



# BIRDLIFE AFRICA NEWSLETTER



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## A MESSAGE FROM THE REGIONAL DIRECTOR'S DESK

2023 has been a remarkable year for the BirdLife Partnership in Africa. From new collaborations to impactful conservation work being carried out by our partners, we continue to be on the frontline of nature protection. We are also delighted to welcome the newest member of the BirdLife family, Nature Rwanda and congratulate SOS-Forêts in Côte d'Ivoire for being upgraded to a full BirdLife Partner, as we continue to increase our conservation footprint on the continent.

We hope you will enjoy our Partners' stories from around the continent, and that you will share this newsletter with your friends and supporters. Happy reading, thank you for your continued support and may 2024 bring greater benefits for nature and people.

**Kariuki Ndong'ang'a**  
Regional Director for Africa, BirdLife International

## ENDANGERED BIRD

### THE GREAT BUSTARD OTIS TARDA

Listed as Endangered on the IUCN Red List, this species found in northern Morocco, Mediterranean Region, and Central Europe, has suffered rapid population reductions. Main threats to the Great Bustard populations in Africa include collisions with power lines, illegal hunting, and habitat loss among others. In Morocco various [intervention strategies](#) are being rolled out to conserve this species including securing habitats in key areas, research and monitoring, in addition to awareness raising.

# NATURE RWANDA JOINS THE FLOCK



Community members transferring seedlings into seed pots at Butare nursery as part of Nature Rwanda's restoration work © Nature Rwanda

By Lewis Kihumba

**BirdLife International has officially welcomed Nature Rwanda, as the newest BirdLife Partner, becoming the 27th BirdLife Partner in Africa. Established in 2016, Nature Rwanda aims at building communities where human beings coexist with nature. This is done through conservation of biodiversity and ecosystems in a way that fosters a sustainable future and leads to social and economic transformation in communities, while addressing issues that threaten the coexistence of humans and nature. Key pillars of Nature Rwanda's work include Species and Habitats conservation, Climate Change Adaptation, Environmental Leadership and Capacity building, in addition to Policy and Advocacy.**

Nature Rwanda and BirdLife are collaborating on various initiatives. In the Lake Kivu- Rusizi Basins in Western Rwanda, the two organizations are working to restore 500 hectares of degraded landscapes through planting more than 300, 000 trees, and improving community livelihoods through a project supported by the TerraFund for AFR100.

In addition, Nature Rwanda is part of the East Africa Wildlife Poisoning Response Network, an initiative by BirdLife Partners in the East Africa Region to address wildlife poisoning, a major threat to vultures and other raptors in Africa. With more than 360 members and growing, Nature Rwanda is a perfect fit for the BirdLife Partnership.

"This news brings immense joy, marking a significant milestone that fills us with elation. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the BirdLife team for their unwavering support throughout this journey. We are truly grateful for the collaboration and are steadfast in our commitment to creating an even greater impact together", said Jean Claude Dusabimana, Executive Director, Nature Rwanda.

"We are delighted to have Nature Rwanda join the BirdLife flock. Nature Rwanda's aspirations perfectly match those of the BirdLife Partnership, as espoused by its conservation model and extensive restoration and climate work in Rwanda. We are excited about this collaboration", said Kariuki Nding'ang'a, Regional Director for Africa, BirdLife International.

“ We are truly grateful for the collaboration and are steadfast in our commitment to creating an even greater impact together



Jean Claude Dusabimana,  
Executive Director, Nature Rwanda

**The latest addition brings the total number of BirdLife Partners in Africa to 27.**

# ADDRESSING WILDLIFE POISONING IN KENYA



Community volunteers engage in traditional dances to create awareness on wildlife poisoning and vulture conservation during market outreaches in the Amboseli landscape. © Ednah Kulola

By Ednah Kulola and John Mwacharo

On a bright mid-morning in Amboseli, Kajiado County, southern Kenya, 99 men and women are gathered in the Enchilishili Social Hall at the Eselenkei Group Ranch. Attendees pay close attention to the speakers, as they do at other grassroots public gatherings. Today's subjects of discussion include vulture conservation and wildlife poisoning. This village gathering is one of several planned by Nature Kenya to educate locals living in the Amboseli environment about the hazards of wildlife poisoning.

Over the past years, Kenya has lost a significant number of its vulture species populations.

The country hosts eight vulture species: White-backed Vulture (*Cypsauchen*), White-headed Vulture (*Ripidura*), Rüppell's Vulture (*Cypsauchen*), Lappet-faced Vulture (*Torgos*), Hooded Vulture (*Necrosyrtes*), Egyptian Vulture (*Neophron*), Bearded Vulture (*Cypsauchen*) (Lammergeier) and the Palm-nut Vulture (*Cypsauchen*). Four of these species (Hooded, White-backed, Rüppell's and White-headed vultures) are listed as Critically Endangered while one - Lappet-faced is listed as Endangered in the IUCN Red List. In the last 40 years, according to a recently published paper (Ogada et al 2022), Hooded vulture populations have declined by 88 percent, White-backed by 75 percent, Lappet-faced by 65 percent and Rüppell's by 20 percent.

Wildlife poisoning, which stems from human-wildlife conflict (HWC), is the leading cause of vulture deaths in Kenya. When livestock is preyed on by predators such as lions or hyenas, herders often resort to lacing carcasses with poison in retaliation, aiming to kill the rogue predators. Vultures often fall victim to these wildlife poisoning incidents since they feed on carcasses in large numbers.

"Wildlife poisoning is prevalent in Amboseli. Vultures are the most affected victims. We use such gatherings to sensitize our people on the threats posed by the poisoning", says Jackson Oloibon, a community vulture volunteer based in Kimana.



A community vulture conservation and wildlife poisoning sensitization meeting in session at Nolasiti/Samai village in Amboseli. © Ednah Kulola

"We are thankful to Nature Kenya for this informative session. Over the years, we have witnessed a decline in vulture numbers in this area and assumed that the birds have migrated to other places in search of food and shelter. Today we have learned that these birds are disappearing due to wildlife poisoning", says Meijo ole Kerina, an Enchilishili village resident.

