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Foreword by HH Princess Takamado



Birds are beautiful. They are everywhere. We see and hear them everyday. Many of us are extremely fond of birds, but even if we were not, it would be difficult not to notice them. As a result, there is a wealth of data available on birds and that makes them ideal as environmental indicators. The aim of the BirdLife Partnership is to conserve birds and their habitats, and in so doing, to protect the biodiversity within our ecosystem. BirdLife International coordinates a global viewpoint, and by working closely with the local people, strives to provide a mechanism for combining economically sustainable growth with ecologically sustainable development. This includes the broader agenda of the eradication of poverty, the supply of fresh, potable water, and the prevention of natural disasters as a result of ill-advised land-use.

The Important Bird Areas concept, which BirdLife International has been developing since the mid-1980s, is a foundation stone for our future work. It identifies sites for migratory species, as well as the most important resident species, with a particular focus on those that are threatened with extinction, are unique, and those that concentrate in large numbers.

India is host to vast numbers of migratory birds of Siberian origin during the winter months. It is interesting to find that India's early rulers provided some of the earliest documentation of bird migration, noting their seasonal movements and speculating as to their origins. As economic growth continues to advance upon and replace natural habitats, there are important policy decisions that need to be made. In addition to the designation of protected areas and wise land-use planning for resident birds, we must ensure that measures are taken to safeguard the networks of areas that are needed to accommodate the seasonal movements of migratory species.

The Bombay Natural History Society (BirdLife in India) is to be congratulated for having initiated the IBA programme in India and for having compiled this most impressive inventory. Now, 464 IBAs have been identified throughout the country, and we note with some trepidation that, whilst India has a wide-ranging network of national parks and wildlife sanctuaries, 198 IBAs are lacking any official protection.

On behalf of BirdLife International, I sincerely hope that "The Important Bird Areas in India" will provide a guide for the strengthening and expansion of the protected area system as well as the finding of other means to ensure conservation measures are in place. Such steps will provide enhanced protection for birds as well as other flora and fauna. Let us never forget that in our ecosystem, there is not a single life-form that does not have a role to play, and that it is our duty to protect this intricate web of life which our planet has taken millions of years to create.

I wish BNHS every success with the IBA programme in India.

Her Imperial Highness Princess Takamado
Honorary President, BirdLife International



Foreword by Michael Rands



Important Bird Areas are sites of international importance for the conservation of birds and their habitats. IBAs are among the world's key sites for biodiversity conservation and the IBA concept developed by the BirdLife International Partnership facilitates their identification nationally using data gathered locally following globally agreed and standardised criteria. Important Bird Areas are practical networks for conservation. They help decision makers locally, nationally and globally to identify priorities and bring together key stakeholders to conserve and manage sites sustainably.

Almost six years ago the Bombay Natural History Society joined the BirdLife International Partnership and began an Important Bird Area programme in India, establishing the Indian Bird Conservation Network as a key mechanism for achieving this. The IBCN has ensured the participation of over 1000 people in the identification of India's Important Bird Areas. BNHS has played both a leadership and facilitating role in the creation of this IBA initiative for India, which is the most comprehensive analysis of sites vital for the conservation of birds throughout India. I warmly congratulate BNHS and all the Partners of the Indian Bird Conservation Network, who have identified and documented the 465 Important Bird Areas of India. This volume is vital for the conservation of birds and wider biodiversity throughout India, and forms an important basis for a conservation agenda in India that will conserve India's vital natural resources, not only for wildlife but also for India's people. Many critical sites and habitats identified by this book are under threat and need immediate attention from civil society, governments and others who care for the future of this magnificent country. I strongly encourage everyone who cares for India to act on the analysis and recommendations so eloquently presented in this publication.

Michael Rands
Director and Chief Executive
BirdLife International





Foreword by Graham Wynne



Salim Ali's '*Book of Indian Birds*' is arguably the most important book on Indian birds ever produced but '*Important Bird Areas in India*' is perhaps the second most important. Its publication is an enormous achievement befitting such a huge and biologically rich country. The power of this book is that the 465 Important Bird Areas it details are a signal that, often against the odds, birds and other biodiversity continue to flourish in wonderful places throughout India. The majority of these IBAs are within exclusively managed Protected Areas but nearly 200 are unprotected areas where wildlife survives alongside local people. I believe that this book reflects the cultural affinity that all Indian people have for nature. This empathy and India's rich natural heritage are a source of pride for the whole nation.

The overriding need for India today is to maintain its rapid economic growth and thus the ability to afford comprehensive social development and environmental protection programmes. I have no doubt that India will continue on her impressive development path through continued endeavour, enterprise and robust democracy. My fear is that in the interim period - the next 20 years or so - the pressures on natural resources, arising from the needs of the half a billion rural poor and rapidly expanding industry, will squeeze birds into ever smaller and more degraded sites. This, coupled with the overarching problems of climate change, will leave many species vulnerable to local and perhaps total extinction. The challenge is for the Government of India to invest in these 464 priority sites for conservation as a core part of a national biodiversity strategy even though funds are limited and the needs of many sectors are pressing. It is also a challenge for those of us in the richest nations that wish to see this suite of IBAs conserved; we should be obligated to provide extra resources to bridge the funding gaps if called upon to do so.

'Important Bird Areas in India' covers so much ground and provides information on so many sites and species that it required the creation of a new national network of bird conservationists, the Indian Bird Conservation Network, to tackle it. The Bombay Natural History Society has not only produced a wonderful inventory but also has galvanized a new force for conservation in India. The IBCN members should take most of the credit for the quality of the site accounts because it is their local knowledge that has provided the depth of information. The next step, to take this conservation agenda forward as a dynamic programme of action, for site safeguard, for campaigning against serious threats and for continued monitoring of the state of the IBA resource, will depend on how well the Indian Bird Conservation Network can grow into a formidable force for conservation. My hope is that this vitally important book will usher in a new era of bird conservation because it should enthuse and encourage all IBCN members to safeguard their local sites. BNHS at the heart of the network is in a position to generate and advocate relevant policies that affect many similar Important Bird Areas and assist network members to find a sympathetic ear in the national media and Government. I believe that this national network mirrors the successful BirdLife International Partnership of national conservation NGOs, with BNHS perhaps best regarded as IBCN's Secretariat. Certainly, both BNHS and my own organisation, the RSPB, as members of BirdLife, have learned much about the power that such a network creates.

The RSPB has supported BNHS' IBA programme and IBCN establishment since 1998. The need for site safeguard, policy analysis and advocacy are areas where the RSPB has much experience and we look forward to sharing this with BNHS and the IBCN over the coming years. Salim Ali's '*Book of Indian Birds*' created huge numbers of active and skilled birdwatchers across India. '*Important Bird Areas in India*' provides the agenda to safeguard the best places for birds and engender widespread support for India's wildlife.

Graham Wynne

Chief Executive

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)



Important Bird Areas in India: Priority sites for conservation



सत्यमेव जयते

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT & FORESTS

PRODIPTO GHOSH, Ph.D.
Secretary

Foreword



We need better knowledge of threatened species to prevent their extinction, and for effective legal and social actions and more sustainable use of natural resources. It is indeed shocking that among the 1225 species of Indian birds, 78 are threatened with extinction and 8 listed as critical in the globally threatened species category. Among these the Pink-headed Duck *Rhodonessa caryophyllacea* and Himalayan Quail *Ophrysia superciliosa* are probably extinct since scientists have found no evidence of their survival despite various field expeditions by the Bombay Natural History Society directly and through its Indian Bird Conservation Network (IBCN).

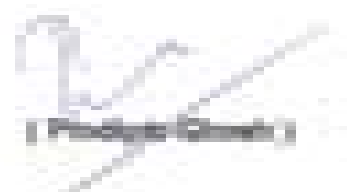
Why save endangered species? What makes a relatively few animals and plants so special that a great deal of effort and money should be expended to preserve them? The Indian Parliament has addressed these questions a number of times. The preamble of the Ministry of Environment and Forests states that, endangered and threatened species of birds, mammals and other biodiversity are of esthetic, ecological, educational, historical, recreational, and scientific value to the nation and its people.

