

Field Report: Rufford Grant Community Ecoguard Training in Foya Proposed Protected Area (FPPA)



Date: September 26, 2025

Location: Kolahun City, Foya Proposed Protected Area (FPPA), Lofa County

Implemented by: Dickarmien A. Deemie

1. Background

As part of the ongoing implementation of the Rufford Foundation–supported project titled “*Safeguarding the White-necked Picathartes (Picathartes gymnocephalus) in the Greater Gola Landscape of Liberia*”, the Science and Conservation Team of the Society for the Conservation of Nature of Liberia (SCNL) conducted a practical capacity-building workshop for community ecoguards and rangers in the **Foya Proposed Protected Area (FPPA)**.

The Foya landscape, situated in Lofa County, represents one of Liberia’s most biologically rich forest ecosystems, believed to support unconfirmed populations of the **White-necked Picathartes**, a globally Vulnerable species renowned for its distinctive nesting under rocky cliffs and overhangs.

This training sought to expand the project’s reach beyond the Gola Forest National Park (GFNP), strengthening conservation capacity and enhancing community participation in biodiversity protection across the broader Gola–Foya landscape.

2. Objectives of the Activity

The primary aim of the training was to empower local ecoguards and rangers with the technical skills and ecological understanding required to contribute effectively to the monitoring and protection of the White-necked Picathartes. Specifically, the training sought to:

- Deepen participants’ understanding of the species’ ecology, behavior, and conservation significance.
- Build competence in ecological monitoring, data recording, and nest identification.
- Strengthen coordination and communication between community-based ecoguards and FDA rangers.
- Promote community-led conservation through awareness and ownership.
- Establish a foundation for sustained collaborative action across the Foya landscape.

3. Participants

The training attracted a total of **24 participants**, comprising:

- **20 community ecoguards**, which exceeded the expected number of 10 participants.
- **4 FDA rangers** working within the Foya forest landscape.
- **SCNL Science and Conservation Team**, led by **Mr. Dickarmien A. Deemie**.
- Local leaders, youth representatives, and conservation enthusiasts from Kolahun and surrounding areas.

This impressive turnout demonstrated growing local interest in wildlife protection and community-driven conservation efforts in the Foya region.

4. Methodology and Approach

The one-day workshop was held at **Kolahun City Hall** and combined interactive discussions with hands-on demonstrations. The training methodology involved:

1. Presentations on the ecology and conservation status of the White-necked Picathartes.
2. Guided sessions on monitoring techniques and data collection tools.
3. Practical demonstrations on identifying nesting sites and suitable habitats.
4. Group discussions to identify community-level challenges and possible solutions.
5. Distribution of educational flyers and posters to reinforce awareness and advocacy among participants.

5. Key Presentations and Discussions

Presentation by Mr. Dickarmien A. Deemie – Rufford Project Coordinator

Mr. Deemie delivered a detailed and engaging presentation that introduced participants to the project's purpose, conservation vision, and implementation strategies. His session covered:

- **Project Overview:** Introduction to the Rufford Project's goals, components, and its significance for Liberia's forest biodiversity.
- **Species Ecology:** Detailed explanation of the White-necked Picathartes' life history, nesting habits, and habitat preferences.
- **Monitoring Techniques:** Practical guidance on data collection, mapping of colonies, and ethical field conduct.
- **Community Stewardship:** The central role of local ecoguards, elders, and traditional authorities in species protection.
- **Threat Identification:** Discussion on common threats—such as habitat destruction, shifting cultivation, and hunting—and potential mitigation approaches.
- **Integrating Indigenous Knowledge:** Using local environmental knowledge to locate potential nesting areas and track changes in wildlife activity.
- **Technical skills enhancement:** Use of GPS and Compass for navigation and recording of picathartes site
- **Data and Reporting Protocols:** How to properly document, compile, and share monitoring data with SCNL and FDA teams.

Participants expressed enthusiasm for the project, raising insightful questions about how monitoring data would be used and what future opportunities might arise for local involvement. Mr. Deemie emphasized the importance of consistency, teamwork, and accurate reporting to ensure meaningful conservation impact.

6. Expected and Achieved Outcomes

Expected Outcomes	Achievements
Enhanced knowledge of species ecology	Participants demonstrated increased understanding through practical exercises and discussions
Strengthened technical skills in monitoring	20 ecoguards and 4 rangers successfully trained in data recording and nest identification
Greater community involvement in conservation	Participants pledged to conduct routine patrols and share findings with SCNL/FDA teams
Improved collaboration between stakeholders	Stronger coordination established among SCNL, FDA, and community representatives
Broadened participation in project implementation	Attendance surpassed target, expanding project coverage and visibility in Foya PPA

7. Challenges

- **Limited Equipment:** The absence of sufficient GPS units and field cameras hindered practical demonstrations.
- **Transportation Difficulties:** Poor road conditions made it challenging for some participants from nearby communities to attend.
- **Connectivity Gaps:** Weak mobile network signals in parts of Foya limited real-time communication and coordination.

8. Recommendations

- Supply ecoguards with basic monitoring kits (GPS, cameras, notebooks, and protective gear).
- Conduct periodic refresher trainings to build consistency and improve technical performance.
- Facilitate regular communication between ecoguards and rangers through a structured reporting system.
- Expand community awareness campaigns across Foya and neighboring forest communities.
- Promote alternative livelihood programs such as beekeeping and sustainable agriculture to reduce forest pressure.

9. Conclusion

The Foya PPA Ecoguard Training was successfully implemented and marked a significant step in extending the Rufford Foundation project's conservation impact across Liberia's northwestern forest corridor.

The active participation of 20 ecoguards and 4 rangers, surpassing initial expectations, underscored the community's growing commitment to biodiversity protection. The training enhanced local capacity in monitoring and reporting while fostering collaboration between SCNL, FDA, and local communities.

Participants left with improved skills, renewed motivation, and a clear understanding of their role in conserving the **White-necked Picathartes** and maintaining the ecological integrity of the Foya forest landscape.

Photos from the Activity:

