



## Illegal Wildlife Trade (IWT) Challenge Fund Half Year Report (due 31<sup>st</sup> October 2022)

<b>Project reference</b>	IWTR6S2\1009
<b>Project title</b>	Combatting IWT in the Gola Sierra Leone/Liberian Transboundary Landscape Project
<b>Country(ies)</b>	Sierra Leone and Liberia
<b>Lead organisation</b>	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)
<b>Partners(s)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Gola Rainforest Conservation (GRC)</li> <li>▪ Conservation Society of Sierra Leone (CSSL)</li> <li>▪ Society for the Conservation of Nature in Liberia</li> <li>▪ British High Commission, Defence Attaché, Sierra Leone</li> <li>▪ National Protected Area Authority (NPAA), Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Sierra Leone</li> <li>▪ Forestry Development Authority (FDA) Liberia</li> <li>▪ Communities in Sierra Leone and Liberia</li> <li>▪ Universal Outreach (UO) Liberia</li> <li>▪ Rory's Well (RW) Sierra Leone</li> </ul>
<b>Project leader</b>	Richard Dixon
<b>Report date and number (e.g., HYR1)</b>	HYR2
<b>Project website/blog/social media</b>	<a href="https://golarainforest.org/new-page">https://golarainforest.org/new-page</a> <a href="https://golarainforest.org/partners-support">https://golarainforest.org/partners-support</a> <i>@RSPBScience Twitter</i>

**1. Outline progress over the last 6 months (April – Sept) against the agreed project implementation timetable (if your project has started less than 6 months ago, please report on the period since start up to the end September).**

### **Output 1. Disincentive3s for Gola Forest Edged Communities**

*Activity 1.1 to 1.5: Training for Pare Rangers from Gola Rainforest National Park (GRNP) in Sierra Leone and Gola Forest National Park (GFNP) in Liberia:* Initially this component was the responsibility of the International Security Advisory Team (ISAT), which is part of the UK Ministry of Defence (MoD) support to Sierra Leone. ISAT had considerable experience providing Park Ranger training throughout Africa and had provided training to Sierra Leone Gola Park rangers on a number of occasions. However, as this was going to be an international team bringing in trainers from Kenya and Southern Africa the 2020/21 Covid-19 travel restrictions prevented this from happening in the first two years of the project. This component was therefore postponed to the third year, as per our last Change Request. However, ISAT was discontinued/disbanded in Sierra Leone and can no longer provide this service. We were left trying to find an alternative training organisation in the region.

A tender went out and bids received from the Wildlife Service in Ivory Coast and the Southern African Wildlife College (SAWC), field ranger law enforcement unarmed course, other bids came from the Kenyan Wildlife service and Africa Parks. However, the latter two organisations only provide training for armed Ranger Units. SAWC was selected as the best option, but they can only provide training in April-June 2023. A change request will be submitted in December to request for a no cost extension to accommodate this situation so that this important component can be completed.

The Ranger training will cover a range of skills, i.e.: Roles and responsibilities and teamwork; Navigation and Orientation and Map reading; Identification of wildlife by track and sign; Surveillance and law enforcement patrols; Electronic patrol monitoring systems; Evidence collection, suspect handling, and case handling; community engagement; etc. this training is therefore extremely important to improve Ranger capacity. Also, the aim is to improve baseline standards and bring Liberian rangers in line with their Sierra Leonian counterparts.

The project is collaborating with the Wild Chimpanzee Fund EU funded IWT project and will join resources to deliver this training, which will enable us to include Park Rangers from Sapo National Park (SNP) and Grebo Krahn National Park (GKNP). Participants will include: 10 Liberian Park Rangers GFNP, 10 Park Rangers from Sierra Leone GRNP, 10 Eco-guard patrol leaders from GFNP and Foya Liberia and 10 Auxiliary Rangers from SNP, and 10 Auxiliary Park Rangers from GKNP.

