



WETLAND AND WATERBIRD SURVEYS & TRAINING, EQUATORIAL GUINEA 13-22 March 2017

Introduction

Equatorial Guinea has never participated in the IWC and has remained a significant gap in the IWC network. In recognition of this and based on a request by the government of Equatorial Guinea, WSFI supported and organised a 3-day training course and field surveys to the main coastal wetlands of Río Muni, the continental zone of the country, which has a 265km coastline. Equipment was also donated to enable surveys to be carried out in the future, including binoculars, 2 telescopes with tripods and a camera.

Methods

A training course was held in Bata, opened by Santiago Francisco Engona Osono, State Secretary for the Environment. Participants were drawn principally from the ministry, including personnel responsible for coastal wetlands. There were 12 full-time participants. The course aimed to build awareness about the importance of coastal wetlands and waterbirds, and to introduce practical knowledge to enable identification and monitoring. The course comprised one day of training in Bata followed by two field visits to the Río Campo Natural Reserve in the north and the Río Muni Estuary Natural Reserve in the south. Both field days experienced significant delays mainly due to the immense amount of paperwork needed for conducting any kind of field exercise. At the sites, training surveys were conducted by walking stretches of coastline and stopping at access points. Both sites present administrative, logistical and security challenges for monitoring, and only small sections of the sites were visited, the emphasis being on training. The Río Muni estuary is extensive, and would best be counted by boat.

The trainer and three participants then visited the island of Annobón, which is situated more than 500km southwest of Bata. Here, fairly complete surveys were carried out of the whole coastal zone on 19th March by boat, and of Lagoa Mazafim, the country's largest freshwater lake, on 20th March. The trainer and one other participant also visited coastal wetlands of Bioko on 22nd March.

Conclusion

Capacity for conducting wetland / waterbird surveys in Equatorial Guinea is low; this was the first training course of its kind to take place in the country. It is hoped that a small network will carry out surveys in the future, and an IWC Coordinator is now in place. The data from visits to wetlands of Bioko and Río Muni do not present any remarkable information. However, the data from Annobón is significant, noting the high importance of the island for breeding noddies. Although birds had not started breeding yet, they had started to gather at their breeding sites. Black Noddy *Anous minutus* was more numerous (3,890) than Brown Noddy *Anous stolidus* (750). The surveys also confirmed the presence of Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides* on Annobón (first recorded there in 2016) and a breeding population of Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*.

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