Upon learning about the importance of vultures in keeping the environment clean and the threats facing them, ole Kerina pledges to mobilize fellow villagers to report anyone who attempts to poison wildlife. During such meetings, community members ask questions, share their opinions, and give suggestions on preventing wildlife poisoning incidents in their areas. Villages adjacent to the Amboseli National Park frequently experience predator attacks on cattle.

In retaliation, villagers lace cattle carcasses with poison to kill the predators, including lions and hyenas. These poisoned carcasses are consumed by vultures and other scavenging animals, which are unintended targets. Poisoning is a leading cause of vulture deaths in Kenya.

Chiefs and other administration officers are engaged to reach out to the communities. So far, four meetings have been held in 2023 in Iltital, Samai, Nolasiti and Enchilishili villages, with 408 community members reached. Stakeholders from the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS), Maasai Community Wilderness Trust and Big Life Foundation are also involved in the outreach. Scientific data suggests that public education and awareness, among other factors, are key to reducing wildlife poisoning prevalence among pastoralist communities in Amboseli and other HWC hotspots like Maasai Mara.

Nature Kenya has recruited 17 community volunteers in the Amboseli area to monitor vulture populations and wildlife poisoning incidents. "Vulture volunteers have supported in increasing surveillance on human-wildlife conflict and catalyzing community behavior change. We are working closely with these volunteers to enhance vulture conservation efforts in Amboseli and beyond", says Paul Gacheru, Species and Sites manager at Nature Kenya.

“Wildlife poisoning is a major threat to vultures in Africa, accounting for more than 60% of their deaths. In Kenya, vultures are caught in the crossfire of human-wildlife conflict as they become victims when feed on poisoned carcasses. Grassroot efforts, such as community awareness creation are critical in educating the community on the dangers of poisoning and the importance of vultures. Community members who are aware this are less likely to engage in wildlife poisoning activities,” says Vincent Onyango, Senior Vulture Conservation Officer for Eastern Africa at BirdLife International.

Nature Kenya is also supporting the construction of predator-proof *bomas* to reduce cases of big cats and hyenas preying on cattle in homesteads. So far 10 such bomas have been constructed in the Amboseli landscape. In addition, Nature Kenya has supported four primary schools with rainwater harvesting infrastructure.

*Amboseli National Park is a designated Important Bird Area (IBA) and Key Biodiversity Area (KBA). Besides having many large wild animals like African Elephants, Black Rhinos, giraffes and lions, the park hosts over 400 bird species with more than 40 birds of prey, including the threatened Secretary bird, Martial Eagle, and Lappet-faced, White-backed, Hooded and Rüppell's vultures.*



Community volunteers engage in traditional dances to create awareness on wildlife poisoning and vulture conservation during market outreaches in the Amboseli landscape. © Ednah Kulola

# UNLOCKING THE POTENTIAL OF THE HIGH SEAS TREATY: A PATH TO SUSTAINABLE OCEAN GOVERNANCE



Seychelle's displays its commitment to conserving the high seas by signing the High Seas Treaty on September 20th, 2023, at the United Nations General Assembly © High Seas Alliance

By Julia Riopelle & Susan Waugh

**The High Seas Treaty, a groundbreaking international agreement aimed at preserving the biodiversity of the world's oceans, which opened for signing and ratification at the United Nation's General Assembly in New York on the 20th of September 2023, represents a monumental step for collaborative ocean governance beyond national jurisdiction.**

## The need for a High Seas Treaty

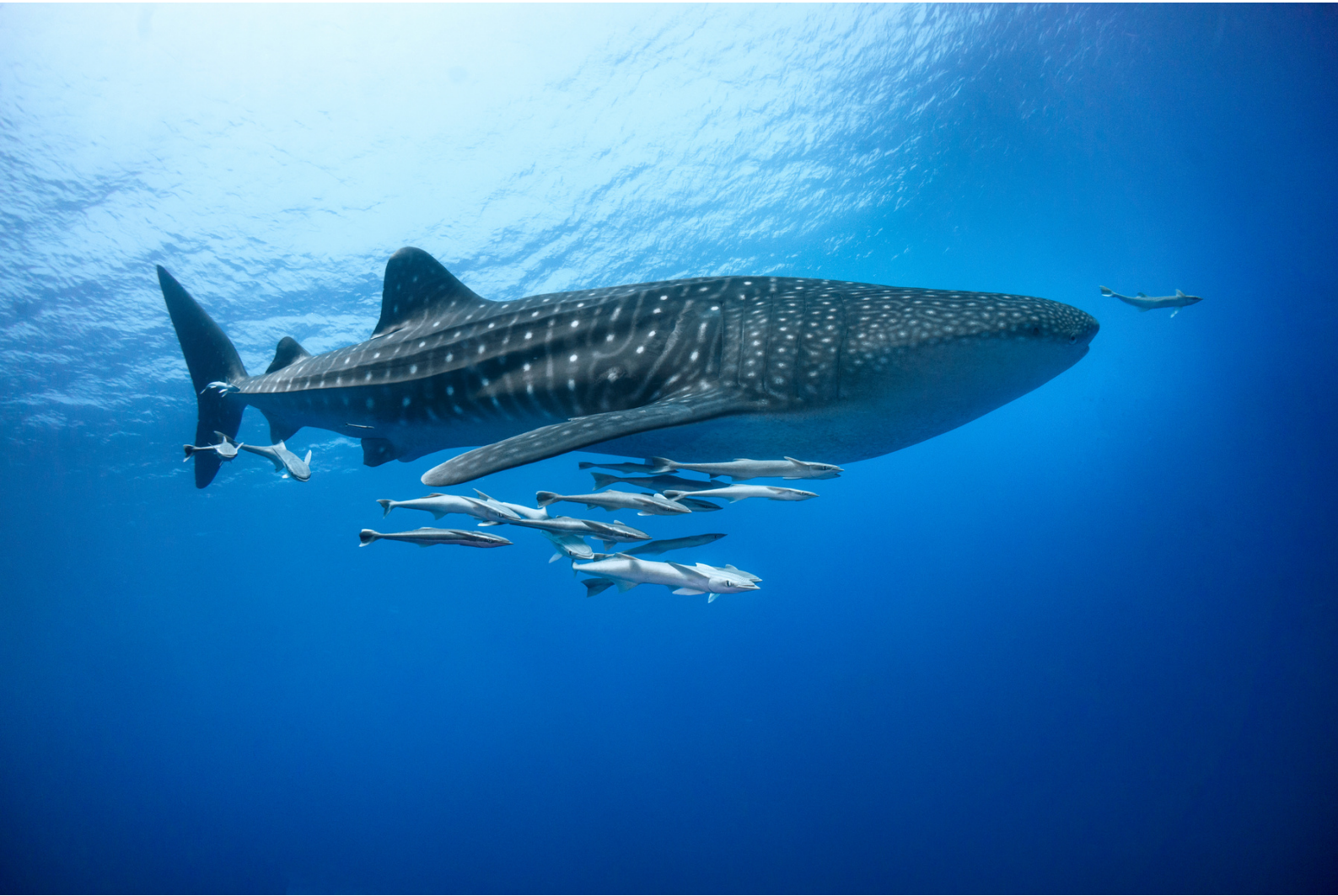
Fragmented legal frameworks and resource-intensive activities have left ecosystems across vast expanses of international waters facing numerous challenges. Over fishing, extractive activities, pollution, and the impacts of climate change are threatening marine ecosystems and the species that inhabit them. This, furthermore, can affect economies and livelihoods such as through impacts on fisheries and tourism as well as food security and health of coastal communities.

To address these pressing and mounting pressures the oceans face, the High Seas Treaty was negotiated for almost two decades, with the Agreement text adopted in June 2023. This landmark agreement provides a legal framework for the establishment of area-based management tools, including Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and a comprehensive and modern framework to conduct environmental impact assessments on human activities.

## Equitable, sustainable access to high seas resources

The urgency and importance of the High Seas Treaty are underscored by the potential it holds to deliver substantial economic and developmental benefits to its Contracting Parties. Notably, developing nations and landlocked countries can also benefit from this treaty. The Treaty promotes the fair and equitable access to marine genetic resources discovered in the high seas, as well as facilitates the effective development and transfer of marine technologies from developed countries Parties to developing countries Parties.

By ensuring that all nations can access and benefit from the genetic diversity found in the high seas, the treaty promotes a more inclusive and fair approach to ocean management. This is particularly significant for developing countries, as they often lack the resources and technology required to explore and exploit marine resources effectively. The treaty's provisions can help bridge this gap, creating opportunities for economic growth and technological advancement.



Whale shark can be found in both coastal waters and the high seas, inhabits all tropical and warm-temperate waters © Cinzia Osele Bismarck, Ocean Image Bank

A special fund has been established to distribute benefits from the treaty through capacity building and technology transfer. Advocating for governments to ratify this treaty and commit to its provisions is essential to begin a new era of collaborative oceans governance in international waters.

### **BirdLife International's Commitment to the High Seas Treaty**

On October 31, BirdLife International hosted a webinar on the High Seas Treaty for our Partners in Africa. The webinar featured an expert panel from the High Seas Alliance, a coalition of over 50 NGOs of which BirdLife International is a member, as well as guest speakers from Réseau régional d'Aires Marines Protégées en Afrique de l'Ouest (RAMPAO), Cabo Verde based Projeto Biodiversidade and The Mauritian Wildlife Foundation, who spoke on marine protection in West Africa, Cabo Verde and Mauritius, respectively.

As an observer of the creation of the Treaty, the High Seas Alliance has played an instrumental role in the years of negotiations leading to the finalization of the High Seas Treaty Agreement.

Their expert speakers delved into the treaty's provisions, provided an overview of the ratification process, and presented the implications of the treaty for both coastal and landlocked countries across Africa.

The webinar was attended by over 50 participants from across the African Partnership, highlighting the growing interest and engagement in ocean conservation.

"The High Seas Treaty represents an opportunity to regulate and monitor activities in the high seas with the aim to stem the uncontrolled exploitation of the oceans and ensure equity in the sustainable use of ocean resources. For African states, this could mean participating in and benefiting from the international maritime economy. Ratification of the treaty is a first important step, but we should also already focus on action, as effective implementation will determine its real impact on oceans, people, and the planet", says Tabea Zwimpfer, Africa Marine Coordinator at BirdLife International.

The High Seas Treaty represents a historic opportunity for coordinated action towards conserving biodiversity in the high seas. It also offers a key opportunity for all its Parties, particularly developing countries, landlocked countries and small island or coastal developing nations, to unlock the economic and developmental benefits it has to offer.

This treaty sets the stage for a more sustainable and inclusive approach to ocean governance. It is now up to governments and civil society groups worldwide to take the necessary steps to sign and ratify the treaty, entering a new era of responsible and collaborative management of the high seas. Missed the webinar?

Click [here](#) to find the recorded session!

Please contact the webinar organizers, Susan Waugh, and Julia Riopelle at BirdLife international if you wish to follow up with further questions about how your organization or your government can progress the ratification of the treaty.

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*“The High Seas Treaty represents an opportunity to regulate and monitor activities in the high seas with the aim to stem the uncontrolled exploitation of the oceans and ensure equity in the sustainable use of ocean resources. For African states, this could mean participating in and benefiting from the international maritime economy. Ratification of the treaty is a first important step, but we should also already focus on action, as effective implementation will determine its real impact on oceans, people, and the planet”*



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**Tabea Zwimpfer**  
Africa Marine Coordinator, BirdLife International



A Shy Albatross soaring across the middle of the Southern Ocean © Dominique Filippi



# BIRDLIFE SOUTH AFRICA ANNOUNCES

## BIRD OF THE YEAR 2024:

### THE BATELEUR



Bateleur (*Terathopius ecaudatus*) © Chris van Rooyen



Bateleur (*Terathopius ecaudatus*) © Chris van Rooyen

Also known as the Berghaan (Afrikaans), ingqungqulu (isiZulu), and ingqanga (isiXhosa), this magnificent raptor is famous for its striking appearance and remarkable aerial behavior. Indeed, a Bateleur (*Terathopius ecaudatus*) soaring high above the African bushel, with its rocking, gliding motion, is one of the most iconic sights of South Africa and, indeed our continent.

The Bateleur is a genuinely charismatic and eye-catching bird of prey, with its distinctive plumage – a combination of black, white, and vibrant red-orange on the face and legs. Its common English name, Bateleur, was coined by famed French explorer, writer and ornithologist François Levaillant, and is said to be French for a “tumbler” or “tightrope walker,” which aptly describes this bird’s graceful, aerial acrobatics. Its isiZulu name, ingqungqulu, is onomatopoeic, referring to the sounds of battle drums due to the species’ relation to war in the Zulu culture. Also, very fittingly, its scientific name, *Terathopius ecaudatus*, celebrates its marvelous face and short tail.

This species is equally at home in the bushel of the Kruger National Park, or the arid Kalahari. It is sexually dimorphic, meaning males and females can be differentiated based on their plumage or appearance. This is most easily done when they are in flight by looking at their underwing pattern. Males have all-black secondary and inner primary feathers, while females have broad white bases to these feathers (referring to the header image at the top of this page, the male is on the left of the female).

As bold, majestic and strong an image as these birds portray, unfortunately they are classified as regionally Endangered, with an estimated population reduction of over 50% over the past three generations (40 years), leaving a regional population size of less than 1000 mature individuals.

It is suspected that this is due to habitat transformation, which has led to a decrease in the available prey base for Bateleurs, especially outside protected areas. Its tendency to scavenge also puts this species at particular risk from indiscriminate poisoning, especially by small-stock farmers. Illegal harvesting of this species for use in the muthi trade is another recent trend, which needs to be further investigated.

Join us in celebrating the Bateleur and supporting the conservation of these incredible birds and their habitats. Together, we can ensure that future generations can marvel at the beauty of the Bateleur in the wild.

**Read more** <https://www.birdlife.org.za/bird-of-the-year-2024/>



© Albert Beukhof

# SAFEGUARDING SÃO TOMÉ AND PRÍNCIPE'S NATURAL HERITAGE AND BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY



Awareness session with local residents of Pico Macuru (a Special Reserve) © BirdLife

By Vânia Trovoada

## The value of conserving nature

The natural abundance and diversity of São Tomé and Príncipe (STP) includes hundreds of endemic species of flora and fauna, like the endangered São Tomé Ibis (*Bostrychia bocagei*), or the São Tomé Fiscal (*Lanius newtoni*). Many of these species are within the high altitude protected areas of the Obô Natural Parks of São Tomé (PNOT) and Príncipe (PNP). However, the respective buffer zones, lowland forests, coastal and marine areas also high in biodiversity, had limited or non-existing protection, and were therefore an important reason to increase efforts in expanding the Protected Areas' network in the archipelago.

BirdLife International, together with national and international academia and NGOs supported the Government in identifying and designating 21 new protected areas under the status of Special Reserves (SRs) in addition to the natural park and distributed throughout the landscape of São Tomé Island, totalling more than 12,300 hectares, by using High Conservation Value (HCV) Areas criteria and methodology. HCV Areas are characterized by biological, ecological, social, or cultural values, and are of extreme significance at a national, regional and/or global level.

"The natural resources that exist in the 21 SRs are numerous, diverse and very valuable from a socio-economic and environmental point of view. We all need to realise this and find short and medium-term solutions to use the resources sustainably, before we reach an undesirable level of ecosystem degradation and biodiversity loss, which would lead to a diminished supply and impaired regulation of ecosystem services", says Conceição Neves, Project Leader for BirdLife International in São Tomé Island.



Sao Tome Ibis (*Bostrychia bocagei*) © Jean-Baptiste Deffontaines



Meeting with community leaders in Me-Zochi district © BirdLife

### São Tomé's Special Reserves

The formal recognition of these areas in STP includes identifying management and monitoring aspects, participating in the creation of land use policies around the PNST that maintain the ecological integrity of sensitive sites.

This recognition process began in 2019 with data collection, followed by public consultations with local authorities, leaders and representatives from communities neighbouring the SRs, most of which within the PNST's buffer zone. Through these participatory meetings, important information, concerns, and recommendations were gathered about the pressures, threats, and value of each areas' natural resources, culminating in their validation and cartographic mapping.

"Since this is a process that began in 2019-2020, there was a noticeable increase in the level of awareness among community representatives, and the need to adopt sustainable management mechanisms to exploit the natural resources existing in the target areas, where the community is the main beneficiary. The definition and implementation of sustainable and inclusive management mechanisms in each reserve, is becoming urgent", notes Mr João Vaz, representative of the Brigoma community in Santa Catarina, São Tomé.

### A Sustainable Green Future

This multi-stakeholder process creates synergies for actions to be developed in the future, where each involved party is aware of their role. Early involvement of the communities directly targeted by this initiative is critical. In future activities, the aim is to develop management scenarios based on tailored and benchmarked innovative approaches such as co-management by communities, sustainable tourism development models founded on collaboration, and high-level private investments, among others.



We all need to find short and medium-term solutions to use the resources sustainably, before we reach an undesirable level of ecosystem degradation and biodiversity loss, which would lead to a diminished supply and impaired regulation of ecosystem services

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**Conceição Neves,**  
**Project Leader, BirdLife Africa**

"Concerned about the destruction of the forest, we, from our own initiative, created protected areas, but even so, everything has been destroyed. So, what should we do? Will the creation of this area resolve this situation", poses Hipólito Gomes, President of the Água Coimbra Residents' Association.

