

The Babbler

BirdLife International
in Indochina



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**Welcome to issue 13 of the Babbler and
the first for 2005**

We are reporting in this issue on some disturbing developments at a number of IBAs, many of which are protected areas. In Vietnam we report on a road building development inside Tam Dao National Park, right under the nose of an internationally funded development project. Likewise illegal land allocation within Easo Nature Reserve is occurring we understand, and Lao Dong newspaper reported that staff at Bu Gia Map Nature Reserve had been beaten and attacked by loggers. As the economy grows development pressures are increasing on protected areas in Vietnam and the resources allocated by government are still insufficient to ensure existing protected area legislation is enforced. The slow attrition of protected areas by rural people, whether encroachment for agriculture, hunting, NTFP collection or logging, is now being rapidly being overtaken by larger-scale, often illegal, development projects that enjoy local political support.

Some better news is that at long last the government of Vietnam has finally now approved our medium-sized GEF project which aims to assist the establishment and development of Chu Yang Sin National Park. This project, designed only to support government protected areas policy, was designed in 1999. One may reasonably ask, why did it take so long to get approved?

Other welcome developments we report on are the launch of a second Darwin Initiative funded project in Myanmar. On this project we will work in collaboration with UK BirdLife Partner the RSPB and the Biodiversity and Nature Conservation Association (BANCA). We are also delighted to report that Nikon, through Sweden's Club300 will support our conservation efforts in southern Myanmar. Thank you Nikon and thank you Club300.

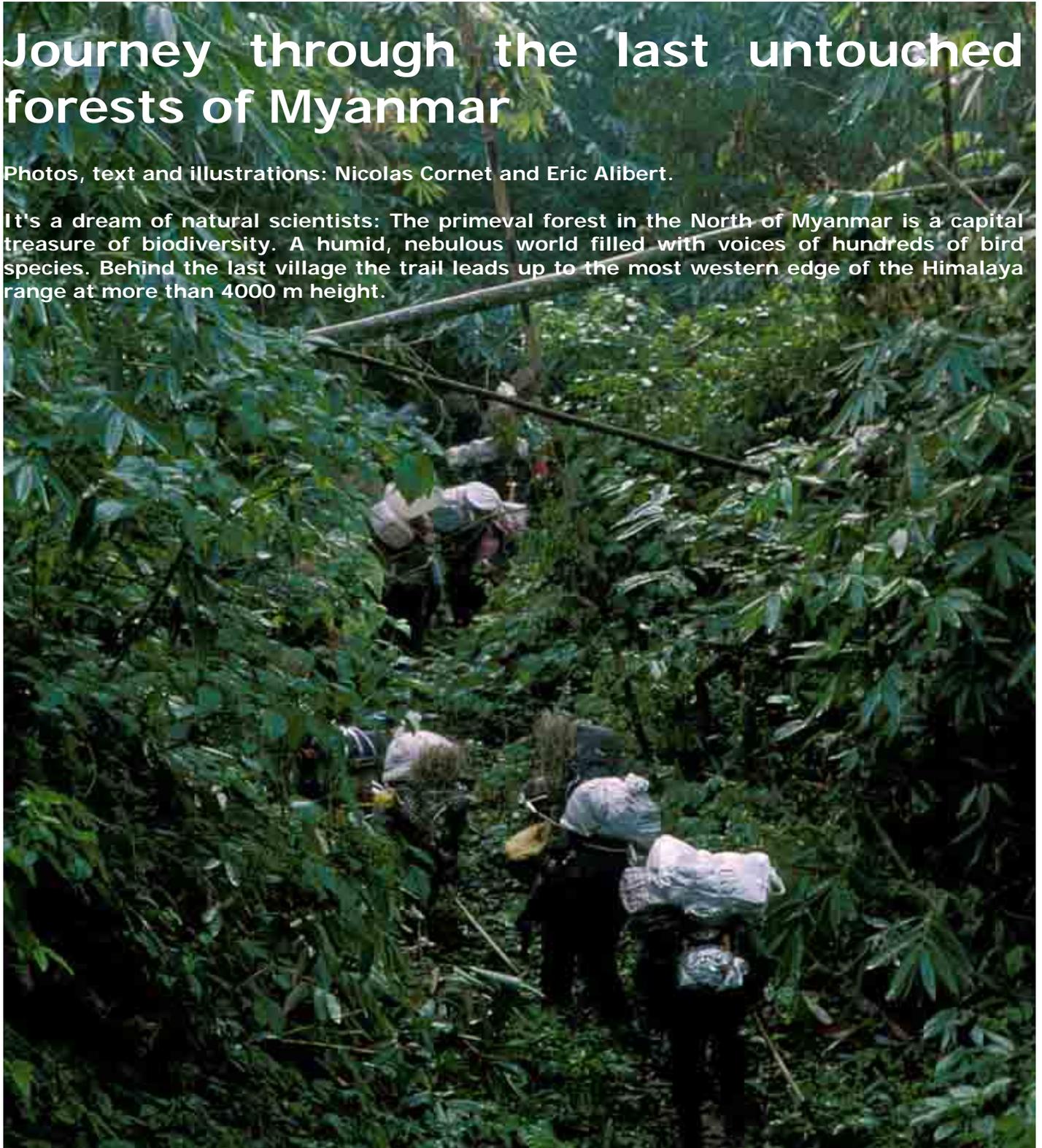
Babbler is compiled and edited by Vu Thi Minh Phuong. If you have any contribution or suggestion for the next issue, please contact Phuong@birdlife.netnam.vn by 1 June.

Feature

Journey through the last untouched forests of Myanmar

Photos, text and illustrations: Nicolas Cornet and Eric Alibert.

It's a dream of natural scientists: The primeval forest in the North of Myanmar is a capital treasure of biodiversity. A humid, nebulous world filled with voices of hundreds of bird species. Behind the last village the trail leads up to the most western edge of the Himalaya range at more than 4000 m height.



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1st day: Airport of Putao. The two-engine/motor airplane of Myanmar Airways coming from Mytkyina is starting to land and describes a half-circle above the valley of Putao. We have a view on the foothills of the Himalaya mountain range that are covered all over with forest and cut by rivers that run southwards.



