

FOREWORDS

ASIA is a rapidly growing economy. As a result, there is ever more pressure being brought to bear on its natural resources. Across the region, there are few places left where the influence of the increasingly international and unrestrained markets is not being felt. This demand for land and raw materials has placed Asia's forests, wetlands and grasslands under great stress. Such market demand offers some economic stability, but only in the short term. In the long term, it is in many cases totally unsustainable. The consequential threat to the remarkable biodiversity in Asia was dramatically highlighted by BirdLife's detailed Red Data Book *Threatened Birds of Asia*. Around one quarter of all bird species in Asia were found to be of conservation concern, and 323 species or about 12% at risk of global extinction.

In order to halt and reverse this negative trend, it is imperative that the most important areas of natural and semi-natural habitat first be identified and then prioritised on the basis of scientific analysis. Only then can we start to take effective conservation measures. BirdLife International initiated its Important Bird Areas programme for this purpose, and the identification process involves a thorough analysis using internationally-agreed criteria, through national and local level consultations led by the BirdLife Partnership and involving NGOs, experts and government agencies.

This inventory of Important Bird Areas in Asia is the product of more than 8 years of work, covering every Asian country and resulting in the identification of 2,293 magnificent areas across the region. Of these, 976 or 43% are lacking any formal protection status. Since birds are excellent indicators of overall biodiversity, these areas will be important for other fauna and flora. By adopting this method, we are able to protect whole areas, not only for their biodiversity, but also for their capacity to provide such natural resources as fresh potable water and forest products and to prevent such environmental disasters as floods and forest fires. Without doubt, the conservation of such areas will contribute to the broader agenda of environmental management, sustainable development, and poverty eradication.

BirdLife believes that the Asian IBA inventory provides a sound basis for the development of national conservation strategies and protected areas programmes, and highlights areas that should be safeguarded through wise policies and land-use planning. We trust and hope that the IBA Programme provides a focus for the

conservation efforts of civil society including national and regional NGO networks, and the grant-giving and lending programmes of international banks and development agencies.

BirdLife also believes that the IBA inventory provides sound guidance in the implementation of global conventions, particularly the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and the Convention on Migratory Species (Bonn Convention). The information needed by governments for the development of bilateral and multilateral agreements regarding sites for migratory birds is concisely presented, as is the identification and conservation of flyway networks, a cause particularly close to my heart. It is to be hoped that the new IBA inventory will be fully utilised in the initiation of policies and measures regarding migratory birds.

All is not well with the world. We all feel it. We all know it. Surely, and with increasing speed, we are approaching a point in time when nations, and the individuals that make up these nations, will have little choice but to take immediate action. The dedicated gathering of data and their scientific analysis by BirdLife International over the years will form an important basis for action plans at that time.

I firmly believe that the single most important contribution that BirdLife will have made in the history of ornithology and environmental conservation is the compilation of IBA inventories that cover the world. The global network that we have built up of like-minded people who are concerned about the fate of our planet is making this compilation possible. That same network is certain to play an increasingly vital role in advocating and implementing measures based on these inventories.

On behalf of the BirdLife Partnership and its public memberships across Asia, I ask you all to do whatever is within your power to secure in one way or another the conservation of these very important areas. The future of Asia lies in our hands—precious and fragile, but potentially sustainable and strong. We must choose well on behalf of all the life forms that inhabit her.

**Her Imperial Highness Princess Takamado,
Honorary President,
BirdLife International**



THIS publication, highlighting almost 2,300 Important Bird Areas across Asia and presented in summary form, is another milestone in the BirdLife Asia Partnership's mission to conserve wild birds and their habitats by working with people towards sustainability in the use of natural resources. By focusing on the most important sites, the IBA inventory represents a complementary strategy to earlier comprehensive works by the BirdLife Asia Partnership, the BirdLife Red Data Book *Threatened Birds of Asia* and *Saving Asia's Threatened Birds*.

IBAs form a cornerstone of the BirdLife programme in Asia, and this work has been underway since 1996, involving the entire BirdLife network of Partners and Affiliates. Data gathering at national level has been achieved in consultation with a wide range of national experts, and this project is a fine example of collaboration amongst diverse interested parties.

Although the focus is on birds, many IBAs are also important biodiversity areas with concentrations of endemic animals and plants and are of wider ecosystem significance.

Many IBAs are unprotected or under-protected and the BirdLife Asia Partnership will now be focusing on promoting an awareness of the location and importance of the IBAs, and encouraging

governments to increase their legal protection and safeguard IBAs through land use planning, policies and strategies. BirdLife will also be taking direct action for priority sites, through monitoring IBAs and campaigning to remove any threats. Where possible, we will be promoting the establishment of locally-based Site Support Groups to complement the conservation work of government agencies. Many sites are worthy of designation in accordance with international conservation conventions, such as the Ramsar Convention, and BirdLife will be encouraging governments to work towards international recognition of IBAs.

The BirdLife Asia Partnership has shown that it can achieve the objectives that it has set. Much work remains to be done, but I am confident that major progress will be made with IBA conservation over the years to come. We encourage all interested parties to work for the conservation of these very precious areas.

