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Migratory Species of Conservation Concern in the Southeast Asian Region

Prepared by BirdLife International and the EAAFP Secretariat

Summary

The Southeast Asian region supports a large number of short-distance migratory waterbirds. Of this, many species are known to undertake wet-dry migratory movements in response to seasonal monsoonal patterns.

As a result of widespread habitat loss and degradation, especially that of inland freshwater and riverine wetlands, many short-distance, migratory waterbirds are now listed under the IUCN Red List as globally threatened. This includes the Sarus crane *Antigone antigone* (VU), greater adjutant *Leptotilos dubius* (EN) and the masked finfoot *Heliopais personatus* (EN).

This information document seeks to highlight the conservation needs of short-distance migratory waterbirds in the Southeast Asian region and to promote discussion on regional collaboration and cooperation on shared priority species of conservation concern.

1. Introduction

The East Asian–Australasian Flyway is widely considered the largest and most threatened of the world's four major migratory bird flyways. This is due to the large-scale loss and degradation of coastal, inter-tidal wetlands across in the region, which are used as key staging and wintering areas by a majority of the migratory species in this flyway. In recognition of these issues, the East Asian–Australasian Flyway Partnership was established in 2006 to provide a flyway-wide framework to promote the conservation of migratory waterbirds and their habitats along the EAAF. Of the 22 countries along the EAAF, 18 (80%) have so far joined the Partnership.

In recent decades, conservation effort and resources in the East Asian–Australasian Flyway have prioritised globally threatened long-distance migratory waterbirds that either stage and/or over-winter in wetlands in eastern Asia, especially in the Yellow/West Sea region. These include shorebirds (spoon-billed sandpiper *Calidris pygmaea*), gulls (Saunders's gull *Saundersilarus saundersi*, relict gull *Larus relictus*), ducks (Baer's pochard *Aythya baeri*, scaly-sided merganser *Mergus squamatus*), cranes (white-naped *Antigone vipio*, hooded *Grus monacha*, Siberian crane *Leucogeranus leucogeranus* and red-crowned crane *Grus japonensis*), spoonbills (Black-faced spoonbill *Platalea minor*), storks (Oriental stork *Ciconia boyciana*) and herons (Chinese egret *Egretta eulophotes*).

In contrast, there has been far less effort and resources allocated to conserve intra-tropical or short-distance migratory waterbirds, many of which remain poorly studied. Many of these species migrate within the Southeast Asian region and neighboring areas in the EAAF (e.g. southern China, Bangladesh, north-east India, Bhutan). Short-distance migratory waterbirds in Southeast Asia typically undertake wet-dry season migratory movements, in response to the seasonal monsoon patterns that characterizes the region. These short-distance migrants includes many species of storks, cormorants and pelicans that breed in mainland Southeast Asia, such as the spot-billed pelican *Pelecanus philippensis* and the Sarus crane *Antigone antigone*. Like long-distance migratory species, short-distance migrants in the Southeast Asian region are increasingly impacted by habitat loss and degradation of inland wetlands (including riverine wetlands), as well as localized hunting pressures in Southeast Asia. This has resulted in many species being now listed as globally threatened under the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.

In recent years, there has been an increasing interest and involvement of the ASEAN member states in the conservation of migratory waterbirds. To support this, Singapore presented a proposal on behalf of the eight ASEAN Member States (AMS) present at 9th Meeting of the Partners (2017) on Improving Biodiversity Conservation of Wetlands and Migratory Waterbirds in the ASEAN Region to the ASEAN Working Group on Nature Conservation and Biodiversity (AWGNBCB). It has since been endorsed and renamed the ASEAN Flyway Network (AFN).

2. Migratory waterbird species of concern for Southeast Asia

A preliminary review was made to identify short-distance, migratory waterbird species of conservation concern for Southeast Asia and neighboring countries. The results of this review (Table 1) includes a number of globally threatened species with significant populations in Southeast Asia. This includes, for instance, the masked finfoot *Heliopais personatus* (EN) and the Sarus crane *Antigone antigone* (VU) as well as species that migrate between Southeast Asia and adjoining countries, such as Japanese night heron *Gorsachius goisagi* (EN). This review also identified a number of migratory waterbirds whose populations show declining trends but their conservation status has not yet been upgraded on the latest IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, such as the watercock *Gallicrex cinerea* (LC) and Schrenck's bittern *Ixobrychus eurhythmus* (LC).

The review also identified some widely-shared causes of decline for these species. This includes the conversion, loss and degradation of their wetland or forest habitat, as well as unsustainable and/or illegal hunting. Efforts to conserve these species would necessarily involve addressing the different drivers of threat affecting these species, regional cooperation as well as the sustainable management of key sites for these species. For instance, efforts to conserve the eastern (migratory) population of the Sarus crane (ssp. *sharpii*) in mainland Southeast Asia can be expected to include strengthening the management of protected areas important to the species. These protected areas include the breeding grounds of the Sarus crane in Preah Vihear Protected Forest and Kulen Promtep Wildlife Sanctuary and wintering grounds in the Ang Trapeng Thmor, Boeung Prek Lapouv and Anlung Pring Sarus Crane Reserves in Cambodia, as well as the adjacent Tram Chim National Park and Kieng Luong in Vietnam.

