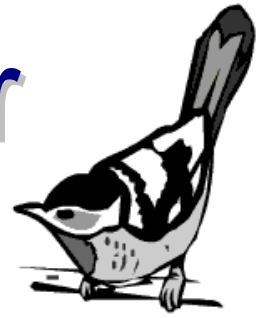




June 2003
Volume 2, Issue 2

The Babbler

BirdLife International
in Indochina



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Welcome to the latest edition of the Babbler. This issue of the Babbler has a strong emphasis on globally threatened species and also on new staff appointments, reflecting our continued expansion in the region.

The major species news of the last quarter has been the rediscovery of Gurney's Pitta in Myanmar by a team comprising Dr Tony Htin Hla, Sein Myo Aung (a.k.a Kopan), and Saw Moses from the Bird Enthusiasts and Nature Conservation Association, U Saw Nyunt Tin, from the Department of Forests, Kawthaung District, and myself. Although the survey was only one-month long, and was hampered by heavy rain, the results indicate the species still occurs in Myanmar. The ease with which we found it also suggests it is still widespread in southern Myanmar and not as threatened as was feared. BirdLife and BENCA will launch a new project in Myanmar this autumn and an extensive survey of lowland forests in Thanintharyi Division will be a priority for 2004. The identification of the largest and most suitable areas for protected area designation is now of upmost urgency given the rate of forest clearance for oil palm estates in the area. Once again, many thanks to Rufford Foundation and RSPB for funding the survey.

Earlier in the year, a BirdLife team enjoyed a "purple patch" during fieldwork in Yok Don National Park, rediscovering Giant Ibis after 68 years, and also finding Black-necked Stork and White-winged Duck. Well done to Le Trong Trai, Nguyen Duc Tu, Le Manh Hung and Ha Quy Quynh.

In this issue we also extend a warm welcome to Mrs Pham Tuan Anh, who takes over as Vietnam Programme Manager, and to Dr Sean C. Austin, who was recently appointed Cambodia Programme Officer. The appointment of these two individuals will strengthen our capacity in the region and mean we can deliver more effective conservation.

Jonathan C. Eames, Programme Manager
BirdLife International in Indochina

Babbler is compiled and edited by Vu Thi Minh Phuong. If you have any contributions or suggestions for the next issue, please contact phuong@birdlife.netnam.vn by 15 September.

Regional News



Red Data Bird revisited: Jerdon's Courser

The exquisite Jerdon's Courser *Rhinoptilus bitorquatus* has rarely been observed, let alone photographed.

Photo Simon Cook

The December 1992 issue of *World Birdwatch* carried a Red Data Bird article about Jerdon's Courser. Ten years later, we still know remarkably little about this beautiful, but highly elusive species. Panchapakesan Jeganathan from the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS, BirdLife in India) is studying Jerdon's Courser, and shedding light on the habits of Andhra's Pradesh's nocturnal dweller.

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Jerdon's Courser *Rhinoptilus bitorquatus* was first described from central India around 1848 by Dr T C Jerdon, a British Army Medical Officer, and was seen a few times up to 1900. It was then lost, believed extinct, for 86 years, until its remarkable rediscovery in January 1986 in Cuddapah District, Andhra Pradesh, by Bharat Bhushan from the BNHS, helped by Aitanna, a bird trapper from Reddipalli village, during a study funded by the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the Indian Government. The area where it was rediscovered was destined to be dug up for an irrigation canal, but thankfully officials from the Forest Department and the State Government of Andhra Pradesh recognised the ornithological importance of the site and declared it a sanctuary for Jerdon's Courser. Subsequently, the species has been seen in a few restricted areas of scrub jungle in the Sri Lankamaleswara Wildlife Sanctuary. Jerdon's Courser is nocturnal and nothing is known of its numbers, distribution or habitat requirements, although it is believed to have a tiny, possibly declining population, and is therefore classified as Critically Endangered.

To learn more about Jerdon's Coursers, researchers from BNHS, the RSPB (BirdLife in the UK) and the Universities of Reading and Cambridge, UK, joined forces in a research project supported by the UK Government's Darwin Initiative and the Andhra Pradesh Forest Department. Our first priority was to discover the geographical range of Jerdon's Courser by developing a standard survey technique—something of a tall order for a bird whose voice was unknown and that had only ever been seen on a handful of occasions!

After 1986, Jerdon's Coursers had occasionally been located by torchlight in lightly wooded scrub jungle, by masking the noise of observers' footsteps using a



Although the Sri Lankamaleswara Wildlife Sanctuary is home to much wildlife, including Sloth Bear and Leopard, it is most important as the only known regular haunt of Jerdon's Courser, which features prominently on this roadside signboard. Photo: Chris Bowden

battery-operated buzzer. Success no doubt varied enormously depending on the area being surveyed, and failure to locate coursers didn't necessarily mean they weren't present. To overcome this, we developed a cheap, reliable survey method by looking for Jerdon's Courser footprints on specially prepared tracking strips.

Tracking strips were made by clearing then leveling a strip of ground 5 m long by 25 cm wide. Locally obtained fine soil was sieved and laid out along the strip, then carefully flattened and smoothed using a builder's trowel to create a layer 1–2 cm thick on the surface. A fine layer of soil taken from adjacent to the strip was then dusted onto the surface using a sieve so that the tracking strip matched its surroundings. On some strips camera traps, triggered when an infra-red beam 12 cm above the strip was broken, were set up, to enable identification of birds crossing them.

