

# Conservation Society of Sierra Leone

Connecting people to nature.



## From the CSSL President

Dear Friends and Partners in Conservation,

The beginning of March saw the global community celebrating a great success for conservation and nature protection. With the High Seas Treaty of the United Nations, we now have a global agreement on the protection of maritime eco-systems and species; 30% of international waters shall become protected areas. We hope that countries meet soon to officially approve the agreement and start to take actions.

Conservation efforts are not only getting more speed at international level, but also at national level. We are happy to share with you some success stories from our work with communities around the Gola Rainforest and Kambui Hills Forest Reserve.

In this edition also, the Society throws light to the severe challenges well-meaning environmentalists still face at the Western Area Peninsula. CSSL continues to register its concerns over the encroachment and human activities inside the protected area, and government's plans to set up a fish harbour at Black Johnson beach.

We thank all of you for your continued support. Without you on our side, our work would be much more difficult!

Let's continue to work together!

Charles Showers,  
President of CSSL

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## Waterbird Census 2023 along the East Atlantic Flyway - a Global Monitoring Project

Every third year, it gets busy along the African East Atlantic Coast. Teams from all around the world come together to count waterbirds for the Waterbird Census along the African East Atlantic Flyway from Morocco to South Africa. It is an international monitoring activity to collect long-time data on bird movements, numbers and species appearance.



The teams are easy to spot and identify. If you see a group of people in a boat or walking through the Mangrove mud equipped with binoculars and telescopes, you can be pretty sure that you have spotted a Waterbird Census group.

The Conservation Society of Sierra Leone (CSSL) is the implementing organisation and host in Sierra Leone. With the support of two bird experts from the Netherlands, CSSL started the ten-day bird counting along the coast of Sierra Leone on 21st January.

Each day the teams started with preparing for the count of the day; the units that will be observed are defined; papers, pens, binoculars, enough water and sun protection prepared. Then, the teams are ready to board and start the counting. Every day is different. And still on the last day, everyone got excited when a big flock of waders took off to perform a wonderful choreography in the sky.

### Everything has its important role

High tide and low tide, the Mangroves and the mud with the small animals (which the birds eat) living there, all play their respective roles. With increasing oyster harvesting and other human activities, the birds find less food and get disturbed. They are not able to gain enough energy for their long travel back to the northern parts of the world where they breed. This is why the numbers counted along the West African coast are also important for countries in the north.

### 44,083 birds and 64 species

The total numbers counted are already verified. It will still take a while before the full analysis will be available. But be assured that we will inform you when the numbers from the 2023 count are published.



**"With the data from the waterbird census, we can monitor important developments of bird numbers and species. This data can be used for climate change reports and mitigation plans on global and national levels."**

Papanie Bai-Sesay,  
Senior Biodiversity and Project  
Manager, CSSL

[Click here to read the Waterbird Census Report 2020](#)

text and photo: Kathrin Prinzing



# UNITE TO PROTECT THE FORESTS OF G (GAYA YEYEI)



## Partnering with Local Communities to Preserve Forests in Sierra Leone

**Since October 2020, the Conservation Society of Sierra Leone (CSSL) has been working with the people of Gaura chiefdom - under the European Union funded Gola PAPFor project, to conserve the forest and their only source of clean water.**

Located in Kenema district, Sierra Leone's eastern province, Gaura chiefdom covers an area of 398.0 square kilometres. A significant ecosystem of the chiefdom is Gayayeyei, a mountainous and hilly landmass of 828 hectares of primary forest. With an estimated population of 34,704 scattered across six towns, the lush and hilly forest landscape is the chiefdom's source of clean water. Furthermore, the ecosystem is rich in biodiversity and home to chimpanzees, the black, white and red Columbus, and the Diana Monkeys, all endangered species listed on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List. Communities in Gaura depend on this lush ecosystem for livelihoods, which is increasingly threatened by deforestation activities including logging, upland farming, felling of trees for charcoal production, poaching and hunting.

In collaboration with the local authorities, CSSL has established and trained six Community Forest Management Committees (CFMC), both at the chiefdom and township levels, including all legal community forest land-owning communities and families. CSSL has also trained the committees to monitor the designated areas.

"Gaura chiefdom is one of the most cooperative chiefdoms in the establishment and management of Community Forests. I have been marvelled by the enthusiasm and commitment of the communities to conserve their forest. They have gone to the extent of making an undertaking to preserve the ecosystem even after the PAPFor project lifespan elapses. This is a resounding demonstration of how partnership with communities can lead to sustainable outcomes", Patrick Dauda, CSSL's Land-use Planning, Community Forestry and Co-Management Coordinator explains.

