

What is BirdLife International?

BirdLife International is a Partnership of non-governmental conservation organisations working in more than 100 countries, with a special focus on birds. The BirdLife Partnership works together on shared priorities, policies and programmes of conservation action, exchanging skills, achievements and information, and so growing in ability, authority and influence.

Each Partner represents a unique geographic area or territory (most often a country). In addition to Partners, BirdLife has Affiliates and a flexible system of Working Groups (including some bird Specialist Groups shared with Wetlands International and/or the Species Survival Commission (SSC) of the World Conservation Union (IUCN)), each with specific roles and responsibilities.

The BirdLife Partnership in Africa comprises 17 autonomous organisations in 18 countries that together have over 30,000 members and more than 300 paid staff.

What is the purpose of BirdLife International?

Mission Statement

The BirdLife International Partnership strives to conserve birds, their habitats and global biodiversity, working with people towards sustainability in the use of natural resources.

Where is BirdLife International heading?

Vision Statement

Birds are beautiful, inspirational and international. Birds are excellent flagships and vital environmental indicators. By focusing on birds, and the sites and habitats on which they depend, the BirdLife International Partnership is working to improve the quality of life for birds, for other wildlife (biodiversity) and for people.

Aims

BirdLife's long-term aims are to:

- 1prevent the extinction of any bird species
- 1maintain and where possible improve the conservation status of all bird species
- 1conserve and, where appropriate, improve and enlarge sites and habitats important for birds
- 1help, through birds, to conserve biodiversity and to improve the quality of people's lives
- 1integrate bird conservation into sustaining people's livelihoods.

Guiding principles

BirdLife International promotes sustainable living as a means of conserving birds, and all other life forms. BirdLife

programmes are built through a participatory process of:

- 1linking Partners to plan policy, programmes and actions and to agree chosen priorities
- 1using the expertise and resources of Partners in all activities as fully as possible
- 1dividing programme tasks and responsibilities amongst the Partnership according to their wishes, expertise and capabilities
- 1sharing skills, experience and information within the Partnership so as to develop the capacity of individual Partners
- 1providing open access to data on birds and biodiversity to enable better informed decision-making
- 1democratic governance by the Partners
- 1working through local communities, organisations and individuals
- 1integrating bird and biodiversity conservation with social and economic development.

BirdLife International works with all like-minded organisations, national and local governments, decision-makers, landowners and managers, in pursuing bird and biodiversity conservation. The global work of the BirdLife Partnership is funded entirely by voluntary donations.

To find out more about how you could support this work, please contact the Africa Division of BirdLife International in Nairobi, Kenya, at either of the following addresses:

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Important Bird Areas and potential Ramsar Sites in Africa

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The Ramsar Convention's mission is "the conservation and wise use of wetlands by national action and international cooperation as a means to achieving sustainable development throughout the world". One of the three pillars of the Convention in achieving this mission is the List of Wetlands of International Importance (the Ramsar List). The other two are the wise use of all wetlands in the countries that have joined the Convention, and the practice of international cooperation in relation to shared aquatic systems.

In relation to the Ramsar List, the Conference of the Parties has adopted a strategic framework for the development of the List, seeking "to develop and maintain an international network of wetlands which are important for the conservation of global biological diversity and for sustaining human life through the ecological and hydrological functions they perform".

One of the most important aspects of the work of the Ramsar Convention has been its promotion of an improved knowledge of wetlands, through inventory and the assessment of the status and trends of wetland resources, and of a better recognition of wetland functions and values to support biodiversity conservation and sound socio-economic development.

This latter concern is particularly important for Africa in view of the recent debates and outcomes at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in support of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). The Summit emphasised very clearly the link between the wise use of ecosystems, including wetlands, and the strategies required to achieve poverty eradication, including the supply of clean water, food security, and better sanitation for people.

In this regard, the identification, designation and management of Ramsar sites in Africa should be pursued vigorously in order to maintain their critical values and functions as an important contribution to poverty eradication on this continent and its associated islands.

