

# Empowering the Grassroots

*BirdLife, Participation, and  
Local Communities*



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## FOREWORDS

One of the BirdLife Partnership's most distinctive approaches is to support the emergence and strengthening of organisations at the site or community level, that share BirdLife's objectives, and are committed to site or species conservation. The 2000-plus Important Bird Area Local Conservation Groups (LCGs) reflect the diversity of culture, history, legislation and social norms in different places. This results in appropriate and effective responses that would be very unlikely to be achieved solely through externally managed interventions.

BirdLife Partners support their LCGs to varying extents and in different ways, from technical support for managing and monitoring sites, to helping communities win recognition of their basic rights. BirdLife's Local Empowerment Programme is helping LCGs and their communities to build the confidence, skills, knowledge, resources and rights that enable people to overcome obstacles, to make decisions, to improve their personal and collective circumstances, and to engage and inform the perceptions, actions and decisions of others.

The case studies in this book have been selected to show the diversity of ways in which LCGs are working with BirdLife Partners to help conserve what is not just internationally important biodiversity, but also locally important biodiversity. The approaches, like the challenges they address, are locally specific, but all share the common theme of people being empowered to take action for the environment at the places where they live.

**Paul Matiku – Executive Director of Nature Kenya**

Across the world, from Madagascar to Kazakhstan, and Armenia to Ecuador, experience shows local people are key to bird conservation. This lively and well-informed set of studies illustrates why working with the grain of local interests makes sense. Biodiversity management can sound a bit abstract, but it all becomes very real when you bring it down to earth. Birds hold a special place in the culture and imagery of many peoples, perhaps because they exercise such freedom in soaring through the air, a gift we can only dream of.

Bird species act as a vital indicator of broader eco-system health, and rare birds can be a huge source of local pride, as well as income through visiting birdwatchers. But there are also many intangible benefits brought by birds. For example, swallows in Mali are held in great affection by farmers, since a nest in the rafters of your house is considered a guarantee of a happy home. And the good fortune of a dozen pairs nesting more than compensates for the splatterings on the floor. As I write, I can see a pair of Long-tailed Tits flit between two silver birches and each sighting lifts my heart.

This booklet offers clear, well-grounded guidance on how to keep the joy of chattering and swooping birds and ensure the recognition, rights and responsibilities of local people lie at the centre of sound land management.

**Dr Camilla Toulmin – Director of the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED)**

## KEY MESSAGES

**Biodiversity is a global good - but experiences of nature, and the benefits that biodiversity brings to people, are mainly local. Biodiversity conservation has the potential to benefit us all, and regional and international initiatives for conservation are important. But much conservation action has to be focused on very specific places, and must involve local people.**

- ⇒ A local approach helps to ensure the appropriate application of local knowledge. It builds on the motivation of local stakeholders, enhances the prospects of sustainability, increases efficiency and legitimacy, empowers people, has the potential to reduce conflict, and respects people's rights.
- ⇒ At over 2,000 of the world's priority sites for bird and biodiversity conservation, local people are working with BirdLife Partners to help conserve biodiversity that is both locally and globally important.
- ⇒ Empowered through local organisations, people are:
  - (a) managing natural resources;
  - (b) linking biodiversity conservation to their own livelihoods and wellbeing;
  - (c) influencing local, national and international policy and planning decisions;
  - (d) standing up for their rights to a healthy environment;
  - (e) monitoring sites;
  - (f) providing information for effective decision-making;
  - (g) raising awareness of the value of local biodiversity; and
  - (h) building pride and identity linked to local wildlife.
- ⇒ BirdLife's structure, as a network of grassroots, national and local organisations, means that it is uniquely well placed among conservation NGOs to develop and support such local-level actions.
- ⇒ BirdLife's **Local Empowerment Programme** aims to provide more effective support for local conservation actions, and to strengthen and expand networks of local organisations.
- ⇒ Policy at national and international level should aim to provide the rights, opportunities, institutions and financing which will support local people to realise their potential to conserve locally and globally important biodiversity, improving livelihoods and enhancing wellbeing.

# 1. EMPOWERING THE LOCAL LEVEL

## Biodiversity loss, its impacts, and the need for a local response

Biodiversity loss is happening worldwide. The latest Global Biodiversity Outlook, published by the Convention on Biological Diversity, concedes that the 2010 target of significantly reducing the rate of biodiversity loss has not been met, and that the principal pressures leading to biodiversity loss are in some cases intensifying. The foreword by the UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, continues:

*“The consequences of this collective failure, if it is not quickly corrected, will be severe for us all. Biodiversity underpins the functioning of the ecosystems on which we depend for food and fresh water, health and recreation, and protection from natural disasters. Its loss also affects us culturally and spiritually. This may be more difficult to quantify, but is nonetheless integral to our well-being”.*

In an effort to address this failure, conservation initiatives are taking place at a range of scales, from global to regional to sub-regional to national, depending on the challenge. However, there also needs to be a local response<sup>1</sup> which empowers local people, recognises their rights and responsibilities, and which mobilises civil society at the local level. Although biodiversity is an acknowledged global good it is also, by its nature, profoundly local, existing (mainly) in specific places, where it is experienced and utilised by people living in and around or visiting those places. Biodiversity conservation has the potential to benefit us all, and global to national policy and strategy are important tools, but ultimately much of the required action has to be focused on very specific locations. In this way it is very different from the other big global environmental issue – climate change.

## Local organisations as an entry point for poverty reduction and well-being

Whilst the relationship between people and their local environment is important everywhere, it is especially significant for many poor people living in low-income countries whose livelihoods are directly connected to their environment on a daily basis. Global poverty is predominantly rural, with 70% of the developing world's 1.4 billion extremely poor people living in rural areas and having a high dependence on natural resources for their livelihoods<sup>2</sup>. For many of the rural poor, health, nutrition, education, shelter and resilience are linked to availability and rights of access to environmental resources.

People's relationship with their environment is always complex and locally specific – and

environment and development problems need to be designed in a culturally and environmentally appropriate way well-suited to the local context.

Organisations in which local people are the decision-makers and actors are most likely to understand this complexity and find solutions which combine conservation of the environment – and its goods and services – with local poverty reduction. Biodiversity and access to green, natural space has been shown to be important to people's wellbeing, in both developed and developing country contexts (Box 1), and local biodiversity is often key to local pride and identity.

<sup>1</sup> BirdLife understands *local* to refer to people who are directly connected to a site and its resources, through their livelihood, place of residence, culture or employment.

<sup>2</sup> IFAD (2011) *Rural Poverty Report 2011. New realities, new challenges: new opportunities for tomorrow's generation*. International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), Rome, Italy.

## Box 1: Biodiversity and wellbeing

It has been shown that<sup>3</sup>:

- ⇒ The environment supports substantial economic activity, and wildlife can generate significant benefits for local economies.
- ⇒ Our livelihoods and health rely on ecosystem services, and nature's products and processes.
- ⇒ Access to nature and green spaces improves people's physical and mental health, makes communities more attractive, and often contributes to local regeneration.
- ⇒ Education on the natural environment benefits current and future generations.
- ⇒ Locally, people take pride in their wildlife, especially if it is unique, and connections with nature are an important part of culture and identity.

These benefits accrue to the people who live in and around sites, and so local people are often strong, self-motivated supporters of conservation.

## Participation in conservation - the policy context

Participation has been described as the keystone of good governance<sup>4</sup>, and is now a requirement of many regional and international conservation and development conventions. For example, participation has been enshrined in the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, with reference to three inter-related pillars: access to information, participation in decision making,

and access to justice. It is also mentioned within articles of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) on sustainable use, traditional knowledge, the involvement of communities and the ecosystem approach (Box 2). By supporting local participation in conservation, BirdLife helps to support the implementation of such principles.

## Box 2: Examples of the principle of participation in international environment and development law

### Rio Declaration on Environment and Development (1992)

*Principle 10:* Environmental issues are best handled with the participation of all concerned citizens, at the relevant level. At the national level, each individual shall have appropriate access to information concerning the environment... and the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes.

### Convention on Biological Diversity (1992)

*Article 8(j):* Subject to its national legislation, respect, preserve and maintain knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities embodying traditional lifestyles relevant for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity and promote their wider application with the approval and involvement of the holders of such knowledge, innovations and practices and encourage the equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the utilization of such knowledge, innovations and practices;

*Programme of Work on Protected Areas, Programme Element 2:* Governance, Participation, Equity and Benefit Sharing. Goal 2.2: To enhance and secure involvement of indigenous and local communities and relevant stakeholders. Target: Full and effective participation by 2008, of indigenous and local communities...

### Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (1998)

*Article 1,* setting out the objective of the Convention, requires Parties to guarantee rights of access to information, public participation in decision-making and access to justice in environmental matters.

<sup>3</sup> BirdLife International (2007) *Wellbeing through wildlife in the EU*. BirdLife International, Cambridge, UK.

<sup>4</sup> Governance is the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented. The characteristics of good governance include that it is "participatory, consensus oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive and follows the rule of law" (*What is Good Governance?* United Nations, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. <http://www.unescap.org/pdd/prs/ProjectActivities/Ongoing/gg/governance.asp> Accessed on 11/02/2011).

Many of the root causes of biodiversity loss are local - local power structures, land owning patterns and inequities in the way costs and benefits are shared within and between communities. Likewise, many of the key decisions affecting resource management are made locally, and many of the changes needed to achieve conservation, relating for example to education and awareness, rules governing access to resources, and land-planning decisions, need to be delivered locally. Local organisations are likely to include people with a deep knowledge of the local environment,

who understand the social relationships that affect resource use and management. People's dependence on and attachment to their local environment means that they have a lot at stake when the benefits it provides are threatened, and are likely to approach problem-solving with a high degree of motivation. Therefore, conservation that is rooted in the decisions and actions of grassroots organisations has the potential to deliver a range of positive outcomes (Box 3).

### Box 3: Benefits of working locally

**Local knowledge** People living near or at a site often have an intimate knowledge of the local environment, and the management and use of natural resources, that can be critical in developing strategies for conservation or sustainable use.

**Motivation** Many local people are directly dependent on a site for resources, or the services it provides, including recreational, cultural and well-being benefits. It is they who are most affected if biodiversity is lost or a site is degraded, and they are therefore highly motivated to help ensure that the site continues to produce a sustainable supply of the benefits that they enjoy or depend on.

**Sustainability** Conservation takes place over the long term. Supporting the work of local organisations means conservation activities can be sustainable, and delivered by motivated and capacitated local people. This is especially important to avoid 'stop-start' actions driven by the time frames of project funding.

**Efficiency** Conservation involves complex relations between different stakeholders, resource users and decision-makers. Local individuals and institutions understand how to deal with this complexity.

**Legitimacy and avoiding conflict** When decisions and actions are led by organisations rooted in the community, this helps give social legitimacy to an intervention, and may help to avoid conflict. Many local organisations have a *de facto* mandate to represent the interests of the local community.

**Empowerment** Working at the local scale requires that people's rights to resources and participation be acknowledged, promoted and observed. It provides an opportunity to empower people to express their views. Institutional development at the local level is an avenue for empowering vulnerable groups such as youth and women, that are otherwise marginalised by society and are at the periphery of development priorities.

**Cost Effectiveness** Working locally provides an opportunity for investing wisely in need-driven initiatives that have a far-reaching impact for both conservation and livelihoods. More often than not, the limited funds reach deeper and wider targets at the local scale and avoid expensive bureaucracies.

**Universality** The concept of 'Localism' has been embraced in both developed and developing countries. For example, some northern governments are planning or implementing 'localism' bills, and many countries have decentralisation programmes which aim to devolve responsibility, including for environmental issues, to the local level.

As the examples that follow demonstrate, together these factors help improve conservation efforts in the long term. Conversely, not involving local communities can lead to interventions that are inappropriate, expensive, and not supported by local people, thus undermining conservation goals.



## 2. BIRDLIFE'S APPROACH TO WORKING LOCALLY

BirdLife is a global network of national civil society organisations, present in 116 countries, that is working for biodiversity conservation and sustainable development. Through a participatory process catalysed at national level, the BirdLife Partnership has identified over 10,000 sites of highest priority for bird and biodiversity conservation (Important Bird Areas – IBAs<sup>5</sup>).

Local empowerment, to conserve these sites for the benefit of biodiversity and for people, lies at the heart of BirdLife's approach. There is no single definition of empowerment, but it is basically about facilitating and supporting (not controlling)

a process through which people can take control and bring about positive change, for the benefit of environment and for themselves (Box 4).

BirdLife Partners work locally through their members (all BirdLife Partners are membership-based, civil society organisations), volunteers and supporters. The relationship is a mutually beneficial partnership, as national BirdLife Partners work with local people helping them to achieve their objectives and ambitions, and local stakeholders contribute their knowledge, experience and action to the conservation of globally important sites and species.

### Box 4: Local empowerment

BirdLife aims to **empower** local organisations and individuals so that:

- ⇒ They have the **skills, knowledge, resources** and **rights** to allow them to overcome obstacles, and show leadership when addressing local conservation issues
- ⇒ They have the ability to **make decisions** and **access information** and resources for decision-making
- ⇒ They have the ability to **learn** and **access skills** for improving their personal and collective circumstances
- ⇒ They have the ability to engage and **inform perceptions of others**, to be heard by others, and to **influence the actions and decisions** of others.
- ⇒ They have **confidence** in their own capacities, think positively about their ability to make change, and are able to take the initiative and **mobilise** to make change happen.

One of the most distinctive of BirdLife's approaches to working locally is to support, mobilise and empower networks of organisations and individuals, rooted locally, for the conservation and sustainable management of Important Bird Areas. BirdLife calls this its '**Local Conservation Group**' (LCG) approach. In practice the approach is hugely diverse – the structures, governance, membership, and specific objectives and activities vary depending on the local context. There are however a number of important characteristics of BirdLife's approach:

**Principles:** Through its work with local organisations, BirdLife aims to reflect the Partnership's values and principles as a network of open, democratic, membership-based organisations.

**Long-term engagement:** Relationships are entered into with the specific intent of making them long-term, rather than limited to a project time-frame. This reflects the long-term commitment of BirdLife Partners to the sites that the Partnership has identified as conservation priorities, and to the communities that use, depend on and appreciate the sites and their biodiversity.

**Networks:** The experience of BirdLife shows the value of linking people and institutions across scales and geography, to share resources and experience, and bring local voices to national and international decision-makers. LCGs form part of this networking approach, connecting local people nationally, as well as to institutions at national, regional and international level (Fig 1).

<sup>5</sup> IBAs are key sites for conservation – small enough to be conserved in their entirety and often already part of a protected-area network. They do one (or more) of three things: (i) Hold significant numbers of one or more globally threatened species; (ii) are one of a set of sites that together hold a suite of restricted-range species or biome-restricted species; (iii) have exceptionally large numbers of migratory or congregatory species. The IBA criteria are internationally agreed, standardised, quantitative and scientifically defensible.

## Strength in diversity and networks

There is no local standard for an LCG. Local communities themselves are not homogeneous, but have unique and diverse characteristics that make them special in their own right. LCGs reflect local and national economies, histories, culture and traditions, legal frameworks and the specific objectives of each organisation. This diversity is an immense strength that builds on the energy, creativity and innovation of LCG members to address local needs in context.

To name just some of the approaches that exist, LCGs include:

- ⇒ community-based organisations;
- ⇒ networks of individuals; resource user groups (for example fisheries cooperatives and tour-guides associations, where the members have a particular interest in the health of an IBA on which their livelihoods depend);
- ⇒ members of local branches of national organisations (that have an attachment to and take on responsibility for 'their' local IBA);

- ⇒ committees elected from the community (for example to govern the management of municipally owned community conserved areas);
- ⇒ community landowners (for example in the Pacific, where most forests are owned by communities);
- ⇒ mixtures of local government officials and community representatives (e.g. in Vietnam and Cambodia, where national politics require a greater role for government agencies).

As the number of LCGs in a country grows, it presents opportunities for LCGs nationally (and occasionally regionally) to work together, combining efforts to address national issues, supporting one another to deal with site-based concerns, and sharing experience, skills, information and resources (Box 5). This rapidly growing network is currently present at over 2,000 IBAs worldwide (Figure 1 and Table 1).



