



# BIRDLIFE AFRICA NEWSLETTER



## A MESSAGE FROM THE REGIONAL DIRECTOR'S DESK

As we begin to reset our interaction with nature, the question is how to build back better post COVID-19. The COVID-19 pandemic has underlined the importance of nature in ensuring our wellbeing. We need a Green Recovery pathway that ensures the protection and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystems, to build back from the impacts of the pandemic. Following up on the just concluded November COP26 talks in Glasgow, it is critical to redouble efforts towards protection of nature. The BirdLife Partnership in Africa is doing its part.

We hope you will take time to enjoy our partners' stories from around the continent, and that you will share this newsletter with your friends and supporters. Happy reading and thank you for your continued support.

### **Kariuki Ntang'ang'a**

Ag Regional Director for Africa  
BirdLife International

### ON THE COVER PHOTO...

## Hooded Vulture *Necrosyrtes monachus*

© Peter Ichman

Across Africa, vulture populations have catastrophically declined over the last 50 years, with overall decline rates of up to 97%. Today, 7 out of 11 African-Eurasian vulture species are at risk of extinction, underlining this decline.

In West Africa, belief-based use is considered the leading cause of vulture deaths, where vultures are killed for their parts which are used in traditional medicine or charms. To address this threat, a new vulture conservation project supported by [IUCN Save Our Species](#), and co-funded by the [European Union](#), was launched in Guinea Bissau, the Gambia and Senegal.

Want to know more?  
Read the whole story [here!](#)

# BIRDLIFE AFRICA MAKES NEW ADDITIONS

**"One head cannot make a council. Three heads are better than one".** This Ashanti saying from Ghana aptly describes the recent additions into the [BirdLife Africa Partnership](#). In 2021, BirdLife Africa welcomed three partners into the flock namely [Biosfera](#), from Cabo Verde, [Guinée Ecologie](#), from Guinea, and [Nature-Communautés-Développement](#) (NCD), from Senegal.

By Lewis Kihumba

The three organizations have a track record of working in environmental conservation. Biosfera was founded in 2006, by two Cape Verdean ecologists Tommy Melo and José Melo. Located in the island of São Vicente, Biosfera seeks to protect coastal and marine biodiversity, working with public and private institutions, in addition to local communities. Key focal areas for Biosfera include conservation of turtles, sea birds, sharks and rays, reptiles; tackling marine pollution; advocating for sustainable fishing, and Marine Protected Areas (MPAs); and creating awareness on the need for environment protection.



Biosfera was born from its commitment to ban the massacre of Cape Verde Shearwater chicks (*Calonectris edwardsii*) on the Raso island. The BirdLife Portuguese partner [SPEA](#) quickly supported us and helped us to grow. Today a new stage is underway, we are strengthening our links with the BirdLife International ship and proudly joining the large family of 120 partners throughout the world."

**Blandine Melis Biosfera's Executive Director**

Established in 1989, Guinée Ecologie seeks to promote conservation of biodiversity and sustainable use of natural resources in Guinea through participating in the enactment and implementation of policies and strategies, which protect the environment for the benefit of present and future generations. The organization has a wealth of experience in nature conservation issues, and has developed extensive collaborative networks both at national, regional and international levels.



We welcome the inclusion of Guinée Ecologie in the BirdLife International partnership. This is a very important step for our organisation. It is also very good news for conservation in our country. It will allow Guinée Ecologie to continue strengthening its governance capacities and its visibility on the international level. This partnership is an opportunity to exchange experiences and opportunities and help the organisation increase its capacity to mobilize financial resources for its interventions. This partnership represents for us a strength to advance certain issues and change certain behaviours towards critical species and ecosystems through lobbying and advocacy.

**Mamadou Diawara, Guinée Ecologie's Executive Director**

Founded in 2010, Nature-Communautés-Développement (NCD) works in the conservation of nature, protection of biodiversity particularly birds and ecosystems in Senegal. Additionally, NCD works to improve livelihoods, through training and supporting local communities develop sustainable income generating activities.



Joining the BirdLife International family is a good opportunity for NCD to continue to grow in such a strong network. The most important thing to stay is to continue to be ourselves so that our model, based on biodiversity volunteers, can positively influence conservation approaches in Africa. Our adhesion must not suffer from a lack of ideas and must be characterized by a strong commitment in which volunteerism is balanced with the professionalism of the association

**Aliou Bah, Executive Director of NCD**

**The latest additions bring the total number of BirdLife Africa partners to 25. Currently, the BirdLife Partnership has over 115 Partners across the globe.**



Implementing Workshop of beekeeping with women in Côte d'Ivoire © SOS Forêts

## AFRIEVOLVE: STRENGTHENING CAPACITY OF LOCAL NGOS IN EAST AND WEST AFRICA

**Green NGOs play a critical role in advocating for the interests of local communities and in securing maintenance of natural livelihoods. Nevertheless, local organisations in Africa often face structural challenges to secure long-term funding and to enlarge background expertise limiting their influence on political decision makers for conservation topics both at national and regional level.**

By Samuel Fournet

To strengthen NGOs and the BirdLife partnership network in Africa, the project [AfriEvolve](#) - Capacity Development for Green NGOs in Africa - enables six African BirdLife (or candidating) partners to jointly use newly gained capacities for improved civil society cooperation and climate adaptation of smallholder agriculture.

