Overview of results

Distribution of selected sites

Data on IBAs have been collected from every territory in Africa and, following the site-selection criteria used in this report (see 'Introduction', p.11), at least one IBA qualifying as a potential Ramsar Site has been identified in 54 out of the 58 countries or territories within the region (Table 2). Only in four countries do no IBAs appear to contain potential Ramsar Sites—the Federal Islamic Republic of the Comoros, Lesotho, Swaziland and Togo – according to the site-identification methodology used in this report (see pp. 11–13). In the remainder of Africa, a total of 586 IBAs have been identified that contain areas that qualify as potential Ramsar Sites (Figure 3). These IBAs are spread across the entire continent, spanning more than 10,000 km from 'Bouvetøya (Bouvet Island) Nature Reserve' IBA (54°S) in the Southern Ocean to 'Galite archipelago' IBA (37°N in Tunisia) in the Mediterranean Sea, and c.8,500 km across from 'Ilhéu Branco' IBA (24°W in Cape Verde) in the west to 'Plateau des Tourbières' IBA (77°E in French Southern Territories) in the east. The most notable concentrations of IBAs (potential Ramsar Sites) are in the highlands of East Africa and Ethiopia, along the Sahelian belt, on the lowland floodplains of south-central Africa, and in Madagascar. IBAs in the coastal zone and on oceanic islands are also well represented. Potential Ramsar Sites are, not surprisingly, sparse in the major African deserts of the Sahara, Kalahari and Ogaden, but there is also a notable lack of identified IBAs in the lowland forest zone of the Congo basin.

The wetland within an individual IBA can qualify as a potential Ramsar Site under several Ramsar criteria. Figure 4 shows IBAs that contain areas that qualify as Ramsar Sites under Ramsar Criterion 2 (sites important for wetland species that are globally threatened or otherwise of global conservation concern). These IBAs follow the same pattern as that shown in Figure 3, but with notably fewer IBAs in southern Africa, a relatively well-counted sub-region where many IBAs have been identified as holding potential Ramsar Sites under Ramsar Criterion 6 (sites that regularly support 1% or more of at least one waterbird species's biogeographic population). Figure 5 shows IBAs which contain areas that qualify as Ramsar Sites under Criterion 5 (sites that regularly support at least 20,000 waterbirds). The most striking concentrations of IBAs occur in the Sahelian belt, Rift and Nile Valleys, and East African highlands, reflecting the combined importance of these regions as foraging areas for both Palearctic and Afrotropical migratory waterbirds during the winter or non-breeding season. IBAs qualifying under Criterion 5 in southern Africa and Madagascar are notably few, compared to the overall number of sites qualifying in these regions, while oceanic islands are well-represented, resulting from the great importance of these areas for large populations of breeding seabirds.

IBAs that contain areas that qualify as Ramsar Sites under Criterion 4 (critical or refuge sites) and Criterion 6 (1% threshold sites) have a distribution very similar to that of all IBAs illustrated in Figure 3, since most IBAs selected qualify under at least these two criteria.

Ramsar designation progress

A total of 112 Ramsar Sites had been designated by the 35 Contracting Parties within the African region (as defined here), as of July 2002. Table 2 shows national progress with the designation of the qualifying IBAs as Ramsar Sites. Of the 586 IBAs in Africa that qualify as potential Ramsar Sites, the wetlands within 83 (14%) have actually been designated as Ramsar Sites, with nationally a relatively high proportion of such sites in Algeria, Benin, Botswana, Chad, Ghana, Guinea, Malawi, Mali and Senegal. However, within 25 of these 83 sites there is a need for the extension of Ramsar Site boundaries to include other important wetland habitat within the IBA. A total of 503 (86%) of the qualifying IBAs have no part of them designated as a Ramsar Site as yet, with nearly all countries or territories having at least one such undesignated IBA, and with particularly high numbers of such sites in Madagascar, Tanzania, Tunisia and South Africa.