David Thomas

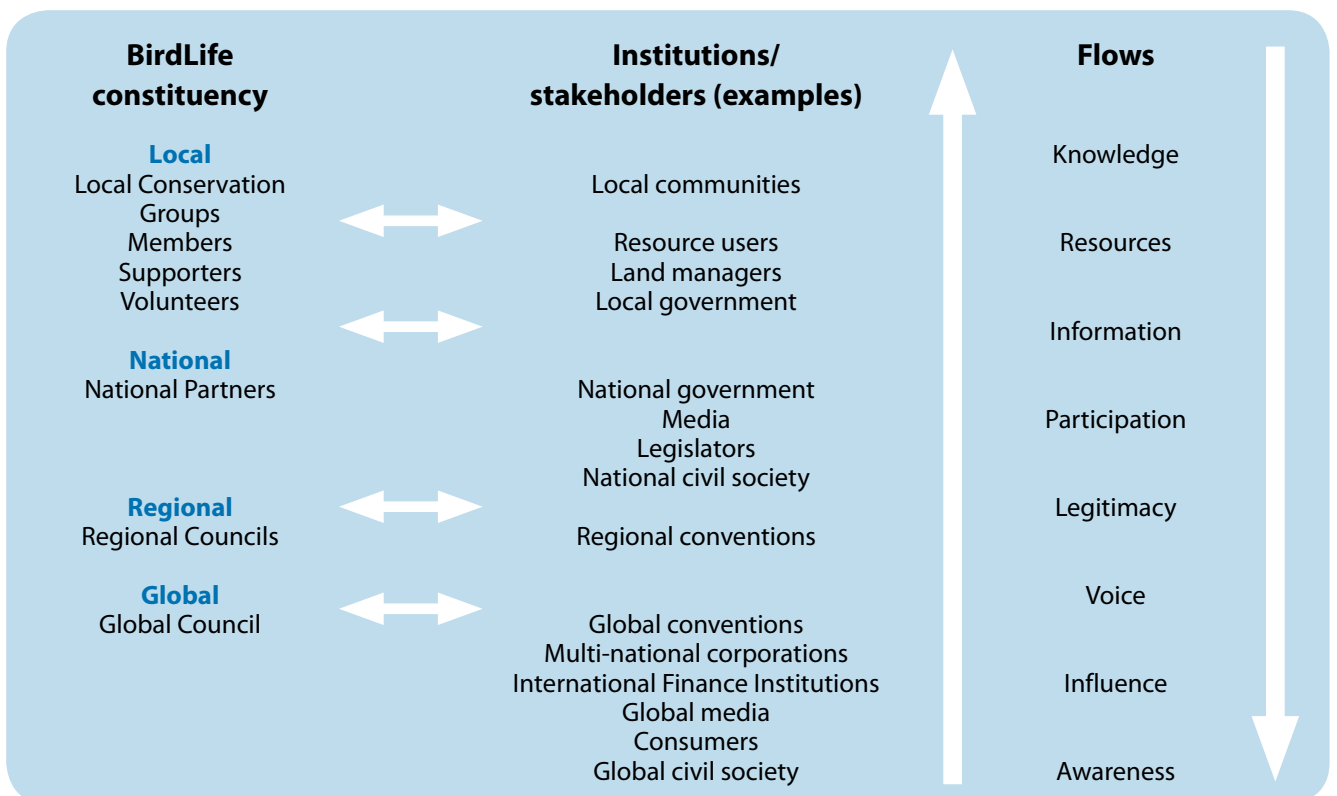
## Box 5: Connecting people: examples of local networks

- ⇒ In **Africa**, BirdLife Partners are working with over 200 LCGs (known regionally as 'Site Support Groups' (SSGs)) at IBAs, involving over 19,000 members. The objectives of many of these SSGs include integrating conservation, sustainable management of natural resources, and local development and poverty reduction – a reflection of the precarious economic situation in many African countries.
- ⇒ The **Bombay Natural History Society** (BNHS, BirdLife in India) is one of the largest membership-based conservation NGOs in India. In 1998, BNHS established the Indian Bird Conservation Network (IBCN). IBCN is now one of the leading membership networks in India, with about 700 individual members and 80 member organisations, who work at specific IBAs, or sometimes a network of several, promoting conservation through measures including education and awareness, monitoring, advocacy and sustainable use.
- ⇒ In **Europe**, BirdLife Partners have established national networks of IBA 'Caretakers'. How the Caretaker network is organised differs country by country. For example, the Danish IBA Caretakers network consists of 900 people organised into 151 local groups.
- ⇒ In 2005, BirdLife began to support the development of a network of civil society organisations with an interest in, and concern for, **China's** birds and the environment. Network organisations are now present in about 20 cities throughout China, where they are helping to raise awareness amongst civil society of the importance of China's birds, habitats and key sites, and the need for conservation action to address the threats that they face.
- ⇒ In **South Africa**, the local approach works at three different levels. BirdLife South Africa (BLSA) has a network of more than 40 Bird Club/branches and affiliates, with over 6,000 members, nationwide. This strong network of bird watchers has fast developed into a network of citizen scientists, assisting BLSA to assess and monitor its 124 IBAs. In addition, BLSA's Community Based Conservation Programme works directly with LCGs at IBAs to ensure better protection by linking social benefits to the continued conservation of a site. And finally, local Bird Guides, who originate from rural communities living next to IBAs, networked along tourist 'Birding Routes', provide a way of linking South Africa's reputation as a tourist destination with local economic development and job creation.
- ⇒ In 2007 **Aves Argentinas** (BirdLife in Argentina) launched an initiative to encourage local groups to contribute to environmental education, conservation management and monitoring of wild birds in Argentina. The Clubes de Observadores de Aves (COAS) are independent, voluntary groups of amateur birdwatchers, organised under their own rules, each led by a local environmentalist, and coordinated by Aves Argentinas. The network currently comprises 49 COAS, which support conservation efforts at 40 of the country's 47 IBAs.
- ⇒ In the **USA**, State Chapters of the National Audubon Society (BirdLife in the US) encourage bird clubs and other conservation groups to play a role in furthering the goals of the IBA programme. By adopting one or more IBAs, these local community groups provide much needed stewardship of the site, recruit volunteer Citizen Scientists for monitoring bird populations, and offer educational opportunities that help conserve the site. The activities taken on by each IBA Adoption Group are based on the skills and interests of its members, the conservation needs of the IBA in question, and the time and energy those members are able to commit. The US IBA Adoption Programme currently covers 280 sites, of which 17 are global-level IBAs.
- ⇒ In **Fiji**, the BirdLife International Fiji Programme and NatureFiji-MareqetiViti (potential BirdLife Partner in Fiji) have established Site Support Groups in three IBAs and two potential marine IBAs. These local community groups are democratically elected and play a proactive role in protecting the IBAs, including through the establishment of community-managed Protected Areas, the implementation of resource management plans, and development of income-generating projects to support community livelihoods.

Figure 2: IBA Local Conservation Groups worldwide



Figure 1: Connections between Local Conservation groups and individuals and institutions at national, regional and global scales



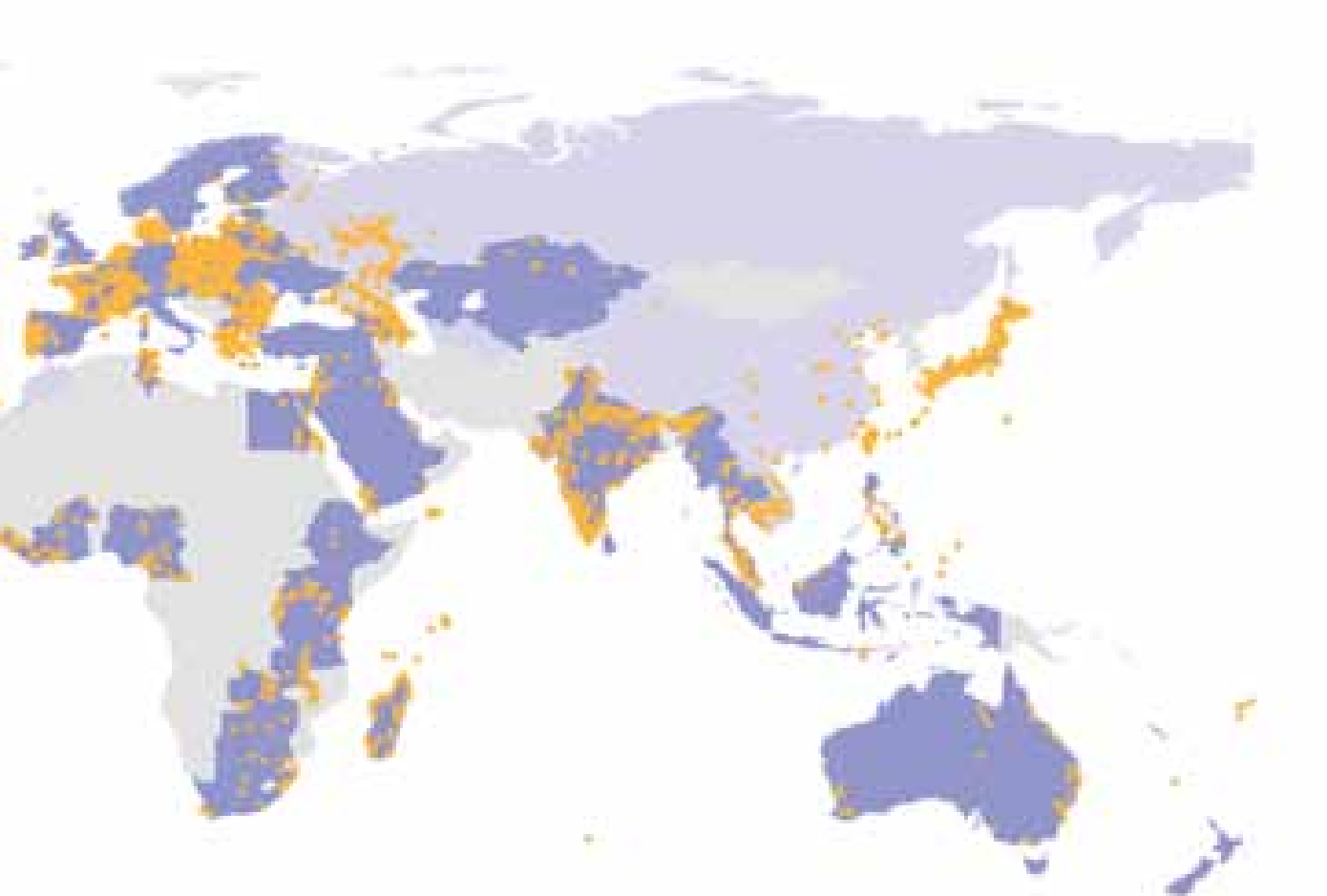


Table 1: Local Conservation Groups in different regions

Region	Number of IBAs	Number of IBAs with known LCG	Percentage of IBAs with known LCG
Africa	1219	239	20%
Europe	4659	1039	22%
Middle East	387	70	18%
Central Asia	344	7	2%
Asia	2373	605	25%
Pacific	432	38	9%
Americas	2237	300	13%
Antarctica	25	1	4%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>11676</b>	<b>2299</b>	<b>20%</b>

Note: Not all Partners have reported the LCGs with which they are working, therefore these totals under-represent the actual numbers active in each region and globally.

International linkages are also increasingly important to how LCGs work within a global community that shares a common global but differentiated local agenda. For many, today's technology helps to facilitate effective communication and the transfer of experience and resources, and increases their sense of belonging to a wider BirdLife community (Boxes 6 and 7). In this way the LCG approach helps to channel people's access to 'global civil society' and to ground the often abstract, global debate concerning biodiversity conservation. Preserving

the individuality and local response, while uniting a global civil society constituency around a common cause, is a central feature of BirdLife's approach.

First-hand experience also makes a difference and – when resources permit – BirdLife has supported exchanges between LCGs. Visiting communities that face similar challenges, and observing first-hand how they have tackled them, is a powerful tool for lesson-learning, capacity-building and network development in a wide range of contexts.

### Box 6: Connecting local groups across continents

Many birds that breed in Europe fly south in autumn to spend the winter in Africa, building a natural link for birds and birdwatchers between the two continents. Lake Oursi Important Bird Area (IBA) in Burkina Faso is located in the dry north, close to the border with Niger and Mali. The site is made up of a series of lakes interspersed with sand-dunes, grassland and stands of trees, and is very important for wetland birds. Since 2009, the Cambridgeshire Bird Club (UK) has been supporting the local Site Support Group, linked to Fondation des Amis de la Nature (NATURAMA, BirdLife in Burkina Faso), to undertake regular bird counts at Lake Oursi. <http://cbcoursi.blogspot.com>

### Box 7: Connecting local groups to local groups in 'real time'

Today's world of real time communications provides opportunities to connect communities in ways that have never previously been possible. Video-conferencing allows groups to talk and share experiences at little cost, building bonds, raising awareness of local realities and developing a shared understanding. BirdLife Partners' recent experiences have demonstrated the potential of this technology. A small number of Ghanaian school clubs are 'twinned' with school clubs in the Netherlands and Ireland. In November 2010, with support from the British Council, a 90-minute video conference was held in Accra between the Wildlife Clubs of the Sakumono Complex School and Glanmorran County High School in Ireland. The Sakumono Complex School is located at the edge of an IBA, the Sakumono Ramsar Site, where the school club studies the ecology of birds, particularly the Black Tern *Chlidonias niger* which winters there from Ireland. The coastal school in Ireland also looks after the welfare of birds including the Black Tern.



### 3. LOCAL ACTION, INTERNATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

#### Opportunities and Challenges

The case studies presented in this publication show the huge potential for local people and local organisations to deliver conservation and sustainable resource management in the places where they live. Links to national and international networks, and access to the world wide web, provide opportunities for local people to have influence at national and international level, and facilitate peer-to-peer sharing of knowledge and experience.

The need to empower local people has never been greater – international conventions won't conserve biodiversity or avert catastrophic climate change without the actions of local people, and the policies that such international mechanisms seek to put in place depend on the capacity of local actors to make a long-term and organised contribution to the planning, management and monitoring of natural resources. For example, many local and indigenous communities have been stewards of forests for centuries, and even under the economic and political pressures of modern times, community forestry and Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas have been shown to be effective and efficient at delivering multiple objectives<sup>6</sup>.

Within the challenging framework of climate change, for example, it is clear that policies for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD) must recognise the role of local people, and give local and indigenous people a just share in the responsibility and reward for forest conservation. There is considerable interest in Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) driven in part by The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity study (TEEB), and there is evidence to suggest that PES programmes will be more sustainable when they act to empower local institutions and reinforce intrinsic motivations<sup>7</sup>. Much of the response to climate change also needs to be local, and will be facilitated through empowered local organisations. For example,

ecosystem-based adaptation, advocated by many organisations including the World Bank<sup>8</sup> and UNEP<sup>9</sup>, works to apply the services and resilience of healthy, functional ecosystems to help people adapt to the adverse effects of climate change. It can be a cost-effective and sustainable approach, but is also one which often requires empowered local organisations to be effective.

BirdLife's Local Empowerment Programme focuses on building local capacity to address such local and global challenges. The following examples demonstrate the effectiveness with which people at many of the 2,000 Important Bird Areas (IBAs) where there are Local Conservation Groups (LCGs) have been able to deliver benefits for birds, biodiversity and people. But BirdLife Partners have also faced many challenges in their work with local organisations, and these should not be ignored.

These include:

- ⇒ Local priorities (e.g. for some forms of development) may not be compatible with biodiversity conservation. Finding common ground, and 'win-wins' on which to base a partnership between local stakeholders and the demands of national, regional and international conservation priorities, is not always easy.
- ⇒ Local communities are heterogeneous, with conflicting interests and unequal power relationships. Working with local organisations does not automatically solve the problem that some social groups may be marginalised and their voices rarely heard. Special efforts will be needed to reach such groups and individuals.
- ⇒ Local organisations may not be representative of the community as a whole, indeed it is more than likely that they represent a 'special interest group'. Therefore whilst they very often provide an important entry point to the wider community, they are not necessarily representative of the community.

<sup>6</sup> IUCN/CEESP (2010) *Strengthening what works: recognising and supporting the conservation achievements of indigenous peoples and local communities*. IUCN/CEESP Briefing Note number 10, May 2010.

<sup>7</sup> Tom Clements, Ashish John, Karen Nielsen, Dara An, Setha Tan, E.J. Milner-Gulland (2010) Payments for biodiversity conservation in the context of weak institutions: Comparison of three programs from Cambodia. *Ecological Economics* 69, 1283–1291

<sup>8</sup> World Bank (2010) *Convenient Solutions to an Inconvenient Truth: Ecosystem-based Approaches to Climate Change*. The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank, Washington DC..

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.unep.org/climatechange/adaptation/EcosystemBasedAdaptation/tabid/29583/Default.aspx>

- ⇒ Local organisations are particularly effective at addressing local issues but may be less well placed to deal with threats to local resources that have their root in decisions made at national, regional or international level.
- ⇒ In many countries, civil society organisations are looked upon with suspicion by government agencies, and laws and mechanisms for governance may not encourage a role for local civil society. Projects focused on enhancing local rights may be met with hostility by those who perceive their own interests and power to be threatened.
- ⇒ Many communities will lack the technical capacity for conservation, resource management and record keeping demanded by some agencies. Organisational and financial management experience may also be limited, whilst expectations arising from the presence of a national NGO may be high.
- ⇒ The LCG approach provides significant opportunities for local communities to enter global civil society. However, their impact is limited by factors such as lack of

communications technology at the local level in many developing countries, and lack of resources for people to travel and participate at meetings and conferences where they can put their views across directly.