*1.6 Facilitate the signing and adaptation of MOUs in the wider MRU Sub-Region to facilitate joint training events, allow joint patrolling and to improve border security:* A Memo of Understanding (MoU) has been signed, further coordination meetings were held in Monrovia at the beginning of the year, funded jointly by the IWT CF and the Support to Protected Area's (PAPFor) EU project. This is part of the Peace Park initiative to improve cooperation and collaboration between Liberia and Sierra Leone to eventually develop a management plan for both National parks.

*1.7 Develop Gola (Lalehun) as a centre of excellence for ranger training:* The Lalehun centre, Sierra Leone (40 beds) has been upgraded with solar energy, a new borehole and water pump to supply water to the facility, in preparation for the Park Ranger training. The Sileti centre in South Gola has also been upgraded with roof repairs, solar panels, and a water pump. Although smaller training events have taken place in Lalehun, the main training event for Park rangers will take place in April/May 2023.

*1.8 Pilot Sierra Leone border river boat patrol stations and develop a training package for river rangers:* The pack-rafts have been field tested by RSPB staff in Sierra Leone and candidates to receive this specialised training have been identified from the current GRC ranger teams.

*1.9 Awareness training for local communities about the project and IWT issues in general:* All the target villages have been visited at least once, meetings and workshops have been held to explain the IWT issues, such as, which species are protected, penalties for hunting protected species, the reason they are being protected and the livelihood support for eco-tourism and honey production. In June 2022 a further awareness raising meeting was held in Faama, the headquarter town for Nomo Chiefdom attended by representatives from 14 selected FECs. This meeting focused on the details of the research activities to be undertaken in Nomo Chiefdom over this year of the project, following the same protocols as the activities conducted in Malema Chiefdom over the previous year. Following this meeting, the selected FECs nominated candidates to become IWT 'Species Champions'.

Awareness training and meetings have been held in several project communities at the Gola Forest Landscape in Liberia. The communities are Bambala, Fornor Kawelahunn, Gbanju, Benduma Camp Israel, Fula Camp, Soso camp, Tima Town, SLC, Camp Alpha Zuie and Kongbor. Flyers, calendars, t-shirts, and posters were presented to the community members to carry out awareness in their respective communities.

*1.10 Hold community meetings in 10 FECs in SL and 10 FECs in LIB to ask communities to select 'Species Champions' (1 female and 1 male Species Champions in each community):* During the second year of the project, 28 'Species Champions' were recruited from 14 Forest Edged Communities (FECs) in Malema Chiefdom in Sierra Leone (2 per community) with support from the Darwin Initiative. Unfortunately, very few women were selected in this first recruitment in Sierra Leone, due to husbands being reluctant for wives to participate in this activity. We have now tried to target younger women for these positions for the recruitment of IWT Species Champions in Nomo Chiefdom. During the stakeholder meeting in June 2022 the Nomo target communities were invited to nominate up to 4 Species Champions each, with the stipulation that a maximum of 2 could be male with the additional 2 positions available to women only. Following feedback from the community leaders, concessions were made to allow smaller communities to put forward 3 male champions due to their more restricted pool of potential candidates. This led to a marked increase in female participation with 45% of new Species Champions in Nomo being female (25 women compared to 31 men).

Meetings were held in 20 FEC target communities and 15 species champions were selected in Normon & Tonglay Community Forests and 5 in Sokpo community Forest in Liberia. The species champions have been patrolling collecting data on wildlife both direct and indirect observations and illegal hunting activities and also conducting awareness in targeted communities.

*1.11 Train Species Champions: 2 training sessions at the GRC (4 days each) at the start of project and one refresher training as required, Species Champions from SL and LIB to be trained together:* Following lessons learnt from similar activities conducted in Malema Chiefdom over the previous year, Species Champions for Nomo Chiefdom were trained in their respective community forests. Refresher trainings for all species champions are planned for the end of November 22.

*1.12 Women Species Champions (mentored by the project Outreach Officer, Community Mobilisation Officer) raise their communities' awareness of the value of species threatened, IWT, community hunting regulations. Men Species Champions (mentored by rangers from the National Parks) patrol forest outside of the National Parks, reporting signs of illegal hunting to rangers:* In Sierra Leone and Liberia training in patrolling protocols has been completed. Data of sightings are being collected and recorded on simplified data collection forms for those who cannot read. In Sierra Leone female and male Species Champions are involved in both awareness-raising activities and forest patrols outside of the National Park in their community forests.

