

## FOREWORD

Birds are very much a part of our natural heritage and the economy in the Asian region. From Japan Airlines' crane logo to the *Garuda* of Indonesia, birds inspire every culture, every religion and every nation in some way. As the forces of globalisation impact on the region, birds will play an increasing part in helping people and societies to define national and local identities. Birds are also good indicators of biodiversity, and are a measure of the sustainability of human utilisation of the natural environment. From this Red Data Book, it is clear that Asia is far from reaching sustainability in its economic and social practices.

The messages from the Asian Red Data Book are very distressing. One in eight (12%) of all bird species in the Asian region are globally threatened; a total of 323 bird species is facing extinction. Most worryingly, 41 are Critical, and a further 65 are Endangered. An additional 317 (Near Threatened) species are close to qualifying as globally threatened. In summary, the Red Data Book documents serious reasons for concern for 25% of Asia's birds. This is a measure of the general deterioration of biodiversity in the region.

Forests are by far the most important of all the habitats for threatened bird species in Asia, supporting around 80% of the total. The single most important forest type is tropical lowland moist forest, and it is our over-exploitation of this resource, and conversion to other land-uses, that is by far the most significant threat to the region's birds and biodiversity. Wetlands are also important in Asia, with around 20% of threatened species found in such habitats.

Red Data Books are an important foundation for preventing extinctions, and for reversing the general decline in birds and the deterioration in their, and our, environment. The Asian Red Data Book for Birds identifies the species at risk of extinction, and provides comprehensive information as a basis for planning, action and monitoring. Detailed reviews are provided for each species, and conservation recommendations are presented. Building on this, *A Strategy for threatened birds in Asia* will be developed from the work presented here. It will summarise priority actions by species, by sites, by habitats and by country, and provide a framework for monitoring success and failure in addressing these challenges.

The Asian Red Data Book Project has benefited greatly from the contributions of a network of thousands of people who care for birds, including ornithologists, conservationists, and birdwatchers, from almost every Asian country and across the globe. It has been an achievement of the entire BirdLife Asia Partnership that will provide a foundation for our work over the coming decades and will form the basis on which we encourage action by individuals, NGOs, and governments across the region and beyond. I would like to thank the Vice Chairmen of the Asia Council: K. Oesman, S.A. Hussain, A. Andreev, and K. Kumar for their wholehearted support of this important project. I also extend my sincere gratitude to all BirdLife Partners in the Asia region.

This work would not have been possible without the support of the Japanese Government, and I wish to thank the Ministry of the Environment for its commitment to the conservation of birds and biodiversity in Asia. I would like to pay a special tribute to Sukio Iwatare, Vice President of BirdLife International and the Wild Bird Society of Japan, who played such a significant role in the project. It was with great sadness that Iwatare-san died on 7 March 2001, just months before the publication of this work.

On behalf of the Asia Partnership, I would also like to express my considerable thanks to the other supporters of this project, including the BirdLife Partners in the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and Denmark. It is especially pleasing to receive support from Conservation International, an example of the close collaboration between international NGOs. I would like to express my deep appreciation to the staff members of WBSJ at WING and the BirdLife Secretariat, in particular R. Grimmett, for organising the project, and to the editors of the Red Data Book.

The Asian Red Data Book will be a foundation for action to reverse our over-exploitation of the natural world, and a baseline against which we can judge our progress. We are a long way from reversing the trend towards mass species extinction in the Asia region. The challenge is considerable but not impossible. I hope that everyone using this book will wish to work with the BirdLife Partnership over the coming years to prevent the loss of so many fabulous creatures, and the diversity and environmental security that they represent.

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