

■ JUSTIFICATION FOR THE ASIAN IBA PROGRAMME

THE PROBLEM DEFINED

As Asia's economy develops and its human population expands, greater demands are being placed on the region's natural ecosystems. Throughout the region, forests are being lost to clear felling and conversion to agriculture, infrastructure and other land uses, and degraded by timber extraction, livestock grazing, shifting cultivation and over-exploitation of non-timber forest products. Similarly, grasslands are being converted into agriculture and other land-uses, and degraded by over-grazing, over-harvesting of grass, and inappropriate fire management. Finally, wetland habitats are being lost through afforestation, reclamation and infrastructure development, and degraded by over-exploitation of wetland resources.

Even where natural habitats are relatively well protected from degradation and loss, wildlife populations are under pressure from over-exploitation. For many Asian ecosystems, there is a long history of human use of natural resources. However, commercial demand is now contributing to ever-higher pressure on natural resources, and this trend, coupled with dwindling areas of natural habitat, is resulting in over-exploitation of plant and animal populations.

The root causes of biodiversity loss in Asia are entrenched and complex. At their heart are human population growth, economic development and rising levels of consumption, both in the region and beyond. These forces are compounded by under-valuation of ecosystem products and services, inappropriate land tenure systems, external and internal pressure to pursue export-led growth, and capacity limitations among government agencies mandated to conserve biodiversity. Furthermore, climate change threatens to have significant, if as yet uncertain, impacts on the region's biodiversity.

Efforts to stem the accelerating loss of Asia's biodiversity have centred on development of national systems of protected areas. While considerable resources have been invested in this area and significant success has been achieved, there are severe weaknesses in management, and many important areas remain outside the network. Moreover, there has been limited progress in mainstreaming biodiversity into broader socio-political agendas. As a result, on-the-ground conservation action continues to be undermined by incompatible programmes and policies of governments and donors, such as commercial logging, expansion of cash crop plantations, agricultural intensification, land reclamation and aquacultural development.

As natural ecosystems are degraded, natural resources depleted and biodiversity lost, the capacity of natural ecosystems to support human livelihoods and contribute to the wider socio-economic development of the region is being diminished. A recent study estimated the irreplaceable value of wild nature globally at around about \$20 trillion per year (Balmford *et al.* 2002), while a separate study estimated the combined global value of 17 ecosystem services, including climate regulation, water supply and food production, at between US\$16 and 54 trillion per year (Costanza *et al.* 1997).

If the contribution of Asia's natural ecosystems to human livelihoods is to be maintained, and the full diversity of the region's habitats, communities and species is to be conserved, it is essential that the principle of environmentally sustainable development is adopted in all countries and throughout all sectors of society. A key aspect of environmentally sustainable development is avoiding development inconsistent with the conservation of the most biologically important sites, and ensuring that conservation action is targeted at the highest priority sites. The Asian IBA Programme is a contribution to this end.

RATIONALE FOR THE IBA APPROACH

■ Sites are an effective unit for conservation action

Sites are discrete areas of habitat that can be delineated and, at least potentially, managed for conservation. Effective protection of sites can address habitat loss and over-exploitation, two of the major causes of biodiversity loss. Protection of a network of sites can represent a cost-effective approach to conservation, because a relatively small network can support a large proportion of the species, communities and/or habitats within any given region of analysis. In addition, protection of a network of sites is consistent with sustainable development and poverty alleviation agendas, because it allows a significant degree of human use of landscapes. For these reasons, sites are a major focus of conservation investment by government, donors and civil society. In particular, they form the basis of most protected area networks.

■ Birds are a good basis for site networks

The Asian IBA Programme uses birds as the basis for a region-wide site network. As a group, birds have several features that make them good indicators:

- They contain high numbers of globally threatened and restricted-range species.
- They have well understood distributions and habitat requirements.
- They are relatively easy to record and identify in the field.
- They are good indicators of habitat condition and human disturbance.
- They can act as flagships for conservation.

