

## Gola rainforest spared from logging

One of Sierra Leone's top biodiversity sites—Gola rainforest—is to be managed to benefit local communities, rather than being logged, thanks to a ground-breaking project implemented by the Government of Sierra Leone in co-operation with two BirdLife Partners: the Conservation Society of Sierra Leone (CSSL, BirdLife in Sierra Leone) and the RSPB (BirdLife in the UK).

The 75,000 ha Important Bird Area (IBA) forest will be protected from legal and illegal logging. Local people from seven chiefdoms have been recruited by the project to patrol the reserve, and will have a key role in managing the project. The RSPB and CSSL are working with the Government to secure the logging rights to Gola,

**Tree nurseries are among the initiatives which will benefit both biodiversity and livelihoods (RSPB/Gola Forest Programme)**



and are financing development projects such as the construction and repair of schools and other community buildings that will directly benefit up to 100,000 local people. A fund will be established to meet the cost of managing the forest for biodiversity for the long term, and to support continuing community development programmes.

His Excellency Alhaji Dr Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, President of Sierra Leone, commented: "This is a new approach in forest protection that will address not only the protection of the forest and its biodiversity, but will also provide sustainable benefit to the local community in perpetuity."

Daniel Siafra, Head of CSSL, said: "This project will benefit both people and wildlife. CSSL and the RSPB are looking forward to working alongside the government to help protect this remarkable forest. Our goal is to see Gola managed by local people as a national park by 2010."

More than 270 bird species, including 14 globally threatened are found at Gola. They include Rufous Fishing-owl *Scotopelia ussheri*, Gola Malimbe *Malimbus ballmanni* (both Endangered), and the Vulnerable Green-tailed Bristlebill *Bleda eximius* and White-necked Picathartes *Picathartes gymnocephalus*, a charismatic species recognised as a symbol of African conservation.

Gola is also important for threatened mammals including pygmy hippopotamus, forest elephant and zebra duiker.

The Gola rainforest project was established in response to the government of Sierra Leone's commitment both to the UN's Millennium Development Goals of reducing poverty and promoting sustainable development, and to the international Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). On 23 March 2006 the government of Sierra Leone announced its backing for the scheme, at the meeting of the international Convention on Biological Diversity in Brazil ■

## Pelicans bounce back

A decade ago, things looked bleak for the Spot-billed Pelican *Pelecanus philippensis* in South India. Excellent community-based conservation work by NGOs in the region, coupled with improved protection of breeding sites, has turned the pelican's fortunes around.

In the 1920s, more than a million Spot-billed Pelicans were believed to exist in South and South-East Asia. But by the 1990s the number had dropped to fewer than 12,000 birds, and the species was listed as Vulnerable. The decline was largely caused by conversion of wetlands and loss of nesting sites.

In South India, a slow recovery of the pelican population is taking place. Between them, the southern Indian states of Andhra Pradesh,

Karnataka and Tamil Nadu support 21 breeding colonies, and numbers are on the increase.

The pelicanry at Kokkare Bellur, Karnataka, has doubled in size to 400 pairs in recent years, and two new small breeding colonies have been established in the state. In Tamil Nadu the number of nesting colonies has increased from six to 14 in recent years, several of them with more than 250 nests. In Andhra Pradesh, pelicanries at Nelapattu and Uppalapadu each support more than 300 nests.

This recent increase is largely due to better levels of protection for the species. In Tamil Nadu most colonies are found on partially submerged stands of *Acacia nilotica* grown in village irrigation

tanks (reservoirs) under the Social Forestry Programme. Eight of them enjoy State protection.

Coupled with this has been community-based conservation work at several pelicanries, like those at Kokkare Bellur (Mysore Amateur Naturalists, Mysore, Karnataka, headed by K. Manu) and Uppalapadu (Care for Nature's Creatures, Guntur, Andhra Pradesh, headed by K. Mrutyumjaya Rao).

Overall, pelican numbers in South India have risen from fewer than 4,000 individuals, to perhaps 6,000 birds—a welcome success story ■

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**Spot-billed Pelicans *Pelecanus philippensis* are on the increase (Mohan Ram)**

