IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS IN ASIA

Key sites for conservation

A project of the BirdLife Asia Partnership
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A SIA 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 action 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 useful in helping 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.

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 safeguards 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 the efforts of these 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.
The Important Bird Areas programme was launched in 1996, and BirdLife International would like to thank the many people and organisations that have contributed to it over the past eight years. The implementation of the programme across the region, through the holding of national workshops and support for national co-ordinators, was made possible due to the support to the Wild Bird Society of Japan (WBSJ) (BirdLife Partner in Japan) from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, Keidanren Nature Conservation Fund (KNCF), Sekisui Chemical Company, Ltd., and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) (BirdLife Partner in the UK). In addition to supporting the IBA programme across the region over a three-year period, KNCF and Sekisui Chemical Company, Ltd. supported more detailed gathering of IBA information in Indonesia and China. Without the help of these sponsors, the IBA programme in Asia would not have started. Early work by the BirdLife Secretariat was possible due to support from the Ernest Kleinwort Charitable Trust.

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The Asian IBA Programme was officially launched at the BirdLife Asia Conference in Coimbatore, India, in November 1996, which was organised by the Sulim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History (SACON). Since the launch, numerous regional and national IBA workshops have been held throughout the Asia region, many hosted or led by the Wild Bird Society of Japan. Thanks are extended to the many people who organised and participated in these meetings for their valuable contributions to the project, including the following: Bird Conservation Society of Thailand and Uthai Tresucon (Thailand workshop, November 1998), Wild Bird Society of Changhwa and Simon Liao (Taiwan workshop, August 1998), China Ornithological Society and Zheng Guangmei (China workshop, December 1998), WWF Mongolia (Mongolia workshop, 1999), WCS Myanmar Office (Myanmar workshop, 2001) and many others.

This book is the result of an eight year project of the BirdLife Asia Partnership. The data which have been used in its preparation have been collected over a much longer period by a very large number of amateur birdwatchers and professional ornithologists, conservationists and others interested in the biodiversity and natural environment of the Asia region. It is of course impossible to acknowledge all of these people here, but their work provides the foundation of this analysis of Important Bird Areas in Asia. There have been contributions to this book from every country and territory in the Asia region. National networks of organisations and individuals were mobilised to identify and collect information on IBAs in some places, and in others the national IBA compilers or compilation teams were the principle sources of data. All of these people are to be congratulated on their efforts to identify, map and document 2,293 sites throughout the Asia region. It is hoped that many of them will continue their involvement into the next phase of the project, to strengthen the protection of the most important sites for bird conservation in Asia.

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**THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ASIA REGION FOR BIRDS**

The Asia region includes a great diversity of habitats, ranging from Arctic tundra to tropical forest, and including vast expanses of desert, steppe grassland and boreal forest, as well as the highest mountains in the world. This variety of climates and habitats has resulted in the region being extremely rich in birds and other biodiversity. The Asia region supports more than 2,700 bird species, or more than one quarter of the world’s species.

**THREATS TO ASIA’S BIRDS AND THEIR HABITATS**

As Asia’s economies develop and its human population expands, greater demands are being placed on the region’s natural ecosystems. Throughout the region, forests, grasslands and wetlands are being degraded or lost as a result of human activities, while bird populations are under pressure from over-exploitation. Additional threats to Asia’s birds and their habitats include invasive species and pollution. As a result, 332 of the region’s bird species are threatened with global extinction.

**THE NEED FOR AN IBA PROGRAMME**

If the degradation and loss of natural ecosystems in Asia are to be halted, and the essential services and products they provide are to be maintained, it is vital that the negative impacts of economic development on biodiversity are mitigated, and that proactive measures are taken to conserve the region’s highest priority sites. The Important Bird Area (IBA) Programme of BirdLife International is a contribution towards these goals.

**WHAT IS THE IBA PROGRAMME?**

The IBA Programme is a worldwide initiative aimed at identifying, documenting and working towards the conservation and sustainable management of a network of critical sites for the world’s birds, termed IBAs. The Asian IBA Programme, initiated in 1996, aims to document and promote the conservation of a region-wide network of internationally important sites for the conservation of birds and biodiversity.

**OBJECTIVES OF THE ASIAN IBA PROGRAMME**

The Asian IBA Programme has five long-term objectives: (i) to provide a basis for the development of national conservation strategies and protected areas programmes; (ii) to highlight areas that should be safeguarded through wise land-use planning, national policies and regulations, and the grant-giving and lending programmes of international banks and development agencies; (iii) to provide a focus for the conservation efforts of civil society, including national and regional NGO networks; (iv) to highlight sites that are threatened or inadequately protected, so that urgent remedial measures can be taken; and (v) to guide the implementation of global conservation conventions and migratory bird agreements.

