LETTER OF SUPPORT

The conservation of biological diversity, the sum total of life on earth, is now widely recognised as one of the priority environmental issues facing today’s ‘decision-makers’ in government, at national and international levels, and in local communities and civil society as a whole. In order to conserve this diversity, we need to know what it comprises and where it can be found. Birds, in their own right, a beautiful and inspirational component of biodiversity, are invaluable indicators of the condition of our world.

BirdLife International’s Threatened Species programme has continued unbroken for almost forty years. As a result we know now that a frightening one in eight of the world’s birds (1,186 species altogether) is globally threatened. Of these, over 300 are found in Asia alone. This Red Data Book for Asia follows in the footsteps of companion volumes for Africa and the Americas, and most recently the comprehensive colour illustrated *Threatened Birds of the World*, which relied so heavily on the Red Data Books for its information. *Threatened Birds of Asia* shows that by a process of meticulous and painstaking data gathering, and analysis of information, the BirdLife Network can document the conservation status and needs of each species at risk of extinction. Such precision allows the world to target its conservation actions cost effectively, and with the greatest accuracy.

This volume provides the detail from which to target specific conservation actions and policies at local, national and regional levels throughout Asia. I congratulate all those responsible for its creation, especially the BirdLife Partnership in Asia. We must now work together to ensure that such valuable knowledge is used by all of us in our efforts to protect our national heritage for present and future generations.

Her Majesty Queen Noor of Jordan,  
Honorary President of BirdLife International
LETTER OF SUPPORT

The conservation of biological diversity (biodiversity) is one of the most globally important environmental issues in recent years. Unfortunately, a large number of wildlife species are estimated to be lost or at risk of extinction, resulting from human activities such as over-exploitation, trade volume increase and habitat destruction. The Asian region is remarkable for its rich biodiversity as well as the social and cultural diversity closely linked with the biological dimension. For example, six of the seventeen megadiversity countries of the world are located in this region. It is our task to make every effort toward "the conservation of biological diversity and the sustainable use of its components", as addressed in the Convention on Biological Diversity.

It is essential for the conservation of biodiversity to understand the current status of wildlife species. It has been recognized that birds could act as useful indicators of biodiversity and its change. They are also known to play an important role for conservation of various ecosystems such as wetlands, forests and grasslands. Therefore, accumulation and analysis of data on threatened bird species have been one of the top priorities in promoting conservation of bird species and their habitats. Recognizing this importance and urgency, the Ministry of the Environment, Government of Japan, has supported the compilation of "Threatened Birds of Asia" since 1994, in cooperation with the Wild Bird Society of Japan.

I would like to express my sincere congratulations to BirdLife International for the publication of the book after many years of hard work. I truly appreciate the efforts done by all those who worked for this project.

I believe this book will provide key information for policy development, as well as scientific research and public awareness in the countries of the region. I hope this excellent and important work will contribute to successful wildlife conservation in the Asian region in the new century.

小林光

Hikari Kobayashi
Councilor to the Minister's Office
Nature Conservation Bureau
Ministry of the Environment
Government of Japan
LETTER OF SUPPORT

It is a pleasure and a privilege to write a letter of support for the Asian Bird Red Data Book. This authoritative compilation is a treasure trove of information on the distribution, population, ecology, threats to the populations, and ongoing and proposed measures for conservation. Fortunately, South Asian bird life is amongst the best documented for the tropical parts of the world and there is a great deal of good information that can serve as a foundation for well designed conservation efforts. I have myself observed over years the fate of one of the threatened species dealt with, the spotbilled pelican which breeds every year in the midst of the village of Kokre Bellur not far from the city of Bangalore. I was delighted to find an excellent and accurate summary of the many publications dealing with this breeding colony and what is happening to it in the Red Data Book.

The name Kokre Bellur means the “Good Village of the Storks”, undoubtedly in honour of generations of spotbilled pelicans and painted storks which have been breeding here, possibly for some centuries. In this, as in many other villages of South Asia, the breeding birds have been well protected. Of course, the villagers can collect valuable guano in return; but the tradition of protecting breeding storks, herons, ibises, pelicans and egrets is an ancient one. Indeed the three thousand or more year old epic Ramayana opens with the sage Valmiki cursing a hunter for killing one of a pair of storks.

But these traditions are no longer sufficient to ensure bird conservation in South Asia. In fact, this Red Data Book mentions how, in Kokre Bellur, the felling of a huge tree because of property disputes led to the elimination of nesting sites of 80 pairs. With proper scientific skepticism the account questions whether a single tree could have supported 80 pairs, since other accounts suggest that there are a maximum of 20 nests per tree. Such careful scrutiny of data is indeed of great value in formulating conservation strategies in these fast changing times. As a scientist I too have been trained to take everything with a pinch of salt, and before concluding I must put on record that I am very uneasy with the assignment of the various species treated to particular categories of threat. Such assignment depends on the assessor being able to make some credible numerical estimates; these are almost never possible, even in case of conspicuous species such as pelicans. As a result the exercise lends the “Red Lists” an air of spurious certainty. As Holling and other modern ecologists have stressed, such spurious certainty can lead to poor management decisions. Of course, it is precisely the careful documentation provided in this volume that is needed to overcome such problems. All in all, therefore, I believe this Asian Bird Red Data Book to be an endeavour of enormous value, and am delighted to join BirdLife International in presenting the product before the nature lovers of South Asia, and others around the world.

Madhav Gadgil
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