



From the President

Warm greetings from CSSL,

A lot has happened since the last newsletter was released.

Mangroves are endangered species and CSSL has been involved in its intensive restoration in Yawri Bay and Kambia District axis.

Lake Sonfon is still under serious threat as illegal mining by the Chinese intensifies.

We bring to you, our valued supporters and readers, one of the beautiful birds of Sierra Leone, the Gola Malimbe and other inspiring stories in this issue.

Wishing our valuable partners, noble members and all, a happy reading.

Charles Showers
President of CSSL



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Lake Sonfon Faces Continued Threats from Mining Activities

Lake Sonfon, a natural treasure in Sierra Leone, continues to be under threat from industrial and artisanal mining activities, raising concerns among conservationists and environmental advocates. Despite efforts by organisations like the Conservation Society of Sierra Leone (CSSL) and its allies, the persistence of mining operations in and around the lake poses an existential risk to its ecosystem and biodiversity.

Situated among the protected areas (PAs) in Sierra Leone, Lake Sonfon is held in high regard as a vital ecological site that warrants stringent conservation measures. By law, the lake falls under the purview of the National Protected Area Authority, supervised by the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change. This institutional arrangement underscores the legal framework designed to safeguard its integrity and sustainability.

However, the irony of the situation lies in the apparent disconnect between the legislative protection afforded to the lake and the harsh realities of ongoing mining activities that threaten its existence. Despite being designated as a PA, the lake continues to face encroachment and exploitation, raising questions about the effectiveness of regulatory oversight and enforcement mechanisms. The lack of accountability and responsibility from both national and local authorities has further exacerbated the challenges facing the lake. The blame game among

government agencies only serves to highlight the systemic failures in protecting the environment and upholding the sanctity of natural heritage sites like Lake Sonfon.

In response to the aforementioned perennial threats to the lake, CSSL and its partners have intensified their advocacy efforts to rally support for the conservation of the site. The unwavering commitment of these organisations to safeguarding the lake's ecosystem and cultural significance reflects a broader commitment to environmental stewardship and sustainable development. Despite facing obstacles and resistance from vested interests with intent on exploiting the natural resources around Lake Sonfon, CSSL remains steadfast in its mission to protect the lake and preserve its sanctity for future generations. The collective efforts of communities, like-minded institutions, government officials and development partners are crucial in achieving the common goal of ensuring the long-term survival of this vital ecosystem.

The protection of Lake Sonfon demands an urgent need for coordinated actions and collaboration among all stakeholders involved in environmental conservation and sustainable natural resource management in Sierra Leone. As the "fight" rages on, the voices of environmental advocates continue to grow louder and more determined! The resilience and perseverance of CSSL and its allies serve as a beacon of hope in the face of environmental challenges, inspiring others to join the cause in solidarity to defend the nation's shared natural heritage.

Text: Abdul K. Dumbuya/ photo: Alhaji O. Kamara



Featured Beautiful Birds of Sierra Leone: Long-Tailed Cormorant

Mende: Njakukwei
Temne: Kàthathəp/Thathəp
Krio: N/A
Scientific Name: *Microcarbo africanus*

DESCRIPTION

The Long-tailed Cormorant is a large black bird with long curved neck, yellow bill and long tail. A small crest of feathers occurs on the head when breeding. When not breeding, the birds appear dull brown above and white below

SIZE:
Large

WHERE TO SEE:
Long-tailed Cormorants occur in or near water. They can be seen standing on rocks or trees next to rivers or streams; perched in mangroves or swimming with just the head and neck above the water.

NEED TO KNOW:
The birds sometimes stand with their wings held out from the body as if they are drying their wings.

CONFUSION SPECIES
None in Sierra Leone



Photo by Tasso Leventis

Text : Common Birds of Sierra Leone



Upland Versus Lowland Farming Practices: a case study on sustainable agroforestry in Nomo Fama Chiefdom, Kenema District

The Gola Rainforest National Park's satellite community forest landscape is threatened by anthropogenic practices that include poaching, timber logging, charcoal burning, and unsustainable farming activities with negative impact on the ecosystems. These practices are mainly driven by poverty and the quest for livelihood options to support daily family needs. They however have the potential to degrade the community forest landscape and expose inhabitants to serious environmental consequences including floods, storm surges, drought and poor soil fertility. These community forests serve as an indirect buffer to the National Park, with a 12 km radius to the park. They have high conservation value (HCV) species, including the White-necked Picathartes, Pygmy Hippo, the Jentink's Duiker and the Western Chimpanzee among many others. These HCV species constantly come under the threat for survival of particularly upland farming practices by communities.

