

Newsletter 1 - 2025

Conservation Society of Sierra Leone

Connecting people to nature.



Our friends in Conservation,

This issue reiterates CSSL's relentless pursuit in protecting our biodiversity and promoting conservation in Sierra Leone.

Getting communities involved in reforesting mangroves, changing the negative perceptions of our people with regards certain bird species like useful owls, and the ultimate challenge to keep encroachers out of our government designated protected areas including the Western Area Peninsular National Park, amongst others, are all featured herein.

We continue to call on everyone to increase our conservation efforts to save our forests which are mostly the source of our potable water as well as serving as a strong barrier to protect our cities and communities from dangerous windstorms.

CSSL would like you to always wholeheartedly join in making Sierra Leone a better place, environmentally.

Happy reading.

Charles Showers, President of CSSL



CEPF supports CSSL

to strengthen coastal communities with mangrove restoration and sustainability skills



The Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) is currently supporting the Conservation Society of Sierra Leone (CSSL) to implement the project: Linking livelihood to community-based mangrove conservation to secure the future of Yawri Bay Marine Protected Area. This is phase 2 of the project which aims at equipping communities with the necessary skills and knowledge to promote successful mangrove restoration and sustainability.

On 25th January 2025, CSSL commenced the training of one of the site support groups – Mangrove Monitoring Committee (MMC) – at Mokorbu community in the business of mangrove restoration and monitoring. Key highlights of the training included definition of mangrove, importance of mangrove restoration, pre-conditions to restoration, roles and responsibilities of the MMC and monitors, how to monitor and maintain restored mangroves, data collection, etc.

Furthermore, the project team at CSSL also rolled out a training for a Village Savings and Loan Association group that was earlier formed in the community on the methodology of the scheme and how it supports sustainable mangrove conservation.

At the climax of the training, the group received a full package of startup materials which included tables, chairs, pens, VSLA boxes, ledger books, savings books, and calculators. This was to support the group with its full operations.

by Abdul Kaprr Dumbuya

In Cooperation with JOA

strengthening knowledge of local communities
in mangrove conservation needs



Mangrove conservation has been noted by environment protection specialists as one of the effective measures to fight against climate change. Owing to the massive degradation of mangroves in various wetlands across the country, CSSL has been in serious engagement with coastal communities to restore much of these areas.

Late last year, the organization received funding support from Jersey Overseas Aid (JOA) in the United States through GOAL Sierra Leone to undertake mangrove restoration interventions in Western Area Rural and Kambia districts.

