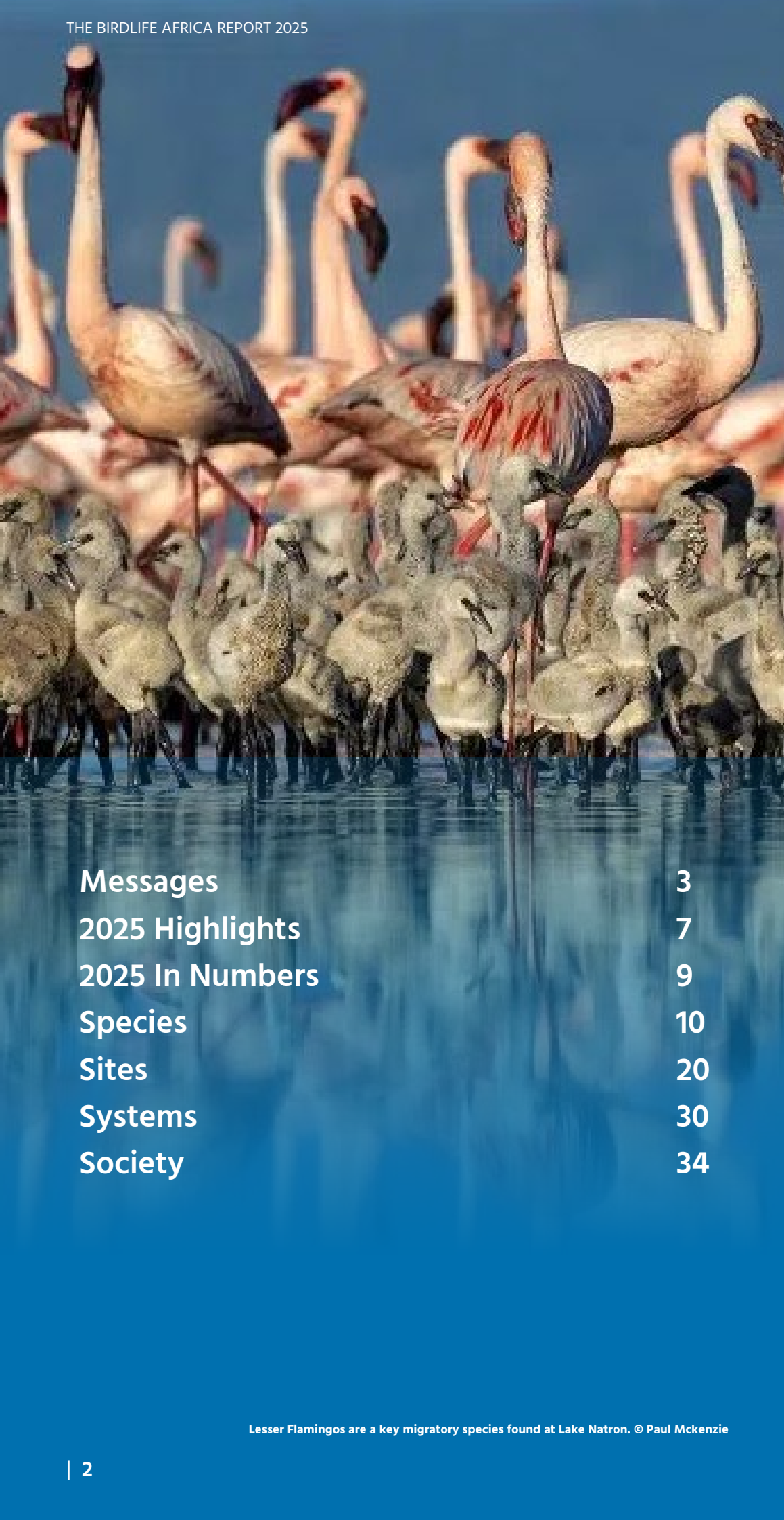




Rodrigues Fody © Jacques de Speville

OUR IMPACT

The BirdLife Africa Report 2025



MESSAGES

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Lesser Flamingos are a key migratory species found at Lake Natron. © Paul McKenzie

Message from the Chair, BirdLife Council for the Africa Partnership (CAP)



2025 was a year of resilience, and remarkable progress, reminding us why our work matters. Despite threats including biodiversity loss, climate change and competing development priorities, our 27 National Partners continued demonstrating that grassroots conservation work combined with science, policy and partnerships can deliver lasting results.

From restoring important Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs), protection and monitoring of key species, tackling climate change, while empowering local communities. Each of these stories, highlighted in this report is small on its own, but together, they form the foundation of a continent-wide movement protecting nature. Progress does not come from singular breakthroughs, but from consistency, putting in the work even when results are not immediately visible. Our Partners across Africa have embodied this patience and persistence, and it is their determination that has made these achievements possible.

Finally, I want to thank our donors, strategic partners, and the BirdLife family for their support during the year. On behalf of the Council for the Africa Partnership, I look forward to continuing support the Partnership as it grows in ambition and impact.

Khaled Noby Mohamed

Chair, BirdLife Council for the Africa Partnership (CAP)

MESSAG



Liben Lark in Jigiga Plains, Ethiopia © Henok

Message from the Regional Director, Africa



As I reflect on another year of work across our continent, I am reminded that conservation is never a solitary act. It is a partnership between people, institutions, and nature itself.

In 2025, our 27 national Partners delivered impact across our four pillars of work Species, Sites, Systems and Society. From the recovery of two once-endangered bird species in Mauritius, to landmark legal protections for African Penguin colonies in South Africa, to the safeguarding of critical wetlands, and forests from Sierra Leone to Tanzania, to youth capacity building programs in Tunisia. What stands out most to me is not any single achievement, but the driving forces behind them, local ownership, and partnerships.

None of this would happen without our Partners' dedication, the communities working alongside them, and our extraordinary staff. I am equally grateful to our donors, governments, and strategic partners, whose trust and support make our work possible. Thank you for being part of this vital journey.

As we look ahead, the challenges facing Africa's environment remain significant, but so too does our resolve to continue this vital work, for the benefit of Africa's nature and people.

Dr Kariuki Ndang'ang'a
Regional Director, Africa
BirdLife International



Nature Rwanda's staff visiting avocado farms as part of the sustainable livelihood project at Busaga Forest © Nature Rwanda

2025 Highlights

2025 demonstrated the breadth of BirdLife's contribution to conservation in Africa: from preventing species extinctions and securing Key Biodiversity Areas, to influencing policy, strengthening community stewardship, building climate resilience and developing new mechanisms for sustainable conservation finance.

Across 27 National Partners, the Partnership combined local leadership with science, advocacy, policy influence and international partnerships to address threats to biodiversity and systemic drivers of nature loss. In Mauritius, populations of the once nearly extinct Rodrigues Warbler and Rodrigues Fody have reached over 20,000, while in South Africa, a landmark ruling established ten-year no-fishing zones around six key African Penguin (Critically Endangered) breeding colonies.

Partners across the continent made good strides in vulture conservation work, and in Egypt, a nationwide campaign was carried out to address the Illegal Killing, Taking and Trade of Birds (IKB) which kills so many migratory birds.

In Nigeria, a coalition was launched to coordinate frontline action and advocacy efforts to protect key forest areas, while in Sierra Leone, 50 ha of mangroves were restored in collaboration with local communities. Progress was made in restoring the country's biggest lagoon in Malawi, and in protecting a forest through the promotion of environmentally friendly income generation activities in Burkina Faso.

In Cabo Verde, seabird bycatch was reduced, and more than 10,000 children and young people reached by environmental education initiatives. In São Tomé and Príncipe, the EcoTéla Fund – a conservation trust fund to sustainably finance conservation efforts – was operationalized. And from Mauritania to Tanzania, throughout the continent, local communities benefitted from improved livelihoods as part of conservation interventions.

2025 IN NUMBERS



600 Number of wildlife rangers trained in the Rapid Response to Wildlife Poisoning Protocol in Kenya	25,000 Estimated number of Rodrigues Warblers in Mauritius today, up from 30 individuals in the early 1970s	9 Number of Hooded Vultures tagged in 2025 in Rwanda, to learn where they go and what happens to them
100 Size in hectares of degraded forest restored in 2025 in Guinea’s Mount Béro Classified Forest	26,000 Agroforestry seedlings distributed to local communities to aid restoration efforts in Burundi	2200 Number of farmers trained in climate-smart agriculture in Uganda, with crop yields increasing by 84%
3,000,000 Estimated number of people reached by an awareness campaign on the perils of deforestation in Nigeria	272 Number of youths trained on green economy and sustainable entrepreneurship skills in Tunisia	10,000 Number of children and young people reached by environmental educations campaigns in Cabo Verde
1,400,000 Amount in USD that the Ecotela Fund aims to capitalize annually in Sao Tome and Principe	150 Size in hectares of protected bird sanctuaries in Malawi’s Chia Lagoon	1300 hectares of land protected through conservation efforts and the promotion of environmentally friendly income generation activities in Burkina Faso

Lesser Flamingo Colony in Lake Natron, Tanzania © Akshita Rabdiya

SPECIES

A key pillar of the BirdLife strategy is preventing extinctions. In 2025, the BirdLife Partnership in Africa continued taking action to halt the decline of endangered species and keep common birds common .



Rodrigues, Mauritius – the last two endemic birds bounce back!

The Rodrigues Warbler (*Acrocephalus rodericanus*) and the Rodrigues Fody (*Foudia flavicans*) were downlisted from 'Near Threatened' to 'Least Concern' on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, marking a conservation milestone. These are the last two surviving endemic birds of the island of Rodrigues, north of the main island of Mauritius. Their recovery marks one of the most inspiring conservation success stories in the Indian Ocean.



