

FOREWORDS

THE BirdLife Partnership strives to conserve birds, their habitats and global biodiversity, working with people towards sustainability in the use of natural resources. Critical to achieving this goal is our understanding of the links between wise use of natural resources and poverty alleviation. We must recognise that sustaining people's livelihoods requires not only economically sustainable growth, but also ecologically sustainable development. BirdLife, through its programme of data-gathering, synthesis and analysis has played a pioneering role in highlighting the unprecedented loss of biodiversity worldwide, taking advantage of the wealth of data available on birds and using them as key environmental indicators. This publication makes a major contribution to our understanding of the status and distribution of birds in Africa.

Perhaps BirdLife's greatest contribution, however, to sustaining all life on earth is to provide mechanisms for pre-emptive action. In this respect, the BirdLife Important Bird Area Programme is unique. It identifies sites for biodiversity conservation by applying locally a set of objective criteria to an internationally agreed standard. This provides the basis for local, national, regional and global action and advocacy. *Important Bird Areas in Africa and associated islands* is a unique and powerful tool for the conservation of birds, and it makes an outstanding contribution to the sustainability of human use of natural resources throughout the continent.

Her Majesty Queen Noor of Jordan
Honorary President of BirdLife International

THE BirdLife Partnership is currently present in 18 African countries: from Tunisia in the north to South Africa in the south, and from Sierra Leone in the west to Ethiopia in the east. The autonomous national conservation organizations that comprise this network have almost 300 staff and 30,000 members, and conservation activities typically involve over 200,000 children in almost 5,000 wildlife clubs. This huge network is delivering effective biodiversity conservation appropriate to the African environment because national approaches reflect local culture, resources and priorities. For example, most BirdLife Partner organizations in Africa have a more general agenda than birds that usually includes salient local issues such as desertification in the Sahel, brushfires in the equatorial region and invasive species on islands. However, a common theme throughout the continent is the Important Bird Areas (IBAs) programme, which started in 1993. Since then, the BirdLife Africa Partnership and numerous other conservationists have been working together to identify, document and ultimately protect a network of sites of global conservation significance for birds across Africa.

organizations in Africa. This has greatly strengthened each Partner's ability to achieve conservation action and has developed their relationships with the government bodies responsible for the management of natural resources. Critically, the research and compilation process has seen the formation of a unique collaborative network of skilled conservationists. Thus, ten countries secured funding from the Global Environment Facility through the UNDP in 1998 to turn their Important Bird Area inventories into national plans of action and advocacy, moving the process on from identification to the conservation action that protects sites.

Implementation of the programme has led to significant and innovative advances in biodiversity conservation in the region. The international cooperation, institution building and training necessary for the compilation of national Important Bird Area inventories have had a profound impact on the capacity of the BirdLife Partner

The IBA programme in Africa has now culminated in the publication of *Important Bird Areas in Africa*, a book which we believe makes a new and critical contribution to conservation and development in our region. At one level, this book will mark the end of a successful process to compile the first regional inventory for nature conservation in Africa, but the African Partnership would like to turn this 'end' into a 'new beginning'; the beginning of a truly African process of managing our precious natural resources and biodiversity in a strategic way, to benefit all present and future inhabitants. This book will help us chart such a path.

Alhaji Dr Muhtari Aminu-Kano
Executive Director, Nigerian Conservation Foundation
Chair of Council for the Africa Partnership 2000/2001

AFRICA has a wealth of natural resources, ranging from mountain forests to desert, wetlands and marine habitats. It also has a large rural population dependent on these resources. Diverse and viable knowledge systems have evolved, which help communities to live harmoniously with their environment. Growing human population and high levels of poverty, however, are placing these resources under increasing pressures. However important sites may be for biodiversity conservation, it is clear they cannot co-exist with communities which are hostile to them.

economic burdens is not likely to care very much whether its use of resources is sustainable. Unless, of course, they become partners in conservation, with the capacity and an enabling environment for making and executing conservation plans and—more importantly—making decisions on how natural resources in their area are used. When conservation is seen as enhancing livelihoods, it will be embraced. This is the thinking behind Site Support Groups such as KENVO, now taking a lead in developing a management plan for the much-valued Kikuyu Escarpment forests IBA.

Indigenous knowledge and experience in the conservation of natural resources is valued increasingly, and there is an urgent need to support and recognise the contribution local communities can make to achieving global conservation objectives. Realistic conservation strategies and partnerships are required to align conservation needs and human needs. One such partnership is the Important Bird Areas programme in Kenya, implemented by the national BirdLife Partner, Nature Kenya. The programme recognises that social-cultural changes have eroded some of the valuable traditional conservation knowledge and that there is poor commitment and awareness, resulting in attitudes that clash with conservation. A poorly empowered community faced with heavy

The KENVO experience shows that birds can be very effective tools in community conservation. The rapid increase of community participation in birding activities, especially by the youth, is a healthy indicator of environmental understanding. I believe that by providing detailed information on key sites for birds and biodiversity, as is done in this book, communities will be further empowered and enabled to take appropriate decisions and conservation actions. This is vital for securing the conservation of IBAs in the future. This book marks a milestone in conservation of our declining but yet very important resources.

David K Kuria,
Coordinator, Kijabe Environment Volunteers (KENVO), Kenya

RARE are the times when we are not aware of birds, and rare the places where we do not see them. They represent, in their power of flight, in their busy existence, and in their sheer beauty, an ethereal side of human beings. They lift our spirits and remind us of that part of us that is forever free. Yet, one in every nine species of birds is in danger of extinction. We know this because modern man has come to recognise that the fate of birds, like the fate of reptiles, amphibians, fish and plants, mirrors humanity's chances of survival.

All people depend on Earth's natural endowment for their lives and livelihoods. Because of the continuing threats to biodiversity, the international community has mandated this global issue as one of the main foci of the work of the Global Environment Facility. In the decade since it began working, many of the principles that are the foundation of the GEF's operational strategy, principles like participation and sustainability, have also become bywords for international conservation thinking and environmental governance.

Since 1991, the GEF has financed more than 800 projects in 160 countries, disbursing more than US\$3.2 billion in grants, with co-financing of US\$8 billion. Of this amount, close to \$1.2 billion in grants went to some 400 biodiversity projects, attracting \$2 billion in co-financing. The rest addressed climate change, degradation of international waters, ozone depletion, desertification and deforestation. These projects were developed through the GEF's implementing agencies, the World Bank, UNDP and UNEP. Recently, the number of agencies has been increased to include the four regional development banks, UNIDO, FAO and IFAD, thus

further diversifying the agency constituency that has access to GEF project financing. Working with the NGO community has also been a major goal for the GEF. Our strategy recognises that the local, national and international NGO community plays an important role in a number of areas, including facilitating stakeholder access, in scientific and technical studies, and in taking on devolved responsibility for managing key natural resources. Specific channels, such as small grants and the medium-sized project window, have been established to ensure GEF resources reach a wide range of critical stakeholders at the local level.

Our relationship with the BirdLife Partnership of national NGOs stretches back to the time of the GEF's establishment. Alongside World Heritage Sites, Biosphere Reserves, and Ramsar Sites, Important Bird Areas (IBAs) are recognised as one of the systems for classifying sites that can be considered globally important. By applying robust IBA criteria, the conservationists in the BirdLife Partnership have identified a remarkable network of sites. I congratulate the committed NGOs and individuals in this grassroots-level African constituency on their achievement. Africa's IBAs definitely provide another key foundation for ensuring the conservation of major elements of the continent's unique biodiversity, including the protection of its distinctive bird life.

Dr Mohamed T. El-Ashry,
Chief Executive Officer and Chairman
of the Global Environment Facility (GEF)

WETLANDS International et BirdLife International entretiennent une collaboration qui date de très longtemps. En 1989, par exemple, le Bureau de Recherche sur les oiseaux d'eau et les Zones Humides (précurseur de Wetlands International) a collaboré avec l'ICBP (précurseur de BirdLife) dans la publication des Zones Importantes pour les Oiseaux en Europe, un événement qui se révèle être une étape déterminante en matière d'information notamment quand il s'agit de mettre à la disposition des décideurs et des exploitants urbains Européens des informations accessibles.

