

HOPE FOR WEST AFRICAN SAWFISHES!

Back from First Field research expedition, AfricaSaw program can proudly announce that Sawfishes are still present in Western Africa. Despite the dramatic decrease in sawfish populations, since the 70's ; it remains some specific locations that were identified in Guinea Bissau and Sierra Leone during the recent investigations conducted in collaboration with the fisheries departments of the two countries.

Juveniles and mature females were caught regularly the last three years **bringing unexpected hope** for these rays considered as the most endangered elasmobranch species.



A specific Alert Network was spread in the two countries in order to rapidly act in case of accidental catch of a sawfish. A first training session was given to the fisheries observers and MPA rangers to identify the species and to be able to assist the fishermen in IBAP Bissau's office in collaboration with Noé Conservation.

AfricaSaw field mission was able to distribute laminated posters in more than 70 strategic fishing places along the coastline and the rivers of both countries. More than 1000 fishermen were directly sensitized and most of them accepted to become a **'Sawfish friend'** that means contribute to communicate any sawfish by-catch to the alert network, take a picture of the sawfish and make all his best to **release it alive**. Some fishermen from York Island (Bonthe district, Sierra Leone) have recently freed two young sawfishes, giving proof of their self awareness raising as **"eco-actor"**.



Good news in marine ecology have become so rare that these preliminary results worth to be public. But as a gift debt it also creates **huge responsibilities** on the shoulders of the ecology and fisheries national institutions as well as NGO's, MPA's and fishermen communities to confirm the long-term effort likely to reverse the trend.



Considering that clock is truly ticking on these species, that's a **major challenge** to handle to maintain biodiversity in areas where population's food safety is tightly linked to fisheries resources.

Challenge that AfricaSaw team is willing to take up by pursuing his research in the all Western African countries.

Sawfish Alert Network, please call :

078 31 62 76 or **078 92 87 13 Sierra Leone**
512 49 86 or **925 18 17 Guinea-Bissau**




Bissau

Pictures on request

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