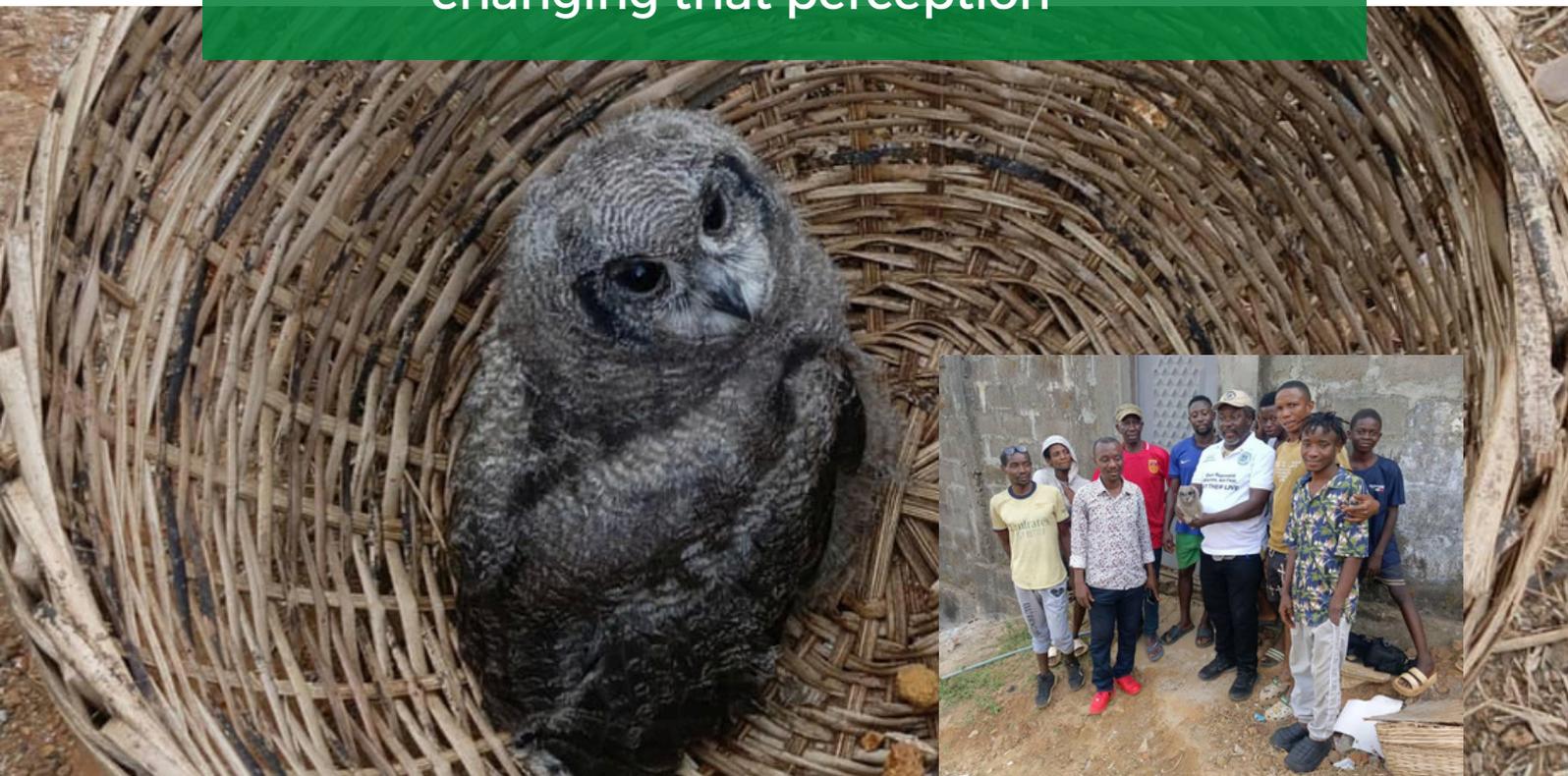
On 27th and 28th January, 2025, the CSSL conducted sensitization engagement sessions at Tissana and Kassirie communities in Western Area Rural and Kambia districts respectively on mangrove conservation needs. The exercise targeted 9 communities (3 in Western Area Rural and 6 in Kambia).

Education materials were distributed to participants to enable them to also educate their community folks.

by Abdul Kaprr Dumbuya

The plight of owls in Sierra Leone:

changing that perception



It is mostly believed that Owls represent bad omen and are witches, from the traditional perspective. They are killed, maimed and sometimes burnt alive, which is pathetic!

These beautiful birds mostly feed on rats that destroy our crops.

Barn Owls are common in towns and cities. You easily hear their screech call at night, especially on moonlight nights.

The Greyish-Eagle Owlet (in the photo) fell from its nest and was taken by some youths. The headman of Regent, Brother Sorie, informed the CSSL President, Charles Showers, who later raised awareness in the community about the importance of owls before taking it back to its nest, where the other chick was.

In order to further increase community awareness and trigger actions to protect these important birds, CSSL conducted an awareness-raising workshop on 6th February, 2025 at the San Siro Cinema, Calaba Town, east of Freetown. The session attempted to address the rather widespread negative perceptions and myths surrounding these birds, while also educating participants on the ecological importance of owls and promote conservation efforts.

A short documentary on the lives of owls, their significance, and conservation efforts was shown to further help participants to visually understand the importance of owls. This was followed by discussions during which participants asked questions and shared their experiences on their interactions with owls.

One of the attendees, Rev. Kpande, referenced the Bible, emphasizing that birds are valuable creatures and that owls are no exception. The story of Noah's Ark and how birds were used to check if the floodwaters had receded (Genesis 8:6-12).

