Protected Areas Resilient to Climate Change, PARCC West Africa

PARCC WEST AFRICA

2015

Sierra Leone Gap Analysis and Spatial Conservation Prioritisation

UNEP gef DICE University of Kent

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The United Nations Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC) is the specialist biodiversity assessment centre of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the world's foremost intergovernmental environmental organisation. The Centre has been in operation for over 30 years, combining scientific research with practical policy advice.

West Africa Gap Analysis and Spatial Conservation Prioritisation, prepared by Robert Smith, with funding from Global Environment Facility (GEF) via UNEP.

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Executive Summary

The importance of protected areas (PAs) for reducing biodiversity loss is widely recognised. This is why parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) have agreed to implement Aichi target 11, which involves increasing the global coverage of terrestrial PAs to 17% and marine PAs to 10% by 2020. In addition, Aichi target 11 commits these countries to develop PA networks that include "areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services" and are "ecologically representative and well connected systems". Currently most national PA networks fail to achieve this target and so there is an urgent need to modify and expand these PA systems to improve their value for biodiversity conservation.

Systematic conservation planning is the most widely used approach for designing PA networks. It involves producing a list of important species, habitats and ecological processes (collectively known as conservation features), mapping their distributions and setting targets for how much of each conservation feature should be protected. These data are then used to carry out a gap analysis, which measures the extent to which the existing PA system meets these targets, and a spatial conservation prioritisation, which identifies priority areas for filling any target shortfalls.

PA networks also need to be robust to the impacts of climate change, as the distributions of the conservation features are likely to shift in response to changes in temperature, rainfall and sea levels. Systematic conservation planning can be used to address this problem by identifying priority areas for conservation that protect the predicted future distributions of important species, as well as their current distributions.

As part of the PARCC West Africa project, we carried out a gap analysis and spatial conservation prioritisation for the West African region and the five project countries: Chad, Gambia, Mali, Sierra Leone and Togo. This involved producing one regional and five national systematic conservation planning systems. We then used these systems to help identify ways in which PA networks could be improved to conserve biodiversity both now and in the future, taking into consideration future climate projections. This report presents results from the analysis for the Republic of Sierra Leone.

The systematic conservation planning system for Sierra Leone contained data on the following conservation features found in the country: 11 vegetation types, 2 elevation zones, 4 ecoregions, 51 amphibian species, 498 bird species and 94 mammal species. It also contained data on the predicted distributions for the time period of 2010-2039 for the 27 amphibian, bird and mammals species that were predicted by these Species Distribution Models (SDMs) to change their ranges by more than 10% by 2010-2039 and are considered threatened or vulnerable to the predicted impacts of climate change.

Sierra Leone Gap Analysis and spatial conservation prioritisation

Sierra Leone has an area of 71,740 km^2 and 5.6 % of this falls within existing PAs, while another 0.7% falls within unprotected Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs) that have been identified by BirdLife International and their local partners.

The combined network of PAs and IBAs meets targets for 11.7% of all conservation features. Conservation targets are met for 3.9% of amphibian species, 11.7% of bird species, 10.6% of mammal species and 13.8% of the 2010-2039 SDMs. 1.5% of these features are completely missing, but all threatened species have at least some representation within this network.
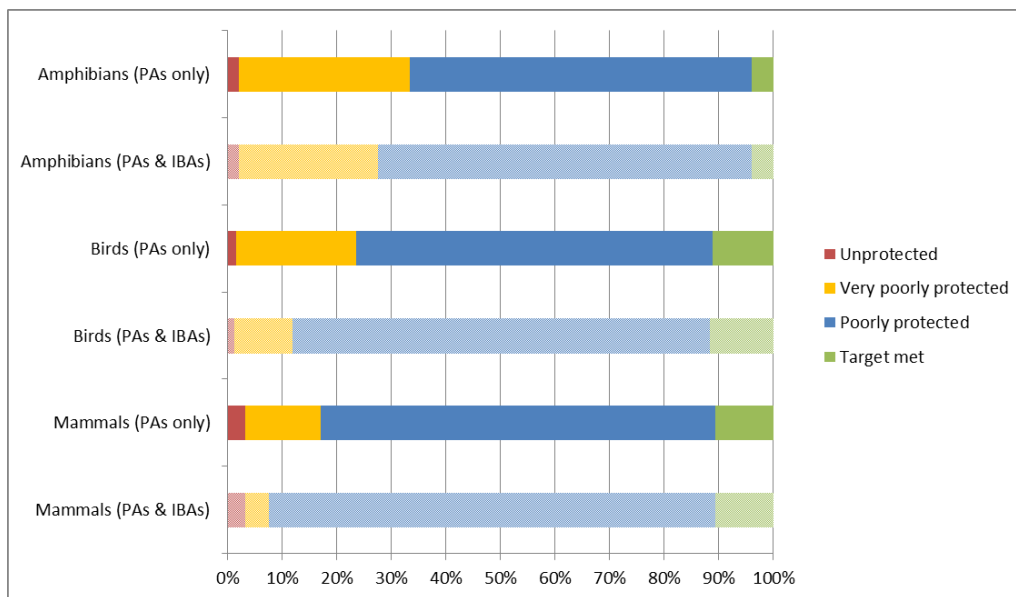
Percentage of amphibian, bird and mammal species for which the set target (i.e. the proportion of their current distribution range to be protected) is met by the existing Protected Area (PA) network and Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs) in Sierra Leone.

We used the Marxan conservation planning software to identify priority areas for meeting the missing targets. The analysis was designed to avoid areas of high human population density where possible and to identify priority areas that extend existing PAs or are large enough to be ecologically viable. We found that meeting all the targets required an additional 9,661 km^2 to be added to the PA network, so that 19.7% of the country needs protection to achieve all the targets.
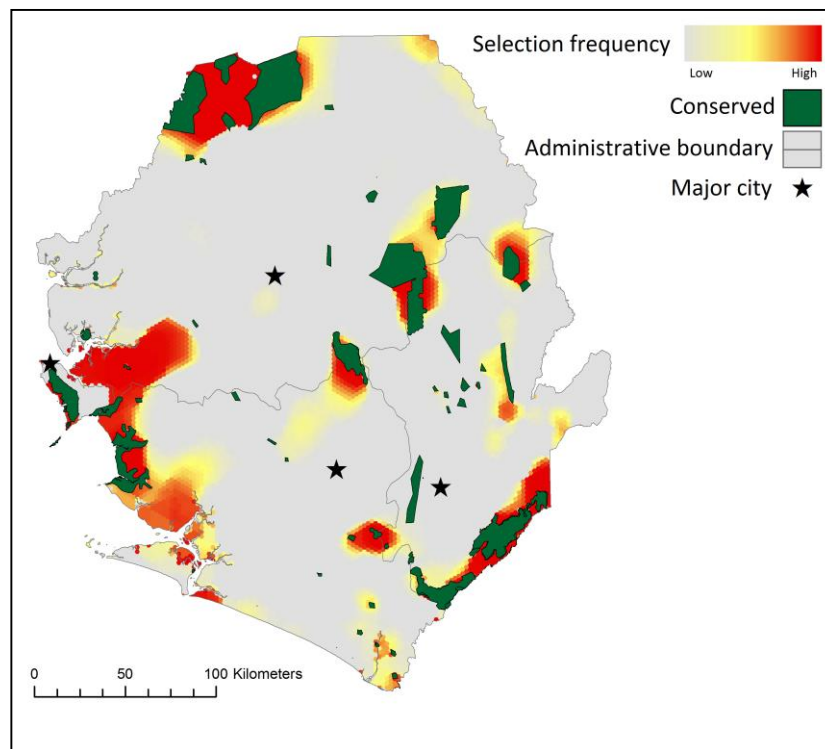
Priority areas for conservation in the Republic of Sierra Leone. Areas in red were selected most frequently by Marxan.

The priority areas that were most consistently identified by Marxan were found around the existing PAs, with the exception of a large area to the east of the Western Area Peninsula Forest National Park which connects a number of IBAs and extends northwards. The fact that this priority area is largely unprotected, despite containing some IBAs, suggests it should be the focus of future conservation management.

The results from the gap analysis and the spatial conservation prioritisation provide a wealth of data that can be used to inform conservation policy and practice in Sierra Leone. However, caution is needed when implementing the results because most of the distribution data were based on range maps that include some unsuitable habitats. Thus, the first step in implementing these results is to carry out literature reviews and field surveys to check that each priority area is definitely important for the conservation features for which it was selected.

It is also important to recognise that the Sierra Leone conservation planning system only contained data on three groups of vertebrates and did not include data on a range of factors that might influence implementation, such as ecosystem services, opportunity costs from agriculture or land-use plans from other sectors. Thus, it is important that national and international researchers and conservation practitioners continue to improve the planning system by updating and adding new data.

List of abbreviations

asl	above sea level
BLM	Boundary Length Modifier
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CPS	Conservation Planning System
GRUMP	Global Rural-Urban Mapping Project
IBA	Important Bird and Biodiversity Area
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
PA	Projected Area
SDM	Species Distribution Model
SPF	Species Penalty Factor
WDPA	World Database on Protected Areas
WWF-US	World Wildlife Fund – United States

Acknowledgements

Introduction

Biodiversity is in decline and protected area (PAs) are seen as a key approach for stemming this loss (Butchart et al, 2015). This is why the 196 countries that are signatories to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) have committed through Aichi target 11 to increase the global extent of the PA network to 17% of the terrestrial realm and 10% of the marine realm by 2020 (CBD, 2010). However, there is an increasing recognition that simply increasing the extent of the global PA network will not be enough to reduce biodiversity loss. This is because PAs have traditionally been located in areas with little economic value, which has resulted in networks that fail to represent a wide range of species and habitats and are particularly poor at protecting threatened species (Venter et al, 2014). Thus, Aichi target 11 also stresses that PAs should be located in areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services and PA systems should be ecologically representative and well-connected systems. In addition, it is widely recognised that PAs should play a major role in achieving Aichi target 12, which states that "By 2020, the extinction of known threatened species has been prevented and their conservation status, particularly of those most in decline, has been improved and sustained".

Meeting Aichi targets 11 and 12 will require expanding the current PA networks so that they adequately represent and protect a much wider range of species and ecosystems (Butchart et al, 2015). However, nature is not static and it is also important that these PAs continue to protect these conservation features in the future. In particular, PAs need to take into account how biodiversity is likely to respond to climate change, as species are likely to shift their distributions in response to changes in temperature and rainfall patterns (Willis et al, 2015). Thus, there is a real need for research on how climate change will impact species distributions to inform the management actions of PA managers and conservation planners. The PARCC project has identified which species are most likely to be vulnerable to the impacts of climate change (Carr et al, 2014) and which PAs are likely to experience the highest levels of species turnover (Baker et al, 2015). The final research component of PARCC investigates how well the current West African PA system is conserving the current and future distributions of biodiversity and identifies priority areas for filling any gaps. This report describes the results from a national analysis for the Republic of Sierra Leone, one of the five focal countries in the PARCC project.

We adopted a systematic conservation planning approach to measure how well the current PA system protects the current and future distributions of biodiversity in West Africa. Systematic conservation planning was designed to be flexible enough to be applied in a range of contexts (Margules and Pressey, 2000) but it generally involves the following steps: (1) Identifying and involving key stakeholders; (2) Identifying broad goals for the conservation planning exercise; (3) Identifying the species, habitats and ecological processes, collectively known as conservation

features, to be used in the analyses; (4) Gathering and evaluating the available data on these conservation features, as well as data on socio-economic and implementation-relevant factors; (5) Formulating targets for each conservation feature; (6) Conducting a gap analysis to review how well the existing PAs meet the conservation feature targets; (7) Selecting additional conservation areas through a conservation assessment; (8) Implementing conservation action in selected areas, and (9) Maintaining and monitoring established conservation areas.

This means that systematic conservation planning is a long-term process based around working with stakeholders to collaboratively develop and deliver an implementation strategy (Knight et al. 2006). However, there are two key short-term technical aspects to this process. The first is a gap analysis (step 6 listed above) which involves measuring how well the current PA network meets biodiversity targets. The second is a conservation assessment, also known as a spatial conservation prioritisation (step 7 listed above), which involves identifying priority areas for conservation to fill any of these gaps (Knight et al. 2006).

The spatial conservation prioritisation is the most technical part of this process and consists of: (i) Dividing the planning region into a number of planning units; (ii) Listing the abundance of each conservation feature in each planning unit; (iii) Setting representation targets for each conservation feature; (iv) Assigning a cost value for each planning unit; (v) Measuring the effectiveness of the present PA system, and; (vi) Using computer software to identify new planning units to be incorporated into the system based on complementarity. We used the Marxan software package to undertake the spatial conservation prioritisation. Marxan has been designed to identify sets of priority areas that meet conservation targets, minimise costs and maintain connectivity and is the most widely used systematic conservation planning software package (Ball et al. 2009).

Marxan uses an approach named simulated annealing to identify the priority areas, which involves running the software a number of times to identify a near-optimal set of planning units each time, where each of these sets of planning units is known as a portfolio. The results of each run tend to be slightly different, so Marxan produces two main outputs: (1) the 'best' solution which is the portfolio with the lowest overall cost; and, (2) a 'selection frequency' output which counts the number of times each planning unit appears in the different portfolios (**Figure 1**).
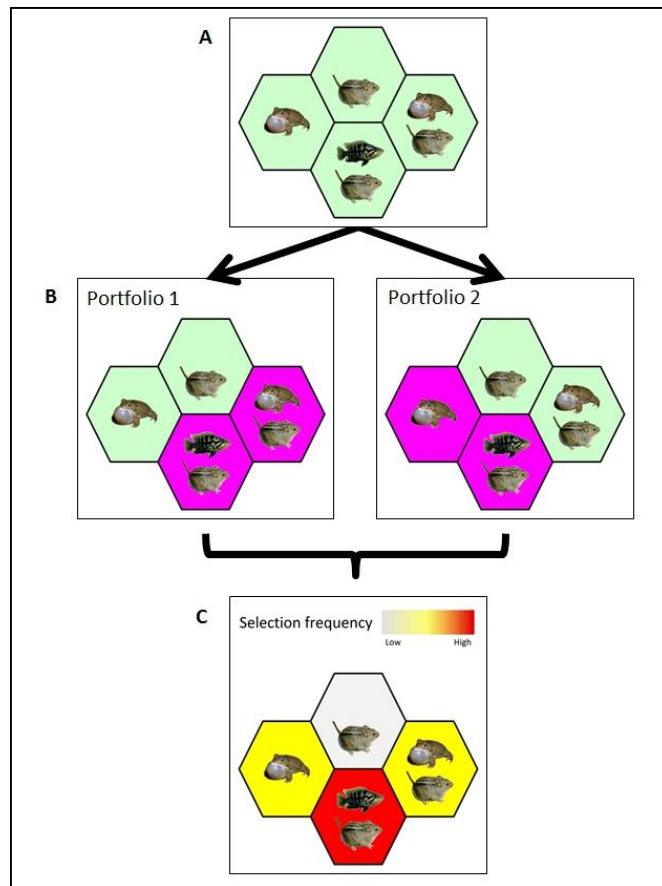
Figure 1: Schematic representation of the outputs from Marxan. (A) shows the distribution of three species in four planning units. (B) shows the results of running Marxan twice and the resultant two different portfolios, where the selected planning units are shown in magenta. Both portfolios meet the target that at least one population of each species should be protected. (C) shows the selection frequency output, which counts how often each planning unit was selected in the two portfolios: the red planning unit is always selected because it contains the only population of the fish; one of the yellow planning units is needed to meet the target for the toad but neither is irreplaceable because it could be swapped with the other.

In this report we focus most on the selection frequency output, as it identifies priority areas without being too prescriptive about exactly which areas should be protected. In addition, we analysed the four best portfolios (the four portfolios with the lowest cost) to measure the total area needed to meet the targets and maintain connectivity. The decision to show the four best portfolios is based on balancing the need to illustrate the variation in the results without swamping the reader with information. So here we describe the results from the gap analysis and Marxan spatial conservation prioritisation analysis for the Republic of Sierra Leone. The next section describes the methodology that explains how the systematic conservation planning system was developed. This is followed by the results from the gap analysis and spatial prioritisation. The final section discusses the results and then lists a number of recommendations for implementing the results and improving the conservation planning system.

Methodology

Study region

The Republic of Sierra Leone is situated on the far west coast of Africa, bordered by Guinea to the north, Liberia to the south-east and the Atlantic Ocean on the south-west. It has an area of 71,740 km^2 and an estimated population of 6 million people in 2011. Sierra Leone has a diverse tropical geography, encompassing mountains, rainforests and savannah.

Selecting and mapping the conservation features

We selected three types of conservation feature, with the aim of: (A) representing broad elements of biodiversity; (B) conserving the current distribution of particular species, and (C) conserving the future distribution of species that may be vulnerable to climate change. Details on how we selected and mapped these different types of conservation feature are given below.

A) Broad biodiversity elements and national commitments

The first set of conservation features sought to represent a broad range of biodiversity by including vegetation types, ecoregion types and elevation zones, as elevation is known to drive patterns of biodiversity. For the vegetation types we used the GlobCover dataset which has mapped the global distribution of 22 landcover types with a resolution of 300 m (Bicheron et al, 2008). This map was based on MERIS satellite imagery. The ecoregion type map was produced by WWF-US (Olson et al, 1998) and divided the terrestrial realm into 825 ecoregions based on species richness, endemism and higher taxonomic uniqueness (**Figure 2**). We produced the elevation zone map by reclassifying a 1 km resolution Digital Elevation Model that was provided by the Hadley Centre into three classes, which were 0 – 500 m above sea level (asl), 500 – 1000 m asl and > 1000 m asl. We selected these elevation zone classes based on a literature review and an initial assessment of mean annual temperatures at different elevation levels.

Figure 2: The WWF Ecoregion map of Sierra Leone, where ecoregion type is based on species richness, endemism and higher taxonomic uniqueness (Olson et al, 2001).

B) Current species distributions

We selected all amphibians, birds and mammal species as our conservation features, except those that are listed in the IUCN Red List as Data Deficient. We did not include data on other species in our analyses, either because there was insufficient data on their distributions or because they were freshwater taxa, which generally need to be managed by improving management of the water catchment rather than establishing new PAs. We used the 2014 IUCN Red List range maps for each of these amphibians, birds and mammal species. For birds we also used separate data on their breeding and non-breeding range where appropriate.

C) Future species distributions

To map future distributions we used the species distribution models (SDMs) produced by the PARCC project (Baker et al, 2015). These predicted the distribution for a number of amphibian, bird and mammal species based on mean temperature of the warmest month, mean temperature of the coldest month, precipitation seasonality and an aridity index. The nature of this approach meant it was not possible to model the distribution of species with very narrow ranges, as they had too few

distribution records to analyse (Platts et al, 2014). The SDMs have a resolution of 0.44°, which is approximately 50 km x 50 km at the equator. The original study produced 100 future different models for each species for the time periods 2010-2039, 2040-2069 and 2070-2099. However, including all this information would have been unwise for three reasons. First, there is a high uncertainty in these models that predicted the distribution of species for 2040-2069 and 2070-2099 (Baker et al, 2015). Second, the systematic conservation planning software is unable to analyse all the data because the files sizes are too large. Third, as part of the analysis we needed to run the systems during expert workshops, and to investigate the impacts of using different targets and analysis parameters we needed the datasets to be small enough to make this feasible.

We therefore reduced the size of the dataset in the following ways: (i) we only used SDMs based on climate models for the 2010-2039 time period, as these had relatively low levels of uncertainty; (ii) we condensed the 100 SDMs for each species into five, where each of these new SDMs represented the different regional climate modelling climate projections; (iii) we only included data in the analysis on species that are currently listed as Threatened (IUCN Red List status of Vulnerable, Endangered or Critically Endangered) and/or were identified as vulnerable to climate change in a previous PARCC study (Carr et al, 2014) based on their 'exposure', 'sensitivity' and 'adaptive capacity' to climate change and its impacts, and (iv) we only used data on those species where the predicted overlap in the current and future distribution by 2010-2039 was less than 90%, in order to focus on species that are most likely to affected by climate change. These four steps ensured we used the most reliable data on species that are likely to be most susceptible to the impacts of climate change.

Setting targets

We used two different approaches when setting initial targets. For the landcover types and elevation zones we set targets as 10% of their total area in the country. We used this relatively low target because, although we wanted to ensure the priority areas were representative of biodiversity, previous research has shown that setting high targets for broad-scale biodiversity surrogates is an inefficient at conserving narrow-range or threatened species (Venter et al, 2014).

For the ecoregion types and species, we based our approach on a widely used methodology for setting species targets in global analyses (Rodrigues et al, 2004). This method is based on global range data and sets targets that decrease from 100% for species with distributions <1,000 km^2 to 10% for species with distributions >250,000 km^2, and linearly interpolated on a log-linear scale between these two thresholds (**Figure 3**). However, this method was developed for analyses with a coarse spatial scale based on the recognition that some of the priority regions selected would contain unsuitable habitat. In our analysis, we assumed that our priority areas should directly inform the location of new PAs because our planning units were smaller and our analysis included higher resolution data. This more

spatially detailed information came from the 300 m resolution GlobCover landcover dataset, which we used to both exclude planning units that were highly transformed and to map and set targets for natural vegetation types. Thus, our analysis was much less likely to select highly transformed planning units and so we decided to cap these targets at 20% of the total range of each species. This also ensured the total extent of the priority areas would be closer to the national coverage targets set by each country as part of their CBD commitments.
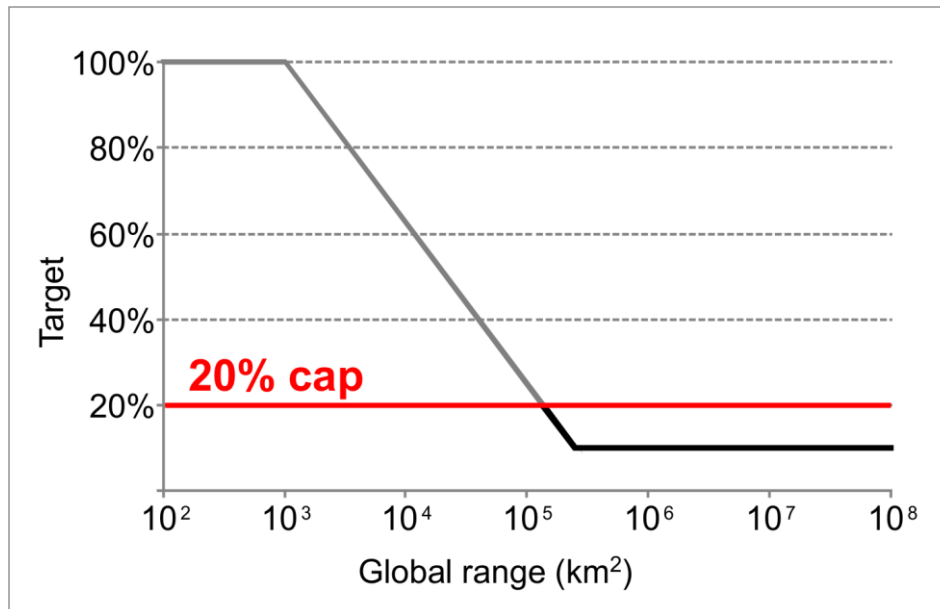
Figure 3: The approach used to set species targets based on their global ranges. This is based on a methodology developed by Rodrigues et al (2004) but each target is capped to 20% because the PARCC analyses used data with a relatively fine spatial scale.

Thus, our initial target for each species and ecoregion was calculated based on determining the total range of the conservation feature, that is to say the global range for the ecoregions and current species distributions and the total area that had been modelled for the SDMs (which covered Africa and the Mediterranean region). For each species we then worked out the percentage of the range that should be conserved based on the Rodrigues et al (2004) approach and then capped this at 20%. We then multiplied this percentage by the total range of the species found in the country in order to obtain the target.

Producing the Conservation Planning Systems

The first step in developing a conservation planning system (CPS) is to define the planning region, which in our case was the political boundary of Sierra Leone. We then divided the region into a number of planning units, which were based on a layer of hexagons, clipping this to the planning region boundary and then combining this with the PA and IBA boundary layers. We set the hexagon sizes as 5 km^2, as we wanted to balance the need for the results to have a fine enough spatial

resolution while having a small enough number of planning units to ensure that Marxan could produce efficient results. This meant the final system contained 16,243 planning units.

The PA boundary data were extracted from the World Database on Protected Areas (WDPA) (IUCN and UNEP-WCMC 2015) and the IBA boundary data were provided by BirdLife International. The WDPA boundary data consisted of polygons for most PAs, but in some cases we only had data showing the centroid of the polygon and the total area of the PA. For the point data we used buffers to represent each PA as a circle around the centroid with the PA area. Combining the data in this way produced planning units that were regular hexagons or sections of hexagons wherever they were split by a PA or IBA boundary or clipped by the national boundary (**Figure 4**).
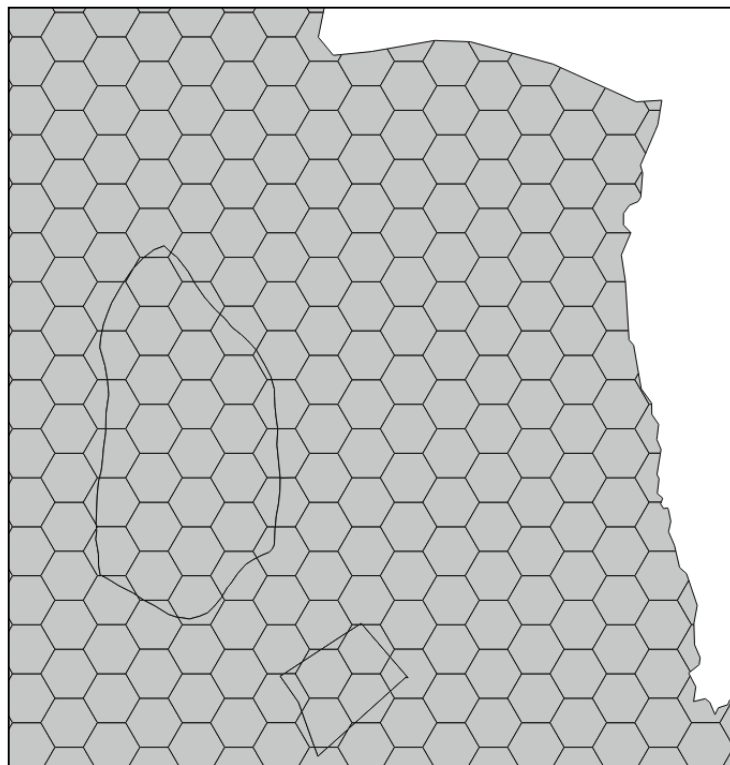
Figure 4: Details of planning units produced by combining a regular hexagon layer, the layer of protected area boundaries and the layer of Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas. It shows that each planning unit is a hexagon unless it is found at the boundary of the planning region or is part of an existing PA or IBA

The next step was to calculate the cost of each planning unit and we decided to base this on the human population size, so that Marxan would avoid selecting areas with a high population density where possible. Agricultural opportunity cost data are also available at a global scale (Naidoo and Iwamura 2007) but we decided not to use this in our analysis, as it risks selecting areas of subsistence agriculture that have low economic value but are important for poor people's livelihoods (Butchart et al, 2015). Instead, we used the 1-km resolution Global Rural-Urban Mapping Project (GRUMPv1) dataset (CIESIN et al, 2011) dataset and used ArcGIS to calculate the number of inhabitants per planning unit.

We then imported all of the data into the CLUZ plugin for QGIS. This involved specifying the planning unit layer and producing a table that listed every conservation feature and its target. We then imported the conservation feature distribution data into CLUZ, which we had already extracted from the landcover, ecoregion, elevation zone, IUCN range maps and PARCC SDMs.

Finally, we set the status of each planning unit, based on whether it is "Conserved" (i.e. if it is already part of a PA) and should always be included in the priority areas selected by Marxan, or whether it is "Excluded" and should never be selected by Marxan (for example, because it has a very high human population and would not make a suitable PA). We set the status of every planning unit that fell within a PA or unprotected IBA as Conserved, following the example of previous studies (Butchart et al, 2015). We used this approach in the national analyses based on feedback from local experts, who argued that IBAs should be treated in the same way as PAs, as they had been identified as globally important by BirdLife International and had similar or higher levels of conservation management than many Pas. We set the Excluded planning units based on their human population density and the proportion of their area under unsuitable landcover types (defined as irrigated cropland, rainfed crops and artificial surfaces). Based on feedback that we received during Skype meetings to develop the national conservation planning systems, we selected 400 inhabitants per km^2 as the human population density threshold and 25% as the unsuitable landcover threshold. We then amended this based on expert feedback so that a relatively highly populated area on the Western boundary was set as Available, as this had potentially high conservation value. We also changed the status of planning units from Available to Excluded where the low spatial resolution of the human population density led to bands of Available planning units in known patches of land with high population density.

Gap analysis

By importing the distribution of each conservation feature into CLUZ, setting their targets and setting the status of each planning unit, we automatically calculated the percentage of each target met by the PA and IBA systems. This provided the data for the gap analysis and we recorded for each conservation feature whether the percentage of its target met fell into one of the following four categories: 0% – 2% (referred to as "Unprotected"), >2 – 50% (referred to as "Very poorly protected"), >50% - 98% (referred to as "Poorly protected") or >98% (referred to as "Target met"). The categories were adapted from the approach used by Butchart et al (2015) and allowed for the imprecision in the boundaries of the IUCN species distribution range maps, some of which were developed at a relatively coarse spatial scale. This imprecision means that a species may appear to have a protection value that is a few percentage points above or below the actual value, so we defined any species as unprotected

if its target percentage was 2% or less and defined it as having its targets met if the target percentage was 98% or more.

Calibrating the Marxan parameters

Marxan is a systematic conservation planning software package that identifies near-optimal portfolios of planning units that meet conservation feature targets, whilst minimising costs and reducing fragmentation levels. The user can influence the fragmentation levels by adjusting the Boundary Length Modifier (BLM) value. Selecting a higher BLM creates a higher cost for having fragmented portfolios and, as a consequence, Marxan selects larger patches of planning units to reduce this cost. After running some sensitivity analyses we decided that a BLM value of 0.2 produced efficient results that were not overly fragmented. The user can also determine the importance of meeting each target by setting a "species penalty factor" (SPF), which is multiplied by the estimated cost of meeting any target shortfall. We used a SPF value of 10 for each feature in order to ensure that each target was met but was not so large that it would mask the trade-off between the combined planning unit cost and boundary cost.
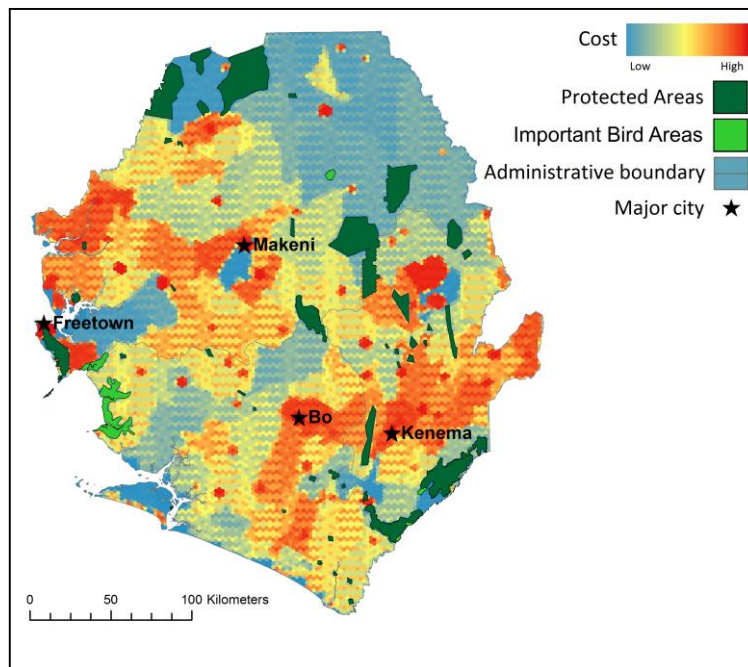
Figure 5: Map of Sierra Leone showing major cities, administrative boundaries, Protected Areas, Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas and planning unit cost data.