The 'Important Bird Areas in India' book describing 465 sites essential for bird conservation, is a commendable work by the BNHS for bird conservation in the country. I am sure the Book will assist environmental planners, policy makers, wildlife managers, students and researchers. Though the publication paints an alarming picture, it also presents solutions and calls for action. If we as individuals, Governments and voluntary organizations act together to preserve the threatened birds, habitats and conserve IBAs, it would be a step towards the long-term conservation of our magnificent avian resources.

I commend the BNHS and Indian Bird Conservation Network partners, and forest officials for their involvement in this collaborative effort to preserve Important Bird Areas and birds of the country.

Place: New Delhi

Dated: 07.10.2004



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Foreword by B. G. Deshmukh



Among all the groups of animals in the world, birds delight us most by their rich colouration, song, easy recognition and liveliness. Birds are present everywhere - forests, grasslands, wetlands, crop fields and even in city gardens. With proper care, we can even attract birds to our balcony or veranda. Fortunately our country is very rich in bird life. It is estimated that there are more than 9,000 different kinds of birds in the world and the Indian subcontinent has 1225 species, or over 13% of the world's birds.

The main reasons for the very rich bird life in India is the presence of varied habitats from hot arid deserts of Rajasthan to thick tropical rain forests of Western Ghats and northeast India. We also have many types of grasslands, wetlands, mangrove forests and islands which support unique types of birds and other animals.

It is indeed sad that habitat destruction, illegal shooting and trapping has brought many of our birds to the point of extinction. Among the 1225 birds of the Indian subcontinent, about 10 percent are at risk. If we do not take prompt action to save these species, they will totally disappear. The Pink-headed Duck *Rhodrossa caryophyllacea* and Mountain Quail *Ophrysia superciliosa* are already extinct and more than a hundred bird species are in danger of extinction.

We can save these birds by protecting their habitat, totally stopping illegal hunting and trapping. Unfortunately, we use poisonous chemicals as pesticides to kill crop pests that also kill many birds when the birds eat insects. Earlier, it was thought that pesticides are harmless for wildlife but new researches show that the pesticides are deadly to many bird species if proper precautions are not taken while using them. Not only to birds, these pesticides are also harmful to us also. Our Government has now banned many dangerous pesticides but they are still illegally sold in the market.

For a high proportion of threatened bird species, especially for those with restricted ranges and strict habitat requirements, effective site protection and management is the key to their survival. The Bombay Natural History Society has been working on these species through its Important Bird Area Programme since 1999, and 465 internationally important sites, i.e., IBAs in India have been identified using globally agreed criteria. The involvement of Indian Bird Conservation Network (IBCN) partners is a commendable initiative.

The '*Important Bird Areas in India*' book is the first publication in the country which has involved more than 1000 people and about 80 local NGOs. It is a significant contribution towards conservation as it provides vital information for the identification of priorities and requirements for biodiversity conservation. We look forward to seeing realistic action on the ground based on this valuable document and hope the government will use it as a base for bird conservation in the country.

B. G. Deshmukh

President

Bombay Natural History Society, India



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The Indian IBA Book is the result of five years' exhaustive work by the IBA team and a large number of people. The data, which form the core of the book, have been collected over a period of five years, by more than 1000 people: many hundreds of amateur and professional ornithologists, birdwatchers, conservationists, forest officials and people interested in birds. It is impossible to acknowledge them all here, but without their contributions it would not have been possible to identify the Important Bird Areas in India. It has been a privilege to work with a large number of Indian ornithologists, conservationists and other experts from various departments including forest officials, who have given full support and collaborated enthusiastically and helped in writing the site accounts and commented on the drafts. The partners of the Indian Bird Conservation Network (IBCN) have been involved in the IBA process since its inception. One particular gratifying aspect of the IBCN has been the increasing degree to which a rapidly expanding group of young ornithologists has contributed to the programme, and continue to do so.

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