

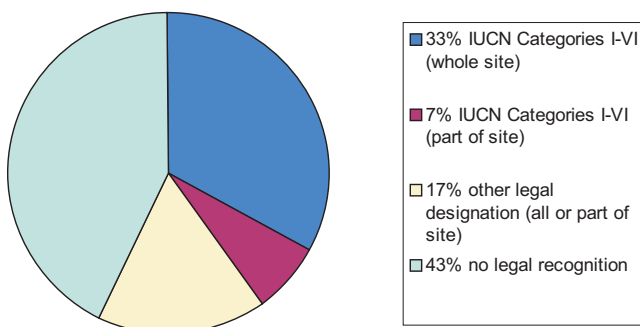
- The number and size of protected areas (PAs) reflect measures taken to safeguard biodiversity. However, these simple indicators do not tell us how effective these measures are. For this, we need to know whether PAs are in the right places, and what their ecological condition is.
- Important Bird Area (IBA) indices are being developed to help overcome this limitation. These indices show the effectiveness of PAs in protecting globally important biodiversity.
- IBAs are sites of international significance for the conservation of the world's birds. They are identified using rigorous, standardized criteria based upon the presence of bird populations at sites. To date, more than 7,500 IBAs have been identified worldwide.
- IBAs are an integral part of the key biodiversity area approach to site-based conservation. Since IBAs capture the bulk of diversity in many taxonomic groups, indices based on IBAs provide a good indicator of trends in the overall coverage of biodiversity by PAs.
- A comparison of the IBA and PA networks in Africa shows that 20% of the region's 225 Globally Threatened Bird species occur only at unprotected sites. The continent's PA network fails to cover 43% of IBAs (529 sites).
- Monitoring of IBAs can show trends in condition, threats and conservation responses. A pilot study of the Kenya IBA network demonstrates how this approach generates indicators of progress towards the 2010 target at the national level.

### Important Bird Areas: what are they?

BirdLife International's Important Bird Areas programme forms part of the key biodiversity area approach to site-based conservation. This seeks to identify and, ultimately, safeguard networks of sites of global significance for biodiversity. Key biodiversity areas are identified using standardized, objective selection criteria that address the two central issues for setting site conservation priorities – *vulnerability* and *irreplaceability*. IBAs are thus selected based on the presence of viable populations of birds that are globally threatened and/or geographically concentrated – through small global ranges, congregatory behaviour, or restriction to a particular biome.

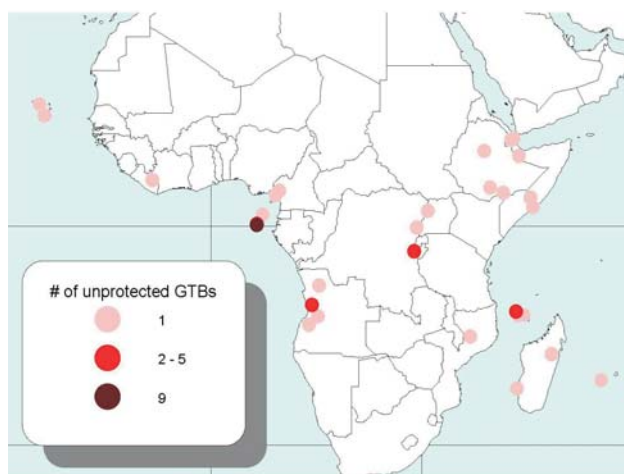
Since the IBA programme began in the 1980s, networks of sites have been identified across Europe, Africa, Asia and the Middle East. The process of identification is well advanced in the Americas, the Pacific, Central Asia and Antarctica. More than 7,500 IBAs have so far been recognized worldwide. Selection takes full account of existing PA networks but is not limited to them. IBAs can therefore be used to indicate where there are gaps in coverage of particular species.

Important Bird Areas are top priorities for conservation safeguard, though the most appropriate governance mechanism will vary from site to site. Forty percent of Africa's 1,230 IBAs (as of 2001) are at least partially legally protected under IUCN categories I-VI. A further 17% are wholly or partly covered by other forms of legal protection. However, a substantial 43% (529 sites) have no form of legal safeguard: many of these sites are also highly threatened.



Protection status of Africa's 1,230 IBAs

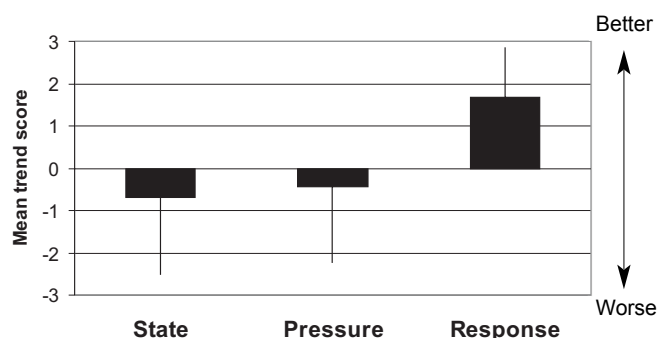
In total 20% of Africa's 225 Globally Threatened Birds (GTBs) do not occur in any protected area. This amounts to 44 species at 32 sites. Some unprotected sites hold many unprotected GTBs (a site in São Tomé & Príncipe is home to nine). Eighteen of the 44 (77%) GTBs that do not occur in any protected area are only known from one locality, that is, they are single-site endemics. These sites are of particular conservation concern: many have also been identified as conservation priorities by the "Alliance for Zero Extinction".



Gaps in Africa's PA network: IBAs holding unprotected Globally Threatened Birds (GTBs)

### A national example: monitoring Important Bird Areas in Kenya

BirdLife's IBA monitoring framework uses a state-pressure-response model to report on the condition, threats and conservation actions at sites. Simple quantitative measures for each site can be combined to provide assessments of trends across the IBA network as a whole, both at the national and, eventually, the regional and global levels. Monitoring at 49 of Kenya's 60 IBAs during 1999–2003 has shown that, for example, illegal logging, charcoal burning and firewood collection is a threat in 19 of 22 of forest IBAs and encroachment for livestock grazing is prevalent at 85% of sites, but that donor-funded, income generating projects have begun at 18 sites and that research or regular monitoring is underway at 73% of sites. Overall, sites in the network showed a small mean decline in site condition over this period and a small mean increase in threats. More positively, there was a noticeable mean increase in the level of conservation action. Basic monitoring data of this sort can feed directly into national reporting against the 2010 target; they are essential for the meaningful interpretation of information on PA extent and coverage.



Summary of trends at Kenya's IBAs 1999–2003 (n=49)

BirdLife is working with UNEP-WCMC to show how the numbers of IBAs (and hence GTBs) benefiting from legal safeguard have increased over time as the PA network has grown. As well as showing whether recent expansions of PA networks have been effective in capturing critical biodiversity, this analysis will refine understanding of the remaining gaps. Several studies have shown that IBAs capture a large proportion of terrestrial diversity across many taxonomic groups. Thus, this index will provide a good indicator of temporal trends in the overall coverage of biodiversity by protected areas.

#### Further information:

Bennun *et al.* (in press) *Biodiversity & Conservation*; Brooks *et al.* (2001) *Ostrich Suppl.* 15: 3-12; Eken *et al.* (2004) *Bioscience* 54(12): 1110-1118; Fishpool & Evans (2001) *Important Bird Areas in Africa and associated islands*, Pisces Publications and BirdLife International; Otieno *et al.* (2004) *Kenya's Important Bird Areas: status and trends 2004*, NatureKenya; Rodrigues *et al.* (2004) *Bioscience* 54(12): 1092-1100.