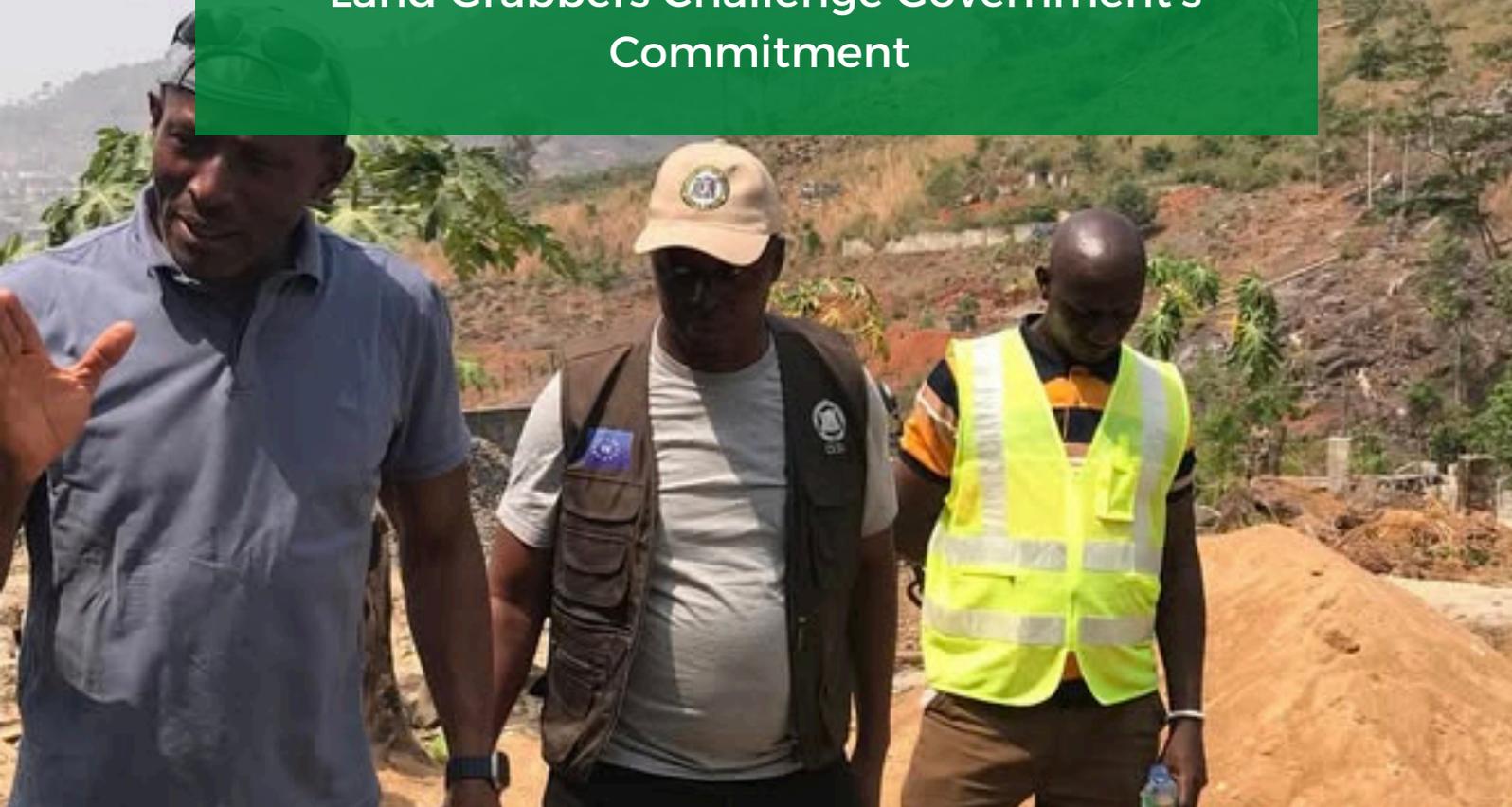
“ I used to believe that owls were evil and could cause death or harm to humans. Because of this belief, I used to kill any owl I saw. However, after today's workshop, I have learned that owls feed on rats, insects, and other pests. Knowing this, I have decided to stop killing them because they do not harm humans, instead, they are really very helpful to us.”