Rod Warbler ©Jacques de Speville

The Rodrigues Warbler had been feared extinct in the late 1960s. An estimated 30 individuals were found in the early 1970s, and today, their numbers have soared to around 25,000. The Rodrigues Fody was even closer to extinction, with only 12 known birds remaining in the early 1970s. Today, this brightly coloured songbird has recovered to an estimated 20,000 individuals, according to the 2025 Red List Update. Such a comeback is the result of decades of dedicated work by the Forestry Services and the **Mauritian Wildlife Foundation (MWF)**, its staff, and partners in Rodrigues.

The remarkable resurgence of the Rodrigues Warbler and Rodrigues Fody stands as a testament to the power of long-term conservation, habitat restoration, and community engagement. The Mauritian Wildlife Foundation remains committed to ensuring these two survivors continue to thrive, securing Rodrigues' natural heritage for generations to come.

“ In the 1980s when we were surveying the birds, we had to search hard to find any Rodrigues Fodies or Warblers and their future was uncertain. With the protection of watersheds and the planting of native forest, we have watched their populations grow. Today it is a delight to walk in the forests of Rodrigues that are pulsing with life and resonating with the songs of these very special birds that we may have lost if it was not for the actions of local naturalists supported by conservation organisations

Carl Jones, Scientific Director at the Mauritian Wildlife Foundation.



MWF Rodrigues staff doing a survey of endemic birds in Grande Montagne Nature Reserve © Marie Anne-Sweetie Félicité.

Conserving the Grey Crowned Crane in Burundi

The beautiful Grey Crowned Crane (*Balearica regulorum*) is listed as Endangered in the IUCN Red List, facing threats such as hunting, egg collection, illegal trade, agricultural expansion and wetland degradation. In Burundi, BirdLife Partner **Association Burundaise pour la protection de la Nature (ABN)** rolled out a conservation initiative through the Royal Crane Conservation project funded by the Zoological Society for the Conservation of Species and Populations (ZGAP), to protect the few remaining cranes in the wild and explore how those in captivity could be reintroduced into their natural habitat in the long term.

The crane project integrates a participatory element, including awareness raising and environmental education

in schools, community capacity building, and a livelihood aspect, with 1,000 households receiving avocado tree seedlings or agroforestry seedlings for planting, while 20 community associations have been officially registered, with members receiving training on good agricultural practices

The project also established a team of six volunteers to monitor Grey Crowned Cranes. An August 2025 survey showed that there are still a few cranes in the wild in Burundi, with 19 individuals observed in the northern part of the country. With future funding, these volunteers will become conservation champions, equipped with the resources needed to travel for monitoring and to share data in real time.

“ Before the project, I didn't know that the Grey Crowned Crane was endangered and needed to be protected. Thanks to the capacity-building training I've received, even the people around me know that I'm an advocate for biodiversity, especially the Grey Crowned Crane. From time to time, I find traps in the area where the birds feed, and remove them. Now I understand that the Grey Crowned Crane is to be protected, not killed.

Gervis Magendo, project volunteer from Rusaga Hill in Kirundo commune



Students matching during Vulture awareness's Event in Chobe, Botswana © BirdLife Botswana

Species Monitoring and Conservation Efforts in Botswana

To address the decline of vulture populations, BirdLife Botswana conducted vulture monitoring at key breeding, roosting, and foraging sites to document the population status and potential threats. Awareness and advocacy

activities targeted communities, conservation authorities, and land managers to reduce the use of poisoned baits and promote safer wildlife management practices. This led to increased awareness and improved coordination among key stakeholders. Monitoring activities strengthened national datasets on vulture presence and threats, contributing to earlier detection and reporting of poisoning incidents.

For the conservation of the Slaty Egret (*Egretta vinaceigula*), BirdLife Botswana implemented targeted monitoring at both historical and active breeding sites, enabling comparison with previous records and identification of emerging threats. The data informed site-level conservation recommendations and strengthened collaboration with partners responsible for wetland management. Improved knowledge of breeding success and habitat requirements in the Okavango Delta contributed to more targeted conservation planning, benefiting not only the Slaty Egret but also other wetland-dependent species sharing the same habitats.

“ We would like to express our sincere appreciation for the engagement and collaboration this past year. The dedication of our stakeholders and community volunteers has been crucial to our success in species conservation and empowering people initiatives. We are also grateful to the media for their invaluable role in airing the work we conducted in support of nature and people.

Percy K. Percy, Project Manager, BirdLife Botswana.

Saving the African Penguin in South Africa

In **South Africa**, the **African Penguin** (*Spheniscus demersus*), listed as Critically Endangered in the IUCN Red List, faces threats from climate change and commercial fishing, which influence the abundance and availability of prey: sardines and anchovies, among others. With numbers reaching an all-time low of 9,900 pairs in South Africa and Namibia during 2023 – approximating an 80% decrease in the last 30 years – it has been estimated that the species may go extinct by 2035.

In 2008, a groundbreaking experiment – the Island Closure Experiment (ICE) – was conducted by the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE) to investigate the impacts of fishing for small pelagic fish around penguin breeding colonies. Two pairs of islands, one on the west coast and the other on the southeast coast, were alternately opened and closed to fishing every three years for 12 years. Following the experiment,

a recommendation was made to identify optimal closure designs that would maximise penguin benefits while minimising costs to the fishing industry. Although the DFFE implemented closures around six colonies, these closures were inadequate to help the penguins.



Penguins at Stony Point, Island, South Africa © Alistair McInnes

Represented by the Biodiversity Law Centre (BLC), BirdLife South Africa and the Southern African Foundation for the Conservation of Coastal Birds (SANCCOB) launched litigation to review and set aside the Minister's decision to implement inadequate closures to fishing around key African Penguin breeding colonies and to substitute closures that were more balanced in terms of the proposed trade-off. A lengthy legal process ensued, but shortly before the scheduled court hearing, and after intense negotiations, the two conservation bodies reached a settlement with the fishing industry associations, which was supported by the DFFE. The agreement, which became an order of the court on 18 March 2025, resulted in meaningful closures that incorporated most of the important penguin foraging habitat around at least one colony in each of three major regions. The closures will be in place for ten years, with a review after six.



BirdLife South Africa, SANCCOB and Blue Marine Foundation teams celebrating the court decision © Peyton Joe Basson & Ayanda Kanise

A suite of actions are also being undertaken by different colony management authorities at penguin colonies to mitigate the impacts of predators, provide artificial nests at colonies where the habitat has been degraded and ensuring that any abandoned chicks are rescued and hand-reared at rehabilitation facilities. A coalition of partners is also working to prevent the impact of ship-to-ship bunkering (refuelling of ships at sea) on the penguin colonies in Algoa Bay, where oil spills and increased noise

pollution from ships have been implicated in the collapse of the formerly largest African Penguin colony.

“ This case was first and foremost about improving the chances of conserving Africa’s only penguin species, but the outcome of these closures will also benefit other marine predator species, such as Cape Gannets, Cape Cormorants, and socio-economically important fish that also eat sardine and anchovy, as well as the livelihoods of many who derive benefits from marine ecosystems that are equitable and judiciously managed.

Dr Alistair McInnes, BirdLife South Africa’s Seabird Conservation Programme Manager, hailed the court order as an important milestone in the fight to protect African Penguins

Saving Critically Endangered Species in Ethiopia

In Ethiopia, the **Ethiopian Wildlife and Natural History Society (EWNHS)** continued conservation action targeting the **White-winged Flufftail** (*Sarothrura ayresi*) and the **Liben Lark** (*Heteromirafrarcheri*), both Critically Endangered species. Through its network of Site Support Groups (SSGs), EWNHS continues to monitor the Berga Flood Plain, in Central Ethiopia, the last stronghold of the White-winged Flufftail, only found in Ethiopia and South Africa, with estimates indicating that there are fewer than 250 adult birds in existence today.



Liben Lark in Jigiga Plains, Ethiopia © Henok

EWNHS also carried out a survey in Jijiga Plain, Eastern Ethiopia, one of the known sites hosting the Liben Lark, only found in Ethiopia, with fewer than 250 birds remaining today. The EWNHS expert team did a socio-economic assessment to determine the suitability of the area as an alternative site for the survival and continuity of the species, with about 13 birds encountered during the 2025

assessment. A series of consultative workshops involving key government stakeholders, local communities, and religious and clan leaders were also organized to enhance awareness and strategize on how to secure a suitable habitat to ensure the survival of the Liben Lark.

In 2025, EWNHS was designated as a member of the Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA) Lesser Flamingo International Working Group, to provide expert technical support in the implementation of the International Lesser Flamingo Single Species Action Plan (ISSAP). EWNHS is also involved as national expert under AEWA’s International Working Group (IWG), tasked with conservation of the **Northern Bald Ibis** (*Geronticus eremita*).

Strengthening bird conservation efforts in Morocco

In **Morocco**, BirdLife Partner **GREPOM** was involved in the **revision of Morocco’s annual hunting decree in 2025**, in the framework of “Safe Flyways IKB 3 – Ending the illegal killing of birds in the Mediterranean and beyond”, coordinated by BirdLife International and funded by **Hans Wilsdorf Foundation**. Collaborating closely with various partners, including the hunting community, GREPOM developed draft proposals for the hunting decree revision as part of its IKB (Illegal Killing and Taking of Birds) work.

GREPOM then worked with the Conservation Department of the National Agency for Water and Forests (ANEF), and ANEF recognised that the proposals were fully consistent with Moroccan law on species protection and with the country’s international commitments, notably under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and the Bonn Convention. The proposals were subsequently submitted, through ANEF, to the High Council of Hunting, chaired by the Minister of Agriculture, Maritime Fisheries, Rural Development, and Water and Forests, in July 2025.

