



*The Wadden Sea Flyway Initiative - linking the Wadden Sea with critical sites  
along the East Atlantic Flyway in Africa*

**Report on the training course to improve local competencies  
for implementing waterbird flyway conservation and sites /  
species monitoring**

*Kent, Sierra Leone, 22-26 January 2013*



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## **1.0 Introduction and Justification**

The Wadden Sea Flyway Initiative has compiled a comprehensive series of targeted training events as one of its core activities. The purpose is to build and strengthen the capacities of environmental NGOs working with government agencies in the PRCM region in West Africa in conserving migratory waterbirds and their key habitats.

The Wadden Sea Flyway Initiative secured funding from the German Federal Ministry for the Environment and Nature Conservation to conduct a national training programme in Sierra Leone from the 22-26 January 2013.

The report presented herein provides a detailed account of the training activities including highlights of the achievements of the programme and recommendations for possible improvements in future.

## **2.0 Day 1**

The training programme lasted five days and included field trips to neighbouring villages/sites and settlements near Kent namely Tissana, and Tombo respectively.

### **Opening of Training Workshop**

Twenty five persons comprising 3 from the Republic of Liberia and 22 Sierra Leoneans from NGOs, local conservation groups, tertiary institutions and community representatives attended the course. The participants from Freetown, the provinces and Liberia arrived in Kent on the 21st January 2013. The Workshop started on the 22nd January 2013 first with the registration of participants. Thereafter opening remarks were made by the Executive Director of the Conservation Society of Sierra Leone (CSSL), Dr. Sama Monde, the international expert, Mr. Tim Dodman, the biodiversity officer of CSSL, Mr. Papanie Bai-Sesay and the government representative, Mr Amos Kamara. The speakers welcomed the participants and conveyed on behalf of their organizations the high expectations on the training programme for the individuals involved, the countries represented and the region as a whole.

The workshop was started with the following presentations:

#### **(a) Introduction to the East Atlantic Flyway including the WSFI and CMB**

Mr Tim Dodman introduced the East Atlantic Flyway as a vital region of the Wadden Sea Flyway Initiative (WSFI). He outlined the key features and habitats of the region and highlighted the influence of the Atlantic currents and the Inter-Tropical Convergence Zone on the coastal zone. He also discussed the geographical characteristics of the region which have a major impact on habitats, productivity and waterbird distribution and monitoring; and elaborated the uses of the coastal zone like harbouring large human populations within major cities, fisheries activities in coastal waters, rivers and lagoons; resource exploitation (wood, sand, water etc.), all of which contribute to the agricultural and industrial development cooperation of the Wadden Sea Flyway Initiative with countries along the flyway. He conveyed to trainees the aim of the

Wadden Sea Flyway Initiative being to support the conservation of migratory waterbirds in the region, obtain more detailed monitoring data and develop a long-term perspective for these activities.

#### **(b) Conservation of Migratory Birds (CMB) Programme**

Geoffroy Citegetse the regional representative of the CMB programme based in Sierra Leone introduced the programme on the conservation of migratory birds. He informed participants that the coastal zone of West Africa supports some of the highest concentrations of migratory birds in the world, and is therefore a priority zone for the conservation of migratory birds. He enumerated the threats which migratory birds face with various consequences on their survival and wellbeing.

#### **Additional Presentations**

Before lunch that day Mr Dodman discussed the topic entitled the **Flyway Approach To Conservation And Migration Strategies**. To introduce that topic more vividly he asked participants to make individual sketches of the East Atlantic Flyway. Later he divided them into four groups with each group leader carrying the name of the group's favourite bird. Then he asked each group to make a drawing of the flyways of individual bird species. In the course of the exercise Mr Dodman provided relevant information and made corrections to the trainees' work where necessary. The exercise was concluded successfully.



