

Celebrating the international World Migratory Bird Day in Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone Nature Guides Association (SLNGA)



Project report to the Wadden Sea Flyway Initiative (WSFI)

December 2022



Promoting Nature through Awareness and Community Engagements

Project Overview

On 27th October 2022, the Sierra Leone Nature Guides Association (SLNGA) celebrated World Migratory Bird Day (WMBD) in October 2022 and organised a birdwatching trip to Tissana point along the Youri Bay coastal reserve area, which is an ideal site for birdwatching, as it has a vast area of mangrove swamps and mudflats where migratory waterbirds can be easily spotted on their feeding grounds.

Sierra Leone has played an active role in the conservation and protection of migratory waterbirds through several programmes organised by the Conservation Society of Sierra Leone (CSSL), supported by the Wadden Sea Flyway Initiative, BirdLife, Wetlands International and other related organisations over the years. Activities supported by WSFI have included the training of Nature and Birdwatching tour guides in various parts in Sierra Leone.

The SLNGA was formed after the training workshop for nature and birdwatching tour guides supported by WSFI held at Tassoh Island from the 6th to 10th December 2021.

Sierra Leone was adversely affected by the Covid19 pandemic like any other country in the world, and has suffered in all sectors of development, more especially in the tourism sector. The SLNGA, as a formidable new association, thought it fit to partake in this year's World Migratory Bird Day celebration.

We envisaged to hold some birdwatching activities in Sierra Leone and organised a birdwatching trip to Tissana point in October to celebrate WMBD, in order to promote sensitization and awareness raising for the conservation and protection of migratory waterbirds. We invited school children, University students, nature clubs from all walks of life and the local community at the Tissana point village along the Youri Bay coastal area of the Freetown Western Peninsula.



Aims

The Project aimed to strengthen a new network of committed Nature tour guides, birdwatching lovers and nature clubs who were keen and interested to partake in our birding activities and also willing to share their passion with the locals, especially the young people. We hope that in the future our association can also play an important role in supporting migratory waterbird conservation and protection efforts including the waterbird census in Sierra Leone. The specific aims were to:

1. Increase birdwatchers and to let people have love for nature.
2. Raise awareness, education and sensitization relating to the conservation and protection of migratory waterbirds.

Activities during the Birdwatching trip included

- Introduction of the tour trip as a WMBD celebration, by Mr Momoh B Sesay of CSSL.
- Presentations and discussion on why birds migrate to different places and why stopover sites should be protected.
- Introduction to birdwatching equipment.



The school children, university students and the entire people were also introduced to what is a wetland and why wetlands should be protected for birds. Information was also provided about protected areas and IBAs. The importance of local wetlands such as the one at Tissana point was emphasised, and why it was important for breeding and roosting birds.

Conclusions

The project was a great awareness campaign and brought nature tour guides and local communities together to celebrate migratory birds at one of Sierra Leone's key coastal sites. The project also demonstrated the importance to SLNGA of engaging local communities and playing an active role in community-based conservation. Tour guides operating in the coastal area depend on a healthy environment, and working closely with local communities is therefore vital.



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