Following **GREPOM’s** intervention, a number of threatened species were excluded from the huntable species list, including **Common Pochard** (*Aythya ferina*) and **Grey Plover** (*Pluvialis squatarola*), globally listed as Vulnerable in the IUCN Red List; and **Great Snipe** (*Gallinago media*) and **Bar-tailed Godwit** (*Limosa lapponica*) listed as Near Threatened. Other species explicitly excluded from the huntable species list include **Ruff** (*Calidris pugnax*), **Northern Lapwing** (*Vanellus vanellus*), **Red-knobbed Coot** (*Fulica cristata*) and the family of Loons. This revision of the annual hunting decree, in collaboration with partners, represents an important step in strengthening bird conservation in Morocco.

Training and monitoring for conservation in Kenya

BirdLife Partner **Nature Kenya** intensified vulture conservation efforts, maintaining a team of 65 Vulture Volunteers in an area of 8,000 Km², for surveillance and rapid response to poisoning of wildlife. When a predator kills a cow or other livestock, herders often fill the carcass with poison, hoping to kill the predator. Vultures are usually the unintended victims. To build local capacity, **600 rangers** from **17 community conservancies** and one National Reserve were trained on the Rapid Response to Wildlife Poisoning Protocol.

Site Support Groups (SSGs), government agencies and Nature Kenya monitored the habitat of 36 threatened bird species in 15 Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs). Common bird monitoring was carried out in 20 KBAs, and Waterbird counts conducted in 10 KBAs, including Rift Valley Lakes, coastal and inland wetlands. More than 750 bird species were documented across citizen science platforms promoted by Nature Kenya.

Tackling the Illegal Killing, Taking and Trade of Birds (IKB) in Egypt

The Illegal Killing, Taking and Trade of Birds (IKB) is a critical danger for migratory birds on the African-Eurasian flyway. In **Egypt**, BirdLife Partner **Nature Conservation Egypt (NCE)** has been at the forefront of tackling IKB, focussing on three key sites, Lake Nasser, Egypt’s largest lake and one of the largest man-made reservoirs in the world, Lake Burullus, Egypt’s second largest natural lake, located in the Nile Delta, and the Wadi El Gedi Governorate’s oases.



The Nature Conservation Egypt team conducting the Mid-Winter Waterbird Survey in Lake Nasser after the implementation of the hunting ban © NCE.

NCE partnered with a newly established local tourism agency, Camp Burullus, to develop and promote an ecotourism initiative centred on birdwatching in Lake Burullus. Today, Camp Burullus operates independently, offering birdwatching tours that provide alternative livelihoods for former hunters and raises community awareness about local bird diversity and their ecological importance. NCE conducted a socio-economic study on bird hunting and trading activities across Burullus, and is currently analysing data to produce a comprehensive report with actionable recommendations.

To ensure the continuation of the hunting ban in Lake Nasser in the 2025/2026 season, NCE launched the national campaign **“So That The Birds Return”** at the **Egyptian Journalists’ Syndicate**, in collaboration with the Society of Writers on Environment and Development. The launch attracted over 50 media professionals/journalists and generated more than 60 published articles. This campaign successfully helped maintain the hunting ban for an additional season and led to the establishment of Egypt’s first dedicated ‘Biodiversity Media Network’, a group committed to environmental journalism nationwide.

After two consecutive seasons (2023-2024/2024-2025) of implementing a hunting ban in Lake Nasser, signs of a recovering ecosystem were apparent; **63 Village Weaver** (*Ploceus cucullatus*) nests were documented for the first time in Egypt and Reed Cormorants (*Microcarbo africanus*) have returned to Lake Nasser. Simultaneously, NCE has actively engaged local boat owners at Lake Nasser in conservation initiatives, including winter waterbird counts and monitoring training. NCE is currently promoting Lake Nasser as a premier birdwatching destination both locally and internationally, aiming to generate alternative income sources for the community.

Following a successful campaign by the Nature Conservation Sector (NCS) in Egypt’s Ministry of Environment, BirdLife Malta, and NCE, which resulted in the first hunting ban at Lake Nasser for the 2023-2024 season, NCE and NCS collected data on hunting tourism in the Wadi El Gedid Governorate’s oases. This effort led to the implementation of a hunting ban in Wadi El Gedid for the 2025-2026 season.

“Therefore, these birds are part of our local ecosystem, not merely transient visitors. Our commitment to protecting them is not solely due to international agreements, but because their presence is essential for the stability of the ecosystem we are part of.”

Dr. Khaled Noby Mohamed, Chief Executive Officer and Acting Conservation Director of Nature Conservation Egypt.

Saving the Critically Endangered Hooded Vulture in Rwanda

In **Rwanda**, there has been fears of local extinction of the Critically Endangered Hooded Vulture (*Necrosyrtes monachus*). There is a lack of ecological data about the species, coupled with degradation of the 152 ha Busaga Forest – the only known breeding site of the vulture – due to agricultural encroachment, timber harvesting, and clay extraction, among others. So in 2025, Nature Rwanda, with financial support from the Max Planck Institute of Animal

Behaviour and technical guidance from The Peregrine Fund, launched the Hooded Vulture tagging project. Additional collaboration with the Rwanda Wildlife Conservation Association enabled complementary research on genetics and disease risks.



Four hooded vultures foraging along with White-necked Raven around Busaga Forest © Nature Rwanda

To resolve the critical data gap, nine GPS trackers were deployed on nine Hooded Vultures captured at feeding sites in Kigali City and Musanze District. This tracking is generating the first detailed insights in Rwanda on vulture movement, feeding ecology, and habitat use, information essential for designing targeted conservation actions. Blood and DNA samples were collected to determine sex ratios and assess potential disease transmission risks between vultures, livestock, and humans. The nine tagged Hooded Vultures are now broadcasting daily movement data via the **EarthRanger** and **Movebank** real-time monitoring systems. This has revealed previously unknown communal roost sites and key foraging zones outside of recognised sites and beyond Rwanda’s landscapes, providing the first empirical evidence of the species’ landscape use and range.



A hooded vulture fitted with a back-hooked GPS transmitter before release in Kigali © Nature Rwanda.

“IBA status tells everyone that Busaga Forest is not just any forest, it is the last breeding home of the Critically Endangered Hooded Vulture in Rwanda, proving its conservation significance. But recognition alone does not protect a forest. Protection comes when the family living at its edge sees more value in a standing tree than in a bag of charcoal. That is why our work in

Busaga is not just about vultures, it is also about community livelihoods.

Elie Sinayitutse, Head of Species and Habitat Conservation, Nature Rwanda

GREPOM/BirdLife Morocco Feted for Northern Bald Ibis Conservation Efforts

GREPOM/BirdLife Morocco received the Hassan II Prize for the Environment in 2025, a prestigious national award recognizing years of commitment, perseverance, and collective effort toward the conservation of the **Northern Bald Ibis** (*Geronticus eremita*). This recognition highlights an exemplary integrated conservation program focused on protecting the world’s last wild population of this iconic species, concentrated in the Souss-Massa National Park in southwestern **Morocco**.



GREPOM feted for the Northern Bald Ibis conservation efforts © GREPOM

The Northern Bald Ibis is one of the world’s most endangered birds. Once widespread throughout the Mediterranean basin, it came close to extinction in the early 1980s, with only 74 breeding pairs recorded. Thanks to continuous and coordinated efforts, this dramatic decline has been reversed. In 2023, the population reached a record high of **147 breeding pairs**, and a total of **708 individuals**—a success that contributed to the species’ reclassification on the IUCN Red List, moving from “Critically Endangered” to “Endangered” in 2018.

This result is the outcome of an integrated approach led by GREPOM/BirdLife Morocco, in collaboration with the National Water and Forests Agency, the Souss-Massa National Park Directorate, national academic institutions, and a broad network of partners, including BirdLife International and several of its partners.

The approach combined species protection, management of key sites, and active involvement of local communities. It involved daily monitoring of breeding colonies by trained and equipped local rangers, public awareness campaigns, scientific monitoring, improvements to nesting platforms, and tracking via GPS tags, which provide a better understanding of the species’ movements, dispersal

areas, and ecological needs. Beyond this, the employment of rangers from neighbouring villages, support for women’s cooperatives and sustainable artisanal fishing activities, as well as the gradual development of responsible ecotourism, have generated local economic benefits while reducing pressures on sensitive habitats. GREPOM also carried out awareness programs, and hundreds of schoolchildren, students, visitors, and local stakeholders have been educated about the heritage and ecological value of the Bald Ibis, now seen as a symbol of national pride.



Northern Bald Ibis colony in Morocco, © GREPOM

The awarding of the Hassan II Prize for the Environment serves as both recognition and encouragement. It confirms that conservation grounded in science, institutional cooperation, and the involvement of local communities can yield concrete and sustainable results. For GREPOM/BirdLife Morocco, this distinction serves as a key lever to strengthen our conservation efforts, share the lessons learned from this experience, and contribute significantly to national and international biodiversity protection goals.

Conserving the Black-tailed Godwit in Northwest Africa

In 2025, BirdLife Dutch Partner **Vogelbescherming Nederland (VBN)** began supporting the **“Safe flyway for the Black-tailed Godwit”** project in West Africa. The three-year project being implemented by five BirdLife Partners entails conservation action across various sites including Bas Loukkos and Oualidia in Morocco; Lac Aleg, Lac de Mal and Keur Macene in Mauritania; Tocc-Tocc and Casamance in Senegal; and the communities of Patche lala and Unche in Mansoa in Guinea Bissau. Some of the project activities to be carried out include intensive monitoring of the **Black-tailed Godwit** (*Limosa limosa*) to gain an understanding of habitat use, awareness raising activities and engaging with authorities to advance conservation efforts.

During the Year VBN supported the launch of a scoping exercise of the Niokolo-Badiar-Koulountou transboundary landscape, bordering Senegal and Guinea. The project which includes various Partners, including **Nature-Communautés-Développement (NCD)** and Guinée Ecologie (Guinea), Université Cheikh Anta Diop de Dakar (UCAD) and ZSL among others aims at improving

biodiversity knowledge management, including a harmonized monitoring protocol for birds, improvement of participatory management, capacity building in addition to developing a multi-year action conservation action plan. It is envisaged that the scoping exercise will lay the foundation for long-term nature conservation in the southeastern Senegal and northern Guinea areas of this wider landscape.

Tackling poisoning of wildlife in Zambia

Poisoning of wildlife remains one of the most significant threats to vultures and other scavenging species in **Zambia**. Vultures are particularly vulnerable due to their feeding behaviour, often dying in large numbers from a single poisoned carcass. In Zambia, these incidents are frequently linked to human-wildlife conflict, poaching, and, in some cases, the belief-based use of wildlife parts.

In 2025, **BirdWatch Zambia (BWZ)** implemented a multi-faceted approach to address wildlife poisoning and strengthen vulture conservation at a national scale, with support from partners including the Isdell Family Foundation and BirdLife International Africa. A central component of this work was capacity building. **BWZ** conducted Wildlife Poisoning Response Trainings targeting the Department of National Parks and Wildlife (DNPW) and conservation partners. Over **76 officers** from at least five protected areas were trained, alongside an additional **37 participants** from partner organisations such as Conservation South Luangwa and the Zambian Carnivore Programme. These trainings equipped frontline staff with practical skills in detecting, responding to, investigating, and reporting poisoning incidents. To support field implementation and operational efficiency, 23 Wildlife Poisoning Response Kits were distributed.

To institutionalise these efforts, **BWZ** led the development and rollout of the Zambia National Wildlife Poisoning Response Protocol which was recently officially approved by the Department of National Parks and Wildlife – the first of its kind in the country. The protocol provides standardized guidance for coordinated response across agencies. **BWZ** also collaborated with partners on tagging and tracking vultures, generating critical data on movement patterns and mortality. This has enabled early detection of carcasses and poisoning events in key vulture landscapes, improving response time and reducing secondary poisoning risks.

Further, **BWZ** conducted community outreach in at least **100 communities**, raising awareness on the ecological importance of vultures and the dangers of poisoning. For the first time, BWZ engaged traditional healers, opening dialogue around the use of wildlife parts and promoting alternative practices. This marked a significant step in addressing previously underexplored drivers of vulture decline, fostering dialogue and opening pathways for behaviour change.

“ We have always relied on our traditional knowledge. When wildlife is healthy, there are resources for us to use. This engagement has opened our eyes, and we are ready to explore alternatives that protect both our culture and wildlife

Dr. Rodwell Vongo, President of the Traditional Health Practitioners Association of Zambia.



Reducing marine bycatch, releasing turtles and improving livelihoods in Cabo Verde

The **Empowering Cabo Verde communities towards responsible practices in artisanal fisheries** project, implemented for three years by partners including **Biosfera** (BirdLife Partner in Cabo Verde), Associação Projecto Vitó, Bios CV, the Portuguese Society for the Study of Birds (SPEA), Projeto Biodiversidade, and BirdLife International, came to a successful end.

A key aspect of the project was **bycatch mitigation**. The introduction of the Scarybird device – a seabird bycatch mitigation technique – showed a 55% reduction in seabird bycatch risk in trials – more than double the project’s reduction target. And safe-handling protocols has led to **100% live release of bycaught turtles** among trained fishers.

The project enabled the Guardians of the Sea (**GOS**) **programme** – a revolutionary citizen science approach that puts fishers at the heart of marine conservation – to expand to 185 fishers across six islands of the archipelago. GOS embedded fishers as community stewards for biodiversity monitoring and bycatch mitigation. The fishers were trained on bycatch reduction, marine biodiversity, and fisheries legislation, with visible behaviour change indicating strengthened roles in community governance and stewardship.

The project further improved livelihoods for fishing communities through lowering operational costs, improving market access, strengthening social protection awareness, and empowering artisanal fishers and fishmongers. Through the sustainable fisheries labelling scheme, **103 fishers** and **23 fishmongers** accessed better markets, gained recognition for sustainable practices, and reported improvements in fish quality and marketability. The installation of solar-powered ice production systems in Palmeira and Santa Maria reduced ice prices by 33%, resulting in estimated monthly savings of up to 4,000 CVE (42 USD) per fisher and contributing to reduced post-harvest losses, greater food security, and income stability. behaviour change.



“Working hand in hand with communities and government agencies to preserve marine biodiversity has been made possible through this project. For me, this is the way forward if we really want to make an impact here in Cabo Verde and in the region.

Keider Neves, Conservation Director at Biosfera

SITES

Africa has over 2,100 Key Biodiversity Areas – sites important for the conservation of biodiversity: plants, animals, and micro-organisms, the genes they contain and the ecosystems of which they are part. Some 1,300 KBAs were first identified as Important Bird Areas (IBAs). BirdLife Partners across the continent are ensuring the integrity, protection, conservation, and restoration of these sites, including continuous assessments and establishing National Coordination Groups (NCG) in Partner countries.

Lake Natron © Akshita Rabdiya

Wetlands of Hope Campaign in Seychelles

Coastal wetlands on Seychelles' main island, Mahe, have come under increasing pressure in recent decades. Some sites have been reclaimed for development or used as dumping areas, while the remaining are not effectively managed due to a lack of institutional capacity and knowledge. Local communities living near wetlands are at risk of flooding due to degradation, private sector entities at wetland sites lack the technical know-how and tools to implement conservation and management actions, and environmental authorities are constrained by limited site-specific data and stakeholder engagement, affecting informed and equitable decision-making for long-term wetland management.



Wetlands of Hope Pledge signees © Nature Seychelles

In March 2024, **Nature Seychelles** launched the **Wetlands of Hope** project aimed at improving ecological understanding and conservation of wetlands, while strengthening cooperation between government, the private sector and communities. The environment ministry selected target sites for scientific studies and provided strategic guidance throughout the project. People living near wetlands were engaged through consultations, awareness sessions, and a social media wetlands campaign. Private sector entities participated in training on wetland management; and a multi-stakeholder taskforce was established to facilitate knowledge sharing and the exchange of best practices.

Thanks to the Wetlands of Hope, the Ministry of Environment now has access to tools and data, including updated information and maps on six key wetland sites, one of which is a Ramsar site. A wetland management plan has been developed and the National Wetlands Policy was updated through an extensive, multi-stakeholder consultation process.



Wetlands policy validation workshop participants © Nature Seychelles

The Wetlands of Hope campaign encouraged private sector engagement in wetland conservation and strengthened wetlands governance by promoting Partnership Agreements between government and the private sector. Private sector entities benefit from access to ecological data on the wetlands within their premises, as well as targeted training to support future eco-tourism activities linked to wetland conservation. A voluntary Wetlands of Hope label was introduced to recognise and incentivise best practices in wetlands by private sector entities operating within or around wetlands, such as hotels. To date, seven entities – five hotels, one bank and Seychelles' national airline – have signed the wetlands pledge, which is one of four criteria required to achieve the label.

“ I grew up in Seychelles at a time when wetlands were seen as wastelands. Nearly 40 years later, mangroves are viewed as superheroes! With the Wetlands of Hope label, we are recognising establishments that commit to wetland conservation through clear criteria, with support from Nature Seychelles and the Ministry of Environment. This partnership is about experts sharing what they do best; I call it being Nature Positive

Dr Nirmal Jivan Shah, CEO of Nature Seychelles

Landscape- based conservation approach in Burkina Faso

In Burkina Faso, BirdLife Partner **NATURAMA (Fondation des Amis de la Nature)** has been implementing the **WAKANDA (West African Knowledge for Agriculture, Nature and Development Activities)** project, focusing on participatory sustainable development around protected areas in the Pô-Nazinga-Sissili (PONASI) ecological complex, a critical 355,700-hectare wildlife habitat in south-central Burkina Faso. Funded by the European Union and implemented in partnership with NITIDAE and CERDE, the project adopts a landscape-based and integrated approach, combining the conservation of protected areas within the PONASI complex with local economic development.

To date, WAKANDA has helped preserve **1,300 hectares** of land through conservation efforts and the promotion of environmentally friendly income generation activities. Iconic tree species such as shea, néré (African locust bean), and tamarind have been protected, ensuring the continuity of ecosystem services. The beneficiaries are the communities of 23 riverside villages, now actively participating in local governance and the preservation of natural resources.



Training in modern beekeeping under the WAKANDA project © NATURAMA

Some of the income-generating activities implemented under the project include beekeeping, poultry farming, vegetable farming, non-timber forest products, and agroforestry. Economically, income-generating activities have had a direct impact: 5.36 tons of raw honey were harvested, worth 6,433,500 CFA francs (11,396 USD); and 5,177 poultry were sold, generating revenue of 15,510,000 CFA francs (27,475 USD). These revenues enabled families to improve their diet, finance their children's education, and enhance access to healthcare. WAKANDA has demonstrated that integrating income-generating activities into a landscape-based approach reduces pressure on the natural resources of the PONASI complex while strengthening local economic development.

“ Before WAKANDA, we were struggling to feed the family. Since we learned beekeeping and poultry farming, I've been selling honey and chickens. With that, I've been able to pay for the kids' school and we eat better. Plus, we're protecting our trees, like the shea and néré. Honestly, this project has changed our lives.

Boureima Sawadogo, farmer in Tiébélé, beneficiary of the Wakanda project.

Safeguarding Critical Key Biodiversity Areas in Kenya

In **Kenya**, BirdLife Partner **Nature Kenya** continued efforts focusing on Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs). Nature Kenya

maintained **1,436 hectares** of nature reserves, including 12.8 hectares in the Taita Hills forest fragments, 1,351.2 hectares of the northernmost Miombo forest in Dakatcha Woodland, and 72 hectares in Kinangop highland grassland to secure habitats for the Taita Apalis (*Apalis fuscicularis*), Clarke's/ Kilifi Weaver (*Ploceus golandi*) and Sharpe's Longclaw (*Macronyx sharpei*), respectively. Eight Community Conserved Areas were established in Dakatcha Woodland covering an additional 12,950 ha.