AfriEvolve has the threefold objective to increase organisational development capacities through equal mutual learning; to intensify regional or transboundary collaboration along with interregional networking and; to enhance partner portfolio expertise with innovative Climate-Smart Agriculture directly benefiting local farmers in 6 countries. Two less, mid and more experienced NGOs trio partners are formed into a West African and East-African regional cluster. Clusters are conceived as regional southern-driven cooperation platform facilitating peer-to-peer or mentoring exchanges of knowledge, skills and resources in order to emulate capacity building and political empowerment among its members.

The six partner NGOs are also introducing [Climate Smart Agriculture](#) (CSA) at six selected sites. Each of the project areas is located in significant regions for the country's biodiversity.

The Yala is Kenya's largest freshwater wetland with 20,756 ha and a [Key Biodiversity Area](#) (KBA). The papyrus swamps are home to rare blue-breasted bee-eater ([Merops variegatus](#)) and papyrus gonolek ([Laniarius mufumbiri](#)), among others. On top to the marshlands at the North-Eastern end of the Lake Victoria, two mountainous regions in East Africa have been selected as project areas. The Echuya Forest Reserve is a highland forest landscape at an altitude of 2,570 m in the heart of the biodiversity rich Albertine Rift in western Uganda. The Albertine Rift is known for its variety of endemic animal and plant species that inhabit the remaining primeval forests.

In north-east of Tanzania, the Usambara Mountains are located not far from the Indian Ocean coast and the border with Kenya, in the Tanga region. The mountains are partly covered with remnants of very old (> 30 million years) forests and are of outstanding importance for nature conservation.

In contrast, the project areas in West Africa are dominated by other ecosystems. The Mole-National Park is located in North-Western Ghana and is mostly structured by open savannah forests hosting important wintering area for many migratory bird species and



Implementing intercropping techniques in Kenya © Nature Kenya

various mammal species such as the African elephant (*Loxodonta africana*), lion (*Panthera leo*), leopard (*Panthera pardus*) and the bohor reedbeek (*Redunca redunca*). The Azagny National Park in Côte d'Ivoire extends 100 km west of Abidjan over 21,850 ha along the coast of the Gulf of Guinea. With lagoons, evergreen primary forests, dry and wet coastal savannah, wetlands and mangrove areas, the park offers around 134 plant species and rare, endangered animal species such as forest elephant (*Loxodonta africana cyclotis*), chimpanzee (*Pan troglodytes verus*), pygmy hippopotamus (*Choeropsis liberiensis*), West African manatee (*Trichechus senegalensis*) and royal antelope (*Neotragus pygmaeus*). In Burkina Faso's interior lies the Sourou Valley. With a total area of 20,926 ha, this watershed bordering with Mali consists of broad floodplain marshes and acacia forests. Large parts of the area are dominated by agricultural land, where only trees of economic value remain. The valley is an [Important Bird Area](#) (IBA), but the natural resources are under considerable pressure.



Implementing workshop of tree nurseries © Nature Uganda

AfriEvolve is an initiative running from March 2021 to December 2023 implemented by [Nature Kenya](#), [Naturama](#), [Nature Uganda](#), the [Chana Wildlife Society](#), [Nature Tanzania](#) and [SOS Forêts](#), [NABU](#), the Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Union, coordinates the project and cofunds it with [BMZ](#), the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. A final learning catalogue product, including all key webinars and field practices, will be developed to disseminate and upscale the experience among the BirdLife network. This article draws up a general project introduction.

*In the next newsletter, we feature the work of individual African partners participating in the AfriEvolve.*





# THE GREAT GREEN WALL: AN EPIC PLAN TO HOLD BACK DESERT ACROSS AFRICA

Visual representation of nature's ability to hold back deserts © Great Green Wall Initiative

By Lewis Kihumba

**Metre by metre, climate change and over-farming are degrading Africa's formerly productive Sahel region and threatening not just wildlife habitat, but also people's survival. However, there's epic ambition to restore depleted lands and grow a 7,000-km natural wonder across the entire width of the continent. It's showing that some walls can actually be liberating...**

Restoration is not just about improving things for nature: it can mean life or death for millions of people. In Africa's Sahel region, a largely semi-arid expanse of land that stretches the breadth of the continent on the southern fringes of the Sahara Desert, 80% of people depend on agriculture.

But years of climate change, over-farming and over-grazing have eroded this once green band, endangering the food security and livelihoods of 130 million people.

To tackle this crisis, in 2007 the African Union and the [UN Convention to Combat Desertification](#) joined forces to launch the [Great Green Wall](#) initiative, spanning 11 countries west to east from Senegal to Djibouti. The initiative aims to restore degraded soil by creating a mosaic of different land uses, including sustainable farming and restored patches of natural habitat. Their vision is to see 7,000 km of trees, grasslands and verdant vegetation stretching the breadth of the continent – vegetation that will bind the soil, retain water and create 10 million green jobs, in addition to providing food security for more than 20 million people by 2030.