Plus récemment, une collaboration similaire et aussi étroite se fait en Afrique. Ainsi, Wetlands International est représenté dans le Conseil Technique de BirdLife International qui est chargé de superviser le programme sur les Zones Importantes pour les Oiseaux d'eau en Afrique tandis que BirdLife International siège dans le Comité de Suivi du DOEA, un comité qui est chargé du suivi biennal des oiseaux d'eau partout en Afrique. Sur le terrain, les deux institutions ont collaboré dans la gestion durable des sites de biodiversité importante en menant des projets conçus pour exécuter les protocoles des conventions et des accords intergouvernementaux, en particulier la Convention sur les Zones Humides (Ramsar), l'Accord sur la conservation des Oiseaux d'eau Migrateurs d'Afrique et d'Eurasie (Convention de Bonn) et la Convention sur la Diversité Biologique. Cependant, le développement de capacité reste le

domaine le plus important dans la collaboration existant entre ces deux institutions. Wetlands International et BirdLife International ont été les plus grands «avocats» du développement d'une capacité nationale et locale pour la conservation de la biodiversité. Ceci explique le soutien commun apporté à un certain nombre d'ONG œuvrant en Afrique à travers diverses initiatives de formation à leur égard. Cette collaboration est illustrée par l'appui important que les deux institutions apportent au Congrès Ornithologique Pan-Africain, un événement quadriennal qui a vu une augmentation phénoménale dans le rendement des conservationnistes Africains ces dernières années.

Un autre succès majeur dans la relation réussie entre ces deux institutions est la publication de cet excellent volume sur les Zones Importantes pour les Oiseaux en Afrique.

Nous félicitons chaleureusement BirdLife International pour les efforts déployés dans le rassemblement de ces informations riches obtenues de partout dans le continent. Nous souhaiterions continuer à travailler en étroite collaboration avec BirdLife International en Afrique pour passer des recommandations de ce livre aux actions de conservation directes.

Mr Seydina Issa Sylla
Coordonnateur du Programme Afrique de l'ouest de
Wetlands International

ALMOST 2,000 years ago, Pliny the Elder penned the phrase "There is always something new out of Africa". Today, birds are the best-known vertebrates in Africa, but new species are still being discovered almost annually. As yet, Africa's birds do not face an imminent extinction crisis on the scale of that threatening the birds of, for example, south-east Asia. This is, however, no cause for complacency on a continent characterized by rapid human population growth and widespread poverty, where conservation often plays second fiddle to immediate human needs and aspirations. Life in Africa, from fuel to food and from medicine to tourism, is intricately linked to its natural resources and biodiversity. However, the environmental ravages of war, unrest and exploitation have taken a heavy toll, and a renaissance in African conservation is desperately required if this erosive tide is to be stemmed. An informed understanding of conservation needs and priorities is an essential precursor to this. By placing bird conservation in a continental context, this book represents an achievement of a nature and on a scale unmatched in Africa. Because birds have the potential to act as

biodiversity surrogates for other, less well-known groups, especially in the tropics, the ramifications of this publication extend far beyond birds alone. Birds, like plants and other wildlife, do not respect national or regional boundaries and conservation strategies that ignore this reality will be sub-optimal at best. For example, the species-rich forests of West Africa and the Eastern Arc are scattered across a spider's web of political boundaries and their biodiversity cannot be conserved by single-country initiatives. Habitat loss, fragmentation and degradation are pervasive and accelerating realities, and international conservation protocols are needed if the unique ecosystems, communities and species of Africa are to be conserved for future generations. This book provides an invaluable platform for the development of such strategies—a platform to launch an African conservation renaissance of world-wide significance.

Professor Morné du Plessis,
Director, Percy FitzPatrick Institute of Ornithology,
University of Cape Town