

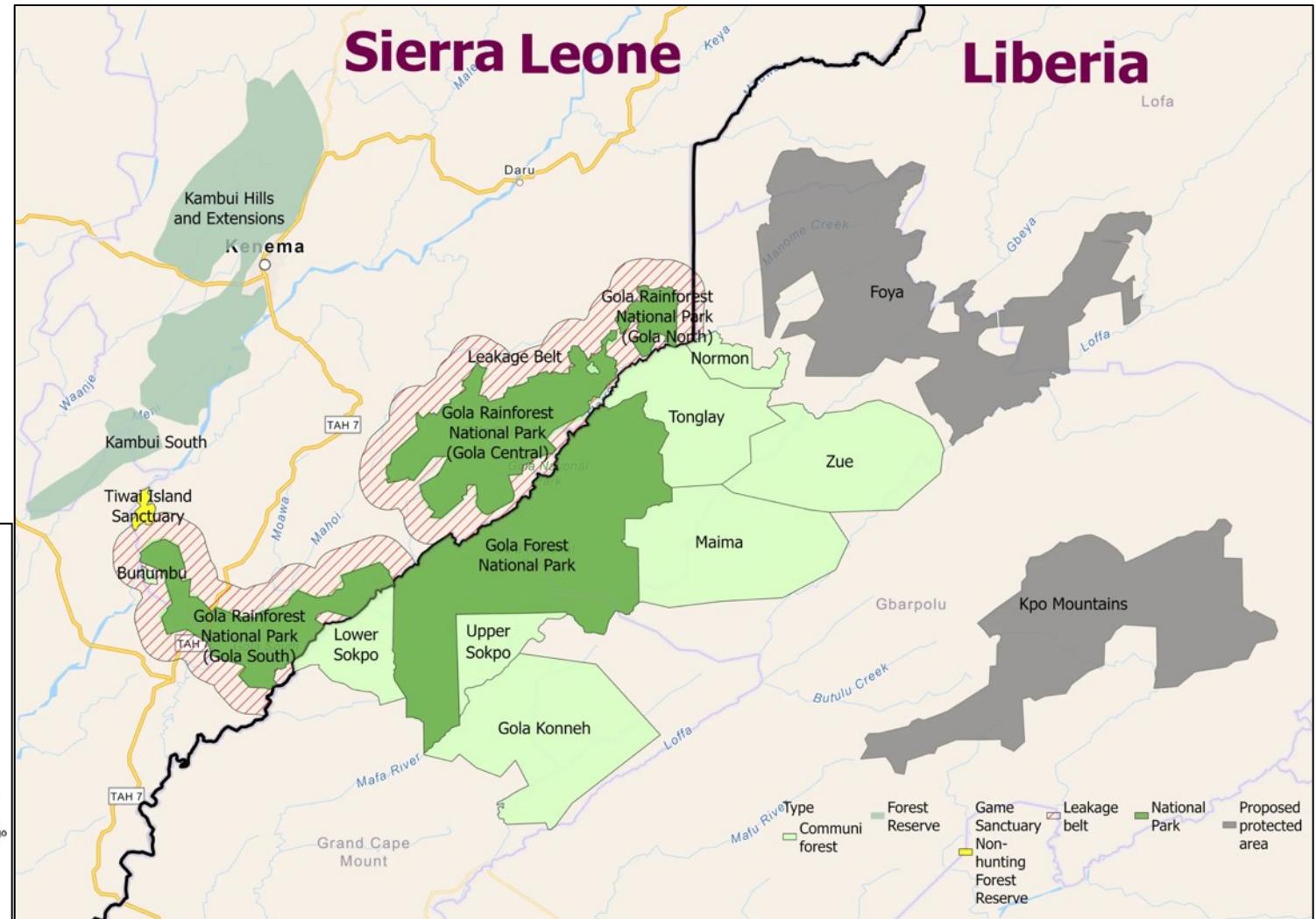
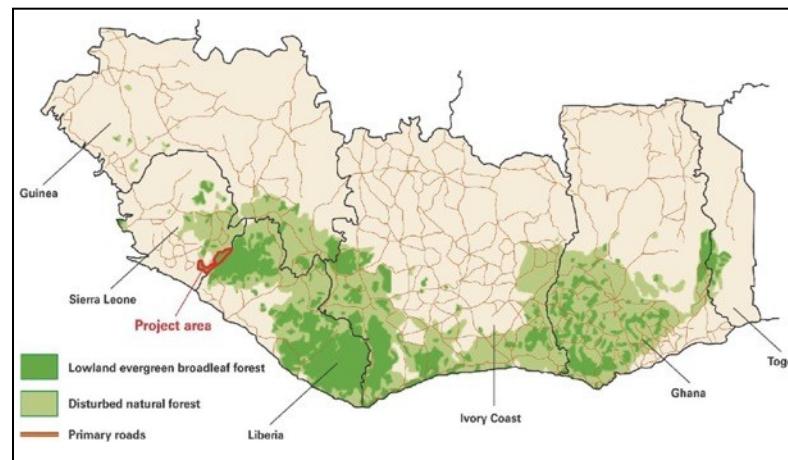