## Keeping it personal

Every country in the Sahel is different, and so are the reasons for land degradation. A key aspect of the Great Green Wall initiative is its localised approach, where participating countries address the problem using local contexts. Given the nature of the problem and the needs of people, nations may choose to focus on agroforestry, reforestation, irrigation systems or even fixing sand dunes in place with native vegetation. Their efforts are already beginning to bear fruit. An report released in 2020 shows that about 20 million hectares of land have been restored so far. In Senegal, 11 million trees have been planted, while across Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Nigeria and Ethiopia, more than 540,000 hectares of land have been reforested, creating over 280,000 jobs.



[Nature Mauritania](#) (BirdLife Partner) is carrying out a habitat restoration program in partnership with the National Agency of the Great Green Wall and supported by [Vogelbescherming](#) (BirdLife in the Netherlands). So far, 10,000 seedlings of various local species including Acacia Senegal, Umbrella Thorn and Indian Jujube have been grown. The seedlings, bolstered by 20,000 others from Nature Mauritania's nursery, have gone a long way towards reforesting the degraded land around Lake Mâle – a site that is crucial to fishing and farming communities, as well as an Important Bird & Biodiversity Area. Furthermore, local communities are benefiting from various livelihood schemes including poultry raising and market gardening.

**“These restoration efforts are a testament that ordinary people with conviction can have an extraordinary impact on their world,” - Djibril Diallo, Executive Director of Nature Mauritania**

## Putting wildlife at the centre

Restoring the land is no doubt beneficial for agriculture – but it is also vital to consider nature conservation at every turn. To this end, BirdLife and our Partners are collaborating with the Great Green Wall initiative to make sure that wildlife also reaps the rewards of restoration.

**“BirdLife and Partners have been involved in a lot of conservation efforts in the region, such as the Living on the Edge project in the Sahel. Building on what has been done, this collaboration will ensure that as activities are implemented, biodiversity conservation is also considered and integrated for sustainability”**, says Geoffroy Citegetse, BirdLife's lead co-ordinator in mainstreaming conservation in Great Green Wall activities.

Major areas of co-operation include restoring wildlife habitats, monitoring biodiversity along the Great Green Wall corridor and building the capacity of national and local conservation organisations. Partners have also helped raise awareness of the initiative and campaign to decision-makers.

In January 2021, the Great Green Wall initiative received a boost at the fourth [One Planet Summit](#), which brought together decision-makers from around the world to accelerate international action for the protection of biodiversity. At the summit, the initiative's partners pledged almost €14 billion for the 11 countries to preserve biodiversity and meet UN Sustainable Development Goals by 2025.

“While each country has its own restoration goals and ways to achieve them, the implementation activities are being performed at the local level, which means that local communities own the process and are directly benefiting from restoration efforts and the conservation of biodiversity. Greater support for communities will help the green revolution to take shape in the Sahel, and with it the promise of better lives for its people,” concludes Citegetse.



# AFRICAN CONSERVATIONIST LEADERS ADVOCATE ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION, CALL ON YOUTHS TO SAVE THE PLANET

(L-R) Dr. Muhtari Aminu-Kano, DG of NCF; Chief Ede Dafinone, Chairman, National Executive Council, NCF; Chief Philip Asiodu, President, Board of Trustees, NCF; Mr. Esimaje Brikin, GM, Policy Govt & Public Affairs, Chevron Nigeria Ltd; Dame Marie Fatayi-Williams, Council Member, NCF and a representative of Chevron Nigeria Ltd during the 19th Chief S.L. Edu Memorial Lecture held on August 12, 2021 at Lekki Conservation Centre, Lagos © NCF

By Oladapo Soneye

From Nairobi, Abuja, Lagos, Calabar, and elsewhere, African conservationist leaders participating in the 19th Chief S.L Edu Memorial Lecture joined the [Nigerian Conservation Foundation](#) (NCF), BirdLife Partner on 12th August 2021 to advocate for ecosystem restoration, challenging Nigerian youths to help save the planet.

The event, hosted by NCF themed Youth and Ecosystem Restoration was held at the Lekki Conservation Centre in Lagos and streamed on Zoom, Instagram, YouTube and Facebook to **mobilise the Nigerian Youths to rise and champion courses that can promote ecosystem restoration.**

The guest speaker, Ms. Simangele Msweli, Senior Manager, Youth Leadership Programme, African Wildlife Foundation, led other youth conservationists including Ms. Omobola Eko, Mr. Abubakar Muhammad & Ms. Nella Duke Ekpeyong to add credence to this discussion.

In her presentation, Ms. Msweli said that the world needs urgent restoration of ecosystem which has been degraded for so long. She identified poor implementation of great policies and strategic action programmes in African countries owing to bad leadership, corruption and non-youth integration.

**“Youth commitment coupled with effective youth engagement, from government organisations, will bring us closer to a world where ecosystems are reserved and therefore providing livelihood, climate resilience, and sustainable economy”**, she further noted.

Earlier in his opening remarks, Chief Philip Asiodu, President, Board of Trustees, NCF who also doubles up as the Chairman at the Memorial Lecture, observed that forest reserves in Nigeria had depleted significantly from 35% to 3%, thereby denying animals their natural habitat which could possibly bring harm to human environment.”

“It is a great concern that when we look at our environment today, especially people who have been around before independence, one will be moved to tears at the level of degradation, loss of wetlands, desertification and fast disappearing forest.” he said, urging immediate action to halt and reverse the biodiversity loss.

In the same vein, Chief Ede Dafinone, Chairman, National Executive Council of NCF, noted that said that the theme was very important, as humanity seemed to have severed our relationship with the ecosystem, with the earth.



The 2 grantees displaying certificates of award, flanked by NCF & Chevron Nigeria Ltd officials during the lecture ©NCF

Underlining that plundering and polluting nature's resources, treating earth as a dumping ground for plastic and other waste had harmed the planet, in addition to projections that the planet could lose one million species in the next few decades, all called for urgent action.

**“There are some actions we can take, starting from today, individually and collectively to recreate our relationship with the planet and restore our ecosystem.”** he added.

During the event, Director General of NCF, Dr. Muhtari Aminu-Kano, made a clarion call to African youth, to take the driver's seat in this global decade-long project of ecosystem restoration from 2021-2030. According to him, **“The youths have the energy, technical savviness and the information at their disposal to make a meaningful contribution to environmental restoration”**.

Meanwhile, Mr. Esimaje Brikinn, General Manager, Policy, Govt & Public Affairs, Chevron Nigeria Limited revealed that his organisation was transparently committed to advancing a lower carbon future, one that meets the global needs of all people, through affordable and reliable and ever cleaner energy towards achieving a more prosperous and sustainable world.

He commended the giant strides of NCF and other stakeholders and urged everyone to make a personal commitment to preserve the environment which is more threatened now than ever before. While sharing her impact statement on ecosystem restoration, a youth conservationist, Ms. Omobola Eko, said:

**“Tree planting is one of the cheapest solutions to climate change. According to her, this can be achieved by planting the right tree, at the right place, at the right time, and in the right quantity. She added that efforts should be made to plant trees that are indigenous to the environment to achieve effective ecosystem restoration”**.

Others who featured at the event included Mr. Abubakar Muhammad, a youth conservationist, Ms. Kafayat Quadri, a Nigerian lawyer, singer, songwriter, poet and music producer, and a 12-year old boy, Rereloluwa Oketola who made a 'spoken word' presentation on ecosystem restoration.

The event equally served as a platform to award scholarship grants to two PhD students whose research works are in the field of environmental sciences in any Nigerian academic institution. The grant sponsored by Chevron Nigeria Limited, seeks to promote research works in nature conservation, biodiversity preservation, environmental management and sustainable livelihood. This year's edition was won by Mrs. Iboronke Olubamise and Mr. Samuel Jatto. Olubamise is a PhD student at The Post Graduate School, Nigerian Defence Academy, Kaduna pursuing a programme in Environmental Management with a research titled, **“Assessing the Effectiveness of Community Initiatives for Environmental Restoration and Policy Development in Nigeria”**. While Jatto, a PhD student at The Postgraduate College, University of Ibadan pursuing a programme in Forest Management with a research titled **“Forest structure, Woody species diversity and basis for Joint forest management in Omo-Shasha-Oluwa Forest Complex Nigeria”**.



Common Cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*) © Vladimir Turkenich / Shutterstock

## HERE'S HOW 7 ICONIC MIGRATORY BIRD SPECIES SPENT THE SPRING & SUMMER

**Digging metre-long tunnels, luring away predators, stealing other bird's nests... The breeding season is never dull for these seven bird species, which are now leaving Europe for the warmer climate of Africa.**

By Jessica Law

Many migratory birds have return this autumn to Africa for a much-deserved rest after the intensive activity of the breeding season. They will use the coming months to moult their old feathers and grow shiny new plumage to impress next year's mate. They will also eat as much as they can, building up their fat stores before setting off next spring to start the process all over again.

As part of our [Spring Alive programme](#), which aims to inspire and educate children across Africa and Eurasia about the wonders of nature and bird migration, this lasts months teachers, parents and volunteers have been educating children across the continent, about birds and nature through our seven Spring Alive focal species. Even though these birds breed in Europe, they couldn't do it without the rest, warmth and nourishment that Africa provides them. By keeping them safe while they're here, we can help them to carry on with the important business of nesting next year.

The nesting habits of the Spring Alive species are as varied as the birds themselves. Here's a glimpse into what they got up to over the spring and summer:

## 1. WHITE STORK – A PENTHOUSE APARTMENT



© Macedonian Ecological Society

The White Stork is not afraid to build its nest near humans, often locating them high up on telegraph poles, church roofs or even people's houses. Male White Storks return to the same nest every year, adding to its height until it can reach a whopping two metres. Their nests are so big that smaller birds such as sparrows and starlings often nest in the sides of these towering structures, creating a multi-storey, high-rise apartment block.

Today, Europe has a network of "Stork Villages" where storks are not only protected, but celebrated by humans. The district of Cheshinovo-Obleshevo in North Macedonia [holds annual "Stork Day" festivities](#) that draw crowds. The [Macedonian Ecological Society](#) (BirdLife Partner) works with energy companies in the area to re-model dangerous powerlines that risk electrocuting nesting storks, and the district has even updated their coat of arms to feature the White Stork.

## 2. COLLARED SAND MARTIN – LIFE UNDERGROUND



© Jochen Roeder

The stereotypical bird nest is one made out of twigs – but the Collared Sand Martin digs deep burrows into the sandy banks of riversides, lakes or coastal cliffs. They like to nest in large groups ranging from twelve to several hundred pairs, and their tunnels can reach over a metre long!

