

## **Organisation profile for Biodiversity Commons meeting (May 2004)**

### **Contact details**

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### **Biodiversity information resources**

BirdLife's information holdings are focused on 3 key themes – birds (especially globally threatened birds), priority sites for conservation – Important Bird Areas, and priority areas for global biodiversity conservation - Endemic Bird Areas.

Much of BirdLife's scientific data are managed through a fully relational database known as the World Bird Database (WBDB). The World Bird Database provides the information management tool through which the BirdLife Partnership manages, analyses and reports on the breadth of its scientific knowledge. The database architecture provides some 120 tables covering in excess of 1,400 data fields. The database is in use in over 50 Partner organisations spread across all regions of the world with data being added continually.

For species (some 10,00 in total), data are stored on characteristics, taxonomy, range, population numbers, trends, habitat use (including importance and seasonal use), threats (including timing, scope, severity and impact) and targets for future action, with all the key terms using standard authority files shared with IUCN (for the Red Listing process).

Detailed information is also maintained on almost 10,000 sites identified as important for birds (Important Bird Areas - IBAs) and over 200 Endemic Bird Areas. Details are held on location, bird species, reasons for importance, habitats, land-uses, threats, protection status and conservation action.

Mapped range data for all threatened birds (and increasingly near threatened and least concern species) and IBA and EBA boundaries are all maintained in a geographical information system along with a number of additional spatial data sets.

Aside from this classic information, managed largely with data management tools, there are a suite of other information resources, including books, reports and a world leading ornithological library.

## **Value of these resources**

### ***Species***

BirdLife International is the leading authority on the world's birds. Through its Global Species Programme, BirdLife has collated, assessed and published information on the world's threatened birds for over 20 years.

BirdLife uses information from a global network of experts and Partners and from publications and unpublished sources to assess each species's extinction risk using standard quantitative criteria based on a species's population size, population trends and range size to determine its IUCN Red List Category. BirdLife is the official Red Listing Authority supplying this information on birds for the IUCN Red List.

Information on threatened birds is used to focus global conservation efforts and to guide BirdLife's priorities for action.

### ***Sites***

The Important Bird Areas (IBA) program of BirdLife International is a worldwide initiative aimed at identifying and protecting a network of critical sites for the conservation of the world's birds.

IBAs are:

- critical sites for the conservation of birds and biodiversity
- places of international importance
- practical targets for conservation action
- selected according to internationally recognised criteria
- used to reinforce existing protected area networks
- used as part of a wider approach to conservation

Data collection and analysis play a highly influential role in underpinning the conservation and management of IBAs. Useful for conservationists, ornithologists, governmental and non-governmental agencies, policy-makers, researchers, consultants and planners, the data managed in the World Bird Database (WBDB) are intended to inform and guide practical management and actions at IBAs and to target political and legal mechanisms to achieve the adequate protection of IBAs.

Contributions have been made by a vast network of ornithologists, birdwatchers and conservation experts around the world. Many thousands of individuals have been involved in the collation of data. In most countries the relevant BirdLife International Partner has co-ordinated the work nationally, and this has generally involved substantial collaboration with governmental and non-governmental organisations.

### ***EBAs***

Biodiversity is the total variety of life on this planet. Much of this variety has evolved in or become confined to small areas of the world's land surface known as “centres of endemism”. The unique biodiversity concentrated in these small areas is particularly vulnerable to the destructive effects of man.

BirdLife has mapped every bird species with a restricted range of less than 50,000 km<sup>2</sup>, using many thousands of geo-referenced locality records. The areas where these ranges overlap define avian centres of endemism that are termed Endemic Bird Areas (EBAs) by BirdLife International. Many other animals and plants have evolved into unique species in these same areas of endemism. EBAs are also, therefore, excellent indicators of general biodiversity.

The great majority of the world's 218 EBAs occur in tropical countries. No fewer than 2,500 bird species, 26% of all bird species on earth, are restricted to these areas, which cover only 5% of the world's land surface. And because this pattern in the birds is reflected in other life-forms, EBAs represent priority areas for global biodiversity conservation.

### ***Awareness raising and free access to information***

Much of BirdLife's information resources are made available through a dedicated area of BirdLife's web site – the Data Zone – which receives more than 35,000 unique visitors a month. Here, access is provided to detailed information on species, IBAs and EBAs, with links between the respective data sets. Direct access to these data is also provided to other web sites and is becoming increasingly available through standard web search engines such as Google.

### **Expectations of a Biodiversity Commons**

A collaborative initiative that ensures free and sustainable access to biodiversity data, information and knowledge. It is not a single system, although of course it will be supported by sensible use of standards and appropriate technologies, but more importantly commitment from individuals and institutions to the ideal that information and knowledge are assets that should be free for use for the public good.

Quoting from the Biodiversity Knowledge Commons work of BCIS:

***Goal:*** *knowledge, information and data better inform conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. This will be achieved by breaking down cultural, institutional, commercial, legal and technical barriers to the free and open sharing of information.*

***Purpose:*** *To secure a critical mass of institutions that make their knowledge, information and data freely available to meet the needs of stakeholders in biodiversity within Biodiversity Knowledge Commons.*