Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBA)

ACRONYMS | AREAS | COUNTRIES | MARINE | TERMS

DEFINITION

Globally important sites for the conservation of bird species. They are the sites needed to ensure the survival of viable populations of most of the world's bird species. The IBA network also holds a large and representative proportion of other biodiversity. IBAs are a subset of Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs).

DESCRIPTION

Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs) are key sites for the conservation of bird species, identified through the BirdLife International IBA programme. These sites are small enough to be conserved in their entirety, often form part of a protected-area network, and are, as far as possible, different in character or habitat or ornithological importance from the surrounding area [1]. IBAs form part of Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs), which is a wider integrated approach to the conservation and sustainable use of the natural environment [1]. The identification of IBAs is based on a set of internationally agreed, standardised criteria and is an ongoing process. Inventories of IBAs have now been produced for many of the terrestrial, freshwater and marine regions of the world [1]. In 2013 IBAs were renamed from "Important Bird Areas" to "Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas", to reflect their importance for other species.

SUPPORTED BY

BirdLife International

YEAR OF CREATION

1980

COVERAGE

Global in extent, with over 12,000 sites in more than 200 countries, territories and autonomous regions (Year: 2014). [1] IBAs cover terrestrial, marine and freshwater regions. The identification of IBAs is an ongoing process, which involves Birdlife International as well as Birdlife Partners (nationally or regionally-based NGOs which collaborate with Birdlife). When complete, the global network is expected to comprise around 15,000 IBAs covering 7% of the world's land surface [1].

CRITERIA

The set of global criteria developed by BirdLife International for the identification of IBAs use the occurrence of key bird species that are vulnerable to global extinction or whose populations are otherwise irreplaceable. Furthermore, the criteria build upon existing international legal instruments such as the European Commission's Birds Directive which obliges the designation of Special Protection Areas in the European Community, and the Ramsar Convention under which contracting parties must designate at least one Ramsar site. A site may qualify as an IBA if it meets one or more of the following criteria: [2]

- Globally threatened species: The site is known or thought regularly to hold significant numbers of a globally threatened species, or other species of global conservation concern (i.e. a species listed as Critically Endangered, Endangered or Vulnerable by the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species).
- Restricted-range species: The site is known or thought to hold a significant component of a group of restricted-range bird species (global distribution of less than 50,000 sq. km) whose breeding distributions define an Endemic Bird Area (i.e. where two or more restricted-range species occur together) or a Secondary Area (one that supports one or more non-overlapping restricted-range species).
- Biome-restricted species: The site is known or thought to hold a significant component of the group of species whose distributions are largely or wholly confined to one biome
- Congregations: A site may qualify on any one or more of the four sub-criteria listed below:

i) Site known or thought to hold, on a regular basis, 1% of a biogeographic population of a congregatory waterbird species.

ii) Site known or thought to hold, on a regular basis, 1% of the global population of a congregatory seabird or terrestrial species.

iii) Site known or thought to hold, on a regular basis, 20,000 waterbirds or 10,000 pairs of seabirds of one or more species.

iv) Site known or thought to exceed thresholds set for migratory species at bottleneck sites.

Thresholds within these criteria are set globally or regionally where appropriate. In addition, further sets of regional and sub-regional criteria have been applied in certain regions, namely Europe and the European Union, and the Middle East. [3], [4] The criteria for IBAs were used as the basis for the criteria for KBAs.

MANAGEMENT

IBAs are identified and supported by the BirdLife International Partnership as well as other national and regional stakeholders, ranging from local communities, government agencies to international conservation organisations. BirdLife's Partners monitor and work to protect bird populations within IBAs, while the BirdLife Secretariat deals with international aspects of the programme. In many countries IBAs are part of existing protected area networks and hence are managed as such. However, the level of

formal recognition of other IBAs varies greatly and for a large proportion it is completely lacking. Several countries have a National IBA Conservation Strategy (NIBACS) to guide the integration of IBA conservation with other national conservation processes. Several governments and donor agencies recognise the importance of IBAs, and therefore, in some cases, these sites attract significant financial incentives or direct funding for development and management. IBAs form the main focus and foundation for the conservation work of the BirdLife Partnership. They are also comprehensively documented in a range of publications and through the BirdLife International website's Data Zone, as well as in the Integrated Biodiversity Assessment Tool (IBAT).

