



BirdLife

SÃO TOMÉ & PRÍNCIPE

Newsletter
nr. **01**



2024
December


BirdLife
INTERNATIONAL



We would like to thank all our partners:



In this edition

- 4 Welcome
- 5 EcoTéla Fund
- 8 The power of science
- 11 Special reserves
- 13 Preserving the endemism of São Tomé and Príncipe
- 16 Dukunú Molê! Zôgu Cunxensa
- 17 Biodiversity is the future!
- 18 Implementing internships
- 19 You can make a difference!

Welcome

It is with great enthusiasm that we launch our first newsletter, a space to share the progress and challenges of our mission in São Tomé and Príncipe. With an unrivalled natural heritage, the archipelago faces significant challenges in conserving its unique biodiversity. BirdLife International is privileged to collaborate with local communities, authorities and international partners to address these challenges and promote sustainable conservation.

São Tomé and Príncipe (STP) is one of the most biologically endemic countries in the world, with a rich diversity of species threatened by factors such as population growth, unsustainable practices and the exploitation of natural resources. Our actions, based on a long-term strategic programme, aim to reverse these threats, by promoting solutions that integrate conservation with sustainable economic development.

In recent years, we have worked to strengthen the management of Natural Parks and areas of greatest ecological value. We are also committed to creating sustainable solutions to finance biodiversity conservation.

We know that collaboration with the government, civil society organisations, the scientific community and local populations is essential to the success of our efforts. We are committed to strengthening local capacities, as we believe that true sustainability will be achieved when the country's citizens take the lead in protecting their natural heritage.

We would like to thank everyone who has contributed to the advancement of our mission and hope that this newsletter will inspire more people to participate in the preservation of São Tomé and Príncipe's rich biodiversity.

*Agostinho
fernandes*

Head of Project's Office
in São Tomé and Príncipe



2024 in review

The variety of activities developed by BirdLife are based on eight (8) strategic objectives, which provide a diversity and continuity of actions implemented. In this chapter, we would like to showcase our actions that have contributed to advances in conservation of biodiversity in STP.

EcoTéla Fund

Promoting a blue and green sustainable future for STP



ECOTÉLA

To fill the technical and financial gaps in the management of protected areas (PAs) in São Tomé and Príncipe (STP), the operationalisation of a Conservation Trust Fund (CTF), named EcoTéla Fund is underway. The implementation of this fund began in 2023 with leadership of the Government of STP and BirdLife International's technical support, financed by the European Union and GEF through UNDP. This innovative activity quickly became a priority as a strategic mechanism, with the potential to contribute to the conservation of PAs.

The fund will be hosted by the EcoTéla Foundation, an independent organisation with administrative structures (initially comprised of 3-5 members, including the CEO and a fundraising team) and governance structures that will ensure the technical, scientific and financial supervision of the fund, as dictated by Conservation Finance Alliance¹. The administrative and governance teams will manage the fund by promoting the capitalisation of resources through 3 windows: endowment, revolving and sinking.



Capacity building session on sustainable finances to local institutions.

¹ Conservation Finance Alliance is the main specialists' professional association on conservation financing - <https://www.conservationfinancealliance.org/>

In turn, the funds generated will be reverted and applied to finance the management of the PAs (including human resources, supervision and infrastructure), finance local NGO projects on conservation and climate action, and finally to promote private sector initiatives.

The EcoTéla Fund will be fully operational by 2026, with the potential to capitalise 1.5 million per year.



First meeting of the EcoTéla Fund inter-ministerial committee.

“The aim of this fund is to reposition nature as a strategic economic asset, capable of propelling our sustainable development (...) The CTF will not only protect our biodiversity but also create new livelihood opportunities for our communities, based on the intrinsic value of our nature.” – Speech by His Excellency the President of the Republic of São Tomé and Príncipe at the UN General Assembly’s Future Summit.

The progress made in 2024

In 2024, important progress was made in the operationalisation of the EcoTéla Fund. Among the main activities, were:

- The presentation of the EcoTéla Fund concept at the United Nations Conference on Príncipe Island;
- The operationalisation of the inter-ministerial committee of the EcoTéla Fund with the organisation of 2 follow-up meetings;
- Capacity building sessions and consultations with local institutions;
- Bilateral coordination and advocacy meetings at the highest level;
- Validation of the EcoTéla Fund concept note in a participatory workshop;
- Presentation of the fund’s concept at international events, such as the 14th General Assembly of CAFÉ network members in Namibia, and the 16th meeting of the Conference of the Parties at the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP 16);
- Development of communication and visibility products.



Participation in CAFÉ Net in Namibia.

At the same time, fundraising efforts are underway, presenting the fund’s progress so far to potential donors.





Minister for Planning, Finance and the Blue Economy and Agostinho Fernandes at the first meeting of the EcoTéla Fund inter-ministerial committee.

What the future holds

In 2025, we will continue to take several steps to operationalise the EcoTéla Fund:

- Registration of the EcoTéla Foundation as a public and independent local management entity
- Recruiting the members for the local management entity
- Registration and capitalisation of the endowment fund
- Development of the fund's institutional strategy
- Design the fund's jurisdiction and legal framework
- Continuous training of national organisations about the EcoTéla Fund

The power of science

Supporting decision making based in facts

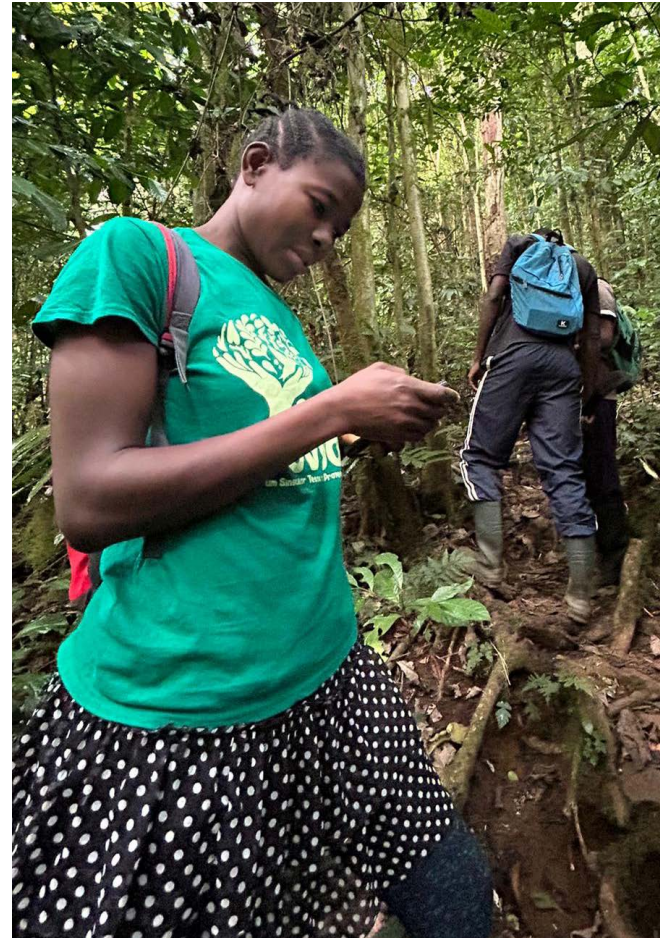
BirdLife has supported scientific research to better understand local biodiversity, and propose areas of intervention to guarantee ecosystems' health, by promoting 'Actions based on scientific based on scientific evidence'.

Since 2021, through a partnership with CIBIO/InBio, we have developed 3 study packages, namely:

A) ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT OF INVASIVE MAMMALS AND RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH ZONOSSES

This research had the following objectives:

- I Understanding how introduced mammals impact the ecosystems of São Tomé Island, mainly because they feed on endemic and/or threatened species. The study focussed on analysing the diet of rats, and the results show a very diverse diet, with a relatively low consumption of native vertebrates (2.4%); however, depending on the abundance of rats, the cumulative impact can exert strong pressure on threatened populations, particularly birds. Future studies should provide more information on the threat these species may pose to the endemic vertebrates present in the forest and analyse the diets and impacts that other mammals such as civets and monkeys represent to the endemic fauna.
- II To analyse the potential risk that these species pose when associated with zoonoses, since they are also consumed by humans. The results did not show the presence of zoonotic viruses, or viruses with zoonotic potential in the introduced mammal species analysed (rats, monkeys, civets). However, it is recommended that we continue to monitor zoonotic viruses in introduced species, especially those that are consumed by the population.



