

## Location



## Introduction

The Republic of Sierra Leone is a country on the southwest coast of West Africa. It is bordered by Guinea to the north and east, Liberia to the southeast and the Atlantic ocean to the southwest and west. Sierra Leone has a tropical climate, with the rainy season running from May to December. The Atlantic coastline is 402km long and there are 19 islands off the coast.

## Regional Seas and Biogeography

Atlantic Ocean  
West, Central and Southern Africa.  
Guinea current LME

## Habitats

The coastline of Sierra Leone can be divided into two sections: the section north of Bonthe on Sherbro island, characterized by a series of estuaries, bays and creeks and the south section with about 200km of nearly unbroken steep coast, and beach ridge backed with coastal swamps. The coast is dominated by mangrove-fringed rias, with some sandy beaches, low cliffs on the Bullom Peninsula and mountains on the peninsula where the capital port city of Freetown is located. Turtle islands are a remote archipelago of 8 islands off the middle of coast, inhabited by fishermen and one of the islands is off limits to anyone except men who have been initiated through a rite of passage. Major river deltas/wetlands include the Scarcies river basin, Sierra Leone estuary, Sherbro river basin and Gallinas and mano rivers basin. Sandy beaches occur all along the Freetown Peninsula interrupted only by a few rocky headlands and bays, some areas dominated by mangroves. Sandy beaches serve as nesting grounds for turtles and birds including gulls, sandpipers, terns and pelicans.

- ➔ Mangroves – there is an extensive belt of mangroves throughout Sierra Leone’s coastline usually on tidal flats around river mouths. Mangroves occur along the Scarcies River, Sierra Leone River, along creeks and bays in the Western Area, the Yawri Bay and along the Sherbro River.
- ➔ Seagrasses – only documented recently, seagrasses are known to occur around the Turtle islands.

## Biodiversity Hotspots

### ➔ Ramsar sites

**The Sierra Leone river estuary** is a RAMSAR site and IBA dominated by mangrove systems, with lowland coastal plains to the north and the estuary widening to form a very deep natural harbour. Also an IBA, the site is important for several waterbird species such as curlew sandpiper (VU), Eurasian oystercatcher (*Haematopus ostralegus*) and greenshank, including some breeding habitat for species such as greenback heron (*Butorides striata*). The estuary is one of the four major sites for wintering waders in Sierra Leone and numbers regularly exceed 20,000 individuals.

### ➔ National Parks and ecological reserves

**The Western Area peninsula Forest NP**, part of the Freetown peninsula and also an IBA, is a narrow hill chain, bounded by a thin strip of shoreline and being drained by several rocky, seasonally flowing streams. The site is known for White-crested Tiger-heron (*Tigriornis leucolopha*).

### ➔ IBAs

**Yawri bay** is a shallow coastal wetland, with extensive intertidal mudflats and mangrove swamps. The site supports populations of royal tern (*Sterna maxima*), West African manatee (VU) as well as green (EN), loggerhead (VU) and Olive ridley (VU) turtles. Waterbird numbers across the bay are regularly are over 20,000. Winter visitors include several species of flamingo, egret, pelican, oystercatcher, curlew, godwit, knot and sandpiper.

### ➔ IMMAs

There are no IMMAs designated in Sierra Leone.

## At risk Wildlife

In this section, some individual wildlife species are mentioned followed by a letter in parentheses. These are species included in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species within the top three categories of risk - Vulnerable to extinction (VU), Endangered (EN) or Critically Endangered (CR). A more complete list of IUCN listed species is found in Appendix 1.

### → At risk birds

There are twenty three species of seabirds which frequent Sierra Leone coastal waters, although most do not have special conservation status. Seabirds observed include a number of gull and tern species, as well as cormorants, boobies, gannets, pelicans, storm petrels and shearwaters. Waders, many winter visitors and a few breeding species, include bitterns, sandpipers, ibis, storks, geese and swans, ducks, flamingo and several species of heron. Resident species include white-crested tiger heron (*Tigriornis leucophola*). The white-necked rockfowl (VU), the National bird of Sierra Leone, is found near rivers and streams.

### → At risk reptiles

Five species of sea turtles are found in Sierra Leone: loggerhead (VU), green (EN), leatherback (VU), hawksbill (CR) and Olive ridley (VU). Only green and leatherback turtles routinely nest in the country, which normally happens between September and November. The highest nesting occurs on the Turtle Islands, Sherbro Island, Turner's Peninsula (south of Sherbro) and along the Freetown peninsula.

West African crocodiles (*Crocodylus suchus*) is occasionally seen in wetlands in Sierra Leone and the Slender-snouted crocodile (CR) is also thought to occur in the country as well as the Nile crocodile (*Crocodylus niloticus*).

### → At risk mammals

Mammals known in Sierra Leone's waters include Atlantic humpback dolphin (CR), blue whale (*Balaenoptera musculus*) (EN), Clymene dolphin (*Stenella clymene*) and Humpback whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*). Whales are normally observed during August to December.

West African manatees are found in most river systems in Sierra Leone, especially at the coast and in river mouths, moving upstream during the rainy season.

## Past experience with oil spill and potential risks

Sierra Leone has not experienced any major marine oil spills. Oil and gas exploration is at an early stage, but large undeveloped reserves are known and the country is preparing to licence an increasing wave of exploration activities, so the risk of oil spills is likely to increase.

## International and Regional Treaties and Agreements

### → Oil spill and HNS Response

d CLC Convention 69

CLC Protocol 76

CLC Protocol 92

FUND Protocol 76

FUND Protocol 92

FUND Protocol 2003

LLMC Convention 76

LLMC Protocol 96

OPRC Convention 90

HNS Convention 96

HNS PROT 2010

OPRC\_HNS 2000

BUNKERS CONVENTION 01

### → Marine Biodiversity Protection

- Abidjan Convention for Cooperation in the Protection, Management and Development of the Marine and

Coastal Environment of the Atlantic Coast of the West and Central Africa Region  
- GI-WACAF (The Global Initiative for West, Central and Southern Africa)

## **Oil Spill Response and HNS Spill Response**

### **→ National Contingency Plan?**

The National Oil Spill Contingency Plan of Sierra Leone was adopted in 2012 and is undergoing revision as at 2024.

### **→ Role of Competent National Authorities**

The competent national authority for oil spill response is the Sierra Leone Maritime Administration (SLMA). They have overall responsibility for coordinating national response organisations and coordinating with Lead Agencies of other States, regional bodies and international response organisations. As lead agency, the SMLA will direct the Response team, and ensuring that other agencies play an appropriate part in supporting any action. The NOSCP is based on an ICS structure, with the Armed Forces taking responsibility for the Operations Section, the SLMA logistics and finance/admin and the Environmental Protection Agency taking Planning.

Under the Environment Protection Agency Act, all oil spills must be reported to the Executive Chairman of the Environment Protection Agency and owners or carriers of a pollutant must prepare contingency plans and respond to oil spills from their operators.

## **Oiled Wildlife Preparedness and Response**

### **→ Formal guidelines?**

According to the NOSCP, the Environmental Officer is responsible for identifying and protecting sensitive areas including wildlife and for identifying threatened species and preparing to recover and rehabilitate injured wildlife. This role is normally played by a qualified representative from the Ministry of Land, Country Planning and Environment (MLCPE) or the Environment Protection Agency. However, no detail on wildlife response strategies and stakeholders are provided in the NOSCP.

There is no reference of a national oiled wildlife response plan.

### **→ Response objectives and strategy**

No reference

### **→ Euthanasia or rehabilitation?**

Oiled wildlife rehabilitation is likely permitted, as the NOSCP states that this shall be done, if possible, by the Conservation Society of Sierra Leone (CSSL) and other similar bodies.

### **→ Impact assessment**

The Conservation Society of Sierra Leone (CSSL) would likely get involved in supporting impact assessment activities as they carry out monitoring of bird and turtle populations. As would the Institute of Marine Biology and Oceanography at Fourah Bay College.

### **→ Notification and early response**

No reference.

### **→ Wildlife responders**

CSSL would likely get involved in supporting an oiled wildlife response as well as Friends of the Earth Sierra Leone.

### **→ Cooperation between stakeholders**

There is no formal arrangement for cooperation between stakeholders.

### **→ Permanent facilities**

There are rescue facilities for chimpanzees and domestic animals in Sierra Leone, but not for marine or oiled wildlife.

### **→ Current processes**

CSSL, in conjunction with the Environment Protection Agency, the Maritime Administration (SLMA) and the Institute of Marine Biology and Oceanography (IMBO) at the University of Sierra Leone have been collaborating on activities (COGAPE initiative) to mitigate impacts of imminent oil pollution on the marine coastal environment

and nearby communities.

## Documentation and references

### General references

Action plan for the conservation of the West African Manatee. [https://www.cms.int/sites/default/files/document/Afr\\_Cet\\_Man\\_Manatees\\_AP\\_e\\_0.pdf](https://www.cms.int/sites/default/files/document/Afr_Cet_Man_Manatees_AP_e_0.pdf)

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## **Appendix 1**

### **→ At risk birds**

**Common name / Latin name / IUCN Red List Category (CR,EN,VU) / Resident-Migratory (season) / Breeding-Nesting-Pupping (season)**

Grey Plover / *Pluvialis squatarola* / VU / Resident/migratory /  
Curlew Sandpiper / *Calidris ferruginea* / VU / Resident/migratory /  
White-necked rockfowl / *Picathartes gymnocephalus* / VU / Resident /

### **→ At risk reptiles**

**Common name / Latin name / IUCN Red List Category (CR,EN,VU) / Resident-Migratory (season) / Breeding-Nesting-Pupping (season)**

Leatherback turtle / *Dermochelys coriacea* / VU / /  
Hawksbill turtle / *Eretmochelys imbricata* / CR / /  
Green turtle / *Chelonia mydas* / EN / /  
Olive ridley turtle / *Lepidochelys olivacea* / VU / /  
Loggerhead turtle / *Caretta caretta* / VU / /  
West African slender-snouted crocodile / *Mecistops cataphractus* / CR / /

### **→ At risk mammals**

**Common name / Latin name / IUCN Red List Category (CR,EN,VU) / Resident-Migratory (season) / Breeding-Nesting-Pupping (season)**

Atlantic humpback dolphin / *Sousa teuszii* / CR / Migratory / Not well studied  
Blue whale / *Balaenoptera musculus* / EN / Migratory (Aug-december) / Not well studied