**A NETWORK OF INTERNATIONALLY IMPORTANT SITES**

Through the application of standard, internationally recognised criteria, based, as far as possible, upon accurate and up-to-date knowledge of bird distributions and populations, a network of IBAs has been identified in the Asia region. The worldwide use of standard criteria to identify IBAs means that they are a “common currency” for conservation, comparable among countries and regions.

**CONTRIBUTIONS BY A NETWORK OF PEOPLE ACROSS THE REGION**

The data on IBAs included in this directory were collated by an extensive network of ornithologists and conservation experts across the Asia region. In 17 countries and territories, this work was coordinated by the relevant BirdLife Partner, Affiliate or Country Programme. Elsewhere, the work was carried out by research contacts of the BirdLife Asia Partnership. In many parts of the region, data were collated in collaboration with relevant government and local civil society organisations.
**A TOTAL OF 2,293 IBAs COVER 7.6% OF THE ASIA REGION**

This directory documents a total of 2,293 IBAs in all 28 countries and territories in the Asia region (Table 1). These sites cover a total area of 2,331,560 km², equivalent to 7.6% of the region’s land area. The proportion of Asia’s land area within the IBA network is comparable to that of other regions of the world where IBA analyses have been undertaken: Africa (7%); Europe (7%); and the Middle East (5%).

**ASIA’S IBAs HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED UNDER SEVERAL CRITERIA**

82% of Asia’s IBAs have been identified because of their significance for globally threatened bird species. Excluding marginal species, 98% of the region’s globally threatened bird species are thought to occur within the IBA network. 41% of Asia’s IBAs were identified because of their significance for restricted-range bird species (those with a global breeding range of less than 50,000 km²). 42% of Asia’s IBAs were identified on the basis of their importance for assemblages of bird species restricted to a biome (or major regional ecological community), while 41% were identified because they hold globally significant congregations of waterbirds, seabirds and/or migratory raptors or cranes (Table 1).

---

**Table 1. Summary statistics on the Asian IBA network by country and territory**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country/territory</th>
<th>Number of IBAs</th>
<th>Total area of IBAs (km²)</th>
<th>% of land area within IBA network</th>
<th>Number of IBAs qualifying under category¹</th>
<th>% P</th>
<th>% p</th>
<th>% U</th>
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<tbody>
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<td><strong>South-East Asia</strong></td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
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<td>5.1</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>2,293</td>
<td>2,313,560</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>1,882</td>
<td>932</td>
<td>974</td>
<td>919</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Key: A1 = Globally threatened species; A2 = Restricted-range species; A3 = Biome-restricted assemblages; A4 = Congregations; P = Protected; p = Partially protected; U = Unprotected.

Notes: ¹ The percentages given for Indonesia and Russia are for the parts of these territories within the Asia region only; ² Many IBAs qualify under more than one category; ³ All IBAs in India and Sri Lanka were classified as either “protected” or “unprotected”, the category “partially protected” was not used.
Important Bird Areas in Asia

**IBAs ARE IMPORTANT FOR TAXA OTHER THAN BIRDS**

Birds have many features that make them good indicators of overall biodiversity, and studies have shown their effectiveness in defining geographical priorities for other taxonomic groups. Analyses of the IBA networks in several Asian countries indicate that protection of the IBA network would also make an important contribution to the conservation of other animals and plants, particularly in those parts of the region where data on other groups are scarce.

**FORTY-THREE PERCENT OF ASIA’S IBAS HAVE NO FORMAL PROTECTION**

43% of Asia’s IBAs are wholly included within formal protected areas designated under national law, and a further 14% are partially included. However, the remaining 43% are wholly outside formal protected area networks, although some benefit from non-formal protection, such as community management, or are under land-use designations consistent with biodiversity conservation. In many parts of the Asia region, there is a need to expand national protected area systems to address gaps in coverage of the IBA network.

**WHAT ACTIONS NEED TO BE TAKEN FOR ASIA’S IBAS?**

Given the scale of threats faced by IBAs in Asia, and, in particular, the fact that 43% of the region’s IBAs lie wholly outside of formal protected areas, there is a need for a comprehensive, region-wide programme of coordinated conservation action by governments, civil society, donors and the corporate sector. This directory proposes the targets of such a programme, and outlines the priority actions that must be taken to attain them.