The Gola REDD+ Project

Securing a Future for Forests, People, and Biodiversity

The Greater Gola Landscape

A Transboundary Landscape
Sierra Leone and Liberia





Brief History of Gola

1920s: Gola Forest Reserves designated for timber extraction.

1930s-1980s: Peak commercial logging, southern regions heavily logged.

1989: Biodiversity assessment by Dr. Glyn Davies highlights unique forest value.

1991-2001: Civil war in Sierra Leone; poaching and encroachment heavily impact wildlife.

2000s: Post-conflict conservation projects supported by RSPB aid in wildlife recovery.

2010: Gola Forest Reserves gazetted as Gola Rainforest National Park.

Gola Rainforest National Park

Established in 2010

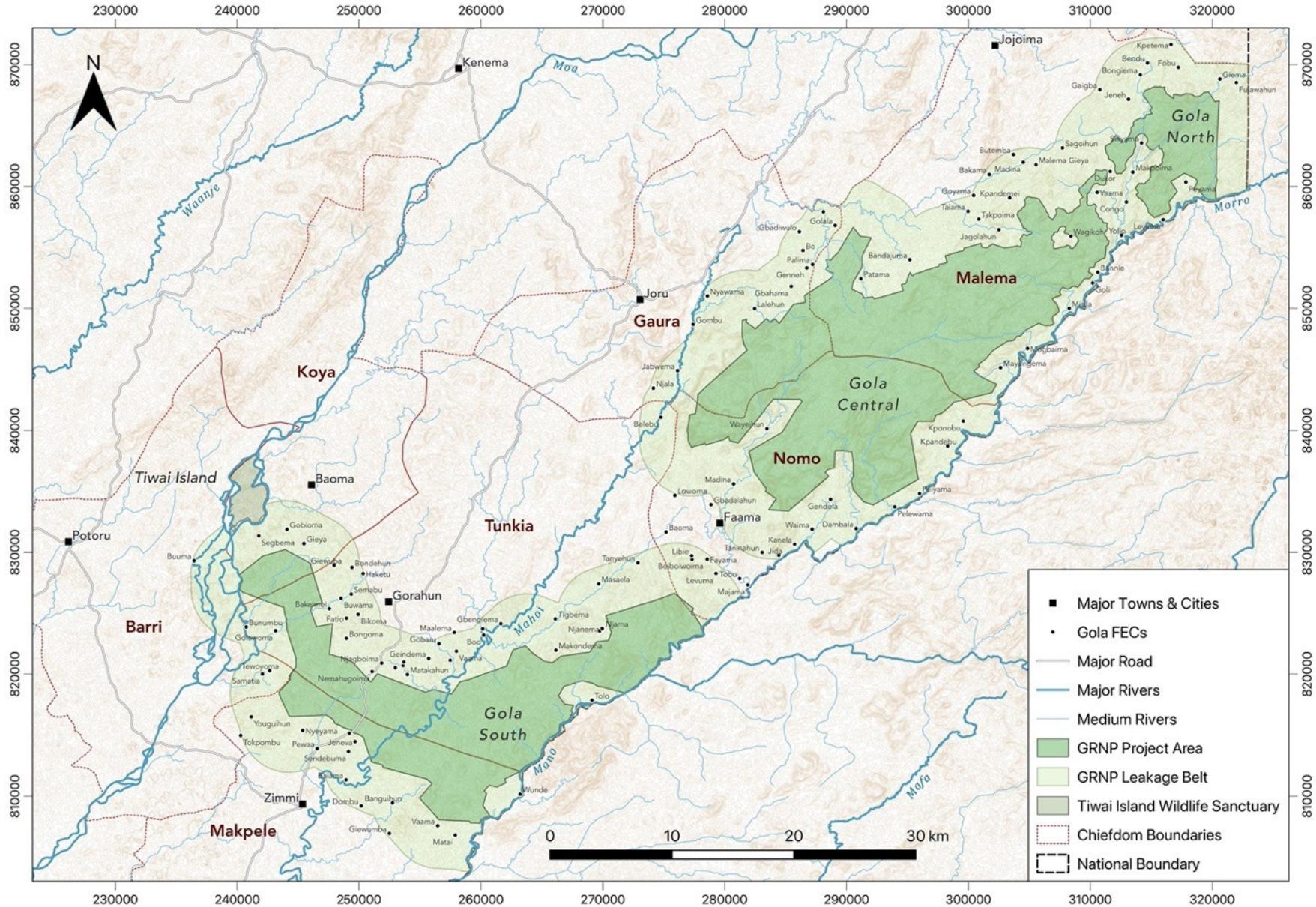
70,000 ha of protected forest

4km “Leakage Belt” (70,000 ha)

7 Gola Chiefdoms

122 Forest Edge Communities

480+ Offsite Communities



Gola REDD+ Project



Date	Milestones
Scoping	<p>2002 Gola Conservation Concession Framework officially established to develop a multi-stakeholder approach to the conservation and management of the Gola Forest Reserves.</p>
Feasibility	<p>2006 Scoping study carried out to investigate long term financing strategies for protected areas in Sierra Leone concludes that REDD financing has potential</p>
Project Initiation	<p>2007 Cooperation and Benefit Sharing Agreement between the local communities and partners (National Commission on the Environment and Forestry – NaCEF, RSPB, CSSL and the seven Chiefdoms) signed</p>
