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**Building Networks for KBA Monitoring and Protection in the Guinean Forests of West Africa**

A half-year project funded by the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) and managed and co-funded by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB; BirdLife in the UK) has been developing capacity for KBA identification and establishing National Coordination Groups (NCGs) in 5 countries of West Africa; namely Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Ghana, and Nigeria. From February to April of 2022 KBA training workshops have taken place in each of these countries with participants from national NGOs, governments, and research institutions.

The workshops were adapted to the level of development and understanding of KBAs in each country. In
Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia, a full set of training materials was used to take participants through the KBA Standard, its criteria, and the process of identifying KBA. Each workshop concluded with discussions on establishing NCG and subsequently, further meetings have been arranged to develop TORs for NCGs and identify priority KBAs for reassessment and the assessment of new sites.

In Nigeria, an NCG is well established, so refresher training was given on the KBA criteria, and updating KBA assessments using current data available to participants. 15 KBAs were reviewed using available data with 5 to be confirmed and the work to continue on the remaining ones. Similarly, in Ghana, an interim NCG exists but is yet to be formally established. The training was condensed as a refresher course, allowing time to plan the next steps for formalizing the NCG and updating some KBAs like Atewa and Ankasa, both AZE sites for the presence of endemic frogs.

RSPB is the BirdLife Partner in the UK and the project was delivered in-country by the respective BirdLife Partners: Guinee Ecologie, the Conservation Society of Sierra Leone, the Society of the Conservation of Nature of Liberia, the Ghana Wildlife Society, and the Nigerian Conservation Foundation. Participation was open to all potential stakeholders in the country. BirdLife International supported project coordination. The training was provided in person by the staff of BirdLife and partners, Missouri Botanic Garden, and Simmy Bezeng (KBA Regional Focal Point for Southern and West Africa).

**Importance of KBAs to Critically Endangered mahseer fish.**
A recent study by field researcher Dencin Rons Thampy in River Pambar and River Nugu, both within the Western Ghats Key Biodiversity Area of south India, has shown the links between local indigenous people and functioning habitat for the survival of Tor remadevii, the Critically Endangered hump-backed mahseer.

The hump-backed mahseer was once spread widely throughout most of the basin of the wider Cauvery/Kaveri River. This important waterway connects the three states of Karnataka, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu.

There exist many records of this fish reaching more than 45kg, making it a threatened mega-fauna. Despite being a prime target for recreational angling for nearly 200 years, the fish only received a correct identification in a paper published in July 2018 ¹.

Dencin found hump-backed mahseer living in several rivers in Kerala, but only in the Nugu and Pambar are they isolated from introduced mahseers of other (non-native) species. The Pambar is also the type locality of this fish ², so protection for this area is of paramount importance.

Ongoing studies are expected to help understand how the mahseer uses quality river habitat within these protected areas. It is expected that greater public awareness will help to lift some of the local habitat pressures and thus extend the ecological space used by this mighty fish.

*With thanks to Shoal for project support*

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**KBA National Coordination Groups – Madagascar.**

Coordination Groups (NCG), which will be primarily responsible for identifying marine KBAs, with the hope to include species and ecosystems in other biogeographic realms.
Through a GEF6 AMP-funded project, virtual KBA training sessions were conducted from February to April 2022 with the support of the KBA Secretariat, Chair of the KBA Standard and Appeals Committee, and the KBA Regional Focal Point for West and Southern Africa.

The virtual KBA training sessions ran for 8 weeks and exposed a diverse group of participants to the KBA concept. Each technical session was followed by hands-on exercises and quizzes to test the knowledge of participants on applying the KBA standard to identify sites that contribute significantly to the persistence of global biodiversity in Madagascar.

The last session of this virtual series of KBA training was held on 21st April 2022, where a way forward was mapped with the establishment of the KBA National Coordination Group in Madagascar, including plans to collect biodiversity data that will inform the identification of marine KBAs in Madagascar. The identification of marine KBAs in Madagascar will take place during the course of 2022 through an in-person KBA assessment and delineation workshop.