Further, the chiefdom has enacted laws that stipulate penalties for violators of the community forest. The byelaws also guide the activities of the CFMC. A fine of SLE 500,000 (\$ 25) is levied on anyone engaging in activities that disrupt the ecosystem.

"We are very serious about preserving our forest. There are regular patrols of the area by members of the CFMC, who are familiar with the entire area. No one will be allowed to engage in any activity that will destroy that forest. Several persons were caught trying to engage in these activities and were reported to the CFMC and the town. They were warned not to repeat such actions. Violators will definitely be fined", said Lahai Nyallay, an elder from Joru town, headquarter of the chiefdom.

Read the whole story online:

<https://cs-sl.org/partnering-with-local-communities-to-preserve-forests-in-sierra-leone/>



## Black Johnson Beach - a Lost Paradise?

When economic interests are more important than conservation...

**On Monday, 16th January 2023, the public was invited to the third Public Disclosure of the Draft Environmental and Social Health Impact Assessment and the Engineering Feasibility Studies of the proposed Fish Harbour Development Project at Black Johnson, Western Rural District, Sierra Leone.**

The conference room of the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources was packed until the last seat when the Deputy Minister gave his opening statement. He stated that since the government of Sierra Leone started the project, all official procedures including consultations with stakeholders according to national and international laws are followed. "...especially all procedures and steps regarding the environment are ensured. We are taking all efforts to minimize and mitigate consequences on people and environment," says the Deputy Minister. "We are working with an independent firm to get neutral recommendations." The following statement was presented by the head of EPA. He explained that, the public should have its say. "The role of government is to decide whether the impact is acceptable or not."

After the statements and the presentation of the document, the floor was open for questions and answers. Different concerns were raised from civil society such as the Human Rights Commission and Christian Relief Services.

A resident of Black Johnson, Mme Jane Aspen, expressed her position that they had not been consulted. She also stated that the Constitution of Sierra Leone ensures that government can acquire private land if it is of major interest for the country but that, the last decision has to be taken by a special established court. That has not happened yet, she added. The questions from international organisations like GIZ from Germany were related to missing numbers about expected positive outcome of the project like jobs created, revenue for the government, tourists attracted and others.

A big concern was the negative impact on eco-tourism in Sierra Leone as the coastline and the beaches would be destroyed. Apart from that, the representative from GIZ questioned the establishment of an aquamarine park.

The international trend is to close these kinds of parks and to protect animals in their natural habitat, she advised.

The Conservation Society of Sierra Leone urges the Environment Protection Agency (EPA) to take all concerns into consideration and to take a decision that will reflect these concerns for the protection of our precious environment. We don't just protect it for us - but also for our children and future generations!

**CSSL hopes that Black Johnson and its amazing sea turtles, friendly dolphins, beautiful birds, timid pangolins, and wonderful Mangroves can still be saved. If we lose Black Johnson, we will feel the impact on the whole Peninsula, not only at Black Johnson.**

Read the whole article online and have a look into the report:

<https://cs-sl.org/public-disclosure-black-johnson-fish-harbour/>



## The future of the Yawri Bay is our concern: PAPBio project kicks off with an inception meeting

**The Conservation Society of Sierra Leone (CSSL) with funding from Wetland International, had on 30th March 2023 organized a project inception workshop. The workshop brought together relevant stakeholders including Ministries, Departments and Agencies, and community stakeholders.**

The project, “Strengthening Stakeholders’ Capacity for Sustainable Management of Yawri Bay in Sierra Leone’s Coastal Corridor”, aims at strengthening the capacity of stakeholders for effective management of Yawri Bay.

Madam Andrea Haffner, Project Coordinator, in her presentation during the workshop mentioned that the advent of the PAPBIO project is to continue working the communities engaged during the CEPF project and to fill in gaps left in that project such as reviving the ecosystem through restoration and establishing community advocacy champions, etc. The project is also focusing on building on the gains and achievements of the concluded CEPF-supported project, to increase recognition, protection, and management of the Yawri Bay ecosystem, and to ensure its sustainability through increased coordination and collaboration among stakeholders on the conservation of the site.

The main vehicle for the coordination and implementation of project activities is the Yawri Bay Ramsar Site Working Group (YaRSWoG) which constitutes 17 individuals from diverse institutions. This group will be meeting quarterly to review, approve, and advise on all planned conservation actions in the bay, she expounded.