In Liberia the species champions have been patrolling in the Normon and Tonglay community forest respectively collecting data on signs of illegal hunting and reporting to rangers. They have also been carrying out awareness at the targeted communities about wildlife law and regulations. Additionally, they have been involved in bushmeat surveys within the targeted community forests from the 28<sup>th</sup>-30<sup>th</sup> September 2022. Six (6) communities were surveyed, and the hunters interviewed age ranges from 20-69 years respectively.

*1.13 Plan with the project managers of the Rainforest Trust community forest project and the EU IWT project (RSPB and SCNL are partners) to plan eco-guard network geographical coverage and training curriculum:* Meetings for representatives from each project staff are held regularly. Patrol maps are developed after each patrol and findings shared. The Technical Advisor (TA) for Combatting Wildlife Crime is leading on these training events. A number of in-country and across border staff exchanges have been held to promote the discussion of different ideas and experiences.

A number of regular planning meetings have been held. A coverage map for eco-guards and species champions has been developed. Training of eco-guards in SMART and community engagement protocols has been completed for 40 eco-guards in forest edge communities outside Gola. Participants include technicians from each of the projects working on IWT issues. The RSPB Technical Advisor (TA) for Combatting Wildlife Crime is leading on these training events and has provided office-based training in SMART and field-based training in SMART Mobile. A number of in-country staff exchanges have been held to promote the discussion of different ideas and experiences. As of December 2021, SMART Patrol reports are being produced by the SCNL Gola Coordinator and Field Technicians on a quarterly basis, and a 2022 annual report will be submitted in January 2023.

*1.14 Hold community meetings in 15 FECs in SL and 15 FECs in LIB to ask communities to select 'eco-guards' (50% female) in 30 communities:* In Sierra Leone, the responsibilities of 'eco-guards' have been consolidated into the role of 'Species Champions' with the latter term used to refer to all local community members recruited to participate in forest patrols and data collection on IWT target species.

In Liberia, 15 FEC's meetings were held in 15 project communities around the Gola Forest landscape to select 15 eco-guards to be supported under the project. 14 males and 4 females have been selected and are patrolling the Gola Forest National Park. The 15 eco-guards are now collecting data on IWT target species and threats within the Gola Forest National Park in Liberia. Additionally, they also conduct awareness meetings within the park fringe communities.

*1.15 Train eco-guards: 2 training sessions at the GRC (4 days each) and 2 in Liberia at the start of project and one refresher training as required:* Initial training has been held in Liberia and Sierra Leone. One joint refresher training has been held in Liberia and six species champions and rangers from Sierra Leone will attend and then train others once back in Kenema.

Two (2) refresher training have been carried out in June and September 2022 for the Species Champions. The training focus on GPS, Compass, and Navigation as well as species identification. The training was held in two locations namely Kongbor and Normon community.

Two SMART Mobile and eco-guard patrol training exercises were held in Liberia last year. As part of the second training event, 6 rangers from Sierra Leone attended and will transfer the knowledge to others in GRNP. Refresher training sessions in SMART Mobile were not conducted in 2022 as eco-guards were

able to patrol and learn on the job, led by SCNL Field technicians. However, these patrols were conducted in April/May 2022 and refresher training is planned for Feb/Mar 2023.

## **Output 2. Wildlife based or conflict reducing Livelihoods**

*Activities 2.1 to 2.8 Eco-tourism:* links have been made with private sector tour operators. In Sierra Leone discussions have been ongoing with Visit Sierra Leone (VSL). A draft agreement between GRC and VSL to manage tourism traffic to the Gola Rainforest has been prepared and is awaiting the approval of VSL. Meetings have continued between GRC Eco-tourism staff and the Ministry of Tourism to discuss how Gola can fit into the national tourism strategy. Sites have been identified in Gola north and at Lalehun and Sileti. The latter two locations have been rehabilitated (as mentioned above). VSL has not yet visited other proposed camp sites (these sites have been mapped and potential trails through the forest identified and mapped). Each site is linked to a specific community to provide a cultural experience and connect with wildlife conservation. These pilot sites will be developed in January 2023 with the help of local staff from neighbouring villages.