Results

Conservation feature details and gap analysis

The Sierra Leone conservation planning system classified 4,078.84 km^2 (5.6%) as already being in PAs and 512.1 km^2 (0.7%) as already being in currently unprotected IBAs (Figure 6A). The planning system contains data on 11 vegetation types, 2 elevation zones, 4 ecoregions, 51 amphibian species, 505 bird species, 94 mammal species and SDMs for 27 species in 2010-2039. Conservation feature richness per planning unit varied between 0 and 507, with a median richness of 446 (Figure 6B).
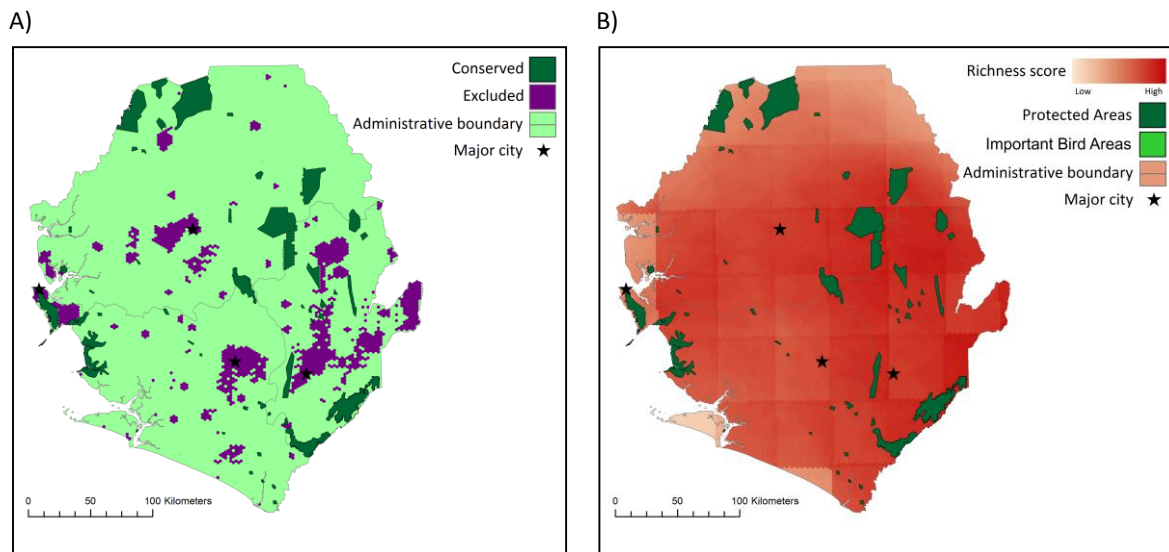
Figure 6: Maps for Sierra Leone showing (A) the status of the planning units used in Marxan and (B) the conservation feature richness, where the richness values range from 0 to 507.

The current PA network meets targets for 10.8% of the conservation features used in this project and meets targets for 11.7% when IBAs are included in the PA system. Thus, the PA and IBA network meet targets for 29.4% of the broad biodiversity elements (ecoregions, elevation zones and vegetation types), 3.9% of the amphibians, 11.7% of the birds, 10.6% of the mammals and 13.8% of the SDMs predicting the distributions of threatened and climate change vulnerable species in 2010-2039.

However, with regards to the broad biodiversity elements, the existing PA network is conserving almost none of the Guinean mangroves ecoregion (Table 1). The PA network is also failing to protect any of the range of 1 amphibian, 8 bird and 3 mammal species. This means that 1.8% of all of these species are absent from the PA system, although this is reduced to 1.5% when the IBAs are included (Figure 7). All threatened species are at least represented (although not always adequately) in the PA network.

Table 1: Details on the ecoregions, elevation zones and landcover types used as conservation features in the Sierra Leone conservation planning system. Targets were set at 10% of the area of the elevation zones and landcover types and between 10% and 20% for the ecoregion types, with higher targets for ecoregions with more limited distributions.

