

## Chapter 4

### Rapid survey of the birds of North Lorma, Gola and Grebo National Forests

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#### SUMMARY

During 20 days of field work in three Liberian National Forests, between 19 November and 11 December 2005, 211 bird species were recorded: 143 at North Lorma, Lofa County, 145 at Gola, Gborpolu County, and 157 at Grebo, River Gee County. Of these, 14 are of conservation concern (eight in North Lorma, six in Gola and 10 in Grebo), amongst which one is classified as Endangered (Gola Malimbe *Malimbus ballmanni*), six as Vulnerable, six as Near Threatened and one as Data Deficient. Twelve of the 15 species restricted to the Upper Guinea forests Endemic Bird Area and 136 (or 74%) of the 184 Guinea-Congo forests biome species recorded in Liberia were found during the study. Range extensions or new localities were noted for several species. All three sites qualify as Important Bird Areas. Considering the high conservation value of these forests, it is recommended that further surveys be conducted in order to complete avifaunal data.

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#### INTRODUCTION

Birds have been proven to be useful indicators of biological diversity of a site, because they occur in most habitats on land throughout the world and are sensitive to environmental change. Their taxonomy and global geographical distribution are relatively well known in comparison to other taxa (ICBP 1992). The conservation status of most species has been reasonably well assessed and is being regularly updated (BirdLife International 2000, 2004). This permits rapid analysis of the results of an ornithological study and the presentation of conservation recommendations. Birds are also among the most charismatic species, which can facilitate the acceptance of the necessity to implement protective measures by policy makers and stakeholders. Hotspots for birds are generally of importance for plants or other animals as well (ICBP 1992).

As West African forests are rapidly disappearing, the survival of the birds of the Upper Guinea forests is becoming increasingly dependent on ever fewer areas. Despite a number of surveys conducted in the region in recent or relatively recent years (e.g. Allport et al. 1989; Gartshore 1989; Gartshore et al. 1995; Demey and Rainey 2004, 2005; Rainey and Asamoah 2005), the avifaunas of the majority of these forests are still inadequately known.

The most recent and extensive study of the Liberian avifauna is that of Gatter (1997), on which the selection of Liberia's nine Important Bird Areas (IBAs) by Robertson (2001) was largely based. However, site-specific avifaunal information is scarce and in many cases the presence of species at sites that were selected as IBAs was inferred from the species' known distributions in the region or in areas adjacent to the site (Robertson 2001). Much thus remains to be learned on the precise distribution of species and the ornithological importance of certain sites. In view of the ongoing forest destruction, updating the scarce existing information is also indispensable.