

Title The Nepalese Government has pledged that the country will lead the way in developing global standards to value ecosystem services; the processes supplied by healthy ecosystems that benefit humankind, such as clean drinking water and crop pollination. Nepal's Joint-Secretary of the Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation, Dr Annapurna Das, opened a national workshop on ecosystem services, which was held in Kathmandu. The workshop is part of a Darwin Initiative project, *Understanding, assessing and monitoring ecosystem services for better biodiversity conservation*, which is being implemented by the national BirdLife Partner, Bird Conservation Nepal, and BirdLife International. Dr Das said that efforts to reduce poverty would be undermined if Nepal's biodiversity continues to be lost and the country's ecosystem services degraded. "One way of tackling this is to demonstrate how sites of high biodiversity value like Important Bird Areas and Protected Areas can also provide ecosystem services that significantly help poor communities", said Dr Hum Gurung, CEO of Bird Conservation Nepal. "We believe that this Darwin Project will have great impact in our country", he added. The workshop was also attended by senior representatives of Department for National Parks and Wildlife Conservation, Also in attendance were staff of national and international NGOs, IUCN Nepal, WWF Nepal Programme, and the United Nations Development Programme's Small Grant Programme.



Dr Das said Nepal was committed to the tough new

Convention on Biological Diversity targets, agreed in Nagoya, Japan, in October, and recognised their contribution to reducing poverty and maintaining sustainable livelihoods. He stressed that most poor people in Nepal live in rural areas. "For these people, there is a high dependence on the services which are delivered to them by nature." The Darwin Initiative project has been running since April 2010 and will end in 2013. Participants were given the opportunity to learn about the progress that has been made in the past six months in developing a site-focused, robust and inexpensive methodology to assess and value ecosystem services at sites. There were also presentations on other projects in Nepal relating to ecosystem services their measurement, routes to policy and establishing payments for services. The project team invited feedback and comment to further improve the methodology, so that it will be shaped in a way that provides the most useful information to end-users and policy planners. "We want to build on the efforts of other projects in Nepal, refine our approach and produce a really practical scientific tool for assessing ecosystem services that can be used widely in sites in Nepal and, indeed, by other BirdLife Partners in countries around the world", said Alison Stattersfield, Head of Science at BirdLife International. "Today we have a workshop for an important new project", Dr Das said. "I encourage you to contribute your ideas on what would make a practical toolkit, and to suggest ways in which we can collaborate to continue to learn together. I believe that your experience and enthusiasm will help develop a global standard approach, in which Nepal is proud to lead the way." Following this workshop, the project team will visit the first of three pilot sites for testing the methodology. Shivapuri-Nagarjung National Park, one of 27 Important Bird Areas in Nepal, will be an important case study for demonstrating the value of ecosystem services to people, as it provides more than 40% of the water supply to the Kathmandu valley and its inhabitants. The two other pilot sites will be Koshi Tappu Ramsar site and Rara National Park.