Rufous-necked Hornbill *Aceros nipalensis*

Still common in Hpon Kan Razi Wildlife Sanctuary, this large hornbill resembles more its smaller cousins in flight.

Artist: Eric Alibert

The path is a mere chaos of vehicle tracks in the midst of which the driver of our old Land Rover drives a slalom. We pass river fords, cross creaking bridges. And after one hour we arrive at Sangaung, the first village on our route. On both sides of the road is a line of houses, a bit further up there is a school and the church. In Sangaung we camp in a wooden house. We eat outside underneath a canvas cover. The villagers stop on their way home from the field work. We exchange curious looks. The Rawang are a Tibeto-Burman ethnic group. As do the Lisu, they live in the valleys surrounding Putao. Our porters - there are 60 of them - were recruited in three neighbouring villages. They are mostly women, all strong, with no children and above all, without this fatal affinity to alcohol which is common with many men. They will accompany us throughout the journey. On this first day we have a feast. The grilled hornets - poisonous when not cooked - taste of hazelnuts and are more tasty than the crickets that are sold on the streets of Yangon.

4th day: climbing up to camp I (1,320 m). A few farmers start their way to the fields to get done with the harvesting, others have their machete on the hip and an empty bucket on their back. They are headed toward the forest to collect wood. At the end of the village where the path ends, the green vegetation rises up like a barricade. Further up the fog is rolling over the pass. The path climbs up the hills. Walking through streams and climbing over fallen trees and roots, our group slowly enters a dense mysterious world that resembles a painting of Rousseau.

At the front the birdwatchers try to listen closely, they raise their heads and they stop walking. Was that a Snowy-throated Babbler? Between us is silence agreed upon. Only the birds' singing is welcome. To lure the birds out of the bush, Jonathan has brought recordings from an earlier expedition. If it was one we never saw it.

There are almost no ways of getting here. Narrow yellow ribbons show that there is a path here and there that meanders around barriers of untouched nature. The colour of the rivers changes from brown to blue. Bamboo stands out from the surrounding vegetation like bright green islands. The Roofs of straw huts appear here and there on the hillsides. Above the valley often lies a thick fog, not infrequently do planes turn around and head back after two failed attempts to land here. But we are lucky. The pilot sets us down safely. The old Willis jeep bounces its way through a small swampy plane for half an hour until it reaches Putao. It gets cool while the sun disappears fast behind the mountains behind which lies India.

2nd day: Putao. It's the last place of considerable size on the way up north. There are two bars across from each other at the village square. The market here is frequented by the farmers who live close by and by the ethnic minorities who come down to the valley in winter time to sell medicinal plants. They then buy salt and clothes and go back to the mountains. Apart from the last Buddhist Stupas there are a few protestant churches, last witnesses of the work of Baptist missionaries in these valleys, where Buddhism seems to vanish. In late November it's the dry season, the farmers are still working on the fields harvesting the remaining rice.

3rd day: Singaung (350 m). For the last two months, Jonathan C. Eames, experienced ornithologist and Programme Manager for Birdlife International in Indochina, including Myanmar "This is a big adventure for me. My first visit to the Eastern Himalayas which supports so many rare and difficult-to-see bird species like the White-bellied Heron, Sclater's Monal and Blyth's Tragopan."



Greater Rufous-headed Parrotbill
Paradoxornis ruficeps

A common inhabitant of bamboo at lower elevations in Hpon Kan Razi Wildlife Sanctuary.

Artist: Eric Alibert



Photo: Nicolas Cornet

5th day: From camp I to Warsadum (800 m). At the camp we are woken up by the first bird's call. It's cold. Hidden in the scrub in the huge bamboo bushes the birds sing without a break. From above we can see the yellow rectangles further down - harvested rice paddies - reassuring cultural islets in the green wild/wilderness. The path towards Warsadum leads over a hillside through a bamboo tunnel turns into a wooden log and a rocky mosaic when it crosses a river. And it leads straight up over some roots that are sticking up. We are totally surrounded by the vegetation. Light only reaches us through the filter of the leaves, honey-like yellow. Reassuring and calming for the senses, it darkens underneath the dense plant cover and becomes a dark tunnel. The further we go, the smaller we feel. When the green darkens, we instinctively feel frightened. And when a patch of blue sky appears, we kind of soak it up with our eyes.

The first Hoolock Gibbons greet us with their endless duetting laughter. Each time one of them stops, another, pair elsewhere in the forest starts over. Finally the path leads into the valley where the river Nam Mu is shimmering. Instead of crossing the long and dangerous hanging ridge, the men build an artificial ford with bamboo and stones. At the other shore lies the village Warsardum, a few unstable huts.

6th day: From Warsardum to Ze Yar Dum (1,010m high). here and there a villager appears in the fog. Only the red lips of a girl are clearly visible in the grey. Further down the valley the string of porters crosses the river. Our path leads away from it and winds between the banana plantations that have only recently replaced the primeval forest. We cross many different paths that are used by villagers on their way to hunt, and fish. They say, there are Gaurs and Tigers in the valley. In a distance, we follow the course of the River Pan Geran. Until we reach the next village, the last before the summits and the border to India. The morning has advanced already, we are walking one behind the other. The last layers of fog dissolve and make the blue sky visible. We come closer to the snowy mountains.

A bit later we encounter a fisherman who is standing in the current and throwing out a weighted net. Then he strives to pull it back out. Within a few minutes he has caught 3 fish that he stuns and throws in his wicker basket. Along the river there are Ibisbills and Common Mergansers, whilst overhead fly groups of Wreathed and Rufous-necked Hornbills. Finally late in the day we reach the last village, Ze Yar Dum.



White-bellied Heron *Ardea insignis*

This reclusive species shuns man and is only found on undisturbed sections of fast flowing shallow rivers in Hpon Kan Razi Wildlife Sanctuary.

Artist: Eric Alibert

night before. For a few days we will only live on our reserves, only the water will be collected fresh every day. Beginning with the first meters the path rises steeply. And it goes on like this the whole day. We are here at the right time: A few weeks ago the rain would have kept us from advancing further. And soon the snow will cover the path and make it impossible to walk on. We are walking on a ridge that leads up to the summit of Hpon Kan Razi at more than 4000 m. The primeval forest changes and profits from the light coming from everywhere. The air is fresher and also thinner. On the ground, moss replaces many of the plant species. We warm up by the fire, eat before the night comes. Huddled up next to each other in order to stay warm, the women are humming traditional songs and pieces they have heard on the radio. The improvised choir accompanies us into the evening that often dies away with great laughter.