A new project, funded by The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and implemented by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), will revise and formally propose KBAs in Lake Tanganyika.
Lake Tanganyika is the world's second oldest and largest freshwater lake, lying within the Eastern Afromontane Biodiversity Hotspot and hosting globally outstanding levels of freshwater biodiversity and endemism. The lake is home to some 250 species of cichlid fishes endemic to the lake, amongst many other species. However, there is currently no definitive map of freshwater conservation priorities within the lake, which spans four countries and covers an area of approximately 33,000 km². Lake Tanganyika remains one of the most ecologically intact freshwater lakes in the world, but it is vulnerable to threats including overexploitation of fisheries through unsustainable fishing practices and sedimentation adjacent to areas of land clearance. Small-scale fisheries are prevalent along the lakeshore where biodiversity is highest. Sustainable management of the lake and its resources requires data on conservation priorities and threats within the lake. The identification of Key Biodiversity Areas within the lake provides a tool that can be used by decision-makers in spatial planning and natural resource management.

The outputs from this project – formally proposed KBAs – will inform the GEF transboundary project on “Biodiversity conservation, sustainable land management and enhanced water security in Lake Tanganyika basin” (GEF ID 10388), in particular, Component 1 “Addressing identified transboundary threats to fish biodiversity”. The existing draft Key Biodiversity Areas have been used as part of the preparation for the development of Component 1 of the GEF project, for the preliminary selection of target areas to establish and strengthen community-based fisheries Co-management Institutions (CMIs). The site selection process was built on the premise that given the small effective population sizes for many littoral cichlid species in Lake Tanganyika, small-scale protected areas in key habitats are enough to effectively protect local fish communities, serve as reservoirs to re-seed neighboring populations and represent undisturbed spawning grounds or nursery areas for pelagic species. In each co-managed fisheries area, the participatory mapping will develop zoning options including fish reserves and temporary fishing zones to be informed by Key Biodiversity Areas.

This project will revise and submit proposals for Key Biodiversity Areas in Lake Tanganyika, identified during a previous project led by TNC and IUCN in 2017. The KBA proposals will be subject to an open online consultation process, and key stakeholders will be contacted individually. An online inception workshop in April will kick-start the online consultation process. Further, a KBA validation workshop will be
The KBA website has just been updated with a new dashboard that allows some querying of data

The World Database of KBAs contains a wealth of data about each KBA. Users can now access much of this data through a revised dashboard on the KBA Website. Data for the world or regions of the world can easily be selected by highlighting the listed regions shown in bars with numbers of KBAs on the left. More detailed queries can be made using the filter panel option on the top left where data for countries and specific species groups can be selected.

Data on habitats, threats to sites and also the biodiversity trigger elements can also be obtained. Data for all KBAs shows that while birds still dominate the trigger species (43.5%), as a result of BirdLife International’s Important Bird Areas Programme, plants now provide 25.2% of all trigger elements followed by amphibians and mammals. While sites triggered by birds have a relatively high percentage coverage by protected areas (45.9%), protected area coverage of KBAs triggered by invertebrates (30.6%) or fish (33.5%) is much lower. Please explore the new site and assess the data for your country or region.
COMING UP

KBA COMMUNITY WEBINAR SERIES

Introduction to the KBA Dashboard and Proposal Portal
Presented by Olivia Crowe

Monday 27 June 2022
13h00-14h00 GMT/UTC

Join: zoom.us/j/8826190836?pwd=UFBjeXpKWUNuWkdYy05BNGZPTopodzo9

CONTACT US

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KBA REGIONAL FOCAL POINTS:

If you have queries about assessing Key Biodiversity Areas or want to nominate a KBA please contact the Regional Focal Points:

Africa (Southern and Western Africa) - Simeon Bezeng: simmy.bezeng@birdlife.org.za;
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