Sadly, in modern times we humans have modified our waterways, putting in flood control and anti-erosion structures, and these natural cliffs are being lost. Nowadays, quarries are one of the few remaining habitats where they can set up a colony. But quarries are also working landscapes that change constantly as new areas are dug up. Our sponsor HeidelbergCement solves this problem by [attracting birds to cliffs in unused areas of the quarry](#), and making sure they keep their machinery a safe distance away.

## 3. COMMON RINGED PLOVER – HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT



© Arnoldius

Most birds like to build their nests out of harm's way – but Common Ringed Plovers have another strategy. They lay their eggs straight onto the beach, barely bothering to build a nest at all. Instead, the eggs are perfectly camouflaged to look like pebbles. Even the chicks, when they hatch, are grey and mottled like the stony shingle of the shoreline. If a predator does manage to sniff out the nest, the parents have yet another trick up their sleeve – they stagger away from the nest, calling out and feigning a broken wing, luring the predator towards them.

Unfortunately, the Common Ringed Plover's population is declining due to wetlands being polluted or drained to make way for agriculture – something which is happening on every step of its migratory journey. The [Ghana Wildlife Society](#) (BirdLife Partner) runs school birdwatching trips to local wetlands, using the Common Ringed Plover as an ambassador for these vital habitats.

## 4. BARN SWALLOW – SCULPTED TO PERFECTION



© J.N. Stuart / Flickr

Barn Swallows used to nest in caves, but today they nest almost exclusively in small gaps underneath the rooves of houses, churches and – unsurprisingly – barns. Here, they build their distinctive cup-shaped nests out of hundreds of tiny pellets of mud that they collect in their beaks. Unfortunately, modern buildings have fewer suitable holes for the birds to use. Added to this, there is sometimes a lack of mud to build the nests from – especially in urban areas, or during unseasonably dry weather.

To combat this, Spring Alive runs workshops across Europe on how to create artificial nests. Our Serbian Partner Bird Protection and Study Society of Serbia even employed artists from a [local ceramics museum](#) to coach families on the best techniques to make these clay homes.

## 5. COMMON CUCKOO – A FLYING VISIT



© Vladimir Turkenich / Shutterstock

The Common Cuckoo's habit of laying its eggs in other birds' nests is notorious worldwide, to the extent that the word "cuckoo" has become synonymous with unwelcome intruders. The deception starts with the adult female, whose plumage mimics that of the fearsome Eurasian Sparrowhawk. This scares off other birds, allowing her to lay her eggs in their nests unchallenged. In this way, the female can visit up to 50 nests in a single breeding season.

As a species, the Common Cuckoo can target more than a hundred different species of bird, including the Eurasian Reed Warbler, Pied Wagtail and European Robin. However, females tend to specialise in targeting just one species, laying eggs that are the same colour and pattern as those of their host.

The similarities end when the chick hatches. This baby grows big and fast, pushing the real eggs and chicks out of the nest, and making a loud call that mimics the sound of a whole nest full of chicks begging to be fed. This may sound shocking, but it's worth remembering that cuckoos don't understand that they are tricking other birds. They evolved this strategy because it helps their species to survive.

Despite this, the Common Cuckoo's population is now in decline, and scientists across the world are satellite-tagging the species to understand the cause. The first cuckoo to be tagged by the Beijing Cuckoo Project (a collaboration between several conservation organisations, including BirdLife) was christened "Flappy McFlapperson" by local school children. [Flappy became world famous](#), inspiring thousands of followers with her amazing journey from China to Africa.

## 6. COMMON SWIFT – LIFE ON THE WING



© fs-phil / Flickr

The Common Swift spends most of its life in mid-air, and never lands on the ground. You might be forgiven for thinking it has trouble finding nesting materials, but that is not so. This ingenious master of the skies builds its nests out of anything that can be gathered on the wing, including feathers, straw, hay and seeds, glued together with its own saliva. Swifts form lifelong pairs, meeting up with the same partner every year after journeying thousands of kilometres from their wintering grounds. We humans love it when they arrive too, with their streamlined silhouette and screeching call heralding the start of spring. World Swift Day takes place on the 7th of June every year, and the town of Alange in Spain holds its very own Swift Festival in celebration of the birds.

Organisations across the Spring Alive partnership hold tutorials on how to build artificial nesting boxes to help these birds out – including [this great instructional video](#) from [BirdLife Malta](#). Our Partner [SEO/BirdLife](#) even has its own [recovery centre to help baby swifts](#) that jump out of the nest prematurely during increasingly-common heatwaves.

## 7. EUROPEAN BEE-EATER – A DINNER DATE



© Pierre Dalous

What kind of food would you eat on your ideal date? Curry? Pizza? Sushi? Or how about a delicious dead wasp? Don't worry, your date has removed its sting by hitting it against a hard rock...

Fortunately, for the female European Bee-eater, this is the perfect way to win her heart. During courtship, the male will impress the female with his hunting prowess, depositing a series of bees, wasps, hornets, dragonflies and even butterflies at her feet. And while the male seems to do most of the work at the start of the relationship, when the eggs are laid the couple shares the duties equally, taking turns to incubate the eggs and feed the chicks in their sandy cliffside burrow. In fact, their next door neighbours in the colony might help out too!