A greater amount of information is available on the status and distribution of birds in Asia than on any other major taxonomic group. Studies in other regions have shown that birds can be a highly effective means of setting geographical priorities for conservation in the absence of detailed data on other taxa (Howard *et al.* 1998, Burgess *et al.* 2002). Consequently, conservation of the IBA network can be expected to make a major contribution to the conservation of taxonomic groups other than birds, and identification of IBAs can contribute to the identification of a network of globally important sites for species conservation, termed "key biodiversity areas" (Box 1).

Birds are also an important conservation focus in their own right. They perform ecological roles essential to the function of ecosystems, such as seed-dispersal and pollination, and they have

Box 1. Key biodiversity areas.

The IBA criteria can be generalised to other taxonomic groups to identify key biodiversity areas, places of international importance for the conservation of biodiversity (Eken *et al.* 2004). All IBAs are key biodiversity areas, but some key biodiversity areas are not IBAs; they are significant for the conservation of other taxa but not birds.

Data on species status and distribution are still very scanty for most taxonomic groups, apart from birds. Fortunately, studies suggest that the network of IBAs is an excellent first approximation to the overall network of key biodiversity areas. IBAs capture the bulk of diversity in other groups, as well as the most significant sites for threatened and restricted-range species (Brooks *et al.* 2001, Nature Kenya and Wildlife Conservation Society of Tanzania 2003, Pain *et al.* in press, Tushabe *et al.* in press). The IBA network can thus be used with confidence, right away, to guide conservation planning and action, with any gaps being filled later as information becomes available.

economic values, particularly as a basis for ecotourism, a growing industry in many parts of Asia. Moreover, birds have high significance in many Asian cultures, and, like all elements of biodiversity, should be conserved for the richness and diversity they contribute to human experience (Collar 2003).

Because of the intrinsic values of birds and their utility as an indicator for biodiversity in general, many individuals and organisations are interested and motivated to conserve them. As a result, there is a growing constituency for bird conservation in Asia, which forms a strong foundation for efforts to conserve the IBA network.

■ IBAs contribute to socio-economic development

IBAs are not only important for birds and biodiversity but also for socio-economic development at the local and national levels. The ecosystem goods and services provided by IBAs often contribute significantly to human livelihoods. For example, coastal IBAs may be a source of marine products for fishing communities, while forest IBAs may be a source of non-timber forest products, such as fuelwood and medicinal plants, for rural communities. In addition, conservation of the Asian IBA network would bring significant benefits to national economies, because many IBAs provide high-value ecosystem services, such as catchment protection and flood control. Consequently, provided that the socio-economic benefits of IBAs can be equitably shared, and their biological values simultaneously maintained, IBA conservation should be an objective shared by conservationists, local communities and governments alike.

■ Sites can help to address gaps in protected areas systems

In the region to date, the majority of investment in site-based conservation by national governments and donor agencies has been in the development of protected areas systems. However, protected areas systems are rarely developed systematically. Globally, there are major gaps in existing systems with regard to critical habitat types, biomes and threatened species¹, and the most urgent priorities for expansion are disproportionately concentrated in Asia (Rodrigues *et al.* 2003). Because IBAs are identified according to objective, scientific criteria, irrespective of current protection status, many of them lie outside of existing national protected areas systems. Therefore, the IBA network can be used as a tool to review existing national protected areas systems, identify gaps in coverage, and identify candidate sites for expansion or designation of protected areas to address these gaps.

■ There is a need to develop non-formal approaches to site protection

In most Asian countries, it is not feasible to designate every IBA as a formal protected area, due to such factors as resource limitations, conflicting land ownership, and high opportunity costs in productive landscapes, such as lowland forests and coastal zones. Moreover, formal protected area designation may not necessarily be the most effective approach to site-based protection, especially where an IBA supports a large resident human population and/or high levels of human use. Indeed, in some circumstances, formal protected area designation could be counter-productive to conservation objectives, particularly where protected area regulations restrict traditional land- and natural-resource-use practices that are compatible with or contribute to the biological value of a site.