Name	Total area (km²)	Area in PAs (km²)	Area in IBAs (km²)	Target (km²)	% target met by PAs & IBAs
Ecoregions					
Guinean forest-savanna mosaic	18635	1501	27	1864	80.54
Guinean mangroves	6717	2	369	1261	0.17
Guinean montane forests	1653	579	0	331	175.09
Western Guinean lowland forest	45083	2127	101	5995	35.48
Elevation zones					
0-500 m elevation	61184	3488	359	6118	57.01
500 - 1000 m elevation	6483	605	0	648	93.25
Landcover types					
Mosaic vegetation cropland	38252	1333	106	3825	34.84
Broadleaved evergreen semi-deciduous forest	21625	2200	205	2163	101.71
Open broadleaved deciduous forest woodland	5076	444	4	508	87.43
Mosaic forest shrubland grassland	468	20	28	47	42.99
Mosaic grassland forest shrubland	611	78	6	61	128.53
Closed to open shrubland	4501	95	136	450	21.15
Closed to open herbaceous vegetation	376	7	18	38	18.51
Flooded Broadleaved forest - fresh water	12	5	0	1	452.38
Flooded Broadleaved forest - saline water	876	21	2	88	23.71
Bare areas	3	0	0	0	0.00
Water bodies	294	3	5	29	9.77
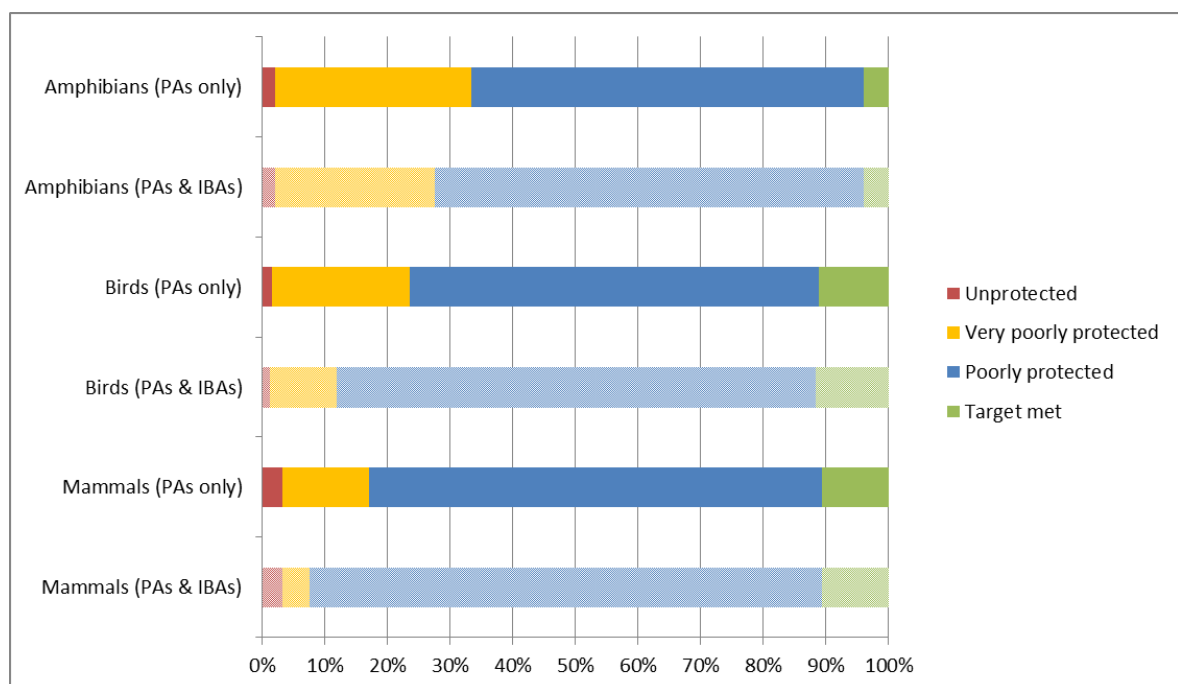
Figure 7: Percentage of amphibian, bird and mammal species for which the set target (i.e. the proportion of their current distribution range to be protected) is met by the existing Protected Area (PA) network and Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs) in Sierra Leone.
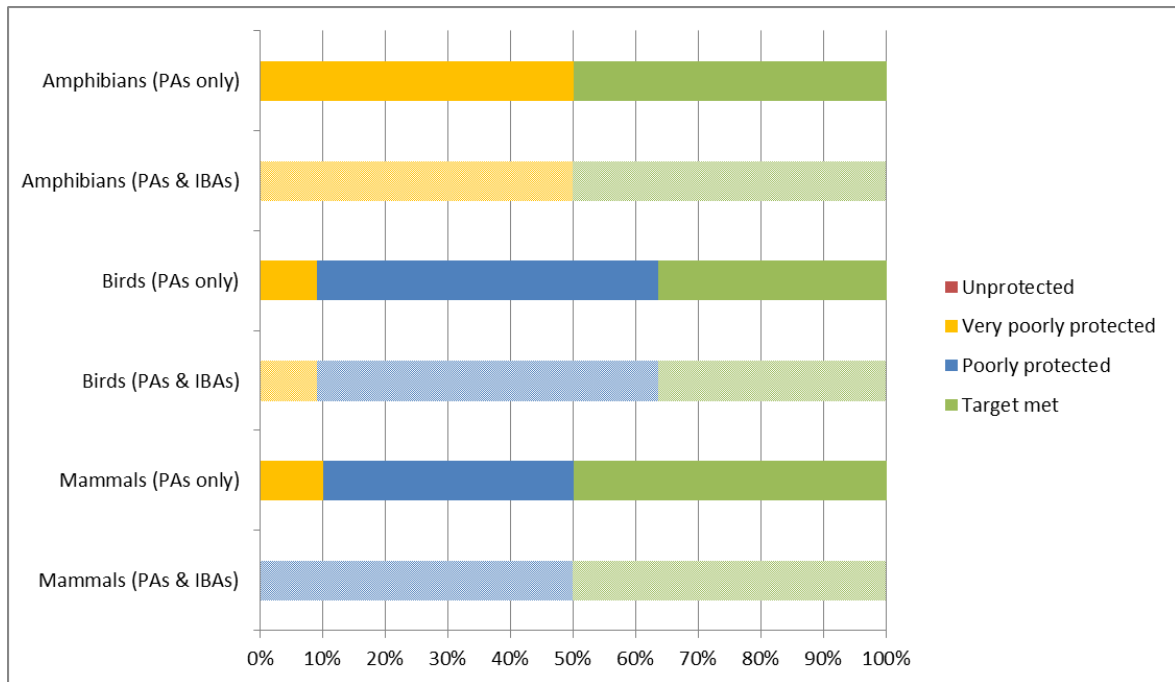
Figure 8: Percentage of threatened amphibian, bird and mammal species for which the set target (i.e. the proportion of their current distribution range to be protected) is met by the existing Protected Area (PA) network and Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs) in Sierra Leone.

Table 2: The Species Distribution Models (SDMs) used in the conservation planning system, showing the predicted distribution of species in 2010-2039. Figures are based on the mean values of the five different SDMs per species.

Name	Total area (km²)	Area in PAs (km²)	Area in IBAs (km²)	Target (km²)	% target met by PAs & IBAs
Agelastes meleagrides	24	11	0	5	246.9
Bostrychia olivacea	25372	1041	458	2537	59.4
Bycanistes cylindricus	12538	727	114	1254	160.8
Campephaga quiscalina	17374	630	440	1737	60.4
Caprimulgus nigriscapularis	37944	1260	471	3794	45.9
Centropus leucogaster	14030	558	426	1403	67.4
Cephalophus zebra	1128	24	0	226	10.6
Cercocebus atys	66380	3886	501	6638	66.1
Cercopithecus diana	43467	2058	468	4347	58.3
Colobus polykomos	62584	3789	501	6848	63.0
Conraua alleni	11488	471	274	1888	27.3
Genetta johnstoni	53714	2895	499	5381	62.6
Gymnobucco calvus	48609	2269	490	4861	57.4
Hylomyscus baeri	2363	145	7	454	33.6
Lycaon pictus	32307	2166	47	3231	69.4

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Melaenornis annamarulae	24	11	0	2	475.2
Muscicapa olivascens	4044	27	99	404	27.3
Nectarinia batesi	3685	30	259	369	82.5
Nectarinia fuliginosa	3014	30	139	301	39.7
Phoeniculus castaneiceps	18	9	0	2	356.4
Psittacus timneh	44803	2101	489	4480	59.7
Rhinolophus denti	27882	2256	27	2788	81.5
Rhinolophus guineensis	38027	2868	47	5856	50.2
Rhinolophus maclaudi	4586	1197	0	917	130.5
Scotonycteris ophiodon	2574	3	0	257	1.3
Tachymarptis aequatorialis	30704	745	399	3070	35.5
Telacanthura melanopygia	24	11	0	2	477.2

Systematic conservation assessment

Most of the areas with high selection frequencies are found around the existing conservation areas, with the exception of a large area to the east of the Western Area Peninsula Forest National Park which connects a number of IBAs and extends northwards (Figure 9). The total area of planning units with high selection frequency scores was 12.8% (Table 3) and the mean area of the four best portfolios was 14,252 km^2, which is 19.7% of the country (Figure 10). This means that the Marxan analysis suggests that an additional 13.4% of the country should be under conservation. The four best portfolio show that large areas in the west of the country are required to meet targets and although there is some flexibility in the system, the high selection frequencies indicate that choice is fairly limited (Figure 9 and Figure 10).

Table 3: Details of the area of planning units in Sierra Leone grouped by their selection frequency scores.