After the presentation of the project’s objectives and planned activities, statements from different key stakeholders emphasized on the importance of the engagement of CSSL at Yawri Bay. All speakers expressed the commitment of their respective institutions or organisations to add their bid to the success of the project.

One of the 16 eco-guards trained by CSSL who is a resident of Kent, Madam Phebian Henry said: “I am really pleased to be here and to witness that the engagement of CSSL with the communities and other stakeholders in Yawri Bay continues”. She further explained that, between March 2021 and June 2022, CSSL engaged communities, local authorities, and government bodies in the protection of the Mangrove Forest of Yawri Bay through the CEPF project.

To ensure that the achievements of the CEPF project will be sustainable, CSSL continues to be present in the area and continues to work together with the community and government to protect the sensitive ecosystems of the bay.

**“The wish of CSSL is to see Yawri Bay and the entire coast become like Gola, fully protected and sustainably conserved - together with the communities and all other actors. This is our dream.”**

Abdulai Dauda, CSSL Assistant Biodiversity Officer

Read the whole article online and learn more about the PAPBio Project:  
<https://cs-sl.org/papbio-inception-workshop/>



## Sucess Story from the Gola Rainforest: Hawa Puhunde, Mother of Three Relinquishes Profitable Trade in Bush Meat to Help Save Forest

**The Conservation Society of Sierra Leone (CSSL) has established 31 Community Forest Management Committees or Governance Structures across 6 chiefdoms in Gola Rainforest National Park Landscape and 1 chiefdom in the Kambui Hills Forest Reserve Landscape over the last 2-3 years through the PAPFor project. The story of Hawa Puhunde is one of the life changing success stories of our work.**

Hawa Puhunde, 29, is one of three women who are members of the Community Forest Management Committee (CFMC) in the town of Joru, headquarters of Gaura chiefdom, Kenema district in the Eastern Province of Sierra Leone.

A mother of three, Hawa's livelihood depended on the forest, like many others eking out a living in Sierra Leone's lush forestland, through bush meat hunting, a practice that destroys the ecosystem by killing animals, including several endangered species on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List. Hawa was a thriving meat seller, netting daily sales of approximately 1 million Old Leones with the income generated used to support demand for bush meat,

a delicacy in Sierra Leone and Liberia, made the trade very profitable. But in 2021, Hawa was left with no alternative but to abandon the business after the people of Gaura signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the CSSL.

The MoU essentially banned activities of deforestation, including hunting in Gayayeyei, the mountainous forest they relied on as source of livelihood. The chiefdom enacted laws that stipulate penalties, including a hefty fine of 500,000 Old Leones on anyone engaging in activities that violate the ecosystem.

The Support Program for the Preservation of Forest Ecosystem in West Africa (PAPFor) in the Gola Rainforest, implemented by CSSL, has been working with the people of Gaura to conserve the ecosystem. With support from CSSL, Hawa and other community leaders have drawn up their own plan to save the forest, preserve their natural resources and livelihoods and hence, be a model for sustainable forest management.

**“Before CSSL brought the PAPFor project to Joru, my livelihood depended on buying bush meat from hunters. I bought dead meat and dried them before selling in the market. I traded meat to communities as far as across the border in Liberia. The bush meat market was very profitable, and I used the profit to support my three children.”**

Hawa Puhunde

Read the full story of Hawa Puhunde and the PAPFor activities online:

[Mother of Three Relinquishes Profitable Trade in Bush Meat to Help Save Forest](#)



## The Emerald Starling: A fascinating Bird to display

**Starlings are chunky and blackbird-sized, but with short tails and long, slender beaks. In flight, their wings are short and pointed, making them look rather small, and like four-pointed stars.**

Unlike other starlings, the Emerald Starling (*Lamprotornis iris*) is a conspicuous and idiosyncratic bird; mainly iridescent green, with a purple iridescent cheek patch and belly. The ear-coverts and underparts are metallic purple. In poor light, it can look black. Its global population is estimated to be about 500, 000. According to the IUCN Redlist, the species is therefore listed as Least Concern (Birdlife International 2023).

The Emerald Starling is one of the tiniest species among starlings. The species is known from the west and south-east Guinea, Sierra Leone and west-central Cote d'Ivoire (Borrow & Demey 2004). It lives in savannah and lowlands in Cote d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone and Guinea respectively. Also, the species uses the kola nut tree (*Cola spp*), kapok trees (*Ceiba pentadra*), locust trees (*Parkia biglobosa*) and red ironwood (*Lophira alata*) as their habitats (Fisher et al., 2013).

