

Launch of BirdLife's new Local Empowerment Programme

Title

BirdLife is launching a Local Empowerment Programme to provide more effective support for Local Conservation Groups, and to strengthen and expand networks of local organisations. The Local Empowerment Programme (LEP) will also help communicate this work more effectively to donors and decision-makers, to increase its impact, and leverage more resources for this essential aspect of BirdLife's activities. It is recognised throughout BirdLife that working with people locally is critical to effective, sustainable, equitable conservation. One of the BirdLife Partnership's most distinctive approaches has been to support the emergence and strengthening of networks of individuals and organisations at the site or community level, who share BirdLife's objectives, and are committed to site or species conservation. Approaches reflect the diversity of culture, history, legislation and social norms that underpin social organisation in different places. Himas, IBA-Caretakers, Site Support Groups and IBA-Adoption Groups, collectively termed 'IBA-Local Conservation Groups', are present at over 2000 Important Bird Areas (IBAs) worldwide, and a network of Species Guardians is developing under BirdLife's Preventing Extinctions Programme. BirdLife Partners support these groups with the management, monitoring, development and defence of 'their' IBAs, providing an approach that is rooted in local distinctiveness. This enables traditional approaches and diversity to shape responses that are very unlikely to be achieved through externally managed interventions. Empowerment involves building the confidence, skills, knowledge, resources and rights that enable people to overcome obstacles. It is about enhancing their ability to make decisions, and building skills for improving personal and collective circumstances. It concerns attitude: positive thinking about the ability to make change. And it is about the ability to engage and inform the perceptions, actions and decisions of others. The vision of the programme is that 'Local organisations at critical sites for biodiversity are empowered to effectively conserve, manage and defend their sites, so that biodiversity values and benefits are provided locally, nationally and globally in the long term'. The LEP aims to achieve this by expanding the coverage of LCGs and local engagement generally; building capacity; linking groups and individuals for effective sharing of experience and knowledge; promoting rights for local people to conserve and manage resources sustainably; and by generating resources for local group development, networking and action. To find out more about the Local Empowerment Programme contact David Thomas (*david dot thomas at birdlife dot org*), or visit <http://www.birdlife.org/community/2010/09/birdlifes-local-empowerment-programme/>. Everyone is encouraged to use the BirdLife Community to share

their experiences of working locally ? please send us your stories.