Strips were then checked at regular intervals, and photographs and or plaster of Paris casts taken of any tracks found so that the length and angles between the toes could be measured using Vernier calipers. To identify which tracks belonged

to Jerdon's Coursers, we first had to consider the tracks of those species present in this part of India. Most were easily excluded because Jerdon's Courser has a vestigial hind toe—so any footprint with a hind toe couldn't be Jerdon's. We then turned to museum specimens to measure the feet size of various species, to determine those species with toes significantly larger or shorter than Jerdon's Courser. Finally, for species with similar-sized feet, that didn't leave the impression of a hind toe, we used measurements of the relative lengths and angles between the inner and outer toes to distinguish them from Jerdon's Courser. Tracking strips were first constructed in areas where Jerdon's Coursers were known to occur so we could determine how efficient our method was at locating birds. We found several footprints of Jerdon's Coursers, two of which were confirmed with infra-red camera trap photos. Based upon our results, we calculated that to be confident if coursers were present in an area of suitable habitat or not, at least 12–15 tracking strips placed 50–100 m apart were needed and these had to be monitored for a minimum of two months.



The scrub jungle habitat of Jerdon's Courser in the SriLankamaleswara Wildlife Sanctuary. Photo: Chris Bowden

Next, we located apparently suitable courser habitat within the sanctuary using satellite imagery and constructed regular grids of 12–16 strips at seven locations. To our delight, three of these locations proved to have Jerdon's Coursers, the furthest some 14 km from the previously known locality.

Our research is only just getting underway, but already we have made two further significant discoveries. First, we have tape-recorded the previously unknown call of Jerdon's Courser. Now we can listen for calling birds and use tape playback to speed up our survey work, although early indications are that birds are unresponsive to playback, at least for much of the year. Secondly, by analysing Jerdon's Courser droppings, we have determined that they feed mainly on termites. This may be another factor in determining the species's distribution—for example, its range might be limited by the availability of a particular termite species. Only time and further research will reveal more information about this mysterious inhabitant of central India's scrub jungles.



Right: Tracks of a Jerdon's Courser on a tracking strip. The angles between the toes and their relative lengths are distinctive. The dropping between the footprints contained the remains of a fungus-gardening species of termite. Photo: Panchapakesan Jeganathan

Left: Panchapakesan Jeganathan puts the finishing touches to a tracking strip by smoothing the fine soil which will record the footprints of passing wildlife. Photo: Simon Wotton

Panchapakesan Jeganathan, Field Researcher, Bombay Natural History Society

GURNEY'S PITTA *PITTA GURNEYI* REDISCOVERED IN MYANMAR

In June, 2003 - BirdLife International announced the rediscovery of Gurney's Pitta, one of the rarest and most beautiful birds in the world, in southern Myanmar.

The discovery was made by a team of conservationists from the Bird Enthusiasts and Nature Conservation Association (BENCA), the Department of Forests Kawthaung District, Tanintharyi Division, and BirdLife International following a month-long survey of lowland forest in southern Tanintharyi Division (Tenasserim), Myanmar. The team found a maximum of 10–12 pairs of pittas at each of four lowland forest sites, all close to historical collecting localities. The last confirmed record of Gurney's Pitta from Myanmar was in 1914.

Gurney's Pitta is teetering on the brink of extinction and classified as Critically Endangered. Prior to the latest discovery only a handful of birds were known, from a single locality in Thailand where conservationists have been working closely with the Thai authorities to protect the dwindling population.

Dr Michael Rands, Director and Chief Executive of BirdLife International commented "The rediscovery of Gurney's Pitta in Myanmar is tremendously exciting and important, but we must not be complacent. There was always hope that another population existed in Myanmar, but it is crucial that the fulfillment of that hope doesn't in any way weaken or compromise the determination to save the species at its one site in Thailand."

The surviving Gurney's Pittas in Myanmar are increasingly threatened by the rapid clearance of their forest habitat to make way for oil palm plantations and unless action is taken soon, could soon disappear.

Jonathan Eames of BirdLife International in Indochina, who took part in the survey, said "Throughout our work



Female Gurney's Pitta *Pitta gurneyi* feeding young at the nest. Photo: U Treesucon/BirdLife

we could hear the constant whine of chainsaws, and everywhere we saw patches of recently burned forest. Flat, lowland forest is being rapidly cleared from the region, particularly along the route of the trans-Tenasserim highway. The extent and scale of the forest clearances are clearly visible from satellite images and pose a significant threat to the continued survival of this spectacular species."

BirdLife International believes that the next priorities in the battle to save Gurney's Pitta from extinction are:

- to identify the largest remaining areas of suitable lowland forest habitat in Myanmar urgently and work with the relevant authorities to develop an appropriate conservation strategy for them.
- to continue to work closely with the authorities to protect the small but vital population of Gurney's Pittas in southern Thailand.

GRANTS FOR CONSERVATION PROJECT IN THE ORIENTAL REGION

The Oriental Bird Club (OBC) aims to encourage interest in Oriental birds and their conservation. In 2003 the OBC is pleased to offer the following grants:

Forktail -Leica Award for Conservation

The 2003 Forktail-Leica Award for bird conservation is the fifteenth award supported by funds generously donated by Leica Camera. The award is for GBP 1,500 and proposals must be received by 1st September, 2003. This award is only open to Asian nationals and projects should where possible:

- Involve local people
- Support national non-government organisations
- Aim to influence Government decisions in favour of wildlife conservation

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OBC targets this award to projects which include studies or survey of:

- Globally threatened species
- Areas supporting concentrations of endemic species
- Poorly known areas likely to support globally threatened or endemic species

OBC-WildWings Conservation Awareness

The OBC-WildWings Conservation Awareness Award 2003 is the tenth award generously sponsored by WildWings, the independent travel agency for birders. The award of GBP 1,000 is being offered to Oriental nationals for projects designed to raise conservation awareness, particularly among local communities. The closing date for applications is the 1st September 2003. Example of such projects include:

- Involving local communities in making decisions which benefit wildlife
- Funding publications and education material about wildlife conservation
- Funding wildlife camps for school children
- Interpretative material for visitor centres

OBC Small Grants

The OBC Small Grants up to GBP 500 are offered for conservation work and conservation awareness projects. *Small grant applications are considered at any time of the year.* Criteria outlined for the two major awards apply also to small grant applications, which are awarded four times a year. The "Conservation Fund" section of the OBC Bulletin outlined successful projects. Strong preference is shown to application from Oriental nationals, or those that support Oriental nationals working with counterparts from outside the region. Applications should apply at least *six months* prior to the intended study period.

If you are interested in applying for any of these awards and would like a copy of the guidelines for applicants please contact Phil Benstead (Conservation Officer), OBC, PO Box 324, Bedford, MK42 0WG, UK; email obc.admin@virgin.net or visit the website <http://www.orientalbirdclub.org>

A STRATEGY WORKSHOP FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION ON THE HA TIEN PLAIN

On 29 May 2003, in Rach Gia town, Kien Giang Provincial People's Committee, Holcim Vietnam, the International Crane Foundation (ICF) and the International Finance Corporation (IFC) held a strategy workshop entitled "Sustainable development and biodiversity conservation on the Ha Tien Plain". The Ha Tien Plain was ranked as the highest priority site for wetland conservation in the Mekong Delta following a study by BirdLife International and the Institute of Ecology and Biological Resources in 1999. This plain supports the largest remaining area of the inundated grassland on the ancient alluvial soil and supports the largest dry season population of eastern Sarus Crane *Grus antigone sharpii* in the Vietnamese part of the Mekong Delta. Furthermore, the Ha Tien Plain contains two Important Bird Areas (IBAs). Unfortunately, in recent years, the plain has been the focus of numerous agricultural and aquacultural developments planned by the provincial and district government. As a result, almost all the natural habitats have now been converted to other land-uses, including marginal agriculture and aquaculture.

Prior to this workshop, two others were held in 1999 and 2001 to raise awareness of the biological and socio-economic importance of natural habitats on the Ha Tien Plain among key decision makers. Despite these efforts,

a conservation plan for this area has not yet appeared. Perceiving the importance and urgency of this issue, Holcim Viet Nam, a company which owns a large cement factory in the Kien Giang province, and its financial partner - IFC, in collaboration with ICF, sponsored a study on the possibilities for sustainable development and biodiversity conservation on the Ha Tien Plain. This study was conducted in early 2003, and the results were presented at the workshop. Based on the results of the study, Holcim and IFC agreed in principle to fund feasibility studies for two projects in the area: a project for the conservation of Sarus Cranes in the Hon Chong grassland, which supports about 1,300 ha of natural habitats; and a project for the conservation and sustainable use of *Lepironia* grasslands, incorporating the preservation of the traditional handicrafts. These feasibility studies will be carried out immediately the provincial authorities indicate their willingness to support them.

At the workshop, the representative from BirdLife International pointed out that the Ha Tien Plain presents a golden opportunity for the private sector to take an active role in site conservation. BirdLife hopes that suitable activities will be implemented on-the-ground soon, before the last natural habitats on the Ha Tien Plain disappear forever.

VULTURE DEATH MYSTERY EXPLAINED?

An exciting development in the search for the reason why vultures belonging to the *Gyps* genus have declined by more than 90% in parts of South Asia in the last 10 years was announced at a meeting of raptor biologists in Hungary recently. Lindsey Oaks, from Washington State University working with The Peregrine Fund, presented information on the causes of death of several vultures from three colonies in Pakistan.

Autopsies on dead birds found they were frequently suffering from gout - like the human condition, caused by uric acid crystallising in the body. Oaks found that birds with gout had high levels of an anti-inflammatory painkilling drug, diclofenac, in their kidneys, whereas dead vultures without gout had undetectable levels. It appears that this drug, used for human medicine for decades, has recently been introduced as a veterinary medicine in India and Pakistan.

Whilst these results could explain vulture deaths in the studied Pakistani colonies, many issues require explanation if diclofenac is responsible for vulture declines in India, where the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS, BirdLife in India) has been working with the RSPB (BirdLife in the UK) and the Institute of Zoology (London) to investigate the phenomenon, funded by the UK Government's Darwin Initiative.

Debbie Pain, Head of International Research at RSPB commented "Whilst diclofenac could be the breakthrough we've been waiting for, we can't yet assume that it is responsible for the vulture declines in India. Much work needs to be done to investigate this, and we are working on this with BNHS and IoZ as a matter of urgency."

Vibhu Prakash, Principal Scientist at BNHS outlined some of the anomalies under investigation "The experimental results from Pakistan suggest that diclofenac has a rapid effect on birds, with death following several days after exposure. Observations from the field and from our recently opened Vulture Care Centre in India document the birds experiencing a state of prolonged illness before death, often lasting for several weeks. Additionally, lesions more characteristic of infectious disease than a contaminant have been found in several vulture carcasses in India. Diclofenac is thought to be excreted by mammals within a few days. A high proportion of cattle across India would therefore have to be treated shortly before death for vultures to be exposed and to decline on such a large scale. Diclofenac



White Rump and Slender-billed Vultures in Kalaw, Mynamar.
Photo: Saw Moses

is also considered toxic to certain other bird species and to dogs. However, of all the scavenging species present at cattle carcasses, only populations of *Gyps* species appear to be severely affected and dog populations have increased noticeably at sites where *Gyps* vultures have declined."

BirdLife is very concerned that should the declines in India prove to be caused by an infectious disease and not diclofenac, it could spread through migratory Griffon Vultures *Gyps fulvus* to other vulture populations across the Middle East, Europe and Africa. Should diclofenac prove to be an important factor in India, however, spread is unlikely, as long as the drug's use in veterinary medicine can be prevented. Until this is shown to be case - and results of tissue sample analysis from dead Indian birds are keenly awaited - BirdLife is keeping an open mind on the matter.



BENCA project officer - Saw Moses. Photo: Saw Moses

VIETNAM'S ENVIRONMENT IN THE NEWS

Submitted by Education for Nature - Vietnam (ENV)

Phong Nha- Ke Bang National Park becomes World Heritage Site

Quang Binh province- Phong Nha- Ke Bang National Park has become the fifth World Heritage site in Vietnam. The announcement was made on the 27th of June in a meeting of the World Heritage Council held in UNESCO headquarter in Paris. The park is known for its extensive karst limestone formations and many spectacular caves and grottos.

At present, the Quang Binh provincial People's Committee and the Park Management Board are considering how to minimize the impacts resulting from the construction of a 55 km section of highway that will bisect the park through the core zone. According to current plans, an 80 cm wall will be built on either side of the road along 21 km of the highway where it cuts through the most important forest areas. A half-meter break in the wall will be cut every kilometer of road to allow animals to pass from one side of the highway to the other. (People newspaper issued 17578 dated July 3, 2003 and Labor newspaper issued 184 dated July 3, 2003)

FPD Launch Investigation of Wildlife Trade in HCM

Ho Chi Minh City- The HCM Forest Protection Department (FPD) carried out the first day of a new strategy aimed at reducing the trade of wildlife on the streets of Ho Chi Minh city. Investigators inspected establishments and street merchants finding animals sold openly on Pham Viet Chanh st, (District 1), in Hoa Binh market (District 5) and in some restaurants. According to officials, it is estimated that over one ton of wild meat is sold everyday in the city, most of it coming from the neighboring provinces of Gia Lai, Kon Tum, Binh Phuoc, Tay Ninh and Dong Nai. (Vietnam Economic Times issued 104 dated June 30th 2003)

Daklak province – Residents Relocation in Ea So

Relocation of 31 families living illegally within the strictly protected area of Ea So Nature Reserve will cost Ea Kar district of Daklak province four billion VND. Ethnic minorities from northern provinces have settled within the nature reserve, clearing out over 25 ha of forest. In addition to providing land for residences and farming, each household will receive 800,000 VND. Eleven households in Ea Da commune, who have been unlawfully living on ecologically restored forest land since 1997 will also be relocated. (*Labor newspaper issued 172 (6133) dated June 21st 2003 and Youth newspaper*)

Quang Ninh province- Dong Son- Ky Thuong Nature Reserve Established

The Quang Ninh People's Committee announced the establishment of the Dong Son- Ky Thuong Nature Reserve with the total area of 17,792 ha, covering the five communes of Ky Thuong, Dong Son, Vu Oai, Dong Lam and Hoa Binh in Hoanh Bo district. The Reserve will receive five billion dong investment, of which 1.8 billion will be spent on infrastructure, and the rest to establish and support a forestry farm. (*Labor newspaper issued 171 dated June 20th 2003*)

Loggers Attacked Rangers

Quang Nam province- On June 29th, illegal loggers used stones to strike and injure two rangers of the Doc Kien Forest Protection Branch. Both rangers were seriously injured in the attack. The loggers were identified as residents of Doc Kien hamlet in Quang Nam province. (Liberated Saigon newspaper issued 9311 dated July 2nd 2003)

Rarest of the rare:

GURNEY'S PITTA *PITTA GURNEYI*



Male Gurney's Pitta *Pitta gurneyi*.

Photo: R D Round/BirdLife

This beautiful pitta is classified as Critical, but only just survives and is on the verge of extinction. It has declining population, which occupies an extremely small, declining range. Its rate of decline is predicted to increase as a result of the continued destruction of its remaining forest habitat, compounded by trapping for the cage-bird trade.

Identification

18.5-20.5 cm. Unmistakable pitta with blue crown and black-and-yellow underparts. Black forecrown and head-sides, yellow underparts with black centre of breast and belly, black undertails-coverts and black barred flanks. Warm dark brown rest of upperside, deep blue tail tinged turquoise. Female has buffy-brown crown and nape, blackish-brown sides of head with paler streaks, whitish throat and pale buffy-whitish remainder of underparts with dark bars. Juvenile has dark brown crown, nape, breast and upper belly with buff streaks and, initially, freshly-orange bill base and tip. **Voice** Sings with short explosive *lilip*.

Range and population

Gurney's Pitta occurs in peninsular Thailand and adjacent southern Tenasserim, Myanmar. Formerly common across much of its range, there have been no records in Myanmar since 1914, but recently Gurney's Pitta was rediscovered in Myanmar in June, 2003. Since 1986, intensive surveys in Thailand have found it in at least five localities, although it has disappeared from all but one of these, Khao Nor Chuchi. This population has declined from 44-45 pairs in 1986 to just nine pairs in 1997, most of which are outside protected area boundaries. Its future is clearly precarious.

Ecology

It occurs in secondary, regenerating, lowland semi-evergreen forest, usually below 160m, with understoreys containing *Salacca* palms, in which it nests. Territories are centred on gully systems where moist conditions prevail year-round, usually with access to water, and often close to forest edge. It breeds during the wet season, April-October.

Threats

The key reason for its decline has been the clearance of lowland forest in southern Myanmar and peninsular Thailand through clear-felling for timber, unofficial logging and conversion to croplands, fruit orchards, coffee, rubber and oil-palm plantations. By 1987, only 20-50 km² of forest below 100 m remained in peninsular Thailand and this area continues to decline.

Conservation

CITES Appendix I. Following its rediscovery, a series of breeding season censuses were conducted, from 1987-1989, to locate and quantify populations in peninsular Thailand. The most important of these, Khao Nor Chuchi, was designated a Non-Hunting Area in 1987, and upgraded to a Wildlife Sanctuary in 1993. The Khao Nor Chuchi Lowland Forest Project was established in 1990 and engaged the local community in participatory management, education programmes and ecotourism, to help reduce pressure on remaining forest. However, this has met with limited success as economic incentives continue to govern land-use decisions.

Spotlight organisation:

EDUCATION FOR NATURE - VIETNAM (ENV)

Education for Nature – Vietnam (ENV) was established in 2001 as Vietnam’s first environmental education-focused NGO, built upon the success and experience of the community-based Conservation Awareness Program at Cuc Phuong National Park. ENV specializes in training of environmental educators, and carries out a variety of educational programs and initiatives aimed at raising awareness and understanding about the environment, and the need to protect nature and wildlife in Vietnam.

ENV’s educational programs focus on protected area stakeholders (e.g. school children, residents of local communities, park visitors), while its training programs are aimed at enhancing the quality and effectiveness of environmental education in Vietnam through capacity building and experienced-based training for practitioners of environmental education in the field (e.g. teachers, local organizations, protected area staff).

To date, ENV has carried out numerous training programs aimed at helping establish community-based environmental education programs at national parks and protected areas including Pu Mat, Ba Be, Cat Ba, Phong

Nha, Con Dao, Na Hang, Yen Bai, Sa Pa, Bach Ma, Xuan Thuy and U Minh Thuong.

ENV is also currently providing technical support and assistance to Cuc Phuong National Park following the transfer of the FFI-administered program to the park early last year, and working with teachers at Xuan Thuy National Park to develop a model for sustainable local awareness initiatives.

Summary of ENV activities:

- Training for community-based environmental education practitioners
- Administer educational programs and activities in partnership with local stakeholders
- Technical assistance and field support
- Educational resource development
- Raising public awareness about key environment and nature conservation issues

Contact details: Education for Nature - Vietnam (ENV)
A14/25 Lang Ha, Ba Dinh, Ha Noi
Tel/Fax: 04-856 1759
Email: env@fpt.vn

Project Updates

IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS DIRECTORIES FOR VIETNAM AND CAMBODIA LAUNCHED

On 13 March 2003, BirdLife International’s landmark publication, *Directory of Important Birds Areas in Vietnam: Key Sites for Conservation* was launched by Richard Grimmett, the Head of BirdLife International’s Asia Division, at a reception held at the Press Club in Hanoi.

The directory contains the first ever list of sites in Vietnam

recognised as internationally important for bird and biodiversity conservation, and identifies some of the main threats affecting them. More than half of the sites, by area, are in protected areas established by the government of Vietnam.

Speaking at the launch, Richard Grimmett commented “Vietnam has remarkably rich biodiversity. Earlier fieldwork aimed at

identifying Important Bird Areas by the BirdLife team and their Vietnamese counterparts discovered three species of bird new to science. This in itself is a remarkable achievement, and the Government of Vietnam is to be congratulated on establishing two new protected areas to conserve these species: Ngoc Linh and Kon Ka Kinh.”



The publication of the directory was funded by Danida, through the Royal Danish Embassy, Hanoi. "The publication describes a network of Important Bird Areas, the protection of which would go a long way towards the conservation of biodiversity and the wider environment in Vietnam. It draws attention to on-going conservation efforts, and highlights the need for continued and intensified conservation effort" said His Excellency Bjarne H. Sorensen, Ambassador of Denmark to Vietnam, of the publication.

"It is my hope that this publication will of use for government agencies, donors and NGOs. On

behalf of the Royal Danish Embassy, I warmly congratulate the Research Institute of Ecology and Biological Resources and BirdLife International in Indochina for their efforts" he added.

However, 68% of the sites identified in the directory are threatened by agricultural intensification. This threat is particularly serious for wetlands, including coastal mudflats and wet grasslands in the Mekong Delta. But there are some encouraging signs. For example, at Ha Nam island where local people, shrimp farmers, the police and other stakeholders have come together to establish a site-support group and draw up a plan to ensure the long-term sustainability of their area, both for themselves and the wildlife found there.

The directory's aims are to inform decision-makers at local, national and international levels of the biodiversity value of sites, to identify threats to this biodiversity, and to recommend appropriate steps that can be taken to ensure its conservation. It identifies clear priorities for conservation action, and encourages government

agencies, donors and NGOs to address them.

Following the successful launch of the Vietnamese directory, its companion publication, *Directory of Important Bird Areas in Cambodia: Key Sites for Conservation*, was launched at a reception held at the Sunway Hotel in Phnom Penh, on 27 March 2003. The launch of the Cambodian directory was also a high profile event, and drew the attention of decision makers at government institutions, donor agencies and NGOs to the utility of the document. The publication of the directory in Cambodia marked the completion of a very successful two-year collaboration between the Department of Forestry and Wildlife, the Department of Nature Conservation and Protection, the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) Cambodia Program and BirdLife International in Indochina. Again, financial support was provided by Danida.

Copies of both directories are available from BirdLife International in Indochina. The directory for Laos, the third publication in the series, will be launched later in 2003.

CEPF TO SUPPORT CONSERVATION ACTION BY CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE INDO-BURMA HOTSPOT

From early 2004, the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) will support conservation activities by civil society groups in the Indo-Burma Hotspot. CEPF is a joint initiative of Conservation International (CI), the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the Government of Japan, the MacArthur Foundation and the World Bank, which aims to dramatically advance conservation of the Earth's biologically richest and most threatened areas. A fundamental goal is to ensure that civil society organisations, such as community groups, non-

governmental organisations, academic institutions and private-sector enterprises, are engaged in biodiversity conservation. An additional goal is to build partnerships among these organisations and between them and government institutions.

To date, CEPF has made funding available to civil society groups in 11 of the 25 global biodiversity hotspots. In early 2004, CEPF plan to begin investing in the Indo-Burma Hotspot, which comprises parts of Nepal, Bhutan, north-eastern India, Myanmar, Thailand,

Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam and southern China. In order for funding to be made available for this hotspot, "ecosystem profiles" must be prepared as guides to investment. These documents will define "conservation outcomes" or biological targets for conservation action, and identify a number of "strategic directions" for funding. Only projects that address one or more of the conservation outcomes and fall within one of the strategic directions identified in the ecosystem profiles will be potentially eligible for CEPF funding.

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For the Indo-Burma Hotspot, two ecosystem profiles will be prepared: one for the Indochina Region and one for the Eastern Himalayas Region. BirdLife International in Indochina have been asked to take the lead in preparing the Indochina profile, while the WWF-US Asia Program will take the lead in preparing the Eastern Himalayas profile, with support from BirdLife International in Indochina.

During May and June, a team from WWF-US and BirdLife, with the support of local partner organisations, organised a series of expert round-tables in the Eastern Himalayas Region, to introduce CEPF to key stakeholders and solicit input into the ecosystem profile. In August, similar expert round-tables will be held in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam, to engage key stakeholders in the Indochina

Region. It is hoped that, through this consultation process, a funding strategy that focuses on the highest biological priorities and addresses gaps in conservation investment can be formulated.

Further information about CEPF can be found on the fund's website: www.cepf.net

ENDANGERED SPECIES REDISCOVERED IN YOK DON NATIONAL PARK, DAK LAK PROVINCE

During a biodiversity survey in March and April 2003, scientists from BirdLife International working on the Protected Areas Resource Conservation ((PARC) Project, a Government of Vietnam, GEF/UNDP undertaking in Yok Don National Park, Dak Lak province, Vietnam, have rediscovered three of rarest bird species in Vietnam. They are the Giant Ibis *Pseudibis gigantea*, White-winged Duck *Cairina scutulata* and Black-necked Stork *Ephipiorhynchus asiaticus*.

Giant Ibis: Two Giant Ibis were observed by survey team members Ha Quy Quynh and Jonathan Eames, feeding at a small forest wetland in the central part of the national park on 6 March, 2003. The birds flew-off westwards towards Cambodia.

These are the first sightings of Giant Ibis in Vietnam since 1931, when the species was encountered in Binh Phuoc province. The species was listed as Critically Endangered by BirdLife International in the Threatened Birds of Asia, The BirdLife International Bird Red Data Book, because it has a tiny, declining population that is threatened by habitat loss and disturbance. The species was believed to be extinct in Vietnam. The remaining global population, probably less than 500 individuals, is centred on northern Cambodia and extreme south Laos.

- The re-discovery of the Giant Ibis in Yok Don National Park considerably increases the conservation importance of the national park.
- The re-discovery of the Giant Ibis in Yok Don National Park is very timely, because the Government of Vietnam will shortly make a final decision on whether to route the "Ho Chi Minh Highway" through the national park. Both the proposed routes within the national park would either destroy or disturb the habitat of this species thereby undermining the integrity of the National Park.



Giant Ibis *Pseudibis gigantea*.
Photo: WCS Camdodia

"In order for Vietnam to fully discharge its responsibilities under the Convention on Biological Diversity, which it has both signed and ratified, it is vital that the national park, and the population of the Giant Ibis therein, is not compromised by routing the road through the protected area" said Fernando Potess PARC Project Leader.

"The Giant Ibis in Yok Don National Park form part of the population centred on Cambodia, and it is vital that no infrastructure or other development takes place in Yok Don as this will drive a wedge between these populations." said Colin McQuistan Site Task Manager PARC Yok Don.