Biodiversity biannual monitoring.



Data collection for monitoring.



Arthropod sampling traps.



B) STUDY OF ARTHROPOD COMMUNITIES IN AGROECOSYSTEMS OF SÃO TOMÉ ISLAND, WITH A SPECIFIC FOCUS ON PREDATORS AND POLLINATORS

The study aimed to provide inventories of arthropod species (insects) and their distribution, and to create a reference collection (DNA barcodes) for the insects of STP. This work concluded with the generation of 1076 insect specimens DNA barcodes in BOLD SYSTEMS², the Coleoptera groups (beetles), Lepidoptera (butterflies), Hemiptera (bedbugs) and the Hymenoptera (wasps, bees and ants) being the most prevalent. The study showed that tropical forests and agroforest systems support a greater diversity of pollinators, while monocultures, such as oil palm plantations, tend to reduce this diversity. Hence the relevance of continuing to analyse the benefits of using insects in biological pest control, which could in turn reduce dependence on chemical products in agricultural production.

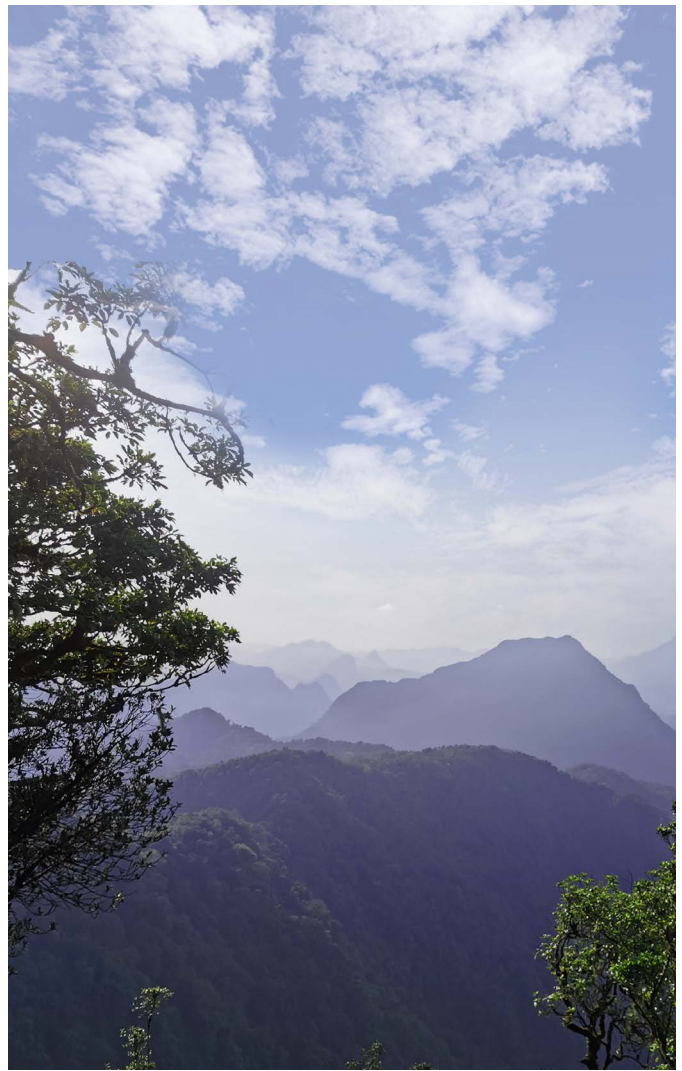
By 2025, we hope to identify the connections between predatory arthropods and pests in order to test the efficacy of using endemic arthropods to control pests in São Tomé's agroecosystems.

² A composed platform of integrated database - <https://v3.boldsystems.org/>

C) STUDY ON ASSESSING THE CULTURAL VALUE OF PROTECTED AREAS IN SÃO TOMÉ AND PRÍNCIPE

Protected areas (PAs) also contribute to socio-economic factors, especially in countries like STP, where ecotourism is an activity on the rise. Through this study, it was possible to understand the relationship between the Obô Natural Park of São Tomé (PNOT) and its neighbouring communities, and understand the importance of how the park influences human well-being, economic development and cultural identity on the island of São Tomé.

