**Gola Rainforest National Park**

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**Code of Conduct and Operational Regulations for Permitted Researchers**

Generally, researchers are expected to conduct their research following best scientific practice and ethics. This applies to all different aspects of the research activities, i.e. the interaction with local staff and counterparts, communities, wildlife and the forest environment.

**1) Research Permit and payment receipt:**

a) Researchers are not allowed to enter the National Park without a valid research permit, obtained from the Gola Rainforest National Park (GRNP). The research permit states the names of the researchers, objective of the research, methods to be used and number of specimens to be collected (if relevant), the timeframe and information about the location of planned research.

b) After having completed necessary paperwork and payments at the GRNP headquarters, researchers are issued a receipt that gives information about payments made in the office (e.g. for research fees and accommodation at GRNP substations/guesthouses) and payments that are expected to be made directly in the field (e.g. for community cooks and guides). The receipt needs to be shown to GRNP staff in the field upon request.

**2) GRNP staff:**

a) Researchers are expected to work with at least one GRNP Research Technician (unless none is available) or Community Research Assistant. The participation of a GRNP Research Technician will improve the research work through the local knowledge of GRNP staffs (in terms of the forest, wildlife and communities) and will also enhance the safety of external researchers. Furthermore, though GRNP Technicians and Community Research Assistants are well trained in a variety of survey techniques and taxonomy of relevant groups, it is expected that external researchers are contributing to the general capacity building of GRNP staff and community members through their participation in the various research activities.

b) Unless explicitly stated in the Research Permit, researchers are not allowed to enter the National Park without any designated GRNP staff.

c) Researchers have to provide food for designated GRNP Research Technicians and Community Research Assistants/porters/guides during field work.

**3) Communities:**

a) Good relationships with surrounding communities are very important for the success of the work of GRNP and its protection. Furthermore, many community members have excellent local knowledge of the forest and its organisms. Researchers are expected to include local community guides, research assistants and cooks in their research work, for safety reasons and to create benefits for local communities, but also as their knowledge can significantly contribute to the success of the respective research. No researcher is allowed to enter the forest without at least one local community guide for day tours, or one community guide and one cook for research activities that involve camping in the forest. In case of more than one research team member, at least three community members have to be included in the team.

b) Researchers have to provide food for community guides, research assistants and cooks during field work.

c) Community guides, research assistants and cooks are paid directly following the rates given in the “Guidelines and Fees for Researchers”. GRNP staff members can assist with the payment procedure.

d) Researchers are expected to be flexible and open towards local customs and culture and might occasionally be asked to greet the chief and elders of communities close to the National Park that serve as access points.

e) In case research is also intended to be conducted in community forest areas outside of the National Park boundaries, researchers are expected to inform the respective town chiefs and elders prior to the planned work, in order to get permission from these local authorities. Researchers need to be accompanied by a GRNP staff member in order to facilitate the process and to serve as interpreters. Please note that the GRNP cannot guarantee that the local communities will provide such permission in all cases.

f) Researchers are not permitted to carry out research in cultural sites, such as “secret forest” of the local secret societies or burial sites.

**4) Local counterparts:**

Wherever possible and affordable, GRNP encourages external researchers to include local counterparts into their work, such as students and lecturers from Njala University, the University of Sierra Leone and the Eastern Polytechnic College in Kenema or colleagues from local conservation NGOs. GRNP can help with providing suitable contacts and suggestions for local counterparts.

**5) Interaction with local GRNP staff, community members and counterparts:**

a) Researchers are expected to treat GRNP staff, community members and counterparts respectfully and politely at all times. Good and respectful work relationships are essential for the success of the work of GRNP, research activities and the protection of GRNP. If an irresolvable or ongoing conflict arises the research party is expected to return to GRNP HQ to further address the issue with senior management.

b) External researchers are guests of GRNP and GRNP staff therefore are responsible - although not liable - for the safety and wellbeing of visiting researchers as much as possible. Researchers are therefore advised to follow instructions of GRNP staff members concerning their behavior in the forest, communities and when using GRNP infrastructure or vehicles, and in respect of health and safety issues are required to follow the instructions of the GRNP staffs.

**6) Use of GRNP infrastructure and accommodation:**

a) When using GRNP infrastructure (office, guesthouses, Gola Rainforest Conservation Centre), researchers are expected to follow the instructions given by the local GRNP staff and/or any codes of conduct that are posted in the facilities.

b) Researchers are permitted to hold on to keys for their individual rooms, but keys for the general access to the different buildings have to remain with the respective GRNP caretakers.

**7) Behaviour inside the National Park:**

a) The use of vehicles is not allowed inside the boundaries of the National Park, unless specifically authorised by the GRNP management.

b) Researchers are expected to minimize their impacts on wildlife and plant life at all times.

c) Researchers are expected to avoid extensive and unnecessary collection of specimens or to only collect the number of specimens as detailed in their permits.

d) Researchers are expected to avoid unnecessary manipulation of plants and animals.

e) Researchers are expected to avoid any damage to the forest, or if unavoidable, to keep it to a minimum (e.g. when setting up temporary camps in the forest).

f) Researchers are expected to use existing roads and footpaths wherever possible.

g) Researchers are expected to keep the noise to a minimum while being inside the National

Park.

h) Researchers are expected to prevent forest fires: Fires are allowed only in designated areas with the supervision of village guides and GRNP staff.

**8) Waste management:**

a) Researchers are expected to minimize and manage their waste.

b) Researchers are expected to carry all non-biodegradable waste from the forest back to the community or Kenema, e.g. plastic, bottles, batteries etc.

c) Where there is no toilet, researchers and their team members are expected to go at least 60-100 m away from camps, trails and water sources and to carefully bury excrements and toilet paper using a shovel or machete.

**9) Materials, equipment and transport:**

a) Researchers are expected to be self sufficient with regard to their camping equipment and transport. However, transport can be provided for external researchers (at the rates given in the “Guidelines and Fees for Researchers”) if a vehicle is available. Also some camping equipment can be borrowed from GRNP, based on availability.

b) Researchers are expected to carry a first aid kit for their team members at all times.

c) Researchers are encouraged to be equipped with suitable means of communication for emergency cases, such as a satellite phone for remote areas.

**Researchers are not permitted to enter the national park and to use any GRNP infrastructure without a research permit stating the period and location of the research activities.**

**Researchers who prove to be unable to comply with this code of conduct and deliberately act against it may be required to cease all research activities with immediate effect and/or may not be accepted for future research activities.**