White-winged Duck: During this survey, one male was sighted 3 times by five ornithologists from the team at Dak Lau River in the center of the park. Inside Yok Don NP, there are many suitable habitats for White-winged Duck, including those in Dak Lau, Dak Ken, Dak Na, Dak M'Bre, and Dak Rue rivers. This species was ranked as Endangered (BirdLife International 2001) and was being considered as Critically Endangered in Vietnam. Prior to this discovery, there were few records of one or two birds each in Cat Tien NP (Dong Nai province), Ke Go NR (Ha Tinh province) and Dak Dam River (Dak Lak province).

Black-necked Stork: This globally Near-threatened species was believed to be extinct in Vietnam. Two birds were observed in the same pond where Giant Ibises were found, feeding together with other large waterbirds including Woolly-necked Stork and Lesser Adjutant. Prior to this re-discovery, the most recent record was in Tam Nong district, Dong Thap province in 1987.

Black-necked Stork *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus* (left)
Photo: Peter Davision

Photo spot

GREY-CROWNED CROCIAS *CROCIAS LANGBIANIS*



Grey-crowned Crocias *Crocias Langbianis* photographed at Ta Nung near Da Lat.

Photo: Richard Craik



Staff news

DR. SEAN C. AUSTIN - BIRDLIFE CAMBODIA PROGRAMME MANAGER

Dr. Sean C. Austin, a US citizen born in Germany has traveled, lived, and worked across the globe. He has worked extensively in South-east Asia on a number of conservation issues ranging from tropical species conservation issues to the protection and management of protected areas. As part of his doctorate dissertation, he conducted two plus years of field research on a sympatric carnivore community in Khao Yai National Park, Thailand. Regionally, he consulted on protected area issues in Lao P.D.R. and more recently designed and implemented a biological monitoring program in eastern Cambodia. Working with wildlife conservation issues in the region, Sean brings not only a solid understanding of biological issues threatening the birds of Cambodia, but also the necessary skills to work collaboratively with NGO and government partners in setting up a successful Cambodia Programme Office.



MRS. PHAM TUAN ANH - BIRDLIFE VIETNAM PROGRAMME MANAGER



From the beginning of April this year, BirdLife International *in Indochina* welcome Ms Pham Tuan Anh to our team as the new Vietnam Programme Manager.

Tuan Anh has a strong development background. She has worked in the Vietnam-Sweden Health Co-operation from 1992 to 2001 with considerable experience on project/programme management. She recently returned to Hanoi from Singapore after completing her Masters study in Public Policy. We believe Tuan Anh will bring new strengths and ideas to our BirdLife programme *in Indochina* and will successfully lead our growing Vietnam Programme.

Huong joined BirdLife in June 2003 for a six months internship. During the internship, she expects to improve her understanding of the factors that hinder and favor sustainable development in the country of Vietnam. She would like to examine how much the theories of sustainable development can be applied in practice in the areas of biodiversity conservation through a capacity building for local communities in planning, developing and implementing conservation actions. During her internship with Birdlife, Huong will support Birdlife staff to implement Important Bird Areas Support Group Projects in the fields of project planning, implementation, monitoring and management.

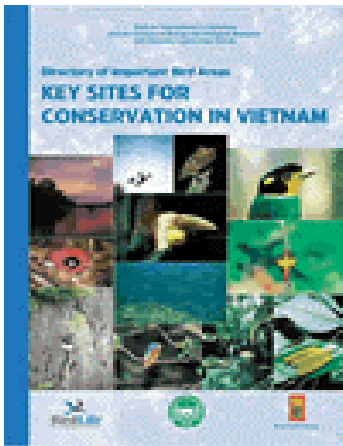
Huong is doing Master of Art in Sustainable International Development at Heller School for Social Policy and Management, Brandeis University, USA.



Book Reviews

Directory of Important Bird Areas in Vietnam: Key sites for conservation

by Andrew W. Tordoff, Nguyen Cu, Jonathan C. Eames, Neil M. Furey, Le Manh Hung, Ha Quy Quynh, Adam M. Seward, Le Trong Trai, Nguyen Duc Tu and Dr. Corinthe T. Zekveld (2002). BirdLife International and the Institute of Ecology and Biological Resources with financial support from Danida.



Birdlife International and the Institute of Ecology and Biological Resources have created a new landmark for conservation in Vietnam. The publication of the *Directory of Important Bird Areas of Vietnam* demonstrates that our knowledge of the status and distribution of at least one class of

organisms - birds - has increased to the point that individual sites throughout the entire country can be prioritised for conservation efforts (and all of Indochina as this is one in a series of three covering Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam).

The directory presents the first national assessment of the sites of the highest importance for bird conservation. It provides information on 63 IBAs representing 5% of the total land area of the country. Only half of the sites presently are in protected areas and, therefore, the document demonstrates the need to consider conservation outside of the present network of protected areas. The directory also describes the main threats to these sites, and indicates that the expansion and intensification of agriculture pose the greatest threats to the 63 IBAs.

The IBA methodology requires a great deal of accurate site level data, quite often lacking in Vietnam. Therefore there are limitations for a directory that represents a prioritisation based on the present understanding of bird distributions. Many areas may have been missed in the analysis due to a lack of data. This consideration must be understood when using this document to plan for conservation. The authors, however, have made an every attempt to alleviate this problem by undertaking an

extensive and thorough collation of data obtained from searching the literature and consulting with experts in Vietnam. The data on other taxa, collated to demonstrate that many of the IBAs are important not only for birds, will be useful for planning broader conservation efforts.