Therefore, there is a need to develop alternative approaches to site-based protection of IBAs, in addition to formal protected areas, such as community-managed conservation areas, private protected areas and voluntary agreements with land-owners. In many cases, these approaches may be more cost-effective and/or engage support from non-traditional sources. Moreover, these approaches may provide greater opportunities for sustainable human use of natural resources, and therefore, make a greater contribution to poverty alleviation among people for whom natural resources form a critical component of their livelihood strategies.

■ IBAs can be building blocks of networks

While protecting individual sites can be an effective approach to conservation for many species, at least in the medium term, the long-term conservation of all species requires the protection of inter-connected networks of sites. This is particularly important for species with wide home ranges, low natural densities and/or migratory behaviour, for which individual sites cannot support long-term viable populations. In addition, protection of inter-connected networks is essential for the maintenance of broad-scale ecological and evolutionary processes (Schwartz 1999). Furthermore, inter-connected networks may be less susceptible to the impacts of global climate change, as species are better able to “track” changes in habitat distribution. Therefore, site-level approaches to conservation must be complemented by landscape-level approaches, which maintain or establish habitat connectivity among individual sites.

There are a number of examples of landscape-level conservation initiatives in Asia and other parts of the world. Such approaches typically involve the identification and integration into broader socio-political agendas of inter-connected networks of core areas, linked by habitat corridors, protected by buffer zones and, in some cases, further developed by restoration areas. In most parts of the region, the IBA network represents the most comprehensive assessment of internationally important sites for conservation. Thus, IBAs could be adopted as core areas for such networks, with additional core areas being identified for other taxonomic groups as available data permit.

■ IBAs are a tool to mainstream biodiversity into other policy sectors

Incompatible land-use and development schemes are among the major threats to biodiversity in Asia, for example land reclamation and mangrove afforestation in the case of coastal ecosystems, or commercial logging and conversion to plantations in the case of forest ecosystems. These threats typically arise from insufficient integration of biodiversity conservation objectives into the plans and policies of other sectors, leading to site-based conservation efforts being undermined by incompatible development projects and patterns of land use. Consequently, there is a need to “mainstream” biodiversity into other policy sectors, particularly agriculture, forestry, fisheries, mining, transport, energy and tourism.

In order to mainstream biodiversity into other policy sectors, it is essential that accurate, up-to-date information on the conservation importance of sites is made available to decision makers in government and donor agencies. It is also essential that such information is based on clear, objective and universally accepted criteria. Consequently, IBAs represent a valuable tool for integrating biodiversity into policy and planning.

One area where IBAs can help to mainstream biodiversity is in implementation of environmental safeguard policies. Governments and donor agencies have introduced a number of policies that can be used to safeguard important sites for biodiversity conservation from incompatible development and land-use, most notably national Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) legislation and donor environmental safeguard policies (see Section on Relevance of IBAs to Donor Safeguard Policies, pages 7–8). However, there remain a number of obstacles to the effective implementation of these policies, including a lack of consensus on what constitutes a site of high conservation importance. Because they are based on objective, scientific criteria, IBAs can assist the clear and consistent implementation of government and donor environmental safeguard policies.

■ IBAs support national commitments under multilateral environmental agreements

Conservation of the Asian IBA network will assist national governments and donor agencies to meet their commitments under multilateral environmental agreements. These agreements include the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat (Ramsar Convention), the Convention on Migratory

¹ The Seventh Conference of the Parties (COP-7) to the CDB decision on protected areas recognises that “existing systems of protected areas are neither representative of the world’s ecosystems, nor do they adequately address conservation of critical habitat types, biomes and threatened species, and, with marine areas particularly under-represented, actions need to be taken to fill these gaps.”

Species (CMS), and the Asia-Pacific Migratory Waterbird Conservation Strategy (see Section on Relevance of IBAs to Multilateral Environmental Agreements and other Mechanisms, pages 5–7).

Because of the strong similarities between the criteria for identifying important sites for conservation under multilateral environmental agreements and the IBA criteria, many IBAs meet the criteria for designation under these agreements. Consequently, one way in which IBAs can support national commitments under multilateral environmental agreements is by identifying candidate sites for designation.