Nature Kenya published its twentieth Kenya Key Biodiversity Area Status and Trend Report, highlighting that Kenya's critical ecosystems face severe threats from climate change-induced drought, land-use changes, and infrastructure development. Three new KBAs were profiled, while **58 KBAs** were monitored collaboratively with Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS), Kenya Forest Service (KFS), National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) and National Museums of Kenya (NMK).

Some **3,162 ha** of degraded landscapes were restored in KBAs. Ecosystem Services Assessment and Restoration Opportunity Assessment and Mapping (ROAM) were carried out in Cherangany Hills forests. In the Tana River Delta on the coast, Kenya's biggest delta, **101,917 ha** of forest land was brought under participatory forest management (PFM) with four community forest associations (CFAs) implementing their management plans. Pasture seed banks were set up to restore and improve the grasslands.

Tackling Forest Degradation in Uganda

NatureUganda is implementing the People Partner with **Nature (PPN) project** funded by CISU through DOF (BirdLife Partner in Denmark) to address the growing pressure on the 40,000 ha Kasyoha-Kitomi Central Forest Reserve in Western Uganda. Over the years, overdependence on forest resources for firewood, charcoal production, agricultural expansion and illegal logging, together with limited law enforcement and limited awareness about the importance of forest conservation and sustainable natural resource management have led to its degradation.



Forest management meeting with local community members © NatureUganda

Working with local communities living adjacent to the forest, **NatureUganda** is focusing on strengthening sustainable livelihoods while enhancing community-

led forest conservation. This includes supporting the development of sustainable climate-smart agricultural practices, promoting site-wide community enterprises and tree planting, providing training in sustainable Collaborative Forest Management (CFM) and expanding CFM into new forest areas

The project has delivered measurable impact. More than **60,000 agroforestry** trees have been planted on farmlands, enhancing the communities' resilience to climate change. Formation and strengthening of four local Collaborative Forest Management (CFM) groups, involved in forest patrols and in regulating resource use, have strengthened forest protection. By reducing pressure on forest resources, the project also contributes to the protection of habitats for over 300 bird species, including those of conservation concern.

Distribution of about 1776 improved cookstoves by NatureUganda has reduced firewood consumption by approximately **50%**, thus reducing deforestation and forest degradation. About **2,200 banana** farmers have been trained in climate-smart agriculture, with crop yields increasing by **84%**, reducing the need to clear additional forest land for cultivation. Working with schools, NU has educated over **1,600 school** children on climate-smart initiatives. The children establish and manage tree nurseries and learn about energy-saving stoves, transferring this knowledge to their homes and communities. To improve livelihoods, 125 households are involved in beekeeping, producing and marketing honey and other bee products. The 5,296 beehives distributed have generated an estimated 7,456 litres of honey annually, providing households with supplementary income and reducing reliance on forest resources. Similarly, 84 individuals engaged in fruit winemaking and value addition have increased household earnings by 67%, creating a direct economic incentive to preserve natural habitats.



Energy saving stoves provided by NatureUganda © NatureUganda

Protecting Critical Forest Landscapes in Nigeria

Nigeria has an alarming deforestation rate of 3.5% annually, and Cross River State, home to nearly half of the country's remaining forests, has been hit hardest. From 2001 to 2023, the state lost 134,000 hectares of tree cover, a staggering 11% decrease, making it one of the highest rates of deforestation globally. Activities such as illegal and unregulated timber extraction, slash-and-burn agriculture, and both industrial and artisanal mining have placed severe pressure on the state's remaining forest ecosystems. All these were further exacerbated by the state's removal of the logging ban in 2023.

With support from BirdLife, the **Nigerian Conservation Foundation (NCF)** responded by implementing the "Strengthening Collaboration Between CSOs, Community and Government toward Deforestation Reduction in Cross River State" Project. The project built coordination and accountability across the conservation landscape, targeting eight buffer zone communities and four critical forest landscapes, including the Oban and Okwangwo divisions of Cross River National Park, the Afi Mountains and Mbe Mountains.

Twenty civil society organisations formally signed onto a shared Terms of Reference and communique, creating a unified coalition against illegal logging. A cooperation framework was signed between the Cross River National Park and the Forestry Commission to strengthen collaboration with CSOs and community eco-guards on forest monitoring and reporting. This formalised structure significantly improved coordination and reduced institutional silos. The coalition was publicly launched at a press conference in Calabar, generating coverage in national newspapers and on television

Simultaneously, **NCF** strengthened frontline enforcement. Multi-stakeholder strategy workshops were organised with the Cross River National Park, the Forestry Commission, and community eco-guards to improve collaboration on forest monitoring and patrols. Five National Park rangers and **50 community eco-guards** were trained in biodiversity data collection and forest monitoring techniques.



Advocacy engagement in Owai Community. © Nigerian Conservation Foundation

At the site level, improved monitoring and coordinated patrols contributed to better protection of forest landscapes within and around Cross River National Park. Data collected by trained eco-guards and rangers led to successful updates of the Wildlife/Biodiversity Database (WBDB) in November 2025. Updated species documentation strengthens conservation planning and supports Nigeria's reporting commitments under international biodiversity agreements. Enhanced patrol efforts by the eco-guards led to the apprehension and seizure of chainsaws used by illegal loggers. Patrol teams also intercepted illegal wildlife hunters, resulting in the confiscation and reintroduction of rescued pangolins into the wild. These enforcement actions demonstrated renewed vigilance and boosted morale among frontline actors.

In addition, an awareness campaign was carried out in the eight buffer communities. Environmental education modules were distributed to support outreach in schools and communities. Radio jingles and talk shows, were aired weekly for three months, reached an estimated **three million people across all 18 Local Government Areas of the state.**

“ Before the coalition, organisations were working in isolation. Illegal logging was rising, but our voices were scattered. By coming together under one platform, we transformed concern into coordinated action. The government began to listen differently because we were speaking as one

Emmanuel Owan, Coalition Steering Committee General Secretary.

Restoring Malawi's Chia Lagoon

In **Malawi**, the **Wildlife and Environmental Society of Malawi (WESM)** has been restoring Chia Lagoon, Malawi's largest lagoon, connected to Lake Malawi. Over the years, degradation, lack of bird hunting protocols, illegal fishing, and deforestation have threatened the site. Through the Chia Lagoon Water Bird Project funded by the UK government through the Darwin Initiative, WESM, BirdLife International and Malawi University of Science and Technology (MUST) have been carrying out conservation actions to restore the lagoon.



Chia Lagoon © WESM

To protect critical bird species, the project has supported the establishment of **18 bird hunting clubs** composed of 10 members each, hence capacitating **180 hunters** in bird monitoring and law enforcement, and safeguarding approximately **150 hectares** of sanctuary sites for birds. Monitoring recorded **64 bird species** in 2023, increasing to **171 bird species** in December 2025.

More than nine hectares of land around the lagoon is being restored through natural regeneration. To improve community livelihoods, revolving funds and loans from Micro Loan Foundation have directly benefited 269 local community members, and 30 Village Savings and Loan Groups were established, benefiting **905 individuals** (643 women and 262 men). WESM also carried out an awareness campaign reaching over 25,000 people through various platforms

In 2025, Chia Lagoon and Flood Plain was officially designated as a Key Biodiversity Area (KBA) by the KBA Partnership Secretariat, marking a major milestone for biodiversity conservation and community-led natural resource management in Malawi.

“ Chia lagoon community water bird project is a game changer; with the conservation experience of being part of the implementing team, the project has taught me many lessons. The project's different and unique approach to protect birds and improve livelihoods has greatly benefitted biodiversity and local communities around the lagoon.

Rasheed Malandula, Community Liaison Officer for Chia Project and Dwangwa Branch Manager

Restoring Rwanda’s Busaga Forest

Rwanda’s 152-hectare Busaga Forest in the south of the country faces severe threats from agricultural encroachment, timber harvesting, and clay extraction, among others. Local communities in the Ndiza landscape, a region of steep hills and smallholder farms near the forest, depend on the forest for livelihoods, but degradation now threaten their livelihoods.

In July 2025, Busaga Forest was recognized as an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA) by BirdLife International, elevating the forest’s conservation profile nationally and internationally. Around the forest, **Nature Rwanda** is implementing a community livelihoods project supporting **200 households** through sustainable avocado farming, establishing over **7,500 avocado trees** as at December 2025. It is designed to build a community-based avocado value chain that generates stable, climate-resilient income while reducing pressure on forest resources. Households are also being supported through Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) to improve financial skills and economic resilience.



“ A family with savings and a small avocado farm does not need to cut trees from the forest. Our VSLA and avocado programs give people a better way to live. When the community benefits, Busaga Forest and its rich biodiversity benefit too

Jean-Claude Dusabimana, the Executive Director, Nature Rwanda

Restoring Mangroves in Sierra Leone’s Tissanah Coastal Community

For years, the coastal community of Tissanah in the Western Area Rural District in Sierra Leone faced a steady loss of its once-thriving mangrove ecosystem. The mangroves, which served as vital breeding grounds for fish and natural barriers against coastal erosion, became severely degraded due to unsustainable harvesting, weak enforcement of environmental regulations, and

limited awareness of sustainable practices The underlying challenge was rooted in poverty and a heavy dependence on mangrove resources for fuelwood and livelihoods, with few alternative income opportunities available.

The Government of Sierra Leone, through the National Protected Area Authority (NPAA), designated these areas as protected, but local enforcement remained insufficient. As a result, fish stocks declined, coastal erosion intensified, and women were forced to travel longer distances in search of firewood, placing additional strain on households.