**The IBA network should be formally recognised under multilateral environmental agreements, and by national governments, civil society, donors and the corporate sector**

A significant proportion of IBAs lack any form of national or international recognition as important sites for conservation, as a result of which they are less likely to be prioritised for investment or safeguarded against incompatible development. There is, therefore, a need for formal recognition of the entire IBA network by key stakeholders and under multilateral environmental agreements. To this end, the following actions are necessary:

1. Formally recognise the contribution of the IBA network to the conservation of global biodiversity.
2. Where they meet the criteria, designate IBAs under multilateral environmental agreements and other mechanisms.
3. Incorporate IBAs into National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) and other national conservation plans.

**Appropriate and effective site-based protection should be put in place at every IBA**

At many IBAs, the most appropriate and effective form of site-based protection will be inclusion within a formal protected area. However, formal protected areas should be complemented by alternative, non-formal, approaches to site-based protection, including management by local communities and voluntary agreements with private land owners. To this end, the following actions are necessary:

1. Review and, where appropriate and feasible, expand national protected area systems to address gaps in coverage of the IBA network.
2. Strengthen management of formal protected areas that overlap with IBAs.
3. Where appropriate, develop non-formal approaches to site-based protection of IBAs.

**The IBA network should be integrated into broader socio-political agendas by mainstreaming biodiversity into other policy sectors**

At many Asian IBAs, site-based protection is being undermined by incompatible development projects and patterns of land use, such as road construction, agricultural intensification, coastal reclamation and aquacultural expansion. Consequently, there is a pressing need to integrate the IBA network into broader socio-political agendas, particularly in the agriculture, forestry, fisheries, mining, transport, energy and tourism sectors. To this end, the following actions are necessary:

1. Integrate IBAs into safeguard policies of national governments and donors.
2. Reduce subsidies, taxes and other incentives that promote natural resource and land-use practices incompatible with IBA conservation.
3. Promote natural resource and land-use practices compatible with IBA conservation, through subsidies, incentive schemes, certification and other market mechanisms.
4. Strengthen the legal framework for IBA conservation.
5. Use IBAs as anchors for landscape-level conservation.

**A constituency for IBA conservation should be built among a broad spectrum of stakeholders**

The entire Asian IBA network can be effectively conserved only with the support of stakeholders at all levels, including government agencies, donor agencies, civil society organisations, private businesses, local people and local authorities. To this end, the following actions are necessary:

1. Engage stakeholders in IBA conservation at the site level.
2. Establish and strengthen networks of stakeholders engaged in IBA conservation.
3. Strengthen capacity for IBA conservation at all levels.
4. Develop approaches to IBA conservation that deliver significant socio-economic benefits to local communities.
5. Raise awareness of the biological and socio-economic values of IBAs, and the threats that they face, among all sections of society.
A cost-effective, stakeholder-based monitoring system should be put in place for the IBA network

There is a growing need to develop an IBA monitoring system for the Asia region that could provide early warning of threats and enable prompt conservation action to be taken in response. The growing site-based constituency for IBA conservation presents an opportunity to develop a cost-effective monitoring system involving local stakeholders. To this end, the following actions are necessary:

1. Establish a region-wide IBA monitoring system, and link to policy, site management and site safeguard.
2. Develop and adopt indicators of conservation success based on IBAs.

A strong foundation of scientific knowledge should be put in place for the development and protection of the IBA network

If the utility of the IBA network as a guide to conservation action is to be maximised, it must be based on a strong foundation of scientific knowledge. The data presented within this directory represent a good starting point of scientific knowledge on IBAs but must be kept up-to-date and supplemented, in order to increase both the quality and the depth of the information base for IBA conservation. To this end, the following actions are necessary:

1. Conduct surveys to fill gaps in coverage of the IBA network and keep the network up to date.
2. Conduct detailed ecological and socio-economic studies at IBAs.

An adequate, diverse and sustainable funding base should be put in place to support the long-term conservation of the IBA network

Given the scale of the IBA network in Asia, the funding required for its conservation is significantly greater than that currently committed. Consequently, the development and protection of the IBA network will require an adequate and sustainable funding base, drawn from a greater diversity of sources than at present. To this end, the following actions are necessary:

1. Use IBAs to guide allocation of existing conservation resources.
2. Expand and develop conservation financing mechanisms.
4. Secure corporate support for IBA conservation.