

Conservation Society of Sierra Leone

Connecting people to nature



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From the Executive Director, CSSL



Sheku Kamara (PhD)
Executive Director, CSSL

Dear Readers,

As always, the Conservation Society of Sierra Leone continues to gracefully interact with its incredible membership, well-wishers and partners by providing regular updates on some of its key activities. In this edition of our quarterly newsletter, we take you through some of the important milestones of our work in the Gola Landscape, Kambui Hills Forest Reserve and Yawri Bay among other important sites across the country. It is our hope that this medium will provide the basic information to support the general reading public to act more smartly in interacting with our environment in order to save species, protect biodiversity and people.

We want to extend a special thank you to our donors, energetic team across the country, the Board of Trustees and partners for the invaluable support they continue to provide to CSSL. With all of this, the Society will continue to work with related ministries, departments and agencies to support the government's efforts in protecting the environment for a better Sierra Leone.

Happy reading!

We for Nature, Nature for us.

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CEPF Supports the Conservation of the Yawri Bay Ecosystem.



Kai Konkay Island, situated close to Tissana community in Western Area Rural District.

Yawri Bay's ecosystem in Sierra Leone has been degraded and is susceptible to further decline. The major threats are indiscriminate cutting of mangrove trees for fish smoking and other domestic uses, unsustainable harvest of fish and crustaceans, loss of coastal shorelines and disturbance of wildlife and habitats by people. These threats are driven by gaps in our knowledge of the bay, insufficient legal protection, non-compliance with existing environmental laws, and the fact that at present local residents do not benefit from protecting the bay.

It is against this backdrop that the Conservation Society of Sierra Leone (CSSL), with funding support from the Critical

Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) is currently implementing a project dubbed, *"Conserving the Yawri Bay Ecosystem in the Coastal Corridor of Sierra Leone"*. The CEPF primarily focuses on empowering civil society organizations to protect biodiversity hotspots around the world.

The project, which commenced in April 2021, has several intervention components including community engagement, assessments (socio-economic, geological, biodiversity and existing legal framework), sensitization and advocacy. The project team at CSSL is currently monitoring the various assessments being undertaken by

professional consultants to ensure the achievement of the desired results. Also, engagements so far conducted in the Yawri Bay-edge communities and relevant government institutions have shined a light on the supportive attitude of the various key stakeholders towards the success of the project. In one of such engagements at the Settus Villa in Bureh Town, the Ribbi Chiefdom Speaker, Mr. Mohamed Kamara who spoke on behalf of his people said, *"... our resolve to support CSSL in this project is strong because we know that if we conserve Yawri Bay, it will provide invaluable benefits to all"*.

Reports received from the consultants

CEPF Supports the Conservation of the Yawri Bay Ecosystem. contd.

on the outcomes of the various assessments will determine the appropriate strategies to be developed by CSSL, communities and strategic partners to ensure sustainable conservation of the Yawri Bay ecosystem corridor in Sierra Leone.

Text: Andrea/CSSL & Abdul/CSSL

Photos: Andrea/CSSL



Sand mining, one of the illegal activities destroying the beauty of Yawri Bay

PAPFor Project Strengthens Staff Capacity in GIS Operations



Miatta B. Luama, CDRO, Barri chiefdom in Pujehun district.

With funding support from the European Union, the Conservation Society of Sierra Leone (CSSL) through the PAPFor project recently completed a four-day GIS training for staff of CSSL and Gola Rainforest Company (GRC) at the Hawaz

Inn Multi-purpose Hall in Kenema, to introduce participants to the use of the GPS equipment, a vital tool for conducting surveys and mapping of forests.

One of the participants, Miatta Blessing Luama, GRC's Community Development Relations Officer (CDRO) attached to Barri chiefdom in Pujehun district, expressed profound gratitude to CSSL and the donors for exposing them (field staff) to such a useful training. She stated that she has never had this kind of opportunity before. She asserted thus: "... I initially thought GIS skills were only meant for boundary officers and staff of the Park Operations. But the PAPFor project has done a marvelous job to introduce us to the device for the first

excited and thankful to the project for such an undertaking".

Madam Luama furthered that, they are usually faced with boundary problems between communities in their respective operational chiefdoms, but always referred such issues to the headquarters in Kenema due to lack of skills to handle those matters. She expressed her delight in her ability to use the GPS and to analyze data collected using a computer. She encouraged other participants to beat the spirit of shyness and strive to continue practicing the device as that is the only way to be conversant with its

Text & photo: Alice/CSSL

CSSL Works with Partners to Demarcate Permanent Boundaries for Kambui Hills Forest Reserve.



The photo above shows south of Kambui Hills Forest Reserve (Kambwabu community)

The ongoing increased threat to biodiversity presence at Kambui Hills Forest Reserve (KHFR) is regarded as an issue of grave concern by both national and regional institutions and individuals. There is evidence of high encroachment and degradation in the Reserve stemming from activities such as massive logging, charcoal production, settlement expansion, mining, poaching, etc. Sustained collaborative efforts are required from all key actors, including state and non-state actors to stop the current spate of lawlessness if it is to be protected and conserved for future generations.

In order to support government and communities to reverse this trend, the Conservation Society of Sierra Leone (CSSL) received funding support from the European Union through the International Union of Conservation of Nature (IUCN) to implement the "Biodiversity and Protection Areas Management (BIOPAMA)" project

in the north and south of the KHFR. One of the project's deliverables is boundary demarcation, ensuring that visible structures in the form of concrete pillars are installed in identified locations around the Reserve. To commence work on this, the BIOPAMA project team held a consultative meeting with key stakeholders to start discussions around the exercise. Paramount Chiefs, Section Chiefs, representatives from the National Protected Area Authority (NPAA), Forestry Division of the Ministry of Agriculture, and other elders from chiefdoms within the Kambui Hills Landscape attended the meeting, organised on 2nd June 2021.

The NPAA's Manager, Mr. Ansumana Barber Turay who chaired the meeting started off by highlighting how critical it is to demarcate boundaries for the Reserve. He said other protected areas across the country continue to face problems with encroachment and related illegal activities, but emphasised that the KHFR is facing more threats than the others. Barber therefore pleaded with the stakeholders to provide the required support to CSSL and partners in order to ensure a successful boundary demarcation exercise.

The District Forestry Officer (DFO), Mr. Julius Sama also expressed grave concerns over the current status of the Reserve, and emphasised on the ramifications that will follow if the country loses the Reserve. He described the Forestry Division's critical role of monitoring all activities in and around the Reserve and other sites across the country. Mr. Sama also registered his disappointment about the location of government offices and private

CSSL Works with Partners to Demarcate Permanent Boundaries for Kambui Hills Forest Reserve. Contd.

buildings in the forest reserve area. He concluded by asserting that a clearly defined and agreeable boundary is important in order to avoid impunity - defaulters will be dealt with in accordance with stipulated laws. Various speakers, including the Paramount Chief of Koya chiefdom, PC Alamin Kanneh, expressed similar sentiments. They further raised concern regarding payment of royalties to the respective chiefdoms that host the Reserve and the functionality of the governance structure of KHFR.

Using the Google Earth Pro software, the NPAA's GIS Specialist, Isaa Gassama projected satellite images of the Reserve for all to see the original boundary points and current level of encroachment and degradation. This presentation helped stakeholders to vividly see the high level of destruction people have perpetrated on the KHFR and thus, the relevance of the proposed boundary demarcation exercise. They therefore strongly expressed commitment to support the entire activity. They further requested CSSL and partners (NPAA and Forestry Division) to notify them before the commencement of the demarcation exercise for communities to be fully informed and for them to provide the much-needed local support .

Text: Abdul K. Dumbuya/CSSL
Photos: Samuel S. Dimoh/CSSL



KHFR key stakeholders in a group photo after the consultative engagement meeting at Agriculture Compound (Chinese Farm) in Kenema.

A New Era for Bird Conservation in Sierra Leone.



In February 2021, the Conservation Society of Sierra Leone received support from the African Bird Club to establish bird clubs in Sierra Leone. This initiative gears towards promoting awareness on the importance of birds to the environment and stimulating local interest in their conservation across the country.