The directory is well presented. The inclusion of colour photographs and illustrations of birds makes a technical directory more accessible and enticing. However, the maps in the appendices are almost illegible. A map at the beginning in the executive summary or on the inside cover would have been useful particularly in finding the relevant IBA descriptions. The coding system for the IBAs does not appear to follow any logical system, and, therefore, finding the right page or location on the map for individual IBAs is tiresome. References placed after each chapter further hamper the accessibility of the document. The directory could have been improved by providing polygons representing the IBAs rather than points. It would have been useful to know more details about the location and management of each IBA.

As a tool for advocating increased protection of these high priority sites, the directory would have benefited by having a clearer set of recommendations. One of the aims of the document is to support the government's commitment to the CBD by revealing gaps in the PA network and potential Ramsar sites, but these results are not clearly presented in the directory. A follow-up communications effort would add considerable value to the work.

Nevertheless, the directory remains an important and timely contribution to conservation in Vietnam. It will certainly serve as a very useful tool for monitoring future efforts and provide a critical reference for anybody planning or developing conservation interventions in Vietnam. I hope this directory will be the inspiration and guide for a concentrated effort to ensure that these IBAs are protected.

Review by Mike Baltzer - WWF

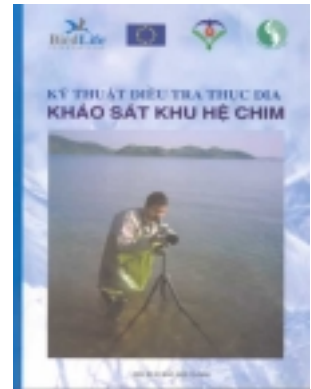
Expedition Field Techniques: Bird Surveys in Vietnamese by Colin Bibby, Martin Jones and Stuart Marsden. Translated by Nguyen Duc Tu and Le Trong Trai (2003). Mui Ca Mau Printing Company.

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Bird Survey techniques by Colin Bibby, Martin Jones and Stuard Marsden was recently translated into Vietnamese by staff of BirdLife International in Indochina. For thirty years, Vietnamese ornithologists have waited and desired to have a standard text in Vietnamese on bird survey methods, which meets international scientific standards. This book will help Vietnamese ornithologists and scientists and ensures that they have access to the best methods for their research.

The book contains nine parts, the first six main parts lead the reader through general concepts, choosing and applying methods and data processing. The three last part deals with writing reports, data storage and distance software using skills. The book is, in short, a precious gift for Vietnamese ornithologists and scientists.

Review by Le Manh Hung - IEBR



Slipper Orchids of Vietnam by Leonid Averyanov, Phillip Cribb, Phan Ke Loc and Nguyen Tien Hiep (2003). The Board of Trustees of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. ISBN 1 84246 0471 (308 pages).



Vietnam has a remarkable and diverse orchid flora that is still being explored and described. Orchids are the largest family in the flora and may exceed 1000 species with more being described every year as remoter areas are explored. They are found in every habitat from the costal mangrove forest to the highest mountain peaks. The slipper orchids, a small but showly part of the flora, epitomise the exuberance of Vietnam's orchids and, at the same time, emphasise their vulnerability. Although almost haft have been discovered within the past ten years, many of them are already threatened with extinction by the combined problems of forest destruction and commercial collecting.

The book details the geology, climate and vegetation of Vietnam in all its remarkable diversity. The main text provides comprehensive accounts of the history, nomenclature and relationship of each of the 22 slipper orchid species and natural hybrids found within the country. It also provided the first detailed accounts of their habitats, biology and ecology. On a more urgent measures are necessary both within Vietnam and abroad to protect that remains.

The result of the author's field studies, detailed here for the first time in a popular book, provide a unique insight into the rich flora of Vietnam where so many of the orchids are found. This book is a significant contribution to our understanding of plant diversity in Vietnam and to the threats to it.

The richness of Vietnam's biological diversity is only now becoming apparent. This book will enthrall the reader with its descriptions of Vietnam, its unique environment, its rich flora and its endemic plants. It will also serve to alert all of us to the dangers that threatd its unique heritage.

Recently Published

- **Important Bird Areas in Lao P.D.R.** Khamsene Ounekham and Sipivan Inthapatha. Department of Forestry, BirdLife International in Indochina and the Wildlife Conservation Society Lao Programme with financial support from Danida. Vientiane 2003. In English and Laos.
- **Directory of Important Bird Areas in Cambodia: Key site for Conservation.** Seng Kim Hout, Pech Bunnat, Colin M. Poole, Andrew W. Tordoff, Peter Davision and Etienne Delattre. The department of Forestry and Wildlife, The department of Nature Conservation and Protection, BirdLife International in Indochina and Wildlife Conservation Society Cambodia's Programme with financial support from Danida. Phnom Penh 2003. In English and Cambodian.
- **Manual for Conservation Monitoring at Xuan Thuy National Park, Nam Dinh Province.** Nguyen Duc Tu, Le Manh Hung and Mai Xuan Trung. BirdLife International in Indochina and Xuan Thuy National Park with financial support from Keidanren (KNCF). Hanoi 2003. In Vietnamese.

From the Archives



This male Sumatran Rhinoceros *Dicerorhinus sumatrensis* was shot in Myanmar for The Natural History Museum in 1930. This photograph was published in "A game-book for Burma and Adjoining territories" by E. H. Peacock and published in 1993.