The plan is to focus on tourism in Liberia and Sierra Leone separately at first then look at the possibility of cross border tourist circuits while consulting with the Ministries of Tourism to see how cross boarder collaboration can work. To that end a joint visit to Libassa Eco Lodge in Liberia was held and discussions initiated with Libassa Management, Jos Travel, and the Embassy of Sierra Leone in Liberia to establish a partnership agreement. The final review and signing of this agreement is planned for December 2022.

In Liberia: SCNL and RSPB continue to work with the multidisciplinary team to implement the business plan for Gola ecotourism. The Business Plan, created through collaboration with the Forest Development Authority's (FDA) Liberia Forest Sector Project (LFPS), defines a detailed roadmap for development of the **Northern Circuit**. The focal points of this circuit are **Gola Forest National Park (GFNP)** and **Lake Piso Multiple-Use Reserve (MUR)**, located approximately 5- and 2.5-hour's drive from Monrovia, respectively, with an optional visit to Tubmanburg/Blue Lake, which is approximately halfway between the two protected areas (PAs). The site is being measured to start building the tourist infrastructure outlined in the plan presented in the last Annual report.

**Cultural Value Assessment:** The purpose of the assessment was to hold tourism awareness meetings in communities about benefits and negative impacts of ecotourism and to assess opportunities to add cultural value trekking and nature-based tours. The methodology used for the assessment was an open discussion and visit to areas of cultural value and potential ecotourism site. Fourteen Gola Forest Landscape communities in Liberia were visited during the assessment. The communities are Fornor, Gbanju, Kawelahun, Benduma, Fula Camp, Camp Israel, Soso Camp, Greenbar City, Tima Town, SLC, Zuie, Kongbor, Daniel Camp and Camp Alpha. Sites of interest were identified for ecotourism potential mainly Picathartes colonies, Waterfalls, Bat caves, Flat rats, and a mounting with higher altitude for area view of the Gola Forest National Park

*2.8-2.10 Beekeeping:* In Liberia training on Beekeeping has been completed. Equipment has been distributed and Beekeepers have constructed hives using local materials. Beekeepers are now producing honey. More hives means more honey money and beekeepers have been encouraged to build as many hives as possible.

In Sierra Leone, links have been established between Rory's Well, Gola Forest Conservation (GRC), Bees Abroad, Melo and PAD-SL. Beekeepers are now marketing honey in the local, national, and external markets. The lead bee farmers are now supporting new training initiatives. GRC have since been in contact with the local beekeeping groups to make arrangements to extend this training to further FECs.

## **Output 3. Research and monitoring**

*3.1 Hold Gender Action and learning System (GALS) training and use GALS tools to understand involvement of persons from different gender in IWT process and reduce gender inequality:* Completed: GRC and Birdlife Partners have developed gender policies with the aim of mainstreaming gender throughout all project activities. GRC has built on previous training in the GALS tools. An additional training session for Nomo FECs is being developed for next year.

*3.2 Conduct monthly field surveys of signs of hunting of IWT target species across the project area in SL and LIB and constantly review trends:* Park Rangers in the GRNP and Eco-guard's in the GFNP collect SMART data for the Gola database, this information is analysed and fed back to the Park Operations Department for ranger patrol planning meetings and directs how the rangers are deployed in the following



week (Please see Annex 1 & 2) for summary data generated by these patrols in Sierra Leone and Liberia). Species Champions in FECs also record signs of IWT target species in their community forests.

In Liberia SMART patrols conducted by eco-guards obtain data on hunting of target and other species across GFNP. No patrols are currently possible in Foya PPA due to absence of FDA staff.

*3.3 Conduct camera trap baseline and end of project surveys of IWT target species across the project area in SL and LIB and analyse data:* Sierra Leone 37 camera traps were initially deployed along the upper reaches of the Morro River in Malema Chiefdom, which forms the border with Liberia. These cameras were collected in April 2022 after a full year of deployments (4 in total). For the next phase of the project in Nomo Chiefdom 36 cameras were deployed along this stretch of the Morro River following the same protocols. This first deployment in Nomo ran from June to September 2022. The next deployment in Nomo is scheduled for November 2022 to January 2023.