BUSINESS RELEVANCE

Legal and compliance – Globally, 40% of IBAs occupy an area which has some legal protection1 and 28% of IBAs are completely covered by protected areas. [5] The legal recognition and protection of IBAs varies across countries. For instance in Ecuador, IBAs are recognised and protected in law. More usually, the IBA network informs design and gap-filling of national protected area systems. In the European Union, substantial case law establishes IBAs as the basis for designation of Special Protected Areas under the Birds Directive. IBAs also inform the implementation of other international agreements. They could provide a starting point for implementing the Convention on Biological Diversity's (CBD) Programme of Work on Protected Areas, which urges Parties to set up 'comprehensive, effectively managed, and ecologically representative national and regional systems of protected areas'. For waterbirds, criteria for the IBA congregatory species category are closely aligned with the criteria for designating wetlands of international importance under the Ramsar Convention. BirdLife International has published 'shadow' directories of IBAs that it believes could be considered potential Ramsar sites, in support of Parties' efforts to ensure conservation and wise use of their wetlands.

IBAs are not usually included by name in standards and certification schemes, but these typically include requirements relating more broadly to the umbrella concept of KBAs which encompasses IBAs. For examples of standards and certification schemes which refer to KBAs, please visit the KBA factsheet.

Biodiversity importance – IBAs are well established and recognised as sites of very high biodiversity value and are therefore priorities for conservation attention. IBAs form an important subset of KBAs and although they are identified using information on birds, they are also frequently of exceptional importance for other biodiversity. In countries where other important areas have been identified based on non-bird species, IBAs overlap with 80% of these high-biodiversity areas. For example, the global IBA network overlaps with distributions of 76% of amphibian and 87% of mammal species. [6] The IBA criteria may be applied using either global or sub-global thresholds: in all cases, however, sites identified as IBAs are of international conservation importance. Since IBAs are identified at the site-scale based on existing protected areas, concessions and management units, they are highly relevant for business in terms of mitigating and avoiding risk from biodiversity loss and identifying opportunities associated with biodiversity conservation.

Socio-cultural value - IBAs focus on birds, one of the most accessible and popular groups of animals. They highlight internationally important biodiversity, often bringing sites on to the conservation agenda for the first time. For these reasons, IBAs are an important mechanism for engaging local communities in conservation. BirdLife Partners in over 100 countries around the world are working with a diversity of Local Conservation Groups (LCGs) to build local engagement and awareness of conservation, and to catalyse action for sustainable resource management. There are currently LCGs working with BirdLife Partners at around 2500 IBAs worldwide. LCGs take on a number of roles, including involvement with IBA management, monitoring, and where necessary campaigning against inappropriate and damaging development projects.

REFERENCES & WEBSITE

1. Birdlife International, website on Important Bird Areas
2. Birdlife International, global IBA criteria
3. Birdlife International, European IBA criteria
4. Birdlife International, Middle Eastern IBA criteria
5. Bertsky, B. et al. Protected Planet Report 2012: Tracking progress towards global targets for protected areas. (UNEP-WCMC and IUCN, 2012).
6. Butchart, S. H. M. et al. Protecting important sites for biodiversity contributes to meeting global conservation targets. PLoS One 7, e32529 (2012)



Falkland Islands (UK), IBA. Josh Anon/Shutterstock.com

Category:

Biodiversity designations

Related pages

Alliance for Zero Extinction sites (AZE) (Areas)

Important Plant Areas (IPA) (Areas)

Key Biodiversity Areas (KBA) (Areas)

Endemic Bird Areas (EBA) (Areas)

Tools

The Integrated Biodiversity Assessment Tool (IBAT) provides a visualisation and GIS download tool for areas important for biodiversity, including Important Bird Areas.

Links

Birdlife International

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