

Australia

The Australian IBA Programme



Red-winged Parrot

Location	Throughout Australia
Rio Tinto company	Rio Tinto corporate (Melbourne); Rio Tinto Foundation for Sustainable Minerals
Partner organisations	Birds Australia and 10 regional bird groups
Key people	Guy Dutson (Birds Australia); Karin Lorenzon (Rio Tinto)
Habitats	Seabird islands, coastal, wetland and terrestrial
Birds	296 species can trigger Important Bird Area (IBA) status out of 830 species recorded in Australia
Outcomes	All sites meeting IBA criteria mapped and data-based; use of database for monitoring and conservation advocated

This three-year project will identify and document all of the Important Bird Areas (IBAs) in Australia. Global criteria have been adapted to Australia and applied comprehensively to identify 340 IBAs. The project will produce a GIS map supported by details of each IBA. Opportunities are being identified to promote bird monitoring and appropriate land management, mostly by local communities and neighbouring Rio Tinto businesses.

Project background and history

In 2002, the partnership commissioned Birds Australia (the BirdLife Partner) to produce a biodiversity toolkit for Rio Tinto businesses, using recent Australian Bird Atlas data and the Action Plan for Australian birds (2000). Completed in 2003, *Bird Diversity at Rio Tinto Sites in Australia – A Strategic Overview* incorporated national and state lists, and clearly identified bird conservation priorities and land-use contexts relevant to Rio Tinto operations. This information, targeting bird species, was designed to assist Rio Tinto's Australian businesses focus their efforts in addressing biodiversity risk more effectively.

A natural progression of the partnership was to address the identification and conservation of priority sites. At the time, Australia was a country (and continent) that had yet to undertake the challenge of compiling a national IBA inventory, a key gap in BirdLife International's global IBA programme. A pilot project undertaken for Birds Australia in North Queensland helped develop a methodology appropriate to Australia. For Rio Tinto, the development and ongoing implementation of its Biodiversity Strategy requires each business to identify the biodiversity values of the mine site and its surrounding area. However, there were few, if any, maps or databases of important biodiversity sites in Australia, other than those of existing protected areas.

The Australian IBA project, undertaken by Birds Australia in partnership with Rio Tinto, is creating the first comprehensive map of sites of biodiversity significance: in this case sites of global bird conservation significance. The IBA map and database will be a useful tool and asset for biodiversity conservation mapping and management. The focused biodiversity information will make decision-making and planning more effective and rigorous for exploration activities and mine operations. It will also aid the identification of potential biodiversity offsets. The IBA database contains references and suggestions for background data resources, management considerations, access to local experts and supportive community groups. The IBA map and database will also be advocated for use by national and state governments, non-government organisations, and any other interested groups and stakeholders.

Project details

The project is identifying and mapping all Australian IBAs, and will publish and advocate the recognition and conservation of these sites in Australia over a period of three years. IBA criteria have been developed based on BirdLife's global criteria, adjusted where necessary to Australia's vast and often ephemeral ecosystems. Identification of IBAs has been based on literature reviews, databases such as Birds Australia's Atlas, and local experts' data and opinion. Each IBA is documented in detail to justify the site boundaries, its ornithological value and recommended management considerations. The final inventory of IBAs will be analysed to determine scientific conclusions and opportunities for monitoring and conservation. An initial total of 340 IBAs have been identified, concentrated in the densely settled south-east of the country. In the extensive natural

habitats of inland and northern Australia, some IBAs can be identified for waterbirds and restricted-range birds but large areas remain best addressed by biome or landscape-level conservation actions.

The future

IBAs will be a major target for Birds Australia's new community-based initiative for monitoring sites, which will endeavour to link changes in bird numbers to threats and management actions. Where associated with Rio Tinto businesses, IBAs will provide targeted opportunities for potential biodiversity offsets and additional conservation and sustainable development actions, such as have been undertaken elsewhere across the Rio Tinto group.



Banded Stilt



Arnhemland Escarpment IBA,
Kakadu