl. & Zeyh.) Bridson	Rubiaceae	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Rothmania globosa Thunb.	Rubiaceae	-	-	-	X	-	-	X	-
Tricalaysia lanceolata (Sond.) Burtt Davy	Rubiaceae	-	-	-	X	-	X	X	X
Vangueria infausta Burch.	Rubiaceae	X	-	X	-	-	X	-	X
Clausena anisata (Wild.) Hook.f. ex Benth	Rutaceae	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Zanthoxylum capense (Thunb.) Harv.	Rutaceae	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Hippobromus pauciflorus (L.f.) Radlk.	Sapindaceae	-	-	-	X	-	-	-	X
Manikara discolor (Sond.) J.H.Hemsl.	Sapotaceae	-	-	-	X	-	-	-	-
Dombeya cymosa Harv.	Sterculaiaceae	-	-	-	X	-	-	X	X
Dombeya rotundifolia Hochst.	Sterculaiaceae	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Dombeya tiliacea (Endl.) Planch.	Sterculaiaceae	-	-	-	X	-	-	X	X
Strelitzia nicolai Regel & Körn.	Strelitziaceae	X	X	X	X	X	X	-	-

Grewia occidentalis L.	Tiliaceae	-	-	-	X	-	-	-	X
Clerodendrum glabrum E.Mey.	Verbenaceae	X			-	-	-	X	X

Table S3: Invasive alien plants recorded in the restoration (0, 3 and 5-year-old) and reference habitats.

Species	Family		Upland area				Lowland area			
		Invasive category	0-year-habitat	3-year-habitat	5-year-habitat	Reference habitat	0-year-habitat	3-year-habitat	5-year-habitat	Reference habitat
Chromolaena odorata (L.) R.M.King & H.Rob.	Asteraceae	1b	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Lantana camara L.	Verbenaceae	1b	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Melia azedarach L.	Meliaceae	1b, 3 in urban areas	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Rubus cuneifolius Pursh	Rosaceae	1b	-	-	X	-	-	-	-	-
Solanum mauritianum Scop.	Solanaceae	1b	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

For a details on the National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act (NEMBA) 2004 (Act no. 10 of 2004) invasive alien categories see South Africa (2016).