Sierra Leone is a biologically diverse country situated in the Upper Guinea Forest (UGF) – an Endemic Bird Area (EBA). Presently, the Upper Guinea forest is a highly fragmented system and remains one of the most severely threatened forest blocks in the world. The UGF is a high global priority for

biodiversity conservation and Sierra Leone is a key component, as it is one of the four countries over which it spreads.

Currently, there are very few bird watchers nationally which speaks volumes of the existing inadequacy of information on the actual abundance and diversity of birds in the country. According to BirdLife International (2020), 581 bird species are currently listed for Sierra Leone of which 16 are globally threatened. Of the 16 Globally Threatened Birds, 2 are Critically Endangered (the Hooded Vulture, *Necrosyrtes Monachus* and the

A New Era for Bird Conservation in Sierra Leone. Contd.



White-backed Vulture *Gyps Africanus*), three are endangered, and 11 are classified as vulnerable. An additional 21 species are near threatened. The figures above highlight the bird conservation importance of Sierra Leone and the pressing need to update the data which would render them valuable conservation tools.

In a study done in 2001 by Okoni-Williams et al, 10 Important Bird Areas (IBA's) were recorded in Sierra Leone. Three of these - Western Area Peninsular National Park (WAPNP), Yawri Bay and Lake Sonfon - have been identified as IBAs in danger, resulting from strong anthropogenic pressures and natural resource exploitation. These bird clubs are purposefully established in these sites with the aim of addressing the current inadequacy of bird data, highlighting the value of the sites as natural high biodiversity sites and complementing ongoing conservation efforts. Kambui Hills – home of a few confirmed *Picathartes* colonies, is another forest reserve being severely degraded and also included in this project.

Clubs have so far been established in Kabala, Kenema, Freetown and most recently, Yawri Bay, covering parts of the north, south and west of the country. Each Bird Club currently has at least six members from the locality who were trained in bird identification techniques for regular bird monitoring and recording. At least one participant was also trained in the use of the Birdlasser App which will contribute towards creating a digital bird atlas for Sierra Leone – this is part of a bigger project for Africa. After the training, bird watching equipment (binoculars, telescopes and copies of field guide entitled, *Birds of Africa*) were handed over

to all the groups to support them in their work.

Through Bird Clubs, more people will see the possible benefits that could be derived from birdwatching, including conservation (through monitoring), potential economic gain (ecotourism), citizen science and recreational value/enjoyment. This should lead to more people becoming involved and supporting a national bird conservation movement.



One of the facilitators and project staff, Andrea Haffner (Mrs.), taking participants through the use of birding equipment during the training.

*Text: Andrea/CSSL
Photos: Dauda/CSSL & Paul/Intern @ CSSL*



One of the Bird Clubs being led on a birding excursion after the training.

CSSL Supports Government to Strengthen Security of Kambui Hills Forest Reserve.



The new KHFR Eco-guards and Rangers during the engagement at the meeting in Kenema.

The management of Kambui Hills Forest Reserves (KHFR) has been highly neglected over the past few decades, especially since the outbreak of the country's civil war in 1991. Large areas within the Reserves have been encroached and degraded, with the degraded land covering approximately 2000ha in the northern section and a similar sized area in the south. Illegal chainsaw logging and charcoal harvesting occurs in community lands and in the Reserves. The government, through the National Protected Area Authority (NPAA) and Forestry Division of the Ministry of Agriculture, has been facing serious manpower and logistical challenges to protect the Reserve from the aforementioned illegal activities.

In order to support the government and communities to institute the required security within and outside of the Reserve, the Conservation Society of Sierra Leone (CSSL), through the European Union funded PAPFor project, has officially presented ten (10) Eco-guards to NPAA and other key stakeholders on 17th June 2021, at the YAD Hall, Maxwell Khobe Street in Kenema. The Eco-guards were recruited by CSSL from the Kambui Hills forest-edge communities on the recommendations of the local leaders, in order to augment the few existing Rangers deployed in the Reserve by NPAA. They were trained by the Regional NPAA officials in routine patrols and bio-monitoring of protected areas. To further support their work, CSSL provided them with some logistics including 68 set of rain gears.