RELEVANCE OF IBAs TO MULTILATERAL ENVIRONMENTAL AGREEMENTS AND OTHER MECHANISMS

National governments in Asia are party to a number of multilateral environmental agreements, established to promote biodiversity conservation and sustainable use of natural resources, as are several multilateral development banks (see Table 1). In addition, there are a number of other mechanisms that promote international cooperation for the conservation of biodiversity and natural resources. This section briefly describes each agreement and mechanism, and highlights the main ways in which conservation of the Asian IBA network would assist national governments and donors to meet their commitments under them.

Table 1. Participation in multilateral environmental agreements and other mechanisms by countries in the Asia Region.

Country	Agreement/mechanism						
	CBD	Ramsar	CITES	CMS	WHC	UNCCD	MAB
Bangladesh	CP-P	CP(2)	CP		CP(3)	CP	NC
Bhutan	CP-C		CP		CP	CP	
Brunei			CP			CP	
Cambodia	CP-C	CP(3)	CP		CP(1)	CP	NC(1)
China	CP-C	CP(21)	CP		CP(30)	CP	NC(24)
India	CP-P	CP(19)	CP	CP	CP(26)	CP	NC(3)
Indonesia	CP-C	CP(2)	CP		CP(7)	CP	NC(6)
Japan	CP-C	CP(13)	CP		CP(12)	CP	NC(4)
North Korea	CP				CP(1)	CP	NC(1)
South Korea	CP-C	CP(2)	CP		CP(7)	CP	NC(2)
Laos	CP-C		CP		CP(2)	CP	
Malaysia	CP-C	CP(4)	CP		CP(2)	CP	NC
Maldives	CP-C				CP	CP	NC
Mongolia	CP-C	CP(11)	CP	CP	CP(2)	CP	NC(4)
Myanmar	CP		CP		CP	CP	NC
Nepal	CP-C	CP(4)	CP		CP(4)	CP	NC
Pakistan	CP-C	CP(19)	CP	CP	CP(6)	CP	NC(1)
Philippines	CP-C	CP(4)	CP	CP	CP(5)	CP	NC(2)
Russia ¹	CP-C	CP(14)	CP		CP(5)	CP	NC
Singapore	CP-C		CP			CP	
Sri Lanka	CP-C	CP(3)	CP	CP	CP(7)	CP	NC(2)
Thailand	CP	CP(10)	CP		CP(4)	CP	NC(4)
Timor-Leste						CP	
Vietnam	CP-C	CP(1)	CP		CP(5)	CP	NC(2)

Key: CDB: Convention on Biological Diversity (CP = Contracting Party; CP-C = Contracting Party, NBSAP completed; CP-P = Contracting Party, NBSAP under preparation); Ramsar: Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (CP = Contracting Party; figures in brackets are the number of Ramsar Sites at September 2004); CITES: Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CP = Contracting Party); CMS: Convention on Migratory Species (CP = Contracting Party); WHC: World Heritage Convention (CP = Contracting Party; figures in brackets are the number of World Heritage Sites at August 2004); UNCCD: United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (CP = Contracting Party); MAB: Man and the Biosphere Programme (NC = National Committee established; figures in brackets are the number of Biosphere Reserves at August 2004).

Note: 1 = the numbers of Ramsar Sites and World Heritage Sites given for Russia only include those in the Asia region, as defined in this directory.

Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)

The CBD was adopted in 1992 and came into force in 1993. As of May 2004, the convention had 188 contracting parties, including 22 in the Asia region (as defined in this directory). The convention's objectives are the conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of its components, and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilisation of genetic resources. The convention has a focus on *in situ* conservation, and Article 8(a) commits national governments to establish "a system of protected areas or areas where special measures need to be taken to conserve biological diversity".

At the global level, conservation of the IBA network could be adopted as a conservation target under the CBD. A precedent has been set by the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation, adopted by the contracting parties to the CBD in 2002, which includes a target to protect 50% of the most important areas for plant diversity globally by 2010.