## **The Function and Concept of Sites and the Migration Challenge**

In the afternoon he made another presentation on the above topic. He discussed the range of different functional sites which are required within a flyway pointing out that for some birds the site function may be different but the habitat could be similar. He cited the example of ducks which can use similar habitats (marshes, lakes) for breeding, moulting or non-breeding. Further he elaborated on the differences in the vegetation composition and water temperatures based on variations in geographical regions/latitudes. He highlighted also the other group of species which depend on very different habitats in their breeding and non-breeding areas, e.g. waders breeding on the Arctic tundra using West African shores as their main non-breeding areas. As a consequence of these variations he pointed out that food items taken by these birds differ from site to site, thus emphasising the importance of adaptation to available and suitable sites for the survival of migratory species.

The international expert ended the day's presentations with the discussion on habitat threats that can have significant impacts on migratory waterbirds, especially wetland loss. The trainees participated fully in highlighting the challenges and threats migratory species face along the flyways.

### **3.0 Day 2**

That day started with the review of Day 1 activities. Thereafter Mr. Charles Showers, one of the resource persons, and Mr. Tim Dodman led participants through the new topic called the **Identification of Waterbirds**. For the start they projected photographs of several bird species on the projector screen and requested participants to identify them, which they did. The exercise showed that every participant knew a certain number of birds from their local knowledge and experience.

In their lecture the trainers highlighted the three groups of criteria in describing every bird: (1) colour, (2) shape and (3) behaviour. They also stressed that at any one time one criterion is not enough but rather the 3 criteria should be used to complement each other. They stressed also that a brief description is not enough; rather, a full and accurate description is essential. They taught participants the approaches to identify bird species being the shape, plumage and behaviour. They advised that a rigorous description method is needed for the following reasons:

- To make a note of the key elements for identification (and to prevent "I forgot to look at the beak")
- To describe the bird objectively (and answer questions like "when do we consider the beak to be long")
- To make a written description before the bird flies away and before looking in the field guide.

After the lecture session the participants were led on a field trip to Tissana where they were introduced to the field exercise on bird identification; and familiarization with and care of technical equipment.



Participants were later divided into four groups with one trainer per group and taught simple techniques in erecting the telescopes; how and when to use the telescope and binoculars; how to carry and care for the equipment. By the end of that session each participant was able to use the equipment well and identify at list one waterbird. The field trip ended at lunch time.

#### **Training on Waterbird Counting**

Participants returned to the training centre after lunch and took lessons on waterbird counting and completing the census form from Mr Dodman and Mr Showers.

### **4.0 Day 3**

The day started with the discussion of the field trip of Day 2. Participants were asked to count the species they had identified from the field exercise and compare them. Then Mr. Arnold Okoni-Williams, the other resource person, gave a presentation on **Population Dynamics, Conservation and Wise use**. He outlined the balance of factors affecting population numbers between individuals born (fecundity), died (mortality), immigrating and emigrating.

On the aspects of conservation management and wise use, he discussed two aspects of exploitation:

(a) consumptive exploitation (economic benefits:-shooting, cultural traditions:-range of hunting and trapping traditions, livelihoods:-catching birds for food/local sale, habitat management: control of geese, trade: live trade/feathers); and

(b) non-consumptive exploitation (economic benefits: ecotourism, cultural traditions: recreational bird watching, livelihoods: local guides, trade: guano from colonies).

Mr Dodman concluded that lecture with the class exercise on conservation management and wise use which gave practical effects to technical details in the lesson.

Thereafter Mr Dodman gave the lesson on: **Site Conservation and Management of Coastal Wetlands and Community Involvement** which introduced the participants to the essentials of the overall flyways habitat management and the important roles communities can always play to support and sustain the process. That lesson concluded the morning session.

After lunch on Day 3 Mr Dodman and Mr Okoni-Williams gave the lecture on **Site Inventory, Monitoring / Site Forms and Mapping** where they outlined the elements involved in inventorying and monitoring sites; mapping of these sites and recording of data on site forms. Then they conducted the classroom exercise where participants were trained how to fill those forms.

That was followed a field trip to Tombo about 10km north of Kent. Tombo is one of the largest fishing towns in the area with more than 400 fishing boats. The town is over populated and serves as the main market and transport area for Yawri Bay communities. The coast line is littered with domestic waste being used as toilets by most of the inhabitant of the town. Few bird species were seen along the coast as a result of the challenges and threats mentioned above.



In the field participants were divided into two groups for want of adequate field equipment. Mr Showers and Mr Dodman first gave them the introductory lecture on site inventory description and monitoring; and taking coordinates followed by practical training on those topics. One of the teams was given a lesson on using the GPS receiver to take coordinates for the mapping exercise.

## 5.0 Day 4

That day was started with the review of Day 3 activities. Mr Dodman then started the day's activities with a lecture on: **Planning and Organizing an Integrated Site Count**. He taught the participants how best to conduct these activities within the resources available. That lecture was followed by Mr Okoni-Williams who gave the lesson on the **Introduction to Yawri Bay and its Environmental Challenges**. He described Yawri Bay as the first and largest Marine Protected Area (MPA) in Sierra Leone and highlighted the following challenges for protecting it:

- Anthropogenic activities
- Lack of political will
- Inadequate resources
- Community participation
- Economic benefits.

### Field Trip to Tissana

After those presentations, participants were led in a field trip to Tissana where they worked in groups to make coordinated counts and site monitoring to Yawri Bay. Due to the severe shortage of equipment, participants were again divided into two groups instead of four and directed to conduct bird counts under the keen supervision of the international expert and local resource persons. The results of those counts were taken back to the training centre in Kent and compiled as follows:

	Species	Group 1	Group 2	Highest no.
1	Pink-backed Pelican	14	1	14
2	Grey Heron	12	7	12
3	Western Reef Egret	9	4	9
4	Little Egret	2	4	4
5	Woolly-necked Stork	2	1	2
6	Sacred Ibis	25	6	25
7	Grey Plover	15	2	15
8	Ringed Plover	4	2	4
9	Little Ringed Plover	9	2	9
10	Kentish Plover	3	-	3
11	Whimbrel	36 (2)	40	40
12	Eurasian Curlew	2 (36)	2	2
13	Common Redshank	3	3	3
14	Common Greenshank	5	3	5
15	Common Sandpiper	6 (12)	-	6
16	Red Knot	1	-	1

17	Ruddy Turnstone	-	4	4
18	Curlew Sandpiper		6 (2)	6
	<b>Total Number of Species</b>			<b>18</b>
	<b>Total Number of birds</b>			<b>164</b>



The trainers decided to recognize the highest number for each species for each count because both groups under-counted the birds at the site on that particular day. Group 1 misunderstood the differences between Whimbrel and the Eurasian Curlew but that mistake was corrected when the results were being compiled. Similar mistakes occurred for other species, which were under counted and all such cases were indicated in brackets in the table above. In total however 18 species of 164 birds were counted at Tissana on the 25<sup>th</sup> January 2013.

## 6.0 Day 5

### Wrap-up Session

The day started with discussions led by the trainers on the results, issues and problems of the sites. The role of a national coordinator and the need to set up a national network to support the coordinator was presented by Mr. Tim Dodman.

Mr. Papanie Bai-Sesay another resource person discussed the ways he had mobilized partners and volunteers for the waterbird count in early January 2013. Following those presentations the group discussed mechanisms for developing a network for the 2014 waterbird count.

### **Recommendations for Action Points Made by Participants**

At the end of the above presentations the participants were led into plenary discussions on the training as a whole and requested to identify action points to improve on all aspects for the management and conservation of migratory birds in their respective domains, the country and the region as a whole. After a very animated discussion they came up with the following Action Points:

- Try to know well all the sites to be covered.
- Identify more inland / freshwater sites to be included.
- Conduct meetings with key stakeholders to plan the count and share ideas.
- Make reference to existing databases to guide the process.
- Prioritise areas with high concentration of waterbirds.
- Make field guides / posters available to network teams.
- The need for detailed and timely information on the logistical means for reaching the various sites.
- Take safety issues into account, especially in the planning process.
- Increase the number and types of equipment needed.
- Need to sensitise communities, especially before the count.
- Form more local conservation groups (LCGs) at sites and identify incentives for local communities, e.g. involvement.
- Networks to be empowered regularly with training, meetings and workshops; and with resources which are properly monitored for progress.
- Increase awareness raising activities in local schools and educational institutions
- Establish an action plan for these activities.
- Identify resources and plan budget carefully.
- Good planning needed between government, CSSL and other stakeholders.
- Update regularly total number of sites and sub-sites.
- Improve communication among stakeholders.
- Support volunteers to know more sites.