Ibrahim Sillah,
stakeholder from Calaba Town

by Foday Kamara & Abdul Kaprr Dumbuya

Western Area Peninsula National Park

Land Grabbers Challenge Government's Commitment



The leadership of the Conservation Society of Sierra Leone (CSSL), National Protected Area Authority (NPAA), Environmental Foundation for Africa (EFA), Guma Valley Water Company, and the Sussex community on Friday 7th February 2025 conducted a spot-check on the Western Area Peninsula National Park (WAPNP) to inspect the aftermath of bushfires that were seen raging in the horizons overlooking the Park.

The team witnessed very grave realities of the immediate results of the fires that were reported to have been lit by local communities, but masterminded by people in high government positions. Revelations from caretakers of construction sites mentioned names of key government functionaries including military officers and a senior official in the House of Parliament of Sierra Leone to be the alleged owners of unfinished structures in areas known as Bio Barray and One Ose (Number 2 community) within the protected area.

The bushfires, allegedly caused by arsonists and land grabbers, serve as a test of the President's resolve to not compromise housing developments and settlements in the National Park and Green Belt zone.

In April 2022, President Julius Maada Bio visited the Guma Dam to assess firsthand the serious threat to the water source and emphasized the need for political leadership in prosecuting those involved in land grabbing around the water catchment areas. He emphasised, "The Western Area Forest Green Belt area is protected by law. This is very annoying and concerning. All those responsible should face the law. This is an existential threat that will not be tolerated. We are going to re-establish the Green Belt and protect it." The President further stressed the importance of following legal procedures for development saying, "...as much as we want everyone to build homes, we should do it within the confines of the law. Guma (Dam) is a major water source for Freetown, and encroachment into the land will limit water storage and access. If you undermine the environment, it will not protect you."

In September 2023, a committee which was tasked to investigate encroachment activities into the WAPNP reported that despite its recommendations for the deployment of security personnel at strategic locations of the Park,

deforestation and wildfires continued to rise, putting both the Guma Dam and local communities at risk. The co-chair of the Committee, Dr. Isata Mahoi, revealed that the greenbelt, covering 18,337 hectares, had lost 24% of its area (between Mile 13 and Tokeh) to encroachment, with over 900 structures identified. This grim discovery compelled the committee to recommend an immediate ban on all illegal activities, including quarry mining and housing construction within the greenbelt. They also recommended the establishment of a permanent physical boundary around the protected area.

Following these recommendations, President Bio authorized the Minister of Climate Change and the Environment, Emmanuel Giwoh Abdulai, in May 2024 to lead the demolition of all illegal structures within the National Park.

In spite of all the aforementioned strides taken by the Government of Sierra Leone to strengthen the protection of the WAPNP, landgrabbers and their sponsors continued their illegal efforts, challenging the President's proclamations, and remained undeterred in their pursuit of more land within and around the National Park at the detriment of the greater population.

The Executive Director of CSSL, Dr. Sheku Kamara, spoke directly to community members who were found at Bio Barry and tried to appeal to their consciences, "...coming here, you would really see that you people are highly dependent on the water from this forest for your domestic use as well as for construction purposes. But look, you are also destroying the source of the water which is the forest. Is this an issue of ignorance or desperation for land?"

The spot visit of environmental stakeholders including CSSL, EFA, NPAA and Guma Valley increased public outcry through the media for government to apply robust and punitive measures that would ensure the security and sanctity of the Guma Dam, surrounding water catchments as well as the remaining biodiversity hosted by the Park.

by Abdul Kaprr Dumbuya



CSSL Uses Culture and Tradition

to Secure the Future of Mangroves in the Yawri Bay Marine Protected Area



Mangroves are vital coastal ecosystems but are currently facing unprecedented threats from deforestation, pollution, and climate change. While scientific approaches are crucial, incorporating cultural and traditional knowledge offers a powerful, often overlooked, complementary strategy for mangrove conservation. Performances, embodying local traditions and beliefs can be instrumental in raising awareness, fostering stewardship, and safeguarding these valuable forests.