At the national level, implementation of the CBD is guided by National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs), which set out priorities for biodiversity conservation. These documents are used, in part, to guide investment from the Global Environment Facility and other funding sources. NBSAPs have been completed for 17 Asian countries, and are under preparation for two more. NBSAPs present an opportunity for official recognition of national IBA networks within national conservation plans.

The Seventh Conference of the Parties of the CBD, held in Kuala Lumpur in 2004, adopted a Decision on Protected Areas, which sets goals to establish and strengthen regional networks of protected areas, and ensure that scientific knowledge contributes to their establishment and effectiveness. The Asian IBA network provides an objective scientific basis for the review and expansion of protected areas networks in the region, and their integration into broader socio-political agendas.

Ramsar Convention

The Ramsar Convention, officially known as the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat, was adopted in 1971 and came into force in 1975. As of September 2004, the convention had 141 parties, including 16 in the Asia region (as defined in this directory). The convention provides a framework for international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands, and parties have a commitment to promote the wise-use of all wetlands in their territory, to designate suitable sites for inclusion on the List of Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Sites), and to promote their conservation.

As of September 2004, the parties had designated 1,387 Ramsar Sites globally, including 132 in the Asia region. As several of the IBA criteria are shared with those used to identify Ramsar Sites, IBAs meeting these criteria could be adopted as candidates for designation as Ramsar Sites by their respective national governments. Other ways in which information on IBAs could assist parties to deliver on their commitments under the Ramsar Convention could be their inclusion in national wetland policies, or their use as a basis for national wetland monitoring programmes.

Convention on Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS)

The CMS, also known as the Bonn Convention, was adopted in 1979 and came into force in 1983. As of June 2004, the CMS had 86 parties. Only five Asian countries are party to the convention (India, Mongolia, Pakistan, Philippines and Sri Lanka), although a number of others participate in CMS Agreements. The aim of the convention is to protect migratory species that cross international borders.

The CMS has two appendices: Appendix I and Appendix II. Parties have a commitment to prohibit the taking of species listed on Appendix I, and to endeavour to conserve and restore important habitats for them. Information on IBAs can assist parties to meet this commitment by identifying important habitats for migratory bird species in need of conservation.

Parties also have a commitment to conclude international agreements with other range states for the conservation and management of species listed on Appendix II. These agreements should provide for a network of suitable areas of habitat along

each species’s migration routes. Again, information on IBAs can assist parties to meet this commitment by identifying suitable areas of habitat for each bird species covered by international agreements.

World Heritage Convention (WHC)

The WHC was adopted in 1972 and came into force in 1975. As of July 2004, the convention had 177 parties globally, including 21 in the Asia region (as defined in this directory). The aim of the convention is to identify and conserve cultural and natural monuments and sites of outstanding universal value. Parties to the WHC have a commitment to nominate suitable sites for recognition by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) as World Heritage Sites. As of July 2004, a total of 788 World Heritage Sites had been designated worldwide, including 129 in Asia.

To date, the majority of World Heritage Sites have been nominated for their cultural values. In order to redress this imbalance, the WHC wishes to see more natural monuments of outstanding value nominated. As a significant number of Asia’s IBAs have outstanding biological and other natural values, information on IBAs can be used to assist parties to identify candidate sites for nomination as World Heritage Sites.

Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Fauna and Flora (CITES)

CITES was adopted in 1973 and came into force in 1975. As of August 2004, the convention had 166 parties globally, including 21 in the Asia region (as defined in this directory). The aim of CITES is to regulate international trade in wildlife and wildlife products through international cooperation, while recognising national sovereignty over wildlife resources. CITES has two appendices: Appendix I, which lists species that cannot be traded commercially; and Appendix II, which lists species that can only enter international trade under specific controlled circumstances. Parties are expected to have trade management regulations in place to ensure that export of any species listed on Appendix II will not be detrimental to the survival of that species. Of over 300 globally threatened bird species in Asia, 124 are included on CITES Appendix I or II (BirdLife International 2003), and many of these species occur in important populations at IBAs.