Upland farming employs slash-and-

burn practices which get rid of trees and shrubs to allow cultivation of crops. These practices have widely been regarded by conservationists as inimical to forestry development and sustainability. Communities in Nomo Chiefdom in Kenema District and numerous others across the country have long been applying such practices since prehistoric period with poor agricultural yields, and huge consequences on biodiversity and climate change.

To support communities with improved knowledge and skills in sustainable agriculture and agroforestry, the Conservation Society of Sierra Leone (CSSL), in

collaboration with Gola Rainforest Conservation (GRC) and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) in UK received funding support from USAID to implement the West Africa Biodiversity and Low Emissions Development (WABiLED) project in Nomo chiefdom, Kenema district in June 2023. The project, which targeted Lowuma, Faama, Gbadalahun and Wayeihun communities, has 3 core objectives: combat wildlife trafficking and enhance great ape conservation; reduce deforestation, forest degradation, and biodiversity loss in key transboundary forest landscapes; and reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increasing carbon sequestration from land use.



Text & Photos by Abdul K. Dumbuya



Upland Versus Lowland Farming Practices: a case study on sustainable agroforestry in Nomo Fama Chiefdom, Kenema District. Contd.

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and reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increasing carbon sequestration from land use.

Massa Kamoh is a 25-year-old peasant farmer and a mother of two in Lowuma Community, Nomo Chiefdom. Massa has been practicing upland rice farming for many years until CSSL introduced the concept of agro-forestry through the WABiLED project to their community in 2023. According to Massa, she was very much aware that practising upland farming involved too much labour with little yield in the harvest season for all her hard work. This is also combined with the serious destruction they cause on the environment as they always have to clear the land through the slash-and-burn method of preparing the farm land for cultivation. "We did not have options at the time, so we kept doing the same thing year in year out", she lamented.

"Since I began doing upland farming where I used to cultivate rice predominantly, the largest harvest I ever received was 11 bushels in 2023, out of which I sold 8 bushels and earned a total of NLe 800.00 (\$35.08 USD). I reserved the remaining 3 bushels for our consumption", Massa disclosed.

Upland Versus Lowland Farming Practices: a case study on sustainable agroforestry in Nomo Fama Chiefdom, Kenema District. Contd.

The project staff held a series of meetings during which communities were enlightened about the consequences of destroying the forest for agriculture and other purposes. “For me, those engagements opened my mind to understand the real threats we have been posing to our environment. In fact, we soon realised that our only water source in the forest was drying up, and we started trekking in search of portable water in long distances”, Massa revealed.

“We were happy that Massa and many of her fellow community members in Lowuma and other communities were very cooperative and ready to implement the knowledge they learned from our sensitization engagements”, asserted Patrick Sahr Dauda, Land-use Planning and Co-management Lead at CSSL. Patrick further disclosed that the local authorities were very supportive in ensuring that people become compliant by reinforcing the implementation of existing community byelaws established for the protection of their community forests. He underscored the relevance of local communities in sustainably managing community forests, as they are the custodians of the forest, and play a key role in conservation activities through this initiative. Community forestry involves the participation and collaboration of various stakeholders, including community, government and

non-governmental organisations. The level of involvement of each group depends on the specific community forest project and the management system in use.

“Since I started embarking on inland valley swamp (IVS) farming, where I cultivate rice, pineapples, vegetables, cassava, bananas and groundnuts, among many others, I have realised tremendous improvement in my health as well as my earnings. In my first harvest of a small portion of my one-acre pineapple farm, I had three bags of pineapples which I sold and received NLe 1,300.00 (\$57 USD). I also gave away lots of the produce to my community folks for consumption. I feel very proud that I don’t have to toil too much to support my family. This is now helping me greatly in supporting the education and other welfare needs of my children and other family members”.

“I would like to advise my people for us all to stop destroying the forest. If we destroy the forest, we are destroying ourselves and the future of our children. For me, rather than I continue destroying the forest through upland farming, I now decided to practice IVS farming; thanks to the advice of CSSL through their WABiLED project”, Massa prevailed on her people and the general public.





