



# BIRDLIFE AFRICA NEWSLETTER



## A MESSAGE FROM THE REGIONAL DIRECTOR'S DESK

2022 is a special year for the BirdLife family, as we mark 100 years of existence. As we celebrate the impact of our conservation work in Africa, and indeed around the world over the past decades, we also look forward to the coming decade with a sense of renewal and optimism that the BirdLife Partnership is well placed to continue being on the frontline of nature's protection.

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 Ndang'ang'a**

Interim Regional Director for Africa  
BirdLife International

## ON THE COVER PHOTO...

### Anyone can be a citizen scientist!

Birdwatching isn't just great fun – it also plays an important role in scientific research and public engagement. Put simply, citizen science is scientific research conducted by people who are not professional scientists. Some of the biggest discoveries in the world have been made by people without official scientific qualifications!

But how does it help birds? Birds can be found in almost every part of the world and often migrate vast distances. Citizen science can help us keep track of bird numbers and how they are changing around the globe. With this information, we can identify species and habitats that are under threat, and act to help them. Isn't it wonderful? [Here's everything](#) you need to know about citizen science and how you can take part.

# FLOCK TO MARION: AN UNPRECEDENTED VOYAGE AT AN UNPRECEDENTED TIME



Flock to Marion guests gather in support of the Mouse-Free Marion Project, on the last day of the voyage © Mark D. Anderson

**By Andy Wassung**

As far as the eye can see, you are surrounded by vast, deep, blue ocean. There is nothing else in sight, except for the spectacle of hundreds of seabirds above, below, and alongside you, 1500 other passionate birders and conservationists, and an all-you-can-eat buffet with every cuisine under the sun. Did I mention the seabirds?

Now, back on dry land and in landlocked Johannesburg, it seems like a dream. But Flock to Marion 2022, BirdLife South Africa's once-in-a-lifetime voyage to the pristine waters of the Southern Ocean aboard the luxury MSC Orchestra, was very real, and a real success, at that.

It may have taken more than three years of planning and patience, while navigating an unprecedented global pandemic, but navigate we did, and our dream of an expedition to the Prince Edward Islands was finally realised.

And so, on 24 January 2022 Captain Pinto of the MSC Orchestra started up the engines and we bid farewell to the South African coastline (and the 'Cape Doctor' winds) at last. The next morning we crossed the continental shelf, and as we sailed further South, the ocean got bluer, the stars brighter, and the prospects more promising. And then it happened...





Flock to Marion guests gather in support of the Mouse-Free Marion Project, on the last day of the voyage © Mark D. Anderson

I can still hear Andrew de Blocq, BirdLife South Africa Avitourism Project Manager, Flock to Marion Organising Committee member, and our resident bird sightings announcer, over the MSC Orchestra's ship-wide PA system: "Bird Alert! Bird Alert! Wandering Albatross coming down the port side, from bow to stern."

With its 3-metre, snowy white wings, our first Wandering Albatross glided effortlessly over the ocean swells, mesmerising 1000s in its wake. Swarovski and Zeiss binoculars were drawn en masse, camera shutters went wild, and gasps of excitement made their way, like dominoes, from bow to stern, as the world's largest flying bird graced us with its presence.

As we neared the border of the Prince Edward Islands Marine Protected Area, which provides a 12 nautical mile sanctuary around Marion and Prince Edward Islands, our species list just kept growing. Some of the more notable sightings included Wandering, Light-mantled and even Tristan Albatrosses; Grey and Blue Petrels; Little and Tropical Shearwaters; King Penguins; Sooty Terns; Grey-backed Storm Petrels; Common Diving Petrels; and an incredible array of cetaceans such as Rough-toothed and Hourglass Dolphins; Beaked, Pilot and Blue Whales, to name a few.



Fellow 'Flockers' scan the wake for petrels, prions and penguins © Andy Wassung



Peter Harrison MBE, as inspiring a guide on the decks as he is a storyteller on stage © Andy Wassung





Thanks to support from donors and Swarovski Optik, eight BirdLife South Africa Community Bird Guides were able to join Flock to Marion © Andy Wassung

Our final Flock to Marion species list can be viewed in full [here](#), and our thanks go to our experienced team of 40 professional guides, seabird and mammal experts who were on deck from 5am, come wind, rain, shine, or Southern Ocean shivers. In fact, so spoilt were we that even Peter Harrison MBE, the world's top seabird expert, felt that the day spent near the Prince Edward Islands was probably his top albatross day ever:



“

I think everybody who's ever met me knows that albatrosses are my number one loved birds. And on this particular voyage, Flock to Marion, we have been so blessed. Never in our wildest dreams could we ever have imagined that we would look out over Prince Edward Island and have something like 300, or even 400 albatrosses in the air together. I've been at sea well over 50 years, but let me tell you, on the morning of Prince Edward Island, looking out at those albatrosses – seven or eight species no less – was one of the high points of my entire life.

**Peter Harrison, MBE**

Of course, we didn't voyage 2000 kilometres and into the 'Roaring 40s' just to enjoy these incredible seabirds and mammals, but to raise awareness and funds for one of the most important bird conservation projects BirdLife South Africa has ever undertaken, the [Mouse-Free Marion Project](#).

The generosity shown during Flock to Marion really blew us away (more than a strong Cape Town south-easterly!), with more than R3 million raised towards the [Mouse-Free Marion Project](#). Thank you to our donors for contributing to this critically important conservation project, and to ZEISS, Swarovski and Peter Harrison MBE for their support of our competition prizes. Together, you are helping to ensure that generations of future 'Flockers' can witness the majesty and diversity of the Southern Ocean's seabirds and mammals, as we were so privileged to do.

In closing, there were many hardworking and extremely dedicated people behind the success that was Flock to Marion, but BirdLife South Africa would like to express our thanks again to our guests. Thank you for believing in our very ambitious dream from the beginning; for staying the course with us through the uncertainty of a global pandemic; and for keeping the faith right up until the moment when we finally set sail for the relatively uncharted waters of the Prince Edward Islands.

So, the only question we have is: Will you join us for the next Flock "At Sea"?



## SAVE THE DATE

### THE AFRICAN BIRD FAIR 2022

Join BirdLife South Africa for the biggest event in African birding this year: The African Bird Fair 2022. Make sure you diarise **22 and 23 July 2022** to enjoy an epic line-up of speakers, exhibitors, and the opportunity to connect with other avid birders across the continent, and the world.

Find out more [here](#) in the coming weeks



# CAN BIRDWATCHING REALLY IMPROVE OUR MENTAL HEALTH?

## THE SCIENCE SAYS YES



© Tom Clynes

By Jessica Law

We all know that spending time in nature is enjoyable, but now there's increasing evidence that wildlife – and birds in particular – have a profound positive impact on our mental wellbeing. We delve into the latest discoveries from the fields of biology, economics and psychology.

**Over the past 18 months**, everyone I know turned to nature in some way to cope with the pandemic. My friend went to the lake every day to feed the geese. My parents put up a bird feeders in the garden and watched the avian antics from inside the house. I liked to go and see the kestrels soaring overhead at my local nature reserve. Through the various worries, tragedies and restrictions that we endured, nature provided us with much-needed solace and diversion.

Birding is undoubtedly a pleasant experience – joyful, picturesque, some might even say restorative – but as anyone who has ever suffered anxiety or depression knows, pleasant things are not necessarily enough to alleviate long-term mood disorders.

### So can birds and nature really benefit our mental health?

There's increasing scientific evidence that they can – especially for people living in built-up areas. A 2017 study published in *BioScience* measured different nature characteristics in urban neighbourhoods, and found that vegetation cover and afternoon bird abundance were positively associated with a lower prevalence of depression, anxiety, and stress. The findings were so clear that researchers could actually put a number on the minimum amount of vegetation cover needed to reduce each mental health issue: 20% for depression, 30% for anxiety, and 20% for stress.

Zooming in on birds, [a 2020 study published in Ecological Economics](#) put a literal price on bird biodiversity. The study used information from the 2012 European Quality of Life Survey to compare the satisfaction levels of more than 26,000 adults with the diversity of birds found around their homes, towns and cities. The results showed a clear correlation between happiness and the number of bird species. In fact, birds were found to be just as important for human wellbeing as financial security. According to their calculations, being near 14 additional bird species provided as much satisfaction as earning an extra \$150 a month.

There's no way of knowing whether it was the birds themselves that caused this phenomenal effect, or just their species richness, which tends to be higher around natural features such as forests, rivers and lakes. However, there are numerous arguments in birds' favour. Birds are some of the most visible (and audible) members of the animal world, and are much more likely to make their presence known to us in our everyday lives, reminding us that there's more to life than urban drudgery.



There's even evidence that birdsong can boost our attention span and helps us recover from stress. A 2013 study published in the Journal of Environmental Psychology interviewed twenty participants and found that birdsong was the type of natural sound they most often associated with stress recovery and attention restoration. Interviewees recounted that birdsong reminded them of relaxing natural landscapes as a whole, and was also pleasant and melodious to listen to in itself.

It may seem strange to present the beauty and inspiration of nature in such a scientific – some might say soulless – way. How can you put a price on the swoosh of turtle-dove's wing, or write a prescription for a dose of dawn chorus? But the truth is that such statistics are more important now than ever. The United Nations estimates that 54% of the world's population lives in urban areas, and that proportion is rising all the time. More and more of us are living our lives separate from nature – but thanks to studies like these, planners have concrete evidence that green spaces really do matter.

Not only this, but the march of human development is gathering pace, in the face of environmental collapse. Showing governments and businesses that prioritising the environment has measurable economic and health benefits will help them make decisions that could save the planet.

