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Nigeria's World Migratory Bird Day celebrations reveal unexpected link with Finland

The wonders of migration take one small village by storm, and a chance encounter with a ringed Osprey shows that birds' incredible journeys really do link people on opposite sides of the globe...



Students were taken birdwatching at Omo Biosphere Reserve as part of the event © NCF

By Alex Ngari & Stella Egbe

The 10th of May 2018 was an ordinary day for the Ba'ale of Mokore, the chief of Mokore village near Omo Biosphere Reserve – that is, until the Nigerian Conservation Foundation (NCF, BirdLife Nigeria) called on him. He hadn't heard much about World Migratory Bird Day (WMBD) before, but he was aware that some bird species would arrive at his village and then disappear, only to return after some time. And so, after an exchange of niceties with the NCF representatives, the chief assembled community members in his compound to share information about migratory birds. The subject of migration was discussed widely and deeply using the local Yoruba language. The inhabitants enthusiastically welcomed the opportunity to learn more about the birds' inspirational journeys, the human-induced challenges birds faced while in transit, and how they could help to mitigate them.

It was no longer an ordinary day for the villagers or their leader. For him, migration was a subject both deep and wide! He gave the NCF campaigners his blessing to continue educating the local community about the phenomenon of bird migration within his village. That was day one of WMBD in Nigeria.



The celebrations engaged visitors as diverse as students, researchers and the press © NCF

On the second day, an even larger audience engaged in the celebration, including school children, teachers, private companies, press, staff of the Forestry Research Institute of Nigeria, representatives of Omo-Shasha-Oluwa conservation initiative, and members of local communities. The event involved birdwatching, skits by the Omo Conservation Club and rousing speeches. A talk on bird migration was given by Stella Egbe, while Emmanuel Olabode spoke about conservation activities in the area. Song and dance performances added to the buzzing atmosphere.

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It was during this gathering that participants became aware of how birds connect people across the world. A moving speech was given by Rev. Fr. Marie Tito Adelaja on his experience with migratory birds. Some well-wishers from the village had brought him an injured Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*, a migratory raptor, a few weeks earlier. The bird appeared to have been persecuted by humans, and sadly died shortly afterwards, but it was not possible to identify where it had come from until NCF offered to help. NCF retrieved the rings and made contact with a ringing centre on the other side of the world in Finland, who have confirmed the bird's details.



The Osprey's ring was tracked back to the Museum of Natural History in Helsinki, Finland © NCF

This is just one example of how migratory birds link people across continents, unifying our voices and actions to achieve bird conservation - the important message WMBD is focusing on this year.

Marking WMBD at Omo Biosphere Reserve was made possible through the AfriBirds project. This joint project between NABU (BirdLife partner in Germany) and BirdLife International is funded by The German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation with NCF as the national implementer in Nigeria.

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