

SUMMARY

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.

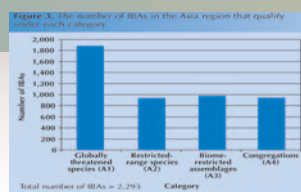


WHAT IS THE IBA PROGRAMME?

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

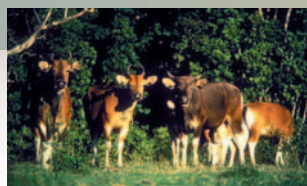
82% of Asia’s IBAs have been identified because of their significance for globally threatened bird species. Excluding marginal species, 98% of the region’s globally threatened bird species are thought to occur within the IBA network. 41% of Asia’s IBAs were identified because of their significance for 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

Country/territory	Number of IBAs	Total area of IBAs (km ²)	% of land area within IBA network	Number of IBAs qualifying under category ²				P	Number of IBAs	
				A1	A2	A3	A4		p	U
North-East Asia										
Hong Kong	2	65	6.0	2	0	1	1	1	1	0
Japan	167	40,257	10.7	61	27	41	115	71	63	33
Macao	1	1	3.7	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
Mainland China	445	1,134,546	11.9	400	162	280	162	247	64	134
Mongolia	41	16,584	1.1	40	4	25	38	12	4	25
North Korea	33	2,531	2.1	29	0	8	20	13	12	8
Russia (Eastern)	169	345,000	3.3 ¹	114	4	87	153	41	29	99
South Korea	40	1,371	1.4	39	0	1	35	11	14	15
Taiwan	53	6,806	18.8	30	17	16	30	11	17	25
South Asia										
Bangladesh	19	5,396	3.6	11	0	10	9	11	2	6
Bhutan	23	12,133	31.6	23	12	15	4	8	0	15
British Indian Ocean Territory	10	9	15.0	0	0	0	10	0	0	10
India ³	465	164,118	5.2	435	208	123	141	266	0	199
Maldives	1	60	20.1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Nepal	27	26,119	17.1	24	13	23	9	12	2	13
Pakistan	55	46,701	5.9	36	16	28	30	33	9	13
Sri Lanka ³	70	3,933	6.0	47	56	46	26	18	0	52
South-East Asia										
Brunei	7	1,388	24.1	7	1	4	2	1	2	4
Cambodia	40	44,170	24.4	38	10	19	25	3	11	26
Indonesia	227	255,571	17.1 ¹	198	184	81	21	58	42	127
Laos	27	23,850	10.1	19	16	19	9	15	4	8
Malaysia	55	50,994	15.5	50	31	42	14	21	8	26
Myanmar	55	54,364	8.0	43	13	27	25	16	3	36
Philippines	117	32,302	10.8	115	106	0	16	47	23	47
Singapore	3	114	17.3	3	0	3	2	0	3	0
Thailand	62	44,426	8.7	50	6	35	19	40	7	15
Timor-Leste	16	1,852	12.7	14	15	0	1	11	0	5
Vietnam	63	16,899	5.1	56	32	40	18	25	4	34
Total	2,293	2,331,560	7.6	1,882	932	974	939	992	325	976

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.



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.
3. Resource IBA conservation via government and donor programmes in the natural resources sector.
4. Secure corporate support for IBA conservation.