Figure 6 shows the distribution of the 83 qualifying IBAs that contain wetlands that have actually been designated under the Convention, at least partially. These IBAs are clustered in north-west Africa, coastal West Africa, the Sahel, East African highlands, and southern Africa. This pattern reflects closely the overall aggregations of potential Ramsar Sites (Figure 3), except that there is a notable absence of designated Ramsar Sites on oceanic islands, in most coastal areas away from West Africa, and in the Ethiopian highlands.

Of the 87 wetland-dependent bird species in the African region that are of global conservation concern (Appendix 3), all but ten occur in significant numbers at one or more of the 586 qualifying IBAs. Among the 384 IBAs which qualify as potential Ramsar Sites under Ramsar Criterion 2, the wetland areas within 53 IBAs (14% of 384) have already been designated completely or partially as Ramsar Sites.

Table 2. The number of IBAs that contain areas that qualify as potential Ramsar Sites, and the progress in designation of these areas as Ramsar Sites.

Country	Designation progress*			Total
	Complete	Partial	Lacking	
Algeria	7	–	15	22
Angola	–	–	5	5
Benin	2	–	–	2
Botswana	3	1	1	5
Bouvetøya (Bouvet Island)	–	–	1	1
Burkina Faso	1	–	3	4
Burundi	1	–	3	4
Cameroon	–	–	6	6
Cape Verde	–	–	4	4
Central African Republic	–	–	1	1
Chad	2	–	1	3
Congo, Republic of	–	–	2	2
Congo, Democratic Republic of	1	–	7	8
Côte d'Ivoire	1	–	4	5
Djibouti	–	–	3	3
Egypt	2	–	23	25
Equatorial Guinea	–	–	1	1
Eritrea	–	–	4	4
Ethiopia	–	–	31	31
French Southern Territories	–	–	17	17
Gabon	–	1	4	5
The Gambia	–	1	8	9
Ghana	5	–	1	6
Guinea	6	–	1	7
Guinea-Bissau	–	–	5	5
Kenya	3	–	15	18
Liberia	–	–	3	3
Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Socialist People's	–	–	3	3
Madagascar	2	–	38	40
Malawi	1	–	–	1
Mali	3	–	7	10
Mauritania	3	–	11	14
Mauritius	–	–	5	5
Mayotte	–	–	1	1
Morocco	1	3	28	32
Mozambique	–	–	4	4
Namibia	3	1	12	16
Niger	3	–	7	10
Nigeria	1	–	3	4
La Réunion and Iles Eparses	–	–	4	4
Rwanda	–	–	6	6
St Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha	–	–	8	8
Sao Tomé and Príncipe	–	–	1	1
Senegal	–	4	9	13
Seychelles	–	–	14	14
Sierra Leone	1	–	3	4
Somalia	–	–	7	7
South Africa	2	11	35	48
Sudan	–	–	7	7
Tanzania	3	–	38	41
Tunisia	1	–	36	37
Uganda	–	1	22	23
Zambia	–	2	20	22
Zimbabwe	–	–	5	5
Total	58	25	503	586

* See 'Identifying potential Ramsar Sites' (p.11) for method of evaluation.

Figure 3. The IBAs in Africa which contain areas that qualify as potential Ramsar Sites.