On a more individual note, it's also a reminder to ourselves that being around nature isn't a frivolous pastime or unimportant hobby. It's something that could vastly improve our health and wellbeing. So take that hike you were planning, visit your local nature reserve, or even just go on a lunchtime walk in your nearby park. If you need an excuse, this year on 14 May, to mark the World Migratory Bird Day, birders across the world will be venturing out to record every bird they see in their area. Join us in observing the wonders of the migration season, in the knowledge that it'll do you the world of good.

Register as a team or an individual at [globalbirding.org](https://globalbirding.org)



# HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF **TYPHA** WEED, AN INVASIVE PLANT IN SENEGAL



The invasive plant is a matter of concern for public health, water supply security and the preservation of biodiversity in the area  
 © Elena Serra Sánchez

**In Senegal, a new project on participatory ecology and community resilience to climate change will contribute to restoring the biodiversity of a wetland of international importance, and improve people's livelihoods.**

**By Elena Serra Sánchez**

On the sandy plains of northern Senegal through which the river Senegal and its tributaries flow marking the border with Mauritania, small houses and sheds rise up like mushrooms blending into the landscape. They might easily go unnoticed, were it not for their unusual construction material: Typha, a wild aquatic herbaceous plant. Between 1 to 3 m tall, with a narrow spike at the top of the vertical stem and excellent thermal insulation properties, it is mostly used as a roof covering and blended with soil to make lightweight blocks.

The construction sector is particularly dynamic in West Africa, including Senegal. However, buildings are often constructed with concrete, and are poorly adapted to the hot climate, thermally uncomfortable and energy consuming. Parts of the cement industry face continuing challenges to improve the environmental sustainability of their production.

[According to UN-Habitat](#), 50% of the building stock that will exist in 2050 are yet to be built. So, it is time to move towards the construction of environmentally friendly buildings.





The Tocc Tocc Community Nature Reserve is Ramsar site a crucial stopover for millions of migratory birds on the East Atlantic Flyway. In the front of the photo, Typha, an invasive plant that is rapidly spreading in the Senegal River © Elena Serra Sánchez

In this context, Typha comes up as an efficient alternative for construction in Senegal. Although it works well for the buildings, it is disastrous for the Senegal River, where it is rapidly proliferating as an invasive plant, especially after the massive construction of dams in the late 1980s. When ripe, their heads disintegrate into a cottony fluff from which the seeds disperse by wind, thus making it among the first wetland plants to colonise wet mud. Today, Typha is a matter of concern for public health, water supply security and the preservation of biodiversity in the area. Bearing the brunt of this proliferation are rural riparian communities whose livelihoods have been affected as a result of this invasive plant damaging their fishing and farming areas.

Because it spreads quickly and aggressively, this invasive plant is extremely difficult to eradicate, but with the right strategy its growth can be controlled while enhancing its positive qualities for the benefit of the population. It is precisely with this strategy that in early 2022, a new project funded by the [Alstom Foundation](#) and managed by BirdLife International and [Nature Communautés Développement](#) (NCD, BirdLife partner) was launched in Senegal



The project targets an internationally important wetland: the Tocc Tocc Community Nature Reserve, one of the eight Ramsar sites in Senegal and a crucial stopover for millions of migratory birds on the East Atlantic Flyway, which runs from the northern Arctic through West Africa to South Africa. The reserve provides vital ecosystem services to thousands of local people, including livelihoods (fishing, irrigation, animal husbandry, ecotourism), as well as protecting Lake de Guiers, the main source of drinking water for millions of residents in Dakar. However, the provision of these multiple benefits is threatened by the unsustainable use of its natural resources and the proliferation of Typha.

### Wetlands sustain life

Wetlands provide ecosystem services worth \$47 trillion (USD) per year, including for rice cultivation, a source of livelihood for 3.5 billion people, and these habitats are home to 40% of the world's plant and animal species. In addition, wetlands are powerful solutions to the climate crisis: they store twice as much carbon as all the world's forests, protect coastal communities from natural disasters and regulate water flows to prevent floods and droughts. However, they are disappearing faster than any other ecosystem.

During the celebration of the World Wetlands Day on 2nd of February 2022, BirdLife International, NCD and authorities from the Senegalese National Parks, including the Head of the Wetland Division and Focal Point for the Ramsar Convention, discussed the project with the Tocc Tocc community. The local communities were invited to participate in the project's restoration activities and going forwards, the project will directly support and upskill at least 150 community members for biodiversity-friendly income generating activities.

The objective of this project is to strengthen community resilience to climate change through the participatory rehabilitation of degraded natural ecosystems on which the lives of local populations depend, including the reforestation of 5,000 trees and the promotion of green entrepreneurship, in particular the conversion of 15 hectares of Typha into ecological construction materials and biofuel briquettes", explained Aliou Bah, Executive Director of NCD.

➤ Its excellent thermal insulation properties make Typha a great building material for roof coverings © Lucia Way-Bricault





The involvement of local communities in the project is key for the succeed. On the World Wetlands Day, the project was discussed with the Tocc Tocc community. © Elena Serra Sánchez

“

The Tocc Tocc reserve was chosen to celebrate the World Wetlands Day in Senegal as the project launched here matches perfectly with this year's theme: "acting for wetlands is acting for humanity and nature. It was therefore an excellent opportunity to make people aware of the importance of living in a Ramsar site.

**Colonel Assane Ndoye, Head of the Wetlands Division of the Senegalese National Parks Directorate and National Focal Point of the Ramsar Convention**

Indeed, the sustainable exploitation of the Typha is not only limited to construction uses, but it can also be used for feeding animal and as a raw material for producing cleaner energy. In Sub-Saharan African countries, the lack of access to energy directly affects [70% of the population](#). In addition, around 730 million people rely on solid fuels for cooking (firewood and charcoal), which are harmful and whose exploitation puts great pressure on forest resources by requiring up to 10 kg of wood to produce 1 kg of charcoal.

In Senegal, where wood energy represents around 80% of the household's energy consumption, upscaling the use of Typha as biofuel while restoring the wetlands and improving people's livelihoods is a win-win solution.



"We warmly welcome this project which will improve our living conditions and help women learn how to process local natural products", said the President of the Women's Group of Tocc Tocc Reserve, Rouguiyatou Sow, noting the importance of the project's objectives to empower women through green entrepreneurship, notably gardening and processing. "There are many local plants and fruits which can be transformed and provide income to our communities, but we lack training and equipment", she added.



“

In the face of threats to this internationally important reserve, we are convinced that the direct involvement of local communities in nature conservation and restoration is essential to maintain the multiple benefits of the wetland. The example set by planting trees and promoting green jobs here will serve to replicate techniques and best practices in Senegal, in the sub-region and along the flyway.

**Geoffroy Citegetse, Manager of the East Atlantic Flyway Initiative**

Furthermore, the project will contribute to the Pan-African Great Green Wall (PAGGW) initiative to restore the Sahel through job creation and restoration of biodiversity, thus contributing to the reduction of malnutrition, emigration, and other anthropogenic threats to the environment in the Sahel.



The project will contribute to empower women through green entrepreneurship, notably gardening and processing local natural products © Lucia Way-Bricault



# MIXING ART AND NATURE TO SAVE AN ENDANGERED WETLAND IN TUNISIA



Sebkhet Sejoumi is a Ramsar site and a natural jewel in the middle of an urban area in Tunis © Hichem Azafzaf, AAO

**By Aymen Abrougui**

Sebkhet Sejoumi is a natural jewel in the middle of an urban area in the Tunisian capital, Tunis. Covering almost 30 square kilometres, this *sabkha* (sandflat) has been designated by the Ramsar Convention as a wetland of international importance since 2007. It also hosts between 80,000 and 120,000 wintering waterbirds annually, with about 100 bird species being regularly observed over the past 20 years.

In 2013, this exceptional biodiversity was ranked as the 4th most important wetland for waterbirds in North Africa, a status that has been further enhanced since. Nevertheless, its biological richness and conservation importance have not protected it from threats and degradation such as pollution, rampant illegal filling and degradation of the vegetation cover on its banks.



Sebkhet Sejoumi hosts about 100 species of birds" © Hichem Azafzaf, AAO





This wetland hosts between 80,000 and 120,000 wintering waterbirds annually © Hichem Azafzaf, AAO

Since 2015, the site and its inhabitants have been threatened by the Sebkhet Sejoumi Development Plan (PAV), proposed by the Ministry of Equipment and Housing. In its first version, the plan did not respect the ecological specificities of the wetland and led to the loss of a quarter of the wetland's surface area (700 hectares) and of all the shallow parts, which are vital for bird populations, as well as of the farmland located in the southern part of the site.

Following the advocacy of the Association "[Les Amis des Oiseaux](#)" (AAO, BirdLife in Tunisia) and its partners, a revision of the PAV was put forward by the Ministry. Although it still falls short of the expectations of the site's defenders, it partially preserves the farmland and the natural aspect of the western bank of the sebkha as well as the very important islets for the reproduction of waterbirds, including globally threatened species. In any case, if this project is carried out in its current form, it will greatly impact the biodiversity and ecosystem services of this wetland, including the climate regulation functions of the surrounding neighbourhoods and the capital, in addition to increasing flooding and erosion risks.

Since 1998 and the identification of the site as an Important Bird Area (IBA), AAO has been making great efforts to preserve Sebkhet Sejoumi as an important wetland for man and nature. Within this framework AAO and its partners implemented the project "Engaging national and international stakeholders for the conservation of Sebkhet Sejoumi and its bird population" project from 2019-2021.

Supported by the local authorities and financed by the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF), the project created synergies and constant collaboration between stakeholders, mobilised public opinion for the protection of this natural jewel and prompted a first revision and improvement of the management and development plan.