- ⇒ BirdLife's approach is to acknowledge the diverse ways in which individuals organise themselves and address local environmental issues. Nonetheless, forming national networks and being part of a global Partnership means taking account of a shared strategic approach. Whilst collaboration towards a common cause is a strength, there is also a risk that local autonomy and individuality, characteristics which may have defined the organisation and its relationship with communities and 'place', can be eroded.

However, none of these problems are insurmountable, and it has been BirdLife's experience that it is worth the effort to overcome or navigate around them.



Glenn Ehmke



## Implications for donors and policy makers

It has been BirdLife's experience that, when given the opportunity, local organisations can play a significant part in the conservation of locally and globally significant biodiversity, while also improving livelihoods and enhancing wellbeing.

In order to support such efforts, policy makers and donors are urged to address the following priorities.

- ⇒ **Promote and strengthen the rights of local people to use, manage and benefit from local resources, and to have a say in resource management decisions.** Legal, policy and institutional frameworks are needed which empower people and establish the foundations for sustained conservation linked to local-level priorities and contexts.
- ⇒ **Facilitate the sharing and exchange of information, lessons and good practice.** There are plenty of good examples of the effectiveness and efficiency with which local actors can deliver conservation linked to local level objectives. Mechanisms are needed which promote the sharing of this experience and knowledge (especially from local-to-local), so that good practice can be spread, adapted and built upon, and its impact widened.
- ⇒ **Provide opportunities for local voices to be heard nationally and internationally.** Decisions affecting local people are often made nationally and internationally. It is important to ensure that the voices of local people are heard, listened to and respected at national and international forums.
- ⇒ **Build the capacity of local organisations to plan, manage, implement and monitor projects that address local priorities.** The capacity of many local organisations needs to be built so that they can meet their aspirations, and take on an effective role for environmental management within their communities.
- ⇒ **Provide finance that can be accessed and managed at the local level. Local organisations need financing tailored to local needs and capacities.** Often this means that it should be long-term, flexible in the way recipients can spend it, with simple (yet still rigorous and transparent) monitoring and evaluation, and allowing significant expenditure on core costs (especially staff) where needed.
- ⇒ **Build awareness of the benefits of local governance, and the complementary value and significance of tradition, culture and the role of local organisations; develop the skills for participatory processes, in national and local government and national NGOs.** Government staff at all levels need to understand the benefits of local participation and not see it as a threat. Government and national NGOs need training to build skills in participatory methods which foster a role for local people.
- ⇒ **Better integrate community efforts into formal development, education, and conservation sectors.** Sectoral policy (for the environment and other sectors) needs to formally recognise the important role played by community initiatives and people acting locally, and include measures which encourage and empower local actors.
- ⇒ **Recognise and make effective use of local resources and talents.** Government and donors often substitute local resources (especially human) and make assumptions that experts need to come "from outside". It is important to recognise the presence and value of human capital within local communities, as well as other available resources that the local community offers, and use these creatively and effectively. Sustainability will be enhanced through the use of local infrastructure, local services and employment of local talent, which needs to be motivated and energised rather than replaced.

## 4. EMPOWERING THE GRASSROOTS – BIRDLIFE’S VISION

BirdLife’s Local Empowerment Programme aims to provide more effective support for Local Conservation Groups, and to strengthen and expand networks of local organisations. The vision of the LEP is that ‘local organisations at critical sites for biodiversity are empowered to effectively conserve, manage and defend their sites, so that biodiversity values and benefits are provided locally, nationally and globally in the long term’.

BirdLife strongly believes that local people are part of the solution to the biodiversity crisis that the world faces today. Biodiversity is being lost at an unprecedented rate – as much as 1,000 times the ‘natural’ rate<sup>10</sup>. A recent analysis of indicators of the state of global biodiversity, and the pressures it is facing, finds that the situation has not improved in the last 40 years<sup>11</sup>. This loss of biodiversity has consequences, because biodiversity and its component ecosystems provide us with the goods and services on which we all depend. Whether we live in a town or a village, Panama, Poland or Pakistan, whether farmer, electrician or surgeon, a schoolchild, or retiree, our shared dependence on a living planet Earth means that it matters to everyone that biodiversity is being lost.

That loss is felt most acutely when the natural places and wildlife close to where we live are degraded or destroyed. People’s close relationship with their local environment, as a source of livelihood, inspiration, recreation or recuperation, means that they are often moved to act to save it – its future affects them directly. It is in their Back Yard. The phrase ‘Not In My Back Yard’ is often derogatory, denoting people with narrow, self-interested concerns. However, the world needs people that are prepared and empowered to stick up for their local environment.

As this document shows, this has been BirdLife’s experience all over the world, and at over 2,000 of the world’s priority sites for bird and biodiversity conservation local people are working with BirdLife Partners to help conserve what is not just ‘internationally important biodiversity’ but also locally important biodiversity. BirdLife’s structure, as a network of grassroots, national organisations, means that it is uniquely well placed among conservation NGOs to develop and support such local-level actions.

<sup>10</sup> Rahbek, C. & Colwell, R. K. (2011) Biodiversity: Species loss revisited. *Nature*, 473, 288-289.

<sup>11</sup> Butchart, S. *et al* (2010) Global Biodiversity: Indicators of Recent Declines. *Science*, 28: 1164-1168. (Published online 29 April 2010; 10.1126/science.1187512)

**Through the work of the BirdLife network of 117 national, membership based, civil society organisations, BirdLife aims to continue to:**

1. Increase the number of Important Bird Area (IBA) Local Conservation Groups (LCGs), to include all priority IBAs.
2. Grow the capacity of local groups to monitor and manage natural resources sustainably, helping them to achieve their own objectives for environmental management and for the benefit of future generations; and to build Partner capacity to coordinate and support sustainable national networks of LCGs.
3. Link local groups sub-nationally, nationally, regionally, and internationally, for effective learning and exchange of knowledge, information and resources.
4. Empower local organisations and individuals through the promotion of rights (tenure, policy and legal processes) which enable local access to, and responsibility for, environmental resources.
5. Provide sustainable resources for local group development, networking and action.

BirdLife's Local Empowerment Programme is focused on achieving this vision. To find out more visit: <http://bit.ly/se2H80>



## LOCAL CONSERVATION GROUPS IN ACTION: Examples from around the world

The case studies that follow have been selected to illustrate the scope of the work being undertaken by BirdLife's local partners at Important Bird Areas worldwide. They provide an overview of the range of activities, from monitoring (in Denmark and Poland) and conservation action (Madagascar, Armenia, Australia) to campaigns (Canada, Poland, South Africa), policy advocacy (Mexico) and planning (Ecuador). They demonstrate the diverse ways in which local people are organised, from networks of individuals (in Western Europe), to resource user groups (Uganda), to elected community organisations (Lebanon). But throughout this diversity there is the common theme of local people being empowered to take action for the environment at the places where they live.

(Clockwise from top): Jenny Birch, Itala Yepez, B Pandeya, Ted Chesky, SPNL





## Conservation action

People's local environment is important to them – it is the place where they live, work, rest and play. Especially in developing countries, communities living around Important Bird Areas (IBAs) will depend on them for their livelihoods. This creates strong attachment as well as dependence – factors that motivate local people to work together to conserve and protect the places near where they live.

## Madagascar: communities defend their forests



*Forest communities trained by Asity Madagascar have proved highly effective in policing violations of environmental law, such as illegal logging*

**When loggers began removing rosewood illegally from the Tsitongambarika forest IBA in the far south-east of Madagascar, local community organisations alerted BirdLife Partner Asity Madagascar. In a joint operation with police, local government**

**officers and Forestry Department officials, several trucks loaded with rosewood logs were seized.**

Evidence of the extent of illegal logging was provided by the local communities around Tsitongambarika, who supplied photographs and video material. Asity Madagascar has been working with these communities to develop sustainable ways of using the forest, which had been suffering encroachment from slash-and-burn agriculture.

In 2008 much of Tsitongambarika forest was given temporary protection by the Government of Madagascar, following consultations with all local communities and other stakeholders, and the development

of an interim management plan and governance arrangements.

Asity Madagascar has been working with 66 community-based organisations, training people to monitor the state of the forest, and working with local communities to address some of their development priorities, such as schools, bridges, improved water supplies, provision of fertilisers, and income-generating activities. For example, 180 people are now involved in bee-keeping, and 37 families in vegetable farming.

In each community where Asity Madagascar is working, an awareness-raising programme is followed by mapping with local communities, to zone the forest areas for different management

objectives, such as conservation, habitat restoration and sustainable use. This zoning is based upon existing community co-management agreements, negotiated between local communities and the government forestry service.

Once sensitised by the awareness-raising programme, local people are conscientious in meeting the terms of their community co-management agreements. Fourteen community-based organisations have agreed to plant 1,000 trees every year. Nearly 17,000 plants of 79 species have been

planted in 22 hectares of degraded habitat, and local people work with Asity Madagascar to ensure that the plants become properly established and are viable.

The next stage is to assist the communities to select and monitor key indicators of biodiversity and ecosystem health (such as abundance of key species, number of cut stumps per hectare, area burnt per annum). The results of the monitoring are then presented at community festivals, and validated by expert teams from Asity Madagascar.

More than 800 rosewood planks and 100 logs were recovered by the police operation, which followed a series of workshops for local authorities organised by Asity Madagascar, to increase awareness of the social, economic and environmental damage caused by illegal logging.

The success of this action demonstrates that given appropriate training, and incentives which enable them to see themselves as joint beneficiaries of protected areas, local communities can be highly effective in policing violations of environmental law.

## Gulf of Thailand: grassroots groups unite against unsustainable development

Chaiwat Chiruparawat; theworldsrarebirds.com



Thanks to grassroots action, Khok Kham, a vital wintering site for Spoon-billed Sandpipers, is on its way to Ramsar designation

**Fishing communities quickly grasped the link between the destruction of mangroves and the decline in their catch, and organised themselves into grassroots groups. BirdLife's Partner in Thailand showed them how to apply for international recognition of the importance of their site.**

One of the most important wintering sites for the Critically Endangered Spoonbilled Sandpiper

*Eurynorhynchus pygmeus* in the Inner Gulf of Thailand, Khok Kham, is on its way to Ramsar designation as a wetland of international importance, thanks to the work of Local Conservation Groups (LCGs).

Between 1979 and 1996, up to 90% of the mangroves along the Inner Gulf of Thailand were converted to shrimp ponds. But after ten years, the shrimp industry crashed. The decline in fish catch over this same period made many fishermen understand

the importance of mangroves, and that a balanced ecosystem is vital to their fishery.

As a result, a local grassroots environmental movement sprang up in the late 1990s. Bird Conservation Society of Thailand (BCST, BirdLife Partner) supported this movement from the beginning, with a programme that included frequent visits to schools and other venues by a mobile education unit. Little by little this helped to shape local attitudes, and there are now four LCGs, working with BCST on the conservation of the Inner Gulf.

At BCST's workshops, LCG members learned that Ramsar designation could be a defence against further unsustainable development.

Ramsar Site designation in Thailand is a bottom-up process, which can take place only when local communities see the benefits and commit themselves to safeguard their local wetland. The LCGs prepared a petition to Thailand's Minister of Natural Resources and the Environment, requesting that Khok Kham be designated a Ramsar

Site. Their petition was welcomed by the Office of Natural Resources and Environmental Policy and Planning (ONEP), the Ramsar Administrative

Authority in Thailand. The public consultation over designating Khok Kham as a Ramsar Site has been completed, and a letter

recommending the designation will be sent from the provincial governor to ONEP, for their endorsement.

## Australia: Friends of the Hooded Plover prepare to tackle bigger issues of coastal conservation

**Birds Australia's award-winning Beach Nesting Birds project has recruited local communities and land managers to improve the breeding success of the Near Threatened Hooded Plover *Thinornis rubricollis*.**

Endemic to Australia, the Hooded Plover acts as a flagship for serious coastal issues. "Hoodies" are an excellent indicator of healthy beaches, where recreation is balanced with coastal needs.

Before the Beach Nesting Birds (BNB) project was set up, annual surveys in Victoria showed that young birds only accounted for a small proportion of the population, suggesting that the greatest threat to this species was low breeding success. Unfortunately, the

species's breeding season coincides with the peak in the summer holiday season, when human presence on beaches is at its highest.

Continued poor breeding success could mean the loss of this species in eastern Australia. Birds Australia (BirdLife Partner) knew that the beach nesting birds would stand no hope if recovery efforts depended on a handful of professionals. Instead, they worked to set up an integrated and broad scale initiative which would include all coastal residents, land managers and beach-goers.

Birds Australia helped establish "Friends of the Hooded Plover" regional groups along the Victorian coast, at Far West Victoria, Mornington Peninsula, Apollo

Bay, Anglesea, Breamlea, Bellarine Peninsula, Bass Coast, Venus Bay, Port Fairy, Warrnambool, Cape Paterson, Rosebud, St Andrews and Sorrento. The BNB project delivered workshops to many of these groups on finding, monitoring and protecting nests.

Nest site management activities include targeting beach users in an education and awareness campaign, physically fencing and signing nest sites, developing signage for beach access points, fencing dune systems, controlling sea spurge, and using nest cameras to identify nest predators to provide advice for predator control.

Among the BNB project's achievements are the coordination and completion of the 2010 biennial count, with more coverage than in any other year. Results showed that the hoodie population in Victoria is now closer to 450 birds than 400, as in the 2008 count. The 2009/2010 season produced 60 fledged chicks, higher than any other season, showing that the project is working.

The Friends of the Hooded Plover groups will continue beyond the life of the project, to ensure the birds have a secure future. The groups are becoming self-sufficient, seeking their own grants, coming up with new ideas for community education, and tackling broader coastal conservation issues.

Glenn Ehmkke



*Hooded Plovers were failing to breed because of disturbance by holidaymakers. Coastal residents now actively protect the plovers, and their population is increasing*

## A 'Vulture Restaurant' in Armenia solves conservation and sanitation problems

**An IBA Caretaker is working with a network of local people to make livestock carcasses available for vultures, reviving traditional disposal practices which benefit both vultures and farmers.**

In Armenia, the recent decline in vultures has been shown to have been caused by the shortage of food in their natural environment. The decline is linked to economic changes, after the demise of the Soviet infrastructure resulted in over-harvesting and illegal killing of wild ungulates and other mammals. Shortage of food is also attributed to huge reductions in livestock numbers, which followed fundamental changes in animal husbandry. Traditional methods of above-ground disposal of livestock carcasses and other waste are no longer practiced.

One response has been to establish feeding places for vultures or 'vulture restaurants', where the carcasses and waste products of animals slaughtered on farms and by communities are put out for vultures. Vardges Gharakhanyan, a local Caretaker at the Noravank IBA, is working with the priest of the



Joachim S. Muller, flickr.com

*Armenia's Cinereous Vulture *Aegypius monachus* population fell from 50 pairs in the 1960s to six pairs in 2003. These birds all breed near Norovank IBA*

Noravank monastery to establish a vulture feeding place in the IBA. By mobilising local community members, they are trying to make sure that all animal waste is saved and made available for vultures.

The vulture restaurants will also resolve sanitary issues in Noravank and its neighborhood. Farmers are able to dispose of dead stock in the most practical way, reducing the potential spread of on-farm disease.

Vardges and his local Caretaker group have developed a network of local people who are willing to help. Pick-up of vulture food is arranged at weekends, to allow disposal of all animal waste that accumulates over the week.

Artificial feeding of vultures also has educational benefits, and perhaps in future there will be an increase in the number of tourists who visit the IBA to see these majestic birds.

## Community-led parrot conservation at Jaragua National Park, Dominican Republic

**A 'parrot trail', partly created and now entirely run by a LCG, is improving conservation prospects for the Hispaniolan Amazon *Amazona ventralis* in the Dominican Republic, and helping raise awareness across the border in Haiti.**

Parrots are familiar to most Dominicans – but as captive animals. By enabling visitors to see parrots

in the wild, often for the first time, the trail has raised awareness that 'pet' parrots are sourced from wild populations and from natural habitats which are both at risk.

A LCG from the borders of the Jaragua National Park IBA, Voluntarios Comunitarios de Jaragua (VCJ), was involved in every aspect of designing the parrot trail, with the help of Grupo Jaragua (BirdLife in

the Dominican Republic) staff and collaborating biologist Serge Aucoin. A brochure with a map and basic information on parrots and other wildlife that can be seen on the trail is provided to visitors. Following on-site training by Grupo Jaragua, VCJ members are equipped to lead parties of visitors without further outside help. The trail is now self-sustaining, requiring no more than occasional maintenance which VCJ



members are able to carry out.

Women constitute about half of the membership of VCJ, and the trail has been designed with children and young adults as a priority. The trail was tested by six groups of 15 to 20 children from the Grupo Jaragua Summer camp in July 2009, and also with a school group from Santo Domingo in May 2009. All the groups succeeded in seeing parrots,

and enjoyed their visit thoroughly. Children from Oviedo, Tres Charcos, La Colonia, El Cajuil, and even the Haitian town of Anse à Pitres, participated in the Summer Camp visit.