These species may all have finished breeding, but Africa also has plenty of resident bird species that breed all year round – including the Grey Go-away Bird. Therefore, it's still important to keep up to date with this year's Spring Alive theme: "How should we protect birds' nests?". From letting your garden grow to building a nest box, there are [plenty of simple actions you can take](#) to help your local birds raise their chicks in safety.

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This article is part of our [Spring Alive programme](#), which aims to inspire and educate children across Africa and Eurasia about the wonders of nature and bird migration. The 2021 Spring Alive season has been made possible with the continuing support of HeidelbergCement. We are delighted to welcome two new countries to our network during this last Spring Alive season for Africa: Senegal and Ivory Coast.



# ADVANCING FOREST CONSERVATION IN WEST AFRICA THROUGH THE PAPFOR PROJECT

Gola Forest in Sierra Leone © Caroline Thomas (RSPB)

In August 2020, the European Commission-funded Programme to Support the Conservation of Forest Ecosystems in West Africa (PAPFoR) was rolled out in Sierra Leone and Liberia to [conserve the Gola Forest](#). In Sierra Leone, the three year programme is being implemented by the [Conservation Society of Sierra Leone](#) (CSSL), BirdLife Partner. Alice Kofi-Asare Communication Officer, for the CSSL PAPFoR project sat down with Madam Musu Massaquoi, a 46 year old farmer from the Small Bo, Chiefdom, Kambui Hills Reserves, one of the areas where the project is being carried out.

By Alice Kofi-Asare

**Alice Kofi - Asare (CSSL): Thank you Madam Musu for honoring the request to talk to us about the PAPFoR project. Now tell me, what do you know about the project?**

**Musu Massaquoi :** The first thing I know about the project is that it is under the Conservation Society for Sierra Leone (CSSL), aimed at conserving and protecting Kambui Hills landscape including the Kambui forests. PAPFoR is being implemented in two forest landscapes, Kambui and Gola Landscapes. In our area (Kambui) CSSL is the sole implementer of PAPFoR, but in the Gola Landcsape, CSSL is co-implementing the project with the Gola Forest. In 2020, before Christmas, the PAPFoR team held a roadshow in our area, where it highlighted conservation, how to protect our forests and subsequent benefits for us as community members. This was very interesting and informative.

**ALICE: Have you been involved with the project?**

**MUSU:** Yes, on various occasions. Before the roadshow, the CSSL team came here and carried out a community assessment exercise. After this exercise, I was invited to go to a meeting in the local school, where I learned that there is an aspect of the project that is going to be working with the school and the children through nature clubs. 20 pupils were selected from our school to form the nature club.

We also learnt a lot about our environment, how to protect ourselves and our communities from self-inflicted disasters. We learnt that by destroying the forest, it is us, the local community who suffer.

**ALICE: What is the role of these pupils in the project?**

**MUSU:** According to the project, the children take part in environmental education activities like talking on the radio to encourage other children to love nature, forest walks, field trips and they will even take them to the forest to see how beautiful nature is. So that when the children become adults in the near future, they will embrace conservation, and not engage in activities that harm the environment including the forest.

**ALICE: What other activity have you been part of, and what have you learnt from the project so far?**

**MUSU:** In one of the meetings I learnt that the project would use forest guards drawn from the local communities, to protect the forest from invaders. Through this, we are happy that our brothers have gotten jobs as a result of the project. Further, we were assured that though these guards are in place, we would not be stopped from accessing the forest. The project would work with us, teaching us how to benefit from the forest resource, without destroying it, for the sake of future generations. This has been pleasant for us, because when we first heard about forest conservation,



Boys carry firewood on their heads Gola Forest in Sierra Leone © Caroline Thomas (RSPB)



A sign announces the entrance to the Gola Forest, Gola, Sierra Leone © Caroline Thomas (RSPB)



White-necked picathartes (*Picathartes gymnocephalus*) in Gola Forest, Sierra Leone © Guy Shorrocks (RSPB)

we were scared, as we were told that if you near the forest you are going to prison, but our fears are being allayed with the frequent engagement and how things are done.

**ALICE: How has the project benefited the community so far?**

**MUSU:** We have learnt a lot. We now know that protecting the forest has important benefits apart from burning charcoal and hunting, mining or logging. Through local engagements and education, we now know that we are dependent on the forest for everything. Even the clean water that running from our taps is due to the forest; our communities are protected from rain storms because the forest covers our community. We just hear about those calamities from other communities without forests. On the International Forest Day 2021, officials who came to celebrate the day emphasized the importance of taking care of the forest. We have greatly benefited from the project's awareness creation on the forest, and the education we have gotten in this short period will help us to be wise, instead of being ignorant, just thinking about how to get money and eat food, forgetting our wellbeing today and our children tomorrow.

**ALICE: Do you have questions you may like to ask about the project discuss**

**MUSU:** I have a number of questions, the main one being about our livelihood. During the Forest Day Celebrations, we were told that forest conservation goes with livelihood support. How will the project support our livelihoods? I am a farmer, I burn charcoal from the farm and sell to buy food, I am willing to stop in order to protect the forest, but I need to engage in other activity that can put food on my table.

Secondly, is the project going to conserve the whole forest, or will it leave a portion for the local community to depend on?