Information and awareness-raising are at the heart of AAO's conservation actions. Since January 2022, art has become a new pillar of its communication for the benefit of Sebkhet Sejoumi. Through the project "Climate justice at Sebkhet Sejoumi", developed in collaboration with the artist Khaled Zaghdoud, the association is trying new forms of communication in order to continue raising awareness about this endangered site.

Zaghdoud artistically interprets the potential consequences of continued degradation and mismanagement of the sabkha and its surroundings in the context of the current climate and biodiversity crisis and the need of local people for transition and adaptation. The main objective is to convince policy makers of the importance of nature conservation, because according to the artist Khaled Zaghdoud "climate justice is the way to economic and social justice".

"Living in harmony with Nature and in a healthy environment is a right of every living being on Earth. Through our Climate Justice Project in Sebkhet Sejoumi, we aim to provide the space and tools for civil society to articulate their needs and claim their rights through Art," says Ms. Imen Labidi, Project Manager at AAO.

This innovative project is financed by the Hivos Foundation as part of its "Voices for Fair Climate Action" programme. During 18 months, it will allow AAO to offer the artist the framework for conveying his art through a participative approach, while defending the right to climate justice, local development and safeguarding of the Sebkhet Sejoumi wetland.



# AFRIEVOLVE: WHAT'S NEW IN WEST AFRICA?



Training session for beneficiaries in Lanfièra (Sourou province) on tree planting and maintenance © NATURAMA

By Kamelan Marius & Silvain Ouedraogo

In effort to build the capacity of environmental NGOs in Africa, the [German Government \(BMZ\)](#) and the [Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Union \(NABU\)](#) initiated in February 2021 the AfriEvolve project with BirdLife International Partners in East Africa (Nature Kenya, Nature Uganda and Nature Tanzania) and West Africa (Naturama, Ghana Wildlife Society and SOS-Forêts).

Within the framework of the AfriEvolve project, SOS-Forêts has initiated a pilot project on Climate Smart Agriculture (CSA) for the benefit of local communities living in the Azagny National Park, in Côte d'Ivoire. The project's aim is to reduce the human pressure on the park through income-generating activities, encouraging environmentally friendly agricultural practices on the perimeter of the protected area.

Above all, the project aims to create a microclimate that mitigates the effects of climate change in the area. "With this project, we join the national strategy that uses agroforestry as a main pillar for the preservation and expansion of forests, in order to contribute to the achievement of the Nationally Determined Contribution objectives of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 30% by 2030", explains the President of SOS-Fôrets, Wadja Mathieu Egnankou.





Installation of hives for modern beekeeping on the edge of the Azagny National Park, in Côte d'Ivoire © SOS-Forêts

Three activities are currently being implemented including modern beekeeping, reforestation of cocoa plantations and the production of solar salt under a tarpaulin to promote sustainable practices instead of using wood fires as salt drying technique, which cause massive destruction of mangroves. This project, which has strong support from stakeholders including the Office Ivoirienne des Parcs et Réserves (OIPR), the villages conservation and development associations (AVCD) and local authorities, will have a positive impact on 750 households around the park, reduce the destruction of mangroves and restore the vegetation cover of the peripheral zone of the Azagny National Park.

“

The implementation of the AfriEvolve project has allowed SOS-Forêts to strengthen our capacities and our collaboration with BirdLife International partners, especially in the West Africa cluster where we have common scenarios, and also to involve more local communities in the protection of Key Biodiversity Areas.

**Wadja Mathieu Egnankou, President of  
SOS-Fôrets**

In Burkina Faso, NATURAMA has strengthened its interventions in the Sourou Valley, an important area for the country's biodiversity, by promoting climate-smart agriculture through the AfriEvolve project. Sourou Valley and Floodplain of the Sourou, in Mali, constitute the fourth transboundary Ramsar site in Africa. In addition, the valley is an Important Bird Area (IBA) with species of geese and ducks, including the Spur-winged goose ([Plectropterus gambensis](#)), the Knob-billed duck ([Sarkidiornis melanotos](#)), Egyptian goose ([Alopochen aegyptiaca](#)), the African pygmy goose ([Nettapus auritus](#)), the fulvous whistling duck ([Dendrocygna bicolor](#)) and the white-faced whistling duck ([Dendrocygna viduata](#)).

However, natural resources in the valley are under considerable pressure including the loss of forests to agriculture, the collection of firewood especially for smoking fish, and non-sustainable fishing thus causing long-term damage to the area and its important ecosystem services. Large parts of the area are dominated by agricultural land, with only trees of economic value remaining. This is further aggravated by poor soils and consequent low yields, consequently increasing degradation.





Reforestation of cocoa plantations on the edge of the Azagny National Park, in Côte d'Ivoire © SOS-Forêts

Through soil fertilisation with compost, tree planting activities to secure the fields and protect the soil from water and wind erosion, and modern beekeeping to generate additional income, NATURAMA promotes Climate Smart Agriculture to improve the food security of local communities while rehabilitating and conserving ecosystems.

To ensure the proper implementation of the various CSA practices, NATURAMA is running workshops for capacity building and purchasing equipment for the beneficiaries. In July 2021, fifty beneficiaries of the AfriEvo project were trained in the rural commune of Lanfièra (Sourou province) on planting and caring for the seedlings planted. This capacity building will facilitate the planting and follow-up maintenance of the reforested plants by each beneficiary in his or her field. In August 2021, each beneficiary planted 200 seedlings including useful species such as White Acacia (*Feidherbia albida*), Babul (*Acacia Nilotica*), Lemon (*Citrus limon*) and Common Guava (*Psidium guajava*), totalling to ten thousand reforested seedlings. The monitoring and maintenance of these plants by the beneficiaries is expected to increase the survival rate of the reforested plants.

“



The AfriEvo project is a great opportunity for NATURAMA to promote its organisational development by strengthening its technical, management, institutional, financial and operational capacities, and to experience, alongside its African peers, the Climate Smart Agriculture approach, thus contributing to the reduction of the vulnerability of local populations to climate change, and to the implementation of the National Adaptation Plan of Action (NAPA) and national commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

**Idrissa Zeba, Executive Director of  
NATURAMA**



# NCF CHAMPIONS CLIMATE RESILIENCE, IMPACTING OVER 10,000 PEOPLE IN NIGERIA



Training of women and youth of River Kampe community on Biochar production to combat climate change impact © NCF

By Oladapo Soneye

Like many countries in Africa, Nigeria is experiencing severe climate crisis manifested in drought and desertification which have affected the country's food system. Temperature continue to rise at alarming rate in some part of the country to about 43oC. Further, livelihoods are being affected causing forceful migration leading to climate refugee in some part of the country resulting in unemployment, climate-related health risk etc.

In Kwara state in Western Nigeria the River Kampe Forest Reserve which covers 65,000 hectares of land has lost about 40% forest cover due to over-logging for timber, fuelwood, and charcoal production, over-grazing, -induced wildfires by herders among others. Despite the Federal Government's intervention to upgrade River Kampe Forest Reserve (RKFR) to a national park, there remains unsustainable practice within the three support zone communities. The Forest Reserve, important for safe drinking water to over one million people in the area, supports irrigation for crop and livestock farming, but lacks sustainable management practice. Threats of unlawful timber exploitation in buffer zones of the Forest Reserve, wildlife poaching, and production of charcoal by merchants persist. These communities do not benefit much from these forest resources with high levels of unemployment among women and youth and continuous exposure to the impacts of drought and desertification on food security.

Beginning December 2021, the [Nigerian Conservation Foundation \(NCF\)](#), in partnership with [the Canadian High Commission's Canada Fund for Local Initiatives](#), embarked on activities to tackle climate change in the grassroot communities of River Kampe National Park, Kwara State.

The objectives of the Nature-based Recovery and Climate Resilience support to zone communities of River Kampe Forest Reserve are to build resilience for vulnerable three support zone communities to the impact of climate change through nature-based solutions, empower three support zone communities especially women on alternative energy source through the production of biochar/briquettes from agriculture waste, and develop a Nature-based Recovery Action Plan for River Kampe National Park towards restoring its over 65,000 hectares of forest landscape through a community-led approach.





Training of women and youth of River Kampe community on Biochar production to combat climate change impact © NCF

As part of the project activities, NCF has trained 50 women and youth from the various communities on biochar production from rice waste. The training covered production, packaging, use, and marketing of briquette. These contributions are key in three area namely energy security by developing alternative and sustainable energy source for the communities, climate change mitigation from reduction in emissions of greenhouse gases and improving livelihoods of over 10,000 inhabitants of these rural areas especially women and youth through fruits and biochar enterprise.

Participants in this biochar training were also organized into community biochar women cooperative group where they will have access to seed funding to set up the biochar enterprise in the beneficiary communities - Agboro, Latayi, and Koro in Pategi Local Government Area of Kwara State.

In January 2022, NCF kicked-off the Nature-based recovery and climate resilience project around River Kampe Forest Reserve with a community need and attitude assessment as well as the establishment of Site Support Groups in the three communities. This resulted into understanding the need of the community around household energy, unemployment, knowledge gap in biodiversity monitoring which informed the design and implementation of the project.

Consequently, NCF has established three native/economic tree nursery across the three target communities with the planting of locust beans and cashew tree seeds. Already, 15,000 native economic seeds have been raised. The local communities are leading on the planting of these seedlings across their agrological landscapes.



