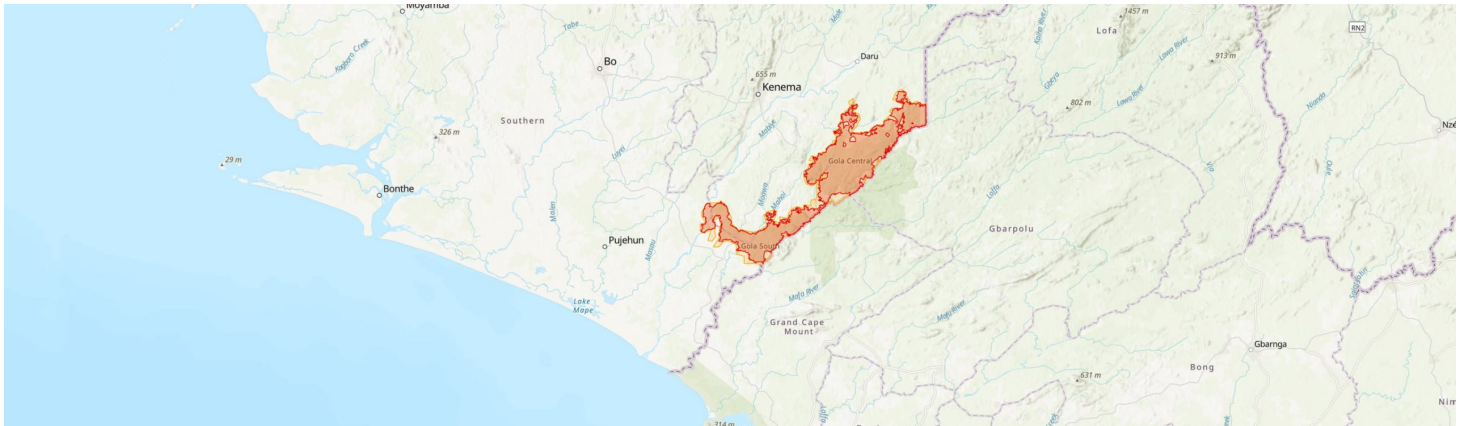


Gola

SIETIPA07



Country: **Sierra Leone**
Administrative region: **Eastern (Province)**
Central co-ordinates: **7.60000 N, -10.90000 E**
Area: **1307.9km²**

Qualifying IPA criteria

A(i), B(i), C(i)

IPA assessment rationale

This IPA qualifies under criteria A(i) as it contains globally significant populations of fifty-one threatened species, as well as A(iii) as it contains the entire known population of a highly range restricted species, *Tricalysia parva*. Additionally this site qualifies under criterion C(i), containing the largest remnant nationally of primary moist closed forest and gallery forest, a threatened habitat type in the region.

Site description

The Gola IPA is located in southeastern Sierra Leone, along the border with Liberia. This IPA is part of the Gola Rainforest National Park (GRNP), a transboundary protected area that represents one of

the largest remaining tracts of Upper Guinean Forest in West Africa. Additionally, the area comprises the largest remaining area of intact, lowland rainforest anywhere in Sierra Leone. While this IPA treats the boundary of the Gola Rainforest as one polygon, the area of the GRNP has been divided into two areas referred to as the 'northern' and 'southern' areas. Effective protection and management of this area is essential to prevent the complete loss of the country's main area of primary evergreen forest.

Botanical significance

Gola has a high diversity in many taxa including a good representation of the threatened and endemic species of the Upper Guinea forests. Many of these species have their westernmost occurrence in Gola.

