

The National Association of Certified Tour Guides – Sierra Leone

Training Tour Guides for bird tourism promotion in Sierra Leone’s coastal zone



Project supported by the Wadden Sea Flyway Initiative



Executive Summary

Sierra Leone is endowed with wetlands and the training was born out of the need to enlighten members of National Association of Certified Tourist Guides on waterbirds they encounter when touring with tourists.

The training was divided into separate sections:

- **Part 1** - provides information on the bird watching itself and the rationale for “bird guide training”.
- **Part 2** - offers practical onsite training, including identifying the birds, counting and monitoring of waterbirds, which took place at the Tissana Wetland and Levuma wetlands

A total number of six (6) tour guides were trained instead of the initial five (5) stated in the proposal, the reason being that one of the trainers declined because of another engagement.

The participants have learnt about the conservation of waterbirds in the marine coastal zone, how to monitor waterbirds in the marine coastal areas and how to count them.

Introduction

Tourism is inseparable from a country’s development and growth, therefore, tourism thrives despite the decade long civil war that destroyed Sierra Leone’s most enviable destinations and resources that led to the vacuum of tourism professionals. Unfortunately, the enthusiasm for tourism to yield more benefits witnessed some drawbacks to the tourism product and its development such as:

- Complaints from visitors/ tourists about poor guiding at sites or destinations e.g. a tour guide misleading a group of tourists about the age and significance of the cotton tree
- Lack of trained and qualified tour guides
- Lack of capacity to handle the number of tourists visiting the country

The amalgamation of the above inconveniencies invigorates the need for the tour guide training programme, and therein establishes the National Association of Certified Tourist Guides (NACToG).

The newly formulated ecotourism policy has paved the way to enhance the ecotourism potentials of the country to serve as an economic base for local communities. Domestic tourism is low in terms of receipt and arrival at the tourist destinations but this can be developed by creating specialized packages. Eco-tourists, such as bird watchers, are an underserved segment in the Sierra Leone Tourism market, therefore, empowering the tour guide will create a competitive advantage for Sierra Leone to target that niche.

Objectives

This project aimed at capacitating the Association in nature studies and hence be able to conserve, preserve, enrich and above all protect our fragile ecological and cultural resources particularly bird populations and their habitats and other biodiversity such as to:

- Prevent the decline and extinction of species in the wild.
- Help, through wildlife conservation, to maintain the diverse natural environment and enrich the quality of people's lives.
- Sustain the vital ecological systems that underpin human livelihoods, which will in turn make the stay of both domestic and international tourists, memorable and pleasant.

Expectations

- Acquire knowledge on bird topography
- Know the techniques involved in identifying birds
- Know the importance of birds
- Build the capacity of NACTOG guides on bird monitoring techniques

The Training Workshop

Six (6) participants took part in the training Programme, which took place at Tissana from 4th - 10th March, 2016. The trainers constitute seasoned bird experts in the persons of Mr. Charles Showers, Freelance and board chairman for the Conservation Society of Sierra Leone and Mr. Momoh Bai Sesay the Field Technician for the Conservation Society of Sierra Leone, whilst the training Programme was organized by Mr. Alieya A. Kargbo, Chairman NACTOG.

A list of participants and trainers is shown in Annex 1.



Field Work



Theory Work

The Training Programme

Below is the training Programme, with descriptions following underneath.

4 th March, 2016		
Time	Activity	Responsible Person
14:00	Registration of Participants	Peter Bassie
14:30	Opening prayers	Mohamed Sesay
14:35	Statement by President NACTOG	Alieya Kargbo
14:40	The topography of a bird	Charles Showers
16:00	Birdwatching techniques: What to look for	Charles Showers
5 th March, 2016		
09:00	The importance of birds	Momoh B. Sesay
10:30	Identifying waterbirds	Charles Showers
12:00	Lunch	
14:00	Counting waterbirds	Momoh B. Sesay
15:00	Site Visit	
6 th March, 2016		
09:00	How to use, and care for your bins	Charles Showers
10:45	Monitoring waterbirds	Momoh B. Sesay
12:00	Lunch	
15:00	Site Visit	Momoh B. Sesay
7 th March, 2016		
09:00	How to satisfy your birdwatcher: Bird stories, local myths, traditional beliefs	Charles Showers
14:00	Field Trip	
8 th March, 2016		
07:30	Field trip	Group work
9 th March, 2016		
07:30	Field trip	Group work
10 th March, 2016		
07:30	Field trip	Group work

Threat to Waterbirds

- KaiKokey Island has nests with eggs of the Sacred Ibis; oyster and cockle harvesting at the Island scared the birds away.
- The locals took about two days to do the harvesting on the island, so caused a lot of disturbance for the birds to roost.

Training Course Content

The topography of a bird

This basically dealt with the parts of a bird. To identify birds, you must know the parts of the bird starting with the crown down to the feet. It also enhances accurate description of bird species during identification.

Bird watching techniques: What to look for?

Knowing the colours, where they occur, the shape, call or song, the gait and the silhouette of a bird helps in bird identification.

The importance of birds

Birds can serve as indicators of a healthy environment. The presence of waders, raptors, insectivorous and seed eaters (different species of birds) in the same ecosystem shows how much life forms that ecosystem can support, therefore how healthy, that ecosystem is.