“

In the long term, NCF's goal is to increase the number of seedlings raised to about 1,000, 000 seedlings over the next two years. These fruit trees will provide long term healthy nutrition, economic and environmental support for these communities to address biodiversity loss and climate change

---

**Solomon Adefolu, Climate Change  
Lead at NCF**

“In the long term, NCF's goal is to increase the number of seedlings raised to about 1,000, 000 seedlings over the next two years. These fruit trees will provide long term healthy nutrition, economic and environmental support for these communities to address biodiversity loss and climate change.”, notes Solomon Adefolu, Climate Change Lead at NCF.

Additionally, NCF organized a Key Biodiversity Area training workshop on wildlife monitoring, data collection, recording, and reporting for 30 forest officers and youth selected from these communities who will become Site Support Groups (SSGs). These SSGs will help the Kwara State Ministry of Environment close the biodiversity data gap already identified in River Kampe, plan for long-term conservation action, and provide employment opportunities for the youth.

Further, in line with delivering a Nature-based Solutions (NBS) framework for Nigeria, NCF organized a national workshop on Nature-based Solution and Climate Resilience in Abuja on 1st April, 2022 targeted at protected area managers, research institutions, government at national and sub-national level including ministries, department, and agencies selected across the country. About 40 people participated in this workshop to identify priority sites for nature-based solution project implementation, popularize and set-up Nature-based Solutions Community of Practice, integrate and strengthen nature-based solution actions in national and subnational climate change mitigation and adaptation plans. This is the first workshop on NBS in Nigeria and participants were very interested in progressing NBS implementation henceforth across identified ecosystem including wetlands, forest, savanna etc.



# PROMOTING BIODIVERSITY PROTECTION IN WEST AFRICA



KBA workshop in Sierra Leone © CSSL

**By Agyemang Opoku**

In 1979, BirdLife International launched the concept of [Important Bird Areas](#) (IBAs) - later redefined as Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas, with the aim of identifying critical sites for birds in order to ensure their longterm conservation. Over the years, more than 13,000 IBAs in over 200 countries have been identified by the Partnership. The concept of IBAs has led to the rise of [Key Biodiversity Areas](#) (KBAs) which go beyond birds, focussing on important areas for all species and their habitats.

Africa is home to more than 1,900 KBAs of which 29% are seriously threatened by infrastructure developments, energy production & mining, agriculture among others. Beginning the early 2000s, BirdLife partners in Africa began working in the KBA sphere.

In West Africa, BirdLife partners in five countries namely Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Ghana and Nigeria are working to expand knowledge of KBAs, and establish National Coordination Groups (NCG).

As part of the Building Networks for Key Biodiversity Areas (KBA) Monitoring and Protection in the Guinean Forest of West Africa project, supported by the [Royal Society for the Protection of Birds](#) (RSPB) and the [Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund](#) (CEPF), [Guinee Ecologie](#) (BirdLife partner) held a KBA workshop from 9-10th February 2022 that brought together more than 30 participants from the public and private sectors. The workshop focussed on the importance of KBAs, in addition to highlighting the status of KBAs in the country.





KBA workshop in Ghana © GWS

At the end of the workshop, a KBA National Coordination Group (NCG) including members from environmental NGOs, research institutions, independent consultants, the Ministry of the Environment and Sustainable Development through the Guinean Office of National Parks and Wildlife Reserves, and the National Directorate of Forests and Wildlife was formed. The NCG will contribute to biodiversity conservation through the identification, evaluation, monitoring and promotion of KBAs in Guinea, in addition to engaging stakeholders on KBA management priorities in the country.

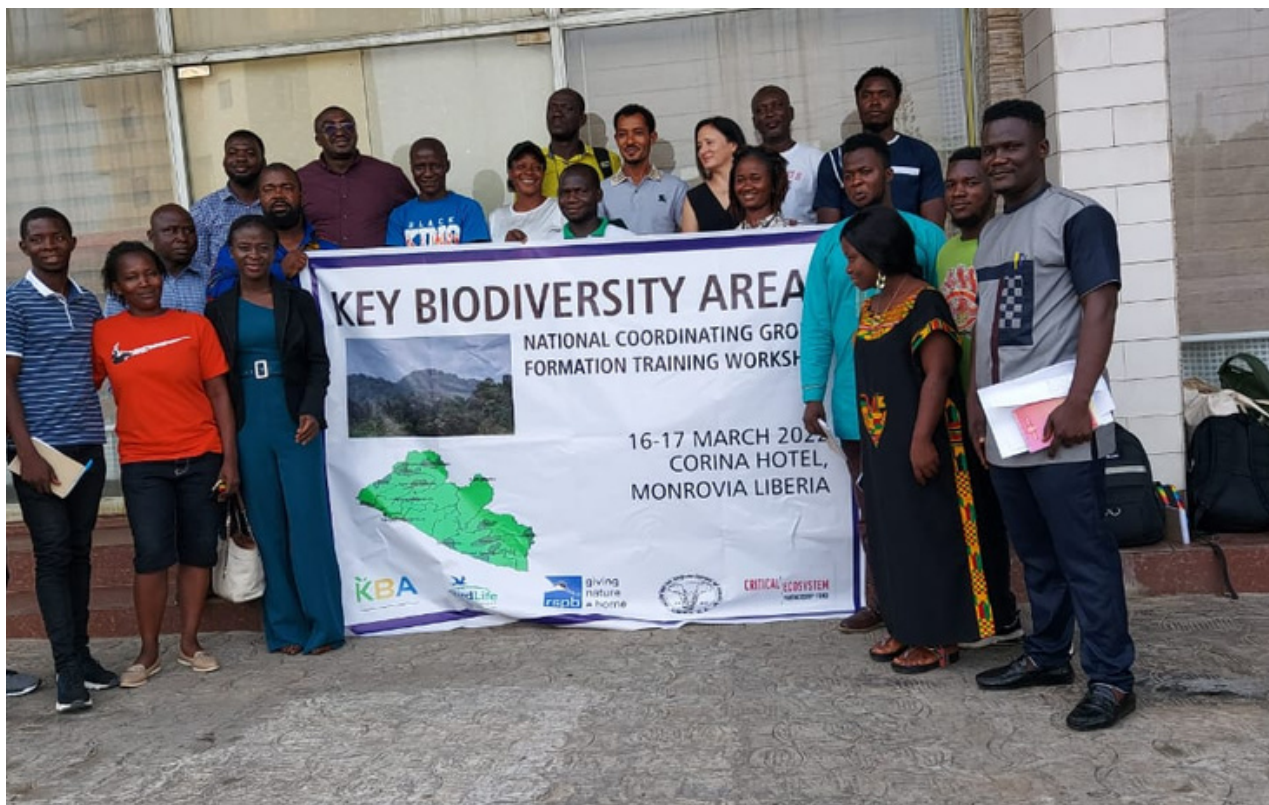
"I learnt a lot of things on KBAs in Guinea and the NCG. I found it really relevant and it contributes to the updating of the KBAs. We should expect the updating of the Djéké classified forest. I am very happy to do this work and to be part of the team working on these key biodiversity areas," said Mamadou Saliou Diallo, Chief Conservator of the Konkouré Delta Ramsar site, who participated in the workshop.

In Ghana, BirdLife Partner, [Ghana Wildlife Society](#) (GWS), organized a three-day KBA workshop supported by RSPB and CEPF. The workshop held from 6th - 8th April 2022 was attended by participants from government institutions including the Forestry Commission, Ministry of Environmental Science Technology and Innovation, Environmental Protection Agency, academia including the University of Ghana, and University of Cape Coast in addition to the [International Union for the Conservation of Nature](#) (IUCN), A Rocha Ghana, and the West African Primate Conservation Action.

The workshop aimed at broadening the understanding of the KBA process and assessment, facilitating the creation of an NCG for KBAs in and collation of data and evaluation exercise for at least 10 selected legacy KBAs in Ghana. At the end of the workshop, a coordinating group was formed and tasked with developing Terms of reference (ToRs) in line with the recommendation from the KBA secretariat. Participants at the workshop also conducted a gap analysis of KBAs in the country. Following this analysis, it was concluded that the NCG should be structured in to two key groups namely the Technical working group and the Executive/Policy working group, reassessment of legacy KBAs putting into account funding needs in addition to institutionalization of data collection and publication of research on species.

Nigeria is the only country in West Africa that with a formally instituted NCG. The [Nigeria Conservation Foundation](#) (NCF), BirdLife Partner which serves as the Secretariat for the NCG in the country, organised a KBA data validation workshop from 30th - 31st March 2022 with support of RSPB and CEPF. The workshop brought together about 30 stakeholders and experts, focused on various sites, and biodiversity elements found in those sites. In Sierra Leone, the [Conservation Society of Sierra Leone](#), BirdLife partner hosted a three-day workshop from 2nd - 4th March 2022 on the identification of KBAs in the country. The workshop was attended by stakeholders from government institutions, and non governmental institutions traditional authorities and the academia.





KBA workshop in Liberia © SCNL

In his opening remarks, Dr. Sheku Kamara, CSSL Executive Director welcomed all participants and made it clear the KBA process is a global move to establish KBAs in different countries of the world, with CSSL leading this establishment in Sierra Leone. Further, he emphasized that the establishment of the NCG would be the beginning of the KBAs process in the country, calling on support from local and international organization to drive the process forward.

In Liberia, the [Society for the Conservation of Nature of Liberia](#) (SCNL), BirdLife Partner held a two day KBA NCG formation workshop from 16th - 17th March 2022. The workshop brought together participants from government institutions, NGOs, researchers and other relevant stakeholders aimed at strengthen the knowledge of stakeholders on KBAs, setting up an initial KBA group, training participants on identification of KBAs, and carrying out a resource gap analysis for KBA work in the country. The workshop concluded with development of TORs which will govern the operation of the Liberian NCG.



KBA workshop in Guinea © GE



KBA workshop in Ghana © GWS



# PROMOTING COMMUNITY VULTURE CONSERVATION EFFORTS IN SOUTHERN AFRICA



Board relaying messages on vulture poisoning at Chobe National Park, Botswana © BirdLife Botswana

By Lovelater Sebele

In Southern Africa, local communities in Zimbabwe, Zambia and Botswana are playing a key role in vulture conservation efforts

Christal Dube walks slowly in the sun-soaked landscape, near Hwange National Park in northwestern Zimbabwe. With a field binocular, he slowly scans the horizon for vulture nests. Christal is part of a Vulture Support Group (VSG) carrying out vulture surveys. Over the years, vulture populations in Africa have drastically declined due to various factors including poisoning, belief-based use where vulture parts are used for traditional medicine, and electrocutions among others.

To halt this decline, BirdLife and its network of partners have rolled out interventions to save vultures, with local communities at the heart of these engagements.

In Southern Africa, BirdLife partners in Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Botswana are working with local communities to protect vultures.

In 2019, BirdLife Zimbabwe (BLZ), BirdLife Partner with funding from the Isdell Foundation and BIOPAMA established the 12000 ha Gwayi Vulture Safe Zone adjacent to Hwange National Park, consisting of private and communal game farms. Three Vulture Support Groups (VSGs) were formed in 2020 in the area and trained in vulture identification and monitoring as well as in rapid response to poisoning incidences.

The VSGs consist of people of different age groups, including women. The groups are self-governing volunteer groups whose mandate is to raise awareness on vultures, champion vulture conservation work and partake in vulture monitoring in liaison with the landowners. The groups go out every fortnight visiting all known active vulture nests, sometime walking over ten kilometres to the furthest nests. The group members have also kept in touch with the BLZ office informing them of any mortalities and rescuing any birds found incapacitated.





A board being set up at Kachikau village Chobe to create awareness among local farmers on wildlife poisoning  
© BirdLife Botswana

"We are going to continue with the programme and we don't want it to stop at any time for whatever reason", says Rueben Mkandla, a member of one of the VSGs "VSGs were started as a way of cementing community participation in environmental protection and management as stewards of biodiversity in their areas. The VSGs would be the vehicles for promoting vulture conservation in their areas with members of these groups actively involved in vulture conservation. BirdLife has invested heavily in the Site Support Group (SSG) system which is a tried and tested system which works very well, VSGs are a slight adaptation from the SSG concept", notes Fadzai Matsvimbo, Preventing Extinctions Programme Manager at BirdLife Zimbabwe.

In the 2021 breeding survey, the BLZ team did not discover any nests that had not been previously identified by the VSGs. Over 30% of the 33 nests found were away from the survey transect and would not have been discovered without the VSGs members assistance. Based on the success and lessons learnt from Gwayi, two more VSGs are in the process of being formed.

Furthermore, two VSGs are being trialled in Zambia and Botswana, albeit with their own adaptations to suit the landscape and land tenure systems in the two countries. While the intended objective of forming VSGs is to monitor vulture populations, report poisoning incidents and prevent further wildlife poisoning through rapid response, community members are not permitted to conduct these activities in protected areas except under a special termly permit issued by the Department of National Parks and Wildlife (DNPW) in Zambia.

However, the VSG concept will be adopted and adapted to focus on raising awareness on the value of vultures in communities and reporting vulture sightings to BirdWatch Zambia (BWZ) BirdLife Partner through DNPW who are in full support of the initiative.

"We have engaged community members and taken note of interested individuals in communities surrounding the Kafue National Park that will potentially form support groups in their areas", notes Mary Malasa, Programme Officer at BirdWatch Zambia.

BWZ has been conducting education and awareness programmes on the plight of vultures and the ecosystem services they provide in different parts of the country. This has included the production of awareness materials and the use of local radio stations to broadcast the message.

"After learning about the importance of vultures today, I now see them differently and will tell anyone who comes to our community to ask for vulture body parts that vultures are important and should not be killed", said Grace Chitumba, a community member who participated in one of the awareness programmes carried out by BWZ.

In October 2021, BirdLife Botswana, BirdLife Partner set up a Regional Anti-Wildlife Poisoning Team, the Chobe Wildlife Poisoning Monitoring Committee which is made up of individuals from relevant government departments (Department of Wildlife and National Parks, Department of Animal Production, Department of Crop Production, Botswana Police Services and Botswana Defence Force), representatives from local conservation NGOs and community representatives from eight of the nine villages in Chobe district, in the vicinity of Chobe National Park.



Community engagement meeting by BWZ in collaboration with the Department of Wildlife and the Community Resource Board  
© Chinga Lufwino





Members of a VSG in Zimbabwe during a training session © Leeroy Moyo

So far, the committee has identified challenges, needs and appropriate approaches to tackling wildlife poisoning in the area and the production of a 2022 workplan draft which will be adopted at the next meeting. The committee has also contributed to the development of communication material for information boards installed in Chobe and initiated the establishment of village level Anti-Wildlife Poisoning Teams in five of the nine villages in Chobe District.

"We thought of setting up the optimal multistakeholder structure with the best capacity to respond to poisoning. The set-up knits together a multistakeholder team for tackling wildlife poisoning, creating a platform for community members, government departments and conservation NGOs to dialogue on the issues surrounding wildlife poisoning, initiate well guided actions and approaches to curb wildlife poisoning. Everyone involved has a specific role assigned to them allowing for timely reporting of poisoning cases, timely response to poisoning, public awareness on wildlife poisoning, mitigation of drivers of wildlife poisoning such as human wildlife conflict", says Mpho Williart, Conservation Officer at BirdLife Botswana.



“

BirdLife International is excited to see how vulture support groups are taking shape in Southern Africa as we truly believe engaging communities is a vital part of any conservation efforts as we work towards inclusive and participatory approaches to saving these iconic creatures.

---

**Salisha Chandra, Vulture Conservation  
Manager at BirdLife International**



# FRIENDS OF COUSIN ISLAND RECOGNITION FOR PASSIONATE SEYCHELLOISE TOURISM ICON



Gemma is the second recipient of the Friends Of Cousin Island award © Nature Seychelles

## Liz Mwambui

[Nature Seychelles](#) (BirdLife Partner in Seychelles) has named local tourism personality Gemma Jessy as the second recipient of its Friends of Cousin Island Special Reserve award. Gemma received her award at Cousin Island on 25th March 2022.

The Friends of Cousin Island accolade recognizes individuals who have made extraordinary contributions to the special reserve, with Ian Stirling being the [first awardee in 2020](#). Gemma was awarded for her support of the NGO's continuous efforts to improve the ecotourism product on the island and to maintain best practices. Gemma has conducted refresher training and troubleshooting sessions for Cousin Island wardens. These covered a range of critical topics, including meeting and greeting clients when they arrive, posture, body language, interacting with clients, presenting rules and regulations of the nature reserve and existing health regulations, and ensuring that information is accurate.



Gemma Jessy is imparting a legacy of excellence to the next generation © Nature Seychelles





We recognize both her knowledge and passion for nature, and for the Reserve - Dr Nirmal Shah © Nature Seychelles

Speaking during a short ceremony attended by the island staff, Dr. Nirmal Shah, Nature Seychelles' Chief Executive said, "Gemma is the only English-speaking guide, apart from our own Wardens, allowed to take visitors around the [Cousin Island Special Reserve](#). That itself says something about this lady. We recognize both her knowledge and passion for nature, and for the Reserve. There are many people who talk about the environment these days but few who are as authentic as Gemma."

Dr. Shah presented Gemma with a certificate and a symbolic Cousin Island t-shirt. She expressed gratitude for the award and said she is passionate about mentoring young people. "I will continue my training on the island. I will come to Cousin for one-to-one sessions to help with individual areas of need," she said. She also stressed the importance of continuous learning and gaining knowledge.

Gemma is no stranger to Cousin. For decades, she has led nature and bird watching tours on the island. "I have always loved coming to Cousin, even though I initially had a fear of lizards. After I walked among thousands of lizards here, my fear vanished. Now I can even hold a gecko!"

She has witnessed first-hand the island's transformation, especially the regeneration of the forest and the increase in biodiversity over the years. "There are lots more birds. What Cousin has achieved is phenomenal," she says.

Gemma's tourism career dates all the way back to 1974 with the opening of the airstrip on Praslin Island. She worked at the airstrip multi-tasking at its office, café, and car hire, while going on tour when needed. After noticing that clients were interested in nature, botany, and birding, she decided to expand her knowledge of Seychelles' nature.

She began to work with renowned local environmentalist Victorin Laboudallon in forestry. She became a self-taught ornithologist learning about different birds from books and has been doing birding and nature tours since 1986. She accompanied tour leaders who visited various islands such as Praslin, Cousin, and La Digue, thus gaining a vast ocean of knowledge and becoming a tour leader herself.

"I enjoyed every moment of it, and I still do to this day," she says.

And the joyful and ever-smiling Gemma is not slowing down anytime soon. She still conducts tours and training with leading destination management companies whenever needed. She encourages young people venturing into guiding to have resilience, adding that the rewards are far more than imagined. Gemma has been lucky enough to visit many Seychelles islands through her work and is happy to impart a legacy of excellence to the next generation.



# GALALA RAPTOR COUNT PROJECT

## FINALLY UNDERWAY

### IN EGYPT



Galala point © NCE

By Tariq Abdalla & Nouran Elbolkin

Galala is home to over 37 species of migratory birds. Every year, more than 1.5 million birds pass through this flyway. As part of [Nature Conservation Egypt](#) (NCE) conservation efforts, a new project known as Galala Raptor Count, which seeks to establish a permanent station within the next two years to monitor and study birds' migration on the Red Sea/ Rift Valley Flyway - one of the most important flyways for birds' migration.

