ENDEMIC BIRD AREAS
OF THE WORLD
Priorities for
Biodiversity Conservation

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Maps by Andrew P. Rayner
Dedication  Endemic Bird Areas of the World: Priorities for Biodiversity Conservation is dedicated to Robert B. Wallace – in recognition of his vision of, commitment to and support for BirdLife International’s Biodiversity Programme.
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### ENDEMIC BIRD AREAS

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PLANNING for the wise use of natural resources is an investment with perpetual rewards. To do this, we need to know how biodiversity is distributed and what the priorities are for its conservation. Our knowledge of birds and the popular enthusiasm for their survival is a most powerful combination. In a previous publication, the award-winning *Putting biodiversity on the map*, BirdLife mapped concentrations of birds with small ranges—many of them threatened with extinction. This new book follows this approach through an abundance of supporting detail and demonstrates clearly the value of birds as indicators of places which are important for biodiversity conservation overall.

The publication of this up-to-date material, and the advocacy programme which will deliver its message to decision-makers around the world, is funded by an innovative collaboration between the Dutch Government (Directoraat-Generaal voor Internationale Samenwerking) and members of BirdLife International’s Rare Bird Club. It shows what can be achieved when the commitment of a government and the enthusiasm of individuals are combined with the common goal of focusing world attention on some of the most threatened birds and the fragile habitats on which they depend. The result is a unique, effective and valuable contribution to biodiversity conservation.

I hope and believe that this book will unite grass-roots support and environmental decision-makers and so help meet one of the greatest challenges facing mankind: the conservation and sustainable development of our biological natural resources.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

THIS BOOK is the culmination of 10 years of work at BirdLife International’s Secretariat, but has only been possible through the guidance and support of BirdLife’s Partner organizations and worldwide network of contacts. We have relied on the firsthand experience of hundreds of ornithologists and conservationists who during the evolution of the project have, in many cases, been asked for information and clarification several times. We very warmly and gratefully thank these people who have freely given us the benefits of their knowledge and of their time (see list of names, below). We simply would not have been able to complete the task without their contributions.

In addition, we have drawn on data from several other BirdLife research projects, and contributors to these may not be personally acknowledged here. We therefore also extend thanks to the many people who provided information to these, notably to Putting biodiversity on the map: priority areas for global conservation (ICBP 1992)—the first publication of the results of this project—but also to Threatened birds of Africa and related islands (Collar and Stuart 1985), Threatened birds of the Americas (Collar et al. 1992), Birds to watch 2: the world list of threatened birds (Collar et al. 1994) and Key areas for threatened birds in the Neotropics (Wege and Long 1995), publications which have all contributed significantly to our understanding of Endemic Bird Areas and their birds.

We acknowledge our many colleagues whom we feel privileged to have worked with. We are honoured to be the authors of this book for we are very aware that in truth its publication represents a mighty team effort by all the staff. In particular we thank Nigel Collar (Research Fellow, BirdLife) who was the main instigator of this project and who is, for all of us, both a mentor and friend. His own work has laid the foundations and standards for most of BirdLife’s research, and he has read all the Endemic Bird Area accounts and the introductory sections, and commented extensively. We also thank Colin Bibby (Director of Science and Policy, BirdLife) for generally overseeing our work and for providing us with scientific guidance, and our other directors, Lindsay Derry, Christoph Imboden and Mike Rands who worked hard against the odds to keep us to schedule.

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We draw special attention to our co-authors of Putting biodiversity on the map—Colin Bibby, Nigel Collar, Melanie Heath, Christoph Imboden, Tim Johnson and Simon Thirgood. They helped to lay the foundations for this book and we have made extensive use of their ideas and information in our introductory chapters. We especially thank Melanie Heath who, along with the four of us, was one of the main data-gatherers and who prepared some of the early drafts of the EBA accounts. We also acknowledge the other people who helped us to gather the bird distribution data on which the analyses are based including Paul Andrew, Mike Barker, Leticia Brandão, George Green, Frank Lambert, Craig Robson and Tony Stones, and many of the people listed below and members of the BirdLife staff. We have been helped along the way by a stream of willing volunteers including Tim Allwood, David Butler, Francis Brearley, Jonathan Ekstrom (who organised the picture research) and Tony Payne, and we thank them all for their enthusiastic commitment.

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SUMMARY

The problem

Biodiversity—the total variety of life on earth—is being lost at an increasing pace. Despite growing popular support to stem this loss, conservation is hindered because financial resources are limited and the knowledge of the distribution of most organisms is poor.

Towards a solution

BirdLife International’s Biodiversity Project makes a unique contribution to the identification of priorities for biodiversity conservation by using birds—one of the best-known groups of animals—as indicators of areas of high endemism. Limited conservation resources can most effectively be directed at these places.

The Biodiversity Project’s results

- Over 25% of all birds (2,561 species) have restricted ranges, being confined to areas of less than 50,000 km² (the size of Costa Rica).

- These small areas overlap to form Endemic Bird Areas (EBAs), such that the majority of restricted-range species (93% of them) are encompassed by 218 EBAs.

- The restricted-range birds include 816 species that are currently classified as threatened—74% of all threatened bird species. Most (80%) of the 62 species that have gone extinct in the last 200 years also had restricted ranges.

- EBAs are found around the world, but most (77%) of them are located in the tropics and subtropics. The top countries for EBAs are Indonesia, Mexico, Brazil, Peru, Colombia, Papua New Guinea and China, all of which have more than 10 each.
Endemic Bird Areas of the World

• The natural habitat in most EBAs (83%) is forest, especially tropical lowland and montane moist forest.

• EBAs vary considerably in size (from a few square kilometres to more than 100,000 km²) and in the numbers of restricted-range species that they support (from two to 80).

• Historically, some 20% of the world’s birds were totally confined to EBAs whose area covered 2% of the earth’s land surface. Today almost half of the EBAs have lost more than 50% of their key habitats, and 20% of the world’s birds can be found in only 1% of the earth’s land surface where these habitats still remain.

• Most EBAs (85%) have one or more threatened or extinct restricted-range bird species. Many restricted-range species are at risk—even in EBAs where the habitat remains relatively intact—owing to the intrinsic vulnerability of having a very small range and/or population.

• The majority of EBAs are important for restricted-range species from other wildlife groups. For example, there is a close similarity (an overlap of more than 60%) between the location of EBAs and areas which are similarly important for plants.

What can be done now?

• These findings show that the conservation of a major part of the earth’s terrestrial biodiversity can indeed be ensured by focusing conservation resources and actions within a relatively small total area. The EBAs of the world are clearly priorities for conservation action.

• At the national level, information on EBAs can be used directly in the implementation of conservation agreements, notably the Convention on Biological Diversity which among other things requires member states to identify important areas and ecosystems.

• At the local level, representative key sites within EBAs can be targeted, such as in BirdLife’s Important Bird Areas programme, which makes recommendations for specific conservation action, ranging from the establishment and management of protected areas to the sustainable use of natural resources.