

Threatened Birds of Asia: The BirdLife International Red Data Book, by N. J. Collar, A. Andreev, S. Chan, M. J. Crosby, S. Subramanya and J. A. Tobias (eds.). Maps by Rudyanto and M. J. Crosby. 2001. BirdLife International, Cambridge, U.K. 2 Vols, 3038 pp. ISBN 0 946888 42 6 (part A); ISBN 0 946888 43 4 (part B); ISBN 0 946888 44 2 (set). Available from the Natural History Book_Service Ltd., 2-3 Wills Road, Totnes, Devon, TQ9 5XN, U.K. (e-mail nhbs@nhbs.co.uk). £55. (Also available as CD-Rom, price £12.

Studies of birds have usually underpinned much of the qualification and enumeration of biodiversity, and assessment of the threats confronting it, because birds are better known than most other taxa. Even so, a compilation on the current scale, and at the present level of detail, could scarcely have been dreamed of only twenty years ago. An earlier Bird Red Data Book (KING, 1981) took just a few hundred pages to cover all the world's threatened birds. The present volume, dealing with Asia alone and comprising a whopping 3038 pages in two huge volumes, is the third part of a Red Data Book trilogy: The African bird RDB appeared in 1985 and was followed by that for the Americas a few years later. Although the threats to biodiversity have grown enormously during this period, perhaps we may draw some slight comfort from the knowledge that, based on the evidence of these compilations, our ability to recognize and assess those threats, and to recommend actions to offset them, has grown even more. Unfortunately though, this improved understanding has yet to be matched by a proportionate increase in societies' and governments' commitments to addressing those threats, in spite of the best efforts of national and international conservation bodies.

Threats to biodiversity in Asia are possibly even greater than those in other regions of the world, owing to human population pressure and the high economic growth rate. No fewer than 323 of Asia's 2700 bird species are listed as globally threatened in the current compilation. Each species account covers, in meticulous detail, country by country distribution, in which all records are listed and mapped; population status; ecology; threats and conservation measures, both those already taken and others which are proposed. Accounts for individual species range from 2–3 pages, up to 45 pages for the Philippine Eagle, and 16 pages for Thailand's own "flagship bird", Gurney's Pitta. In the course of this project roughly 10,400 localities for endangered birds throughout Asia were identified and mapped.

The aim of this RDB is to provide the information on which specific conservation actions may be targeted at local, national and regional levels throughout Asia. One potential danger is that there is so much information contained in the current compilation that it could prove indigestible to statutory national conservation bodies, and hard-pressed conservation planners. However the RDB is only one of a suite of tools provided by the energetic BirdLife partnership, which has been able to draw on the pooled resources, knowledge and dedication of field and museum ornithologists, birdwatchers and conservationists around the world. The RDB is species-based, but the others are site-based. They include a catalogues of the world's endemic bird areas (EBAs), biodiversity "hotspots", where the ranges of two or more restricted range species overlap, and the ongoing Important Bird Areas (IBA) project, which catalogues those areas which do not necessarily fulfil EBA status, but which nevertheless sustain habitats, species or assemblages of particular importance. In addition, the Asian RDB has already spawned a number of national, local language RDBs, most notably that for the Philippines, while many others are in preparation.

Threatened Birds of Asia does credit to the entire team of editors and compilers, and to the BirdLife Asia Partnership, but especially to the Editor-in-Chief, Dr. Nigel Collar, whose foresight, vision and selfless dedication to the cause of bird conservation over two decades have brought BirdLife's RDB project to completion.

REFERENCES

KING, W. B. 1981. *Red Data Book 2. Aves*. Second edition. IUCN, Gland.

Philip Round

Department of Biology
Faculty of Science
Mahidol University
Rama 6 Road
Bangkok 10400