CSSL promotes wildlife conservation knowledge among stakeholders and schools in Koinadugu District

Wildlife conservation is a critical issue facing our planet today with many species facing extinction at an alarming rate due to daily human activities. Mining, unregulated timber logging, charcoal burning, and unsustainable agricultural activities among others gravely contribute to wildlife decline in Koinadugu and other parts of the country. Recently, incidences of killings of leopards and buffalo were reported to have taken place in Koinadugu district, north-east of Sierra Leone. One of such incidents (the gruesome killing of the buffalo) was shown live on video in full view and participation of community people. Several similar unreported incidences have also occurred in other places in that district and other areas across the country. These killings of especially some of the country's most treasured wildlife not only bring sorrow in the country, they also negatively portray Sierra Leone's seriousness in promoting wildlife conservation and ecotourism development.

The Conservation Society of Sierra Leone (CSSL) noted the persistence of aforementioned situation as being the result of serious

knowledge gap about national conservation laws protecting wildlife among the population. The Society therefore used the 2024 Wildlife Week celebration to increase knowledge and consciousness among key stakeholders as well as school children in Koinadugu district.

Wildlife Week is celebrated all over the world from 2nd to 8th October every year with the view to protecting and preserving wild animals and plants from extinction. The theme for this year (2024) is; "people and planet" exploring digital innovation in wildlife conservation" with a slogan, "Be the change, not the deforestation; a world without wildlife, a world without beauty." Owing to the grave situation on the ground, CSSL chose to particularly focus on the slogan rather than the theme to drive its key messages through in communities.

On 7th October, 2024, the Communication and Advocacy Team of CSSL in Freetown joined the field team in Kabala and engaged two (2) School Nature

Clubs at Kondembaia and Yara communities in Diang chiefdom. The team enlightened them about the dangers of eating certain wild animals, as well as keeping them in their homes as pets. "... we contract certain diseases like Laser Fever, Ebola Virus Disease, Mpox, Marburg and many others from our interactions with wild animals. These interactions could cause serious physical injuries and sometimes death to us", Abdul Kaprr Dumbuya, Communication Manager - CSSL advised the young assembly. He encouraged the pupils to serve as champions to sensitize and educate their parents, elders and friends in their communities about wildlife protection and conservation. The Environmental Education Officer, Mariama Kargbo, also took pupils through some key penalties contained in the 1972 Wildlife Conservation Act as amended in 2022, including payment of not less than NLe15,000 fine or a term for imprisonment not less than two (2) years or both such fine and imprisonment for committing wildlife crime.

In Kabala, the team engaged key stakeholders drawn from traditional leaders, civil society organisations,

Text & Photos by Abdul K. Dumbuya



CSSL promotes wildlife conservation knowledge among stakeholders and schools in Koinadugu District. Contd

government institutions and the private sector including representatives from petty traders, motorbike riders among others. The CSSL/Bread for the World (BftW) Project Manager in Koinadugu district, Papanie Bai-Sesay, presented the current state of wildlife protection in Sierra Leone. He stated that the country was currently endowed with 147 different kinds of mammalian species, including 16 species of primates, (some endangered), total population of 626 bird species, 67 species of reptiles including crocodiles, snakes, etc. Mr. Bai Sesay noted that it was therefore the reason for tourists' keen interest in the country. He further informed all that there was need for improved enforcement of the laws as there was high spate of wildlife crimes in the country. He concluded by encouraging all to change their attitudes and be friendly to animals so that Sierra Leone would benefit from ecotourism.

The CSSL Communication Manager explained to participants some major penalties extracted from the 1972 Wildlife Conservation Act as amended in 2022 for committing a wildlife crime. He also disclosed some of the health implications that communities would face if they interacted with wildlife. He called on all to support the government's ecotourism development drive by contributing fully towards the protection and conservation of wildlife in their respective communities.

Responding to the presentations, several stakeholders attributed the rise in wildlife crime in their district to lack of knowledge in the country's wildlife protection and conservation laws. Most lamented over the proliferation of bushmeat trade in the district, referencing the outbreak of certain unexplained health conditions as very concerning to them.

The Paramount Chief of Wara-wara Yagala chieftom said, much had not been done to sensitise the public on conservation laws and called on the Ministry of Environment and CSSL to develop visibilities capturing the "big five" and other endangered species that are on the laws for protection. "... provide us with this information, we will ensure they reach our people all over the chieftom. We acknowledge the power of information and knowledge; we are ready to work with you on this drive", he assured. Other participants including a representative from the Ministry of Environment also expressed commitment to continue to work collaboratively with CSSL and other chieftom stakeholders to ensure that communities are sensitised on the need to protect and conserve wildlife in that part of the country.