The Observatory would be the first of its kind in Africa and could become a global point for bird watching tourism and observing the amazing migration from a distance that may be the closest in the world to birds in flight. It would also be on par with the other stations that lie in different parts of the world such as Batumi in the UK and Sarımsaz in Turkey.

Further, the Galala mountains are strategically located on the flyway, thus allowing a good view of thousands of migratory birds that visit Egypt each spring and autumn.

On March 2, 2022 NCE started monitoring birds from the top of Galala Mountains, and after one month, more than 350,000 birds including eagles, vultures, buzzards among others were spotted, including more than 1100 Egyptian Vulture ([Neophron percnopterus](#)) and more than 12500 Steppe Eagle ([Aquila nipalensis](#)).

NCE is doing all this work with supporters and partners who have been instrumental in advancing this project including Ms. Huda Al-Shawadfy, Assistant Minister of Environment for Tourism affairs, for Mr. Mohamed Elewa, manager of Mainstreaming Biodiversity in Tourism in Egypt (MBTE) project, [Egyptian Vulture NEW LIFE](#) project, [Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds](#) (BSPB) and the [Royal Society for the Protection of Birds](#) (RSPB) for the technical and financial support.

"NCE is setting up more than just a research station. "The Observatory's facilities are planned to be divided into several categories including training and awareness, education in cooperation with Galala University, bird watching tourism in cooperation with the Ministry of Environment, and research and monitoring, hence allowing visitors to embrace a unique, informative, serene, dazzling experience", concluded Dr Khaled El Noby, NCE's Chief Executive Officer.



# SUSTAINABLE FINANCING OF BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION IN SÃO TOMÉ AND PRÍNCIPE



Awareness campaign with primary school students about reforestation © BirdLife International STP team

Situated in the Gulf of Guinea, the island nation of São Tomé and Príncipe (STP) boasts of a wide array of endemic plants and animal species, like the São Tomé Ibis ([Bostrychia bocagei](#)) and the *Begonia baccata* a giant begonia.

**By Julie Courret, Agostinho Fernandes,  
Marquinha Martins and Vânia Trovoadá**

Each island possesses extensive areas of primary rainforest named “Obo” or “Ovyo”, which means “forest” in the local language, that serve as natural habitats to endemic species. The rainforest areas are considered as Protected Areas (PA) by the Law under the official designation of “São Tomé Obo Natural Park” approximately 226 Km<sup>2</sup> in size and “Príncipe Natural Park” which is about 85 Km<sup>2</sup>.

With around 200,000 inhabitants, most of the island’s population lives in coastal areas, largely dependent on ecosystem services provided by forest gradients for their livelihoods, such as wood for housing.

Other natural habitat degradation drivers include inadequate spatial planning, unsustainable use of natural resources, pollution, and climate change. Due to various limiting factors, including high cost of management actions of protected areas and biodiversity conservation in addition to lack of financial resources, the Government has been unable to reduce these threats, or transform the PAs to a source of income and national wealth.

Consequently, in 2020 the Government enlisted the help of national and international partners to incorporate alternatives and improve general conditions to exploit its natural resources, through long term and sustainable mechanisms.





Protected areas of the Natural Obo Park of São Tomé © STP

Through an existing memorandum of understanding between the Ministry of Agriculture, Fishery and Rural Development and BirdLife International in STP, relevant gaps were identified in the management of protected areas. BirdLife International supervised a study that identified various financing options to meet the national costs to sustainably conserve biodiversity in a short, medium, and long term, and with a direct impact on the country's socio-economic context.



“

The Sustainable Finance Plan is the first milestone of a long process to establish long-term financial mechanisms to support any biodiversity conservation work in Sao Tomé and Príncipe. This approach will allow the government and civil society to implement relevant and impactful conservation programmes based on national and local specificities.

---

**Julie Courret, Head of Projects Office in Sao Tomé and Príncipe, BirdLife International.**

Based on the afore mentioned factors, the Sustainable Finances Plan was concluded in 2022 after analysing financial gaps, financing options, cost and revenue scenarios, benefits, and risks, as well as time horizons and potential tools to achieve the intended goals.

The results identified 8 financing opportunities, with three of them being the most feasible. These included the Conservation Trust Fund (CTF), a strategic vehicle to mobilize financing resources for protected areas and biodiversity conservation in STP, carbon market through Afforestation, Reforestation and Regeneration (ARR) thus allowing carbon emission compensation by planting or restoring forest areas, and a concession mechanism focused on permitting the sustainable usage of land for agro-forestry and ecotourism in PAs.

All the financing opportunities have significant potential independently or when associated with the Conservation Trust Fund (CTF). The cumulative prospect of revenues from these options varies between 1,5 and 5,5 million Euros per year (in Sustainable Finance Plan STP, 2021) and demonstrates that the potential for resource mobilization largely outweighs the annual costs of the needs to manage Protected Areas and protect the biodiversity.

The Sustainable Finances Plan also entails an action plan for its implementation, dissemination, promotion, and monitoring, through advocacy; training and awareness of the affected communities, in addition to mobilizing possible investors and donors. This action plan will start to be applied in May of 2022 by hiring a consultancy to implement the CTF in the country.

The results of the plan will directly benefit local communities through job creation in ecotourism, sustainable use and transformation of ecosystem services into products and training of the population in matters of biodiversity.

“The implementation of these financing tools requires a deep individual, institutional and political engagement at a national scale with the integration of all the actors involved in the conservation and management of PAs and biodiversity in our country”, concludes Francisco Martins dos Ramos, Minister of Agriculture, Fishery and Rural Development, São Tomé and Príncipe.



# THE UNEXPECTED GENDER GAPS IN THE SCIENCE OF BIRDS



Female and Male peacocks. She is not impressed with ornithologists © Anna Kucherova

By Marta Vigano

Gender inequality is an endemic, crippling problem affecting every corner of society, tainting development and furthering injustices. The conservation world is no exception. Numerous gender gaps still persist in this field, and some are hidden in spaces one would expect them the least.

## Who cares about female songbirds ?

Female birds are tragically under-looked and under-studied. In the case of songbirds, bird songs have traditionally been associated with males and deemed as just a rarity in female birds. In reality, females have been singing for millions of years. Conservationists have focused their research on male singing, jumping straight to the conclusion that studying the males could provide insights into female singing as well.

This changed when Dr. Karan Odom, Postdoctoral Research Fellow at Leiden University and Cornell Lab of Ornithology, kickstarted a conservation [project](#) aimed at tracing and sharing female singing. Thanks to Female Bird Song Project, the first few steps towards filling the gap were made, with birders submitting tons of their female-focused recordings and field notes.





Male and Female Blue Grosbeak (*Passerina caerulea*)  
© Ed Schneider (left), Steve Byland (right)

### Only males get a name

Strictly linked to lack of interest in, and awareness on, female birds, birdwatchers oftentimes hold an unconscious bias in terms of what they prefer to observe. This [birder](#), for instance, admitted he had not questioned his undivided interest for male birds for a very long time. Others, even more extremely, go as far as not counting a new species until they have seen an adult male.

This is reflected in species naming, which further normalises the male-centredness of ornithology.

For example, when it comes to descriptive names for species, they always describe male exemplars. The female Blue Grosbeak hardly presents any traces of blue, while the female Scarlet Tanager shows no scarlet whatsoever. And the list goes on, with female Ruby-throated Hummingbirds wearing no red neck bandana or Ring-necked Pheasant showing no white collier.

Either males and females look alike so the name is actually descriptive of both sexes, or the name just describes the males.

Similarly, and unsurprisingly given how male-dominated natural explorations were in the 19th century, when birds are named after people, they are usually named after men.

This is the case for the Audubon's Shearwater and Audubon's Oriole paying respects to John James Audubon, and the Baird's Sparrow and Baird's Sandpiper honouring Spencer Baird.



Male and female Ruby-throated Hummingbirds (*Archilochus Colubris*) in flight with a colorful background

### Do we even know what females look like?

Building on the lack of representation in names, it is fairly common that people don't know that females and males do not necessarily look alike.

When one says peacock, the mind instinctively goes to the luxurious show-off of emerald-and-sapphire-toned feathers. To few occurs that what is generally thought of as a peacock is in fact only the male of the peacock. The lady peacock, or peahens, sports grey and brown feathers, and tends to get way less attention from ornithologists.

Birdwatchers have no trouble identifying the male of a species, yet they struggle with females. What's worse is that female bird ID tips and tricks are often not even featured in field guides, which leads to female birds being underrepresented in census counts and scientific studies.

To overcome this bias, a group dubbed the Galbatross Project launched the Female Bird Day. These scientists, birders, writers, and conservationists argue that female birds are so under-appreciated and under-studied and that birders need to be trained and taught how to identify female birds.

Effectively, a lack of knowledge of, interest in, and data on females affects conservation efforts altogether. Verdict? Like many other chunks of society, ornithology presents a bias towards the normalisation of the Male. The 8th of March is no day for celebration, is just another day to fight for equality and intersectionality, within conservation and outside.