In response, the **Conservation Society of Sierra Leone (CSSL)**, with support from Jersey Overseas Aid through GOAL Sierra Leone, implemented a mangrove restoration and community monitoring initiative between October and December 2025. It combined ecological restoration with community empowerment, ensuring that local people became active stewards of their environment. CSSL engaged traditional leaders, youth, and women’s groups to identify degraded sites and lead restoration efforts. As a result, 50 hectares of mangrove forest were successfully restored using community labour. Local monitors were recruited and trained to oversee both restored and intact mangrove areas, while supporting the enforcement of community bylaws regulating resource use. The restored mangrove areas are recording an impressive survival rate of approximately 85%, signalling strong ecological recovery. Fish habitats are gradually regenerating, contributing to improved livelihoods, while illegal cutting has significantly declined thanks to active community monitoring and enforcement. Beyond environmental gains, the intervention has transformed community attitudes. There is now increased compliance with bylaws, stronger local governance, and a growing commitment to sustainable natural resource management.

“ We now see the mangroves coming back, and it gives us hope for our fishing. We protect them because we understand their value for our future.

Mrs. Isha Conteh, a women’s leader in Tissanah

Coordinating conservation in the Guinean Forests of West Africa

BirdLife International’s Forest Programme, implemented across the **Guinean Forests of West Africa**, is delivering transformative impact by integrating conservation action, community empowerment, and institutional strengthening. The programme operates across multiple countries, including **Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Côte d’Ivoire, Togo, Guinea Bissau, and Ghana** through a portfolio of site-based interventions, regional coordination platforms, and locally led initiatives. Together, these efforts are advancing a holistic model for sustainable forest

management that addresses both ecological and socio-economic drivers of forest loss.

More than **100 hectares** of degraded forest in Guinea’s Mount Béro Classified Forest have been restored through the planting of over **47,000 native trees**, achieving survival rates of approximately **80%**. Mangrove regeneration and assisted natural regeneration are underway across multiple landscapes. These efforts are contributing to enhanced forest cover, increased carbon sequestration, improved soil stability, and better water regulation, while strengthening ecosystem resilience to climate change.

Forest protection systems have been significantly strengthened, with patrol coverage increasing from 60% to 78%, contributing to a decline in large-scale illegal activities. Enhanced biodiversity monitoring, using tools such as camera traps and SMART systems, has improved ecological knowledge and confirmed the presence of key threatened species, including the Western chimpanzee, Pygmy hippopotamus, and Timneh parrot. At the same site, recorded mammal species increased from 14 to 24, alongside high species richness among birds and herpetofauna. Across the broader programme, conservation interventions have improved the management of **over 13,000 hectares** of protected and production landscapes, demonstrating both effectiveness and scalability.

A defining feature of the Forest Programme is its strong emphasis on inclusive, community-led conservation. In Mount Béro, the establishment of **25 Village Advisory Committees** and five Communal Advisory Committees has created participatory governance structures where none existed previously, ensuring that communities are directly involved in decision-making. Across the wider programme, **88 communities** are actively engaged in natural resource management, while 28 communities have already experienced direct livelihood benefits. The programme has made substantial investments in building civil society capacity as a foundation for long-term impact. Through the Small Grants Programme and related initiatives, more than **60 local organizations** and networks have been strengthened through training, mentorship, and technical support. Over **960 individuals** have received training across projects, enhancing skills in governance, conservation planning, financial management, and monitoring.

Addressing the drivers of forest degradation through promotion of viable livelihood alternatives including sustainable agriculture, agroecological practices, and forest-friendly value chains has been a key area of impact. In Mount Béro alone, more than **300 beneficiaries**, half of them women, have been trained in sustainable agriculture and supported through farmer groups and knowledge exchange initiatives. Across the wider programme, interventions such as mangrove restoration, improved cookstoves, and sustainable fisheries are helping to reduce pressure on forests while improving community resilience and incomes.

By bringing together governments, regional bodies such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Mano River Union (MRU), and Central African Forest Commission (COMIFAC), civil society organizations, and international partners, the programme has facilitated a shift from fragmented, project-based approaches toward coordinated, landscape-scale governance. This has improved policy alignment, strengthened transboundary cooperation, and created enabling conditions for large-scale conservation.

The Forest Programme is strengthening knowledge systems, science, and innovation by supporting the development of regional knowledge platforms, improving forest monitoring systems, and integrating tools such as GIS, remote sensing, and climate data into decision-making processes. Significantly, the programme is advancing innovative financing for forest conservation, by promoting diversified financial mechanisms such as public-private partnerships, carbon and biodiversity credits, payments for ecosystem services, and blended finance. By combining ecological conservation with socio-economic development and regional coordination, the Forest Programme is emerging as a leading model for integrated and scalable forest conservation in Africa

Sustainable Conservation Financing Mechanism Operationalized in São Tomé and Príncipe

Funding is always a critical issue, and establishing a reliable source is a significant victory. Over the years, population growth, environmental changes, limited institutional capacity, and chronic financial constraints have increased reliance on natural resources, undermining conservation efforts and placing biodiversity at risk in São Tomé and Príncipe (STP). The cost for managing the terrestrial protected areas (PAs) alone is estimated to be between 539,000 and 938,000 USD annually, which is not prioritized on STP’s national budget, thus making the country largely dependent on project funding to implement management plans.

The government’s response to this structural challenge is the creation of the **EcoTéla Fund**: STP’s conservation trust fund, technically supported by BirdLife International with Rio Impact’s support, and financially supported by partners such as the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) through UNDP, Cartier for Nature and the European Union. Development of the EcoTéla Fund began in 2021, with a comprehensive study led by BirdLife International and Natural Strategies. In June 2021, key guidelines for the fund’s design were outlined. BirdLife International initiated the operationalization of the fund in 2022, first with a national dialogue involving civil society and government actors, followed by the establishment of a multisectoral interministerial committee.

Under the guidance of this committee, the EcoTéla Fund was officially named and its logo adopted in July 2023, in a meeting attended by 34 representatives from 20 institutions. The process culminated in October 2024, when the EcoTéla concept note was validated by 72 stakeholders – including representatives from the central and regional governments, NGOs, development partners, embassies, financial institutions, and the private sector. In May 2025, **the Foundation for Conservation of Biodiversity and Protected Areas of São Tomé and Príncipe**, or in abbreviated form EcoTéla Fund, was officially launched at an event with more than 50 participants from 33 institutions, including embassies, donors, private sector leaders, and authorities responsible for PAs.

Engagement of local stakeholders in the EcoTéla is visible through its composition: 32 members, representing different sectors with expertise in areas such as advocacy, finance, economy, biology, research, auditing, entrepreneurship, project management, and international relations, among others. The governance body includes a General Assembly, Board of Directors, fiscal and investment council, advisory board, ethics committee and scientific and technical committee. These entities support and oversee technical and financial management, ensuring alignment with EcoTéla conservation’s vision and mission.

EcoTéla now aims to capitalise at least **1.4 million USD (1.65 million Euros)** annually in the short-term, with a long-term capitalization target of **29 million USD (25 million Euros)**, operating as an independent national trust fund. The engagement of development partners has been crucial in the process. BirdLife will continue to play an instrumental role in EcoTéla, by assisting STP in the effective implementation of the Fund, including capacity building, technical assistance for the pilot phase aimed at capitalisation and disbursement windows, and promoting best practices in monitoring and evaluation.

“A legacy of resilience and experience, emerging in a context of increasing urgency in the face of threats to biodiversity and external factors such as climate change.

Eric Overvest, Resident Coordinator of the United Nations System in STP.



SYSTEMS

Under the Systems Pillar, the BirdLife Partnership in Africa is working to address the systemic drivers of the biodiversity loss and climate change crises and thus promote a nature positive and carbon neutral world.

Delivering seedlings for restoration activities at Chia Lagoon © WESM

Building Climate Resilience in Burkina Faso and Ghana

In Burkina Faso, BirdLife Partner **NATURAMA** has been implementing the AVSTEC (Addressing Climate Vulnerability through Nature-Based Solutions using Transdisciplinary Engagement of Wetland Communities) project. Launched in 2025 in **Burkina Faso and Ghana**, the project is funded by CLARE (Climate Adaptation and Resilience), a UK-Canada initiative supported by the UK International Development Research Centre (IDRC), York University and Start International. The initiative promotes socially inclusive and sustainable action to build resilience to climate change and natural hazards in Africa and the Asia-Pacific Region.



Landscape views overlooking the Volta lake in Akosombo, Ghana
© SEDG Media

Over the years, climate-related disasters have become more frequent in the Volta Basin between Ghana and Burkina Faso. Water discharged from the Bagré dam in southern Burkina Faso has contributed to destructive flooding of downstream communities, affecting tens of thousands of people in Ghana, and unknown numbers in Burkina Faso.

To tackle this challenge, AVSTEC is integrating a scientific and transdisciplinary approach, combining applied research, community consultations, and Nature-based Solutions (NbS). Activities include field missions, prospective analysis of flood risks, mobilization of local academic expertise, and co-design of pilot projects to strengthen community resilience. AVSTEC has already produced significant scientific findings regarding land-use changes, the vulnerability of communities surrounding the Bagré Dam, and trends in climate data. It is preparing to implement an early warning system that will strengthen local capacities for preventing and responding to hydrological risks. In the medium term, cross-border water governance between Burkina Faso and Ghana will be improved, reducing human and economic losses associated with flooding. The approaches tested can be replicated in other watersheds facing similar challenges.

“This project provides relief to communities at risk of flooding due to the Bagré Dam. We now have a better understanding of the causes, whether natural or related to human activities, such as encroachment on riverbanks or siltation of the dam. A major challenge remains the lack of archived flood data, which limits research and planning. This directly calls on CONASUR, the national authority responsible for emergency response and disaster management, to recognize the need to collect and preserve this information for better management of water infrastructure.