The study included the application of surveys to 210 residents (110 men and 100 women) from different communities neighbouring the PNOT, and questionnaires to the organisations involved in managing the park. The results of the questionnaires show that that 88.4% of those interviewed perceive the importance of the park as the main provider of services for their livelihoods; the interviews and consultations resulted in the identification of 5 PNOT assets, namely the Bom Sucesso Botanical Garden, Malanza's mangrove, São Tomé Peak, Cão Grande Peak, and Casa de Duas Portas. The study also presented a proposal for Management Strategies for these assets, which will begin implementation in 2025.



São Tomé Peak, one of the 5 assets identified in the study.

OTHER ONGOING RESEARCH:

- 'Identification and comparison of pest and disease management methods in different cocoa production systems in STP', through a partnership between BirdLife and ETH Zurich;
- 'Regenerative alternatives to timber extraction for construction in STP', also in partnership with ETH Zurich;
- 'Ecological factors influencing the choice of nesting sites for the Concózucu (*Phaethon lepturus*) in São Tomé: Integration of landscape features, nest morphology and human pressures' led by Gustavo Marino, a master's student at the University of Évora, supervised by Ricardo Lima, CE3C-FCUL.
- Updating the distribution maps of the three critically endangered bird species (São Tomé Ibis, São Tomé Fiscal, and São Tomé Grosbeak) and the distribution of threats and human pressures for the 3 species.

The special reserves in 2024

It is proposed that by 2030, the SRs will be managed by fully functional committees and innovative management models, with the involvement of government institutions, academia, communities, the private sector and civil society. To achieve this, in 2024 the following activities were implemented:

- Creation of the National Working Group (GTN), responsible for coordinating and leading future management of the SRs. The group includes representatives from Directorates of the Environment and Climate Action (DAAC), Forestry and Biodiversity (DFB), Land Affairs, Tourism and Hospitality (DTH), Programa Tatô and BirdLife International;
- Presentation and discussion meetings with various stakeholders;
- Creation of a Management Committee for 3 pilot reserves: Southwest Coast of Ilhéu das Rolas, Praias do Sul and Jalé, comprising of 13 members including representatives of local communities, state institutions, the private sector and civil society;
- Preparation and implementation of training sessions for the members of the Management Committee on the referred pilot special reserves.



Work meeting of the pilot management committee of the southern SRs.

What will 2025 hold?

In 2025, the process will continue with BirdLife International's technical support to the Management Committee of the pilot SRs, especially in:

- Ongoing capacity building sessions for the committee;
- Recruitment of a consultancy team to develop the management plan for the pilot SRs, which includes: (1) strategic management plan, (2) annual action plan, (3) threat management plan in key areas;
- Hiring a legal consultancy team to draft internal regulations for the functioning of the management committee of the pilot reserves.

The actions related to the SRs aim to contribute to the sustainable management of natural resources and maintain or improve the conservation status of biodiversity existing in those areas.



Capacity building session for members of the pilot management committee of the southern SRs management committee.

Preserving the endemism of São Tomé and Príncipe

The Balance between Hunting and Conservation

In STP, there are 28 endemic bird species described, some of which are critically endangered, such as the emblematic São Tomé's Green pigeon (*Treron sanctithomae*) and São Tomé Ibis (*Bostrychia bocagei*), which demonstrates the importance of biodiversity conservation in the Gulf of Guinea.

Céssia - *Treron sanctithomae*
Lars Petersson

“São Tomé and Príncipe’s biodiversity is very rich in species of fauna and flora. We have a very favourable climate. We have many species, especially endemic species [and] we know today that endemism is very inviting.” - **Atanásio Bandeira**, Technician from STP’s Forestry and Biodiversity Directorate.



During public consultations held in 2021 as part of the process of creating the SRs and also during the review of the Management Plans for the Natural Parks of STP for 2021-2025, several communities raised the issue of unregulated hunting as a concern, both in relation to the abundance of game species, and the loss of income associated with this activity.



