

Phong Nha

Criteria: A1, A2 & A3

Province(s): Quang Binh
PA Status: National Park
Latitude: 17°29'N
Longitude: 106°16'E
Area: 41,132 ha
Altitude Range: 150-400 m asl

EBA / SA:
 Annamese Lowlands EBA
Priority Landscape:
 NA 6 - Central Indochina Limestone



General Description

The IBA comprises the Phong Nha sector of Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park, which, prior to 2001, was designated as Phong Nha Nature Reserve. The IBA is situated within the largest area of contiguous limestone forest in Indochina, which also includes Hin Namno National Biodiversity Conservation Area in Laos, and the Ke Bang limestone area in Vietnam. The IBA has a limestone karst topography, as a result of which human encroachment into the site has been limited. Consequently, the limestone karst is almost entirely forested, apart from steep cliff faces. At the foot of the limestone karst, the natural vegetation is lowland evergreen forest, although some areas have been cleared for cultivation. There are a number of major cave systems at Phong Nha, and the site attracts large numbers of domestic tourists every year. Phong Nha is one of the most important sites in Vietnam for the conservation of globally threatened primate species, including at least one taxon endemic to limestone karst areas in central Indochina: Hatinh Langur *Trachypithecus francoisi hatinhensis*¹. In addition, the IBA supports an all-black langur, the precise taxonomic affinities of which are currently undetermined¹. To the north-west, Phong Nha IBA is contiguous with Ke Bang IBA.

Bird Fauna: Key Features

Phong Nha IBA is situated within the Annamese Lowlands Endemic Bird Area (EBA), and supports at least two of the nine restricted-range species that define this EBA. Notably, the IBA is one of only two sites in Vietnam known to support Sooty Babbler *Stachyris herbeti*, a species that went unrecorded for over 70 years between its discovery in Laos around 1920 and its rediscovery at Phong Nha in 1994². In addition to Sooty Babbler, Phong Nha IBA supports a population of a form of leaf warbler that is endemic to limestone karst areas in central Indochina. This form, which resembles Sulphur-breasted Warbler *Phylloscopus ricketti* in external appearance but differs in terms of vocalisations, may represent an undescribed species³.

Species	IBA Criteria	Global Threat Status	Other IBAs	Notes
Crested Argus <i>Rheinardia ocellata</i>	A1, A2	VU	15	One bird was heard in November 1994 and one or two birds were heard in June 1996 ⁴ .
Chestnut-necklaced Partridge <i>Arborophila charltonii</i>	A1	NT	7	A pair was heard duetting in November 1994 ⁴ .
Siamese Fireback <i>Lophura diardi</i>	A1, A3	NT	13	The species was recorded between June and July 1994 ² .
Red-collared Woodpecker <i>Picus rabieri</i>	A1, A3	NT	11	The species was recorded between June and July 1994 ² . A family group of four was seen in June 1996 and two birds were observed in December 1996 ⁴ .
Great Hornbill <i>Buceros bicornis</i>	A1	NT	13	The species was recorded between June and July 1994 ² .
Brown Hornbill <i>Anorrhinus tickelli</i>	A1, A3	NT	16	The species was recorded between June and July 1994 ² . Three birds were observed and up to eight were heard in June 1996 ⁴ .
[Short-tailed Scimitar Babbler <i>Jabouilleia danjoui</i>]	A1, A2	NT	18	Although the species has not yet been recorded at the IBA, it was recorded in the neighbouring Rao Bong watershed between June and July 1994 ² . While it is likely to occur at the IBA, this is currently unconfirmed.

Species	IBA Criteria	Global Threat Status	Other IBAs	Notes
Sooty Babbler <i>Stachyris herbeti</i>	A1, A2	NT	1	After a gap of over 70 years since the species's discovery, it was rediscovered at Phong Nha between June and July 1994 ² . During two subsequent visits, four small flocks were seen in November 1995 and several flocks, one of which numbered more than 20 birds, were observed in June 1996 ⁴ .

Notes: [] = unconfirmed record.

Biome Restricted Species: The site qualifies under criterion A3 because it supports 14 species restricted to the Indochinese Tropical Moist Forests (Biome 09). See Appendix 4 for details.