# AUDIOMOTH PROJECT: DETECTING ENDEMIC BIRDS IN MAURITIUS



Adrien Gellé (Scientific Data Officer) deploying an AudioMoth © MWF

By Adrien Gellé

The [Mauritian Wildlife Foundation](#) (MWF, BirdLife partner) has been using ARUs (Autonomous Recording Units) since May 2021 to collect audio data in the field to confirm the persistence and current distribution of previously released Echo Parakeets ([Alexandrinus eques](#), Vulnerable), Pink Pigeons ([Nesoenas mayeri](#), Vulnerable), Mauritius Cuckoo-shrikes ([Lalage typica](#), Vulnerable), Mauritius Paradise Flycatchers ([Terpsiphone bourbonnensis](#), Least Concern) and Mauritius Kestrels ([Falco punctatus](#), Endangered) in the Bambou Mountains (c.4,500 ha; Mauritius' second largest block of forest). These birds were reintroduced to the Bambou Mountains (South-East Mauritius), at Ferney, to restore the distribution of the species, after becoming locally extinct due to predation, habitat destruction, hunting, and the use of dangerous pesticides for kestrels and cuckoo-shrikes. Recently reintroduced Pink Pigeons and Echo Parakeets were locally extinct for over a century, and cuckoo-shrikes since the 1960s.

Reintroduction of endemic bird species in the Ferney Valley started from 2014, whereby 73 Echo Parakeets, 30 Pink Pigeons and 16 Cuckoo-shrikes were released by 2017. MWF also reintroduced 48 Mauritius Paradise Flycatchers in 2016, 2017 and 2019.

Detection of some of the species has been difficult since they occur at low densities e.g., only one known breeding site for the Echo Parakeet (and a few sightings), few breeding records of Pink Pigeons, occasional sightings and no breeding records of cuckoo-shrikes and flycatchers. Further, the distribution of Mauritius Bulbuls ([Hypsipetes olivaceus](#), Vulnerable), which survived in the Bambou Mountains, is patchy. However, Mauritius Kestrels have been reintroduced there since 1988 and our knowledge is fairly complete.





AudioMoth deployment team, Ferney (from left to right: Hans Aubeeluck, Stephan Mellier, Akilesh Jodhee, Adrien Gellé, Jevika Atwaroo, Humaira Auchoybur, Issabelle Desire, Avishek Seebaluck) © MWF

The Autonomous Recording Units in question are AudioMoths, secured through an African Bird Club grant. The recordings made by the AudioMoths are analysed using Kaleidoscope Pro, a software provided to MWF as part of a grant from the producers Wildlife Acoustics Inc. Kaleidoscope finds and extracts distinct sounds and phrases (such as frog calls, bird songs, insects, bats etc) in audio recordings, and groups them together. Determining the distribution of released bird species using Kaleidoscope Pro will improve monitoring efforts and will inform the success of release techniques by providing an indication of post release survival.

The first AudioMoth survey was completed in August 2021 in the Ferney fenced forest plot (a plot of native forest that is being restored). After analysing the recordings using Kaleidoscope Pro, four endemic birds were detected: Mauritius Bulbuls, Mauritius Grey White-eye, Mauritius Kestrels, and Pink Pigeons.

For the second deployment in March 2022, MWF moved the devices outside the Ferney fenced plot, to an area where a pair of Mauritius paradise flycatchers had been sighted earlier during the season. This deployment aimed at testing the ability of the microphones to detect these birds using our sampling method and detect more individuals in the area. Unfortunately, no Mascarene paradise flycatcher calls were detected in our recordings. However, Mauritius Kestrel calls were detected during six different days (early morning and late afternoon).

On the third deployment, in late March, the devices were placed strategically in search of the Mauritius cuckoo-shrike, as a male cuckoo-shrike had recently been observed in the area. However, this deployment was not successful since no cuckoo-shrike was detected. A key challenge of detecting these birds is that these species occur at very low densities hence difficult to find them even when using powerful statistical software.

“Our next objective is to use old recordings from previous years (using different microphones) to try to autodetect our species of interest within our recordings. This should make detection possible, even if there are only a handful of calls, said Sion Henshaw, MWF’s Fauna Manager.

‘This work on the AudioMoth is a reminder that integrating new technologies into our work can be time consuming and requires a lot of trial and error. We will continue to experiment and learn this new approach so that we can further improve our surveying techniques, which in turn will allow us to better understand our species. We look forward to being able to update you on the next AudioMoth development,’ Sion added.

MWF is grateful to the [African Bird Club](#) and [Wildlife Acoustics Inc.](#) which provided the devices and software that makes this project possible, and the [Ferney Ltd \(Ciel Group\)](#), for this partnership



Stephan Mellier (Pink Pigeon Conservation Biologist) deploying an AudioMoth © MWF



# CAPACITY BUILDING OF WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS IN CÔTE D'IVOIRE



Family photo during the women's training © SOS-Forêts

By Narcisse Tehe Gueassemon

For over 15 years, SOS-Forêts (BirdLife Partner) has been actively involved in the conservation of the Azagny National Park (ANP), which is located between the town of Jacquenville and Grand-Lahou in southern Côte d'Ivoire.

With an area of 19,400 ha, it is a priority site for biodiversity conservation as it is a Ramsar site, an Important Bird Area (IBA) and a Key Biodiversity Area (KBA). The Park provides undeniable ecosystem services to local communities, such as climate and flood regulation and crop pollination, but also cultural services, such as aesthetic, ritual, recreational and educational services.

As part of the ongoing conservation efforts, SOS-Forêts in collaboration with the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) selected five active women's associations in the commune of Grand-Lahouen, based on their use of natural resources and their motivation to conserve the biodiversity of the PNA, to undergo training last February.

The selected associations, which have about 370 members in total, sell cassava, fish and attiéké (cassava couscous, a culinary speciality from the south of the Ivory Coast, prized by the entire population), received training in institutional governance, financial and project management, fundraising and communication.

After all these sessions, the trained women now avoid using the Park's mangrove wood for smoking fish and for preparing attiéké.

Some of them intend to sign partnerships with other cassava producers in the country's forest areas to avoid damaging the Park for cassava cultivation.





Women actively participated in the training © SOS-Forêts

In addition to the training sessions, there were also awareness-raising radio programmes on the global importance of the Park, the need for its conservation and the progress of the project on the local radio station "Radio des Grands Ponts" in 13 local languages. These programmes enabled three of these associations to register with the local administrative authority.

They have also been able to draw up association governing rules for better governance. In terms of accounting, the associations are able to keep a journal and are now interested in having a trade register for their cooperative. Further, the associations acquired basic skills in project writing and communication to promote their association and activities.

For Mrs Diplo Angeline, President of the Wadochi cooperative, which specialises in the sale of fish, notes, "The Wadochi cooperative thanks SOS-Forêts for the training. We learnt a lot about communication, something we neglected before, and about financial management.

We once had in the past a session with an accountant explaining the basics of financial management, but we didn't understand much. Today, thanks to the lessons of SOS-Forêts and as they answered all the questions we had, we now understand things better."

"We have strengthened the capacities of five women's associations/cooperatives in Grand Lahou through training that gives them the means to be autonomous and to participate fully in the conservation of a Key Biodiversity Area such as the Azagny National Park. The project has come to an end, but SOS-Forêts remains at the side of these women to accompany them in their mission", said Dr Lozo Roméo, the Coordinator of the CEPF Project, during the closing workshop of the project in February 2022.

All these capacity building activities of local associations, communications and sensitization of local communities have helped to raise awareness of the challenges of sustainable management of natural resources and will hopefully lead to increased awareness of local populations on the importance of conserving the biodiversity in the Azagny National Park.



Women actively participated in the training © SOS-Forêts



# STRONG HIGH SEAS PROJECT HOLDS 5TH DIALOGUE WORKSHOP



Panoramic view of the ocean © PANG WRP

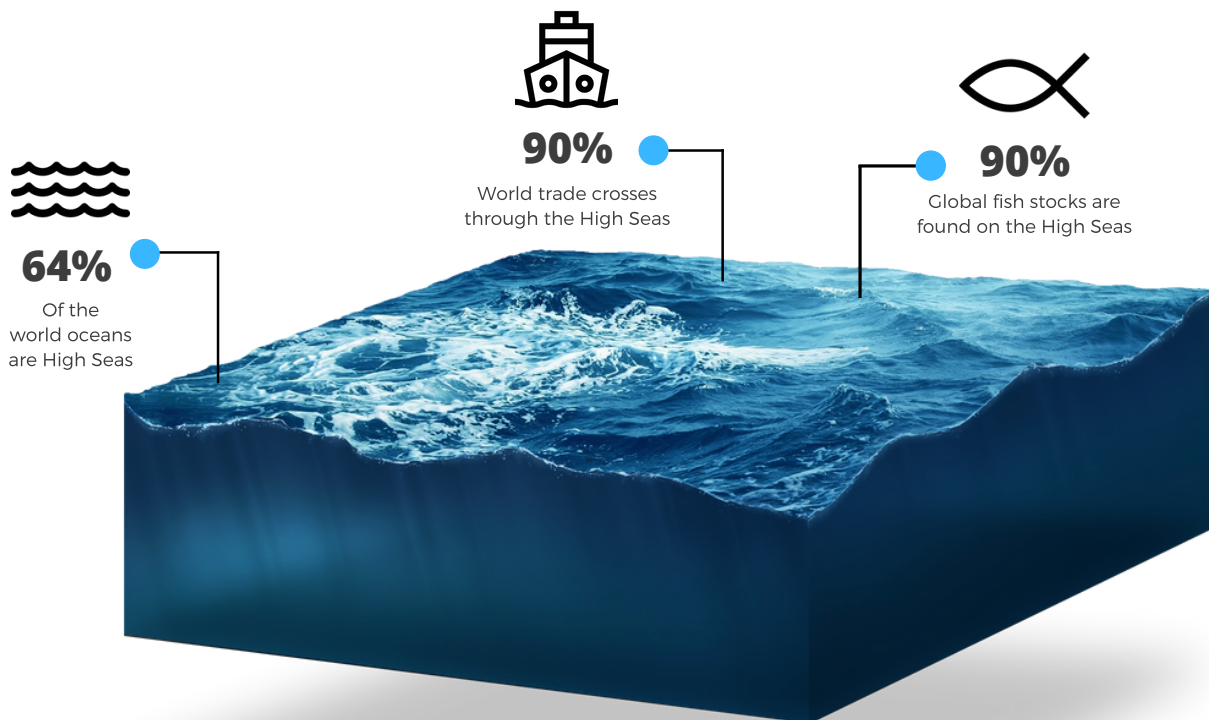
**By Lewis Kihumba**

World over biodiversity is disappearing at an alarming rate, while climate change is having negative impacts on humanity. The effects of these interactions are not only being felt on land but also in our oceans, especially in the High seas which fall outside states' jurisdictions, but account for more than 64% of the world oceans.