Small project, big ambitions, huge results

Beginning in June 2022, the project ‘Strengthening national capacities and competences to regulate to regulate hunting and protect biodiversity’, funded by the Darwin Initiative and implemented by BirdLife International, the Directorate of Forestry and Biodiversity (DFB), the Platform for Responsible and Sustainable Tourism (PTRS), the Centre for Ecology, Evolution and Environmental Changes (CE3C) and the Biodiversity and Genetic Resources Research Centre (CIBIO). The project aimed to support the social and institutional change needed to help conserve STP’s biodiversity through hunting, while promoting sustainable livelihoods for hunters, the project ended in September 2024, with great results.

Among the aspects to be improved are:

- The current hunting law (Decree-Law Nr. 01/2026), by shortening the gaps that refer to the management of hunting species and seasons, avoiding negative impacts on the conservation of endemic species; and
- The poor understanding of hunters and the public of the dual issue of conservation, i.e. the preservation of endemic birds and the management of introduced mammals. Throughout the project, the focus was on:
 - Consulting and strengthening the capacities of the main national actors involved in the regulation of hunting, game species management and biodiversity conservation in STP (Directorates of Forests and Biodiversity-DFB, Environment and Climate Action-DAAC, hunters, consumers of game products, etc.), by organising 15 theoretical and practical training and awareness raising sessions at various levels.
 - Raising awareness and involving hunters in the preservation of our natural capital, adopting hunting practices that promote the conservation of endemic species. To achieve this goal, the work of the ‘Protectors of Hunting’ (a group of local hunters and ex-hunters) within their communities was essential
 - Raising awareness among the public about the importance of STP’s biodiversity, through a communication campaign including **interactive theatre sessions** and a **mini documentary**.



Round table to validate the proposed roadmap to update the hunting law regulations.

What were the results?

Based on the collected interests of the hunters, mentoring programmes were developed to help assess, in a participatory way, viable economic alternatives that justify the abandonment of the hunting of endemic birds, including training in financial resource management, conservation-based small business management, business planning, marketing and communication.

The results of the project were also presented at a round table with all stakeholders, where the gaps in the current hunting law were presented and feedback was gathered, which is now included in a proposed roadmap to improve hunting regulations. Together, the organisations involved have developed an exit strategy for the project's actions, aimed at updating hunting regulations, implementing the law and monitoring activities on the field by the responsible institution - the Directorate of Forests and Biodiversity.

Hunting in STP does not have to be a threat, on the contrary, it can be a very effective activity that can help preserve the extraordinary biodiversity of the islands and thus create a more sustainable future for generations to come.



São Tomé Ibis - *Bostrychia bocagei* - Lars Petersson.



Exchange session to present the sustainable hunting project to the local media.

Dukunú Molê! Zôgu Cunxensa

It is now or never!

Dukunú Molê is a game of conscience that allows for an immersive exercise, in which the community is confronted with challenges of family sustenance and the sustainable exploitation of forest resources. This board game allows participants to define their financial management strategies, family economy, and education while protecting the forest.

This year we held 15 game sessions, including five on the island of Príncipe, involving 165 people. The sessions demonstrate that it is possible to reconcile human needs with conservation, but it is necessary to promote sustainable natural resource usage models such as agroforestry, tourism, and specialised zoning.

At the same time, we developed and implemented a participatory theatre in 5 communities, in which, similarly to the game Dukunú Molê, we set challenges for the communities to identify solutions on their own. After presenting their proposed solutions, members of the public become a part of the theatre play by taking on the proposed role and presenting their solution.



Dukunú Molê game session with representatives from local institutions.



Dukunú Molê's game board.

Biodiversity is the Future!

The Biodiversity Game



Awareness-raising session with the Biodiversity Game at Vila Malanza's Primary School.



Biodiversity Game board.

Playing and learning are interlinked in this activity to help children understand the importance of conservation. Born out of a desire to ignite the spirit of conservation among the youngest population, BirdLife has developed a game dedicated to teaching in a playful way about the uniqueness of São Tomé and Príncipe's biodiversity.

The Biodiversity or Species Game is a giant board game in which children transform themselves into game pieces and learn what it is like to be an endangered bird. Challenges, riddles and questions such as, 'Why are trees important?' or 'What obstacles does the São Tomé Ibis face?' are playful ways of connecting not only with educational content about nature, but above all to understand and appreciate STP's biodiversity.

This game, aimed at children aged between 5 and 13, has been played with more than 280 children in urban and rural schools in São Tomé with great success. Accompanying the game we showcase a short presentation on STP's biodiversity, endemic species, ecosystems and threats, and as a gift, we offer informative colouring books of STP's most emblematic species.