In Liberia, 10 traps have been deployed so far in Kongbor and a further 15 cameras are presently being deployed in south, central and north of Gola Forest National Park. Also, in July 2022 10 cameras were deployed in Sokpo community forest. Eco-guards and Species Champions identified signs and locations of key species and cameras are posted in these places.

*3.4 Compile/analyse information from the pilot informants' network, species champions reports and community meetings to identify IWT target species, identify trends in hunting, and evaluate the different methods of collecting information:* The team is compiling data from the REDD, IWT and Darwin projects in Malema, Tunkia, Nomo, and Makpele. This includes the 37 camera traps that were deployed near the Liberian border along with other camera traps deployed for regular monitoring under the REDD Project. Camera trap deployment protocols were developed through the Darwin project and have been used for REDD and IWT deployment. The first reports from Nomo Species Champions will be added to data from Species Champion reports in Malema that have been compiled from the Darwin project. We are also compiling initial data in Liberia.

*3.5 Collect genetic samples to support transboundary efforts to control IWT:* While elephants have been captured on some camera traps over this period, very few dung samples have been found and collected in Sierra Leone. Information from both Liberia and Sierra Leone is sent to our partner Elephant research conservation (ELRECO). We are now waiting for analysis and feedback from their research. GRC has also developed a partnership with the NOVA University of Lisbon to conduct genomic analyses of primate populations in the Gola Landscape, including western chimpanzees. 12 faecal samples from Gola were collected between March and May 2022 and sent for analysis together with samples collected from previous field visits.

*3.6 Pilot the Wild Scan and SMART monitoring systems:* We have decided not to use Wild Scan but to focus training on SMART. As previously reported a Community Eco-guard Protocol (CEP) has been developed in Liberia, which allows for more strategic monitoring of the forest (biological and enforcement), using a grid system (4x4km cells) across the entire protected area. Data has been collected via GPS and datasheets and passed on to SCNL staff for entry and reporting. However, while the desk-based software is being used to compile patrol data, the devices are not being fully utilized, and thus additional refresher training is planned by the project for early 2023.

*3.7 Socio-economic research on the drivers of IWT:* Completed.

*3.8 Recording of illegal activity through the eco-guard information gathering network:* In Sierra Leone, the ranger units have been conducting monthly patrols to monitor illegal activity in the National Park, while Species Champions have been conducting regular patrols of community forests recording signs of illegal logging, mining, and poaching.

*3.9 Share all data with organisations on the Technical Advisory Group:* this task has not yet been completed in Sierra Leone. In Liberia the Species working group meet every two months and a member of our team participates and shares information at these meetings. As well as the Law Enforcement Committee (PA monitoring system, members include FFI, CI, EU, British Embassy, police, military judiciary) this committee meets every three months and is well established. We are now advocating this type of meeting for all countries in the region.

#### **Output 4. Community awareness**

*Activity 4.1:* Initial community meetings with Gola Community Development Committees (GCDCs) and Community Forest Management Committees (CFMCs) in 15 FECs in SL and 14 FECs in Liberia have

been held. The process of developing IWT regulations and bylaws is ongoing and will continue into next year. The CDRO for Malema together with GDCs Malema held meetings with 20 FECs (Vaama, Dukor, Yollor, Makpoima, Seiyama, Congo, Levuma, Peyama, Goli, Missila, Banni, Moigbaima, Mayengema, wangiakor, Njagolahun, Patama, Takpoima, Teyama, Jenneh and Njama) to develop, promote and adopt IWT regulations and bylaws. 16 FECs in Nomo chiefdom were not visited due to the deterioration of the road network over the rainy season. These communities will be visited in the upcoming dry season.

*4.2 Establishment and support of nature clubs and school programs:* In Sierra Leone, GRC has an extensive network of nature clubs established under the REDD project. The IWT project supports this network. Over this period support was extended to pupils from 34 primary schools across 6 chiefdoms (Tunkia 6, Malema 6, Guara 6, Makpele 6, Koya 5 and Barri 5) and 11 secondary schools (Tunkia 2, Malema 2, Barri 2, Makele 3, Guara 1 and Koya 1). Nomo Chiefdom was not visited due to the poor road network but visits to 6 schools (5 primary and 1 secondary) are planned for December 2022.