9th day: Camp III (1,800 m). One hour walking distance away from the noise of the camp, Jonathan is waiting. The light is weak but a fog has come up. 100 m down from the path he stares and listens silently into the forest. If he has a chance to see the Fire-tailed Myzornis, then it is here and now, he knows that. "Five star birds" is what he calls these seldom encountered species. For one of them he can easily walk through mud, rain and cold for three weeks. Hoa, his girlfriend, says he could skip three or four meals and spend the night in a ditch if he scents a specific bird nearby. As if there was no other human being for him and as if all that counted in his life was an encounter with the bird. As if he would only become himself in encountering what is rare, beautiful and wild. The strange passion of a scientific pilgrim standing in his wet boots and waiting for a pair of wings that might never appear.

Regardless of the cold, Jonathan is thinking of the birds to come. The green that made us numb during the day fades into a night-grey. It gets dark and Jonathan decides give up waiting and to return to the camp. He is back on the path already when a shadow toddles in front of him... When he comes back, everyone else has eaten and looks at him with an asking expression on their face. "Sclaters' Monal, a hen" he explains with a convinced and matter-of-fact voice. Like a miracle, a bottle of old Burmese Rum appears out of a backpack. This event must be toasted.

10th day: Camp IV (2,475 m). The climb has no end. The light playing on the slopes seems to change the depth of the landscape. On the southern side the vegetation shines in a light, almost golden green. In the north it has a metal grey shimmer. At some points, the ridge becomes very narrow, washed away by landslips. So narrow, two men could not side by side. The slope goes steeply down on either side. We move forward slowly, carefully, only looking a few centimetres ahead as we make our way through the bamboo and small, bent and twisted rhododendrons.

7th day: From Ze Yar Dum to Camp II (1,150 m). On Sunday morning a few villagers gather for the service in the church. The pastor and his wife speak the sermon and make music. Passing by, a few of our porters cross themselves. The path leads through shifting cultivation where Jonathan finds Rufous-bellied Shortwings – eastern Himalayan jewels here on their wintering grounds in the elephant grass amid the shifting cultivation – before the trail winds through dense forest down to the River Mon La. The going is soft and slippery and several porters lose their footing. We take a short rest by the river. Great Cormorants fly up from the valley, they pass us on their way to places with more fish. Finally the path arrives at Camp II where two rivers meet.

8th day: Camp II (1,150 m). Jonathan jumps up with a start. We only get a glimpse of the bird overhead. Jonathan is totally psyched. Finally he has seen the White bellied Heron, a rare species that shuns humans and is now only found in the remotest valleys.

Before we start the climb to Camp III, the porters draw in the nets they have laid out in the river the



Himalayan Monal *Lophophorus impejanus*

A species we failed to find on the trip. However, we did find its close relative Sclater's Monal *Lophophorus sclateri*.

Artist: Eric Alibert



Photo: Nicolas Cornet

11th day: Camp V (3,080 m). Finally the last camp, squashed onto a narrow ridge-top. Above it, Hpon Kan Razi rises up above the valleys of India in the west and of Myanmar in the east playing hide and seek with the clouds. We put our tents up on cushions of moss. It becomes damp and the cold makes everything calm.

12th day: Summit of the Hpon Kan Razi (4,100 m). The path gets so difficult that one has to sometimes use a ladder to climb up rock-faces. We keep on stepping over fallen tree trunks and roots of rhododendrons. The muddy paths become snow-covered on the northern slope. The porters are excited. They believe in the healing power of snow, it's even supposed to prevent illness. Finally the path cuts through dwarf bamboo. They resist the cold winds that blow over the summit and grow on all barren ground. A few more hours of walking and gasping we reach the summit of the Hpon Kan Razi on the Indian-Myanmar border. Tibet is only a few days walking away. In the north we can see the snowy mountain of Hkakabo Razi, the highest summit of South-East Asia.

Our camp V is a bit further down. We still only stay here one night, long enough to enjoy the crisp cold air and the foothills of the Himalaya. At this height birds are scarce but familiar sounds around us include Winter Wren and Spotted Nutcrackers. Tomorrow back to Sangaung. But we take a path through another valley where Jonathan hopes to encounter the Himalayan Monal, a miracle with metallic shimmering feathers.

This is a personal account of a trip made by Photographer Nicolas Cornet together with Jonathan C. Eames, Dinh Thi Hoa, Richard and Lan Craik, Frank Momberg and others during November and December 2002. This article was translated from German to English by Isabelle Steimer. The expedition was organized by Dr Tony Htin Hla President of Wildbird Adventure Travels and Tours, Yangon Wildbirdtt@mptmail.net.mm. Nicolas Cornet is a professional photographer and feature writer who specializes in the people, culture and landscapes of Asia. Contact Nicolas at Nicolas.Cornet@wanadoo.fr.

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Regional news

US Embassy Celebrates World Wetland Day at Xuan Thuy Ramsar Site

To celebrate World Wetland Day and highlight U.S. support for wetland conservation in Vietnam, Deputy Chief of Mission John S. Boardman visited communities in Giao Thuy District, Nam Dinh Province on February 1, 2005. During the visit to Xuan Thuy National Park, Mr. Boardman announced a small grant to support Con Lu Bird Conservation Club*, Xuan Thuy National Park, and BirdLife International conduct community-based conservation activities.

Mr. Boardman's visit to Xuan Thuy Ramsar Site highlighted the biological and cultural diversity of Xuan Thuy. Mr. Tran Xuan Giai, Vice Chairman of Nam Dinh Province People's Committee and Mr. Nguyen Viet Cach, Director of Xuan Thuy National Park also gave presentations.

February 2 each year is World Wetland Day. That day marks the signing of the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (the Ramsar Convention) in Iran in 1971. There is only one Ramsar site in Vietnam – Xuan Thuy National Park – located at the mouth of the Red River in Nam Dinh Province.