Mangroves are more than just trees; they are often deeply intertwined with the cultural fabric of coastal communities, which have intricate histories tied to these ecosystems. Communities rely on them for sustenance, livelihood, and spiritual wellbeing.

With funds from the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF), CSSL successfully rolled out roadshow sessions in two coastal communities - Mokobu and Mokumba on 17th and 18th February 2025. The roadshows aimed at raising awareness around mangrove conservation and protection, and increasing local communities' understanding of the significance of protecting mangroves to mitigate climate change related events including coastal erosion and wind surges.

The roadshows also provided communities with deep knowledge of the need for alternative livelihood options as a way to sustainably conserve their mangrove forests.

The event drew the attention of various categories of people in the communities, including local community leaders, women, youth and school children. Much as it was meant to increase public environmental awareness, the roadshow was also seen by community leaders as huge boost towards showcasing their cultural heritage by CSSL. "I've never been more thrilled by a cultural event like this before in my entire stay in this community. This is thanks to Conservation Society! Your message has really been driven through. We will continue to work together as a people to protect our coastal environment", a community school teacher assures CSSL officials.

by Abdul Kaprr Dumbuya

CSSL trains coastal communities

in mangrove conservation as a key approach for community climate resilience



As part of its ongoing commitment to restoring degraded landscapes within the Jersey Overseas Aid (JOA) project communities, the Conservation Society Sierra Leone (CSSL) is taking proactive steps to enhance community engagement in biodiversity conservation.

CSSL recognizes the critical role of local stakeholders in safeguarding mangrove ecosystems and therefore, facilitated a targeted training and awareness creation program that focused on key community members with both interest and influence in mangrove protection.

This initiative was designed to deepen community understanding of the importance of conservation-oriented by-laws and the structured process of their development. Through the engagement, CSSL introduced sample by-laws as guiding frameworks, to empower communities to craft their own tailored regulations that would effectively mitigate threats to mangroves and other natural resources.

“I am so happy to have received this important training by CSSL. I will work with the local authorities and other groups in my community to secure our mangroves. Our environment is all we have!”, Mariatu Sankoh from one of the communities expresses at the end of the training.

The by-laws drafted by each participating community would later be consolidated into a single document by CSSL for use by all communities.

by Abdul Kaprr Dumbuya

Common Birds of Sierra Leone

The Common Bulbul

Connecting People to nature. is our slogan. To connect you with the nature around you, we regularly introduce common birds of Sierra Leone to you. Today it is the **Common Bulbul**.



The Common Bulbul is mainly brown but with a dirty white belly. The head is darker brown than the body. The bill is black and pointed; legs and feet are black. The Common Bulbul is one of the first birds to call in the morning but also one of the few that will continue calling through the day. The call is cheerful and varied but often interpreted as “quick, quick, be quick”.

Common Bulbuls occur almost everywhere, except deep in the forest or on water. They will come into gardens and compounds and are usually seen in twos or in small groups.

Common Bulbuls feed mainly on small fruits and seeds like pepper or chilli. Farmers think they damage their crops.

Common Bulbuls help to spread the seeds of our plants from place to place (dispersal).

“

The common bulbul is popularly known as "Pepeh bud" in Krio (pepper 🌶️ bird) and it does feed on ripe hot chillies right from the plant, in farms.

It is known for waking people up in the morning with it's chuckling 'Is the Queen's property correct ' and 'have you said your prayers'

Charles Showers
President of Board, CSSL

Please note:

The information above and the photo are excerpts from our guide book “Common birds of Sierra Leone - an indigenous language guide”.

COMMON BIRDS
OF SIERRA LEONE
AN INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE GUIDE



Learn more about our birds with **“Common birds of Sierra Leone – an indigenous languages guide”**

Published in 2024 by the Conservation Society of Sierra Leone
154 pages, 60 common birds, lot’s of information about habitats and bird watching in general.

Get your copy now
at CSSL’s office (86A Main Road, Congo Town, Freetown)

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CSSL THANKS ALL MEMBERS, PARTNERS AND DONORS!



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