Selection frequency categories	Area (km^2)	Percentage of region
0 - 49	59,002.85	81.5
50 -74	2,492.25	3.5
75 - 89	1,569.97	2.2
90 - 100	9,260.89	12.8
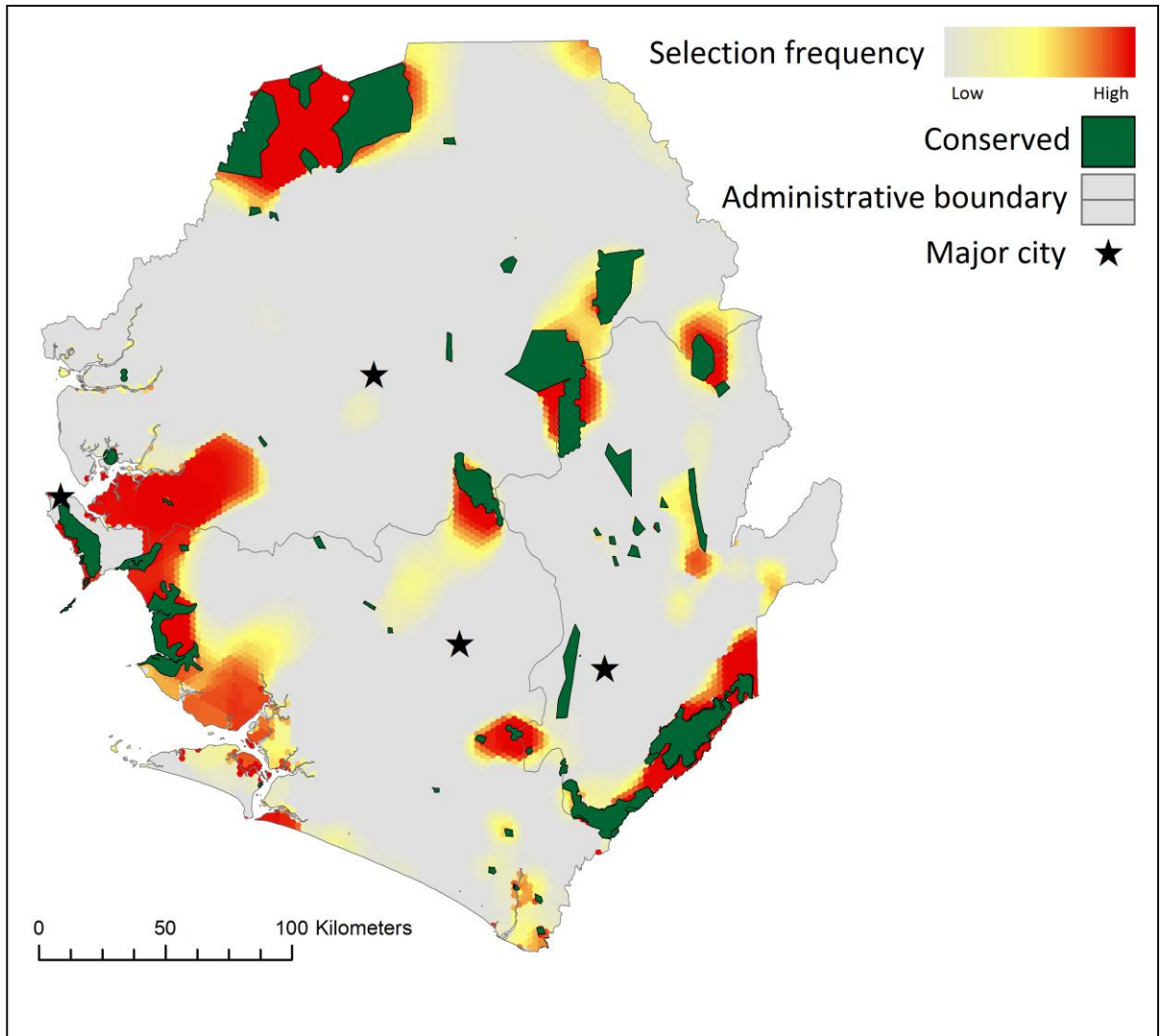
Figure 9: Selection frequency scores for Sierra Leone based on the Marxan analysis. Areas in red were selected in every portfolio identified by the software, based on meeting targets whilst reducing costs and maintaining connectivity.
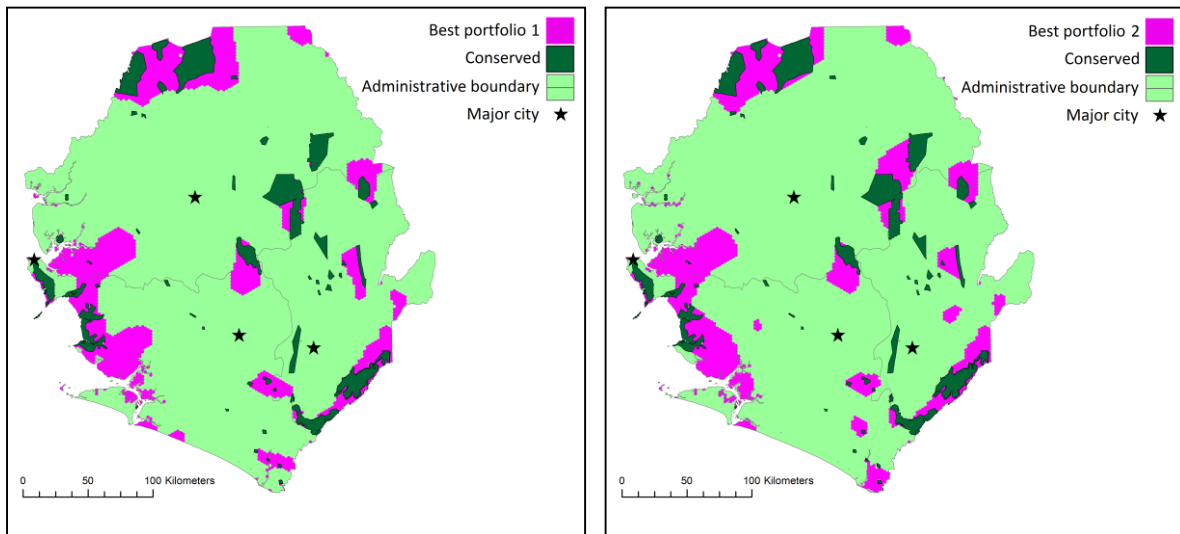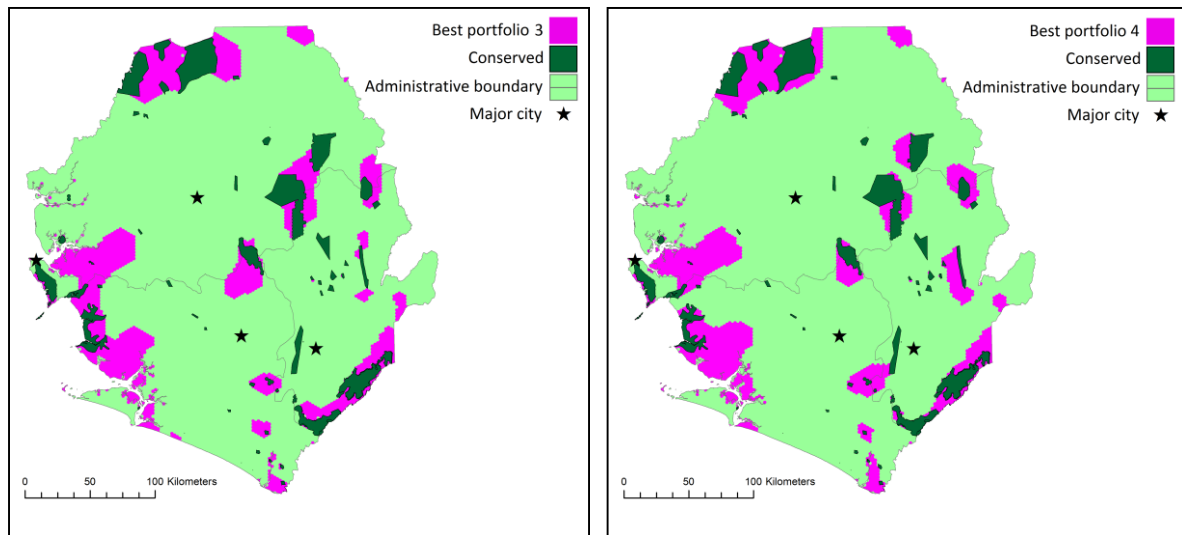
Figure 10: The four best portfolios identified by Marxan for meeting the conservation feature targets for Sierra Leone whilst minimising costs. The total area is the combined area of the existing PAs, the unprotected IBAs and the additional priority areas selected by Marxan to meet the targets whilst minimising costs.

Discussion

Protected area networks are a key component of all national conservation strategies and their importance is recognised in the Convention on Biological Diversity. Therefore, it is vital that each country develops PA networks that, as defined in Aichi Target 11, contain "*areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services*" and "*are conserved through effectively and equitably managed, ecologically representative and well connected systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, and integrated into the wider landscapes and seascapes*". The process of developing such PA networks involves carrying out a gap analysis, to measure how well the existing PAs meet conservation targets, and spatial conservation prioritisations, to identify where new PAs and other conservation areas should be located to fill any target gaps. This report has carried out these analyses for Sierra Leone and in this section we discuss the results, putting them in a broader context and identifying limitations with the analyses that need to be considered.