The next steps for 2024 include implementing the actions in Decree-Law No. 08/2023 that created the SRs, such as developing scenarios and management models for selected pilot SRs considering specificities identified through the HCV methodology, like ecotourism, agroforestry, ecosystem services or others.

"The formal creation of the 21 SRs on the island of São Tomé is a clear demonstration of the potential of coordinating efforts in favor of nature conservation and biodiversity, for and by people. From start to finish, this process involved the participation and engagement of all the relevant actors at local and national level. We can therefore only express our appreciation and thanks to everyone, and particularly to the partners and funders (i.e. the European Union, Rainforest Trust, and the Global Environment Facility) for their invaluable contribution to safeguarding São Tomé and Príncipe's natural heritage", concludes Agostinho Fernandes, BirdLife International's Head of Office in São Tomé and Príncipe.



Aerial view of a Special Reserve © BirdLife

# PROMINENT POACHER BECOMES A FOREST

## CONSERVATIONIST IN SIERRA LEONE



Gola landscape © CSSL

By Abdul Kaprr Dumbuya

Abdul Borbor Musa is a 45-year-old farmer and lives in Joru community in Gaura chiefdom, Kenema district, eastern Sierra Leone. For a long time, Abdul was involved in logging and slash-and-burn farming in the “Gaya-yei” (the crying hills) community forest in Joru. These were key activities that he heavily depended on as livelihood options for the daily survival of his family. Further, Abdul was the leader of a group of five hunters in his community. Within a month’s period, Abdul and his team used to kill up to 12 different animals including monkeys, duikers, among others which when sold, gave them a total of 1,800,000 Leones (\$75USD) that was shared among themselves. This was before the EU funded PAPFor project was launched in the community by the Conservation Society of Sierra Leone (CSSL) in 2020.

“We realised that the numbers of animals had begun dwindling in the forest, and their source of drinking water was gradually drying up due to the community farming practices”, says Musa.

The PAPFor project aimed at tackling the problems of forest degradation by working with rural communities to create awareness about the importance of protecting the forest while at the same time promoting alternative livelihood activities.

As key element of the PAPFor project was sustained sensitization activities through community engagement sessions across the chiefdom, prevailing on people like Musa and his cohorts to desist from practicing unsustainable farming, poaching and logging in the community forest. The messages convinced the local authorities in Gaura chiefdom, and led them into galvanizing support from all the communities that have ownership of the forest to work collaboratively with the PAPFor project.

This was followed by several engagements that culminated into the development and signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in 2021 between CSSL and the chiefdom authorities for the formal establishment of the Gaya-yei Community Forest. This was backed by a set of community by-laws with stringent penalties developed by the communities prohibiting destructive practices in the community forest. This was a move embraced by community stakeholders as moving forward within the context of community forestry, they see themselves playing a central role in decision-making for land-use and management of their local forest, as well as facilitating support from government and development partners.

"We are particularly happy that the communities were willing and ready to embrace the concept of community forestry to protect their forest. We will continue to encourage them to work harder such that their forest becomes an envy for other communities to emulate", highlights Emurana Sowa, the CSSL-PAPFor Project National Coordinator.

"Like many of my colleague poachers, loggers and farmers, the PAPFor project really helped to redirect my focus into realizing the importance of saving our forest. It was initially very difficult for me to change my ways of doing things, especially poaching and upland farming which were my main sources of income", Musa asserts.

Musa is now wholly dependent on agriculture; inland valley swamp farming and mono-cropping with three-month crop varieties including rice, potatoes, garden eggs, cassava and pepper.

"For every harvest I conduct, I always save some produce for food and for the next planting period, and then sell the rest. In my last harvest in the second half of 2023, I have so far made about SLE 7,000,000 (\$311.11). This is obviously a great turnaround for me and my family, thanks to CSSL and the PAPFor project. As the current Chairman of our Forest Management Committee, I will continue to advocate for the protection of not only our forest, but also other community forests, as a healthy forest saves lives just like our Gaya-yei Community Forest", he further notes.

Since the formal establishment of the Gaya-yei Community Forest in 2021, Joru and five other communities have been enjoying uninterrupted water supply to these communities. Joru, has three schools and a community health centre which have running pipe-borne water sourced from the Gaya-yei Community Forest through a gravity system. In addition, a pure water company that has provided employment to nearly 50 young people was also recently established by a resident of Joru.

"CSSL is happy to continue to share more stories about the likes of Abdul Borbor Musa, and how the EU funded PAPFor project has succeeded in changing behaviours and transforming lives through community forestry and related initiatives" concludes Sowa.

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*Like many of my colleague poachers, loggers and farmers, the PAPFor project really helped to redirect my focus into realizing the importance of saving our forest. It was initially very difficult for me to change my ways of doing things, especially poaching and upland farming which were my main sources of income*




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**Abdul Borbor Musa,  
Forest Conservationist**

# MAINSTREAMING BIODIVERSITY IN AFRICA'S GREAT GREEN WALL



A visual representation of the ability of nature to hold back deserts © Great Green Wall Initiative

By Djibril Diallo

In November 2023, ministers from the Great Green Wall (GGW), countries met in Abuja, Nigeria to deliberate on progress made in restoration activities, institutional issues matters such as the status of contributions, and mobilization of external resources among others. Established by the African Union in 2007, the initiative spanning 11 countries west to east from Senegal to Djibouti aims at restoring degraded landscapes in the Sahel.

Years of climate change, over-farming and over-grazing in the Sahel have eroded this once green band, endangering the food security and livelihoods of 130 million people. The initiative encompasses different land uses including restoring of habitats through a mosaic of green and productive landscapes including 8000 km of trees, grasslands, and verdant vegetation. It is envisaged that more than 100 million hectares of land will be restored, 250 million tons of carbon sequestered, 10 million jobs created, in addition to providing food security for more than 20 million people by 2030. To date, about 18 million ha degraded land has been restored.

While the context of every country in the Sahel is different, the initiative leverages on a localized approach, whereby countries address local challenges using local contexts. While some countries focus on reforestation and agroforestry, others focus on fixing sand dunes in places with native vegetation.

Across the belt, BirdLife partners are involved in the restoration program. In Mauritania, for example, BirdLife Partner Nature Mauritania is carrying out restoration work in partnership the National Agency of the Great Green Wall, including in the important Lake Male - a Key Biodiversity Area (KBA). Further, local communities are benefiting from various livelihood schemes including poultry raising and market gardening.

A key element of this is considering biodiversity as a critical element of restoration activities. To this end, BirdLife is leading efforts to mainstream biodiversity conservation in the Great Green Wall activities. In 2019, the Pan African Agency of the Great Green Wall (PAGGW) and BirdLife International signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to support the integration and monitoring of biodiversity, habitats, and ecosystem services, within the initiative. Through this MoU, BirdLife and PAGGW are working together in various areas including restoring habitats and building the capacity of local conservation organizations in addition to advocacy and awareness raising.



Future generations will reap the rewards of this work © Nature Mauritania

Through collaborations between national agencies of the GGW and BirdLife Partners, biodiversity working groups has been established in Nigeria and Burkina Faso. In addition, contracts have been signed with Niger, Mali, and Mauritania to support the establishment of biodiversity working groups. The groups will be instrumental in supporting countries assess the impact of GGW activities on biodiversity, and consequently propose recommendations. As restoration activities continue to be implemented in the GGW countries, greater support for this initiative will be instrumental for a community driven green future for the Sahel.

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*BirdLife International and the Pan African Agency of the Great Green Wall (PAGGW) are working together in various areas including restoring habitats and building the capacity of local conservation organizations in addition to advocacy and awareness raising.*



**Djibril Diallo,**  
GGW Biodiversity Mainstreaming Officer, BirdLife Africa

# IN THE FIELD WITH THE PINK PIGEON TEAM



A Pink Pigeon displaying its amazing color nuances just before landing on a branch © Clément Appadoo

By Thierry Runghen

The Pink Pigeon (*Nesoenas mayeri*) endemic to Mauritius is a distinctive medium-sized pigeon with a pale pink body, brown wings and a broad rusty-brown tail. Over the years, the species declined driven by habitat destruction and degradation, diseases, genetic loss and predators among others. In the 1970s only 12 to 20 individuals remained.

“Before human settled on the island, the Pink Pigeon was found in all forests of the island from uplands to the coast and quite possibly on islets. Following the drastic reduction of its habitats, our interventions through captive breeding or rearing and release, creation of sub-populations, predator control, supplementary feeding, disease management and genetic management”, says Vikash Tatayah, Conservation Director of the Mauritian Wildlife Foundation (MWF).

“The numbers have grown through the years to reach 600 currently from a low of 9 or 10 in 1990. Though the numbers have considerably increased since the 1970s, the last surviving pigeon species in the Mascarenes is still not totally safe from predators, food scarcity, diseases and genetic drift”, adds Tatayah.

Today, the bird can be seen in various localities in the Black River Gorges National Park in the southwest of the country including Petrin, Brise Fer, Pigeon Wood (Plaine Paul), Combo and Bel Ombre and in the South East, on the island reserve of Ile aux Aigrettes among other locations.

To ensure this Mauritian endemic bird’s preservation, a dedicated MWF team of Mauritians and expatriates spends the whole year looking after it in various sites. The ‘Pink Pigeon team’ led by Akilesh Jodhee, Senior Pink Pigeon staff monitors the birds on a daily basis. The Pink Pigeon can breed all year long (except for a variable moult period). Akilesh and the team search the forest for signs of breeding, and if a nest is found, details of the nest are recorded including number of eggs laid, number of squabs that hatch, the number of squabs that fledge among others.

The progress of the nest is tracked over time to determine the outcome (whether the nest is successful i.e., at least one squab fledges, or whether it is unsuccessful due to predation of eggs or squabs, nest destruction or disease affecting squabs). “This information contributes to the evaluation of the status of the population i.e. gives an idea of whether the population is ‘healthy’, growing, declining, ageing”, says Akilesh.





When a nest is found, the staff will observe it from distance without disturbing it © MWF

When a nest is found, the team member will observe the nest from the ground using binoculars. The breeding pair will be identified by their unique combination of metal identity ring and plastic color leg rings.

In addition, the stage of the nest will be determined i.e. whether the nest is at the building stage, nest lining, or incubation. Essential details on the nest are collected such as height above ground, tree species and GPS coordinates. "We do not access the nests as they are sometimes fragile. We also do not want to disturb the birds. If there is too much disturbance around the nest, the female might choose to find another spot", notes Owen Moorghen, Field Conservation Biologist.

Pink Pigeons are also observed by the team around the feeders (hoppers), where wheat and broken maize is provided in sites where birds are being managed. "Identifying the birds that visit the feeders allows us to determine whether there is any nesting pattern. If you see the female and male from a pair regularly coming to the feeders alternatively and at different times of the day, you may be able to deduce that they have a nest and are taking turns to incubate eggs or brood chicks", adds Akilesh.

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*Following the drastic reduction of its habitats, our interventions are done through captive breeding or rearing and release, creation of sub- populations, predator control, supplementary feeding, disease management and genetic management.*

**Vikash Tatayah,**  
**Conservation Director, Mauritian Wildlife Foundation (MWF)**



Everyday, the Pink Pigeon staff go in the forest to monitor the species © MWF



© Clément Appadoo

Feeders offer supplementary to Pink Pigeons in managed areas © Clément Appadoo

Chick(s) are fed for 3 to 4 weeks before they fledge from the nest. The full day 'hopper watch', as this observation is commonly called, also enables the team to look for birds that have not yet been ringed. The team will capture and ring any visiting unringed birds as soon as they enter the aviaries to feed. Ringing allows the bird to be individually recognized from then onward, allowing the team to determine population estimates, survival rates, and life histories.

Additionally, the team is responsible for maintaining a safe-haven relatively free of introduced mammalian predators e.g., rats in the areas where Pink Pigeons are managed, which is quite a daunting task. The team also keeps a close watch on the welfare of the Pink Pigeons and will take care of sick and injured birds.

A lot of work still remains to be done including the creation of new sub-populations to increase the distribution and the population size, eventually, linking all the sub-populations to have one Pink Pigeon population. "This is a long-term prospect, and before reaching this stage, we will need to manage the genetics of existing sub-populations. A study supported by University partners has identified that birds from European and USA zoos have genes that are missing or underrepresented in the wild birds in Mauritius.

These genes, reintroduced to the birds in Mauritius, should facilitate greater fitness of our birds (e.g. in fighting disease) and help ensure long term viability and resilience within our sub-populations", concludes Sion Henshaw, Fauna Manager at MWF.

*MWF and its partners are happy to see our Pink Pigeon population having reached a long-term goal of 600 from some 20 individuals, and look forward to the challenge of moving this species even further away from the risk of extinction.*



© Clément Appadoo

Every pigeon is ringed with combination of colours in order for the team to be able to identify each individual © Clément Appadoo

# A BRIGHT FUTURE FOR THE RASO LARK IN CAPE VERDE



Juvenile of the Raso lark in the midst of vegetation on the small island of Raso in Cape Verde © Nathalie Melo

By Odair Cardoso and Isabel Fortes

The Raso lark (*Alauda Razae*) is a globally endangered bird species only found in Cape Verde. Until 2018, the species listed as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List was only found in Raso – one of the 10 islands that constitute Cape Verde.

Although extremely well adapted to the desert environment, the Raso lark population's vulnerable to climate change and extreme drought, as it depends on seasonal rains for breeding. Additionally, predation by the endemic Cape Verde giant gecko, further reduced populations of the species. By 2004, there were fewer than 100 individuals. Concerted conservation efforts were rolled out and by 2010, the populations had begun increasing, reaching about 1,500 individuals as per the last census carried out in 2017.

## A new home for the Raso Lark

In 2018, conservation efforts by Biosfera, BirdLife partner in Cape Verde, Portuguese Society for the Study of Birds (SPEA), the National Directorate for the Environment of Cape Verde and the University of Cambridge saw the reintroduction of the species to Santa Luzia – another island in Cape Verde, where the species had previously existed before the 15th Century.

Initially, 37 individuals were translocated in April 2018, and in 2019, 33 more were translocated to increase the populations of the species. After the first translocation, the population was monitored frequently for several months by the field team, and the following year, after the rain, the first chick of Raso lark was found, a sign of the success of the translocation and an important milestone in the conservation of this species.

"We were all very anxious to know how they'd behave in a group, or which specific area of the island they would prefer on the island of Santa Luzia", notes Tommy Melo, Co-Founder of Biosfera.

In March 2023, the team carried out a census on the island. Currently, it is estimated that 450-600 individuals are thriving on the island. In addition, 23 Raso larks have already been ringed in Santa Luzia. Further, Raso larks have been sighted flying from the island of Santa Luzia to the islet of Raso and vice versa, over a distance of 17 km.

This reintroduction to the island of Santa Luzia is critical as it reduces the risk of extinction for the species. Biosfera and partners have ensured that the island is cat-free to alleviate any predation threats to the species.

Additionally, the species breeding success is boosted by the fact that there are no giant geckos present in the island as compared to Raso. Biosfera will continue to monitor this species and gather more information about its adaptation to the new home, to aid in conservation efforts.

“The reintroduction of the Raso lark represents an important milestone in the conservation of terrestrial species in Cape Verde and not only for the Biosfera, due to the success and impact it has had on restoring the ecosystem in the Santa Luzia reserve”, concludes Nadina Rodrigues, Biosfera Executive Director.

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*The reintroduction of the Raso lark represents an important milestone in the conservation of terrestrial species in Cape Verde and not only for the Biosfera, due to the success and impact it has had on restoring the ecosystem in the Santa Luzia reserve*

**Nadina Rodrigues,  
Biosfera Executive Director**



Raso lark ringed on the small island of Raso in Cape Verde © Nathalie Melo

# COMMUNITY REVOLVING FUND (CRF) SUPPORTS VULTURE CONSERVATION EFFORTS IN TANZANIA



Entrepreneurship training in Tanzania © Nature Tanzania

By Vincent Onyango

Across Africa, vulture populations are facing steep declines, with some species facing declines of up to 97% over the last 50 years. Today, 7 out of 11 vulture species are faced with extinction, with poisoning, accounting for more than 60% of vulture deaths. Belief based use where vultures are killed for their body parts used in traditional medicine accounts for about 29% of vulture mortalities on the continent. In Tanzania, Nature Tanzania is engaging local communities in the Makao Wildlife Management Area (WMA) in north central Tanzania, to protect vultures.

A key aspect of this work revolves engaging traditional healers to substitute vulture parts for plant-based alternatives. Consequently, a perennial herb - *Biophytum crassipes* (*kiloto*) has been identified for use. Further, Nature Tanzania is engaging communities in the area through promoting community livelihoods. Consequently, a Community Revolving Fund (CRF) owned by the community is in operation.

The CRF entails a cashless system for the disbursement and repayment of small loans, and involves the community including traditional healers. Loans are provided to support environmentally sustainable businesses, thus improving community livelihoods. With financial support from Darwin Initiative through BirdLife International, Nature Tanzania has incorporated 15 million Tanzania shillings (£5,000) to support the fund.

“Employing an integrated approach to vulture conservation will not only safeguards these important birds but also reduce environmental pressures, creating a sustainable harmony for all”, notes Fadzai Matsvimbo, Preventing Extinctions Programme Coordinator, BirdLife International.

