

PREVENTING EXTINCTIONS

White-shouldered Ibis
Pseudibis davisoni



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White-shouldered Ibis (© Jonathan C. Eames / www.rarebirdsyearbook.com).

Background

The White-shouldered Ibis occurs in Cambodia, Laos and East Kalimantan, Indonesia. It has declined dramatically during the twentieth century, having become extinct in Vietnam, Thailand and Myanmar, and has been described as the most threatened large waterbird in South-East Asia.

The species has an extremely small, declining and severely fragmented population (numbering fewer than 250 mature individuals) as a result of deforestation, drainage of wetlands, hunting and disturbance. It is projected to decline by >80% over the next three generations (25 years) due to further habitat conversion which is either underway or projected. Western Siem Pang, Cambodia, is the most important site in the world for the species: 108 birds were recorded in November 2006, and 173 individuals were recorded in September 2009. However, the reasons for this apparent increase are unknown, and may reflect improved survey effort. The government has made a commitment in principle to designate the area a Protected Forest, but it is currently threatened by plans for a plantation concession, which would result in large-scale forest clearance, road development and immigration into the area.

Actions being implemented

1. A **proposal to establish a Protected Forest** in Western Siem Pang has been prepared, reviewed at a provincial workshop, revised to incorporate the input of the provincial authorities and then approved by the Provincial Governor. The finalised documents were sent to the Minister of Agriculture Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) in May 2009. The new proposal increases the total area from 123,717 ha to 152,825 ha following requests from local grassroots and provincial authorities. The extended boundary reaches the international Cambodia-Lao border to the north, the western boundary of Virachey National Park to the east, and to Kanjang Kok village in the south.

Following two meetings organised by the MAFF to discuss the proposal, two companies with land concessions in the area had their concessions either reduced or revoked, and the MAFF chairman has drafted a sub-decree to protect the forest to be submitted to the Prime Minister. The final designation process is expected to be completed by August 2010.

2. The **government have been lobbied** to complete the notification process, and in September 2008 the Deputy Governor of Stung Treng issued a letter in support of the proposal to designate Western Siem Pang a Protected Forest. In October 2008, the executive summary from a master's degree on the ecology of White-shouldered Ibis were translated into Khmer and circulated to the Stung Treng Governor and the Chief of the Stung Treng Forestry Administration in Phnom Penh.

A **district stakeholder meeting** took place in August 2008 involving, among others, a Deputy District Governor and representatives of the police and army, with outputs including the agreement to collaborate to increase awareness of local people to stop trapping, hunting, poisoning and trading of wildlife, to promote the sustainable use of wetlands and to investigate illegal gun and chainsaw use.

3. In order to **raise awareness amongst the local community**, 60 signs covering sustainable use and forest law were produced in November 2008, and were be placed along important trails and *trapeangs* (seasonal wetlands) including areas where White-shouldered Ibis roost. Village meetings took place in 2009 to raise further awareness, reaching at least 750 local people. Furthermore, posters have been designed and distributed, and a roosting reward scheme was also developed in May 2009, offering local people cash rewards for locating and guiding researchers to ibis roosting areas.

4. A **Local Conservation Group** at Western Siem Pang has been supported since August 2007. The group, including former hunters, conducts monthly patrols to the most important *trapeangs* to record key species and any illegal activities. Two key roosting sites (holding up to 50 and 34 birds respectively) are now being regularly monitored by the group following information received from local people.

5. **Research and monitoring** continues, focusing on the foraging ecology of the species, and examining the influence of traditional land management practices on the foraging and breeding ecology of White-shouldered Ibis. The first national census of the species in Cambodia was conducted in 2009 in collaboration with several organisations, recording a total of 310 individuals, and monthly monitoring and patrolling of nesting sites is ongoing.



Left: Searching for White-shouldered Ibis nests, Western Siem Pang, Cambodia; right: a local conservation group member conducting an awareness meeting in the Srea Sambo commune (© Net Norint)

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