While a complete botanical checklist for Gola is a work in progress, a total of 665 dicots, 175 monocots and 32 species of ferns (excluding exotics) have thus far been recorded at the site (Klop et al. 2008, Hawthorne 2010, Ake Assi 2016, van der Burgt & Lopez-Poveda 2018). Of the species recorded in the IPA there are at least twenty-two threatened taxa and one species globally endemic to Gola, *Tricalysia parva* (NE). Eight of these 22 species are unique to this IPA including *Gilbertiodendron splendidum*, *Isolona deightonii* and *Vepris fer*. Many other species found in this IPA are endemic to the Upper Guinean forests, such as *Brachystegia leonensis*, *Cola baldwinii*, *Diospyros thomasii*, *Leptonychia occidentalis* and

Memecylon ramosum. Further studies will result in new records of rare species within the IPA.

Habitat and geology

Gola Forest lies within the Upper Guinean Forest ecoregion (Olson et al. 2001) and is characterised by evergreen and semi-deciduous forest, as well as gallery forest along drainage lines. Geologically, the area features ancient Precambrian rocks, which are overlaid iron and magnesium-rich metamorphic rocks of the by the granite-greenstone complex. The predominant soils in Gola are derived from granite, thus are characterized by freely draining sands and gravels, mixed with varying proportions of lateritic gravel. The area supports lush vegetation due to annual rainfall exceeding 2000 mm. Gola is characterized as moist evergreen forest (White 1972), however some parts of the southern and western portions are better classified as moist semi-deciduous forest with inland swamp forest (Klop et al 2008). Evergreen forest is characterised by Heritiera utilis, Brachystegia leonensis, Calpocalyx aubrevillei and Sacoglottis gabonensis. Moist semi-deciduous forest is dominated by Cynometra leonensis, Parinari excelsa, Parkia bicolor and Piptadeniastrum africanum. In swamo forest Raphia palms often dominate alongside characteristic tree species Uapaca spp. and Nauclea diderrichii. Where forest has been cleared, vegetation at various successional stages occurs, ranging from farmbrush to secondary forest, evident in the higher abundance of trees Carapa procera, Macaranga barteri and Musanga cecropioides (Cole 1968).

Conservation issues

Despite its protected status, Gola continues to face significant threats that jeopardise its ecological integrity. These issues are targeted by the not-for-profit 'Gola Rainforest Conservation, which has been active at site since 2014 (although their inception in 2015; Malan et al. 2022). This organisation is formed as a partnership between the Government of Sierra Leone, the Conservation Society of Sierra Leone (CSSL), the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and the people of the seven Gola Chiefdoms (Ashpole 2023). Gola Rainforest Conservation coordinates research and conservation efforts in the area through various initiatives, including the REDD+ programme (Ashpole 2023). Despite sustained conservation attention on Gola National Park, the area remains a hotspot of forest loss from 2002 to 2023, as identified using the Harris et al. (2017) deforestation hotspot methodology available via Global Forest Watch (accessed 2025). A study from 2014-2018 found that the REDD+ programme reduced but not reversed deforestation in Gola NP (Malan et al. 2022), however analysis shows that forest loss in Gola is vastly less of an issue at Gola in comparison to the rest of Sierra Leone (White, unpublished, 2024). Agricultural encroachment into forest, particularly slash-and-burn farming, continues to expand into forest edges, reducing habitat connectivity. The Gola REDD+ project was designed to incentivize communities to shift away from traditional to more sustainable agricultural practices such such as cocoa (Malan et al. 2022),

however while these practices negatively impact plant diversity. Disturbance also facilitates the incursion of species, such as the invasive shrub Chromolaena odorata (Klop et al. 2008). Illegal logging and artisanal mining are primary drivers of deforestation and habitat degradation, often facilitated by weak enforcement of the national park (Klop et al. 2008). Hunting and the bushmeat trade also pose risks to the forest's fauna, indirectly affecting plant populations that rely on animal-mediated seed dispersal, such as the elephant dispersed endangered tree Tieghemella heckelii. Effective conservation of this IPA requires strengthening community-based forest management and addressing socio-economic drivers of deforestation.