Secondary Criteria

Species	Status	Species	Status
Northern Slow Loris <i>Nycticebus bengalensis</i> ⁵	DD	Hatinh Langur	
Pygmy Loris <i>Nycticebus pygmaeus</i> ⁵	VU	<i>Trachypithecus francoisi hatinhensis</i> ^{5,6}	EN
Northern Pigtailed Macaque <i>Macaca leonina</i> ⁵	VU	Red-shanked Douc <i>Pygathrix nemaeus nemaeus</i> ⁵	EN
Assamese Macaque <i>Macaca assamensis</i> ⁵	VU	Buff-cheeked Gibbon <i>Nomascus gabriellae</i> ⁵	VU
Rhesus Macaque <i>Macaca mulatta</i> ⁵	NT	*[Gaur <i>Bos gaurus</i>] ⁵	VU
Stump-tailed Macaque <i>Macaca arctoides</i> ⁵	VU	Southern Serow <i>Naemorhedus sumatraensis</i> ⁵	VU

Notes: [] = unconfirmed record; * = possibly extinct at the site.

Threats to Biodiversity

Currently, the biggest threat to biodiversity at Phong Nha IBA is hunting, which is widespread at the site and represents a particular threat to populations of primates and large mammals. Levels of hunting are high in response to high demand from the wildlife trade. In addition to hunting, illegal timber extraction is also a major threat to biodiversity, and, again, occurs largely in response to commercial demand¹.

Due to the unsuitability of the limestone karst terrain, the rate of habitat loss to date at Phong Nha has been relatively low⁵. However, a road, which is currently being constructed through the IBA, may result in increased rates of habitat loss and disturbance to key species, especially globally threatened primates¹. The on-going construction of National Highway 2 close to the IBA is also a cause for concern, as this may facilitate human settlement in the surrounding area, thereby increasing human pressure on natural resources.

Another potential threat to biodiversity at the site is tourism development. To date, however, tourism development at the site has been concentrated on the cave systems, and impacts on forest habitats have been limited.

Threat	Severity
Agricultural intensification / expansion	•
Hunting	• •
Infrastructure development	• •
Recreation / tourism	•
Selective logging / cutting	• •

Conservation Actions

- In 1986, the government of Vietnam decreed the establishment of a cultural and historical site at Phong Nha¹.
- In 1993, Phong Nha Cultural and Historical Site was upgraded to nature reserve status and a management board was established¹.
- In 1998, with funding from the UK Department for International Development, WWF initiated a transboundary conservation project at Phong Nha, entitled *Linking Hin Namno and Phong Nha through Parallel Conservation*¹.
- In 1998, Fauna and Flora International initiated a conservation project at Phong Nha-Ke Bang, comprising capacity building and field survey components¹.
- In December 2001, the government of Vietnam decreed the establishment of Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park, comprising Phong Nha Nature Reserve and part of the Ke Bang limestone area.
- Koln Zoo is currently developing plans to undertake capacity building activities and further biological surveys at the site¹.

Recommendations

- National park management regulations, particularly controls on hunting and timber extraction should be effectively enforced.

- Strict controls on human settlement along the route of National Highway 2 should be introduced, in order to minimise increased pressures on the natural resources of the IBA following construction of this road.
- All proposed infrastructure developments at the national park, particularly those involving road construction, should be subjected to careful Environmental Impact Assessment, and appropriate mitigation measures should be implemented.
- A tourism management board, including representatives of the national park management board, the provincial tourism company and other local stakeholders, should be established as a basis for environmentally sustainable tourism development at the site.

References

1. BirdLife International and the Forest Inventory and Planning Institute (2001) *Sourcebook of existing and proposed protected areas in Vietnam*. Hanoi: BirdLife International Vietnam Programme and the Forest Inventory and Planning Institute.
2. Eames, J. C., Lambert, F. R. and Nguyen Cu (1994) A survey of the Annamese Lowlands, Vietnam, and its implications for the conservation of Vietnamese and Imperial Pheasants *Lophura hatinhensis* and *L. imperialis*. *Bird Conservation International* 4(4): 343-382.
3. Duckworth, J. W., Salter, R. E. and Khounboline, K. eds. (1999) *Wildlife in Lao P.D.R.: 1999 status report*. Vientiane: IUCN, Wildlife Conservation Society and the Centre for Protected Areas and Watershed Management.
4. Eames, J. C. and Tordoff A. W. (in prep.) Recent records and a conservation status review of some threatened and near-threatened bird species in Vietnam.
5. Nguyen Xuan Dang, Pham Nhat, Pham Trong Anh, Hendrichsen, D. (1998) *Results of surveys on mammal fauna in Phong Nha – Ke Bang area, Quang Binh, Vietnam: July 1-August 21, 1998*. Unpublished report to the Fauna & Flora International Indochina Programme, Hanoi.
6. Timmins, R. J., Do Tuoc, Trinh Viet Cuong and Hendrichsen, D. K. (1999) *A preliminary assessment of the conservation importance and conservation priorities of the Phong Nha-Ke Bang proposed national park, Quang Binh province, Vietnam*. Hanoi: Fauna & Flora International Indochina Programme.



Sooty Babbler *Stachyris herberti*