## 7.0 Other Relevant Issues

### i. Volunteering

Discussions were also held on who should be a volunteer; the terms of engagements and possible rewards and incentives.

### ii. Database

The last presentation was done by Mr Tim Dodman and Mr Arnold Okoni-Williams on data base issues. A database is a collection of information and a storage facility. They mentioned how to develop a database, through collection of data / information, processing and storing it securely for as long as needed. In these case computers are most useful, they advised. They emphasised the use of databases as facilities which provide information as required or when needed; reference sources, monitoring purposes, detect changes /variations/variances, planning / implementation purposes. They ended by describing the forms of databases such as hard and soft copies, consultations and meetings, entertainment, web (internet) - tourists etc., posters/leaflet/brochures, advertisement/signs, research publications and newsletters etc.

## 8.0 Evaluation of the Training Course

The participants evaluated the training course on 8 training facility profiles graded as very good (\*\*\*), good (\*\*) and poor (\*). Results were as follows:

**Trainers (\*\*\*)**; **Content (\*\*\*)**; **How useful (\*\*\*)**; **How enjoyable (\*\*\*)**; **Organization (\*\*)**; **Accommodation (\*)**; **Food (\*)**; **Logistics (\*\*)**.

The results show that overall the trainees were highly satisfied with content of the course, the quality of training and how important the course was to them. They also enjoyed the whole process. However while the organization and logistics were good on average accommodation and food were rated to be very poor. Unfortunately in Kent the Guest House used for the training was the only place that was large enough and relatively clean for such activities. However in future due consideration will be given to this aspect even if it might involve additional budget outlays. For the food aspect CSSL has now identified a couple of professional catering services in Freetown which are prepared to guarantee standard services at competitive rates anywhere in the country. In future CSSL will take due advantage of such facilities to improve the welfare all participants.

## 9.0 Closing Ceremony

The training course was concluded with the ceremony where closing remarks were made by Mr Dodman and Mr Okoni-Williams. Mr Charles Showers also a member of the Board of Management, Conservation Society of Sierra Leone distributed the certificates to participants on behalf of the Chairman of the Board. A female participant and final year student at Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone gave the vote of thanks.

## 10.0 Conclusion

The programme brought together 25 persons comprising 3 from the Republic of Liberia and 22 Sierra Leoneans from NGOs, local conservation groups, tertiary institutions and community representatives, all associated with the coastal zones of Sierra Leone and Liberia to participate in the training course. A number of outputs were secured from the course showing that it was a successful undertaking. The course evaluation indicated that the contents, professional competence of the resource persons and the methods of delivery all created a significant impact in building and strengthening the capacities of the trainees in the principles and practice of flyways conservation. The host institution for the course the CSSL also benefitted from the training in the provision of books and equipment for this work. But in addition to those materials CSSL being the coordinating institution for wetland and waterbird conservation and management in Sierra Leone will be strengthened through professional interactions with persons involved in the network proposed in the recommendations; it will also continue to benefit from the knowledge, skills and experiences of the resource persons who taught that course. A week before the course and during the course waterbird count and site monitoring was conducted organized on one hand by CSSL and the other as part of the practical lessons for the trainees. Results gained were conveyed to the International Waterbird Census Programme.

During the final session of the course participants were requested to make recommendations which should serve as Action Points for the establishment for the planning and overall governance of the network for wetland and waterbird conservation and management. They made several useful recommendations which will greatly improve these activities in future. For instance they stressed the need for full stakeholder participation including local communities, as well as the free flow of information for more awareness raising and participation. They also emphasized the need for more capacity building in continued training and the provision of needed resources for sustained progress.

### A NOTE OF THANKS FROM CSSL

The outputs detailed above show that the programme was successful. Therefore CSSL wishes to thank the Sierra Leone government, donor partners, resource persons, students, local communities and all persons who contributed to the activities reported herein.

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