

Field Report: Rufford grant Community Ecoguard training in Gola Forest National Park (GFNP)



Date: September 25, 2025

Location: Tima Town, Gola Forest National Park (GFNP), Gbarpolu County

Implemented by: Dickarmien A. Deemie

1. Background

Following the successful inception meeting of the Rufford Foundation–funded 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) organized a one-day practical training session for community ecoguards and rangers.

The training aimed to strengthen local capacity for species monitoring and conservation, with specific emphasis on the White-necked Picathartes — a globally Vulnerable bird species known for its unique nesting habits under rock overhangs and cliffs. Liberia’s Gola Forest National Park (GFNP) and the adjacent Foya Proposed Protected Area (FPPA) remain two of the most important forest blocks potentially harboring significant populations of this species.

Through this training, community ecoguards gained hands-on knowledge on monitoring techniques, nest identification, and data collection, positioning them as active stewards in the protection of this rare species and its habitat.

2. Objectives of the Activity

The overall objective of the ecoguard training was to build the technical capacity of community conservation teams to support the Rufford-funded Picathartes monitoring project. Specifically, the training sought to:

- Equip ecoguards with practical knowledge on the ecology and behavior of the White-necked Picathartes.
- Strengthen local skills in monitoring and data recording techniques.
- Foster collaboration between community ecoguards and FDA rangers.
- Raise awareness on the importance of biodiversity protection and the role of communities in species conservation.
- Promote ownership and responsibility among local participants for long-term sustainability.

3. Participants

The training recorded **46 participants** in total, comprising:

- 40 community ecoguards (exceeding the initially planned 10 participants).
- 6 FDA rangers from Gola Forest National Park.
- SCNL Science and Conservation Team, led by Mr. Dickarmien A. Deemie.
- Local community leaders and youth observers.

This strong turnout demonstrated the growing enthusiasm and community commitment to conservation efforts in the Gola Landscape.

4. Methodology and Approach

The one-day training was held at Tima Town Community Hall and combined both classroom sessions and practical demonstrations. The approach included:

1. Presentations on the biology, ecology, and conservation importance of the White-necked Picathartes.
2. Step-by-step guidance on species monitoring methods and data sheet use.
3. Group discussions on challenges faced by community patrol teams.
4. Demonstration on identifying nesting sites and suitable habitats.
5. Distribution of awareness materials (flyers and posters) among participants to reinforce community messaging.

5. Key Presentations and Discussions

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

Mr. Deemie led the main training session and delivered a comprehensive presentation focusing on:

- Overview of the Rufford Project: Objectives, key activities, and expected conservation outcomes.
- Ecology of the White-necked Picathartes: Nesting habits, breeding behavior, feeding ecology, and habitat preferences.
- Monitoring Techniques: Use of field data sheets, GPS mapping of colonies, and ethical observation practices.
- Community Involvement: The crucial role of local ecoguards and traditional leaders in protecting the species.
- Biodiversity Threats: Identification of major threats such as hunting, habitat loss, and human disturbances.
- Integrating Local Knowledge: Encouraging the use of indigenous ecological knowledge in locating potential nesting sites.
- Data Management: Guidance on recording, reporting, and communicating monitoring findings to SCNL and FDA teams.

During the interactive session, ecoguards asked practical questions on how to identify active nests, how often to visit sites, and how to report sightings. Mr. Deemie emphasized adherence to non-disturbance principles when visiting colonies and underscored the value of teamwork between community ecoguards and rangers.

6. Expected and Achieved Outcomes

Expected Outcomes	Achievements
Strengthened capacity of ecoguards	40 ecoguards and 6 rangers successfully trained in <i>Picathartes</i> monitoring
Awareness raised on species ecology	Awareness materials distributed and species posters displayed
Increased understanding of monitoring tools	Participants practiced data recording and nest identification
Improved collaboration between SCNL, FDA, and communities	Joint field strategy and communication channel clarified
Broadened participation in project implementation	Participation exceeded the target, enhancing project visibility

7. Challenges

- **Logistical Constraints:** Limited field equipment, such as GPS units and binoculars, restricted hands-on demonstrations.
- **Weather Conditions:** Intermittent rainfall delayed some outdoor sessions.
- **Accessibility:** Poor road conditions continued to pose challenges for team mobility within the landscape.

8. Recommendations

- Conduct follow-up field mentoring to reinforce monitoring skills and data accuracy.
- Provide basic field gear (GPS, notebooks, raincoats, and boots) to enhance field efficiency.
- Establish a regular reporting schedule between ecoguards and SCNL field teams.
- Replicate similar training in neighboring communities to broaden local conservation capacity.
- Introduce community incentives linked to conservation performance and data reporting.

9. Conclusion

The ecoguard training on *Picathartes* monitoring in Tima Town was successfully implemented and exceeded expectations in both participation and outcomes. The strong engagement of community ecoguards and FDA rangers demonstrates growing ownership of conservation initiatives within the Greater Gola Landscape.

The training provided participants with essential knowledge and tools to identify, monitor, and protect *Picathartes* nesting colonies. It also reinforced collaboration between SCNL, FDA, and local structures, ensuring a solid foundation for the effective execution of the Rufford Foundation project.

The enthusiasm and commitment displayed by participants are encouraging indicators that community-based monitoring will play a central role in conserving the White-necked *Picathartes* and safeguarding the integrity of Liberia's Gola and Foya forest ecosystems.

Photos from the Activity:



Attendance: