

PREVENTING EXTINCTIONS

Bengal Florican *Houbaropsis bengalensis*



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Male Bengal Florican (© Allan Michaud/www.rarebirdyearbook.com)

Background

This bustard of the Indian Subcontinent and South-East Asia has suffered a dramatic decline owing to the widespread and ongoing conversion of its wet-grassland habitat for agriculture. In the Indian Subcontinent it is now confined to small, highly fragmented populations scattered throughout the north Indian States of Uttar Pradesh, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh and the lowlands of Nepal.

The species' last stronghold is the floodplain of Tonle Sap Lake in Cambodia. This area supports around half (c.800 individuals) of the remaining population and is therefore critical to the future of the species. Despite its importance, the area is not represented within Cambodia's protected area system and habitat continues to be lost at an alarming rate. Two thirds of the region's grasslands have been lost since the late 1990s and, without immediate intervention, their complete disappearance could occur within five years.

In response to this serious threat, the Cambodian government has agreed to create a new category of protected area in the region - Integrated Farming and Biodiversity Areas (IFBAs).

Actions being implemented

- 1. Five IFBAs have been created** by Provincial Declaration (*Deikas*), and two new IFBAs (Trea-sameaki and Toul Kruei- Panheum) have been agreed by the Kampong Thom provincial authorities, however one of the five existing IFBAs was removed from the IFBA network system by Kampong Thom IFBA provincial committee, a concession which was accepted as a strategic decision by the project team. Work is underway to ensure that no further large-scale commercial concessions are awarded. It was decided not to proceed with IFBA designation in Kampong Chhnang, and the project team instead focused on enlarging IFBA in Kampong Thom. Discussion meetings have taken place regarding the upgrading the status of IFBAs from provincial to ministerial level.
- 2. In Siem Reap Province an IFBA commission** has been established, which has already succeeded in halting a major development project. Two rounds of community consultation over IFBA boundaries took place within the second reporting period and the results of these are being combined to produce a revised provisional *Deika*. A network of village volunteers has been established who will form the basis for community consultation committees. Official **patrol teams** are now operating in Kampong Thom and Siem Reap, and a second Forestry Administration staff member has now been recruited and trained. A monthly patrol reporting system is now in place. In total, 63 days of patrols were logged and mapped from January to June in 2009. A number of signposts, prohibiting the construction of dams, have been erected along IFBAs boundaries, and this activity remains ongoing.

- **An in-depth socio-economic study** has been conducted by the *Centre d'Etude et de Développement Agricole Cambodgien (CEDAC)*. The report highlights the economic benefits local communities derive through the traditional use of grasslands and will be used to build support among key decision makers and local communities.
- **An IFBA awareness programme** covering 14 communities, 61 villages and over 1,235 people is underway. A series of meetings has been held explaining IFBAs, the Provincial Declaration (*Deika*), and other relevant laws, such as the Land, Forest and Fisheries laws. Five thousand exercise books containing information on the Bengal Florican and IFBAs have been produced and will be distributed to children and young adults at future meetings.
- **Research** is underway to better understand the movements of the Bengal Florican during and after the breeding season, with several floricans already fitted with radio and satellite transmitters. A second component of the research will focus on experimental grassland management within one or more IFBAs.



Left: Satellite-tagging a male Bengal Florican (© R Thomson); Above: Signpost construction, Stung IFBA (© Sienglay)

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