Thirdly, we heard that the communities in Gola Land are now enjoying benefits like scholarship for their children, money for their women to do business, farming tools and seeds and even money for community development like the construction of schools and clinics. Does the PAPFoR project have similar plans for us?

Also, we want to have photos of animals that we can hunt and eat and those that are protected so we cannot fall short because the NPAA guards are very disturbing even squirrels we cannot catch so let us have those photos like we heard that it is done in Gola.

We would also want the PAPFoR project to do a survey for us so that we can know how big the Kambui is. We heard they did it in Gola land.

**ALICE: Parting shot**

**MUSU:** Well just to thank the PAPFoR project for the enlightenment. Our community is poor and vulnerable, and that is why we engage in some of the activities like timber processing and mining. I am optimistic that the project will help us as we improve our livelihoods, and conserve the forest that we depend on, for the benefit of nature and the whole community.



Staff are kept busy monitoring the turtles during the season © Nature Seychelles

## HAWKSBILL TURTLE NESTING FORAY UNDERWAY ON COUSIN ISLAND, SEYCHELLES

By Liz Mwambui

We're excited to announce that the turtle nesting season is well underway on Cousin Island Special Reserve, Seychelles. This is the busiest time of year for our staff, who are continuing the long-term monitoring of this species established since 1970.

The sighting of the tracks of a Hawksbill turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricate*) in late October signalled the onset of nesting. Chris Tagg, our conservation officer on the island, immediately sent a message with photos. "And so it begins," he said, a tad melodramatic. The nesting season on [Cousin Island Special Reserve](#) begins in October and ends in March. However, an earlier start to the season has been recorded in August and September. Similarly, Hawksbill turtles have nested up to early April.

**Seychelles hosts one of the five largest nesting populations of the critically endangered Hawksbill turtle in the world and Cousin is the most important rookery here and in the western Indian Ocean.**

We expect hundreds of turtles to emerge from the waters around the island to nest. Each will do so two to six times in the season.

The staff and volunteers will be on the lookout for them, recording each turtle seen, the type of nesting activity, track and shell measurements, and tag numbers. They will tag all new turtles and record nests and tracks left behind by the turtles that have not been seen. They will log abandoned egg chambers and body pits with reasons for rejection noted for analysis and conservation. These could include roots or rocks encountered by a digging turtle, a cave-in of the chamber, and disturbances by human or animals, and falling tree or branch. Nests will be marked for excavations two months later to determine hatching success.

The 2019/2020 data shows the importance of this island as a nesting site. The total number of emergences recorded was the highest in the past ten seasons, and the number nests was the second highest in the last six seasons.



Nature Seychelles staff measure the trail left by turtles on the sand © Nature Seychelles

"Cousin is a global conservation success story for the Hawksbill turtle. Turtles come to these beaches because they are free from human persecution, disturbances, and pollution. The marine area 400m from the high watermark is also protected by law," says Dr. Nirmal Shah, [Nature Seychelles](#)' (BirdLife partner) Chief Executive.

"Nesting is here in all of Seychelles. **Although the law prohibits it, turtles are still poached and harmed.** Members of the public can help by not taking part in harmful activities towards turtles and reporting any such activities to authorities," he adds. Other things they can do are not disturbing or distracting a laying turtle; alerting the ministry of environment or an NGO monitoring a nesting beach when they see a turtle; and keeping nesting beaches safe and free of litter.



Cousin is the most important rookery for this species © Nature Seychelles



Inauguration of the Development Showcase Center by the State Representative in Manantely © Asity Madagascar

## PROMOTING FOREST CONSERVATION IN MADAGASCAR'S TSITONGAMBARIKA FOREST

By Elena Serra

Located in the southeast of Madagascar, the Tsitongambarika tropical forest is a Protected Area home to unique wildlife. New species of plants and animals continue to be discovered, not least, the forest is a vital water supply for local people and provide them with valuable materials their livelihoods depend on, such as food, firewood, charcoal and timber. Yet the site is extremely threatened, and with it, the essential services it provides.

Madagascar's deforestation rate is one of the highest in the world, having lost around 23% of its forest cover since 2000. The vast majority of forest clearing is for local subsistence agriculture. And an increasing population and extremely rural poverty, which drives farmers to open up new crop areas by cutting and burning forests, is further amplifying this threat.

**Madagascar is renowned for its rich and peerless fauna and flora. More than 80% of its species are found nowhere else on earth. The island has more unique species than any comparably sized landmass.**



Inauguration of the Development Showcase Center by the State Representative in Manantely © Asity Madagascar



Beehives in the Development Showcase Center in Manantantely © Asity Madagascar

In Tsitongambarika, the practice of tavy - a traditional Malagasy farming method to clear forest by slash and burn for farming land-, bush fires, illegal logging, hunting, and various types of harvesting are the main pressures that threaten the survival of this irreplaceable forest. "All these pressures are linked to four factors: bad governance, bad management, lack of environmental education and, above all, the poor standard of living of the local population," explains Andriamandranto Ravoahangy, the coordinator of the Forest Conservation Programme at Asity Madagascar.

[Asity Madagascar](#), BirdLife partner in the country, and Vohimaintso Tsara Tantana (VTT), a confederation of 55 grassroots communities surrounding Tsitongambarika, co-managed the 60,000 ha of the Tsitongambarika Protected Area. Together, they are working to reduce the pressure on the natural resources of this rainforest by promoting environmentally friendly income-generating activities for the surrounding communities.