In Liberia SCNL continues to support nine communities in the Norman, Sokpo and Tonglay Community Forest areas and has developed a plan to support the management of these community forests. The project has linked to schools in these communities and set up nature clubs with students in each one. Five (5) nature clubs were established during the project implementation. The schools are Nuru Islamic, Mano River Kongo elementary and junior high public school, Israel public school, Robert's Port High School, St. John Episcopal High School in Grand Cape Mount County and Kongbor public school Gbarpolu County. Leadership structure has been put in place to each of the schools to help run the nature clubs effectively within these schools. The leadership is made up of teachers and students. They received training from SCNL environmental education officer for effective running of the nature clubs to make the school nature clubs active, two nature club schools at Mano River Kongo Grand Cape Mount, Nuru Islamic Elementary School, Samuel R. Siaffa Elementary and Junior High School, were involved in Pygmy Hippo Day celebration. Forty-two students participated with the celebration.

*4.3 Awareness raising around protected areas through community meetings drama and theatre:* Theatre groups have been expanded and supported through the project. More species-specific activities have also been conducted in the past to raise awareness about the importance of pygmy hippos in FECs employing a local drama troupe: the 'Eastern Entertainers'. GRC is currently developing a programme for a similar performance to convey conservation messages related to the importance and value of chimpanzees with the aim of holding the drama early next year (2023).

*4.4 Development of awareness raising strategy and materials with project partners:* The awareness raising strategy for IWT in Sierra Leone follows that of the Environmental Education Unit under the REDD Project. The strategy includes road shows (chiefdom, sectional and village), radio discussion programs, drama by nature club pupils or external drama teams, printing of T-shirts, and posters. These typically cover a broad suite of environmental issues, such as climate change and general rules and laws relating to the use of forest resources, but also include specific messaging around IWT and protected species.

In Liberia, SCNL is finalising a strategy in collaboration with FDA, Wild Chimpanzee Fund (WCF), Fauna and Flora International (FFI) and Conservation International (CI). An information flyer is also being developed outlining the strategy.

*4.5 Conduct awareness raising campaigns with the public and stakeholders in market areas:* We continue to develop success stories to feature on websites, blogs and social media and nature magazines. We also hold road shows and workshops about protected species, penalties for killing protected species and livelihood alternatives to hunting.

*4.6 Conduct general awareness raising activities through radio shows and production song:* As part of the REDD project GRC has organised regular radio forest messaging programmes, talking about community forest leadership and ethics. Messages have gone out over the radio in Sierra Leone and songs have been written about positive messages. In July 2022 a special radio programme was held to mark World Chimpanzee Day (14<sup>th</sup> July) with the GRC Research and Monitoring superintendent joining a joint broadcast with Eastern Community Radio FM 101.9 and Nyapui Radio FM 106.6 located in Kenema City, Sierra Leone. This featured a discussion with local callers about the importance of chimpanzees as Sierra Leone's national animal and details of wildlife laws with respect to consequences when caught poaching and selling live or dead chimpanzees. This awareness raising activity led directly to the voluntary surrender of two young chimpanzees, which were being kept as pets, to GRC just a week later. The chimpanzees were immediately transported to the Tacugama Chimpanzee Sanctuary close to Freetown to be placed under their care. Due to the success of this radio show, an additional talk show is being planned for February 2023 to coincide with World Pangolin Day.

Pygmy Hippo Day celebration and awareness at Mano River Kongo, Grand Cape Mount County. The National Pygmy Hippo Day celebration was organized by the Society for the Conservation of Nature of Liberia (SCNL) on the 8<sup>th</sup> of April 2022 and was celebrated at Mano River Kongo, Grand Cape Mount. Forty-two (42) students from Nuru Islamic Elementary School, Samuel R. Siaffa Elementary and Junior High School, Paramount chief of Porkpa District, Mano River Kongo Town Chief and General Town Chief as well as two (2) FDA rangers and SCNL staff attended the occasion. The day was graced in two ways: outdoor- where students and participants paraded the principal street of Mono River Kongo town and later gathered at the Mano River Kongo general market to create awareness about Pygmy Hippo's using flyers, posters, and banners. The indoor program was done at Samuel R. Siaffa School Elementary and Junior High School auditorium.