The experience, and the materials created, are now being shared with other LCGs in the Dominican Republic. The trail brochure can be accessed online through Grupo

Jaragua's web page ( <http://www.grupojaragua.org.do/documents/senderoCotorraBrochure4.pdf>)

Grupo Jaragua believes that the trail provides a learning and behaviour-changing experience like no other in the Dominican Republic, and has greatly improved the prospects for parrot conservation.

Yolanda León



*A school group from the capital learning from a biologist's during a field visit*



## Improving local livelihoods, reducing poverty

For all of us, our livelihoods and well-being are dependent on a healthy environment. However, poor people are especially reliant on the environment, and may depend on it for a whole variety of goods and services – food, fuel, medicine, shelter, fresh water. For poor people, sustainable management of their natural resources can also help to provide a way out of their poverty. Local organisations are important in supporting such livelihoods-environment linkages.

### Better incomes from a naturally productive ecosystem in Rwanda

**The communities around the Nyabarongo wetlands took advantage of government support for the establishment of cooperatives as a mechanism for development and poverty alleviation.**

The Nyabarongo wetlands Important Bird Area (IBA) is a series of marshes in the flood-plain of the Nyabarongo river, the longest river in Rwanda. The wetlands were being exploited unsustainably, leading to environmental degradation and increased poverty.

Working with the local community, the Association pour la Conservation de la Nature au Rwanda (ACNR, BirdLife Partner), has supported the development of a local cooperative, CEDINYA. By building the capacity of this institution, helping them to defend their resources against illegal use by outsiders, raising awareness of relevant legislation, providing training in the production of high-quality products made from materials harvested from the wetland, and helping to provide access to new markets, the project has benefitted both biodiversity and the local community.

Before the CEDINYA Cooperative was set up, the community had formed a Site Support Group (SSG) called the Inyange Club. This was a simple association without any legal status. The Rwandan government encourages the formation of cooperatives as a mechanism for development and poverty alleviation, and ACNR helped the community to use Rwandan law to establish the CEDINYA Cooperative as a formal association with a constitution and a bank account, which is registered at district level.

The CEDINYA Cooperative, which includes all the wetland users from the local communities, now sets sustainable targets for harvesting of wetland resources. Members have been trained to rotate their harvesting plots, allowing the papyrus to regenerate; previous studies have shown that papyrus can be harvested three times a year using this method.

The project provided training to 100 villagers (45 men and 55 women), producing a variety of handicrafts including baskets, plates and ceiling panels from papyrus and other wetland materials. Although some basket weaving was carried out before the project, products were generally of poor quality and fetched only low prices in local markets.

“Since the completion of this handcraft training, both the volume of sales and prices have increased”, said project coordinator Marc Ndimukaga. “Before the training, baskets were sold for \$2 to \$3, and they could not compete in national markets with baskets from other places.”

With the support of ACNR, which lobbied local government and other agencies, the CEDINYA Cooperative was able to expand its markets to include the town of Rwamagana and handicraft shops in the city of Kigali. The better quality baskets were able to command prices of up to \$10.

The project has helped stakeholders diversify their livelihoods, while maintaining and preserving Nyabarongo wetlands as a naturally productive ecosystem with high biodiversity. Using the income from handicraft sales, the cooperative members were able to get loans to invest in other activities for livelihood improvement, such as school fees, health insurance, better livestock keeping and agricultural improvements.

Since the cooperative was established, women and children have spent much less time gathering fuel wood from the wetlands. The women have used this time instead for income generation activities, such as weaving, while the children have been able to attend school more regularly.

The Inyange SSG, and subsequently the CEDINYA Cooperative, were fully involved in project planning, implementation and monitoring, and played a key role by providing the facilities for training. The income from handicraft sales means that they are no longer dependent on external funding, and members have now taken full charge of the cooperative's activities. Those who have been trained in managing the cooperative, in natural resource management, and in handicraft production, are training others in turn. The success of the project is encouraging people from the wider community to join the cooperative.

“The local community can see, and are part of, the changes taking place within their village,” said Marc Ndimukaga. “The implementation of the project has increased the confidence and problem solving capacity of the community. In the course of project implementation, the key element that made this initiative sustainable was the CEDINYA members’ realisation that their wetland conservation efforts would have a much faster and wider impact if they shared their knowledge with other villagers.”

The involvement of local government at district level has enabled the project to be integrated into government policies for poverty reduction and natural resource management, such as the Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy.



*The CEDINYA Cooperative includes all the people who use the natural resources of Rwanda's Nyabarongo wetlands. Their products are sold as far away as Kigali*

In 2008, CEDINYA members reported two cases of poaching of Sitatunga antelopes, and in collaboration with the local authority and ACNR, the poachers were arrested and reported to the police. No poaching cases were reported in the following year. Reed burning activities during the dry season have also diminished considerably since the cooperative has been operating in the area.

The reduction in pressure on the wetlands has significantly and directly contributed to the conservation of threatened species such as the Endangered Madagascar Pond-heron *Aldeora idae*, the Near-threatened Papyrus Gonolek *Laniarius mufumbiri* and the Vulnerable Grey Crowned-crane *Balearica regulorum*. The cranes in particular, which had disappeared after being illegally hunted for meat and for private collections, have returned to the marshes.

## Community-based natural resource management in Cambodia

**Since April 2006, BirdLife in Indochina has been implementing projects aimed at strengthening community natural resource management in Cambodia. Local Conservation Groups (LCGs)/ Site Support Groups (SSGs), involving people with an interest in conservation, helped engage the wider community to find ways of managing the use of the *trapaengs*, or seasonal pools, on which both wildlife and livelihoods depend.**

Cambodia's rural populations are heavily reliant on natural resources to support subsistence-based livelihoods. Small scale rice production and local fishing sustain a large percentage of the population, and forest products are relied upon to provide food and shelter.

BirdLife International in Indochina - Cambodia Programme (BirdLife Cambodia) has been working with the remote villages of Western Siem Pang (WSP) to improve natural resource management and support basic livelihood activities.

WSP is dominated by open deciduous dipterocarp forest. One of the most important features of the Important Bird Areas (IBAs) are the *trapaengs*, or seasonal pools. *Trapaengs* are a critical habitat for the area's biodiversity, and a significant element of traditional livelihood practices. Most people of this area depend on the water from *trapaengs* for their wet season rice cultivation and animal husbandry, and the *trapaengs* provide many non-timber forest products which are collected by

villagers throughout the year. After the final rice harvests in January, the *trapaengs* are increasingly used for foraging and fishing.

Once abundant, wild herbivores are now rare or no longer present in WSP. For generations, mammals used these pools to feed and wallow. Over time, the effect of trampling and wallowing by large, hooved mammals across the *trapaengs* has developed into a highly important ecological function. Grazing domestic buffalo and cattle now perform this important role, making the traditional livelihoods of local people integral to the conservation of WSP's threatened birds. But as the area develops economically, mechanised agriculture may replace traditional techniques using buffalo, and the beneficial

Bun Paing



*Trapaengs are a significant element of livelihoods in the remote villages of Western Siem Pang. Communities are working with BirdLife to ensure they are used sustainably*



*With the decline of large wild mammals, trampling by domestic buffalo helps maintain the seasonal pools known as trapaengs*

effect of buffalo grazing may be lost. The use of poison in both fishing and hunting is a major threat to wildlife. In January 2009, a monitoring team discovered a Giant Ibis *Thaumatibis gigantea* that had died from poisoning – this being one of the most threatened bird species in the world, and now only found in Cambodia, where it is the main attraction to visiting eco-tourists. Chemical bioaccumulation is also a health risk to humans.

BirdLife in Indochina helped establish community-based SSGs, comprising local stakeholders with a common interest in conservation. In many cases, their participation is voluntary and members become involved because of the economic, cultural, religious, recreational or livelihood benefits provided by the

site. Members come from a variety of backgrounds, and in some cases are former hunters who have traded their rifles for binoculars.

With assistance from the SSGs, community meetings were conducted with participants from seven villages. In 2006, over 200 community members attended meetings aimed at introducing new concepts of sustainable natural resource management. The majority of participants were hunters, fishermen or other forest product collectors.

Participants were concerned about the noticeable reductions in ecosystem services, such as reduced fishing yields, and there was a general consensus that natural resources were being diminished as a result of

human activity including agricultural land-clearing and general over-exploitation. As a result, there was a willingness to engage with BirdLife in sustainable resource management initiatives.

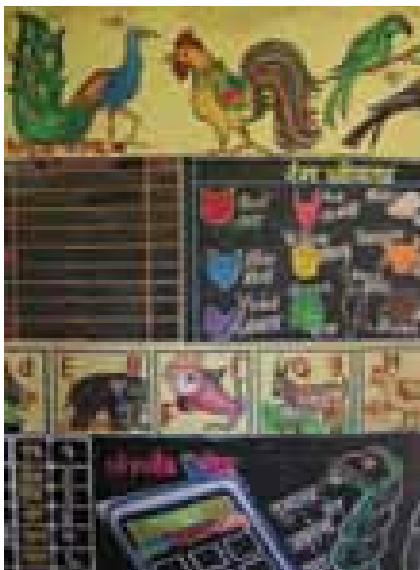
More sustainable natural resource use is being implemented through the development of a *trapaeng* Management Protocol. The outcomes aim to meet the needs of the community while ensuring the essential ecological functions of the *trapaengs* are maintained. Acts prohibited by the communities include the use of poison and contamination of *trapaengs* used for catching fish, pumping water from *trapaengs* or cutting trees around them, and making noise by using chainsaws near *trapaengs*.



## Education and awareness

Environmental education aims to increase people's knowledge and awareness of their environment and the challenges to managing resources sustainably. It also aims to foster attitudes, motivation and a commitment to responsible, informed action. Although they may lack any formal qualifications, local 'champions', leading by example and connected to the community, are excellent educators.

## India: IBA camps take environmental education to the next level



**The majority of Important Bird Areas (IBAs) in India are surrounded by human settlements, and raising awareness about these IBAs among local communities is crucial for their conservation. Local groups organise conservation education programmes for school and college students and residents, through field visits, slide talks, and exhibitions. Many local groups in India belong to the Indian Bird Conservation Network, set up by BirdLife Partner the Bombay Natural History Society to promote conservation of birds and their habitats through development of a national network of individuals, organisations and the Government.**

For the Nature Conservation Society of Nashik (NCSN), in Maharashtra state, the biggest threat to local bird populations is the killing of birds by catapult, for fun and target practice. The fundamental belief at NCSN is that, in terms of making a difference locally, nothing is really possible without education.

NCSN pays for and provides educational materials for children at local country schools. Many of the pupils at these schools come from very low-income families. The materials, such as posters, aim to teach the children about the birds around them, and the problems they are facing and why their numbers are declining. The children are able to

*Posters and paintings help children understand the problems birds face. Fewer children now engage in catapult hunting, a major threat*

identify species by their Hindi names, and know many details about them. The classrooms are decorated with paintings of birds, such as peacocks and drongos, and learning about local wildlife plays an important role in classroom teaching. NCSN say that this is having an effect on the children's behaviour, reducing the incidence of catapult hunting.

NCSN currently visit five local schools to engage in awareness-raising, but they admit this only goes so far. So

to take their education programme to the next level, they have built an education centre, situated on the edge of a large wetland. The centre has its own campground, where they bring groups of school children. Over a two-day visit, including a night's camping, children are taken to visit three IBAs: Borgad Conservation reserve, and two wetland areas.

"How can you explain what a wetland is like? You need to take the children there and show them", says Mr. Raha,

the head of NCSN, and Maharashtra state coordinator for the Indian Bird Conservation Network. "The sight of 20,000 wildfowl is something they don't forget!"

Asked what his future aims are for the education programme, Mr. Raha replies: "I want to have a hundred thousand children visit the sites and take part in our programme. It is important that they learn about the amazing place they live in, so they will take responsibility for it."

## Child-friendly conservation education in Fiji

**Games, comic strips and cheap but robust and colourful pocket guides are teaching the next generation of conservationists at Mount Nabukelevu IBA to use their forests sustainably.**

Mount Nabukelevu is the highest mountain on the Fijian island of Kadavu, with the largest area of montane forest in west Kadavu. It holds the four bird species endemic to Kadavu, and may still support nesting colonies of threatened seabirds. The lower slopes have been largely cleared for agriculture, but the top of the mountain remains untouched because of its rugged terrain and high rainfall. Unsustainable practices were causing degradation of agricultural areas, leading to further pressure to clear more forest. BirdLife worked with the local communities to identify problems, define potential solutions and develop appropriate skills. This led to the establishment of a Site Support Group (SSG), comprising representatives of land-owning *mataqalis* (family units), who wanted to manage their forest resources sustainably (see page 40, A Pacific approach to forest conservation)

The Mount Nabukelevu SSG decided to involve young people, and particularly school children, in their

conservation efforts. Educational tools aimed at the children of Kadavu include a cheap but robust and child-friendly pocket guide to Kadavu's birds, and a comic strip giving information about the value of forests, ecosystems, birds and biodiversity in an easily understandable form. Both are published in the local language. The comic describes practical alternatives to the practices currently degrading Kadavu's forests, including the importance of sustainable management for soil conservation, food security, water quality, climate change, biodiversity and non-timber forest products. The guide and the

comic have been distributed to all the primary schools in Kadavu.

Eco-camps were held during the term breaks, complete with games, bird identification training, quizzes and nature walks for the children of the three primary schools in the Mount Nabukelevu area. Nature clubs and school-based nature programmes have been set up at each of the schools, and the children are involved in a tree-planting programme focusing on the degraded areas of the forest. These activities will be rolled out to other schools on the island if further funding can be obtained.



Tuverea Tuamoto

A field guide to birds, written in the local language, has been distributed to all the primary schools in Kadavu

## Conservation on the curriculum in China

**Bird monitoring groups set up in Wuyuan, Jiangxi Province, China, with the support of BirdLife Partner the Hongkong Birdwatching Society, have succeeded in putting bird conservation on the educational agenda in schools.**

The project aimed to raise public awareness of birds in Wuyuan by organising a school education programme, and to engage students in conserving birds, especially the Blue-crowned Laughingthrush *Garrulax courtoisi*, through bird monitoring work around their schools.

Six schools located near key Blue-crowned Laughingthrush breeding sites were selected for the project. Tai Bai Town Center Primary School, Yutan Primary School, Caomen Primary School and Qiukou Secondary School are in remote villages, and Tian You Secondary School and Ziyang Secondary School are in Wuyuan city.

Bird monitoring groups were established in the schools in 2009, and these groups helped to run birdwatching talks in each school in October 2010. More than 300 students attended the talks, which also helped school science teachers to improve and enrich their school courses, with more emphasis on bird conservation and local biodiversity.



Vivian Fu

*Schoolchildren in Wuyuan City share their birdwatching experiences with passers-by*

After the birdwatching talks, many more students became interested in joining the bird monitoring groups, and taking part in the weekly bird monitoring around their schools. They were shown how to observe the birds and make scientific records of bird behaviour. They were also encouraged to communicate with their group-mates and their families about their birdwatching sightings.

A booklet about the common birds of Wuyuan which includes photos of 100 bird species by local photographers has been produced, and 4,000 copies printed.

An awareness-raising event was held in a pedestrianised street in

Wuyuan city. Members of the bird monitoring groups from the schools participated in introducing birds and birdwatching to the public, and distributed the booklet. The students also enthusiastically shared their experiences of birdwatching with passers-by.

As a result of the project, the Department of Forestry will now work together with the Department of Education on more local school conservation programmes. School teachers are enthusiastic, and willing to keep running birdwatching activities in the future.

### Fujian Birdwatchers take Chinese Crested Tern message to schools

With an estimated population of not more than 50 birds, the Critically Endangered Chinese Crested Tern *Sterna bergsteini* is one of Asia's most threatened birds. The greatest threat to the tern's survival is egg collection by fishermen for food, which continues even though the only known breeding sites on the Mazu and Jiushan Islands, off the coasts of Fujian and Zhejiang Provinces respectively, are both within protected areas.

With support from the BirdLife/Hong Kong Bird Watching Society China Programme, a grant was secured from the Hong Kong Ocean Park Conservation Foundation, which has enabled the Fujian Bird Watching Society to continue its surveys of Chinese Crested Tern, and to try to locate undiscovered breeding colonies. The project also conducted education and awareness work in schools and local communities around the known tern sites, and raised awareness of the need for strengthened law enforcement and other actions among local government and other stakeholders in Fujian and Zhejiang Provinces.



## Bird clubs lead to conservation careers in Central Asia

**A network of student bird clubs filled the gap left when professional conservationists and researchers emigrated after the break-up of the Soviet Union. Now a new generation of professionals is emerging from these clubs.**

Since 2007, the BirdLife Partners the Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity of Kazakhstan (ACBK) and the Uzbekistan Society for the Protection of Birds (UzSPB) have been developing and supporting a network of university student bird clubs across their countries.