Its flight is fast and direct and can walk confidently on the ground. They are noisy and social and spend a lot of years in flocks. In the wild, these birds live in flocks of approximately 15-20 members, although they occasionally gather to form a larger group. They build and nest in small holes in trees, where the female incubates 3-4 eggs alone for about 14 days.

They normally forage on fruits, particularly *Ficus* and *Harungana* berries and seeds and, less frequently, on insects, particularly ants, foraging in the bare ground in areas that have been burnt (Hall & Moreau, 1970). Unlike many other starlings, they can be housed with numerous other bird species with little or no inter-specific aggression.

In Sierra Leone, the species has been recorded at several locations in the North including Lake Sonfon, Outamba Kilimi and Bumbuna (Bowler et al., 2012). According to a survey conducted by Bowler et al., 2012 of the "Data Deficient Emerald Starling in Sierra Leone", a total of 247 emerald starlings were recorded. Of the total, the highest record (178) was obtained in Lake Sonfon with little records of 61 and 8 from Bumbuna and Outamba respectively.

The species faces threats from anthropogenic habitat change, particularly large-scale clearance of wooded savannah for open-cast mining and agriculture. Despite the species facing all these threats, its ability to survive and even thrive in patchy wooded savannah interspersed with cultivation and farm bush gives some hope for its long-term survival.

**"The Emerald Starling is one of my favourite birds. It is just amazing when you are in the forest or in the grasslands and then this beautiful, shimmering bird crosses your way. It always makes me happy when I see them."**

Mariama Kargbo, CSSL Environmental Education Officer



## Is Demarcation enough to protect the Kambui Hills Forest Reserve? Interview with Project Manager Aruna Koroma

The Conservation Society of Sierra Leone (CSSL) has been present at the Kambui Hills since 2019. The forest on the hills overlooking Kenema, was declared a Forest Reserve in 1918 by the government of Sierra Leone. Due to increasing human pressure, the forest is under several threats with its surface decreasing year by year. Aruna Koroma, BIOPAMA Project Manager at CSSL, shares his experience and thoughts about current demarcation activities and further engagements required at Kambui Hills.

**The BIOPAMA project team has just completed its last demarcation activity. Can you explain to us a bit more about it?**

The BIOPAMA project, funded by the EU through IUCN, is here to support government and communities in the protection and management of Kambui Hills Forest Reserve (KHFR). The Conservation Society of Sierra Leone (CSSL) is the implementing organisation of the project. We are working together with the communities around the Kambui Hills and government entities like the National Protected Area Authority (NPAA) and the Forestry Department to reach this goal together. The KHFR spreads over an area of about 23,000 hectares. It is divided into Kambui Hills North, which are the hills you can see on the left side when approaching Kenema from the Bo-Kenema Highway, and Kambui Hills South on the right. Before now, there was a connection between Kambui Hills North and South, but due to human activities including deforestation, this connection is already lost.

It was an important corridor for animals to move from one part to the other. We are very concerned about this development and hence, engaging in activities that will reinstate its integrity. This is why we increase our efforts to stop the trend. One of those activities is constructing pillars on the perimeters of the reserve. This is what we have accomplished recently in some of the strategic areas.

**Which further actions would be needed to really make a difference and protect Kambui Hills?**

To protect the KHFR in the long run, we must continue to work together with the communities, Forestry Department and NPAA. One of the challenges is that the communities claim the land as being theirs. In the past, the government has been paying royalty to them so that they would leave the forest in a better shape. But these payments have been stopped. It would be one option to agree on royalties again as a

compensation for the community members, probably through a REDD+ programme or other support schemes. Another way to strengthen the protection of the forest would be to have guard posts constructed for NPAA forest guards at strategic locations in and around the Reserve. Up till now, the guards are only around during the day on monitoring schedule. We would need 24-hour observation of activities inside the Forest Reserve by these forest guards.

And of course, we also need more Eco-guards recruited from the forest edge communities. The area is huge and the encroachments are taking place at different places. It is difficult for a small number of forest guards to identify and stop all illegal activities. And as I said before, we need real commitment from the communities. When the communities are aware of and enjoy the benefits of the forest, they will be willing to protect it.



We thank all our partners for their support and help for our daily work!



WE FOR NATURE.  
NATURE FOR US.

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