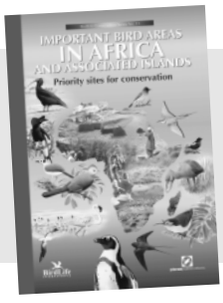
SUMMARY

WHAT IS THE BIRDLIFE IBA PROGRAMME?

The Important Bird Area (IBA) Programme of BirdLife International is a worldwide initiative aimed at identifying, documenting and protecting a network of sites critical for the conservation of the world's birds. The IBA programme in the African region, begun in 1993, is addressing site-orientated research and action, encompassing management, monitoring, education, advocacy, and national and international legal protection.



DATA FOR PRIORITY SETTING AND DECISION MAKING

Scientific data collection and analysis play a highly influential role in underpinning the conservation and management of IBAs. Useful for conservationists, ornithologists, governmental and non-governmental agencies, policy-makers, researchers, consultants and planners, the data presented here are intended to guide practical management and actions at IBAs and to target political and legal mechanisms to achieve the adequate protection of IBAs.

A NETWORK OF GLOBALLY IMPORTANT SITES

Through the rigorous application of internationally agreed, objective ornithological criteria, the global importance of the network of sites identified is assured. By ensuring that each site meets or exceeds the required, often quantitative, selection thresholds, the significance of each site is justified, and the global standardization of the criteria facilitates comparison between sites at local, national and regional levels. These criteria are compatible with those used to designate wetlands of international importance under the Ramsar Convention.

Table 1. Summary of global ('A') criteria for selection of important Bird Areas.

Category	Criterion	Notes
A1 Species of global conservation concern	The site regularly holds significant numbers of a globally threatened species, or other species of global conservation concern.	The site qualifies if it is known, estimated or thought to hold a population of a species categorized as Critical or Endangered. Population-size thresholds for Vulnerable, Conservation Dependent, Data Deficient and Near Threatened species are set regionally, as appropriate, to help in site selection.
A2 Assemblage of restricted-range species	The site is known or thought to hold a significant component of the restricted-range species whose breeding distributions define an Endemic Bird Area (EBA) or Secondary Area (SA).	The site has to form one of a set selected to ensure that, as far as possible, all restricted-range species of an EBA or SA are present in significant numbers in at least one site in the set and, preferably, in more.
A3 Assemblage of biome-restricted species	The site is known or thought to hold a significant component of the group of species whose distributions are largely or wholly confined to one biome.	The site has to form one of a set selected to ensure that, as far as possible, all species restricted to a biome are adequately represented.
A4 Congregations	**(i)** The site is known or thought to hold, on a regular basis, ≥1% of a biogeographic population of a congregatory waterbird species.	This applies to waterbird species as defined by Rose and Scott (1997). Thresholds are generated in some instances by combining flyway populations within a biogeographic region, but for other species that lack quantitative data, thresholds are set regionally or inter-regionally, as appropriate. In such cases, thresholds will be taken as estimates of 1% of the biogeographic population.
or	**(ii)** The site is known or thought to hold, on a regular basis, ≥1% of the global population of a congregatory seabird or terrestrial species.	This includes those seabird species not covered by Rose and Scott (1997). Where quantitative data are lacking, numerical thresholds for each species are set regionally or inter-regionally, as appropriate. In such cases, thresholds will be taken as estimates of 1% of global population.
or	**(iii)** The site is known or thought to hold, on a regular basis, ≥20,000 waterbirds or ≥10,000 pairs of seabirds of one or more species.	For waterbirds, this is the same as Ramsar Convention criteria category 5.
or	**(iv)** The site is known or thought to exceed thresholds set for migratory species at bottleneck sites (see Box 7 for definition).	Numerical thresholds are set regionally or inter-regionally, as appropriate.

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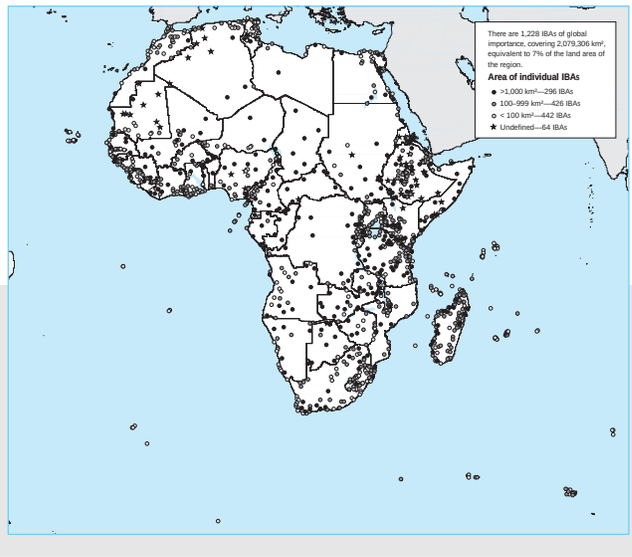
CONTRIBUTIONS BY A NETWORK OF PEOPLE ACROSS THE REGION

This volume results from the contributions of a large number of ornithologists, birdwatchers, conservation experts and other specialists from across the region. More than a hundred people have been directly involved in the collation of data and many times that number have laid the foundations for this project though carrying out field surveys of bird distributions and numbers during past decades. In some twenty countries the BirdLife International Partner organization or equivalent has coordinated the work nationally, and this has generally involved substantial collaboration with governmental and non-governmental organizations through local, national and regional mechanisms.

