

Released: a conservation plan for the Shoebill, king of the marshes

Title

The [International Single Species Action Plan \(ISSAP\) for the Conservation of the Shoebill *Balaeniceps rex*](#) is now available. Its overall goal is to increase the [Shoebill's](#) population size and maintain its current range.

The [Shoebill](#) is a large unique waterbird confined to a rather restricted set of generally extensive freshwater swamps of eastern central tropical Africa. It prefers large freshwater swamps of grasses, reeds and papyrus, and thus has been fondly referred to some as “king of the marshes”. It has a fragmented distribution bound to this habitat and a low population, estimated at 5,000 - 8,000 birds. As the Shoebill has clearly been in decline in several areas, it is listed as Vulnerable in the [IUCN Red List](#). The Shoebill occurs from South Sudan and Ethiopia in the north to northern Zambia in the south. It is resident in South Sudan, western Ethiopia, Uganda, Rwanda, eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, western Tanzania and northern Zambia, with records also from Central African Republic, Burundi and Kenya.

The [Shoebill](#) faces several threats. Its breeding success is largely impacted by anthropogenic (human impact on the environment) factors such as disturbance by livestock and people, destruction of nests and breeding areas by fire, and habitat conversion and degradation. Oil exploration in the Sudd (South Sudan) and agricultural developments in Gambella (Ethiopia) also have huge impacts on the species' habitat. Shoebills are also threatened by illegal live bird trade, with high mortality during capture, transit and captivity. Furthermore, significant knowledge gaps remain about the Shoebill, including current information on numbers and trends at different sites, movements, breeding and foraging requirements, causes and extent of trade.

Among the actions proposed in the plan include: maintaining trade bans, strengthening surveillance and raising awareness, especially with respect to fire; restricting livestock from core breeding areas; conducting proper EIA for oil and other developments; developing management plans for Shoebill areas; and promoting sustainable wetland-based community enterprises that make communities benefit from Shoebills and their habitats, notably ecotourism initiatives. Research to fill the key knowledge gaps is also planned.

Development of this plan was commissioned by the [UNEP/AEWA](#) Secretariat to [Nature Uganda](#) (BirdLife in Uganda) and financially supported by the [Swiss Federal Office for the Environment \(FOEN\)](#). Its compilation commenced with a workshop in October 2012 in Entebbe, Uganda, hosted by the Ministry of Tourism, [Wildlife and Antiquities of Uganda](#), which was attended by government representatives and species experts from the key Range States of the Shoebill. The plan received input from among others, BirdLife partner NGOs in four countries and staff from the BirdLife Africa Partnership

Secretariat.

[Read the full document](#)