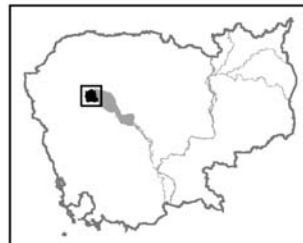


Prek Toal

Criteria A1, A4i & A4iii

Province(s):	Battambang
District(s):	Ek Phnom, Sangke and Mong Russey
Area (ha):	39,873
Altitude (m asl):	4 to 7
Central coordinates:	13°07'N 103°39'E



General description

Prek Toal is one of the most intact areas of freshwater swamp forest around Tonle Sap Lake. This unique ecosystem is adapted to withstand seasonal variation of water level of up to 10 m, and consists of short-tree shrublands and gallery forests of 7-15 m tall trees, dominated by *Barringtonia acutangula* and *Diospyros cambodiana* and a variety of woody lianas. In the dry season (January to May), these large trees support the largest remaining colonies of storks, pelicans and ibises in mainland South-east Asia. The IBA is centred on the Prek Toal Core Area of Tonle Sap Biosphere Reserve and includes all areas the bird colonies and the areas of best swamp forest. It is also completely inside a fishing concession (Fishing Lot No. 2 of Battambang Province), and the area is commercially fished on an industrial scale between January and July, severely restricting access to people who are not employees of the concessionaire. The waterbird colonies of Prek Toal contain some of the world's largest numbers of Spot-billed Pelican *Pelecanus philippensis* and Greater Adjutant *Leptoptilos dubius*, and Prek Toal is perhaps the only site in world where Milky Stork *Mycteria cinerea* breeds in freshwater. In addition, the IBA supports significant wet season breeding populations of Darter *Anhinga melanogaster* and Grey-headed Fish Eagle *Ichthyophaga ichthyaetus*, and, Masked Finfoot *Heliopais personata*, young chicks of which have been recorded.

Key bird species

Common name	Scientific name	IBA criteria	
Masked Finfoot	<i>Heliopais personata</i>	A1	
Grey-headed Fish Eagle	<i>Ichthyophaga ichthyaetus</i>	A1	
Darter	<i>Anhinga melanogaster</i>	A1	A4i
Little Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax niger</i>		A4i
Indian Cormorant	<i>P. fuscicollis</i>		A4i
Great Egret	<i>Casmerodius albus</i>		A4i
Black-headed Ibis	<i>Threskiornis melanocephalus</i>	A1	A4i
Spot-billed Pelican	<i>Pelecanus philippensis</i>	A1	A4i
Milky Stork	<i>Mycteria cinerea</i>	A1	A4i
Painted Stork	<i>M. leucocephala</i>	A1	A4i
Asian Openbill	<i>Anastomus oscitans</i>		A4i
Lesser Adjutant	<i>Leptoptilos javanicus</i>	A1	A4i
Greater Adjutant	<i>L. dubius</i>	A1	A4i

Biome restricted species

One species is restricted to the Indochinese Tropical Moist Forests (see Appendix 4).

Globally threatened primate species

Slow Loris *Nycticebus coucang*, Long-tailed Macaque *Macaca fascicularis* and Silvered Langur *Semnopithecus cristatus*.

Globally threatened turtle and crocodile species

Siamese Crocodile *Crocodylus siamensis*, Asian Box Turtle *Cuora amboinensis*, Yellow-headed Temple Turtle *Hieremys annandalii*, Malayan Snail-eating Turtle *Malayemys subtrijuga* and Asiatic Softshell Turtle *Amyda cartilaginea*.

Threats to biodiversity

Collection of eggs and chicks at the nest remains the single largest threat to the continued survival of colony-nesting waterbirds at the IBA. Teams of large waterbird collectors target breeding colonies of cormorants, pelicans, storks and ibises for egg and chick collection and organise several trips into the flooded forest during the breeding season. The intervention of government officials and international conservation teams, together with the establishment of the Prek Toal Environmental Station, have significantly improved the situation at this vital breeding site since 1997. Collection undertaken by local fishermen has been significantly reduced but it is reportedly still undertaken by farmers moving to the lake from upland areas in Battambang Province.

Aside from fish, the main income derived from the natural resources of the inundated forest is firewood. Firewood collection for local consumption is believed to be sustainable as the flooded forest vegetation is remarkably resilient, resprouting very rapidly after cutting. However, specific targeting of large trees may adversely affect availability of nesting sites for the large waterbirds.

Recommendations

- The current conservation initiative with a local conservation team protecting the bird colonies should be further supported and expanded through the recruitment of additional village personnel and the supply of further training and resources.
- The Prek Toal Core Area should be removed from the fishing lot system and give conservation status as a Fish Sanctuary under the Fisheries Law.
- Appropriate government personnel should work with the local conservation team to control illegal hunting and fishing activities in the Prek Toal Core Area by enforcing both the Forestry and Fisheries Laws.
- Work with the local authorities to establish rules and structures for ecotourism, particularly focusing on minimizing disturbance to the colonies and distributing proceeds equitably within the local community.
- Current environmental education initiatives working with both adults and children, but particularly through the local schools, should be further supported and expanded into all communities in the area.
- Further survey and research should be initiated to identify key feeding areas during the breeding season, and to establish a long-term monitoring programme for bird numbers.

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