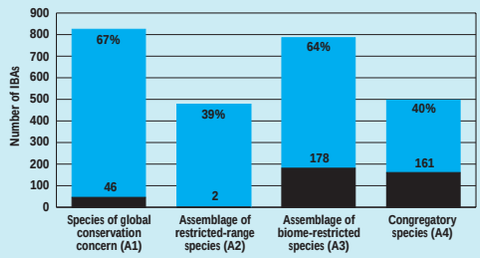


A TOTAL OF 1,228 IBAs COVER 7% OF THE AFRICAN REGION

A comprehensive network of IBAs has been identified across the 58 countries and territories of the African region. The effective protection and management of these sites, a relatively low percentage of the area of each country, is a realistic goal that would make a significant contribution to the conservation of many bird species and other biodiversity in Africa.

SITES IDENTIFIED UNDER DIFFERENT CRITERIA

Two-thirds of the IBAs in Africa have been selected, wholly or in part, for species of global conservation concern, of which there are 343 in the region. A similar proportion of IBAs have been chosen for the assemblages of biome-restricted species that occur within them, while more than about one third of IBAs are selected for species of restricted range (those confined to Endemic Bird Areas). Almost 500 sites (40%) qualify for waterbirds, seabirds and/or terrestrial species that congregate in significantly large numbers.



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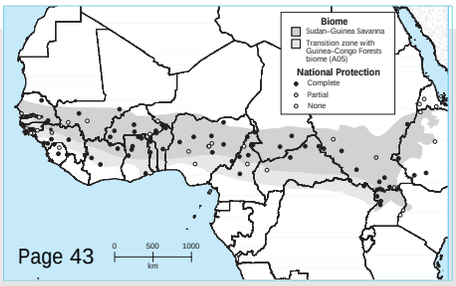

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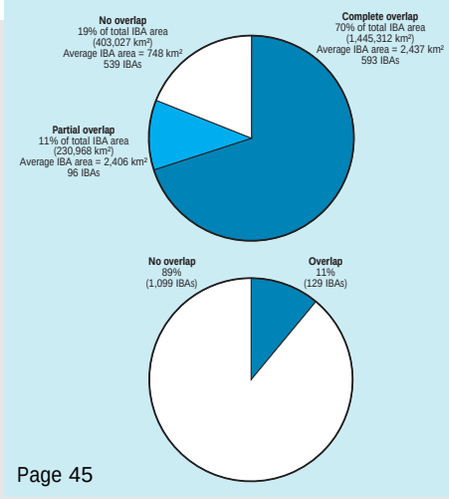
SITES FORM NETWORKS TO PROTECT SPECIES ASSEMBLAGES

Fifteen biomes (or biogeographic realms) covering mainland Africa and Madagascar, have been recognized, to which 974 bird species are globally confined. For example, for the Sudan–Guinea Savanna biome a network of 105 Important Bird Areas has been identified across 22 countries. Between them, these sites support all the 54 species that are restricted to the biome. In addition, the sites chosen in each country have, as far as possible, been selected such that, taken together, they support all species of the biome recorded nationally, with an average of 83% national coverage actually achieved.

44% OF SITES HAVE NO PROTECTION BY NATIONAL LAW, AND 89% ARE NOT RECOGNIZED UNDER INTERNATIONAL CONVENTIONS

Virtually all countries and territories in the African region have legal and institutional frameworks for the designation and conservation of protected areas. IBAs should be designated as protected areas under national law where appropriate. Although 56% of IBAs are wholly or partly under some form of protection by national law, in practice the proportion is much lower because many areas are protected only on paper and because some forms of protection, e.g. designation as Forest Reserve, can nevertheless allow highly exploitative use of the natural resources of the area, e.g. large-scale clear-cutting of forest under logging concessions, which can have highly negative impacts on the biodiversity of the area.

Most countries in the region have ratified global conventions under which areas of international importance for biodiversity can be recognized. Despite the global importance of the IBAs identified in this book, only 11% of these sites benefit from any international recognition or protection under these agreements.



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IBAs IN THE CONTEXT OF THE WIDER ENVIRONMENT

Increasingly, many environmental problems and threats to IBAs are regional or global in scope or origin, and cannot be addressed solely by effective protection and management of IBAs alone. In addition, many species live and breed at low densities in a dispersed, non-congregatory manner, and their populations therefore cannot be conserved successfully by a sites-based approach alone. It is vital, therefore, that conservation of the wider environment is also pursued, in addition to, and in the context of, the protection of IBAs, through the integration of environmental objectives into all policy sectors.

WHAT ACTIONS NEED TO BE TAKEN?

Immense pressures continue to be placed on the African environment through unplanned developments in agricultural expansion and intensification, forestry, fisheries, transport, energy, industry, tourism/recreation and urbanization. This publication shows that such pressures are severely affecting many of the most important sites for birds in Africa. It also shows how IBAs form a key element in a conservation strategy for Africa and how, through local and national NGO–government partnerships that involve capacity building, advocacy and monitoring, innovative, locally appropriate approaches are being developed and adopted to safeguard such sites.