

FOREWORDS

ONE of the greatest strengths of the BirdLife International Partnership is its ability to focus on priorities for species, sites, habitats and people. There is no better example of putting this focus into practice than BirdLife's Important Bird Area (IBA) programme, now well on its way to identifying and documenting over 20,000 IBAs worldwide.

The beauty of the IBA programme is its simplicity. It identifies important sites for the conservation of the world's birds by applying locally a set of objective criteria to an internationally agreed global standard. This provides the basis for local, national, regional and global action and advocacy. It also generates a conservation agenda from which local and national institutions can strengthen their own capacity and be linked, through IBA programmes across the world, to like-minded institutions.

When the first pan-European inventory of IBAs was launched ten years ago, the designation Important Bird Areas was unknown. Now, IBAs are recognised worldwide and they are rapidly becoming a common and increasingly valuable currency of site conservation. In some places IBAs now have legal status. Both the World Bank

and the Global Environment Facility recognise IBAs in their own strategies and action plans, while the European Union has used them as a basis for legal judgements. Communities adjacent to IBAs and dependent on them for their own livelihoods value these sites and play a key role in their conservation. I can think of few concepts in conservation and sustainable development that now have such widespread support and ownership. IBAs unite local people in Burkina Faso, the Philippines, Hungary, Jordan, New York State, Kenya, Spain, Palestine, Panama and many more. They are recognised by inter-governmental bodies and international treaties, such as the Biodiversity and Ramsar Conventions.

This remarkable volume provides detailed information on 3,619 IBAs spread across every country in Europe. It is a unique and powerful source of information that profoundly improves our ability to enable people to conserve birds, biodiversity and the wider environment throughout the region.

**Her Majesty Queen Noor of Jordan,
Honorary President of BirdLife International**

SINCE its adoption in 1979 the Wild Birds Directive has provided a strong legal basis for the protection of habitats of wild bird species throughout the European Union, especially through the designation of Special Protection Areas (SPAs). The objective is to create a coherent network of protected areas which meets the protection requirements of endangered and migratory bird species and to preserve our common heritage.

The identification and delimitation of sites under this directive is exclusively a scientific exercise. With this in mind, ornithological criteria were elaborated as far back as 1981 when the first inventory of important bird areas of the then European Community was prepared. During the 1980s the European Commission set up a working group, which led to the further identification of Community-wide criteria for the selection of SPAs. This resulted in the preparation of the 1989 inventory of Important Bird Areas (IBAs) in Europe by the forerunner to BirdLife International, the International Council for Bird Preservation (ICBP), with contributions by experts from the Member States.

The 1989 IBA review has proven to be a key scientific reference for the selection of sites to be protected under the Birds

Directive. The European Union Court of Justice has concluded that it represents a list of sites of great conservation importance for the conservation of wild birds.

However, more than 10 years have passed since its publication and there have been considerable advances in knowledge on the numbers and distribution of wild birds. The publication of a new inventory of Important Bird Areas is therefore most welcome. I would like to congratulate BirdLife International for the clarity and quality of this work. I am convinced that it will be a standard reference for many years to come.

As most EU Member States have still to actively complete their networks of SPAs it should be a key tool in helping them to fulfil this key requirement of the Birds Directive. Given that it covers all European countries it will also be a valuable reference for those applicants to the European Union as they prepare to take on the nature conservation obligations of membership.

**Margot Wallström,
European Commissioner for the Environment**

FOLLOWING the publication of the first edition of *Important Bird Areas in Europe* in 1989, the year the iron curtain fell, pan-European cooperation in nature conservation issues has improved enormously. The impressive quantity of new data in this second inventory of *Important Bird Areas of Europe* illustrates just how effectively BirdLife International and its network of national bird conservation societies responded to the new social and political situations. More than 1,000 new IBAs have been designated, mostly in Eastern Europe, and there is valuable new information about existing IBAs. All this was made possible by extensive networks of highly dedicated and scientifically skilled volunteers who undertook field research for this book.

Since 1989, many new NGOs have been established in Europe as a result of BirdLife International programmes. The Dutch Government has supported bird conservation organizations in Central and Eastern Europe—the Russian Federation and the Ukraine in particular—by supporting the collection of field data for this edition of *Important Bird Areas of Europe* and contributed towards its publication. High standards have been applied to submitted data so that the designation Important Bird Area (IBA) is given only to those areas which truly have great ornithological

value. In other words, those places which deserve to be protected by existing international conservation frameworks such as Ramsar, the Bonn Convention, the Bern Convention, the EC Birds Directive and the Africa Eurasia Waterbird Agreement.

The work of BirdLife International was of crucial importance in the European Court of Justice case concerning the designation of Special Protection Areas in the Netherlands. Vogelbescherming Nederland, the BirdLife Partner in the Netherlands, had drafted a list of IBAs in the Netherlands, which enabled a quick, efficient designation of a satisfactory number of SPAs, which will be followed by more designations in the future.

The Dutch Government congratulates BirdLife International on the publication of this second edition of *Important Bird Areas of Europe*; without doubt it is a major achievement. We look forward to continuing close cooperation with BirdLife International in conservation projects around the world, particularly with the European Division that is now situated in Wageningen.

**G.H. Faber, State Secretary for Agriculture,
Nature Management and Fisheries,
Dutch Government**

It is an honour for me to greet the dear Reader on behalf of the comparatively large family of conservationists in our small country, Hungary.

Biogeographically, Hungary ranks among the richest countries in Europe. Currently, approximately 42,000 animal and 3,000 plant species are known from Hungary, but it is an alarming fact that more than half (62%) of the natural vegetation associations are threatened to some degree and need protection. It was a major step forward in the 1980s and 1990s when it was recognised that it is hopeless to try to protect species without the protection of their habitats. In Hungary, 855 animal and 515 plant species are protected by law. Among them, birds enjoy a particularly favourable status with 278 protected species.

The majority of Important Bird Areas (IBAs) are already protected in Hungary, but in a country that has long been inhabited, urbanised and agriculturally cultivated, isolated protected areas are in a precarious situation and may easily be doomed without the implementation of special protection measures. The total area

of Ramsar sites, constituting a major part of IBAs, has increased by 30% during the 1990s and today 19 sites with a total area of 149,000 ha are protected under the Ramsar Convention. The Hungarian BirdLife Partner, the Hungarian Ornithological and Nature Conservation Society, played a key role in the designation of IBAs in Hungary and has established excellent relations with the Hungarian Authority for Nature Conservation, Ministry of the Environment. It is hoped that the future of Hungarian IBAs will be ensured, not only by the declaration of protected status, but also by new measures to support nature-friendly farming.

Many thanks to BirdLife International for their excellent, inspirational and far-reaching programmes, and for creating this remarkable manual. It is an honour that the 106-year-old Hungarian Ornithological Institute and the Hungarian Authority for Nature Conservation could, even if modestly, contribute to this work.

**Dr János Tardy PhD, Deputy Secretary of State,
Head of the Authority for Nature Conservation, Hungary**

BEING a mayor of a small town like Třeboň, located at the very heart of Třeboňsko Important Bird Area (IBA) in the unique wetland habitat of Třeboň Basin Biosphere Reserve and Protected Landscape Area, is both a professional task and a public service. It allows intimate daily contact with the surrounding landscape. For example, each time I walk to my office or show guests around my home town or around our ancient fish ponds that give the town its specific character.

Třeboň is the kind of place where one can experience the harmony that still exists between people and nature. It is a town where a glance out of the office window will often provide the magnificent spectacle of migrating flocks of Greylag Geese, or Grey Herons heading towards their nearby colony or even the majestic silhouette of a White-tailed Eagle soaring high in the clouds. I am proud of my town and of all the natural treasures in its vicinity and I am aware of

my responsibility for preserving them for future generations. I also appreciate the economic importance of international designations, such as the recognition of Třeboň as an IBA. This attracts thousands of national and international visitors to Třeboň – naturalists, field scientists, participants in ornithological conferences, birdwatchers and nature lovers. All these activities help to make the local economy more viable. In this sense, the IBA status helps me in two ways – to help secure better protection of our birds and habitats and to promote environmentally sound local development.

It is my great pleasure and honour to express my personal feelings on the occasion of the publication of this book. I hope that the updated list of European IBAs will efficiently help to protect birds and nature in the whole of Europe.

Jiri Houdek, Mayor of Třeboň, Czech Republic

FOLLOWING the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) at the end of 1993, over 170 governments have been working to conserve biodiversity and ensure that any use of biological resources is sustainable. Two articles in the CBD set the stage for all others: Article 6 calls for national strategies and action plans; and Article 7 calls for identifying important biodiversity and monitoring its status. Solid science is the foundation upon which both of these critical articles depend, and birds offer a particularly useful group for collecting and presenting information in a way that is useful to politicians, resource managers and the general public. BirdLife International has been working for many years to build a database on birds and their habitats, and now, with the publication of *Important Bird Areas in Europe*, they have produced a valuable source of knowledge that these various interested parties will be able to use to implement the CBD.

BirdLife International, as a member of IUCN, has been a global leader in collecting and presenting essential information on birds and their habitats, and therefore providing solid leadership for implementing the CBD—and other biodiversity-related conventions and agreements—at local, national and regional levels. Their comprehensive approach is particularly useful in enabling countries to coordinate their respective conservation efforts and ensure that transboundary issues are fully addressed. On the basis of this important book, we can confidently expect much more effective conservation action throughout Europe. The challenge now is to extend this innovative and useful approach to the rest of the world and to other taxa. IUCN is pleased to join other partners to help address this challenge.

Jeff McNeely, IUCN Biodiversity Policy Coordination Division

SITE-BASED management is a cornerstone of biodiversity conservation, and fundamental to this is readily available knowledge of the location and importance of such sites. BirdLife International's Important Bird Areas programme draws together a wealth of this vital information. The publication in 1989 by ICBP (BirdLife's forerunner) and the International Waterfowl and Wetlands Research Bureau (forerunner of Wetlands International) of Important Bird Areas in Europe was a milestone in providing accessible information on Europe's many and varied places vital for birds. Many of these areas are wetlands. The IBA programme has greatly contributed to identifying the whole network of key sites which are vital for the continued survival of migratory waterbirds, and has provided the foundation for developing an effective bird conservation strategy for Europe.

Wetlands International is pleased to have contributed its knowledge and information on waterbirds to this impressively expanded and updated edition of Important Bird Areas in Europe, both through our volunteer census networks in individual countries

and from our population- and flyway-scale information analyses for waterbirds. The new IBA Europe book provides an essential tool for the 21st century in realising the sustainable conservation of waterbirds in Europe and its delivery through the mechanisms of intergovernmental conventions and agreements, notably the Ramsar Convention and Bonn Convention's African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement, and in the designation of Special Protection Areas under the EC Birds Directive.

We warmly congratulate BirdLife International on bringing to fruition the huge task of drawing together this wealth of essential information needed for implementing effective bird conservation in Europe. We look forward to continuing to work closely with BirdLife International in progressing this implementation, and in supporting the continuing IBA programme worldwide with our waterbird knowledge and information.

**Robin Schaap, International Director,
Wetlands International**