Formerly introducing the Eco-guards to the community stakeholders, the NPAA representative, Barber Ansumana Turay observed that the protection of Protected Areas is a presidential directive that gears towards protecting and conserving the country's natural resources. He added thus: "Kambui Hills Forest Reserve has suffered enough brutal encroachment over a long time and so, it is now incumbent upon our chiefs and other local actors to support the government to jealously guard it for ourselves and future generations". He rounded off by calling on all to support the Rangers and Eco-guards by providing them with the much-needed commitment and willingness so they can freely discharge their duties.

The Head of Gola, Francis Massaquoi expressed delight for the continuous strides the PAPFor project was making in complementing government's effort towards the protection of the KHFR. He said, the presence of community stakeholders in that occasion was quite in place, as the newly recruited Eco-guards would be working in those communities. He urged local communities to be supportive and accommodating to the Eco-guards and Rangers in the delivery of their work as mandated by the laws of the state.

One of the Paramount Chiefs, PC Madam Mariama Jaward of Niawa chiefdom expressed profound thanks to the donors for the support and to CSSL for initiating the PAPFor project. She said the idea of constantly engaging communities on issues relating to the protection of the KHFR in the Gola Landscape generally was laudable. She however noted that attention should also be paid to the

CSSL Supports Government to Strengthen Security of Kambui Hills Forest Reserve. Contd.

issue of livelihood support which she referred to as currently being challenging because of insufficient support received from projects. PC Jaward encouraged all stakeholders to cooperate with the Eco-guards and Rangers for the benefit of their communities and the nation as a whole.

At the end of the engagement, a common understanding was established between the Rangers and Eco-guards for them to work collaboratively to ensure the achievement of the single objective of protecting the Reserve from all forms of nefarious activities. Participants also supported the project team in developing operational strategies to enhance monitoring, incident reporting and protection of the Reserve.

The PAPFor National Project Coordinator, Emurana Sowa thanked participants for all the support so far given to CSSL. He noted that the project will never succeed without their support and commitment. He encouraged the Eco-guards and Rangers to work as a team to ensure that they combat all sorts of illegal activities taking place in and around the Reserve. He ended by pledging CSSL's continued commitment towards supporting the government and communities to ensure the wise use and sustainable management of the country's natural resources.

Text: Abdul K. Dumbuya/CSSL

Photo: Alice/CSSL

The Common Bulbul, *a Native of Africa.*

Hi! I am the Common Bulbul.

By Andrea Haffner/CSSL



My scientific name is *Pycnonotus Barbatus*, and I belong to the Bulbul family of passerine birds.

A native resident of Africa, I am quite a conspicuous bird and with increasing populations, I have been listed as 'Least Concern' under the IUCN Red List category.

I love flitting from tree to tree and can usually be spotted perched atop electric poles and cables along the roadside.

I am an early riser, much like many other birds, but my song is distinct and popular amongst local Sierra Leonean homes. The children usually say it sounds like: "The queen's property quite correct!"

At lunchtime, I like to feed on fruits, nectar, seeds and small insects; and my naptimes are spent on leafy tree branches.

When I reproduce, I usually have a clutch size of two to three eggs.

Take a look around today and I'm sure you'll spot me not too far away.



Thanks to our partners for all their support!

- BirdLife International
- Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
- Bread for the World
- PRCM
- IUCN
- EU
- Environmental Protection Agency of Sierra Leone
- Ministry of Agriculture & Forestry
- Tacugama Chimpanzee Sanctuary
- Wetlands International
- Ministry of Lands...
- Ministry of Environment
- Family Kingdom, Freetown, Sierra Leone
- Hotel Africanus, Freetown, Sierra Leone
- Hill Valley Hotel, Freetown, Sierra Leone
- MAVA Foundation



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Visit us @:

86A Main Road, Congo Town, Freetown

Contact us @:

margaret.ngaujiah@cs-sl.org/

abdul.dumbuya@cs-sl.org

+232-76-643546/+232-76-325732

Or find us on Facebook: @conservationsl