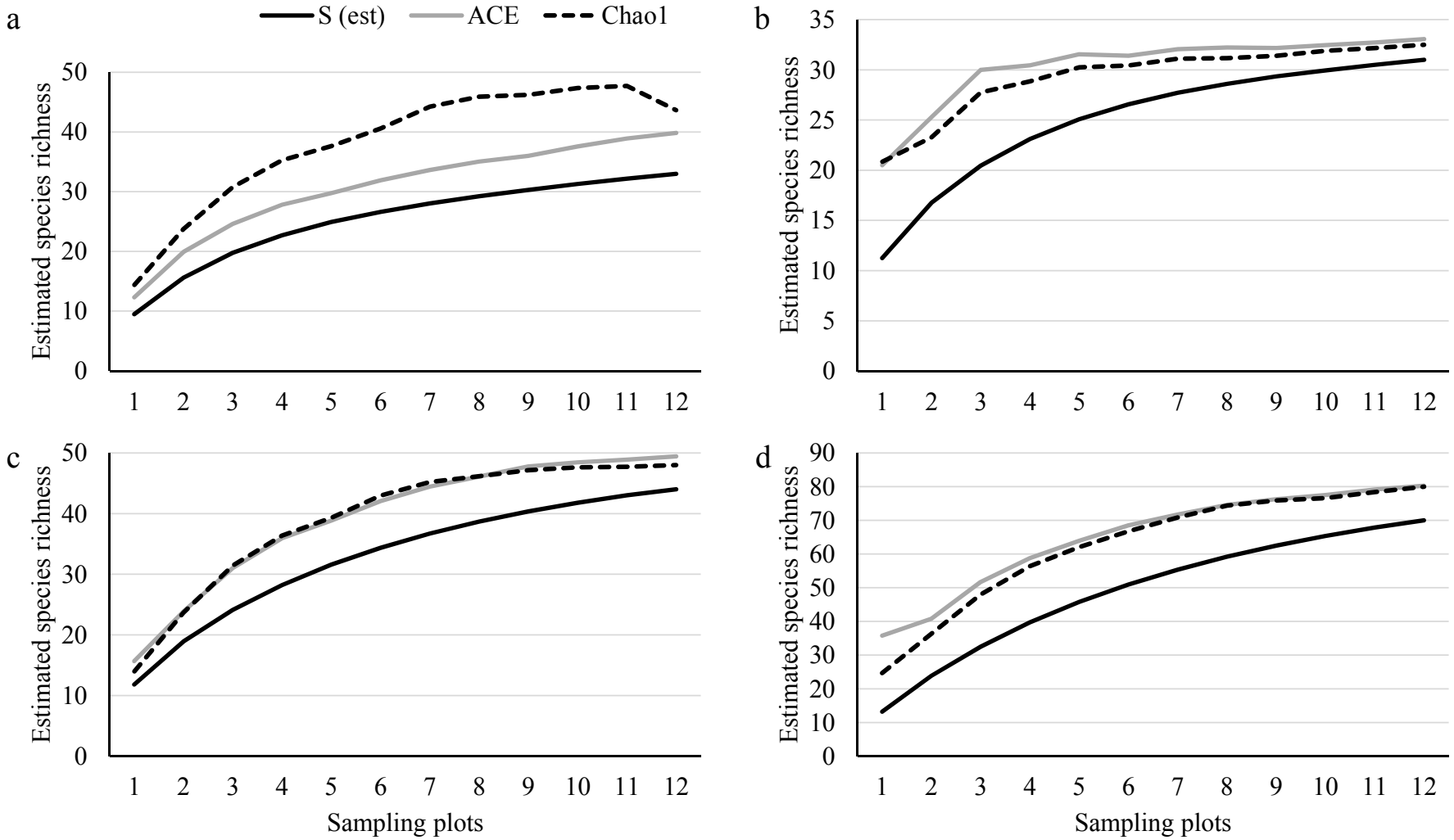

Figure S1: Species accumulation curves. Observed (S est – species estimation), abundance-based coverage estimator (ACE) and Chao1 species richness in the (a) 0-, (b) 3-, (c) 5-year-old and (d) reference habitats

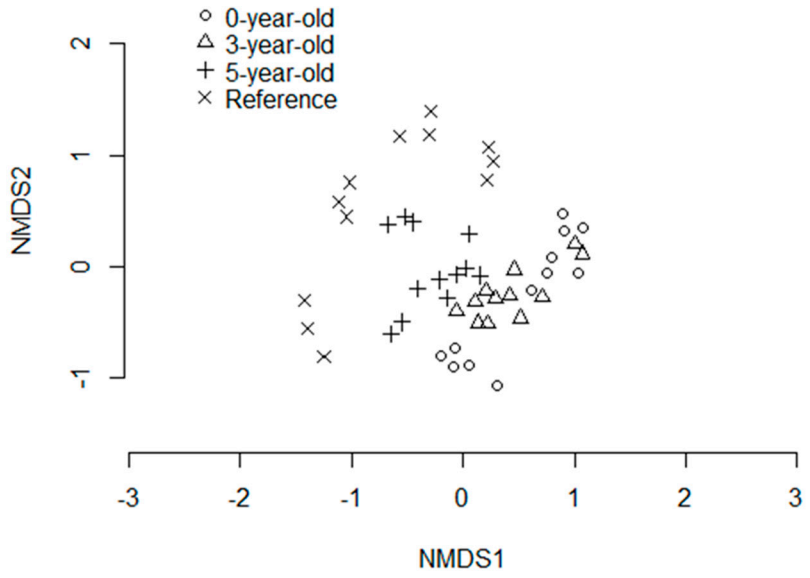

Figure S2: The NMDS ordination plot showing the overall tree species composition per habitat in both upland and lowlands section of the study site. The NMDS was based on the Bray-Curtis similarity index computed using species abundance data.

Figure S3: Dense thickets of *Chromolaena odorata* infestation (foreground) in the 5-year-old habitat (Picture taken by Mugwedi L.F., 2015).