Roland T Koueta, AVSTEC Project Coordinator, NATURAMA

São Tomé and Príncipe Reintegrating back to CITES

São Tomé and Príncipe (STP) has been called the “Galapagos of Africa” and in 2025, became the first country to have the entirety of its land recognised as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. Despite its importance, biodiversity research in STP faces persistent structural challenges, including constrained project cycles and budgets, limited laboratory capacity – meaning that biological samples frequently need to be exported for analysis – and administrative complexities. This has affected research continuity, led to slow knowledge generation, and weakened the integration of science into long-term conservation decision-making.

To address some of these gaps, BirdLife International – through its office on the ground in São Tomé and Príncipe – and the BIOPOLIS Association, hosted by the CIBIO-InBIO laboratory at the University of Porto in Portugal, signed a cooperation agreement in 2021. The partnership aimed to generate applied scientific knowledge to directly support protected areas management and biodiversity conservation in STP.

To facilitate the export of species samples to the laboratory for scientific analysis, STP became a Party to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) in 2001. In 2022, however, STP was suspended because mandatory annual reports were not submitted and national legislation was not aligned with the requirements of the Convention, further affecting research.

To address this challenge, BirdLife International initiated targeted technical assistance to support the Government of STP in restoring CITES compliance. This technical assistance focused on three main areas: creation of

a National Scientific Research Coordination Group; coordination with the CITES focal point in the country and CITES national authorities; and development of a legal instrument to incorporate the CITES Convention into the national legal system.

Multiple consultations with stakeholders – researchers, NGOs, and government authorities from São Tomé and Príncipe – along with discussions with the CITES Secretariat, led to the drafting and public validation of the proposal on 14 November 2025. The Decree-Law is now waiting for the approval of the relevant government entities. Training sessions were conducted to strengthen the capacity of national CITES focal points to effectively carry out their roles and responsibilities in administering and implementing the Convention’s requirements, as well as the forthcoming national CITES Decree-Law. As a result of São Tomé and Príncipe’s renewed and active engagement in implementing the Convention, national authorities were invited to participate for the first time in CITES CoP 20.

“Throughout 2025, the National Scientific Research Coordination Group carried out several important actions in support of the coordination and execution of scientific research at the national level. The highlight was to support the drafting of the CITES Decree-Law at the national level, a document that has already been technically validated and is awaiting approval by the Government of the Republic.

Edjamiro Cardoso, technician of the Directorate of Forests and Biodiversity of São Tomé and Príncipe.

SOCIETY

Across Africa, the BirdLife Partnership is engaging, influencing, and mobilising people to support conservation and contribute to a just, equitable, rights-based society where nature is fundamental to our wellbeing.



Environmental awareness sessions for students © Biosfera



Empowering Youth for a Sustainable Green Transition in Tunisia

In Tunisia, “l’Association Les Amis des Oiseaux” AAO/ BirdLife in Tunisia, advanced its youth programme in 2025 through the GreenStep project, co-funded by the Union for the Mediterranean. In partnership with the Ministry of Youth, AAO/BirdLife in Tunisia carried out key activities to strengthen green skills among youth and women, improve employability and entrepreneurship opportunities in green economy-related sectors—particularly waste management, sustainable tourism, agriculture, and energy—and empower young people to actively contribute to building a sustainable green future.

In June–July 2025, AAO/BirdLife in Tunisia launched an awareness campaign under the slogan “Climate is changing, skills are evolving” looking at the economic and social realities of climate change and the importance of a skilled workforce to support the transition to a green economy. The campaign aims to raise youth awareness about climate change and pollution risks, introduce green professions as promising opportunities for the future, support and highlight youth-led environmental initiatives for a more sustainable future and preserve nature and biodiversity. About **251 youth** from eight different governorates participated in this initiative, a key entry point for selecting candidates for the training sessions.

A series of green skills training sessions for young people, “Green Entrepreneurship for Youth Creating Change”, were then held in August-September 2025. Five on-site training cycles, each lasting six days, were implemented in different regions in the north and south of Tunisia. The training provided a chance for participants – 75 in total – to develop their entrepreneurial skills, transform their ideas into prototypes using the design thinking approach, explore innovative solutions in the green economy sector, and build sustainable business models that were presented to an evaluation committee. The trainings provided a platform for learning, exchange, and capacity building, thus contributing to the emergence of promising local youth-

led initiatives with a positive environmental and green economic impact.

In October 2025, a webinar “Green Entrepreneurship, Youth Creating Change” was organized by AAO/BirdLife in Tunisia, with the participation of young entrepreneurs and chaperones from youth hostels in Tunisia. The event featured distinguished speakers who provided inspiring examples of innovation and business opportunities in the green economy and enriched the discussion on ways to support sustainable entrepreneurship.



Environmental Education in Cabo Verde

Over the past five years, **Biosfera** Academia has been working in schools on the islands of São Vicente, Santo Antão, and São Nicolau in **Cabo Verde**, teaching young people about protecting the environmental and developing Cabo Verde sustainably, and especially about the importance of seabirds and the dangers that they face. Biosfera environmental education teams visit schools for lectures, workshops, and learning through playing.

Biosfera Academia is integrating innovative educational tools and platforms, including interactive games, banners, posters, billboards, videos and a children’s comic book on Biosfera’s conservation work. Murals of seabirds have been drawn in various schools, and several advertisements and short documentary films were shown on Cabo Verdean National Television. Competitions and environmental festivals have been promoted in schools, including contests focused on the biodiversity of the marine reserve and the islets of Santa Luzia, and recycling contests where children and teachers create works of art using only reusable materials collected on the beaches.

More than **10,000 children and young people** have been reached by these efforts. Over **252 seabirds** have been rescued through Biosfera’s SOS Edu programme for injured or lost birds, a testament to the effectiveness of the programme. As more people become aware of the problem, Biosfera also receives a greater number of calls and requests for help.

“ **Biosfera has been an excellent partner in environmental education and awareness, working alongside schools. As a science teacher, I have relied on them for collaborative projects, whether in carnival parades with environmental themes, play and educational activities, awareness campaigns, support for clean-up campaigns with students, and partnerships with the university in the environmental education of future teachers. It is a cross-cutting effort that encompasses not only the sciences, but also the arts and citizenship. With this, we have been able, in many situations, to provide students with learning environments different from the classroom, which remain in their memory and hearts for a lifetime.**”

Otelma Borges, Science Teacher at the Schools of Ribeira Bote, Valentina and Salesianos, and the Faculty of Education and Sports from the University of Cabo Verde.

Empowering Youth for a Sustainable Green Transition in Tunisia

Nature Mauritania has been conducting awareness raising activities on the importance of protecting birds, particularly targeting the youth, which has seen IKB reduce. A key aspect of this work has been the creation of “green classrooms” in schools to raise awareness of biodiversity conservation, the importance of birds, and the rich biodiversity of Lake Maal, a natural freshwater lake located in southwestern Mauritania. Thanks to these green classrooms, communities have started taking an interest in birds and the environment more broadly. It has sparked a great deal of curiosity among young children, who sometimes even draw pictures of the birds they encounter



To improve livelihoods, Nature Mauritania is supporting two cooperatives — one focused on agriculture and the other on poultry farming. The cooperatives are made up of 15 or more people, mainly women. Nature Mauritania provides seeds and equipment to the cooperatives, and capacity building in the agricultural and market gardening sectors from experts. Poultry units have been supplied to the cooperatives, thereby combating bird poaching while improving livelihoods.

At Lake Maal, Nature Mauritania has carried out awareness on sustainable fishing, including the use of the right nets and hooks to avoid catching juvenile fish. Fishermen have benefited from the introduction of metal racks to dry fish, and the use of cattle dung to smoke fish. Previously, trees around the lake were cut down for drying racks, and wood or charcoal used for smoking the fish. This change has reduced the rate of deforestation around the lake, while improving livelihoods through better catch and care which is fetching more income

“ **Previously, a kilogramme of fish cost 400 Mauritanian Ouguiya (10 USD), it now sells for 800 Mauritanian Ouguiya (20 USD). We are also able to dry the fish caught and resell in neighbouring villages, thanks to the interventions introduced by Nature Mauritania.**

Yelly Soumare, a fisherman at Lake Maal.

Improving Community Livelihoods in Tanzania

Communities living next to Tanzania’s Amani Nature Forest Reserve depend heavily on the reserve, and years of unsustainable farming practices, wood collection and agricultural expansion have degraded the forest. The forest-adjacent Mbomole Hill Spices Farmers’ Group, like many rural groups in Amani, faced limited access to reliable markets for their produce. Although they cultivated high-quality spices such as cinnamon, cardamon, black pepper, cloves and others under agroforestry systems, the absence of consistent buyers meant low income and little incentive to maintain environmentally friendly practices. Without viable economic alternatives, communities risk turning to activities that degrade the very forest that supports their orchards – as well as remarkable biodiversity, including the Critically Endangered Long-billed Forest Warbler (also known as the Long-billed Tailorbird).

Through the **AfriEvolue** and its successor, **AfricElle project**, supported by NABU (BirdLife in Germany), **Nature Tanzania** introduced and strengthened agroforestry practices among the Mbomole Hill Spices Farmers’

Group as a strategy to link conservation with livelihoods. The three-year AfricElles project which began in 2024 targeting 2086 beneficiaries including 983 women, aims to demonstrate that biodiversity protection and income generation can reinforce each other when communities are supported with the right skills, organization, and market access.

Nature Tanzania worked closely with the farmers to improve spice production, post-harvest handling, quality control, packaging, and branding. Mbomole Hill Spices products were professionally labelled as “Mole” to enhance traceability and market appeal. Nature Tanzania further partnered with Altezza Travel, a tourism company committed to responsible sourcing, who directly purchased spices from the farmers’ group for their hospitality services. By creating a reliable buyer relationship, farmers gain a steady income source that depends on maintaining agroforestry systems, which in turn protect the forest habitat and improve their lives.

Most important, farmers now clearly see the connection between conserving the forest and sustaining their income. Agroforestry practices protect soil, maintain tree cover, and preserve the habitat of the Long-billed Forest Warbler. The forest is no longer viewed as a barrier to development, but as the foundation of their economic activity.