Additionally, 90% of world trade crosses through the High Seas, which also hold more than 90% of global fish stocks and play a key role in climate regulation. These areas are increasingly under threat from overfishing, emerging deep-sea mining and pollution, thus having a negative impact on marine biodiversity. Recognizing the need for an effective governing regime to regulate activities in the High Seas, the United Nations (UN) began negotiations on a treaty on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in 2015 (commonly known as the [BBNJ Agreement](#)).

Since 2017, the STRONG High Seas Project has focussed on advancing ocean regional governance in the South East Atlantic and South East Pacific Regions. Working with partners, including the [Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies](#) (IASS) and [Institute for Sustainable Development and International Relations](#) (IDDRI), in addition to the [International Ocean Institute](#) (IOI) South Africa, [Abidjan Convention](#) and BirdLife in the South East Atlantic region, and the [Universidad Católica del Norte, Permanent Commission of the South Pacific](#) (CPPS) [WWF Colombia](#), and [WWF Germany](#) in the South East Pacific, the project facilitates development of cross sectoral approaches for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ).





Infographic importance of the High Seas © Serigne Ndione

As part of these efforts, the STRONG High Seas Project held the 5th Dialogue Workshop themed 'Towards Integrated Ocean Management of the High Seas: Lessons Learnt for Regional and Global Action'. The online workshop drew more than 90 participants from both regions, including representatives from governments, academia, scientific institutions, international organisations, the private sector, and civil society.

Speaking at the dialogue workshop opening, STRONG High Seas Co-lead Dr Carole Durussel noted that there have been a number of negotiation rounds that have taken place under the United Nations to develop the BBNJ Agreement, stating that, "There is urgent need for stakeholders to collaborate for strengthened conservation of BBNJ in the two regions."

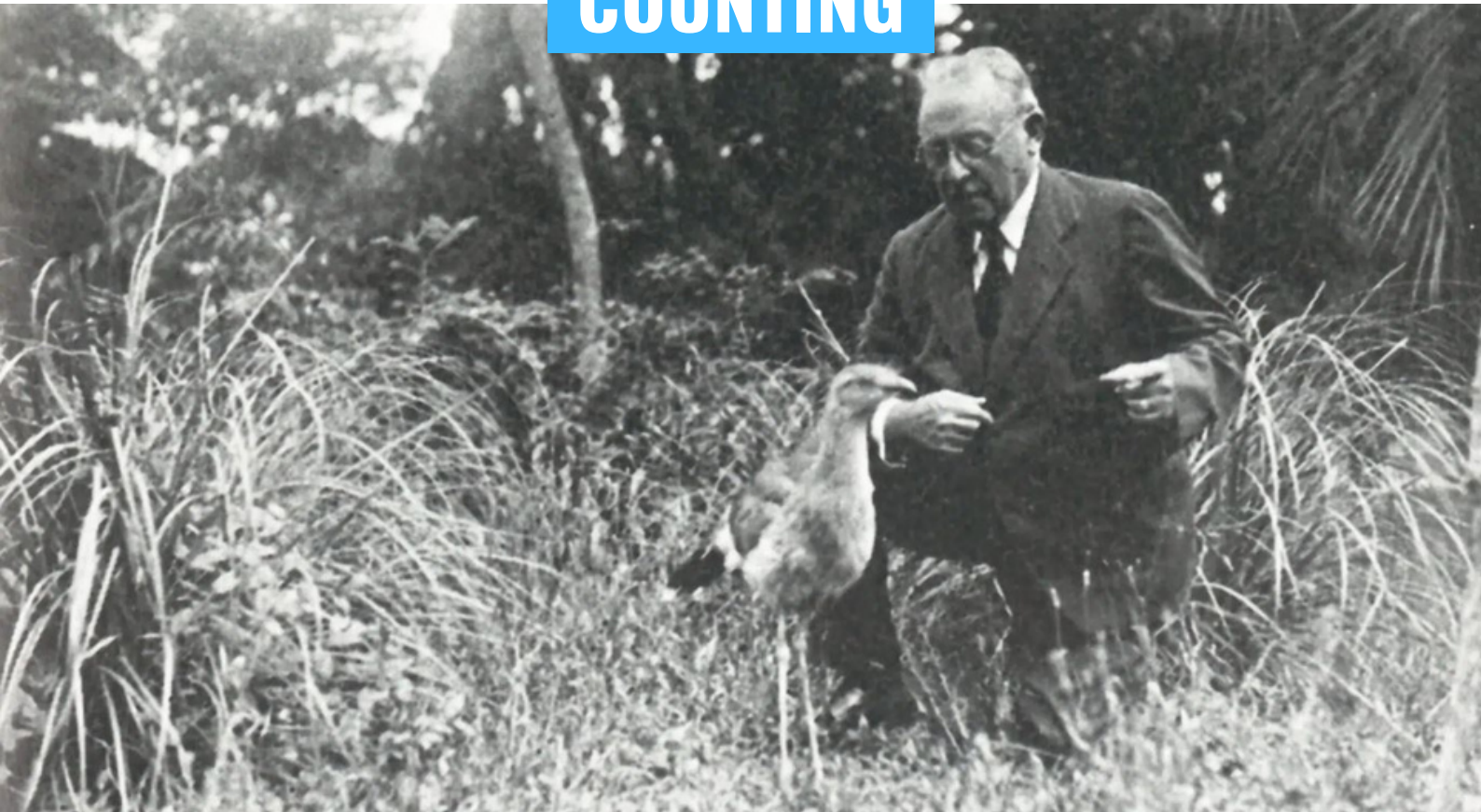
The workshop also focused on the role of multi-stakeholder co-operation within the future BBNJ Agreement and its implementation, from an African and South American perspective, with key interventions from Peru, Chile and Sierra Leone.

Salvador Vega, Head of the Chilean Directorate for Environment and Ocean Affairs, noted that the BBNJ Agreement needs to fit into an already existing governance framework. On his part, Paul Lamin from the Sierra Leone Environment Protection Agency, said that effective regional and global stakeholder dialogues are vital to meet the objective of the BBNJ Agreement.

Other discussions focused on multi-stakeholder cooperation in regional initiatives for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction, and collaborative action in global ocean governance to address biodiversity loss, climate change, and cross-cutting challenges. The STRONG High Seas team also provided recommendations on the three key areas. Further, the team has developed [various resources](#) to promote awareness and dialogue on the conservation and sustainable use of BBNJ, and ongoing negotiations available in English, French, and Spanish languages.



# 100 YEARS AND COUNTING



T. Gilbert Pearson, ICBP President 1922-1938

## Christopher Sands

A century ago, visionary conservationists concerned about the plight of the world's birds and the wider environment came together to form an international movement. Rooted in the foundations of a handful of campaigning national organisations, it steadily gathered momentum, spread its wings and eventually evolved into a powerful global voice for nature.

## WE HAVE MADE A DIFFERENCE

Since 2013 **726** globally threatened bird species directly benefited from the work of the BirdLife Partnership **2000** of the most important sites for nature have been protected by BirdLife, including 2 million hectares of the most important rainforest in the world. We have inspired more than **10 million** people globally to support BirdLife's conservation work

Since 2013

**726**

globally threatened bird species directly benefited from the work of the BirdLife Partnership.

**2000**

of the most important sites for nature have been protected by BirdLife. Including 2 million hectares of the most important rainforests in the world.

We have inspired more than

**10 MILLION**

people globally to support BirdLife's conservation work.



**BUT WE'RE RUNNING OUT OF TIME**

The natural world is in crisis. At least a million species are at risk of extinction, changes in our climate are causing unprecedented natural disasters and the pressures we're putting on our planet are unsustainable. The next decade is critical, and we need everyone to join us in our fight to save nature.

**Join us at the BirdLife 100 World Congress**

The BirdLife100 World Congress is a historic moment and will bring together conservationists and renowned advocates for the environment to work together and bring nature back from the brink.

Our World Congress will see the launch of our ambitious new 10-year global strategy to address the nature and climate crises threatening our existence.

On 15 September we will be holding a series of discussion panels at London's prestigious Central Hall in Westminster where global thought leaders will explore topics ranging from biodiversity and climate change to conservation finance and the links between the health of our planet and human health. The event will culminate with a fundraising gala dinner in the evening of 15 September at the iconic Victoria and Albert Museum. Registration is now open. If you are interested in attending, please [click here](#). We are delighted to co-host this event with the RSPB (BirdLife in the UK).

**This is how the BirdLife story began...**

At midday on 20 June 1922, a group gathered at the London home of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Sir Robert Horne – then MP for Glasgow. United by their passion for birds, the group decided that co-ordinated international action was the answer to the various threats birds faced and founded The International Council for Bird Preservation (ICBP) – now BirdLife International.



Phyllis Barclay-Smith (picture here with Alessandro Ghigi, who founded and chaired ICBP's Italian national section) led BirdLife through decades of conservation advances, retiring in 1978 © BirdLife International





# It's Time.



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