Site assessor(s)

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Date of first assessment:

1st Oct 2024

Date of latest reassessment:

27th Apr 2026

Reviewed by:

Martin Cheek, The Royal Botanic Gardens Kew

IPA criterion A species

SPECIES	QUALIFYING SUB-CRITERION	≥ 1% OF GLOBAL POPULATION	≥ 5% OF NATIONAL POPULATION	1 OF 5 BEST SITES NATIONALLY	ENTIRE GLOBAL POPULATION	SOCIO-ECONOMICALLY IMPORTANT	ABUNDANCE AT SITE
<i>Dactyladenia globosa</i> Jongkind	A(i)	✓	✓	✓	—	—	
<i>Berlinia occidentalis</i> Keay	A(i)	✓	✓	✓	—	—	
<i>Brachystegia leonensis</i> Hutch. & Burt Davy	A(i)	✓	✓	✓	—	—	
<i>Cola baldwinii</i> Jongkind	A(i)	✓	✓	✓	—	—	
<i>Gilbertiodendron splendidum</i> (A.Chev. ex Hutch. & Dalziel) J.Léonard	A(i)	✓	✓	✓	—	✓	
<i>Isolona deightonii</i> Keay	A(i)	✓	✓	✓	—	—	
<i>Leptonychia occidentalis</i> Keay	A(i)	✓	✓	✓	—	—	
<i>Memecylon ramosum</i> Jacq.-Fél.	A(i)	✓	✓	✓	—	—	
<i>Vepris fer</i> Cheek	A(i)	✓	✓	✓	—	—	
<i>Anubias gracilis</i> A.Chev. ex Hutch.	A(i)	✓	✓	✓	—	—	
<i>Cryptosepalum tetraphyllum</i> (Hook.f.) Benth.	A(i)	✓	✓	✓	—	✓	
<i>Didelotia afzelii</i> Taub.	A(i)	✓	✓	✓	—	✓	
<i>Gilbertiodendron aylmeri</i> (Hutch. & Dalziel) J.Léonard	A(i)	✓	✓	✓	—	✓	
<i>Gilbertiodendron bilineatum</i> (Hutch. & Dalziel) J.Léonard	A(i)	✓	✓	✓	—	✓	
<i>Guibourtia leonensis</i> J. Léonard	A(i)	✓	✓	✓	—	✓	
<i>Tessmannia baikiaoides</i> Hutch. & Dalziel	A(i)	✓	✓	✓	—	✓	
<i>Entandrophragma candollei</i> Harms	A(i)	✓	✓	✓	—	✓	

SPECIES	QUALIFYING SUB-CRITERION	≥ 1% OF GLOBAL POPULATION	≥ 5% OF NATIONAL POPULATION	1 OF 5 BEST SITES NATIONALLY	ENTIRE GLOBAL POPULATION	SOCIO-ECONOMICALLY IMPORTANT	ABUNDANCE AT SITE
<i>Campylospermum amplexens</i> (Stapf) Farron	A(i)	✓	✓	✓	—	—	
<i>Drypetes afzelii</i> (Pax) Hutch.	A(i)	✓	✓	✓	—	—	
<i>Sericanthe adamii</i> (N.Hallé) Robbr.	A(i)	✓	✓	✓	—	—	
<i>Monocyclanthus vignei</i> Keay	A(i)	✓	✓	✓	—	—	
<i>Afzelia africana</i> Sm. ex Pers.	A(i)	—	—	—	—	—	
<i>Albizia ferruginea</i> (Guill. & Perr.) Benth.	A(i)	—	—	—	—	—	
<i>Amanoa bracteosa</i> Planch.	A(i)	—	—	—	—	—	
<i>Anopyxis klaineana</i> (Pierre) Engl.	A(i)	—	—	—	—	—	
<i>Antrocaryon micrastrum</i> A.Chev. & Guillaumin	A(i)	—	—	—	—	—	
<i>Cola reticulata</i> A.Chev.	A(i)	—	—	—	—	—	
<i>Copaifera salikounda</i> Heckel	A(i)	—	—	—	—	—	
<i>Cordia platythyrsa</i> Baker	A(i)	—	—	—	—	—	
<i>Deinbollia maxima</i> Gilg ex Engl.	A(i)	—	—	—	—	—	
<i>Entandrophragma utile</i> (Dawe & Sprague) Sprague	A(i)	—	—	—	—	—	
<i>Entandrophragma cylindricum</i> (Sprague) Sprague	A(i)	—	—	—	—	—	
<i>Entandrophragma angolense</i> (Welw.) C.DC.	A(i)	—	—	—	—	—	
<i>Garcinia afzelii</i> Engl.	A(i)	—	—	—	—	—	
<i>Garcinia kola</i> Heckel	A(i)	—	—	—	—	—	
<i>Homalium smythei</i> Hutch. &	A(i)	—	—	—	—	—	