Members of the Mbomole Hill Spices Farmers Group © Nature Tanzania

Strengthening Community-Based Tourism in Botswana

BirdLife Botswana has enhanced conservation in Chobe East, within the Hwange-Kazuma-Chobe Wildlife Dispersal Area (HKC-WDA) by fostering local community participation in conservation-based tourism. Partnering with Zimbabwe's CAMPFIRE Association, the project held consultative meetings, awareness sessions, and participatory planning in Chobe East and Hwange Districts. These efforts empowered communities to develop Community-Based Tourism (CBT) joint ventures that integrate biodiversity values, diversify livelihoods, and build economic and social resilience, strengthening incentives for habitat protection. Collaboration with the Kavango–

Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area (KAZA TFCA) Secretariat, governments of Botswana and Zimbabwe departments, NGOs, communities, private sector, and tourism operators ensured effective coordination and shared knowledge for sustainable outcomes.

Community engagement generated positive socio-economic and conservation outcomes. Through targeted awareness sessions, community consultations, and participatory planning processes, communities gained a stronger understanding of how biodiversity conservation underpins tourism-based livelihoods and broader ecosystem services. The project increased community interest in conservation by demonstrating clear economic and social benefits linked to effective participation in Community-Based Tourism (CBT) joint venture partnerships. As a result, communities showed greater willingness to collaborate with conservation and tourism stakeholders, strengthening trust and fostering inclusive, locally driven approaches that support sustainable tourism development and long-term biodiversity conservation across the landscape.

“ I express my sincere gratitude for the support provided by BirdLife Botswana and the German Cooperation/KFW/KAZA initiative. This livelihood support has been a great help to me and my family, allowing me to become self-sufficient.

Mrs Kefilwe in Lesoma, Chobe Wildlife Dispersal Area.

Saving Africa’s Key Sites through Community-Led Advocacy

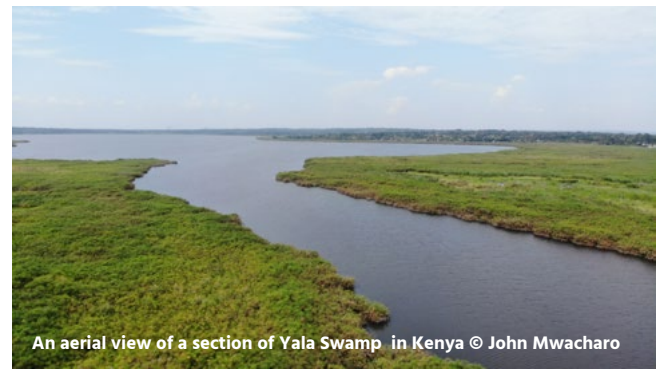
Across Africa, critical biodiversity sites are under siege. Infrastructure projects, mining operations, and agricultural expansion are reshaping landscapes faster than environmental oversight can keep pace. Mechanisms like Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA), designed to protect communities and ecosystems, are often hastily done, poorly enforced, inaccessible, or treated as a formality. BirdLife, through the Africa Policy Team, has been implementing the Emergency Site Casework initiative through the Ecological Restoration Fund (ERF). The initiative aims at addressing urgent damaging developments across sites in Africa where biodiversity, livelihoods, and ecosystem integrity are at immediate risk from threats such as deforestation, mining, and illegal land allocations, among others.

The initiative was implemented through the **African Sites Casework on Emerging Threats Task Force (ASCET)**, benefitting from 14 years’ experience of site action. Over the years, ASCET has provided strategic leadership and

support to African Partners, coordinated site advocacy and promoted lesson-sharing. However, while ASCET had long identified sites requiring priority advocacy action, limited funding constrained the ability of Partners to respond swiftly and effectively. This initiative began to address that gap by providing seed funding to safeguard Africa’s sites through tangible, on-the-ground action. Each Partner was supported with funding to implement focused advocacy and safeguarding actions over a one-year period, while documenting progress, lessons, and outcomes.

Partners adopted a combination of strategies tailored to their specific contexts. They strengthened local communities’ engagement in Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) processes, generated evidence to influence decision-making, conducted community sensitization, awareness raising and capacity-building activities, and established or reinforced dialogue platforms between stakeholders. This ensured that interventions were not only reactive but also strategic, aiming to influence longer-term outcomes in policy, advocacy and practice. As a result, threats to species and sites were either slowed or halted, and local communities were equipped to engage in decision making.

In **Kenya, Nature Kenya** secured the revocation of illegal land titles covering **72.49 km²**, protecting an ecosystem supporting over **250,000 people** at Yala Swamp. The project trained **82 community members**, strengthened 4 Site Support Groups, and formed a **27-member advocacy** committee to spearhead advocacy. Awareness campaigns reached over **500,000 people**, while monitoring recorded **145+ bird species**, including the White-winged Tern and African Openbill. Engagement with 29 county assembly members advanced the Yala Delta Land Use Plan, alongside Ramsar Site listing processes with the Kenya Wildlife Service.



An aerial view of a section of Yala Swamp in Kenya © John Mwacharo

In **Tanzania, Nature Tanzania** temporarily halted renewed soda ash mining threats at Lake Natron, the main nesting grounds for the Lesser Flamingo. Following investigations (Oct 2024–Apr 2025), the Government said it would not permit mining. The project trained **75 village leaders, 58 council members, and 22 tour guides, engaged 66 students**, and reached over **150 leaders**. Awareness activities reached **14,757+ people**, while monitoring recorded up to **80,000 Lesser Flamingos**. A rapid response mobilized 9 villages, with **8** maintaining opposition, reinforcing national and international advocacy momentum, including Ramsar COP15 engagement.

In **Nigeria, the Nigerian Conservation Foundation** strengthened governance around Cross River National Park. Reinstatement of the state-wide logging ban contributed to reduced illegal logging. A coalition of **20 CSOs** reached over **3 million people** through 16 campaigns, **130 radio jingles, 37 radio talks** and media publications. Capacity building trained **80 community champions and 50 eco-guards**, improving patrols and enabling seizures of illegal logging equipment, interception of traffickers, and rescue of species including pangolins. Collaboration with the University of Calabar is strengthening conservation education in schools. This initiative has secured a vital stopover on the African–Eurasian Flyway. The Cross River National Park provides feeding and resting habitats for migratory species such as the Common Sandpiper, Wood Sandpiper, European Bee-eater, Barn Swallow, and Common Swift.

In **Uganda, Nature Uganda** advanced advocacy for Bugoma Central Forest Reserve. A situational analysis showed a potential **US\$1.27 billion** annual loss if converted to sugarcane. A multi-stakeholder nature walk engaged **33 participants**, strengthening coordination across government, NGOs, media, and communities. A policy brief reinforced enforcement of the Forest Act (2004), improving alignment on restoration, patrols, and governance. Continued securing of Bugoma Forest benefits about **225 bird species**. The forest glades and wetlands within Bugoma forest are important stopover and wintering grounds for many migratory species such as Tree Pipit and Woodchat Shrike.

In **Malawi, the Wildlife and Environmental Society of Malawi** strengthened resistance to mining at Mount Mulanje. It mobilized five senior chiefs and five CSOs, reinforcing opposition despite misinformation. Over **1,500 people** were reached digitally, while **30 youth** were trained. Engagement with district authorities and cultural institutions strengthened legitimacy, while collective advocacy reduced risk through shared leadership. This initiative has safeguarded over 250 bird species including seven endemic or near endemic to Mulanje. Recorded migratory species include the Intra-Africa migrant Blue Swallow and the Osprey – a Palearctic migrant.



Cloudy sky with Mount Mulanje and tea plantations at the foot of the mountain © Madelein Wolf

In **South Africa**, **BirdLife South Africa** delivered major legal and policy wins at estuarine sites including Verlorenvlei. A court ruling imposed a **38,176 USD (Rand 625,000)** fine for illegal water abstraction, setting a strong legal precedent. The project also influenced amendments to the 400kV Aurora–Juno powerline, integrating KBAs and bird-safe mitigation measures. WWF and the Endangered Wildlife Trust supported legal action on mining rehabilitation, while a Mining and Threats to Protected Areas (MATPA) workshop engaged 60+ participants across sectors. This ongoing work ensures that key estuarine sites on the West Coast of South Africa are secured. These sites along the East Atlantic Flyway support a variety of bird species distributed across the Red List categories spectrum including endemic African Penguins, vulnerable Curlew Sandpiper and the Ruddy Turnstone and Grey Plover.

In **Zambia**, the project implemented by **BirdWatch Zambia (BWZ)** strengthened ESIA engagement in the Kafue Flats through sensitization of **221 participants** across six chiefdoms, improving understanding of environmental law and development impacts. A participatory ESIA training programme selected and trained **30 community** representatives, who developed chiefdom-specific action plans addressing mining, fisheries, grazing, and biodiversity pressures. BWZ also updated biodiversity databases for the Kafue Flats, Lukanga, and Barotse Floodplains, integrating threats, interventions, and stakeholder data to support long-term site management. BWZ interventions supported the conservation of over 450 bird species in the Kafue Flats, including migratory bird species which rely on this wetland habitat during critical stages of their annual cycles. Across the sites, the initiatives delivered measurable conservation, governance, and community impacts: more than **80,000+ birds**, some Near Threatened like the Chestnut-banded Plover and the Lesser Flamingo, were monitored, **10,000+ km2** protected, and **3 million+** community members reached through social media platforms including radio shows and on the ground advocacy initiatives. At its core, it strengthened BirdLife Partners’ ability to respond to emerging threats, influence policy, and ensure that local communities actively defend critical ecosystems.

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Our work protecting birds and all life on our planet wouldn't be possible without the generosity of our supporters.

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Male Red Fody during breeding season © Jacques de Speville

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Chia Lagoon © WESM

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