



Terkhiin Tsagaan Nuur in Mongolia supports significant populations of globally threatened and congregatory waterbirds, and hence qualifies under the criteria used to identify both Important Bird Areas and Ramsar Sites. (PHOTO: SIMBA CHAN)

A total of 2,293 IBAs have been identified in the 28 countries and territories in the Asia region. Information on these sites was collated by an extensive network of ornithologists and conservation experts across Asia. 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.

The information collated for every IBA in the Asia region includes the international name; administrative region(s) in which the site is located; central coordinates; altitudinal range; area; main habitats; protected area status (including designation under international conventions); and the species and habitats for which it qualifies as an IBA (see below). These data are available in BirdLife International (2004a) and at www.birdlife.org. More detailed information is available on the IBAs in the eight countries and territories that have published IBA directories (Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Laos, Philippines, Taiwan, Thailand and Vietnam: see 'References' for the citations of these publications).

RAMSAR CONVENTION ON WETLANDS

The Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971) (see www.ramsar.org/) was adopted in 1971 and entered into force in 1975. It currently (August 2005) has 146 Contracting Parties, 17 of which are in the Asia region. The Convention provides a framework for international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands. Parties are to designate suitable wetlands for inclusion in the List of Wetlands of International

Importance, also known as Ramsar Sites, to formulate and implement their planning so as to promote the conservation of wetlands included in the List and the wise use of all wetlands in their territory. At August 2005, 144 Ramsar Sites had been designated in the region covered by this publication. Many threatened and congregatory birds heavily depend on wetlands, and the Ramsar Convention is therefore an excellent tool for their protection. A number of Asian wetlands of significance to threatened and congregatory birds have already been designated as Ramsar Sites, and 'wise use' approaches, for example in river basin management, are crucial to the survival of many species and communities. For a systematic approach to the national implementation of the convention, many countries have developed National Wetland Policies.

IDENTIFYING POTENTIAL RAMSAR SITES

The method used in this report for selecting potential Ramsar Sites has been applied, not to all wetlands in the Asia region, but to those sites identified by BirdLife International as Important Bird Areas (BirdLife International 2004a). These IBAs were identified through the application of a set of standard, internationally recognised criteria. These allow the identification of IBAs based on a site's importance for:

- Globally threatened species;
- Assemblages of restricted-range species;
- Assemblages of biome-restricted species;
- Congregatory species (principally waterbirds and seabirds).

A number of the criteria for the selection of IBAs are related directly to the criteria for the selection of Ramsar Sites (Figure 2). Hence, potential Ramsar Sites of international importance for wetland-