The Asian IBA network can provide a focus for the efforts of national governments to implement CITES, for example by identifying sites with significant populations of bird species threatened by the wildlife trade, which may require strengthened enforcement, public awareness raising, and other targeted conservation actions.

United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)

The UNCCD was adopted in 1994, came into force in 1996, and, as of July 2004, had 191 parties globally. The UNCCD is the only multilateral environmental agreement to which every country in the Asia region is party. The objectives of the convention are to combat desertification and to mitigate the effects of drought.

Implementation of the UNCCD is guided by the development of regional and national action programmes. There exist opportunities to incorporate IBAs into these action programmes, thereby assisting them to more fully address biodiversity conservation of threatened species and sites. In addition, integration of IBAs into regional and national action programmes could help to ensure that activities to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought, such as afforestation and irrigation, do not have negative impacts on important sites for biodiversity conservation.

Millennium Development Goals

The Millennium Development Goals are a series of time-bound and measurable goals and targets for combating poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, environmental degradation and discrimination against women, set at the United Nations Millennium Summit in 2000. The conservation of the Asian IBA network would assist national governments to meet Millennium Development Goal No. 7: Ensure Environmental Sustainability, which sets a target for the international community to “integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes and reverse the loss of environmental resources” by 2015 (Target No. 9). The

IBA network provides a very useful tool for monitoring progress towards this target, especially as it is relevant to two of its indicators: “proportion of land area covered by forest” (Indicator No. 25) and “ratio of area protected to maintain biological diversity to surface area” (Indicator No.26).

Man and the Biosphere Programme (MAB)

The MAB Programme was initiated in 1971 by UNESCO. The programme aims to develop a basis for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity, and for the improvement of the relationship between people and their environment. The programme operates through a network of National Committees and Focal Points among UNESCO member countries. As of June 2004, National MAB Committees had been established in 19 Asian countries.

Countries participating in the MAB Programme are expected to designate one or more Biosphere Reserves, which are examples of terrestrial and coastal ecosystems where solutions are promoted to reconcile biodiversity conservation with its sustainable use. As of June 2004, 440 Biosphere Reserves had been designated globally, including 56 in the Asia region (as defined in this directory). Information on IBAs can assist National MAB Committees to identify candidate sites for designation as Biosphere Reserves.

Asia-Pacific Migratory Waterbird Conservation Strategy

The Asia-Pacific Migratory Waterbird Conservation Strategy is coordinated by Wetlands International with support from the governments of Japan and Australia, and aims to promote the conservation of migratory waterbirds and wetlands in the Asia-Pacific region. The first Asia-Pacific Migratory Waterbird Conservation Strategy covered the period from 1996 to 2000; the current strategy covers the period from 2001 to 2005.

Under the Asia-Pacific Migratory Waterbird Conservation Strategy, regional action plans have been developed for Anatidae, shorebirds and cranes. Each of these action plans provides for the establishment of a network of sites of international importance for the group of waterbirds concerned: the East Asian Anatidae Site Network, the East Asian-Australasian Shorebird Site Network and the North East Asian Crane Site Network. The three networks include 68 sites in 10 Asian countries (as defined in this directory). Information on IBAs can assist the implementation of the strategy by identifying important sites for Anatidae, shorebirds and cranes for inclusion within the three site networks.

Bilateral migratory bird agreements/treaties

Ten bilateral migratory bird agreements/treaties involving territories in the Asia region have already been established (Table 2), and others are under discussion. These agreements provide mechanisms for the promotion of bilateral and international actions for the conservation of migratory birds. Information on IBAs can assist with the implementation of these agreements by identifying the key sites for migratory birds in the relevant territories, and thereby providing a focus for international action programmes developed under the bilateral agreements.

Table 2. Bilateral agreements/treaties on the conservation of migratory birds in the Asia-Pacific region.

	Australia	China	India	Japan	North Korea	South Korea	Russia	U.S.A.
Australia								
China	Yes							
India								
Japan	Yes	Yes						
North Korea								
South Korea								
Russia			Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		
U.S.A.		Yes		Yes			Yes	

Table reproduced from the Asia-Pacific Migratory Waterbird Conservation Strategy: 2001–2005.

■ Conservation of Arctic Fauna and Flora (CAFF)

CAFF is a working group of the Arctic Council, of which one Asian country, Russia, is a member. The objectives of CAFF are to conserve Arctic biodiversity and ensure that use of Arctic living resources is sustainable. CAFF developed the Circumpolar Protected Areas Network Strategy and Action Plan, which was adopted by the Arctic Countries in 1996. The strategy and action plan aim to develop a comprehensive circumpolar protected areas network. Information on IBAs can assist the Arctic Countries to meet this aim, by identifying gaps in the circumpolar protected areas network in the part of Arctic Russia within the Asia region.

■ ASEAN Agreement on the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources

The Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) Agreement on the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources was adopted in 1985, although it has not yet entered into force, as it has only been signed by five of the 10 ASEAN member countries. Conservation of the Asian IBA network would assist ASEAN member countries to fulfil several of their commitments under this agreement. First, the IBA network could serve as a tool for integrating the conservation and management of natural resources into development planning at all levels (Articles 2 and 14), and for integrating natural resource conservation into the land-use planning process (Article 12). Second, the IBA network could provide a basis for establishing a co-ordinated network of protected areas to conserve natural habitats and fauna and flora species, particularly endangered and endemic species (Articles 3 and 13). Third, the IBA network could provide a focus for activities to promote the conservation of natural areas by private owners, communities or local authorities (Article 13).

RELEVANCE OF IBAs TO DONOR SAFEGUARD POLICIES

Many multilateral and bilateral development banks have introduced environmental safeguard policies, to ensure that appropriate measures are taken to mitigate potential negative impacts of their financing operations. These policies provide a basis for safeguarding important sites for biodiversity conservation, including IBAs, from incompatible development. Adoption of IBAs as a tool to guide implementation of donor safeguard policies has great potential to assist their effective implementation, through: (i) generating greater coherence and clarity about the implementation of safeguard policies between donor agencies and borrowers; (ii) ensuring increased consistency and transparency of safeguard policies, and promoting greater public trust in donor agencies; and (iii) assisting standardisation and comparability among safeguard policies, thereby reducing opportunities for borrowers to “shop around” for donors with less stringent safeguard requirements¹. This section briefly reviews the environmental safeguard policies of several major multilateral and bilateral donors operating in the region, and highlights ways in which adoption of the Asian IBA network as a standard source of information on important sites for biodiversity conservation could support their implementation.

■ The World Bank

The principle environmental safeguard policy of the World Bank is the Operational Policy (OP)/Bank Procedure (BP) 4.01 on Environmental Assessment. Environmental assessments are conducted for each investment loan, to determine the extent and type of EIA to be conducted, and whether the project triggers any other safeguard policy. Of these other safeguard policies, the Asian IBA network is most relevant to OP/BP 4.04 on Natural Habitats and OP/BP 4.36 on Forests.

Responsibility for undertaking the assessments required by the World Bank’s safeguard policies lies with the borrower government,

while the World Bank is responsible for overall compliance with the policies.

OP/BP 4.04 on Natural Habitats prohibits World Bank support for projects that would lead to the significant loss or degradation of any Critical Natural Habitats, which comprise natural habitats that are either:

- legally protected;
- officially proposed for protection; or
- unprotected but of known high conservation value².

In most Asian countries, lists of legally protected sites and sites officially proposed for protection are available from government departments responsible for development and management of national protected areas systems. However, adoption of the Asian IBA network as a standard source of information could support the implementation of OP/BP 4.04³, by providing a standard list of Critical Natural Habitats that are unprotected but of known high conservation value; information that is typically not otherwise available in an agreed, standardised format.

OP/BP 4.36 on Forests prohibits World Bank support for projects that would involve significant conversion or degradation of Critical Forest Areas or related Critical Natural Habitats. Critical Forest Areas are forest areas that qualify as Critical Natural Habitats under OP/BP 4.04. Consequently, adoption of the Asian IBA network as a standard source of information for OP/BP 4.36 could support its implementation in a similar way to OP/BP 4.04.

