

Action »

Important Bird Areas (IBAs)

The selection of Important Bird Areas (IBAs) has been a particularly effective way of identifying conservation priorities. IBAs are key sites for conservation ♦ small enough to be conserved in their entirety and often already part of a protected-area network. They do one (or more) of three things:

- Hold significant numbers of one or more globally threatened species
- Are one of a set of sites that together hold a suite of restricted-range species or biome-restricted species
- Have exceptionally large numbers of migratory or congregatory species



Mindo IBA has been the focus of much attention from CECIA, the BirdLife Partner in Ecuador.

[Zoom In](#)

Regional IBA pages

It is impossible, both practically and financially, to develop separate projects to conserve all species at risk in the world, one by one. Thus the identification of particular sites, which are important for many species together, is a key component of BirdLife's priority setting.

- [African Important Bird Areas](#)
- [Americas Important Bird Areas](#)
 - [Tropical Andes Important Bird Areas](#)
 - [Neotropical migrants in the Tropical Andes](#)
- [Asian Important Bird Areas](#)
- [European Important Bird Areas](#)
- [Middle Eastern Important Bird Areas](#)
- [Pacific Important Bird Areas](#)
 - [Fiji Important Bird Areas](#)
- [Antarctic Important Bird Areas](#)
- [Marine Important Bird Areas](#)

How are IBAs chosen?

A site is recognised as an IBA only if it meets certain criteria, based on the occurrence of key bird species that are vulnerable to global extinction or whose populations are otherwise irreplaceable. An IBA must be amenable to conservation action and management.

The IBA criteria are internationally agreed, standardised, quantitative and scientifically defensible. Ideally, each IBA should be large enough to support self-sustaining populations of as many as possible of the key bird species for which it was identified or, in the case of migrants, fulfil their requirements for the duration of their presence. By definition, an IBA is an internationally agreed priority for conservation action.

What is the Important Bird Areas Programme?

The IBA Programme of BirdLife International aims to identify, monitor and protect a global network of IBAs for the conservation of the world's birds and other biodiversity. BirdLife Partners take responsibility for the IBA Programme nationally, with the BirdLife Secretariat taking the lead on international aspects and in some priority non-Partner countries.

Since IBAs are identified, monitored and protected by national and local organisations and individuals, working on the ground, the IBA Programme can be a powerful way to build national institutional capacity and to set an effective conservation agenda: it is far more than a technical research exercise.

As of 2004, over 7,500 sites in nearly 170 countries have been identified as Important Bird Areas.

What about other wildlife?

Birds have been shown to be effective indicators of biodiversity in other animal groups and plants – especially when used to define a set of sites for conservation. So although the IBA network is defined by its bird fauna, the conservation of these sites would ensure the survival of a correspondingly large number of other animals and plants.

As the emphasis moves from site identification to site monitoring and protection, the IBA Programme is thus making a major contribution to global biodiversity conservation.

IBAs (sites) are not the only way of conserving birds and other biodiversity, however. They form part of a wider, integrated approach to conservation and sustainable use that also focuses on species, habitats and people.

Does the IBA Programme benefit society?

The conservation of IBAs can make a major contribution to wider landscape or habitat protection. As islands of rich ecological complexity in a landscape which is increasingly simplified and vulnerable to man-made perturbations, remaining semi-natural habitats at key sites such as lakes, rivers, forests, reefs, mires and grasslands can make an inordinate contribution to mediating the natural cycles of water, carbon, nitrogen, oxygen and other substances through the environment, filtering, buffering, purifying, storing and replenishing the substances that make life possible. A healthy environment is good for both birds and people.

In terms of mainstream market economics, because IBAs are recognised world-wide, they attract interest from birdwatchers, conservationists and planners. They become travel destinations and targets for eco-tourism projects and scientific study. Governments and donor agencies recognise the value of IBAs, so these sites attract financial incentives or direct funding for sympathetic development and management.

[<- Return to site.](#) This content © BirdLife International.