Jersey Overseas Aid Supports CSSL in Increasing Local Community Participation in Mangrove Restoration in Western Area Rural and Kambia District

Mangrove forests play a critical role in coastal ecosystem stability, biodiversity conservation, and climate change mitigation. These unique ecosystems provide breeding grounds for marine species, protect coastal communities from erosion and flooding, and act as significant carbon sinks. Sierra Leone hosts approximately 1,052 km² of mangroves, which contribute to food security, economic livelihoods, and environmental protection.

Despite their ecological and socio-economic importance, Sierra Leone's mangroves are facing rapid degradation due to unsustainable human activities. Recognizing this challenge, the Conservation Society of Sierra Leone (CSSL), in partnership with GOAL, is implementing a project aimed at increasing local community participation in mangrove restoration. This initiative seeks to enhance sustainable mangrove ecosystem management, strengthen community-led conservation efforts, and restore degraded mangrove forests across selected communities in the Western Area Rural and Kambia districts.



The project aligns with national and global conservation goals, including the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It incorporates participatory learning, restoration efforts, and capacity-building approaches to foster long-term conservation impact.

The primary problems the project seeks to address include:

i. Mangrove Degradation and Loss

Local communities heavily rely on mangrove wood for cooking and building materials, leading to excessive harvesting. Expanding settlements, agriculture, and infrastructure development encroach on mangrove forests and unsustainable resource extraction damages mangrove root systems and reduces regeneration capacity.

ii. Climate Change Vulnerability

The loss of mangroves has left coastal communities more exposed to storm surges and rising sea levels. Also, the disappearance of mangrove cover has led to increased exposure to extreme sunlight and temperature fluctuations, affecting both humans and wildlife.

iii. Declining Fisheries and Livelihoods

Many commercially and locally important fish species, crabs, and mollusks depend on mangroves for breeding and nursery habitats. Their decline threatens food security and economic stability. Fisherfolk, farmers and other community members face declining income due to resource depletion.

Text & Photos by Bobson Kobba



Jersey Overseas Aid Supports CSSL in Increasing Local Community Participation in Mangrove Restoration in Western Area Rural and Kambia Districts. Contd.

iv. Weak Local Conservation Governance and Awareness

Many communities lack the knowledge, skills, and capacity to engage in sustainable mangrove conservation practices. Without clear conservation guidelines, local community efforts remain fragmented and ineffective.

"This project is not just about restoring mangroves; it is also about restoring livelihoods, strengthening community resilience, and securing the future of our coastal ecosystems. We recognize that local communities are the frontline stewards of these critical habitats, and their involvement is key to long-term success. This initiative is a testament to the power of collaboration between conservationists, local communities, and development partners in protecting Sierra Leone's natural heritage", Bobson Kobba, JOA Project Manager asserts.

By addressing these interconnected challenges, the GOAL/CSSL Mangrove Restoration Project aims to restore 50 hectares of degraded mangrove sites across the nine (9) project communities (Fogbo, Tissana, Banga "Gron" in the Western Area Rural district, and Kassirie, Kichom, Moribaya, Magbonka, Mabonka and Kagbana communities in Kambia district). The project will establish sustainable mangrove protection mechanism while ensuring alternative livelihoods support for coastal communities.

Since its inception in August 2024, the project has so far established 9 Women-led Groups in each of the project communities and a State of Mangrove Users Group, which comprise highly motivated local women, community stakeholders, government and civil society representatives with keen interest and influence in conservation work.

The groups were formed to discuss and provide quarterly updates to ensure inclusiveness and direction towards successful activity implementation.

During one of the engagements, the Women's Leader in Fogbo Community indicated how strongly they as women rely on mangroves for their entrepreneurial as well as domestic engagements. She however noted with dismay how such actions have caused devastation to the ecosystem, rendering their community vulnerable to climate shocks. "Our women rely on the mangroves for fish drying and firewood, but we also see how cutting the trees has made our village vulnerable to floods. We are ready to work with CSSL and GOAL to replant and protect our mangroves", Madam Hawa Kallon, Women's Leader, Fogbo Community.



Photo by Paul Musa Jr.



We thank all our partners for their continued invaluable support to our work!



WE FOR NATURE,
NATURE FOR US.

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