■ International Finance Corporation (IFC)

The safeguard policies currently in use by IFC are based on those of the World Bank, with adaptations to reflect the private sector focus of IFC’s investments. Like the World Bank, IFC has safeguard policies on Environmental Assessment, Natural Habitats and Forests. IFC recently undertook a comprehensive review of its safeguard policies (CAO 2002). Among other things, this review identified lack of clarity about what constitutes a Natural Habitat to be a major source of disagreements between IFC and national governments. By promoting coherence and clarity, adoption of the Asian IBA network as a standard source of information for the application of relevant safeguard policies could make a significant contribution to addressing this issue.

■ Asian Development Bank (ADB)

ADB has undergone a gradual process of incorporating environmental considerations into its operations, including adoption of a systemised procedure for environmental review of proposed loan projects. Despite the progress that has been made, ADB recognised a need to continue to strengthen the integration of environmental considerations across all its operations. To this end, in November 2002, ADB adopted an Environment Policy (ADB 2002) for the first time.

ADB requires an EIA of all its loans and private sector investments. As with the World Bank and IFC, the borrower is responsible for conducting the assessment, in accordance with ADB’s environmental assessment requirements, while ADB is responsible for ensuring compliance, and monitoring agreed mitigation measures by the borrower.

Environmental classification of projects is undertaken during the project screening process, to evaluate the potential significance of environmental impacts and determine whether an EIA should be conducted. In 2003, ADB implemented new guidelines for environmental assessment, with a more transparent procedure for environmental classification (ADB 2003). Specifically, these guidelines aim to improve analysis and documentation leading to the environmental categorisation of projects at the concept stage, through the use of rapid environmental assessment checklists.

Incorporation of the Asian IBA network into the environmental classification process could increase its consistency and

¹ “aid recipients cite differences in donor operational policies and procedures as the single most important impediment to the effectiveness of external development assistance.” Source: *Harmonization of operational policies, procedures, and practices: experience to date* (SecM2001-158). Unpublished report to the Development Committee, 8 March 2001.

² According to Annex A of World Bank OP 4.04, “such sites may include areas recognised by traditional local communities (e.g., sacred groves); areas with known high suitability for bio-diversity conservation; and sites that are critical for rare, vulnerable, migratory, or endangered species”.

³ Site networks can be incorporated into OP 4.04 by being included “on supplementary lists prepared by the [World] Bank or an authoritative source determined by the Regional Environment Sector Unit (RESU)”.

transparency. In particular, it could assist the application of the rapid environmental assessment checklists, by determining whether projects are sited adjacent to or within environmentally sensitive areas⁴.

■ Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC)

In October 2003, JBIC implemented a new set of environmental guidelines (JBIC 2002), which unified and updated two previous sets. Following these guidelines, JBIC conducts screening and environmental reviews of projects before it makes decisions on funding.

At the screening stage, proposed projects are classified according to the potential severity of their environmental impacts, in order to determine the scope of environmental review that is required. Projects that are likely to have significant adverse impacts on the environment are classified as Category A. Category A projects include those located in or near Sensitive Areas, which include:

- nationally designated protected areas;
- habitats with important ecological values; and
- habitats of rare species requiring protection under domestic legislation or international treaties.

Category A projects are subjected to environmental reviews with the greatest scope. These reviews examine potential negative and positive environmental impacts of projects, and evaluate measures necessary to mitigate negative impacts and promote positive impacts. In addition, borrowers must submit EIA reports, in line with the environmental laws and standards of the host governments concerned.

Incorporation of the Asian IBA network into JBIC's safeguard policies could assist the application of its environmental guidelines. In the first place, it could lend consistency and clarity to the screening stage, particularly by providing standard lists of Sensitive Areas. In the second place, it could support the environmental review process, by highlighting potential negative environmental impacts of projects.

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⁴ Environmentally sensitive areas are defined as cultural heritage sites, protected areas, protected area buffer zones, wetlands, mangroves, estuaries, and special areas for protecting biodiversity.