

## **PREFACE**

The Gola forest reserves of Sierra Leone were, until recently, in a region of peace and political stability in which long-term conservation planning seemed both feasible and desirable. This was the context in which this book was researched, and which its arguments address. However, in early 1991 the area was brought sharply and shockingly into the war and conflict which had afflicted Liberia over the preceding year and which now spilled into the border zones of Sierra Leone. Many of the Mende villagers living around the Gola reserves, who had hosted large numbers of refugees from the Liberian civil war throughout 1990, became refugees themselves; others remained in the forest area under appalling rebel-occupied conditions. At the time of writing, the war continues and the full extent of its complex causes and consequences are still unclear. Conflict of this kind provides a very different context for conservation. This book does not try to address it, although it does make some reference to the effects of the 1990 refugee-host relations on the use of forest resources (see also Leach, 1992a).