Training more than 150 members of these clubs in bird identification and monitoring, the principles of conservation, and advocacy and communication, is essential to building a new generation of conservationists in Central Asia. After the break-up of the Soviet Union, many experienced researchers and conservationists were forced to emigrate in search of employment,

which led to an almost complete cessation of research and monitoring. The growing network of student bird clubs has now established an effective and enthusiastic base from which to develop a strategy for conserving Central Asia's rich natural heritage.

The NGOs provide all the necessary equipment, including binoculars, telescopes, cameras, field guides and scientific literature, tents and GPS devices, and organise training, summer camps, conferences and scholarships for study abroad. In turn, the students have the opportunity to assist ACBK and UzSPB by participating in conservation and monitoring projects.

Since the establishment of university bird clubs, more than 60 students have been involved in research projects, such as the Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius* Project, and the Altyn Dala Conservation Initiative, a large-scale project to

protect steppe and semi-desert ecosystems and their key species in Kazakhstan. Three hundred volunteers across both countries provide their observation data to the NGOs.

Students have been trained to raise funds and implement their own projects on the ground. The seven clubs in Kazakhstan and five clubs in Uzbekistan regularly monitor 'their' IBAs and work with local people, landowners, farmers, and fishing and hunting associations, to develop action plans for the IBA. They also raise awareness among local communities and school children, to protect their biodiversity-rich surroundings.

The network encourages members to maintain their interest in bird conservation, and helps to place them in relevant careers. Six former members of Kazakh clubs now work for ACBK, and two members from Uzbekistan are employed by UzSPB.

Edith Koshkin



Students in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are trained in bird identification and monitoring. The national BirdLife organisations provide the clubs with binoculars and other equipment



## Empowerment and organisation

As managers and users of natural resources, local people have an important stake in site management, and the sustainable delivery of a continuous supply of ecosystem goods and services. Supporting strong local institutions is an important route for empowerment – by building technical capacity, organising for influence over decision-makers and markets, networking for effective exchange of information, and training and recognition of knowledge and skills.

### From transient community to local tax committee in Uganda

**The Musambwa islands Important Bird Area (IBA) was used by a poorly organised and transient community of fisherman. Traditional norms on the use of natural resources had broken down, poor access to technology and the capital to invest in it led to waste and high costs in the handling and marketing of catches, and water-borne diseases were rife because of the lack of sanitation. With the help of BirdLife Partner NatureUganda, the fishing community has set up a local organisation, Musambwa Islands Joint Conservation Organisation (MIJCO), which represents them at district level, and ensures that some of the taxes they pay are invested in the community. Use of**

**simple and affordable technology has reduced waste and costs and improved incomes, bye-laws on collection of gulls eggs and wood are enforced and respected, and better sanitation has reduced water-borne diseases by 95%.**

The Musambwa Islands in Lake Victoria, Uganda, are used as a base by a fishing community of about 160 people, allowing them to access the deeper waters of the lake. The islands also hold the largest breeding colony of Grey-headed Gull *Larus cirrocephalus* in Africa.

One of the island's major environmental and economic problems was the limited availability of wood for smoking fish, to preserve

it while awaiting transport to the mainland. There were also problems of unsustainable fishing and harvesting of gull eggs. Traditional practice was to harvest only one egg from a nest containing two or more eggs, but as a result of the transient nature of the island community, coupled with inadequate environmental awareness, these traditional rules and practices had broken down.

Sanitation was completely lacking, which meant that the incidence of diarrhoea and other water-borne diseases was very high.

The fishermen had no organisation, and so NatureUganda supported them to establish

a Local Conservation Group (LCG) (Musambwa Island Joint Conservation Organisation—MIJCO) and worked with them to solve the linked environmental and socio-economic problems in the area. This Joint Conservation Organisation brought together six groups to form one with a unified vision.

First, however, to address the urgent sanitation problems, an ecological latrine facility was installed, and the community was shown how to maintain it. Use of this facility is now almost universal, and the incidence

who transport the local fish to the Ugandan capital, Kampala. This has been a huge success, greatly reducing the need for fuelwood and the loss of fish catch through deterioration, and cutting the number of trips to the mainland (a major cost) from five to two per week. Fishermen’s incomes have increased by 18.5%, and now that wood within the island is no longer being cut to fuel the kilns, the vegetation cover on the islands is being maintained at around 82%. The division of the island into zones, 70% conservation, 10% tourism and 20% “green sensitive” residential,

colony of the Pink-backed Pelican *Pelecanus rufescens*. MIJCO members introduced the community at the pelican colony to sustainable conservation. Here, only pelicans that have fallen from the nest are allowed to be eaten. A fine of 50,000 shillings is levied from offenders.

What is more, MIJCO has been empowered to sit on a ‘transparency committee’ looking at how local taxes and other funds are used by local government. Community members had complained that although they paid their taxes, local government was not providing any services in return. On behalf of the community, MIJCO met local government officers, who agreed that they could hold back the tax percentage that was supposed to come back to the community. Not only has this ensured that taxes collected locally do actually provide local benefits, but it also allows the local community much more control, and a greater voice in decisions on how taxes are spent. The money is used for such activities as maintaining the community boat, repairing the latrines, and managing the island’s habitat.

MIJCO has been registered with the Rakai District local government community development department, which has provided members with identification cards to help in implementation of the Musambwa Islands bye-laws and other national biodiversity laws. A committee member of MIJCO has been formally accepted on the district tourism committee, to guide tourism development.

While many environmental and economic issues at Musambwa remain to be resolved, the empowerment of a local organisation has provided an institutional basis for sustained, locally driven and locally relevant processes to continue in the long-term.



Henry Seguya Kizito

*Using ice boxes instead of smoking kilns means Musambwa’s fishermen preserve and sell more of their catch. With no need for wood to fuel the kilns, the island’s vegetation is regenerating*

of water-borne diseases has dropped by around 95%. Friday has been earmarked as general cleaning day, and the uncontrolled use and disposal of polythene bags has been curbed.

NatureUganda investigated the possibility of improving the efficiency of existing smoking kilns. However, this was not found to be very cost-effective, and would only partly address the problem of the very limited availability of wood transported from the mainland. Instead they developed a system whereby the fishermen could pack the fish in ice boxes, using ice supplied by the fish exporters

has greatly helped in maintaining vegetation cover.

Bye-laws on egg harvesting and disturbance of the breeding bird colonies have been agreed, and are generally observed. The number of gulls breeding on the island increased from about 33,000 when the project started, to nearly 100,000 by its end, and remains around that average. The gulls, previously confined to the smaller of the islands, have returned to the main inhabited island. The zero-tolerance bye-law on egg collection has successfully contributed to this result. The concept was scaled up to include the mainland breeding

## Self-regulation leads to new livelihoods opportunities at Lake Chilwa, Malawi



David Thomas

*Lake Chilwa supports the livelihoods of about 60,000 people. Self-regulation of waterfowl hunting at the lake is working well, and hunters are earning extra income guiding tourists*

**After commercial exploitation made levels of wildfowl hunting unsustainable, 20 hunting clubs were created around Lake Chilwa. Controls agreed with the members have been written into bye-laws, with a framework of fines which are enforced locally, and which contribute to community projects.**

Lake Chilwa, a shallow lake of about 700 km<sup>2</sup> bordered by swamps and seasonally flooded grassland, is very rich in fish, and supports the livelihoods of about 60,000 people. It meets IBA criteria mainly because of its large congregations of waterfowl. Hunting these birds has long been part of local livelihoods, but large-scale commercial exploitation started in 1996, when the lake dried up and the fishery collapsed.

This ability to shift between resources is an important dimension of the resilience of people dependent on natural resources and living in an uncertain environment. But a survey

in 1998/99 estimated that over a million waterfowl had been taken following the drying of the lake, a level that appeared unsustainable. The response of BirdLife Partner the Wildlife and Environmental Society of Malawi (WESM) was not, as might have been expected, to seek a ban on bird hunting, but to find a way to give communities the responsibility and capacity to manage their resource sustainably.

A revision of Malawi's Wildlife Act allows Community Conserved Areas to be established. Under the management of WESM's Zomba branch, 20 hunting clubs have been created around the lake, with representatives elected to an umbrella body. WESM worked with the clubs and local government to reach an agreement on measures such as a closed season, no-hunting zones, and licensing and bag-limits. These have been written into a bye-law, with a framework of fines and measures for dealing with infractions.

Importantly, the whole process operates at the local level – offenders are dealt with by traditional chiefs, and fines contribute to community projects like repairing bore-holes and improving school buildings.

So far the system is working well, and the regulations seem to be respected. The hunting clubs are now looking at ways of diversifying their livelihoods. They are earning extra income by guiding tourists, and with WESM's help, have developed a tourism business plan. The hunters also carry out bird censuses four times a year, in January, April, July and October.



## Supporting rights

Experience has shown that given rights and responsibilities over natural resources, local people can be effective stewards, managing biodiversity effectively both for local economic benefit, and to meet national or international conservation objectives. Many BirdLife Partners are working with Local Conservation Groups, supporting them in their claims to rights over land and resources, and working together to meet shared objectives.

## The *hima* revival in Lebanon combines well-being with conservation

**Faced with the challenge of reconciling site conservation with the resource-use rights of local people, BirdLife's Partner in Lebanon has revived the traditional *hima* system. An increasing number of communities in Lebanon are joining the *hima* revival, and taking on the responsibility of managing natural resources and biodiversity at their local Important Bird Areas (IBAs).**

SPNL (the Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon) helped develop the first protected areas in Lebanon in the 1990s. In the years since then, the BirdLife Partner has worked with Lebanon's Ministry of Environment to set up the management scheme

for the protected area system, to raise local and national awareness, and to diversify local livelihoods and increase incomes and employment around the sites. Working with the NGO A Rocha Lebanon, SPNL has identified 15 IBAs in the country.

Initially, Lebanon's Ministry of Environment favoured designating all sites on governmental land Nature Reserves, which calls for them to be maintained exclusively for conservation. This provoked opposition from communities who were used to benefitting from the natural resources of the sites, and as a result, protection was difficult to enforce.

SPNL realised that complementary, community-based approaches which respected the rights of the owners and users of the sites would be required for IBAs on municipal, tribal or private land. A culturally appropriate alternative already existed, although in Lebanon, as elsewhere in the Middle East, it had fallen into disuse during the latter half of the 20th Century. So in 2004, SPNL began to revive the *hima* system.

The Arabic word *hima* can be roughly translated as 'protected place'. The pre-Islamic *hima* was devised as a way of managing tribal lands, but often fell under the control of tribal

chiefs and other powerful people, who abused the system to their own advantage. The Prophet Mohammad transformed the *hima*, laying down the rules by which it came to be one of the essential instruments of conservation in Islamic law. For over 1,400 years, the *hima* system enabled natural resources such as grazing land, woodland and water to be used sustainably, meeting the needs of local communities and, indirectly, helping conserve biodiversity. Its use extended from Central Asia to North Africa.

In Lebanon, the word '*hima*' resonates more positively for local people than the word '*mahmiyah*', which is used to describe the conventional protected area. The word *hima* is deeply rooted in the collective memory, and associated with a way of life without which survival would not have been possible. People are conscious of the *hima*'s focus on human well-being, rather than the exclusionary wildlife conservation approach.

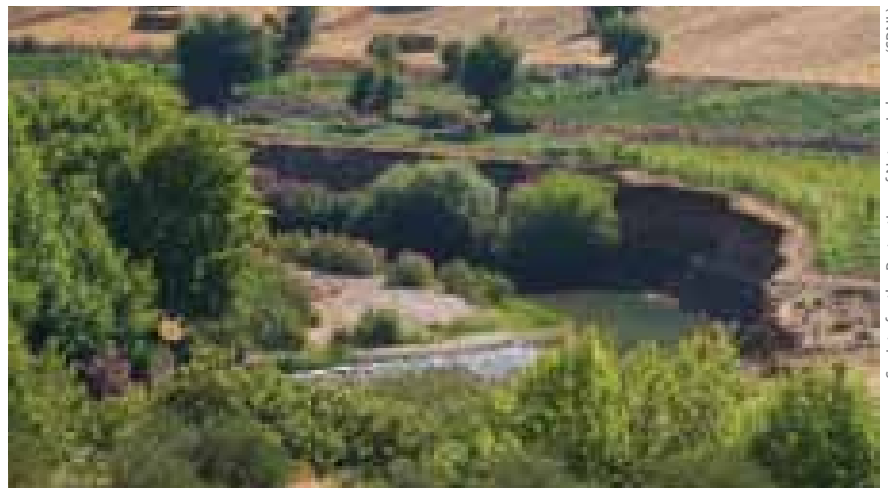
In reviving the *hima*, SPNL aims to mesh traditional practices with modern conservation science to achieve sustainable development. SPNL has so far re-established six *himas*, in four sites: Ebel es-Saqi in South Lebanon, the Qoleileh/ Mansouri coastal area, Aanjar/Kfar Zabad wetland in the Bekaa region, and Upper Akkar in North Lebanon.

Although the Local Conservation Groups (LCGs) at each *hima* are separate entities, with different kinds of membership, motivations and approaches, they share experience through exchange visits and meetings, which have attracted interest from other communities, leading to the establishment of new *himas*.

At Ebel es-Saqi, following extensive community consultations, the municipality agreed to declare the site a *hima*, and banned hunting in the IBA. An LCG was established,

consisting of male and female volunteers aged between 18 and 35, with an interest in birds and sustainable use of natural resources. They were trained in bird identification, guiding techniques and recreational area management. A management plan for the site was developed in consultation with community members, and a committee has been selected by the community to oversee the management of the *hima*.

After attending the bird festival at Hima Ebel es-Saqi, the municipality of Kfar Zabad invited SPNL to advise on managing their publicly owned wetland as a *hima*. As a result, the wetland has been transformed



*As the hima system helps restore important natural resources like this wetland, more communities are seeking advice about managing their lands as himas*

from a dump site for the village to a recreational spot for local people, and an important water resource for surrounding agricultural lands. The LCG has around 20 members, mostly aged between 18 and 30.

In turn, Kfar Zabad LCG members were able to share their knowledge and experience with the environmental committee established by the nearby village of Anjar, and the two villages have developed a productive collaboration, based on common concerns related to their shared wetland resources. SPNL is now trying to involve older people in the LCG, since they are less likely to leave

the area than the young, university-educated founder members.

The community at Qoleileh was left damaged and traumatised by the war of 2006, which caused death and injury, as well as the destruction of 3,500 houses, and infrastructure including roads, electricity and the drinking water supply. SPNL became involved with the community when it provided an emergency drinking water treatment plant for the village. Local fishermen, who had lost their boats in the war, had begun in desperation to use dynamite to catch fish, and SPNL obtained a grant which paid for two new fishing boats. After open public meetings, the *hima* project received the full

and enthusiastic backing of the community. Management of the *hima* is based on an agreement between SPNL and the municipality for the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources. SPNL helped to establish an LCG, and employed them in the rehabilitation of a building left by the United Nation forces, which has been converted into a storage area for the fishermen's equipment and a visitor centre. Fishing and land rights have been fairly allocated, and the fishermen, who have received training in seabird identification, monitor birds and keep the shore clean. Women have received training in visitor hosting and food-making

skills, giving them a source of income and a more active role in the community. The LCG members patrol and monitor the site, and report both to SPNL and the municipality.

Following the success at Qoleileh, the neighbouring municipality of Mansouri expressed its desire to adopt the *hima* approach, and the Mansouri coast has now been added to the list of *himas*.

In Upper Akkar, the entry point for soaring bird migration to Lebanon, SPNL succeeded in acting as a mediator and resolving an old conflict between the Jaafar tribe and the Qobayyat municipality. The conflict had followed the declaration of Karm Chbat forest as a Nature Reserve by the Ministry of Environment, without consultation with the local community. SPNL established a local committee for the sustainable management of the Upper Akkar region that includes



Society for the Protection of Nature Lebanon (SPNL)

*Himas combine modern conservation science with respect for the traditional rights of the people who use them*

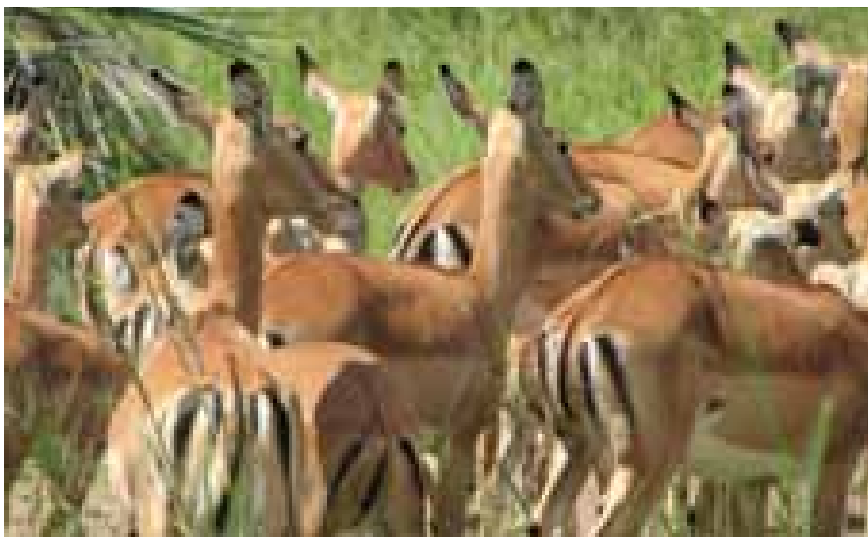
representatives from the Jaafar tribe, municipalities, and local conservation NGOs working in the region.

SPNL finds the LCG approach has a number of benefits, especially reducing the workload of SPNL staff by increasing the ownership of conservation action at the local level. Now SPNL is hoping to gain stronger

support for the *hima* practice as a sustainable and culturally appropriate alternative in Lebanon and beyond. Lebanon's government has adopted the *hima* concept in a new national draft law for protected area conservation, while with a founding donation from Her Highness Shaikha Jawaher of Qatar, a fund has been established to support the revival of the *hima* system across the Middle East.

## Benefit-sharing turns poachers into conservationists in Malawi

David Thomas



*Liwonde National Park was a 'foreign place' to surrounding communities. Now they see the wildlife, like these Common Impala, as their own*

**Denied legal access to natural resources, the communities around Liwonde National Park took what they could from it. With a new**

**benefit-sharing arrangement, they are set to become partners in the conservation of the park's biodiversity.**

Liwonde National Park, a system of Rift Valley flood-plain habitats with associated woodlands on higher ground, was gazetted in 1973. It protects the catchment of the upper Shire River and regionally important game populations, including elephant *Loxodonta africana*, Lichtenstein's hartebeest *Alcelaphus lichtensteini* and sable antelope *Hippotragus niger*. It has over 380 bird species, and is an important site for the Near Threatened Lilian's Lovebird *Agapornis lilianae*.

The park's creation can be attributed to the initiative of local people. Chief Liwonde was largely responsible for initiating the protection of the area. He was concerned with the declining wildlife in the area, which led to the declaration of a controlled area in

1962, followed by the gazettelement of the park in 1973.

Although the park quickly became one of Malawi's most popular tourist venues, the impact on local people's access to resources was not considered. The Department of National Parks and Wildlife will allow the occasional collection of fuelwood for use at funerals, and grass and bamboo for thatching, but little else can be removed. With no incentive to support conservation, people took what they could. According to Park Manager Samuel Nyanyali, "everyone was a poacher – the only people benefitting from conservation (in the minds of the local people) were tourists".

Comments from the community revealed the gap that had grown between themselves and the park on their doorstep. "We want to see the animals in the park from time to time! At the moment we only ever see the occasional elephant when it strays out of the park and destroys

our crops. The park is a foreign place to us."

In the year 2000, recognising that the system was not working, Malawi's Department of National Parks and Wildlife, supported by BirdLife Partner the Wildlife and Environmental Society of Malawi (WESM), revised the wildlife policy and accompanying act to embrace collaborative management as one of the strategies for management and utilisation of wildlife resources in Malawi. Collaborative management involves the sharing of accountability and decision-making, as well as the costs and benefits, between all interested parties.

WESM supported the formation of the Upper Shire Association for the Conservation of Liwonde National Park (USACO), representing 31 villages bordering the park. The villages formed Natural Resource Committees, which elected representatives to USACO. Because of the dense settlement

around the park, sustainable resource extraction from the park wasn't viable. Instead, guidelines have been drawn up for sharing the income from gate fees and the park's two lodges with the community, through a benefit-sharing scheme initiated by the government and supported by WESM.

Together with WESM, the Parks Department is providing financial and technical support for income-generating activities, such as mushroom growing, beekeeping, conservation farming and guinea fowl farming, as well as services like boreholes to improve water supply.

Vested Dosani, chair of USACO, explained how things have changed. "With the new benefit-sharing arrangements, the animals are now our own, and if we find poachers we will tell the park staff. It is us, our children and grandchildren who will suffer if the animals disappear from the park."

## Self-help and experience-sharing in Nepal

**Nepal has come through a turbulent period politically, and local government has for a long time been weak and ineffective. This weakness of government created a 'space' in which communities have organised themselves to manage resources and deliver services. The culture of self help, institution-building and resource management at the local level has helped to create organisations which have become local-level partners with Bird Conservation Nepal (BCN; BirdLife Partner) for IBA conservation.**

With limited staff and a small budget, BCN began working with local groups as a sustainable approach to conservation and development at IBAs. In every case, LCGs are formed

around existing community-based institutions of one kind or another. Most of Nepal's forests (those that are not official protected areas) are managed as community forests. Community Forest User Groups (FUGs) are allocated areas of forest in accordance with management plans approved by the District Forest Office, giving them rights and responsibilities to conserve, manage and use the forest and its resources. There are over 14,000 FUGs in Nepal. Several IBAs in Nepal are managed in this way, and the FUGs are therefore natural local partners to work with BCN for conservation and development of these sites.

BCN say that local knowledge is invaluable in addressing resource management and conservation

issues. BCN encourage LCGs to come up with their own ideas as much as possible, so that their initiatives are genuinely initiated and led from the local level.

There are now LCGs at 17 of Nepal's 27 IBAs, and many IBAs have several. For example at the Mai Valley Forests IBA, there are seven. The LCGs are linked into a loose network, the Nepal Bird Conservation Network. The criteria for membership are very flexible, although organisations must be community-based, local and not-for-profit.

The main purpose of the network is shared learning. For example, one of the LCGs at the Mai Valley IBA (Shree High Altitude Herbal Production and Conservation Institute, located



in Ilam District) has expertise in medicinal plants, which is relevant to communities at other IBAs such as Kanchenjunga Conservation Area. The LCG at Jagdishpur IBA has experience in production and marketing of handicrafts for Nepal's tourist market, which is highly relevant to sites such as Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve IBA, where there are similar raw materials for communities to work with.

In some cases the LCGs network directly amongst themselves. The ten LCGs working on vulture conservation are the most obvious example: all have visited and learnt from the first vulture restaurant at Pithouli, Nawalparasi. Similar networking may take place between LCGs that have met through exchange visits or workshops and training. For others, BCN acts as a 'hub' connecting LCGs.

Through experience, BCN have learnt that Youth Clubs form effective partners for IBA conservation. Many are motivated by an interest in biodiversity and an interest in conserving the nature and resources around them, but also by the opportunity to diversify their knowledge, experience and capacity in the conservation field, and the income and career opportunities that working with BCN and other conservation NGOs provide. Older members of the community are often enrolled as 'advisors' to the youth groups.

While many people have a good knowledge of plants and trees – reflecting their uses for medicine, food, timber, etc- far fewer know about birds, or see their relevance to themselves and their livelihoods. BCN has had to work hard to motivate LCG members to work for bird conservation. The answer has been to link bird issues to broader natural resource management issues. At Mai Valley IBA, for example, they

have linked bird monitoring to forest patrolling and the maintenance of forest quality, so that monitoring

District Forest Office, stipulating permitted levels of harvest and other management arrangements.



David Thomas

*Local groups in Nepal are formed around existing community-based organisations, and most initiatives come from the local level*

becomes part of existing activities, and relates to livelihoods benefits. BCN attributes the success of its LCG approach to the way conservation work has been intertwined with income-generating activities.

At Phulchowki Mountain forests IBA, BCN has been working with six Forest User Groups which vary in size from 57 to 338 members, and manage areas of forest ranging from 34.75 to 283 ha. Rivers and streams originating from Phulchoki supply water to the local town of Godawari and beyond, and to adjacent farmland.

Deforestation during the 1980s caused disruption to stream flow. In 1995, Nepal's government gave a large area of the forests into the safekeeping of nearby villages. These community forests have become successful, and have shown significant regrowth. Conservation by communities has done much to reverse the degradation of services such as water supply.

Each FUG agrees a five-year management plan with the

FUG members are paid to patrol the forest, using funds from membership fees and other revenue-generating activities.

The forest is used by local people for a range of forest products, including fuelwood and timber, fodder for livestock, medicinal herbs and flowers, some of which are sold. In Kathmandu, water shortages are common in summer, so the FUGs also sell water, which is collected by tanker and delivered to the capital.

Only 40 minutes from the centre of Kathmandu, Phulchowki, is a popular destination for Nepalis escaping the city at weekends. BCN helped five FUGs improve facilities for picnickers, and introduce a more organised system for charging. At Godavari Kunda, for example, the community previously received Rs 5000 from picnickers; they now receive about Rs 65,000. These funds contribute to forest patrolling and FUG management costs, but are also used for projects in the village, including improvements to roads, and bursaries for school children from the poorest households.

## A 'Pacific' approach to forest conservation

**Landowning clans on two Fijian islands have established Community-Based Protected Areas (CBPAs), which now cover almost 7,000 ha of forest.**

The project to develop the first of these CBPAs was initiated in 2005, after the Natewa Peninsula, on the Northern Fijian Island of Vanua Levu, was identified as the Natewa/Tunuloa IBA. This IBA contains untouched old growth forest, and is home to many Fijian endemic bird species, and one subspecies endemic to the peninsula. The local landowning clans, or *mataqali*, agreed to protect their forest from damaging activities including commercial logging and agriculture, and formed a SSG to support this move.

The majority of the forest on the Natewa Peninsula has been signed over to logging leases or is being managed as mahogany plantations. Since its establishment, the SSG has worked in close partnership with *mataqalis*, BirdLife and the government department of forestry, to reject offers from timber companies to buy their remaining forests for logging.

In 2009, a workshop was held in Navetau Village in the Tunuloa district, where 11 *mataqalis* agreed

to manage over 6000 ha of land sustainably for ten years. They also agreed an interim management plan.

In the southern island of Kadavu, Mt Nabukelevu is the highest peak, with the largest area of montane forest in the west of the island. The SSG was formed in 2007, after *mataqalis* were under increasing pressure to convert their forested land for unsustainable agricultural purposes, ultimately affecting livelihood, food security and water catchments. Following this, the *mataqalis*, together with BirdLife and the SSG, identified the forest to be protected, which lay above 300m, covering an area of approximately 350 ha. Funding obtained from the GEF Small Grants Programme initiated a reforestation program in areas as low as 250 m and even 200 m. By 2010, ten *mataqalis* had agreed to protect over 1500 ha of forests for a period of 20 years.

BirdLife and the two SSGs have a strong relationship with the respective Provincial Councils, and continue to seek advice and to ensure the support and consent of the Council for planned and ongoing activities. The SSG facilitates logistical arrangements for the meetings in the villages and schools, and is also responsible for sustaining the project's activities.

Locally-driven, sustainable resource management plans have been developed for both sites. These plans include opportunities for sustainable, forest-based income generation, to show the benefits of protecting the forests. Both community-based protected areas, which until recently were only documented through Memorandums of Agreement with BirdLife, have been recognised and endorsed by the National Protected Area Forum, which is responsible for drafting protected area legislation in Fiji.

This project has helped the SSGs develop into informal community-based organisations that can initiate further activities independently. In fact, the Natewa Tunuloa SSG is now managing and implementing its first GEF-SGP funded project in the IBA, with activities focusing on reforestation, establishing native tree nurseries, and ecotourism assessment. Lessons learned from this community-based approach to protected areas are being shared with other *mataqalis* at key forest sites, with other SSGs in Fiji, and with conservation NGOs in Fiji and the Pacific.

This initiative is unique for Fiji because instead of compensating communities for the income foregone for not selling their land for logging, it has developed true partnerships with the forest-owning *mataqali* based on their historical and cultural ties with their land. The models are built on Fijian land-ownership and socio-cultural structures, and the process applied is highly 'Pacific' in its approach, which makes it both widely applicable in the region and, at the same time, flexible in its ability to provide locally appropriate solutions.



Mere Tabudravu (BirdLife International Fiji Programme)

Management plans for forests on the Fijian Island of Vanua Levu have been developed through a participatory process which recognises the rights of the local landowning clans or *mataqali*



## Campaigning

When sites which are important to local people are threatened by 'development', many local groups have taken a robust stance, embarking on evidence-based campaigns for a change to the plans of government or the private sector. Local organisations are particularly strong advocates in this regard, having a legitimate right to a say in decisions which affect their environment and livelihoods. Being part of the BirdLife network, which can bring local voices to national and even international attention, is a further advantage.

## Democracy in Action at Salmon Arm Bay, Canada

**In Canada, as throughout the developed world, threats to Important Bird Areas (IBAs) are not directly linked with unsustainable local resource-consumption patterns to the extent that they are in developing countries. Instead, they are more often related to large-scale habitat destruction, degradation and fragmentation caused by, for example, unsustainable forestry, urbanization, and the expansion and intensification of industrial agriculture. Local conservation action is therefore just as critical at Northern IBAs as it is in developing countries.**

Salmon Arm Bay is the shallow estuary of the Salmon River on Shuswap Lake, British Columbia. In 1986, the Salmon Arm Bay Nature Enhancement Society (SABNES) was set up by local people, to assist the Wildlife Branch of the provincial government with the development and operation of their management plan for the Salmon Arm foreshore, as a Nature Conservancy and viewing area. Since then, SABNES and associated organisations like the Shuswap Naturalist Club have been working for the conservation and protection of Salmon Arm Bay.

The marshland of Salmon Arm Bay remains highly productive, even

though residential and commercial growth in the area has increased. The bird life has actually grown in recent years, and 230 species have been recorded. This indicates that the bay has managed to remain healthy. More importantly, however, it reflects the fact that many of the wetlands have been destroyed in the southern interior and there are now fewer alternatives for the birds to use.

When it recently became apparent that the city council was determined to sanction an application for a SmartCentres shopping complex on 24 ha of land situated on the floodplain, in close proximity to the Salmon River delta, a coalition of

organisations opposed to the plan – including the Shuswap Naturalist Club – was formed. The Shuswap Naturalist Club is a member of BC Nature, a federation of local natural history groups which represents 50 local nature clubs throughout British Columbia. BC Nature is, in turn, the regional partner of Nature Canada, one of the two BirdLife co-Partners in Canada

The club felt strongly that the impact of four feet (1.2m) of fill and the run-off from nearly 2,000 parking spaces would trigger a rapid breakdown of the fragile ecosystem, since it is the river that feeds the nutrients to the marsh.

The coalition did what it could to educate the general public and bring pressure on the council to reconsider. A rally was held, pamphlets distributed and a press conference called. The council seemed not to be swayed.

When five days of public hearings on the proposed amendment to the Official Community Plan began, more than 500 people filled the room at the Prestige Inn, with another 200 listening from the hallway. Presentations went on from 7 to 11

pm for three days, from 5:30 pm to 2:30 am another day, and came to an end at midnight on the last day.

There were never fewer than 400 people in attendance on any evening. In all, 213 residents spoke, 191 in opposition and 22 in favor. The Shuswap Naturalist Club was very well represented at this 26-hour marathon; 17 members spoke about their environmental concerns, and a letter from BC Nature was read.

At the end of this gruelling process, three councillors voted against the OCP amendment, with two in favour and one abstaining. Many of the town citizens were elated that they had witnessed democracy in action, and the process left the public with a much greater appreciation of the value of the marshland.

However, the developers renewed their application, with strong support from within the city council and a rival citizen's lobby in favour of the new shopping centre.

Local volunteers set up the Wetland Alliance: The Ecological Response (WA:TER). Registered as a non-profit society in 2009, WA:TER has spearheaded the science-based

response to the development. They have so far produced four studies (two biological, one geomorphological, and a flood risk assessment) funded primarily

by the citizens of Salmon Arm and the surrounding area, all of which have discredited the developer's information. The flood risk assessment was directly responsible for convincing the Ministry of Environment (MoE) to order an independent study that eventually reduced the development from 24 to 8 ha.

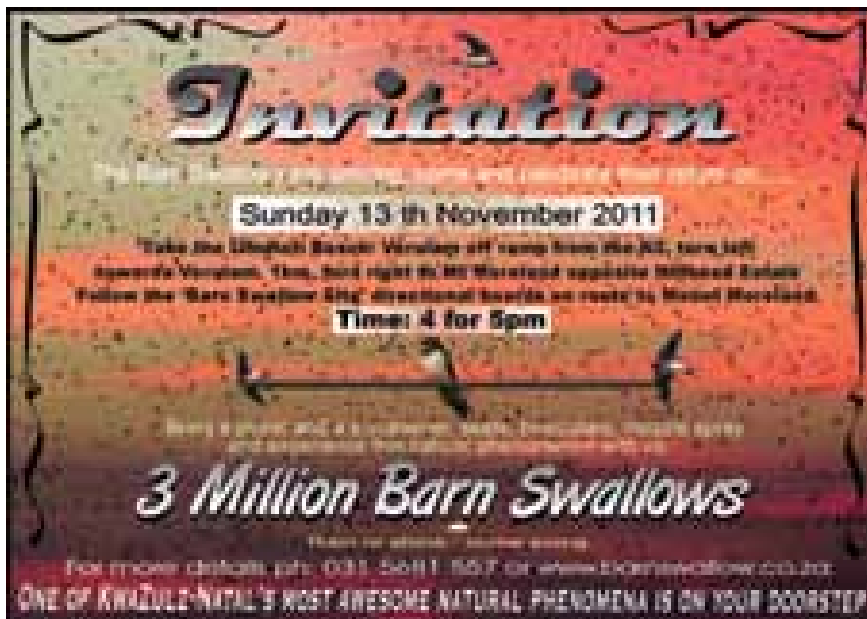
WA:TER is partnering with the Neskonlith Indian Band (NIB), whom they have assisted with information about the development, which will negatively affect their lands directly across the mouth of the Salmon River. As of July 2011, the city council has accepted the developer's Environmentally Hazardous Area Development Permit Application. WA:TER has presented evidence that challenges the information on which this decision was based, which is once again being considered by the MoE; and the Neskonlith Indian Band has petitioned the Supreme Court of British Columbia for a judicial review of the decision.



## Re-routing the Via Baltica

Key sites for biodiversity in North-East Poland have been under threat from a series of road projects on the so called 'Via Baltica' international road corridor, which will link Helsinki to Warsaw via Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. For over seven years, OTO (BirdLife in Poland) and other Polish NGOs have worked together to bring the Via Baltica case to the attention of the Bern Convention and the European Commission. OTO members have been critical in influencing the process, participating in planning processes, giving evidence to national court cases, and providing information, based on local knowledge and data collection, to the Environmental Impact Assessment process. As a result of this campaign, there have been some significant changes in the routes being taken by the roads, avoiding some of the most important and sensitive areas for wildlife, such as the Rospuda Valley IBA.

## Sharing airspace with swallows in South Africa



**When a roost used by 1% of the world's Barn Swallows was threatened by an airport development, BirdLife South Africa found an effective local partner in the Lake Victoria Conservancy. Long before the site was declared an IBA, the group had been acting as custodians of the swallow roost. Their knowledge and campaigning skills ensured that protection of the roost became a high priority for the airport's operators.**

At the height of the 'swallow season' up to three million Barn Swallows *Hirundo rustica* can be seen swirling over the Mount Moreland roost in the Lake Victoria wetland, before diving into the reedbeds below.

Mount Moreland is a small settlement 34 km north of Durban, on South

Africa's east coast. The public viewing site overlooking the wetland roost is run by the Lake Victoria Conservancy, a group of environmentally-minded Mount Moreland residents. They created the viewing site in 2006, to highlight the plight of the swallows and their wetland roost in the face of the development of the King Shaka International Airport (then known as La Mercy Airport).

In 2006, Mount Moreland was declared an IBA, an Important Bird Area, because the roost hosts over 1% of the world's migratory Barn Swallows. At times numbers may be higher than three million, as Mount Moreland is also an important transitional roost, acting as a stop-over for Barn Swallows on their way to more southerly destinations. The Lake Victoria Conservancy was

registered with Ezemvelo KwaZulu-Natal Wildlife, the province's government conservation agency, in 1995, and has since acted as the local custodians for the Barn Swallows and their wetland roost.

Together with BirdLife South Africa (BLSA) and BirdLife Port Natal (BLPN), the local club whose members have been engaged with the site for at least a decade, the Conservancy's members were concerned that the benefits to the local and national economy from the airport development would tip the balance away from protecting the swallows. They also feared that aircraft safety concerns would lead to the clearance of the reedbed, removing the roosting site. The swallows roost here in such numbers because of the lack of other suitable roosting areas around KwaZulu-Natal. The site is an island in a sea of sugar cane plantations.

BLSA and BLPN were represented on the Mt Moreland Wetland Forum, which met every 3 months to discuss developments at the airport site as construction began. Once the airport opened the Forum ceased to meet, but there is continued communication between both the local club and BLSA.

On November 11th 2006, 500 members of local communities in KwaZulu-Natal were invited to the Mount Moreland reedbed to welcome the Barn Swallows back,

and to show support for the site's protection. This has become an annual event called 'The Return of the Swallows'.

The Lake Victoria Conservancy had consistent input into the four-year-long Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for the airport. The runway is only 2.6 kilometres north of the roost, and the flight path skims across the lower end of the roosting grounds. The main threat identified was from planes coming in low in the evenings, at the same time as the swallows return to the roost.

As a result of the EIA process, and representations made by the Lake Victoria Conservancy and Birdlife South Africa, various management schemes have been put in place to protect the swallows. These include a specially modified radar, which gives

early warning should any flocks of swallows move into the flight path at the same time as a plane is coming in. The planes are diverted until the flocks have settled.

The airport's operator has a legal obligation to maintain the roost for the benefit of the swallows. Substantial increase in water run-off from the tarmac and roofing during storm events is anticipated, and the developer has adjusted drainage and built attenuation dams to prevent damage to the wetlands and the roost, and put in monitoring systems to detect spills of aviation fuel, chemicals and sewage.

Long before the airport development brought Mount Moreland to the world's attention, the Lake Victoria Conservancy organised ringing/ banding of the roosting birds, and

recorded the swallows' arrival and departure dates.

In November 2010, as part of their celebration to welcome the swallows back to the roost, the Lake Victoria Conservancy installed an IBA signboard at Mount Moreland. The sign explains what an Important Bird area is, and also includes the history of the Mount Moreland Barn Swallow project, and the Lake Victoria Conservancy's involvement with it.

Every year BirdLife South Africa declares a Bird of the Year, and in 2011 it was the Barn Swallow. A special event was organized at Mount Moreland to welcome back the swallows and create awareness around this special migrant.



*Various management schemes have been adopted to protect the swallows. They roost at Mt Moreland in such huge numbers because there are no other suitable sites*



## Influencing local, regional and national government

Many decisions affecting the environment are made at national level. Often they are made by Departments or Ministries that believe they have nothing to do with the environment whereas in fact their work affects – and is affected by – ecosystems and the goods and services they provide. Accessing these decision-makers can be a challenge for local communities. However, by effective networking at regional and national level, and by working with the national BirdLife Partner, locally-based civil society organisations are able to get their voice heard by those in authority, resulting in more participatory decisions on policies.

Local and regional development plans also need input from local people if they are to incorporate their concerns, vision and knowledge. Local Conservation Groups provide an effective way of building capacity, so that local people are empowered to influence plans that affect their lives – and the biodiversity on which their lives depend – more effectively.

## Mexico: Low impact logging in community-owned forests

**BirdLife Partners across the world have encouraged sustainable harvesting of non-timber forest products as an alternative to logging. In the state of Chiapas, Mexico, however, the regional branch of BirdLife Partner Pronatura backed local communities in their opposition to a state-wide logging ban, after working with them to ensure that their forestry practices are sustainable and well-managed.**

Mexico's protected areas often include human settlements, with a great diversity of cultures and traditions of land management and natural resource use. The people who use these ecosystems also play an important part in maintaining them.

Pronatura, BirdLife's Mexican affiliate, and its six regional organisations, have established eight Important Bird Area (IBA) Local Conservation Groups (LCGs), with three more being developed. Most of the more valuable land in terms of biodiversity is in the hands of rural communities and *ejidos* (the communally-held lands of a village, with a traditional system of use rights and tenure). To the extent that communities receive a tangible benefit for conserving them, *ejidos* are predisposed to be preserved and used in a sustainable way.

The *ejido* Tierra y Libertad is part of the buffer zone of the La Sepultura Biosphere Reserve IBA, in the Sierra Madre de Chiapas. In the late 1990s, the *ejido* assembly applied to the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (SEMARNAP) for a licence to carry out logging in the pine-oak forest. A ten-year licence was granted, but suspended after only one year when checks by SEMARNAP revealed 'irregularities' in compliance.

Despite this setback, groups of *ejidatarios* who were determined to



Alejandro Ramón Vásquez

*With technical support from the regional BirdLife organisation, villagers in Chiapas are committed to maintaining and using their communal lands in sustainable ways.*

find a way of continuing to use the community-owned forests came up with a system of self-regulation. Developed with the support of Pronatura Sur, this enabled Tierra y Libertad to get a new licence for forest use. Working with the directors of the Biosphere Reserve, Pronatura Sur and the community produced a plan for low-impact logging in areas of high biodiversity and ecological value, based on recreating the natural system of ecological disturbance and resilience by logging selected patches of trees. Systematic monitoring of harvestable trees in harvesting areas helps select the appropriate patches, in order to reduce the impacts as well as the costs of logging. Management activities then prevent soil erosion and ensure the maintenance of natural diversity in the trees' regeneration. This was the first time that this system, which was originally developed for the tropical forests of the Yucatan Peninsula, had been implemented in temperate forests.

A community-run technical office is being set up at Tierra y Libertad,

to integrate the management of timber extraction, cultivation of and Fair Trade in the much-prized *palma camador* (an endemic *Chamaedorea* "parlour palm"), and production of organic shade-grown coffee. Pronatura Sur participates in meetings of the *ejido's* advisory council, where they have noted the high level of commitment to the protection of the watershed and ecosystem services, informed by the experience people have acquired during the various projects.

Pronatura Sur is working with similar systems in five other *ejidos* in Chiapas state, and is aiming to set up the Tierra y Libertad forest management system as a standard for all management plans in IBAs and Natural Protected Areas. In 2009, Pronatura Sur supported the emergence of a state-wide movement of forest users, including 42 *ejidos* and some private landowners. This movement was able to defeat a proposed ban on logging in the state of Chiapas, by proving that the forestry practiced by the *ejidos* is sustainable and technically well-managed.



## Helping local communities influence decision-makers in Northwestern Ecuador

**The montane forests of North western Pichincha, Ecuador, were being rapidly lost to illegal logging, clearance for cattle pasture, slash-and-burn agriculture, and charcoal production. As well as being home to a rich biodiversity including the Critically Endangered Black-breasted Puffleg *Eriocnemis nigrivestis*, these forests protect an important watershed, and with their disappearance the quality and quantity of water available to communities were decreasing. Poor local planning and patchy enforcement of environmental protection regulations were exacerbated by the communities' lack of access to decision-makers.**

Aves y Conservacion (A&C), the BirdLife Partner in Ecuador, has identified three IBAs in the area, and formed Local Conservation Groups (LCGs) with adjacent communities. Recent work with LCGs has aimed to improve their capacity to influence local and provincial decision-makers, and the public in general, about the importance of biodiversity conservation in the area.

The project has raised concern about the impact of deforestation and other

unsustainable uses of natural resources, including illegal hunting, and also about the threats posed by poorly regulated mining. Some actions to regulate these issues have been taken at the local level.

The project has helped create the conditions for the conservation of these globally important forests, as well as for sustainable development in the area. Civil society's capacity to influence the decision-makers responsible for land use planning, sustainable development and local environmental management has been strengthened. Outreach to the local authorities on the importance of birds and IBAs has promoted their inclusion in policies, strategies and actions. For example, IBAs are included in land planning documents for the municipalities of northwest Pichincha.

Birding tourism and other nature-based tourism activities are being promoted as a sustainable economic alternative for the area, and different actors are interested in supporting the development of birding tourism initiatives managed by local people. Members of the Alaspungo community at the Mindo and Pichincha Volcanoes IBA have been trained in guiding

and provisioning for tourists, and have received their first visitors, approximately 2,500 school students from Quito. It is hoped that income from such ecotourism will help promote the protection of remaining habitat.

There are plans to develop a management plan for the Alaspungo community forest and other surrounding areas, and to promote the declaration of Alaspungo's forest as one of the ten areas of conservation and sustainable use within the Protected Areas subsystem of the Quito Municipality. Several meetings have been conducted with officials from the Municipality, gaining recognition for the importance of the Alaspungo forest area both for biodiversity and as a watershed. As a result, political and financial support has been provided for the area's recognition under the municipal subsystem of protected areas, as well as for the preparation of the management plan.

There are also plans to explore the possibility of including Alaspungo in the government's *Programa Socio Bosque* initiative, which aims to provide income to landowners and indigenous communities in exchange for protecting their forests.

A&C plans to use the Pichincha experience to influence the implementation of other Local Conservation Groups in the future, and to promote their participation in constructing the Plan and Strategy for the National System of Protected Areas, as well as the National Strategy for Local Participation in Biodiversity Conservation being prepared by the Environment Ministry.

Rolando Hipo



Members of the Alaspungo community have been trained in bird guiding. Their first visitors were 2,500 school students from Quito



## Monitoring for policy and management

It has been said that you can't effectively manage what you can't measure. Regular monitoring of often hundreds of priority sites for bird conservation, as well as the wider environment, cannot be achieved by the limited staff of most organisations. Networks of volunteers can provide an effective system of data collection. With modern technology this can be rapidly synthesised to influence management and policy. The knowledge and awareness that people living local to a site bring to monitoring is especially valuable in recognising and responding to changes in the environment. Monitoring has proved to be helpful to communities too, and its participatory nature ensures a feedback mechanism for corrective action and more effective site management by the LCGs.

### Denmark: Caretaker data is key to designating IBAs as Special Protected Areas

**In 2002, inspired by similar examples from the BirdLife Partnership, Dansk Ornitologisk Forening (DOF – BirdLife in Denmark) decided to establish groups of volunteers around each of their 128 Important Bird Areas (IBAs). The aim of the Danish IBA Caretaker Project, funded by the Aage V. Jensen Charity Foundation, was to build a locally-based network of skilled observers to help conserve the sites by delivering monitoring information about them. Information from the**

**Caretaker network has been key to designating the sites as Special Protected Areas (SPAs) under the European Union Birds Directive.**

By 2011, 900 volunteers were involved as local IBA Caretakers, covering most of the Danish IBAs and the 46 most threatened breeding bird species. The volunteers are organised into 151 local groups and 46 species groups, about three-quarters of which were established as a direct result of the Caretaker project. The rest already existed in one form or another.

The site component of the Caretaker project mainly focuses on IBAs, but due to the favourable availability of local volunteers, it has been possible to extend the coverage to a wider range of sites of local ornithological importance with educational or other value, including DOF's own 20 nature reserves. Thanks mainly to improved knowledge provided by Caretakers, a number of sites have been identified that apparently fulfil the international IBA criteria, and which may be proposed as IBAs in due course.

The majority of group members live near their sites, but some travel as far as 60-100 km. Normally the groups grow around a permanent core of 2-3 individuals and a varying number of irregular members. Volunteers commonly take part in more than one group.

When asked how much time volunteers spend in their role as IBA Caretakers, responses varied from a few hours at weekends to 30 hours a week. Volunteers have shown remarkable reliability, even if they have only a small amount of time to contribute.

Caretakers come from a variety of professional backgrounds. One group of eight includes a graphic designer, a retired trades union employee, a librarian, a construction worker, a former aviation officer, a forester, a chemical engineer and a refrigerator retailer.

Each Caretaker group has a clear task and focus. This usually involves the trigger bird species for which their IBA has been designated, and each group decides within itself and in consultation with DOF what monitoring strategy to follow, what types of data to collect, and how to report them.

The main Internet tool used to monitor birds is DOFbasen, an online database of bird observations covering the entire country. The Caretaker network is one of the key sources and users of DOFbasen data. Each group has its own website, based on a DOF template, for which the members are entirely responsible. This website is linked to DOFbasen to allow exchange of data. Special site-based modules provide a way of organising the data according to the needs of IBA monitoring. DOFbasen's reporting tools also offer instant feedback to the users, who can easily see the contribution their observations are making to the 'big picture' of conserving birds in Denmark and beyond.

Information from DOFbasen has been key in the designation of sites as Special Protected Areas (SPAs) under the European Union Birds Directive. 113 of the 128 IBAs in the country have been designated as SPAs, which are integrated into the EU's network of protected areas, Natura 2000. The Institute for Bioscience, the official body responsible for monitoring SPAs in Denmark, uses data from DOFbasen to fulfil its EU reporting requirements.

IBA Caretakers themselves are not responsible for carrying out conservation actions. This is the responsibility of the site manager, such as the local forestry service or farmer, although some Caretaker groups do arrange hay-mowing and similar activities at their sites. However, the information that the Caretakers provide through DOF feeds into the management of the site, and often leads to changes in the way sites are managed.

The IBA Caretaker project constitutes about one-third of the budget DOF spends on conservation. In return, the Caretakers are DOF's most important resource and source of local knowledge. They are the eyes, ears and voice of DOF at the local level for each IBA. Thanks to the high quality data they provide, DOF has been

able to play an active and effective role in the decision-making process concerning the designation and management of the sites. Moreover, they enable DOF to be instantly aware in case of a threat or change arising at a site.

So far, the international cooperation activities undertaken by DOF's Caretaker network include visits to and from Malaysia, Indonesia, Canada and Kenya. Some of these projects have been related to the establishment and support of Local Conservation Groups (LCGs).

The Caretakers themselves have recruited hundreds of new volunteers to the groups. The IBA Caretaker network has reached a stage where there is no longer any need to actively recruit people: new participants come along on their own, attracted by its success.

DOF may not be the largest membership-based NGO in the country, but it definitely has the biggest share of active volunteers. Seven and a half percent of DOF's 16,000 members regularly volunteer. This enormous contribution of free time, skills and commitment is gratefully acknowledged by the DOF staff and board.



Klaus Dickmann

*Each IBA Caretaker group has a focus, usually the bird species which triggered IBA designation. Each group decides for itself what strategies to follow*

## Spain: 30,000 hours of fieldwork

The first SEO/BirdLife *Atlas of Wintering Birds in Spain* was the result of an enormous sampling effort, with more than 30,000 hours invested in fieldwork by participants who walked or otherwise travelled a total of 67,500 km (1.7 laps of the Equator). One third of the surface of Spain has been covered, with data available for more than 1,800 10x10 km squares. Such spectacular coverage would not have been possible without the collaboration of more than 1,200 volunteers, and a network of more than 50 provincial volunteer coordinators.

## BirdLife South Africa Bird Clubs: Monitoring, mapping and mentoring

**Members of BirdLife South Africa's Bird Clubs are taking on an increasing share of the task of monitoring and managing the country's 124 IBAs. These citizen scientists also provide the data for a number of nationwide survey and atlas projects, which could lead to the identification of new IBAs.**

BirdLife South Africa (BLSA) has a membership of around 6,700, of whom more than 5,000 are also members of Bird Clubs. More than 40 Bird Club/branches and affiliates make up a network of conservationists and citizen scientists which enables BLSA to achieve much more than it could through its dedicated staff alone.

Bird Clubs which affiliate to BLSA receive support for membership, conservation, fundraising, public relations and much more. A number of clubs speak of the importance of being part of a larger network within South Africa, and also being part of the BirdLife International family. As one member put it: "Being affiliated to BirdLife South Africa means that we are part of the main body, receiving advice on issues bigger than our branch can handle".

Proactive conservation of IBAs is becoming an increasing priority for the Bird Clubs. The clubs' coordinated monitoring provides valuable data for identifying IBAs and setting conservation priorities. BLSA recently ran a series of workshops with Bird Clubs, to train their members in IBA assessments. To date Bird Clubs have

completed 67 IBA assessments, which have been loaded into BirdLife's World Bird Database. BLSA plans that all 124 IBAs will be assessed between 2011-2013, which will include a gap analysis of South Africa's IBA network. This would be impossible to achieve without the support of BLSA's national network of volunteers .

The main coordinated avifaunal surveys in South Africa include the Southern African Bird Atlas Project 2 (SABAP2), a five-year project with 580 registered observers, of whom around 400 are members of Bird Clubs. SABAP2 involves recording the presence or absence of species within a grid cell (pentad). Many clubs have SABAP2 coordinators and run workshops on how to undertake surveys. This has been enormously successful, and in just four years over 50% of pentads have been covered.

About 60% of clubs also undertake Coordinated Avifaunal Roadcounts (CARs) to monitor large and conspicuous birds from vehicles covering fixed routes. The first CAR in 1993 was a joint project by Cape Bird Club and the Animal Demography Unit (ADU) of the University of Cape Town, to monitor the populations of Blue Crane *Anthropoides paradiseus* and Denham's Bustard *Neotis denhami*. CARs now monitor over 20 species of large terrestrial birds—cranes, bustards, korhaans, storks, Secretarybird *Sagittarius serpentarius* and Southern Bald Ibis *Geronticus calvus*—along 360 fixed routes covering over 19,000 km. CARs have thrived on the enthusiastic participation of Bird Club volunteers and other members of the public. Every six months, over 750 people travel along bumpy country roads, making this one of the largest birder-participation projects in Africa.



*The next generation of citizen scientists gets to grips with bird identification*

Duncan Pritchard

Similarly, the ADU launched the Coordinated Waterbird Counts (CWAC) project in 1992 as part of South Africa's commitment to international waterbird conservation. This is being done by means of a programme of regular mid-summer and mid-winter censuses at a large number of South African wetlands. Regular six-monthly counts are regarded as a minimum standard; however, BLSA encourages counters to survey their wetlands on a more regular basis as this provides more accurate data. All the counts are conducted by volunteers, making it one of the largest and most successful citizen science programmes in Africa. Currently the project regularly monitors over 400 wetlands around the country, and

curates waterbird data for over 600 sites.

Because of the avian data collected through SABAP2, CAR and CWAC, BLSA is easily able to assess the presence of IBA trigger species in existing IBAs, as well as to map the current distribution of threatened, endemic and congregatory species to identify gaps in the IBA network.

Avitourism (birding tourism) is proving to be one of BLSA's most powerful conservation tools, and two Birding Routes alone generate an estimated US\$6.4 million annually for local people. Birding Routes provide tourists with suggested itineraries, trained community bird guides and birder-friendly accommodation. Bird

Clubs are involved in several aspects of Birding Route development, one of the most important being mentoring bird guides to improve their identification and communication skills.

Bird Clubs are also involved in a huge number of diverse conservation and education projects in and around IBAs. These include setting up school clubs (Eco-schools), managing IBAs, fighting threats, helping to declare new protected areas and increasing the size of existing protected areas. In all these activities the clubs have been greatly strengthened by membership of the network, and the support of BLSA.

## Canada: using traditional knowledge to monitor IBAs



Ted Chesky

*There is a strong overlap between the goals of the IBA programme and the Cree communities, for whom waterfowl are an essential source of food*

### **The traditional knowledge of Cree hunters is helping Nature Canada map changing waterfowl migration patterns.**

When Nature Canada and the Moose Cree Lands and Resources Department held a workshop on Important Bird Areas in the Moose Cree Homelands, the 14 community members who attended were mostly traditional hunters.

Like other Cree communities along the coast, they are very connected to the land, and hunt primarily Canada

Geese and Snow Geese in the spring and autumn, as well as other wildlife such as caribou, moose and sturgeon.

Numerous globally significant IBAs are located along the James Bay coast, and many are recognised as staging areas for thousands of shorebirds on their epic migrations to South America. Other IBAs on the Hudson Bay and James Bay coasts are recognised for the waterfowl – mainly geese and some species of ducks – that they support. These birds breed, moult and feed there, fattening up for their long migrations. But they

also provide an essential source of food to many families in the coastal communities.

Many of the hunters at the workshop observed that the Canada Goose migration pattern was changing, and that they were not migrating along some of the traditional routes, but much further inland. Nature Canada considers that respecting and incorporating traditional knowledge and activities like this into Important Bird Area stewardship and monitoring is the key consideration in working with the Cree communities. In August 2011, a member of the Moose Cree First Nation spent one week in a coastal IBA with shorebird researchers, as part of on-going efforts to promote cross-cultural exchanges, and integrate the local community more into the research and monitoring of shorebirds. There is a strong overlap between the goals of the IBA programme and those of the James Bay Cree, where conserving and protecting the traditional Cree culture in their homelands also means protecting and conserving the IBAs.



## Supporting environmental policy implementation

Communities at Important Bird Areas (IBAs) may often be remote from government, distrustful of officials, and without access to information. Tradition and vulnerability may also make them risk-averse. Trusted local people, connected to a national BirdLife Partner, can provide effective bridges between the local community and government, providing information and guidance in support of policies to meet local economic and environmental objectives.

### Poland's IBA-Caretakers convince farmers that conservation is their business

**OTOP (BirdLife in Poland) have a strong track record in influencing policy and planning decisions, and in persuading farmers and landowners to adopt agri-environment schemes. The involvement of IBA-Caretakers, who are themselves part of local communities and are trusted by them, is critical to the success of many of these initiatives.**

More than half of Poland's 174 IBAs are over 15,000 hectares in area. The biggest of all, Tuchola Forest, covers more than 370,000

hectares. Simply monitoring sites of this size is a formidable challenge, but conserving IBAs also involves identifying and responding to threats to them, creating an active base of support among the people who live in and around them, and building relationships with different levels of government, developers and others whose decisions affect them.

These tasks would be beyond the unassisted capability of OTOP, with its staff of 44 people. So, like BirdLife Partners in many other countries, OTOP has developed a network

of IBA-Caretakers, or, in Polish, *Opiekunowie Ostoi Ptaków*.

OTOP's board believed they would not get sufficient volunteer Caretakers for the whole IBA network, and aimed for coverage at just half the sites. The response confounded these modest expectations: they now have Caretakers at 143 IBAs, comprising 145 individuals and four regional ornithological societies.

One key output of the ongoing Caretaker project is a fully updated publication on the IBAs of Poland –

an important tool in policy advocacy, and a reference source for groups ranging from planners to land-managers and tourists. However, for information to have impact, a more proactive approach is needed.

There is a lot of overlap between the provision of information and influencing policy and decision-making. OTOP have a strong track record in influencing policy and planning decisions, and the involvement of Caretakers is critical to the success of many of these initiatives.

Caretaker expertise and knowledge of a specific site, and their grounding in local communities, are important factors. Like the communities, the IBA-Caretakers have a direct stake in the future of an IBA. They understand the strain that communities are under, and are trusted and accepted by them.

Agricultural intensification is one of the main threats to IBAs in

Poland, and OTOP have cultivated good relations with the Ministry of Agriculture and local MoA officers. The Caretaker network provides an effective mechanism for consultation on specific issues. For example, the Ministry of Agriculture recently put out to consultation a decree on managing commercial fishponds. Through OTOP, the consultation document was quickly circulated to Caretakers at IBAs which included fishponds, providing an efficient way of getting expert input. Through the Caretaker network, OTOP has recently requested information on IBAs where there is, or has been, conversion of meadows to arable. This was compiled and quickly passed to BirdLife International for inclusion in a regional report, which aims to provide a basis for legislative changes in cross-compliance rules within the European Union.

Natura 2000 is the EU programme which protects sites of high biodiversity value. OTOP frequently provides expert knowledge relating

to the management of Natura 2,000 sites, including management plans. In Poland, most (144) of the IBAs have been designated Special Protection Area (SPAs)/Natura 2000 sites. Tracking and contributing to this process is far more than OTOP staff are capable of, and so involving the IBA-Caretakers will be critical. The Ministry of Environment has requested a list of Caretakers to get their help with management planning and bird surveys at SPAs. Lack of public awareness or understanding of Natura 2000 has been one of the biggest problems OTOP have had to face. The first reaction of most people at IBAs in Poland is to be opposed to nature conservation. This is common everywhere, but especially the case in Poland's mountainous South, and the Podlasie region in the North-east. News of the Natura 2000 designation of IBAs tends to scare people, and development problems are blamed on Natura 2000, even when it has had nothing to do with the matter. As a result, awareness-raising among

Tomasz Wilk



The IBA Caretaker for the Kampinos Forest rings a brood of White Storks. He shares his skills and experience with other members of Poland's IBA-Caretaker network

local communities, especially farmers, has been an important part of the Caretaker project at both local and regional level.

Many of Poland's small farmers are still unaware of the EU's agri-environment schemes. These provide financial support for traditional ways of farming which maintain productive habitats that are also rich in wildlife such as Corncrake *Crex crex*, Curlew *Numenius arquata*, or in some places even Aquatic Warbler *Acrocephalus paludicola*. Through its Caretakers, OTOP is now encouraging farmers to become part of these schemes, so that "conservation becomes their business, and damage to biodiversity becomes their problem". Caretakers at IBAs with farmland which could benefit have been involved in distributing information

leaflets and talking to farmers. Some have also put up notices offering to help farmers with conservation management of farms.

As one of Poland's largest membership NGOs, OTOP can be far more influential in standing up to threats to IBAs than any local group could be. But without the early warnings provided by Caretakers, plans for damaging developments could be far advanced before OTOP found out about them.

For example, the Caretaker at the Rakutowski Marshes IBA noticed that the water level in the wetland area was decreasing because of the deterioration of some small dams, and that trees were being cut within the IBA. The Caretaker asked OTOP to write to the Regional Conservation

Director about these issues. As a result, the cutting of trees has been stopped, and a meeting of three key stakeholder groups has taken place to agree how to maintain the dams. A management plan for this site will be prepared in the near future, and OTOP has proposed to the Regional Conservation Director that the Caretakers should be involved in this.

Many Caretakers feel uncomfortable and ill-equipped to work with communities, challenge developments or intervene at public enquiries. To address this OTOP has launched the Eco-interventions project, to build capacity among Caretakers through training in policy and environmental law.



David Thomas





## Building pride and identity

Local Conservation Groups can play an important role in developing community awareness and pride in the important biodiversity around them. Without knowledge of the wider international context, communities have often taken local wildlife species somewhat for granted, assuming that they are commonplace. With awareness of the international importance of their special wildlife comes an enthusiasm for looking after and promoting it, that builds people's pride in 'their place' and strengthens their identity.

### Brazil: the bird that became the emblem of a town

**The community of Boa Nova has adopted a threatened bird which is found only in the dry forests that surround their small town. The town's entire population was behind the creation of a national park to protect the *Gravatzeiro*, the local name given to the Endangered Slender Antbird, *Rhopornis ardesiacus*.**

Boa Nova occupies a transitional area between the Atlantic Forest and the *caatinga*. The municipality is well known for the *mata-de-cipó* forests, a dry deciduous woodland with large bromeliads on the ground. This formation is naturally rare and small in extent, and is under such

pressure that it could disappear in the near future. The *mata-de-cipó* is globally important, because it houses endemic birds, plants and other species. More than 400 bird species have been reported for Boa Nova, of which 14 are threatened with extinction, two are restricted-range species, and 17 are considered Near Threatened.

SAVE Brasil (BirdLife in Brazil) has worked with local artists to raise awareness of the *Gravatzeiro*, through art, sculptures, drawings and paintings. A bird that was totally unknown by the local community in the past is now becoming the emblem of the town, and of people's

pride in the place where they live. Among the many signs of the success of SAVE Brasil's efforts to raise awareness and support for Boa Nova's biodiversity among the community, local schoolchildren wear bracelets carrying the slogan *Sou amigo do Gravatzeiro* (I am Slender Antbird's Friend).

SAVE Brasil is also presenting monthly seminars to members of the local community, especially schools, on the birds of Boa Nova, with a special focus on the Slender Antbird, and the importance of conserving the region's forests. The community itself is demanding seminars and educational field trips. The audience is composed

of children and teenagers from rural and urban schools, and adults from the two main rural communities, who are taking literacy classes. SAVE Brasil calculates that more than 3,000 people have already participated in these activities.

A notable example of the involvement generated by this project is the rural community of Goiabeira, where one of the key remnants of *mata-de-cipó* is located. This region's rural association (*"Associação dos Pequenos Produtores Rurais de Santa Madalena"*), is organising seminars for its members and field tours with children and teenagers. During these tours, participants sing and draw pictures

about the environment. This community has also mobilised to reduce the deforestation in the Goiabeira region, by getting in contact with Boa Nova's Secretariat of Environment, and with the owners of the properties where deforestation takes place.

Local community engagement was also crucial in the process for the creation of a protected area in Boa Nova. Throughout the process, the initiative had the support of the entire community, including Boa Nova's mayor, who sent a letter to the Ministry of Environment requesting that a protected area be established. As a result, in June 2010 the Brazilian president signed

the document establishing the Boa Nova National Park and Boa Nova Wildlife Refuge, safeguarding 27,000 hectares of forest. With the creation of the protected area, Boa Nova is recognised as an important site for biodiversity conservation at the national level. This kind of participatory process for the creation of a protected area represents a huge victory for bird conservation in Brazil.



*The Gravatazeiro has become the emblem of the community of Boa Nova, and an inspiration to local artists*



### *Listening to Local Voices*

'Livelihoods and the environment at Important Bird Areas: Listening to local voices', is the result of a number of 'Participatory Poverty Assessments' carried out by BirdLife Partners in fourteen nations across the Americas, Africa and Asia.

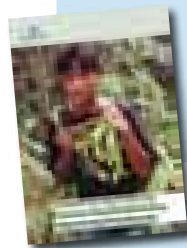
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### *A review of Local Conservation Groups in Africa*

A report produced by the BirdLife Partners in Africa on their experience of working with Local Conservation Groups (called Site Support Groups – SSGs in Africa).

<http://bit.ly/kEZJrL>



### *Conserving biodiversity, improving livelihoods*

Nine case studies from around the world show that poverty elimination and biodiversity conservation are issues that must be tackled side-by-side.

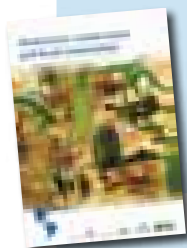
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### *Partners for Sustainability – report*

What BirdLife is doing for People and the Planet, highlights BirdLife's work around the world which combines biodiversity conservation with sustainable development. Available in English, French and Spanish

<http://bit.ly/ruPcCF>



### *Biodiversity conservation and local communities – report*

BirdLife's report about Biodiversity conservation and local communities in the Americas. Available in either English – Biodiversity conservation and local communities or Spanish – Conservación de la Biodiversidad y las Comunidades Locales

<http://bit.ly/tjDuZg>



### *Partners with Nature – report*

Partners with Nature published by BirdLife in December 2009, includes 14 examples of BirdLife Partners' work with vulnerable communities that provide adaptation benefits.

<http://bit.ly/5PNykr>

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