Using standardised criteria, the BirdLife Partnership has since the 1980s identified and documented more than 12,000 Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs) around the world, on land and at sea. This represents by far the most comprehensive science-based effort to identify the world’s key sites for biodiversity conservation.

BirdLife’s World Bird and Biodiversity Database (WBDB) holds enormous amounts of information on the global IBA network. This information is crucial for many purposes – e.g. creating effective Protected Area networks, identifying wetlands of international importance under the Ramsar convention, planning adaptation to climate change and applying safeguards for development projects. IBA data are being accessed and used by Governments, banks, corporates and others, including through new platforms such as the Integrated Biodiversity Assessment Tool.

IBA information is a hugely important resource – but needs regular updating to remain credible and reliable, and so that urgent threats to IBAs can be recognised and addressed.

IBAs are monitored using a simple, practical and robust framework that can integrate data from a wide range of sources – field observers, research reports or even remote sensing. This information is used to assign scores on a four-point scale for pressure (the threats facing the site), state (the condition of birds and / or their habitats) and response (the action being taken to conserve the site).

So far, monitoring data are available in the WBDB for around a quarter of the world’s IBAs. Over half of these sites are in a poor or very poor state and subject to high or very high pressures, while for two-thirds of them conservation responses are low or non-existent.

There is urgent need to expand use of the BirdLife monitoring framework to cover the rest of the world’s IBAs!
Why monitor IBAs?

National IBA monitoring using the BirdLife framework is producing results of immediate practical use for advocacy and action.

Standardised scoring makes it easy to identify and analyse trends – for example, to compare protected and unprotected IBAs. Results can also be collated nationally, regionally and, eventually, globally. For example, analysis of data from 147 IBAs in eastern and southern African countries where IBA monitoring is well established shows that while pressures have been growing, so have responses – with some overall recent improvement in condition.

IBA monitoring is simple and inexpensive

The IBA monitoring framework is designed to minimise the cost and effort of standardised monitoring. Successful IBA monitoring schemes make use of existing monitoring efforts, such as waterbird counts at wetland IBAs, and engage a diversity of people to collect field data – e.g. Local Conservation Groups, Government agencies, volunteer observers and researchers.

Effective national co-ordination is a key factor for success, either in the national BirdLife Partner or a collaborating organisation.

IBAs in Danger

More and more BirdLife Partners are monitoring the state of their IBAs. In early 2013, 95 BirdLife network countries and territories provided data on pressures at their most threatened IBAs. This has identified a set of IBAs at great risk of losing their biodiversity value. This list of over 300 ‘IBAs in Danger’ will be used to target enhanced conservation effort for these sites, through advocacy, campaigning and local action.

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Data from IBA networks in Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Kenya, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Trends need to be interpreted with caution because the number and subset of IBAs assessed varies between years (2001 = 186, 2008 = 186, 2009 = 178, 2010 = 147)

The initial set of IBAs in Danger identified through national IBA monitoring – see tinyurl.com/casestudy545