**Lim Kim Keang,
Chairman,
BirdLife Asia Council**



SINCE the 1980s, there have been various initiatives and agreements to promote regional cooperation on migratory bird conservation in Asia. One of these is the Kushiro Initiative in 1994, which has since evolved into the Asia-Pacific Migratory Waterbird Strategy. Three waterbird “flyway networks”, covering Anatidae, cranes and shorebirds, have been established under the Strategy. As of September 2004, 82 “flyway sites” have been designated by participating countries, of which 68 sites are in 10 Asian countries. Activities such as research, training, site management, education and promotion of public awareness have been undertaken with good results. These “flyway networks” provide a sound basis for waterbird conservation in Asia.

However, it is clear that there are many more sites that are yet to be identified and protected. The Important Bird Areas Programme of BirdLife International uses the same 1% regional population criterion to determine site importance as the waterbird networks, and it therefore provides a valuable reference for Asian countries to identify sites important for waterbird conservation generally, and in particular to designate further “flyway sites”. The IBA inventory also identifies potential Ramsar Sites in the context

of the Convention on the Conservation of Wetlands. More than this, it will also be a useful reference in the implementation of other international conventions, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity, as well as the many bilateral agreements on migratory birds that exist between Asian countries (which cover species other than wetland and migratory species).

As with the conservation masterpiece *Threatened Birds of Asia: The BirdLife International Red Data Book*, published in 2001, the Ministry of the Environment has been pleased to support the IBA programme of BirdLife International and the Wild Bird Society of Japan. We believe publication of these valuable references is very useful to Asian countries, and we hope governments will use the IBA inventory to enhance protection for Asia’s most important sites.

Yoshinori Natori
Director, Wildlife Conservation Division,
Ministry of the Environment, Japan
Chair, Migratory Waterbird Conservation
Committee, Asian-Pacific Migratory
Waterbird Conservation Strategy



IMPORTANT sites for biodiversity and natural habitats across Asia continue to face pressure from both poorly-planned development projects and changing patterns of land use. Alongside the strengthening and expansion of protected area systems, there is a need to further integrate site and habitat conservation into mainstream sectors, such as agriculture, forestry, mining, transport, energy, urban development, and tourism. Whilst primary responsibility for better planning lies at national and local government levels, international development banks and other sources of development finance can, and do, have an important role to play.

The World Bank for example has in place a comprehensive natural habitats policy (OP 4.04) that provides a safeguard for both established protected areas and other important sites for biodiversity. The Bank seeks to support the protection, maintenance and rehabilitation of these sites, and encourages borrowers to incorporate such actions into their development and environmental strategies. The Bank does not support projects that, in the Bank’s opinion, involve the significant conversion or degradation of these sites. Other development banks, such as the Asian Development Bank and Japan Bank for International Cooperation, also have safeguard policies, and there are moves to harmonise policies amongst the major lending institutions.

In order to implement these policies, it is vitally important for governments and lending institutions to know the location of

important areas of natural habitat. All too often areas are degraded or destroyed, or plans advanced to beyond the point of no return, without development planners being aware of their importance. In the World Bank’s East Asia and Pacific Region we regularly use a variety of BirdLife products in our safeguard reviews of development projects, and they have helped us to identify issues which had not hitherto been identified by the project proponents. We recognise that there is more to biodiversity than just birds, but we also acknowledge the close (if imperfect) relationship between BirdLife’s Important Bird Areas, and a site good for other elements of biodiversity. BirdLife thus plays a leading role in identifying and disseminating the location and biodiversity values of these important areas. This inventory of IBAs in Asia is a further example of BirdLife’s pioneering work in this field, and I commend governments and financing institutions in the region to incorporate their use in their evolving processes of safeguard reviews to ensure that development actions are more environmentally sustainable than they might have been in the past.

Tony Whitten,
Senior Biodiversity Specialist,
World Bank



GLOBAL environmental conservation is the most important issue that all of mankind must face. We must recover the past capacity of the Earth and pass it on to future generations. To achieve this, we need to be more aware of the importance of the Earth in both business and our personal lives, and must strive to continuously change our corporate activities and lifestyles in order to reduce society’s impact on the global environment to sustainable levels. The Ricoh Group has long been working towards better environmental management by adopting environmental conservation as its mission. Ricoh believes that conservation activities need to be carried out on a continuous basis with greater public participation.

To improve sustainable management, we have incorporated “environmental viewpoints” into all aspects of management, and are conducting environmental management and improvement activities on a daily basis. In order to recover and maintain the life-sustaining ability of the planet, it is of course not enough to simply reduce the environmental impact of our business activities. The Earth’s life-sustaining ability is dependent on its diverse and interdependent ecosystems and forest ecosystems are of particular value for their biodiversity. To help prevent forest destruction, the

Ricoh Group is doing its best to conserve forest ecosystems in cooperation with non-profit organisations and local communities all over the world. In the wet zone of Sri Lanka for example, Ricoh has been collaborating with the Field Ornithology Group of Sri Lanka (BirdLife in Sri Lanka) to help restore forest at an Important Bird Area for the Sri Lanka Blue Magpie.

In working to secure the Earth’s life-sustaining ability, we must first focus on conserving the Earth’s most important places. The Ricoh Group wishes to congratulate BirdLife on the Important Bird Areas Programme, and we are pleased to be able to support publication of this inventory. As a result of this work, it is now much clearer which areas would benefit from greater levels of corporate responsibility and private sector support. Ricoh will promote the significance of conserving these important sites within the Group, to other companies and to society more widely.

Tatsuo Tani,
Division General Manager,
Corporate Environment Division, Ricoh