The fund is managed and operated by the Makao Wildlife Management Authority, Meatu District Council, Nature Tanzania, and the CRF committee.



Participants during the entrepreneurship training © Nature Tanzania

The committee is made up of representatives from the Meatu District council, Makao WMA, and Nature Tanzania. This committee evaluates loan applications, and conducts monitoring and evaluation of the granted loan projects where businesses are regularly reviewed. Further, community members are benefiting from capacity building trainings on entrepreneurship thus reducing pressure to the environment and helping address drivers of wildlife poisoning, including income losses linked to human-wildlife conflict and belief-based use of vulture body parts.

"We thank Nature Tanzania for supporting the government on fighting against poverty by helping Makao community to have access to loans with small interest hence they will be able to start/improve their small business in their respective area" Miss. Fauzia Ngatumbura, Meatu District Commissioner.

The first batch of loans was disbursed in July 2023 dispatched where 56 people (33 women and 23 men) benefited from the loans. The beneficiaries went through entrepreneurship training to enable them run small businesses well improving their livelihoods and reducing pressure to environment and wildlife.

"The loan we got from the vulture conservation project implemented by Nature Tanzania helped us to purchase a new tailoring machine which improve our working efficiency as we deal with customers order within time enhancing their trust to us hence the number of customers increased. We started paying back the loan and we are expecting to return it back the whole loan with interest as soon as possible for our fellow groups to benefit too", says Miss Jane Nchambi Mipawa - Treasurer of Mbuyuni Women Group - one of the groups benefiting from the loans.

"These people as they keep experiencing the tangible benefits from their conserved land, through CRF implementation we are now expecting to have a large group of vulture conservation ambassadors since every beneficiary have automatically been registered as a vulture conservation ambassador as he/she will be helping Nature Tanzania to raise awareness on important of vulture to their respective area", concludes Edwin Kamugisha, Program Officer, Nature Tanzania.

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**Edwin Kamugisha,**  
Program Officer, Nature Tanzania



Entrepreneurship training © Nature Tanzania

# GREPOM LEADS ON NATURE RESTORATION EFFORTS IN MOROCCO



Mountaineers clearing Northern bald ibis nests in southern Morocco © Mohamed Aourir

By Haytam Iallaten

Morocco is home to more than 480 bird species, with about half of these species nesting in different habitats across the country ranging from high mountain plains to deserts and shrublands. Furthermore, the country is located at the centre of the East Atlantic Flyway, used by millions of birds from the Arctic region, Canada, Greenland, and Siberia travelling to southern African territories.

As birds are good indicators of the planet's health, declines in bird populations indicate a deterioration of the planet's ecological well-being. Nowhere is this more pronounced than in Africa, where birds face various threats ranging from habitat loss driven by various factors including deforestation - which costs Morocco an average of 25,000 ha of forest cover per year, to climate change.

Against this backdrop, GREPOM, BirdLife Partner in Morocco, is carrying out several actions to improve the quality of bird habitats in the country. Located in northeast Morocco, the Sebkhia Bou Areg commonly called Marchica is the second large lagoon on the southern shore of the Mediterranean.

The lagoon is an important regional sanctuary for migratory birds, such as Ospreys (*Pandion haliaetus*), Common Shelducks (*Tadorna tadorna*), and the Pied Avocet (*Recurvirostra avosetta*) among others.

"Many important migratory birds take refuge in this lagoon, where many of these birds contribute to the well-being of the ecosystem, and that's why I call this lagoon 'a crossroads for migratory birds'", says Said Azouaghe, coordinator of GREPOM's Eastern Regional Unit.

Beginning 2022, GREPOM contributed to the creation of bird-friendly nesting habitats in the lagoon. More than 25 artificial flamingo nests and two floating rafts were installed. On June 5, 2023, just a few months after the second raft was installed, the first breeding of Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*) was recorded. Prior to this, the species, was only known to breed at two sites in the country including Marchica (in 1978 and regularly from 2013) and at Khnifiss lagoon in southwest Morocco (in 1967 and 1995).

Other species observed on this floating raft and its immediate surroundings include the Sandwich Tern (*Thalasseus sandvicensis*), the Interrupted-necked Plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus*) and the Little Tern (*Sternula albifrons*).





Common tern (Sterna hirundo) : 2 adults and 1 chick visible © Said Azouagh

Another successful project carried out by GREPOM was the restoration of a natural islet in the Oued Massa estuary - a Ramsar listed site in 2022. With the help of the management of the Souss Massa National Park (SMNP) and the National Water and Forestry Agency (NFWA), the islet was rehabilitated in the hope of creating new breeding habitats for shorebirds, terns, and gulls in the Massa estuary. On April 29, 2023, the first breeding records for the Red-necked Plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus*) was recorded, with 39 eggs in 13 nests on the rehabilitated island, making it, along with the Marchica, one of the very few successful habitat restoration projects in Morocco.

Morocco is home to the world's only wild population of the Endangered Northern bald ibis (*Geronticus eremita*). In October 2023, GREPOM/BirdLife, collaborated with the NFWA to improve breeding sites of the species in the Souss Massa region, including clearing sand and other material which had accumulated in the nest sites, as well as digging new areas for the installation of new nests. GREPOM intends to continue its restoration and conservation efforts, and to extend its scope to other species and habitats.

“Our aim is to strengthen ecosystems for resident and migratory birds, which would not be possible without the commitment of donors, local authorities, NGOs, and local communities. As advocates of Morocco's avian heritage, our commitment to habitat restoration is a pledge to safeguard not only the birds but also the balance of nature”, concludes Khadija Bourass, Executive Director, GREPOM

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**Khadija Bourass,  
Executive Director, GREPOM**



Chicks and nests of Red-necked Plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus*) © Mohamed Aourir

COURTSHIP FLIGHT OF A PIN-TAILED WHYDAH MALE  
© RINA BIERMAN