Identifying waterbirds

Waterbirds are usually found in and around water bodies and include waders. Such waterbodies can be marine or fresh. They exhibit certain behavioural characteristics like diving as in cormorants and darters, swimming like ducks and geese, wading like greenshanks and herons and chasing receding waves like stints.

Counting waterbirds

People may ask, why count birds? It is important to monitor change in number of birds over a period of time. For example, an increase in species numbers might mean the population is doing great and living conditions for that species is good. A decrease in population might be related to habitat destruction or disease or probably the area where the birds breed has been converted into a farm. Counting birds has resulted in valuable research that has saved species from extinction.

How to use and care for bins

A pair of binoculars also known as bins, are very important key equipment used in the study and observation of birds. It facilitates detailed view of bird species thereby enabling factual observation.

It comprises of a couple of prismatic lenses that refract and enlarge the image of the object observed.

Basic care includes cleaning the objective and eye piece lenses before and after use. Keeping the equipment dry as much as possible. Reducing impacts and shocks as this may cause prisms to shift thereby altering image. Some recent models are weather proof to some extent, coated with rubber to make it water resistant.

Monitoring waterbirds

Monitoring is a conservation tool used to evaluate the population, distribution and therefore how healthy waterbird species level remain over time.

Monitoring techniques include bird counts which can be annual or biannual. The information acquired from such exercises tells you how widely or sparsely distributed species of birds are over a period of time. Thus prompting proper research, especially in particular for waterbird species, many of which are in decline.

How to satisfy your birdwatcher

Sometimes, while waiting for a particular species to appear the guide can engage the tourist in fables, folklore or sacred and other interesting events. Cattle egrets are regarded as cow angels because people think they guide cattle, not actually realizing that they feed on insects that are flushed when the cattle are on the move. The guide must always realize that, the essence of the tour is to get the tourist to come back to him in the future, and not to discourage the tourist.

Field Trips / Site Visit

Tour guides were exposed to the actual practical aspects of observing and identifying waterbird species in their habitats as the tide was receding. Species identified can be found at the end of the report.

Results and next steps

The training has added value to tour guides. Bird identification had been a serious problem for tour guides, since we had been facing serious embarrassment from tourists. Though most tourists are not bird watchers, they do want to know about some common birds that fly over them during the tours they embark on. This training helped tour guide to know the basic tricks about bird watching. It increased the confidence of the trainees and this has led to peer to peer mentoring Programme scheduled for the 1st week of October.

NACTOG will design itineraries for scheduled weekend bird watching tours as part of the next steps. This will help us to be able to identify many birds as bird distinction is a very difficult process to master. To maintain bird related tourism, we will target inbound tour operators, NGO's and Companies with our bird watching itineraries (half and full day) to market and promote bird watching in the country. To this end, we are proud to tell you that we are gradually making a way to empower most of our membership on the basic techniques for bird guiding.

Conclusion

Overall, the training was a success as tour guides became conversant with identifying birds, including migratory species. It makes you as a tour guide to be versatile. It is an advantage to the tour guide in the event he\ she is asked to identify a bird by a tourist who may not be a bird watcher but who may come across a bird and may want to know that bird.

For this reason we as tour guides will not only be learning about birds, but also mammals and trees in West Africa.

Recommendations

It was recommended that it will be appreciated, if more funds are made available for more tour guides nationwide to get at least the basic training in bird watching.

- In house training to share experience, challenges and success stories.
- Conduct short refresher course on nature guiding and enumeration
- Create a website for NACTOG market and promote bird watching
- Production of bird watching itineraries to be circulated in travel agencies and inbound tour operators
- The training needs birding gears like Telescope, Binoculars, Gps and Field Guides. They want KaiKokey Island to be protected and regenerate the mangroves.
- There should be an alternative Community Livelihood to protect both sites.
- Training needs certificate and more training in the future.

Acknowledgements

We acknowledge the support provided by the Wadden Sea Flyway Initiative for this training programme. We also like to thank our different partners in Sierra Leone especially the Conservation Society of Sierra Leone for providing the tutors who worked diligently in transferring their knowledge and skills and not forgetting the National Tourist board for the technical expertise and advice. Finally, we thank the trainers and trainees for their participation.

Special Thanks to all who contributed to mobilize the resources and those who provided support for the programme.

Annex 1. List of trainers and trainees and their organizations

NAME	ORGANISATION	ROLE	CONTACT
CHARLES SHOWERS	CSSL	TRAINER	+232 76 725 152
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MOHAMED SESAY	NACTOG	TRAINEE	+232 88 813 994

Annex 2. List of waterbirds observed during the training

No.	English Name	Scientific Name
1	Long-tailed Cormorant	<i>Microcarbo africanus</i>
2	Black Heron	<i>Egretta ardesiaca</i>
3	Western Reef-egret	<i>Egretta gularis</i>
4	Green-backed Heron	<i>Butorides striata</i>
5	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
6	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>
7	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
8	Pink-backed Pelican	<i>Pelecanus rufescens</i>
9	African Sacred ibis	<i>Threskiornis aethiopicus</i>
10	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>
11	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>
12	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>
13	Wooly-necked Stork	<i>Ciconia episcopus</i>
14	African Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>
15	White-headed Lapwing	<i>Vanellus albiceps</i>
16	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>
17	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>