In 2005, the US Ambassador's Fund will support a project entitled "Strengthening Community Support for Conservation at Xuan Thuy Important Bird Area (IBA)." The project will be implemented by Xuan Thuy National Park with technical support from BirdLife International. The \$20,000 grant will support local institutional capacity building and community-based conservation activities in the buffer zone of Xuan Thuy National Park. Specific activities will include conservation awareness raising, bird monitoring, and developing an information center.

Through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the United States also supports forest protection in central Vietnam, coastal management in Ha Long Bay, and protection of endangered primates on Cat Ba Island and in Cao Bang Province.

The theme of World Wetland Day 2005 was "**There's wealth in wetland diversity - Don't loose it!**"

From the US Embassy in Hanoi

Ornithological Expedition to Kachin State, Myanmar, yields new finds



View towards Chinese frontier. Access above 3,000 m was difficult because of snowfall.

and Hkakaborazi National Park, no national park or wildlife sanctuary has been established in the north-east of the state.

The Biodiversity and Nature Conservation Association (BANCA) together with BirdLife International have recently completed a month-long ornithological survey of Mount Ma Jed in north-east Kachin State, the first to the region for more than 70 years. The survey aimed to determine whether the area supports endemic bird species also found in the Yunnan Mountains in China, which lies only a short distance away. This would provide an indication of whether the area might be worth considering for protected area establishment. Currently, although large protected areas have been established in northern and north-western Kachin State, including Hponkanrazi Wildlife Sanctuary



Red Panda *Ailurus fulgens*



Left: Blue-fronted Robin *Cinclidium frontale*. The first record for Myanmar.

Right: Wedge-billed Wren Babbler *Sphenocichla humei*. This restricted-range species was recorded at two localities during the expedition.

A total of 230 bird species was recorded, including eight species confined to the Eastern Himalayas biodiversity hotspot, termed an "Endemic Bird Area" by BirdLife International. These species comprise Blyth's Tragopan, Ward's Trogon, Wedge-billed Wren-babbler, Streak-throated Barwing, Grey Sibia, Beautiful Sibia, White-naped Yuhina and Broad-billed Warbler. The team also found two bird species which had not previously been recorded in Myanmar: Blue-fronted Robin and Red-winged Laughingthrush. Few mammals were recorded, but astonishingly the team saw four different Red Pandas. However, bad weather and steep terrain made survey work above 3,000 m, where the team hoped to find bird species endemic to the Yunnan Mountains Endemic Bird Area, difficult. Throughout the expedition, bad weather, including frequent snowfall, heavy rainfall and high winds hampered fieldwork. The team

therefore plans to return and complete the high altitude part of the survey later in the year when the weather should be better.

The famous botanical collector Frank Kingdon-Ward and his ornithologist-colleague John Keith Stanford (1892-1971) worked in this area in the 1930s, and the 2005 expedition was the first to follow in his footsteps. Kingdon-Ward's expedition was similarly hampered by bad spring weather.



The project team (left) comprised Sein Myo Aung (BANCA), Saw Moses (BANCA), Maung Nu (BANCA), Frank D. Steinheimer, Scientific Affiliate The Natural History Museum and Jonathan C. Eames (BirdLife International in Indochina). The project was funded by the UK Government's Darwin Initiative. The project team gratefully acknowledges the support of the Ministry of Travels and Tours. All logistical arrangements were made by Wild Bird Adventure Travels and Tours and its President Dr Tony Htin Hla.



Photo (right): The wife of the headman at Saw Law village.

Text and Photos: Jonathan C. Eames, BirdLife International in Indochina

Nikon and Club300 support conservation in Myanmar

Club300 is a non-profit organization based in Sweden for birdwatchers with Swedish life-lists of more than 300 species. The new Honorary Chairman, Erik Hirschfeld is now quite busy consolidating the Club and intends to strengthen the business side with the aim of increasing conservation funds over the coming years. The club now has more than 2,000 members. At the moment Club300 has a very professional and dedicated conservation team who are busy not just evaluating projects but also in securing corporate sponsorship.

Recently Club300 secured financial support from Nikon and have agreed to support ongoing and future BirdLife conservation activities in Myanmar in support of conserving Gurney's Pitta. We are grateful to Erik and the conservation team, led by Dr. Henrik Lind, all Club300 members and Nikon for their support, and look forward to working with them in the coming years on this exciting and challenging project.

BirdLife Vietnam's Important Bird Area programme and Site Support Groups

BirdLife International has been developing its Important Bird Area (IBA) programme. It has proved to be a very cost-effective and flexible way of identifying and promoting coherent and organized action for priority sites for birds and biodiversity, at the regional, national and local level. The selection of IBAs is achieved through the application of standard, internationally recognized criteria, as far as possible based upon accurate, up-to-date knowledge of bird species distributions and populations. Using the global criteria, IBAs are selected based on the presence of: globally threatened bird species, restricted-range bird species, assemblages of biome-restricted bird species, and globally important congregations of birds.

IBAs are also important for biodiversity in general. They capture the bulk of diversity in other groups, as well as the most significant sites for threatened and restricted-range species. Therefore, while data on species status and distribution are still very scanty for most taxonomic groups, apart from birds, the network of IBAs is an excellent first approximation to the overall network of key biodiversity area. The IBA network can thus be used with confidence, right away, to guide conservation planning and action, with any gaps being filled later as information becomes available. In Vietnam, 63 IBAs were identified, covering a total area of 1,689,866 ha, or 5% of the total land area of the country. Vietnam's IBAs range in size from two to over 100,000 ha, with a mean size of 26,823 ha. More than 50% of Vietnam IBAs lie outside the formal protected area system.

Though, identifying IBAs is a great achievement, what is more important is how to effectively conserve those IBAs. To this end, the BirdLife network is striving to achieve the following targets:

1. The IBA network formally recognized under multilateral environmental agreements, and by national governments, donors, civil society and the corporate sector
2. Appropriate and effective site-based protection in place at every IBA
3. The IBA network integrated into broader socio-political agendas by mainstreaming biodiversity into other policy sectors
4. A constituency for IBA conservation built among a broad spectrum of stakeholders
5. A cost-effective, stakeholder-based monitoring system in place for the IBA network.
6. A strong foundation of scientific knowledge in place for the development and protection of the IBA network.
7. An adequate, diverse and sustainable funding base in place to support the long-term conservation of the IBA network.

One approach to engaging local stakeholders that has proven successful at IBAs across the world is the Site Support Group (SSG) approach. In Asia, BirdLife is piloting this approach with SSGs established in Vietnam, Cambodia, Myanmar, Philippines and Indonesia, and plans underway for India and Malaysia. In Vietnam, preparing mechanisms for community participation in natural resource protection and management is one of the priority actions set out in the Management Strategy for Vietnam's Protected Area System 2003-2010.



Local people (Van Kieu Group) actively involved in the SSG activities. Photo: Vu Thi Minh Phuong/BirdLife

Site Support Groups are groups of local stakeholders who share a common commitment to the conservation of an IBA. In many cases, participation is voluntary. Stakeholders become involved in SSGs because of the economic, cultural, religious, recreational or livelihood benefits provided by the IBA. BirdLife is aiming to develop networks of SSGs to promote exchange of experience and skills in IBA conservation.

SSG activities vary according to local circumstances and priorities, but often include monitoring of biodiversity and threats, implementing environmental education and awareness programmes, local protection measures, and advancing and developing income-generating activities that are beneficial to both local people and biodiversity.

SSGs can be established at IBAs regardless of their protection status. At protected IBAs, SSGs can have a formal role in protected area management. At IBAs that are not designated as protected areas, SSGs can support local authorities, local people and/or private

landowners to conserve biodiversity, by developing local conservation programmes, or even taking responsibility for site management themselves.

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In Vietnam, BirdLife has piloted the Site Support Group model in six wetlands and forest IBAs, with altogether 11 SSGs in Quang Ninh, Son La, Nam Dinh, Quang Binh and Quang Tri provinces. SSG members typically consist of villagers, commune staff, representatives of local mass organizations and other local stakeholders (e.g. staff of local Forest Protection Department or State Forest Enterprises).

The approach has generated very encouraging initial results, the most important of which is wider grassroots support for conservation. There has been enthusiastic participation by local people, many as volunteers; excellent support and participation among local authorities as they realize the complementary value of the SSG approach to their work; and strong, mutually supportive relationship between SSGs and local Forest Protection Department units.

However, a lot remain to be done. BirdLife's ambition is to find a sustainable funding mechanism to support the long-term conservation of IBAs - sites of global biological importance.

Pham Tuan Anh, BirdLife International Vietnam Programme

Road building in Tam Dao National Park, Vietnam



Photo: Allan Drewitt

We were disturbed to learn of the following, "I have just returned from a trip to Vietnam which included a visit to Tam Dao. While at Tam Dao I visited the famous Three Peaks or water tank trail and, instead of finding a quiet footpath through undisturbed forest, I found the that almost the entire trail had been obliterated by the construction of a new road. The purpose of the road is tourism and it will provide access to Tam Dao's second highest peak (an area with no current access other than by foot).

Shocking though this was, and of concern because it will allow increased access to a relatively remote area of forest, I was even more distressed by the careless nature of the road construction work. Instead of spoil being taken from the site, the rocks and soil dislodged by bulldozers and dynamite (they were blasting for two days during my visit) are simply being dumped down the mountainside. This is causing serious damage to great swathes of the forest below the road, as shown by the attached photo taken from just below Tam Dao and looking up to the first part of what used to be the trail. Clearly this approach will lead to enormous damage if employed all the way to the summit of the mountain and must surely be unacceptable, regardless of this area's status as a National Park.

I am sending this email for information and to alert you, in case you were unaware, to this destruction. I hope that BirdLife International will attempt to persuade the Vietnamese government to reconsider its actions and either cease the road building or at least continue construction in a more environmentally acceptable way."

Allan Drewitt, allandrewitt@onetel.com

Road building threatens Western Siem Pang (KH008) IBA, Cambodia

Western Siem Pang IBA in Stung Treng Province supports important populations of Globally Threatened bird species including Giant and White-shouldered Ibis. Its current status as a forestry concession remains difficult to establish and it is now threatened by active road building.

Global Witness indicate that Siem Pang is one of the "mysterious" concessions that only shows-up on some of the official registries of concessions. If it has been cancelled, there is no official indication or record. Its current status as a concession seems to be in limbo.

The main national highway from Kratie to Stung Treng (across the Sesan River) and on up to the Laos border is now a very wide, large, soon to be surfaced road. It connects with the national highway running north/south through Laos. About 2-3 km south of the Laos border, the government are planning to expand the existing dirt track that meets with the road that runs north-east to Siem Pang. The dirt track runs for about 15 km and the rest is a mapped (albeit virtually nonexistent) road to the town. The Director General of the Public Works Dept. at the Ministry of Public Works and Transportation in Phnom Penh recently indicated that the road to Siem Pang would be built by Cambodian company, not an international one. They are drafting budgets now and hope to start work next dry season. The road is to be ~15m

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wide with about 20m on each side. Total about ~50m or so. It is to be a gravel road, not surfaced. There's no stopping this road as it's going to connect a district capital. Unfortunately, it cuts right through the IBA but it may provide the opportunity to leverage more conservation funding to protect critical parts of the IBA.

A point of concern however is that there is a considerable amount of forest clearing at the point where the small track branches off from the main highway. A recent visit by BirdLife revealed a large swathe of forest cleared adjacent to the track. This does not seem to be part of any formal published plans.

Dr. Sean C. Austin, BirdLife International Cambodia Programme

New Darwin Initiative funded project launched in Myanmar

On Monday February 7th BirdLife and the Biodiversity and Nature Conservation Association (BANCA) jointly held a workshop at *Mi Casa* in Yangon to launch a new Darwin Initiative funded project entitled, *Gurney's Pitta conservation in Thailand and Myanmar*. Beginning in 2005, the project will seek to establish a framework for the conservation of Gurney's Pitta and implement strategic conservation measures in Thailand and Myanmar. It will seek to increase knowledge of Gurney's Pitta numbers, distribution and ecological needs across its range and ensure this information is provided to key stakeholders. The project will put measures to prevent the extinction of Gurney's Pitta in place, develop a strategy for Gurney's Pitta habitat restoration across the species' former range in southern Thailand and agree and propose a conservation strategy for key sites in Myanmar. Lastly the project will seek to increase the capacity of Thai and Myanmar conservationists to undertake further conservation. In Thailand the project will be implemented by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) in collaboration with the Bird Conservation Society of Thailand. In Myanmar the project will be implemented by BirdLife International in Indochina together with BANCA. The workshop heard presentations from Dr Paul Donald, Senior Research Biologist at the RSPB, Dr Htin Hla, BANCA and Jonathan C. Eames, Programme Manager BirdLife International in Indochina. The meeting was well attended by about 50 delegates including distinguished guests the British Ambassador, Her Excellency Vicky Bowman, Dr. Professor Daw Tin Nwe, Dept of Zoology, University of Yangon and U Tin Tun, Forest Department, Ministry of Forestry. We thank everyone for their support.

Rarest of the rare

VU - Spot-billed Pelican *Pelecanus philippensis*



Justification: This species underwent a rapid decline, although at a reduced rate as a result of widespread degradation and exploitation of wetlands and colonies. It therefore qualifies as Vulnerable.

Identification: 127-140cm. Small, dull, pelican with spotted bill and pouch. Dusky, tufted hindcrown and hindneck, bluish lores, mostly pinkish upper mandible, and pale flight feathers from below. Similar spp. Dalmatian Pelican *P. crispus* is larger, brighter white with orange pouch and bushes, curly crest. Juvenile Great White Pelican *P. orocrotalus* is larger with darker head, neck and upperparts, paler lores and blackish flight feathers.

Population estimate	Population trend	Range estimate	country endemic?
7,500-10,000	decreasing	181,000 km ²	No

Range & population: *Pelecanus philippensis* was formerly common across much of Asia. However, it has suffered a widespread decline in the recent past, such that in 1997 its population was estimated at 11,5000 birds, with fewer mature individuals. Known breeding population are now confined to **India** (c.2,000 birds), **Sri Lanka** (500-3,000 birds) and **Cambodia** (more than 5,000 birds around Tonle Sap lake). It probably breeds in small numbers on Sumatra, **Indonesia**, but probably no longer breeds in **Myanmar**, **Nepal**, **Thailand**, **Laos** and **Vietnam**, and no longer occurs in the Philippines and China.

Ecology: It inhabits a variety of deep and shallow wetlands, both man-made and natural, freshwater and saline, open and forested. It breeds colonially in tall trees or palms and feeds in water, primarily on fish. Some populations appear to be sedentary.

Threats: A crucial factor in its decline was the loss of the Sittang valley breeding colony in Myanmar though deforestation and loss of breeding-sites. Key threats are a combination of human disturbance at breeding colonies and wetlands, extensive felling of nesting trees, hunting and poaching of eggs and chicks. Additional threats include loss of important feeding-sites through siltation, agriculture intensification, aquaculture development, drainage and conversion of wetlands, declines in wetland productivity as a result of pesticide use and over-exploitation of fisheries.

Conservation measures underway: In India, several key breeding colonies are in protected areas and some local communities have pelican conservation initiatives. In Cambodia, the breeding colonies at Prek Total and Moat Khla/Boeng Chhma are included in the Tonle Sap Biosphere Reserve. In 1997, eggs and chick collection was prevented by the presence of Wildlife Protection Office stall at Prek Total.

Conservation measures proposed: Identify and survey colonies in Cambodia and any remaining in Myanmar. Afford strict protection to important nesting colonies and key feeding sites. Promote alternative livelihoods to communities dependent on large waterbird colonies in Cambodia. Promote strict control of pesticide use in important feeding areas. Establish a wildlife protection office at Tonle Sap lake. Draft and enforce new legislation pertaining to large waterbird colony conservation around Tonle Sap lake. Expand conservation awareness programmes at key sites.

Project updates

Improving local livelihood through SSG activities

In July 2005, with the add-on monies from DGIS small grants programme, the BirdLife Vietnam Programme implemented development-related activities at one pilot site - Dakrong IBA to address the poverty-related causes of threats to biodiversity loss.

The aim of this component is to help:

- (1) retain a bigger share of the value of exploited forest products from forests to local communities;
- (2) involve the existing Site Support Groups and local communities in activities that combine forest protection and income generation such as forest gardens, forest regeneration, therefore to reduce dependency on natural forests and strengthen the role and sustainability of SSGs in a forest co-management strategy.

A participatory approach was applied in project implementation to secure the support from relevant stakeholders. To collect baseline data and make an action plan, a rapid assessment of key NTFPs in the project commune was conducted by project staff in August 2004. Based on this rapid assessment, the indigenous rattan *Calamus tetradactylus* was selected. Two villages in Ba Long Commune were chosen to pilot community livelihood models.

According to the project design, two traditional handicraft products were selected and promoted in Dakrong and Ba Long communes, including making conical hats from "Nor" leaves and making brooms from "Dot" which are a popular NTFP at the site. A PRA report indicated that the market demand for these products in these areas is increasing.

These training courses were undertaken in March 2005 to make sure all participants had the skills to produce traditional handicrafts. The participants included 50% Van Kieu ethnic minority, 100% of forest-dependent households, 82% of poor households and 100% of women. All of them were very keen to sign the negotiated commitment which commits them to:



Local people were trained on skills of making "Dot" brooms in Dakrong communes.

Photo: Nguyen Luong Duyen/BirdLife

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- Apply their skills at NTFP production;
- Share the experiences and skills of alternative livelihoods with other households in the village;
- Strengthen the involvement of local people in alternative livelihoods practices to increase household income;
- Use forest products sustainably and reduce activities that impact negatively on the forest;
- Not to be involved in illegal activities, i.e. hunting, snaring, illegal extracting and trading wildlife.

Another project plan is to develop rattan nurseries. Because of the cycle of growth of rattan and local seasons, the rattan nursery will be set up in May 2005. This nursery will be managed by SSG members to provide seedlings for forest gardens development and forest regeneration.

The benefit-sharing mechanism was discussed and finalised by stakeholders to identify the beneficiaries of project activities. Some of the rattan seedlings will be sold with a subsidised price or given free to poor households, to encourage their involvement in this activity. Therefore, these livelihood activities will significantly contribute to improve household income and reduce their dependence on the exploitation of forest resources.

The livelihood activities have attracted the interest of the Women's Union and Dakrong district, who have integrated other livelihood projects in the same area and seek the lessons learnt from the experiences on alternative livelihoods from the Dakrong communities.

Local residents now have a new vision to improve their standard of living through their own efforts and manage local forest resources sustainably.

Nguyen Luong Duyen, BirdLife International Vietnam Programme

BirdLife Cambodia Conservation Activities at Western Siem Pang IBA and Sekong River IBA, north east Cambodia

My name is Chea Ngeth, Assistant Project officer for BirdLife International Cambodia Programme Office. I am also a technical officer for the Wildlife Protection Office of the Forestry Administration in Cambodia. I started work with BirdLife International in October 2003. I and Mr. Kry Masphal (Project Officer) currently work in two IBAs in north-east Cambodia, Western Siem Pang and the Sekong River in Stung Treng Province

I-General situation of IBA in Siem Pang district

Western Siem Pang IBA comprises of an area of open deciduous forest which is bordered to the north and west by Xe Piane Protected Area in Laos and to the east by Sekong River. The Sekong River IBA comprises the stretch of the Sekong River from the international border with Laos to its confluence with the Mekong River. Along the Sekong River, the main habitats include a channel mosaic of rock and islands with riverine scrub. Both areas support globally critical and near-threatened bird species such as White-shouldered Ibis, three Vulture species, Green Peafowl, Sarus Crane, Giant Ibis, Lesser Adjutant, Gray-headed Fish Eagle, and Mekong Wagtail. These areas are still very undeveloped and support a relatively low human population. As a result, there are great opportunities for conservation efforts to be successful.

II-Site Support Group Members (SSG)

Mr. Kry Masphal and I recruited Site Support Group Members in February 2004 in Western Siem Pang IBA and August 2004 along the Sekong River IBA. These groups are responsible for conservation activities in their respective villages and communes. The SSGs are made up of village chiefs, commune chiefs, local police, military police, and provincial forestry staff.

The SSG's have different activities depending on the season. This area of Cambodia has a distinct dry season (November - April) and wet season (May - October). During the dry season, the SSGs in Western Siem Pang IBA and Sekong River IBA visit seasonal water holes and seasonal wetlands (locally called trapeangs and boeungs) near their villages to conduct bird surveys and counts, monitor prevent illegal or harmful activities (hunting, egg collection, etc.) and educate local villagers they encounter. During the wet season, they conduct awareness raising and conservation education for villagers, including school children.

The BirdLife International Cambodia Programme has an office in Siem Pang district town for organising its field work, holding meetings and keeping equipment. Every month the SSGs come to the BirdLife office to submit their datasheets and report on their activities.

1-Education and awareness raising in 2004



Giving a schoolgirl a BirdLife writing book as a prize for answering a question correctly. Photo: BirdLife Cambodia Programme

On our many trips to these IBAs, the Project Officer and I conducted several trainings for both IBA SSG members. Training included using a GPS, identifying bird species and writing field reports. I also worked to educate local communities about wildlife conservation, for example, not hunting wildlife, no bird egg collection and no poisoning. We taught the villagers that wildlife species can be made extinct in our country and other species can become near- threatened and globally threatened. This has already happened with species such as Asian Elephant, Wild Water Buffalo, Banteng, Eld's Deer, White-shouldered Ibis, Giant Ibis, Sarus Cranes, etc. In one community in Western Siem Pang, there are 59 participants who work with the SSG to help protect the wildlife. With the support of this Programme Office, the SSG is now able to identify many bird species such as Green peafowl, Parakeet,

White-shouldered Ibis, Giant Ibis, Lesser Adjutant, Greater Adjutant, Sarus Crane, Vulture etc. They can now write monthly field and progress reports (datasheets) and use GPS to identify important sightings of wildlife or human activities.

In December 2004 the Project Officer and I conducted a workshop in Siem Pang town Primary school. We spent the day discussing conservation with 67 school children and educating them about wildlife and the importance of protecting the natural environment.

To increase the children's enthusiasm we played a number of games and then provided them with BirdLife writing books, conservation brochures and BirdLife T-shirts as rewards for participating and answering questions.

2-Cooperation with other NGOs

In January 2004 I worked closely with the development NGO Youth With A Mission (YWAM) and local authorities to conduct a Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) in a remote village of Siem Pang District. We had 172 participants attend and they all provided information about their communities and local needs. The BirdLife staff introduced wildlife conservation information and listened to the local people to hear their views on wildlife protection. The villagers understood that it takes the cooperation and commitment of everyone if we are to protect the natural wildlife in Cambodia. In May 2004 BirdLife staff cooperated with WWF Cambodia and WCS Cambodia to do field training in Siem Pang on conducting vulture restaurants. This training also served as a census of the vulture populations in the north-east dry forest landscape of Cambodia.

The results were unexpected and encouraging. The restaurant recorded the single largest count of vultures in Indochina in the last 15 years. The Cambodia Programme is now working with the partner NGOs (WWF, WCS) to come up with a vulture conservation strategy and action plan. This will include more vulture restaurants to provide supplemental food supplies, satellite tracking and banding to provide population information, and conservation activities to protect nesting sites.

Looking forward, there are several main targets that we at BirdLife would like to work on and achieve for the IBAs in north-east Cambodia.

1. Continue to increase wildlife conservation education and awareness in villages and schools.
2. Initiate conservation activities, including setting up a SSG, along the Sesan River IBA next year.
3. Continue to cooperate closely with local authorities and any relevant agencies.
4. Strengthen wildlife conservation efforts in each priority IBA.
5. Design and distribute conservation education materials to other IBA communities (e.g., designing a bird conservation signboard, putting up a BirdLife conservation banners, etc.)

Mr. Chea Ngeth, Assistant Project Officer, BirdLife International Cambodia Programme

Village-based conservation initiatives in Natmataung National Park buffer zones

The Biodiversity and Nature Conservation Association (BANCA) and BirdLife International, in collaboration with the staff of Natmataung National Park in Chin State, Myanmar, are helping village-based groups with development projects in return for villagers supporting conservation efforts in the adjacent national park. A recent visit by BANCA's Chairman U Uga and Jonathan C. Eames from BirdLife has revealed a promising start that warrants further international support.

BANCA and BirdLife are working at two villages, Okpo and Hilaung in the buffer zone of Natmataung National Park. These villages were carefully selected by U Uga and U Shein Gay Ngai, Warden of Natmataung National Park, in part because of their high levels of poverty and the level of hunting by villagers in the national park. Last year, meetings between local villagers and district authorities helped identify the development priorities in each village. National Park staff explained to the villagers their obligations as stakeholders in maintaining the integrity of the national park, which includes Mount Victoria, the highest peak in Chin State. As a result of these meetings, the villages elected representatives to form Site Support Groups (SSGs) to take the lead in promoting village development initiatives and implementing anti-poaching patrols around the national park.



BANCA Chairman U Uga reviews progress with project activities in the nurseries. Photo: J.C.Eames



Weaving represents a way for village women to earn cash from a high value product produced locally. Photo: J.C.Eames

Site Support Groups comprise concerned stakeholders who organize themselves to protect sites of international conservation importance, termed Important Bird Areas (IBAs) by BirdLife International. The BirdLife International Partnership of non-government organisations promotes this approach worldwide to help safeguard sites which may not receive formal protection as national parks, nature reserves or wildlife sanctuaries.

To-date the two SSGs in Myanmar, with BANCA and BirdLife support and funded through the British Government's Darwin Initiative, have established nurseries for coffee and avocado seedlings, introduced a higher yielding seed potato variety from Shan State, and built or repaired freshwater storage tanks in both villages. In return for this help, the SSGs have formed anti-poaching patrols which intercept hunters around the national park and confiscate traps.

"One of the issues for villagers has been food security," said BANCA's Chairman U Uga, "At the villagers' request we began by providing rice to households facing food shortages, but we discontinued this after we discovered the villagers' preference for improved potato varieties. Villagers are now asking for our help to introduce other cash crops."

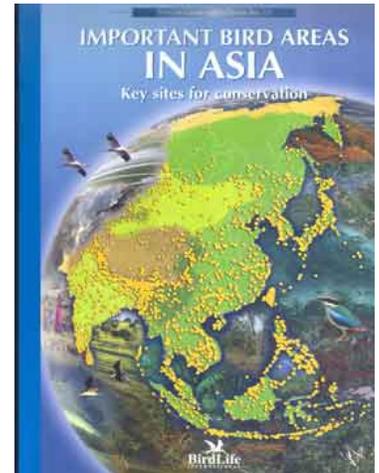
"I was amazed at the level of take-up by the villagers, especially at Hilaung village. Here the anti-poaching patrols asked for staff from the national park to back them up and for us to provide uniforms, which I interpret to be a measure of pride in what they are doing, and an expression of their commitment" commented Jonathan C. Eames.

Flushed with success, BANCA and BirdLife would like to scale-up activities at Okpo and Hilaung villages and introduce the model to other villages in the buffer-zone. This will form part of their Darwin-funded project in 2005. They are also keen to hear from donors who may wish to support the project.

Jonathan C. Eames, BirdLife International in Indochina

Book reviews

Important Bird Areas in Asia by BirdLife International (2004). ISBN: 0-946888-54-X. Available from the Natural History Book Service Ltd, email: nhbs@nhbs.co.uk, Internet: www.nhbs.com/services/birdlife.html



Another milestone BirdLife achievement, *Important Bird Areas in Asia: key sites for conservation* represents the culmination of eight years of research drawing on the knowledge of hundreds of professional and amateur ornithologists and government staff in 28 countries and territories across the Asia region. It is essentially a distillation of eight published county IBA directories, similar works in preparation for several other countries, and the first attempts to collate IBA information for the remainder. Produced in the familiar, eye-catching BirdLife conservation series guise, the bulk of the book (232pp) comprises summary accounts of the IBA networks in each country, in an attractive tabulated format, giving basic information (location, habitats, altitude and criteria for designation) for each site. Each country account also contains overview descriptions of the key habitats and bird species, protected areas systems and key conservation issues, and a well-produced map illustrating the distribution of IBAs by size class.

Of particular interest are the core sections that precede the individual country accounts; these summarise the IBA methodology, provide an overview of analysis of the results, and a seven page strategy for the conservation of IBAs in Asia. One of the work's key findings is that 43% of IBAs are currently afforded no protection. It would have been interesting to see more discussion of this, and perhaps more emphasis given to the role of 'artificial' (heavily man-modified) landscapes in bird conservation, the third most important habitat in terms of proportional area represented (22%) by the IBA network in Asia.

This book's publication comes hot on the heels of *Saving Asia's Threatened Birds: a guide for government and civil society*, to which in some ways it is a companion publication, providing the comprehensive site-level detail that could not be presented in *SATB*, and is another key resource from the BirdLife library for environmental planners across the region. I hope it is widely disseminated and finds a place on the most-used shelves of all government and donor libraries.

Pete Davidson, Freelance Consultant

From the Archives

Ward's Trogon *Harpactes wardi* named for British plant collector Frank Kingdon-Ward, is a shy and enigmatic denizen of montane forests of the eastern Himalayas. The following plate by Henrik Gronvold, reproduced from volume II of *Les Oiseaux de l'Indochine Française* by Jean Delacour and Pierre Jabouille, clearly shows the rich, almost egg-yolk colour of the underparts of the female. This is in contrast to the illustration of the female on plate 14 of *A field guide to the birds of Thailand and South-East Asia* (inset) by Craig Robson, illustrated by Jan Wilczur, which shows the female having bright lemon underparts. So why the discrepancy and who is right? We can be fairly sure that neither artist has seen the species in life. Both artists surely referred to skins. Gronvold painted from freshly collected material obtained in the 1920s, and Jan Wilczur may have referred to the same skins some 80 years later. However, yellow feather pigments are subject to fading in many species, and clearly this is the case with Ward's Trogon, since having just seen the species in the Kachin State, I can vouch for Gronvold being correct.

Jonathan C. Eames, BirdLife International in Indochina