*4.7 Lecture events held at the Universities about IWT, bushmeat and updated law and regulation:* Not yet completed, planned for early 2023.

One nature talk was held at William V. S. Tubman High School on Friday 29<sup>th</sup> July 2022 in Liberia. The topic for the nature talk was protecting Liberia's wildlife through community engagement and improved law enforcement. The presenters were drawn from FDA and SCNL. Below is the list of the speakers and their respective positions

1. Edward Appleton. Manager wildlife confiscation and anti-smuggling unit of the Forestry Development Authority (FDA)
2. Peaches S. Cumme. Awareness Officer at ecotourism division of the Forestry Development Authority (FDA)
3. Boahen G. Sambola. Research Officer / Community eco-guard coordinator at Gola Forest Landscape Society for the Conservation of Nature of Liberia (SCNL)

**Output 5. for best practice approach to fighting IWT**

*Activities 5.1 to 5.3 under Output 5:* A workshop sharing lessons learnt and legislation from the project will be held in the final year. In Liberia project staff continue to be part of the Law Enforcement Working Group, a team that is developing a national strategy to combat wildlife crime (FFI, SCNL, FDA Interpol and CI), a draft will soon be released.

g

**2a. Give details of any notable problems or unexpected developments/lessons learnt that the project has encountered over the last 6 months (for COVID-19 specific delays/problems, please use 2b). Explain what impact these could have on the project and whether the changes will affect the budget and timetable of project activities.**

Most of the problems have been Covid related, which caused initial delays and have had a knock-on effect which have been difficult to catch up on.

Local partners Management capacity is still limited, we have focused a lot of our support to planning, monitoring and financial management, progress is slow, but improvements are being made.

Achieving a good gender balance of staff, eco-guards in Liberia and species champions in Sierra Leone is particularly difficult due to cultural and religious reasons. We are now having some success encouraging younger, unmarried female adults to join, especially in Nomo Chiefdom.

Support covering stipends of eco-guards in Liberia from other projects as sometimes been difficult to coordinate.

FDA and Park Ranger capacity in Liberia is very low and government resources difficult to access, making the ranger network very inefficient. Training in urgently needed.

**2b. Please outline any specific issues which your project has encountered as a result of COVID-19. Where you have adapted your project activities in response to the pandemic, please briefly outline how you have done so here. Explain what residual impact there may be on your project and whether the changes will affect the budget and timetable of project activities.**

Again, we have needed to replan and re-budget the project in response to the knock-on delays caused by Covid on the park Rangers training programme. We have now found an alternative training organisation, but they are not available until April/May 2023.

There is a residual impact on the project in terms of the speed in which some activities could be implemented, some of the activities have been delayed and we may need to request for a no cost extension to the project to complete all the deliverables. This has left the camera trap program and species champion component behind schedule.

**2c. Have any of these issues been discussed with LTS International and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?**

Discussed with LTS: Yes, in previous report

Formal change request submitted: Yes, a change request will be submitted in December

Received confirmation of change acceptance: No

**3a. Do you currently expect to have any significant (e.g., more than £5,000) underspend in your budget for this year?**

Yes  No  Estimated underspend: ████████

**3b. If yes, then you need to consider your project budget needs carefully.** Please remember that any funds agreed for this financial year are only available to the project in this financial year.

**If you anticipate a significant underspend because of justifiable changes within the project, please submit a re-budget Change Request as soon as possible. There is no guarantee that Defra will agree a re-budget, so please ensure you have enough time to make appropriate changes if necessary. Please DO NOT send these in the same email as your report.**

**4. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to IWT Challenge Fund management, monitoring, or financial procedures?**

Staff change from Fiona Sanderson, Conservation Scientist to Ryan Wilkie, TA Research.