Implementing internships

Encouraging a new generation of conservationists

Among BirdLife's five values, we also aim to be 'champions of change', inspiring behavioural change in favour of conservation. Thus, BirdLife will implement within the next 2 years, 10 professional internships for young San Tomeans, to encourage a new generation of conservationists.

Two of these internships have already been finalised in the form of international exchanges, implemented with the NGOs Programa Tatô in São Tomé, and Biosfera in Cape Verde, financed by GEF through UNDP. The themes of the 2 internships were 'Application of communication principles and techniques on the protection of terrestrial and marine biodiversity' and 'Application of monitoring principles and techniques for terrestrial and marine biodiversity'.

Jaquilza Gomes and Sílvia Carvalho, the candidates selected for these internships respectively, had the opportunity to join the BirdLife and Programa Tatô's teams, as well as spending 3 months in Cape Verde with Biosfera's team, participating in activities such as:

- Comparative analysis of communication products, school and community awareness activities, event coverage, social media marketing, among other communication-related activities; and
- Learning, analysing and proposing improvements on biodiversity monitoring protocols, as well as new activities concerning the monitoring of megafauna.

In addition to being part of the 3 organisations teams, thus strengthening synergies between them, this exchange has resulted in innovative proposals for conservation actions in their respective internship themes, as well as becoming an important milestone in the professional lives of these young women.

"I believe that replicating the innovative methods of communication I have learnt could contribute to the promotion of a more solid awareness (about conservation) in São Tomé and Príncipe." - **Jaquilza Gomes**, trainee in Techniques for Communication.



Sílvia Carvalho and Jaquilza Gomes.

"The depth and authenticity of this experience was so impactful that I took with me knowledge, practices and methodologies that will allow us to improve the monitoring protocol for seabirds on our islands." - **Sílvia Carvalho**, trainee in Techniques for Monitoring terrestrial and marine biodiversity.

This training process continues with two ongoing internships currently taking place on 'Principles and Techniques for Community and School based Awareness Raising for behavioural change on the importance of environmental conservation', where two trainees have been applying awareness-raising sessions using games like Dukunú Molê and the Biodiversity Game.

You can make a difference!

Discover activities related to conservation and its benefits



Planting activity at Diogo Vaz's primary school.

Planting trees

- ◆ Helps to conserve water reservoirs
- ◆ Improve air quality
- ◆ Trees are the natural habitat of many species and an important natural resource

Birdwatching

- ◆ Diminishes stress levels
- ◆ Exercites
- ◆ Brings us closer to nature



Birdwatching during October Big Day.



Trail hiking in the Natural Parks

- ◆ Observe endemic species
- ◆ Watch and bathe in beautiful waterfalls
- ◆ Reach incredible sightseeing landmarks

Walk through PNOST's trails.

Visiting Bom Sucesso's Botanical Garden

- ◆ It is a showcase spot for STP's plant biodiversity
- ◆ It is a popular touristic destination
- ◆ It is the main entrance to São Tomé's Obô Natural Park



Awareness session at Bom Sucesso's Botanical Garden.





Partnership for
nature and people

We are the BirdLife team in São Tomé and Príncipe:



Agostinho Fernandes
Head of Projects
Office



Bárbara Campos
Programme
Manager



Roger Pires
Finance and
Administration
Manager



Marquinha Martins
Sustainable
Biodiversity & Finance
Mainstreaming Officer



Maria da Conceição
Neves
Project Officer for
São Tomé



Joana Pereira
Research and
Príncipe's Project
Officer



Vânia Trovoada
Communications
Officer



Abigail Varela
Conservation
Officer



Madlene da Costa
Capacity
Development
Officer



Heulla Afonso
Human Resources
& Administration
Officer



Adjamilson Gaspar
Finance Assistant



Victor Jiménez
Communications
Assistant

2024
December



Partnership for
nature and people

Join the Flock!



Our communication and awareness raising work is continuous! Through our Obô Ôvyô campaign, we showcase to a local, regional and international public, conservation activities implemented by BirdLife in São Tomé and Príncipe and our partners.

Our main objective is to promote our biodiversity and all efforts implemented to protect it.