Feasibility	<p>2008 First REDD feasibility study carried out for Gola forests by Eco-securities concludes that REDD could create sustainable funding for the management of Gola Rainforest.</p>
Project Initiation	<p>2009 First comprehensive management plan finalised (2007-2012)</p>
Project Initiation	<p>2010 Gola Rainforest National Park declared on 25 November 2010</p>
Project Initiation	<p>2011 Second REDD feasibility study and preparations begin to develop a REDD project</p>
Project Initiation	<p>2012 1st August, Gola REDD+ Project start date</p>
Project Initiation	<p>2012-2013 Agreements signed between landowner representatives and the Government to exchange carbon rights for project benefits.</p> <p>National Park boundaries are demarcated on the ground in agreement in the 86 Forest Edge Communities sharing a direct border.</p> <p>Numerous meetings and dialogues held with Forest Edge Communities and other stakeholders to develop the Gola REDD+ project activities.</p>
Project Initiation	<p>2015 Gola Rainforest Conservation LG established to act as project proponent for the Gola REDD project. REDD Benefit Sharing Agreement signed by GRC LG and the 7 Chiefdoms.</p>

Gola REDD+ Project



- Project started in 2012 with 30-year lifespan
- Gola REDD+ project follows the voluntary REDD standards offered by Verra
- Standards used:
 1. Verified Carbon Standard (VCS)
 2. Climate, Community and Biodiversity Standard (CCB)
- Third party assesses the project and its GHG emission reductions and removals against all applicable VCS and CCB Standards rules and requirements.



Verified Carbon
Standard



Climate, Community
& Biodiversity Standards



Organisational Structure



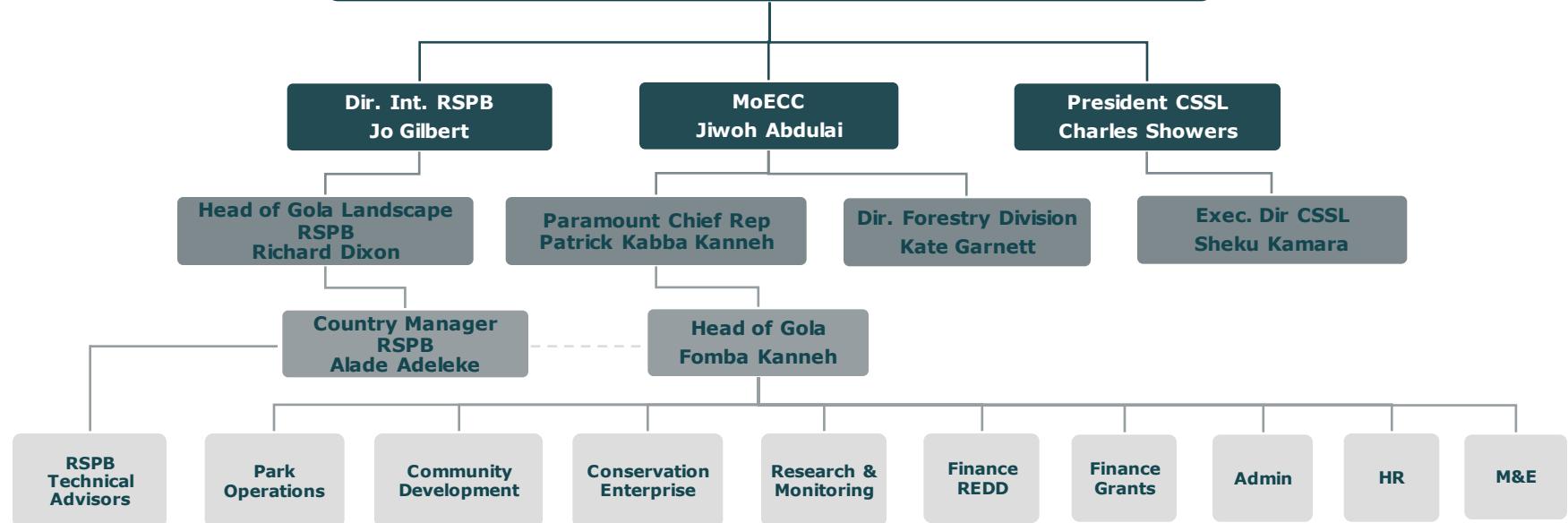
Gola Rainforest Conservation Est. 2015

Members

Directors

Management

Departments



Gola REDD+ Progress



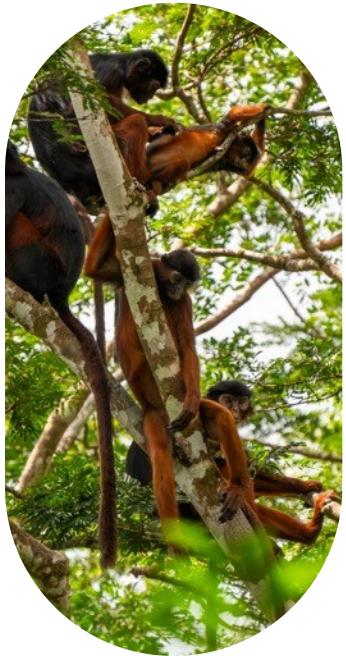
- Robust partnership: Government and civil society working together for past 20 years
- Protection of the 70,000 ha of National Park and surrounding Leakage Belt of the Gola forest and its biodiversity.
- Deliver community engagement and benefits to help protect the forest in 122 forest edge communities.
- Job creation and capacity building for about 170 staff to manage the project.
- Successfully verified by third party assessors twice and currently undergoing a verification process
- Sustainable financing achieved through carbon credit sales after initial investment by RSPB
- Estimated emissions reductions of about 3.4million tons in the past 10 years



Key Intervention Areas



**Protection &
Management**



**Research &
Monitoring**



**Community
Outreach &
Development**



**Sustainable
Livelihoods &
Enterprise**



Park Protection

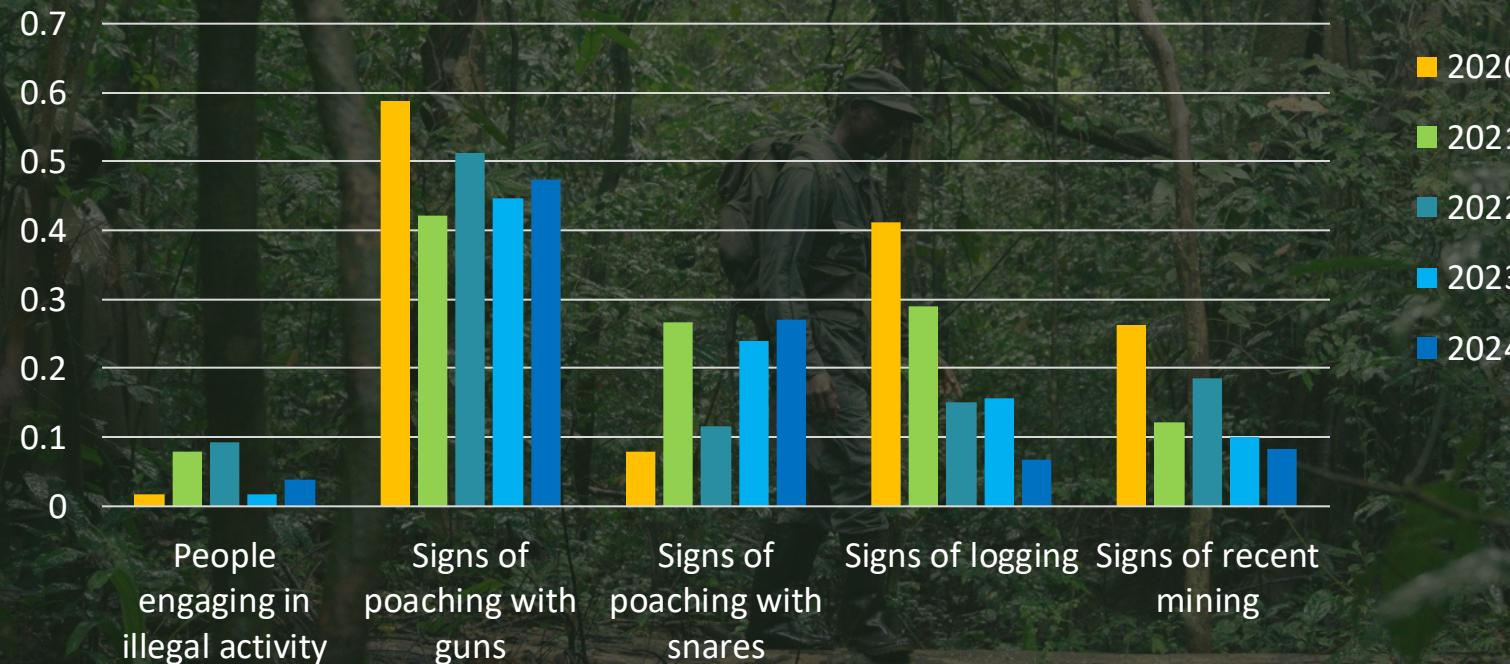
- 50+ forest rangers trained in surveillance and law enforcement protect the park from illegal human activities
- SMART (Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool) mobile-based patrol monitoring software in use since start of 2023
- Regular joint security patrols with support from RSLAF & SLP
- Boundary demarcation and dispute resolution with forest-edge communities



Park Protection



Illegal Activity Encounter Rate



2024 Patrol Stats:
121 Patrols
9,500+ km
96% of the National Park covered



Biodiversity

The project protects the largest remnants of Upper Guinean Rainforest left in Sierra Leone.