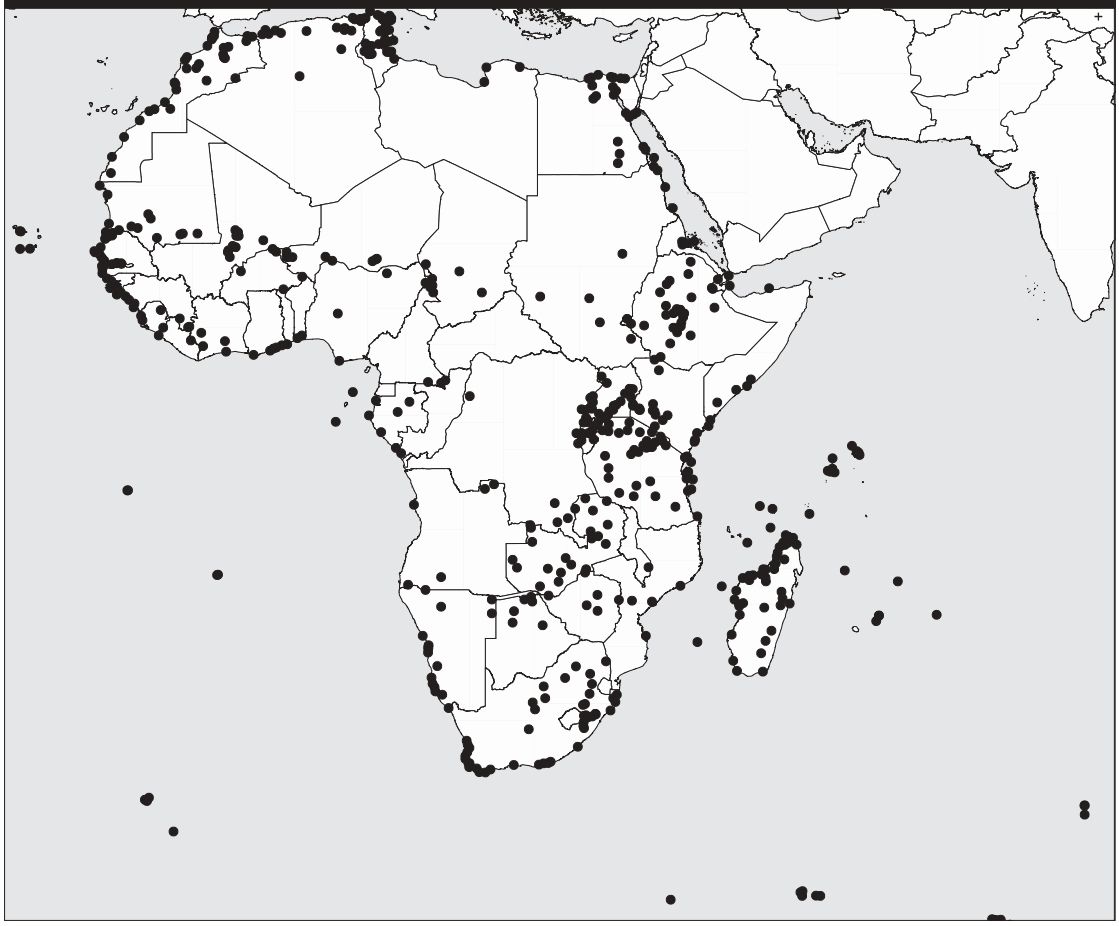


Figure 4. The IBAs in Africa which contain areas that qualify as potential Ramsar Sites under Criterion 2 (sites for species of global conservation concern).

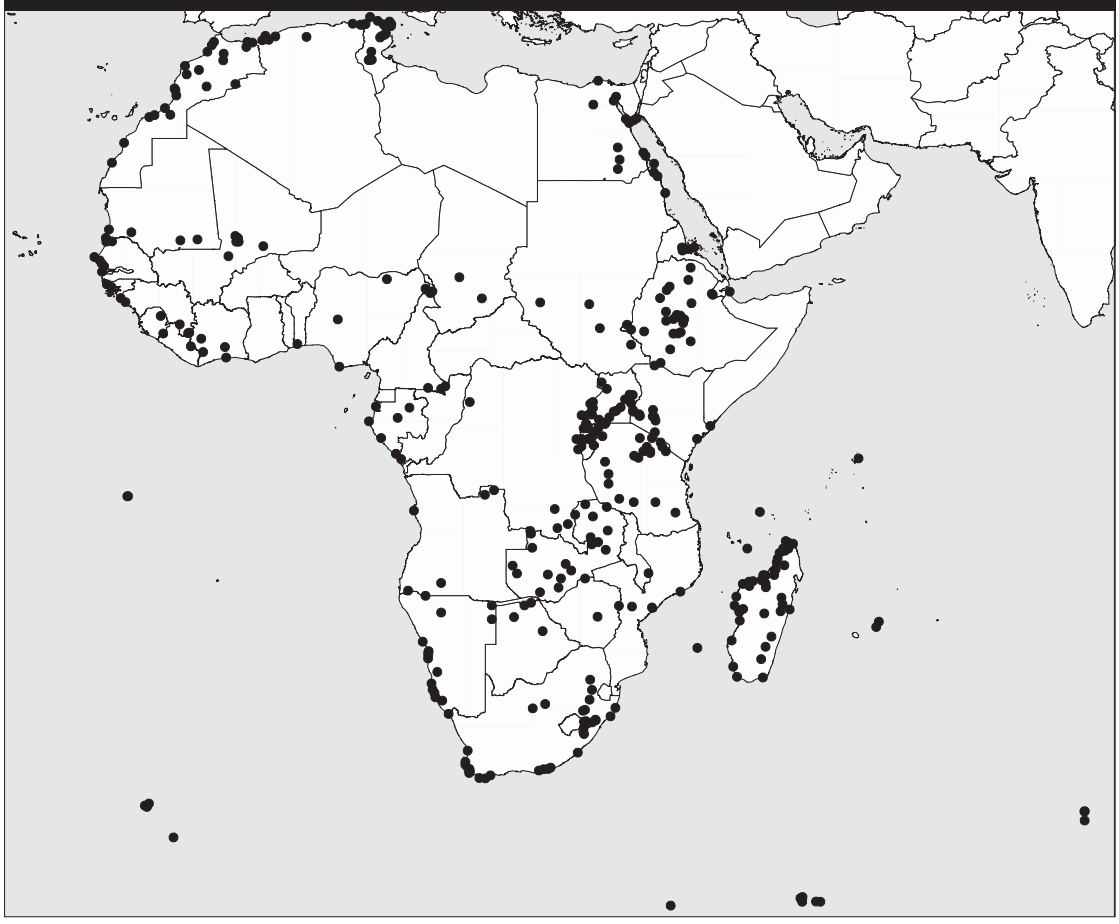


Figure 5. The IBAs in Africa which contain areas that qualify as potential Ramsar Sites under Criterion 5 (sites that regularly support 20,000 or more waterbirds).

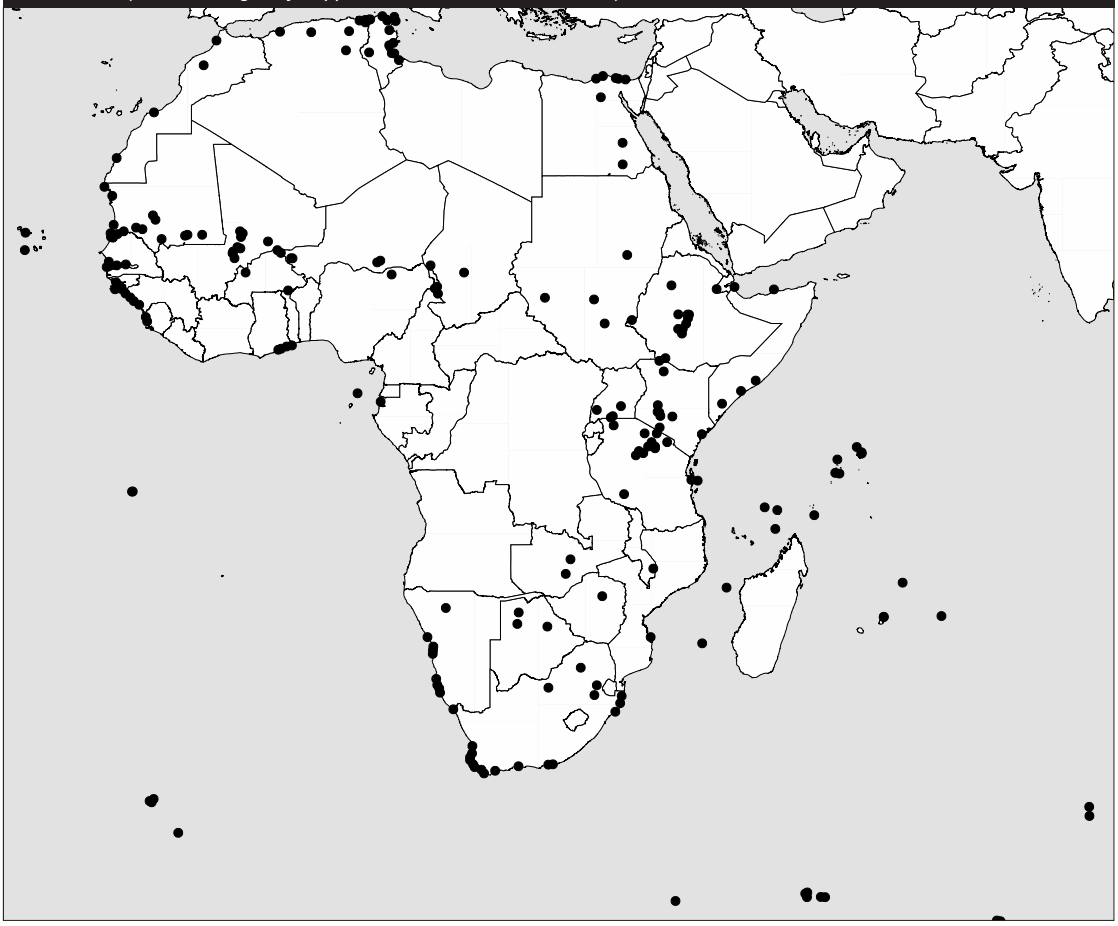
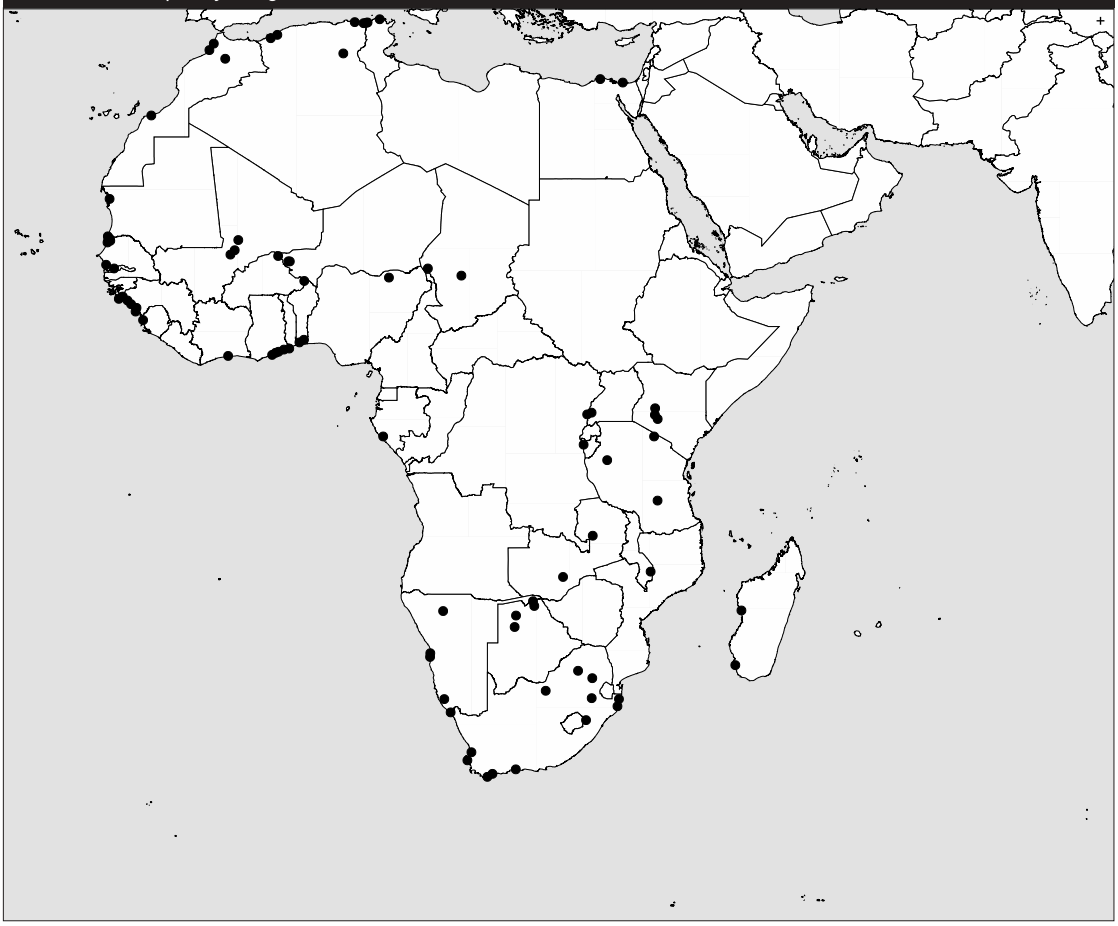


Figure 6. The IBAs in Africa which contain areas that qualify as potential Ramsar Sites, and that have been partially or completely designated as Ramsar Sites.



What should be done next?

Confirming official lists of candidate sites

This document gives an up-to-date list of sites that are shown by IBA data to merit Ramsar designation. It is offered to governments as a technical contribution from BirdLife International in its capacity as one of the Convention's International Partner Organisations. Meetings of the Contracting Parties at the regional and global levels should endorse these findings in appropriate ways, but decisions as to what shall be official candidate sites, and decisions as to designation, remain the responsibility of Parties.

In many instances the data in this document arise from collaborative work between NGOs (BirdLife Partners) and governments.

It is an important and urgent 'next step' for the lists of deserving Ramsar Site candidates presented in this document to be officially recognised as such by Contracting Party governments. In some cases, where there has been good discussion of the matter already, this may now be no more than a rapid formality. In others, where more consideration is required, BirdLife urges that attention be given to it immediately.

The Conference of Parties called for such action in 1996, in Resolution VI.12 which, inter alia, "urges each Contracting Party to recognise officially its identified sites meeting the criteria approved by the Conference of the Contracting Parties".

For countries which are not yet Ramsar Parties, this document should help with protection of their wetlands in the meantime, and should contribute towards their preparation for accession and their initial implementation of the Convention thereafter.

Defining Ramsar Site boundaries

It is beyond the scope of this document to indicate the precise boundary of each site, but clearly, before designation, definition of such boundaries will be required as a 'next step'. In many cases an appropriate boundary will already be suggested by the boundary of the IBA. Contracting Party governments are therefore urged to take the earliest opportunity to discuss this with BirdLife Partners/Secretariat (see 'Contact points and acknowledgements', p.135).

In some cases, in addition to an IBA boundary which encompasses an area of significance for birds, other contiguous areas beyond it which are wetland habitats meeting non-bird Ramsar criteria might also need to be included in any eventual Ramsar Site. In some other cases, an IBA that contains wetland habitats of sufficient importance to be designated as a Ramsar Site may also contain other non-wetland areas, which may not need to be included in the Ramsar designation. However, the simple fact of an area being a non-wetland component need not be a reason for its exclusion, if it plays an integral part in the functioning of the ecosystem.

Guidance and standards for boundary definition of Ramsar Sites have been adopted by the Conference of Parties, in the annex to Resolution VII.11 (1999) on the Strategic framework and guidelines for the future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance (see Box 1). In addition, Recommendation 5.3 (1993) has referred to the importance of a whole catchment approach, to buffer zones, and to ecological corridors.

In Resolution VI.16 (1996) the Parties decided that when sites are designated, their boundaries must be "precisely described and also delimited on a map". Standards of precision for this have not yet been defined under the Convention, but this is becoming an increasingly important issue, and Parties are urged to use the best practicable degree of precision, especially in the interests of legal certainty.

Consulting and finalising site details

In most cases, Parties will wish to conduct consultations on proposals for new Ramsar Site designations with stakeholders such as local administrations and affected communities. This can be important in building support for the implementation of the Convention and can produce information that might be important in refining site details and boundaries. An appropriate balance will need to be struck between exhaustive discussion and prompt protection.

In the light of consultations, site details can be refined and finalised prior to the formal act of designation. An essential step at this stage is the completion of a standard Ramsar Information Sheet (RIS) for submission to the Ramsar Bureau. The sheet can be accessed at www.ramsar.org/key_ris.htm, and guidance on its completion can be found at www.ramsar.org/key_ris_guide.htm. COP Recommendation

Box 1. Extract from Guidelines for adopting a systematic approach to identifying priority wetlands for designation under the Ramsar Convention (annexed to Resolution VII.11).

46. Boundary definition of sites. When designating sites, Contracting Parties are encouraged to take a management-oriented approach to determining boundaries, recognising that these should allow management of the site to be undertaken at the appropriate scale for maintaining the ecological character of the wetland. Article 2.1 of the Convention indicates that Ramsar sites "may incorporate riparian and coastal zones adjacent to the wetlands, and islands or bodies of marine water deeper than six metres at low tide lying within the wetlands". For very small and therefore potentially vulnerable sites, Contracting Parties are encouraged to include buffer zones around the wetland. These may also be a useful management tool for subterranean system wetlands as well as larger sites.

47. In determining the boundaries of sites identified as habitat for animal species, these should be established so as to provide adequately for all the ecological and conservation requirements of those populations. In particular, large animals, species at the top of food-chains, those with large home-ranges, or with feeding and resting areas that are widely separated, will generally require substantial areas to support viable populations. If it is not possible to designate a site extending to the entire range used or accommodating viable (self-sustaining) populations, then additional measures relating to both the species and its habitat should be adopted in the surrounding areas (or the buffer zone). These measures will complement the protection of the core habitat within the Ramsar site.

48. While some sites considered for designation will be identified at landscape scale, containing substantial elements of whole wetland ecosystems, others may be smaller. In selecting and delimiting such more restricted wetlands the following guidance may assist in determining their extent:

i as far as possible, sites should include complexes or mosaics of vegetation communities, not just single communities of importance. Note that wetlands with naturally nutrient poor (oligotrophic) conditions generally exhibit low diversity of species and habitats. In these wetlands, high diversity may be associated with low conservation quality (indicated by markedly altered conditions). Thus, diversity must always be considered within the context of the norms of the wetland type;

i. zonations of communities should be included as completely as possible in the site. Important are communities showing natural gradients (transitions), for instance from wet to dry, from salt to brackish, from brackish to fresh, from oligotrophic to eutrophic, from rivers to their associated banks, shingle bars and sediment systems, etc.;

iii. natural succession of vegetation communities often proceeds rapidly in wetlands. To the greatest extent possible and where these exist, all phases of succession (for example, from open shallow water, to communities of emergent vegetation, to reedswamp, to marshland or peatland, to wet forest) should be included in designated sites. Where dynamic changes are occurring, it is important that the site is large enough so that pioneer stages can continue to develop within the Ramsar site;

iv. continuity of a wetland with a terrestrial habitat of high conservation value will enhance its own conservation value.