SPECIES	QUALIFYING SUB-CRITERION	≥ 1% OF GLOBAL POPULATION	≥ 5% OF NATIONAL POPULATION	1 OF 5 BEST SITES NATIONALLY	ENTIRE GLOBAL POPULATION	SOCIO-ECONOMICALLY IMPORTANT	ABUNDANCE AT SITE
<i>Dalziel</i>							
<i>Lophira alata</i> <i>Banks ex Gaertn. f.</i>	A(i)	—	—	—	—	—	
<i>Milicia regia</i> (A.Chev.) C.C.Berg	A(i)	—	—	—	—	—	
<i>Millettia warneckei</i> Harms	A(i)	—	—	—	—	—	
<i>Nauclea diderrichii</i> (De Wild. & T.Durand) Merrill	A(i)	—	—	—	—	—	
<i>Neolemonniera</i> <i>clitandrifolia</i> A.Chev.	A(i)	—	—	—	—	—	
<i>Nesogordonia</i> <i>papaverifera</i> (A.Chev.) Capuron ex N.Hallé	A(i)	—	—	—	—	—	
<i>Phyllanthus</i> <i>profusus</i>	A(i)	—	—	—	—	—	
<i>Placodiscus</i> <i>oblongifolius</i>	A(i)	—	—	—	—	—	
<i>Shirakiopsis</i> <i>aubrevillei</i> (Beille)Esser	A(i)	—	—	—	—	—	
<i>Schumanniphyto</i> <i>n problematicum</i>	A(i)	—	—	—	—	—	
<i>Terminalia</i> <i>ivorensis</i> A.Chev.	A(i)	—	—	—	—	—	
<i>Turraeanthus</i> <i>africana</i> (Welw. ex C.DC.) Pellegr.	A(i)	—	—	—	—	—	
<i>Warneckea</i> <i>memecyloides</i>	A(i)	—	—	—	—	—	

IPA criterion C qualifying habitats

HABITAT	QUALIFYING SUB-CRITERION	≥ 5% OF NATIONAL RESOURCE	≥ 10% OF NATIONAL RESOURCE	1 OF 5 BEST SITES NATIONALLY	AREAL COVERAGE AT SITE
Low-altitude evergreen forest and gallery forest	C(i)	✓	✓	✓	

General site habitats

GENERAL SITE HABITAT	PERCENT COVERAGE	IMPORTANCE
Forest - Subtropical/Tropical Moist Lowland Forest	—	

Land use types

LAND USE TYPE	PERCENT COVERAGE	IMPORTANCE
Nature conservation	—	
Agriculture (arable)	—	
Agriculture (pastoral)	—	
Harvesting of wild resources	—	

Threats

THREAT	SEVERITY	TIMING
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Protected areas

PROTECTED AREA NAME	PROTECTED AREA TYPE	RELATIONSHIP WITH IPA	AREAL OVERLAP
Gola Rainforest National Park	National Park	IPA encompasses protected/conservation area	100
Sahun	National Reserve	protected/conservation area overlaps with IPA	80

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