Gap analysis

The gap analysis showed that Sierra Leone's PA network is failing to meet targets for the majority of the conservation features and that is situation is little improved when the IBAs are included in the analysis. The situation is worst for amphibians and ecoregions, where targets are not met for three of the four ecoregions and one of them (Guinean mangroves) is almost completely unprotected. Perhaps surprisingly, threatened species are better protected than the other species, although this protection only meets targets for approximately half of them. The PA and IBA network also fail to meet the targets for 21 of the 27 species based on their predicted distributions in 2010-2039, and Pohle's fruit bat (*Scotonycteris ophiodon*) is predicted to be almost entirely unprotected.

It is also important to take into account the quality of the data and target-setting methodology when considering the results of the gap analysis. For the distribution data, the main issue is that the ecoregion and species maps show the range of each conservation feature. This means all these range maps include patches that have been transformed into agricultural or urban land. They also do not take into account the fact that most species are limited to a subset of natural landcover types within this range. Thus, the gap analysis probably underestimates how well each feature is conserved, as they may be absent from much of the unprotected land within their range.

There are also potential issues over how the targets were set, as we used a relatively simple approach that does not account for each feature's threat status, biological characteristics or how much of its range is likely to contain suitable habitat (Pressey et al, 2003). Producing such feature-specific targets would have been ideal but was beyond the scope of this project. Instead, we used a well-established approach that has been used for over a decade (Rodrigues et al, 2004) and accounts

for aspects of endemism and threat by seeking to conserve higher percentages of features with smaller ranges. However, in this study we capped these percentage targets to 20%, rather than using the 100% highest value from the original system. This was partly because our analysis used relatively small planning units that would mostly contain natural vegetation types, whereas the original method was developed for global analyses that used very large planning units based on the assumption that the priority areas identified would include transformed land that would be excluded from any eventual PAs. It was also a response to Aichi target 11, which aims to conserve 17% of the terrestrial realm by 2020, so that the amount of land identified as important for conservation would be relatively close to the 17% figure and so could help inform current planning (we did not cap targets at 17% because we wanted our results to guide action beyond 2020). This produces results that are more likely to influence policy but it should be recognised that the ecoregions and species with limited ranges probably need higher levels of protection in the medium- to long-term.

Identifying priority areas

Marxan identifies priority areas based on meeting targets, minimising costs and minimising habitat fragmentation. Thus, there are two reasons why a priority area is selected. The first is if it is vital for meeting one or several targets. The second is if it helps meet one or several targets, has a low cost and/or helps join or expand an existing PA. None of the targets used in this analysis were more than 20% of each conservation feature's range, so there was generally a great level of flexibility in where Marxan could select planning units to meet these targets. Thus, most of the identified priority areas in Sierra Leone were selected because they had relatively low human population density or were located near the existing PAs and IBAs. This explains why the selection frequency scores show that most of the priority areas were found around existing PAs, especially the Gola Rainforest and Outamba-Kilimi National Parks. The one exception to this is the large patch of planning units with high selection frequencies, which starts to the east of Western Area Peninsula Forest National Park and forms a block heading south that includes Yawri Bay IBA. This priority area must contain a number of important conservation features and should be seen as particularly important for protecting species that are currently missing from the Sierra Leone PA system.

The results from the four best portfolios show there is some flexibility in the size and shape of these priority areas, so there is scope for changing their boundaries based on local factors and expert options. However, there is a high level of consistency in the relative position of these priority areas, suggesting that each one has some level of conservation importance. Thus, it appears that most existing PAs and IBAs are well placed but should be expanded to meet targets for the conservation features they currently contain. In addition, the four best portfolios emphasise the value of the one

currently unprotected priority that could be conserved either by creating one large or two medium-sized PAs in the West of the country.

When considering these results, it is also important to be aware of the limitations of the conservation planning system. As with the gap analysis, it should be stressed that most of the conservation feature distribution data were based on range maps and the priority areas might therefore not contain the specific conservation features for which they were selected. However, it is likely that this problem was reduced in the spatial prioritisation compared to the gap analysis because Marxan was more likely to choose planning units with low population density and that met targets for natural landcover types. Thus, we can be more confident that the priority maps contained untransformed habitat. Another limitation relates to the cost data, as the population density dataset used (GRUMP) only records human population size per large administrative district and therefore failed to distinguish between planning units in the same region. This is why selection frequency scores were relatively low in many areas, as many planning units appeared to have identical costs and could be swapped with similar planning units.

Despite the data limitations, the Sierra Leone conservation planning system provides important information to guide conservation actions and help improve PA systems to better protect biodiversity now and under climate change. However, systematic conservation planning is not a static process and the results presented here should be seen as the beginning of a long-term set of activities. In particular, the results need to be discussed with local experts from a range of sectors. In addition, there is the need to see the gap analysis and conservation prioritisation as a continuous process that should be updated with better data when it becomes available.

Recommendations

Implementing the results

Identify priority sites for implementation. The spatial prioritisation identified many sites where new PAs should be established, based on the conservation targets and distribution data used in the analysis. The importance of these sites should be checked by consulting with local experts and carrying out field visits to check that each site is important for the conservation features for which it was selected. Any assessment should also consider the feasibility of protecting the site. If feasibility is low then the prioritisation should be rerun with the site excluded. If feasibility is low then the prioritisation should be rerun with the site excluded. If feasibility is low then the Marxan prioritisation should be rerun, with the site set as Excluded and with all the other priority areas set as Conserved. This will then identify alternative sites that complement the existing PAs, IBAs and priority areas identified in this study.

Identify priority species and ecoregions for conservation implementation. The gap analysis identified species that are poorly represented in the current PA and IBA system in Sierra Leone. These results should be checked by consulting with local experts and priority species for additional conservation management should be identified.

Build capacity and mainstream the planning system. Part of the PARCC project involved training experts from the five focal countries to use the Marxan and CLUZ conservation planning software. This training needs to be broadened to include more local practitioners and researchers from all of the West Africa range states so that the planning system can continue to be used and updated by national experts. The government conservation agencies should also work to include outputs from the planning system in their decision making processes and mainstream conservation planning into other sectors.

Improving the conservation planning system

Planning unit cost data. The global human population density dataset we used in the analysis had a coarse-spatial resolution for many of the countries in West Africa, including Sierra Leone. This meant that planning units in the same region often had very similar cost values, making it difficult to distinguish between areas. If a more detailed population dataset is not available, one way to reduce this problem would be to develop a composite cost map that weighted values based on distance from roads, settlements or other forms of infrastructure.

Improve the WDPA data. We used two types of PA data in the planning system: polygons and points from the World Database on Protected Areas (WDPA). However, during our national workshops experts from the five project countries stated that some of this PA data was inaccurate. Thus, there is a need for national experts to revise these data and the government of each West African country should provide up-to-date information to the WDPA managers at UNEP-WCMC to ensure that the WDPA only contains accurate PA polygon data.

Improve the IBA polygon data. The IBA polygons had small boundary and projection issues that meant that they often did not perfectly match with country coastlines or with data on the same sites stored in the WDPA (some IBAs already have PA status). Therefore, there is a need for in-country experts to help BirdLife International update these spatial data.

Include a wider range of conservation features. We used a relatively narrow set of species as conservation features in the conservation planning system. In particular, there were no data yet included on the IUCN Red List on reptiles, invertebrates or plants. Future analyses would benefit from collecting and importing these data into the planning system. Notably, the imminent addition of the extinction risk of all West African species, assessed within the framework of the PARCC project, to the Red List should allow data on reptiles to be added to the conservation planning system**.**

Include more data on planned developments. We were unable to include data on factors that relate to implementing the results of the spatial conservation prioritisation. In particular, we lacked data on where different sectors, such as agriculture, transport and mining, have plans to develop new projects. This is why we focused on the selection frequency results in our analysis, as these are less prescriptive and can be used to identify where priority areas for conservation and other sectors may overlap. However, ideally this implementation data should be included in the prioritisation process so that Marxan can, wherever possible, avoid selecting areas that are planned for development.

Improve the target-setting approach. We adopted a widely-used approach for setting targets for the different conservation features that is based on their global range. We then modified some of these targets following feedback from national experts. This was an effective way of setting targets for such a large group of conservation features, especially as little is known about many of these broad biodiversity elements and species. However, there is scope for revisiting these targets and modifying them based on the available data on threat and species population viability.

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