Recognised as a Key Biodiversity Area, which includes:

- 330+ species of birds
(11 threatened)
- 155 species of mammals
(19 threatened)
- 12 species of primates
(6 threatened)
- 1000+ species of plants
(33+ threatened)
- 54 species of amphibians
(1 threatened)





Biodiversity

- Camera traps have confirmed the presence of 18 threatened mammal and bird species including increased sightings of African Forest Elephants
- Surveys of White-necked Picathartes colonies show stable population over the past 10 years
- Chimpanzees and pygmy hippos show preference for protected areas over surrounding community forest
- Increases in primate encounter rates but smaller average group sizes



Climate

- The project ensures around 19 million tonnes of carbon remain locked within Gola's forests and safeguarded through sustainable management.
- The amount of carbon stored per ha of forest increased from 670.5 in 2018 to 756.51 tonnes CO₂/ha in 2024
- Satellite data indicate 38ha of forest (0.05%) was lost in National Park and 4,903ha of forest (7%) lost in Leakage Belt over 5 years between 2019-2023
- Over 1.7 million tonnes of avoided carbon dioxide emissions in 5 years between 2019 and 2023.



Community

- The project funds multiple community initiatives that help to build sustainable economic opportunities to ensure the change is permanent and rebuild infrastructure and services like schools, community halls, and clinics.
- 24,000+ people in 122 forest-edge communities directly benefit from the project
- Wider population of 7 Gola Chiefdoms (240,000+) benefit from project interventions
- Benefit sharing agreement compensates landowners and other stakeholders for opportunity costs associated with the project (~20% of annual operating costs)

Community

- The project has funded 85 community development projects since 2019
- Over 60 Village Savings and Loans (VSLA) groups established to improve financial resilience and invest in small-scale business
- Annual scholarships supported 1,169 children (50% girls) over 2019-2023
- Benefit Sharing Agreement expanded in 2022 to include wider stakeholders and provide university scholarships
- Communities supported with the establishment of 17 Community Forests and Community Conservation sites



Enterprise

The project promotes sustainable cocoa agroforestry models to maximize livelihood benefits, maintain biodiversity and forest cover.

Developing local cocoa business through:

- Improving yields, quality, and prices for farmers through sustainable cultivation practices
- Cloud-based traceability
- Improved market access and export facilitation
- Formation and strengthening of farmers' cooperatives





Enterprise

- Four Farmers' Cooperatives have now been established within the 7 Chiefdoms with a membership of 2,500+ farmers.
- Farmer incomes have improved with stronger, gender inclusive producer organizations, improved yields and increases in quality and prices of cocoa
- Developed forest-friendly principles to uniquely distinguish Gola cocoa production practices and create a niche craft market
- Shipments of cocoa with a total export volume of 109.4 tonnes were sold to cocoa buyers and chocolate manufacturing firms in Europe and the USA



Looking Forward

- Gola-Tiwai Complex inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in July 2025 – potential future expansion to include Gola Forest in Liberia
- Partners are developing a new 5-year plan for the Greater Gola Landscape
- Revision of benefit sharing agreements to focus on performance-based payments
- REDD+ project in development with partners in Liberia to secure sustainable financing for forest conservation in the Gola Forest and Foya PPA
- Greater focus on interdisciplinary research to understand patterns and drivers of forest resource use, land-use change, and human-wildlife conflict



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Protecting habitats, saving species and helping to end the nature and climate emergency.

**Nature is in crisis.
Together we can save it.**

Photo credits: Michael Duff, Nick Williams, Ryan Wilkie (RSPB)

A wide-angle photograph of a dense tropical forest at dawn or dusk. The sky is a soft, hazy blue and pink, with wispy clouds. The forest floor is obscured by a thick layer of low-hanging mist or fog. In the center of the image, the words "GOLA" and "A Forest of Hope" are written in a large, white, sans-serif font.

GOLA

A Forest of Hope