

RTD03 Threatened birds in East Asia

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1 Issues

A large number of east Asian bird species were recently identified as at risk of extinction in BirdLife International's *Threatened Birds of Asia*. Many are large migrants which require conservation through a network of reserves and a suite of management actions. Others are resident passerines whose ranges and numbers remain poorly known. This IOC round table discussion provided a unique forum for ornithologists from around the world, and particularly from within east Asia, to examine the most appropriate responses to the diverse needs of the region's threatened birds. Crucial to this, it offered the opportunity to develop links between biologists working on the same species or habitats, and between researchers in east Asia and conservation biologists elsewhere in the world. The round table explored the development of partnerships at the international level in pursuit of threatened bird conservation in the region.

The session began with a short presentation by Mike Crosby about the BirdLife International Threatened Species Program, with emphasis on east Asia and an overview of the main conclusions from the *Threatened Birds of Asia*. The following questions were then addressed: (1) how can collaborative networks of ornithologists and conservationists be developed further to progress the conservation of the region's threatened birds, and (2) what can be done to promote new research projects that address the many gaps in knowledge of the region's threatened birds, particularly those that involve institutional exchange and partnership at the international level?

2 Outcomes

2.1 The BirdLife International Threatened Species Program

BirdLife International has been documenting the status of the world's threatened bird species since the 1970s. The results have been published in a series of global lists and regional Red Data Books, most recently *Threatened Birds of the World* (BirdLife International, 2000) and *Threatened Birds of Asia: the BirdLife International Red Data Book* (BirdLife International, 2001). The latter includes indi-

vidual assessments of 323 globally threatened bird species (c. 12% of the entire Asian avifauna, including 41 which are "critically endangered" and 65 which are "endangered"). These assessments detail distribution, population sizes and trends, and ecological parameters (habitat, food, breeding, migration) of the species concerned, as well as threats affecting the species and current management activities. Most crucially, they identify projects, programs and policies for the conservation recommended on the basis of the assembled evidence. A unique feature of the manual is its distribution maps: for the first time in the history of either zoology or conservation, a major segment of an entire fauna is mapped using fully referenced point localities.

Another product that will use material from *Threatened birds of Asia* is BirdLife International's forthcoming *Strategy for the threatened birds of Asia*. It is designed for nontechnical audiences, so that the conclusions of *Threatened birds of Asia* become available to decision-makers in more accessible format. Focus is placed on critically endangered and endangered species, highlighting issues that could cause extinctions in the short to medium term, and identifying conservation actions needed to prevent this. It also identifies the most important sites for threatened birds in the region, and priorities for survey and research. Outputs will include a short publication, and more detailed material in a map-based interface on CD-ROM and the Internet.

2.2 Networks in east Asia and their interaction

Many networks needed to progress the conservation of birds and their habitats in east Asia were identified during the round table discussion. Several IUCN/SSC/BirdLife specialist groups are active in the region, notably the galliformes and crane groups. These groups have prepared action plans for a number of taxa (e.g. three galliform groups) which have had considerable success in promoting conservation in East Asia. The action plans identify priorities for conservation research; and the resulting projects and publications (supported by capacity building for local scientists from within the specialist groups) help to identify appropriate management actions. Similar action plans have been developed by groups of individual scientists and conservationists in east Asia, e.g. for the black-faced spoonbill *Platalea minor* and great bustard *Otis tarda*.

This has fostered regional networks that coordinate conservation efforts for these species. The concept of habitat-specialist groups, rather than taxonomically-focused groups, has been proposed as a new approach that could lead to action plans which address the conservation of whole ecosystems and their biodiversity as well.

Other types of networks identified by the round table discussion included those focused on site conservation (North East Asian Crane Site Network, East Asian-Australian Shorebird Reserve Network), bird counting (the Asian Waterfowl Census organized by Wetlands International) and regional coordination of conservation efforts (e.g. a network covering three provinces of southeast China). Several computer list-servers are active in the region, notably the Oriental birding mailing list which covers wild birds, birding and conservation in the Oriental region. BirdLife International is currently developing two websites. One will contain discussion forums to provide opportunities for users to contribute information on threatened birds relevant to their conservation and the assessment of threat status.

The other will allow users to contribute new information on threatened birds and their conservation in Asia, in order to keep the *Threatened Birds of Asia* database up-to-date. Most participants in the round table discussion were aware of some of these networks, but not all of them. It also became apparent that, although the networks often function very efficiently within themselves, there is often little or no communication between them. Other issues raised included the role of bird tour companies in conservation in east Asia, the importance of conservation education and capacity building, and the problems posed by pollution and coastal reclamation.

References

- BirdLife International, 2000. *Threatened Birds of the World*. Barcelona and Cambridge, U.K.: Lynx Edicions and BirdLife International.
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