

## **Biodiversity conservation in the Gulf of the Guinea islands**

Scientists have long found islands intrinsically fascinating. Their more tractable nature has been a lure to investigators who have assumed that the generalities discovered therein may be applied to more complicated situations. Islands with different origins and diverse histories have served as natural experiments for the study of problems such as isolation, dispersal and differentiation of species.

The most basic of studies of islands have concentrated on amassing collections of their representative biotas. Such species lists provide considerable information concerning island inhabitants and their distributions but when combined with paleontological and geological observations they help define biogeographic patterns and hypotheses about the processes responsible for them. Around the African continent, the Macaronesian islands and those off the East African coast have received most scientific attention. However, the islands of the Gulf of Guinea in West Africa, have been somewhat neglected. These contain an interesting complement of continental as well as oceanic islands with differing colonization histories and varying levels of endemism.

This special issue is a compilation of papers that review past information and present new data on species richness and endemism on the Gulf of Guinea islands. It is based on invited papers delivered at a workshop entitled 'Biodiversity and Conservation of the Gulf of Guinea Islands' held at the Jersey Wildlife Preservation Trust in June 1993. This volume encompasses what is currently known about the biological diversity and conservation of the Gulf of Guinea islands. Although advances have also been made in the study of invertebrates and plants, which for reasons of space are not included here, the information collected herein should afford a broad overview of diversity in the area and goes beyond a simple tally of species numbers. Possible threats to the biota on the islands are examined and initiatives taken or to be taken for conservation are also included. Our greatest hope is that this issue will help catalyse further work on the biotic diversity of this exciting part of Africa.

Apart from reviewing current knowledge of the fauna and flora on the Gulf of Guinea islands, the meeting's intention was also to advance ways of conserving it. A notable step resulting from the Jersey meeting was the declaration by the assembled specialists to support actions taken by the islands' governments in protecting biodiversity and to develop future collaboration amongst themselves. In deciding to constitute The Gulf of Guinea Conservation Group (GGCG), a unanimous commitment was made to find common ways of studying and protecting the islands' environments by: (i) furthering research on protection and rational use of the region's natural resources; (ii) fostering inter-island cooperation for environmental protection and (iii) identifying ways of stimulating funding for species and ecosystem conservation. Organizations such as the Cooperación Española of the Spanish Foreign Affairs Ministry, the European Union (EU), United Nations (through FAO, PNUD, PNUMA and UNESCO), the World Bank, Asociación Amigos de Doñana, Zoo Atlanta, World

Conservation Union (IUCN) and World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), who have provided financial resources for research carried out until now, are urged to continue this in the future.

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