Through this publication and numerous other efforts, BirdLife International is making important contributions to the global efforts that are collectively being made to face the current challenges in the implementation of the Ramsar Convention. The Ramsar Bureau is pleased to acknowledge the policy of

BirdLife International in strengthening the link between birds, the habitats upon which they depend, and people and poverty eradication. This policy is entirely consistent with the Ramsar mission and the Ramsar Strategic Plan 2003–2008, which provide the global framework for action in relation to wetlands. This publication is seen as a concrete and useful contribution for the implementation of the Strategic Plan.

In order to make the best use of this publication, Ramsar Contracting Parties should keep in mind that the presence of significant numbers of waterbirds in a wetland is often an indicator of the importance of the site for many other features as well, including values and functions of great relevance for people.

Thus Contracting Parties should aim to use appropriately all the Convention's criteria for Ramsar site designation. Although specific criteria will be applied for waterbirds, these are not the only wetland taxa for which Ramsar sites can be and should be listed. Care should be exercised to ensure that all components of biological diversity are taken into consideration in the designation of new sites and in their effective management.

The sites identified through the Important Bird Areas (IBA) programme as potentially qualifying for Ramsar designation provide a mechanism for establishing a sustainably managed network of critically important wetlands for waterbirds and for people and biodiversity in Africa and associated islands. We hope that many national and international initiatives will make the best use of this important contribution from BirdLife International.

Delmar Blasco
Secretary General
Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)
September 2002

The BirdLife International Important Bird Areas Programme in Africa reached a momentous milestone in October 2001, with the publication of Important Bird Areas in Africa and associated islands – Priority sites for conservation. This 1,144-page book identified 1,230 Important Bird Areas (IBAs) in Africa, summarised their ornithological importance, ecological background and conservation status, and most crucially made a series of recommendations for improving the conservation and sustainable management of these sites. At the launch of the book in South Africa in 2001, my predecessor as Chairman of the BirdLife International African Partnership – Dr Muhtari Aminu-Kano of the Nigerian Conservation Foundation stated: “Important Bird Areas in Africa and associated islands marks the beginning of a new challenge for us all. If we are really to make a difference to the protection of birds, African biodiversity and the natural ecosystems on which many local people depend, we must all focus our attention on these priority sites”.

This new publication by BirdLife International – Important Bird Areas and potential Ramsar Sites in Africa – shows that the BirdLife African Partnership (see back cover) and its network of professional and volunteer collaborators from all corners of the globe have taken up this challenge. Using information from the Important Bird Areas in Africa book and other sources, particularly national and sub-regional inventories, 586 IBAs have been identified that contain areas qualifying as Ramsar Sites.

The importance of these 586 IBAs in the context of sustainable development and management of natural resources on the African continent cannot be overemphasised. These sites have now been identified as not only supporting waterbird biodiversity of global significance but also as crucial for that key resource required for human survival and development – water. Indeed the presence of significant numbers of waterbirds is often an indicator of the importance of a wetland for many other values and functions, including for people. As emphasised at the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development (2002), many people in rural African communities depend on natural ecosystems such as the potential Ramsar sites identified here and on the goods and services they provide. Sustainable use and conservation of these resources is therefore an important mechanism for poverty alleviation. Poverty and environmental quality are closely linked. Poverty constrains people’s choices and often leads to short-term over-exploitation and long-term resource

degradation. An approach that links conservation and sustainable use of natural resources to people’s social and economic development can allow poverty to be alleviated while maintaining the well-being of natural ecosystems and species. This approach is the key to BirdLife’s work in Africa. This publication will contribute to that work by providing a list of sites which, through the mechanism of Ramsar designation, can constitute a sustainably managed network of critically important wetlands for people and biodiversity. Parties, non-Parties, the BirdLife Partnership and its network of collaborators all now need to work together to ensure that qualifying IBAs are designated and protected. It is a great pleasure therefore for me to introduce and recommend effective use of this publication to all who are interested in the wise use of Africa’s natural resources, particularly its wetlands.

In closing, I should like on behalf of the BirdLife International African Partnership to thank most warmly the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (BirdLife in the UK), the Ramsar Bureau and all contributors and reviewers for their support in the preparation of Important Bird Areas and potential Ramsar Sites in Africa.

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