In this region, most farmers lack the technical capacity, financial means and sometimes motivation to adopt more sustainable and efficient techniques. Furthermore, education levels are low; fewer than 50 per cent of children attend school, and some areas even lack schools.

In order to preserve Tsitongambarika, it is essential to make the population aware of the importance of forest conservation and to train them in sustainable ways of using forest resources. "It is through training that we hope to see a transformation and a behaviour change," says Andriamandranto Ravoahangy.

Consequently, Asity Madagascar inaugurated a training centre in Manantantely on 11th June 2021. At the inauguration ceremony, the local community and public and private partners welcomed the creation of the centre, which was set up with the support of the [Hempel Foundation](#), Vanguard and [BirdLife International](#).

The centre will help improve income sources and consequently living standards of Tsitongambarika's local communities through activities that contribute to the sustainable management of the forest. Further, trainees will be supported financially to start sustainable micro-projects, such as agriculture, livestock, beekeeping or fishing and fish farming, to encourage them to take up economic activities that do not harm the environment.

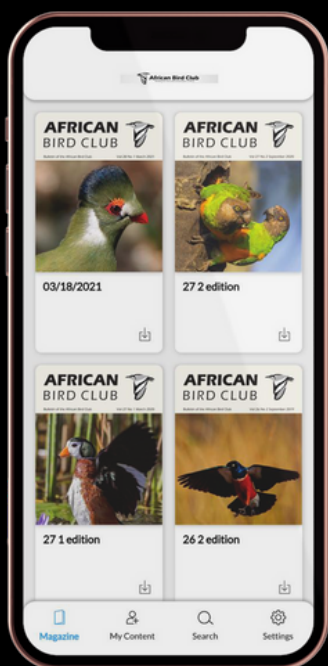
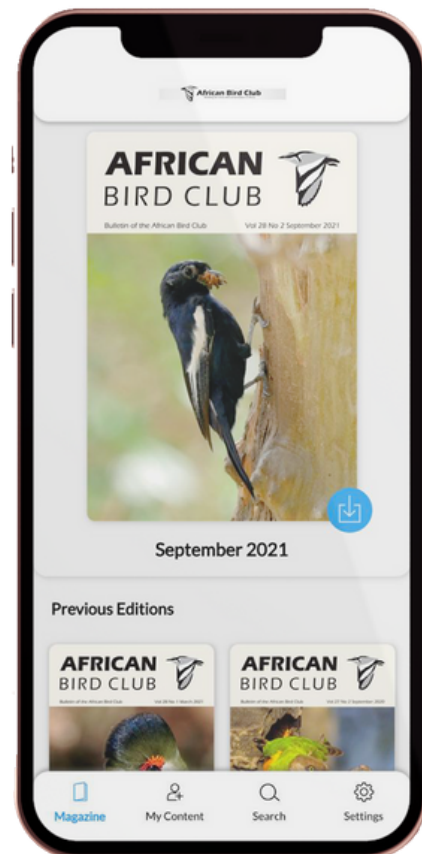
# AFRICAN BIRD CLUB'S BIRDS OF AFRICA APP HAVEN'T YOU TRIED IT YET?

By John Caddick

The [African Bird Club](#) (ABC) has continued to expand and improve its FREE Birds of Africa app, an identification guide which in time will cover all bird species, countries and territories in mainland Africa and neighbouring islands. ABC's major focus over the past six months has been on East Africa and now Kenya with 1,134 species, Uganda with 1,056 species and South Sudan with 818 species are all operational. LITE lists are also available for Kenya and Uganda, and these should be helpful as an introduction to some of the more common birds for school children and anyone new to birdwatching.

**The app now includes 29 countries and islands in West and East Africa with some 1,800 bird species, approximately 65% of Africa's avifauna**

The user base is also expanding with more than 5,000 downloads recorded for Android devices. The equivalent numbers for iOS are harder to determine but ABC would expect total downloads to be in the region of 10,000 to date. The average rating of the app is 4.7 out of 5 from over 40 reviewers. One recent reviewer commented: "The quality of photographic images is second to none, whilst information, maps and interactive functions make this outstandingly the 'go-to' app for those with a keen interest in African birds, from beginner to seasoned ornithologist. The African Bird Club and app developers deserve high praise for producing this excellent resource."



ABC is always happy to receive ideas for improvements, which you are welcome to email to [app@africanbirdclub.org](mailto:app@africanbirdclub.org), along with any problems which you may have encountered while using the app. ABC can incorporate local languages into the app and has recently included Hausa, one of the major languages of Nigeria. Possible ways to improve how sightings are recorded and whether these can be integrated with records from other apps are now being looked at.

The app is only possible because of the work of a number of volunteers in many countries. ABC would like to thank all those who participate in the development of checklists, contribution of photos, recordings and texts, and also everyone who assists with education and roll-out in their local communities. Funding this large project is also important and if you are able to make a donation, it would be very much appreciated. You can donate online securely to ABC at [here](#).



Northern Gannet (*Morus bassanus*) © Patrice Bouchard - unsplash



[www.birdlife.org](http://www.birdlife.org)

