

Double boost for biodiversity in Cape Verde

November 4 2020, by Tim Knight



Credit: Zafer Kizilkaya/FFI

Lying almost 500 kilometers off the west coast of Africa, the remote archipelago nation of Cape Verde is arguably among the least well-known of the world's marine biodiversity hotspots. All that could be about to change.

Thanks to the efforts of Fundação Maio Biodiversidade (FMB), with

whom Fauna & Flora International (FFI) has partnered since 2012, the island of Maio has been officially designated as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, ensuring that the country is now well and truly on the conservation map.

Cape Verde supports a rich diversity of marine life, including over 20 species of whale, dolphin and porpoise. All five of the world's most threatened sea turtle species forage in its [coastal waters](#), along with more than 60 shark and ray species.

Maio itself is home to key populations of threatened lemon and nurse sharks, harbors one of the world's most important loggerhead turtle nesting sites and provides a haven for myriad migratory birds. In recent years, however, this wildlife has faced increasing pressure from boat traffic and coastal habitat destruction, as well as unsustainable and illegal fishing activities such as shark finning.

As part of a 700-strong network of Biosphere Reserves under the protective umbrella of UNESCO, the island will now enjoy greater visibility on the global stage, raising the profile of Cape Verde as a biodiversity hotspot and potentially generating increased funding for [conservation work](#), as well as opportunities for collaboration with other reserves.



Ribeira Dom João beach, Maio. Credit: Jeff Wilson/FFI

This is undoubtedly a historic moment for the country, and the news comes hot on the heels of another significant conservation milestone that—from an FFI perspective—is equally gratifying. Years of hard graft and persistence in partnership with FMB have culminated in the long-awaited Protected Areas Management Plan for Maio—the first for the country—finally being approved.

"This is a day to remember in the history of FMB, Maio and Cape Verde," remarked Dr. Rocio Moreno, Director of FMB since 2017. "A huge thank you to FFI for your endless support and for making this possible. I still remember our meeting in Praia in October 2018, where

we planted the seed that led us here."

It is hoped that the additional protection afforded to loggerhead turtles, sharks and the rest of Maio's unique biodiversity once these plans are implemented will help to safeguard the island's natural heritage from the ill-advised and illegal activities that pose a threat to marine life—and, ultimately, to local livelihoods—across the entire archipelago.

"When I arrived in 2017 the approval of the Protected Areas Management Plan and becoming a Biosphere Reserve were two of FMB's goals that seemed very far away," admitted Dr. Moreno. "I am just speechless. It's an amazing end to the year that demonstrates the hard but productive work done by the FMB team and its partners. I really hope this will make a difference in terms of the unsustainable development that was being planned for the island."



Fisherman from Ribeira Dom João, Maio. Credit: Jeff Wilson/FFI

This double dose of good news is fitting reward for everyone at FMB who has fought tooth and nail to protect Maio's threatened biodiversity. It is also a real vindication of FFI's eight-year collaboration with the organization, during which time we have provided a variety of support ranging from technical advice to help with community-led activities such as the Guardians of the Sea initiative and, more recently, emergency funding to enable FMB to weather the ongoing COVID-19 crisis.

It augurs well for the next phase of the partnership, as we explore opportunities to scale up our program of work, during which we hope to engage with industrial fisheries and address the issue of distant-water fishing fleets, as well as replicating our success on Maio through the development of similar initiatives elsewhere in the Cape Verde archipelago.

FFI is in no doubt that investment on an unprecedented scale in locally driven conservation initiatives such as those led by our in-country partner in Cape Verde holds the key to tackling the global biodiversity crisis. We are continuing to urge the world's most influential governments and [business leaders](#) to heed the central message of FFI's Our One Home campaign and commit to investing in the protection of nature.

Provided by Fauna & Flora International

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