49. The smaller the site, the more vulnerable it is likely to be to outside influences. In determining boundaries of Ramsar sites, particular attention should be given to ensuring that wherever possible the limits of the sites serve to protect them from potentially damaging activities, especially those likely to cause hydrological disturbance. Ideally, boundaries should include those areas of land necessary to provide and maintain the hydrological functions needed to conserve the international importance and integrity of the site. Alternatively, it is important that planning processes are operating to ensure that potential negative impacts arising from land-use practices on adjoining land or within the drainage basin are suitably regulated and monitored to provide confidence that the ecological character of the Ramsar site will not be compromised.

4.7 (1993) and Resolution VI.13 (1996) encourage the use of the RIS.

Protecting sites prior to designation

BirdLife's two strongest recommendations arising from this work on candidate sites are (a) that the sites identified should be designated as Ramsar Sites as soon as possible, and (b) while waiting for the designation process to be completed, or for accession to the Convention in the case of countries which are not yet Parties, sites should receive the degree of protection which Ramsar designation would afford them.

Sites are sometimes damaged through lack of knowledge about their value—however, once their value is known, it would be unfortunate not to apply the desired level of protection simply because a formal step of designation had not yet been completed.

Ideally, this should apply to all the sites in this document from the time of its publication. At the least, however, BirdLife would advocate that it be applied as a matter of policy upon adoption of official lists of candidate sites at government level, as described above in 'Confirming official lists of candidate sites'. This practice exists in some places already, where decision-making authorities treat recognised candidate sites as though they were already designated. To do so effectively requires that this approach be advertised as an official policy, endorsed at the same level of government that designates sites.

Approaches to designation

The act of designation takes different forms in different countries, and its manner is not prescribed under the Convention. Typically, it may be an administrative notification to relevant authorities, land-owners and (by public announcement) local communities, made by the responsible Ministry. In some cases it may be a form of Presidential decree, and in some cases a specific legal instrument applying to the site(s) in question. Parties are free to decide the approach taken, but some points of general good practice are worth mentioning here.

As with the notification of designations to the Ramsar Bureau, a map showing the site boundary should be made available. Information on the reasons why the site is designated, and the particular functions and values which need to be taken into account in planning, management and decision-making, should also be made available. The legal and policy implications of designation (based, of course, on the provisions of the Convention, but elaborated as appropriate for the jurisdiction concerned) should be made clear; as should the allocation of relevant responsibilities, and sources of further information. Wide publicity is desirable, to raise awareness of the significance of both the site and the Convention generally. Consultation with affected stakeholders, especially local communities, is essential.

After designation

The purpose of this document is to contribute towards the adequate representation of important areas for waterbirds in the List of Wetlands of International Importance in Africa. Acting on the steps above should achieve this.

These steps, however, constitute merely the first stage towards the objective of fuller implementation of the site-designation aspects of the Ramsar Convention, and better conservation and wise use of wetlands generally. A wealth of other material and advice is available under the Convention, and from BirdLife International and others, on the various dimensions of the treatment of sites once listed. All users of this document are therefore encouraged to continue dialogue with BirdLife International and the Ramsar Bureau on issues such as planning, decision-making, management, monitoring and awareness-raising.

With the assistance of the systematic information base presented here, the prospects for ultimately stronger, more complete and more durable success in the conservation and wise use of wetlands of importance for birds in Africa should be better than ever before. The challenge to deliver this rests now on all governments and NGOs who are in a position to put this document to use. BirdLife urges the highest levels of commitment to this among all concerned, and stands ready to provide what further assistance it can.

Country chapters

The following sections provide a country-by-country assessment of IBAs and potential Ramsar Sites in Africa. For each IBA, selected details are provided for international name, location, area, Ramsar-qualifying criteria and designation progress. An analysis of the occurrence of wetland-dependent bird species of global conservation concern at the selected IBAs is also provided.

Full details of each site, including count data for individual bird species, can be found in Fishpool and Evans (2001) and will be made available in the Data Zone at www.birdlife.net during 2003.