Table 1. Tentative list of globally threatened and declining short-distance migratory bird species in the Southeast Asian region and known sites where these species occur based on existing data. The IUCN Red List threat categories for each species are provided in parenthesis.

Species	Range states	Habitat type	Known sites
Globally Threatened species under the IUCN Red List			
Masked Finfoot <i>Heliopais personatus</i> (EN)	Breeds India, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Cambodia, (may potentially breed) but winters in Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore	Swamp forest, mangrove forests; also coastal and inland wetlands, e.g. swamps, tidal creeks, flooded forest, and lakes.	Cambodia Kulen Promtep Wildlife Sanctuary Malaysia Taman Negara Myanmar Tamanthi and Hukaung Valley Wildlife Sanctuary Thailand Ao Phang-nga, Khao Yai National Park
Greater Adjutant <i>Leptotilos dubius</i> (EN)	Localized breeding in NE India, and NW Cambodia; disperses widely across mainland SE Asia	Swamp forest and other inland wetlands, including grasslands, cultivation, marshes and forested pools (e.g. trapengs)	Cambodia Prek Toal Ramsar Site and other reserves on the Tonle Sap Lake Vietnam Tram Chim National Park
Japanese Night Heron <i>Gorsachius gosisagi</i> (EN)	Breeds only Japan; winters mainly in the Philippines, also Indonesia, Brunei and Malaysia.	Breeds in lowland and hill forests (Honshu); winters in forest, and adjacent cultivation; also in swamps and rice fields.	Indonesia recently recorded in Belitung Malaysia Mantanani Island Wildlife Sanctuary Philippines Quezon National Park, Mount Apo Natural Park
(Eastern) Sarus Crane <i>A. antigone sharpii</i> (VU)	Breeds mostly Myanmar, Cambodia, Thailand, possibly Laos; winters Cambodia and Vietnam	Breeds open forest, winters in grasslands (flooded, dry), agricultural fields, freshwater marshes and ponds	Cambodia Kulen Promtep Wildlife Sanctuary, Ang Trapeang Thmor, Boeung Prek Lapouv and Anlung Pring Sarus Crane Reserves Myanmar Indawgyi Lake Wildlife Sanctuary, sites in Ayerwaddy Delta Thailand Huay Jorrakaemak Reservoir Non-Hunting Area Vietnam Tram Chim National Park, Kien Luong Wetlands
Indian Skimmer <i>Rynchops albicollis</i> (VU)	Localised breeding populations in India, Nepal, Bangladesh; formerly bred widely in Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam but now very rare in	Breeds on riverine sand bars; disperses widely to coastal wetlands, including coastal mudflats and other open wetlands in non-breeding season	Myanmar Nanthar Island, Gulf of Mottama Ramsar Site; other yet to be identified wetlands likely in northern Myanmar.

	Southeast Asia; disperses widely during the non-breeding season		
Black-bellied Tern <i>Sterna acuticauda</i> (EN)	Localised breeding populations in India, Nepal, Bangladesh; formerly bred widely in Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam but now rare; disperses widely during non-breeding season	Breeds on riverine sand bars and spits; also in marshes; disperses widely along riverine wetlands.	Myanmar Upper Irrawaddy River? Formerly abundant, but now rare Laos Formerly common along the Mekong, but now rare Cambodia Formerly bred along the Lower Mekong, now very rare and possibly extinct
Wood Snipe <i>Gallinago nematicola</i> (VU)	Breeds in the Himalayas and winters at lower elevation, e.g. northern Vietnam, Myanmar, northern Thailand and Laos.	Breeds in alpine meadows and marshes but winters in swampy ground in and at the edge of evergreen forest and marshy grassland and scrub.	Vietnam formerly Hoang Lien National Park
Globally Near Threatened species under IUCN Red List, and other species whose populations are declining based on available data			
Spot-billed Pelican <i>Pelecanus philippensis</i> (NT)	In SE Asia, mainly breeds in Cambodia (Tonle Sap) and disperses to Thailand and Vietnam; small numbers present in Myanmar, but no known colonies	Swamp forest, freshwater marshes, vegetated edge of ponds and lakes, coastal mudflats, rarely working wetlands	Cambodia Prek Toal Ramsar Site and other sites on the Tonle Sap Lake Myanmar Indawgyi Lake Wildlife Sanctuary
Black-headed Ibis <i>Threskiornis melanocephalus</i> (NT)	Occurs across much of South, SE and East Asia. In SE Asia, mainly breeds in Cambodia, with small numbers elsewhere (Myanmar, Vietnam, Indonesia)	Swamp forest, freshwater marshes, vegetated edge of ponds and lakes, flooded grassland, agricultural fields, coastal mudflats and mangroves	Cambodia Prek Toal Ramsar Site and sites on the Tonle Sap Lake Indonesia Berbak-Sembilang National Park Myanmar Gulf of Mottama Ramsar Site Thailand Various sites in the Inner Gulf of Thailand Vietnam Tram Chim National Park
Watercock <i>Gallicrex cinerea</i> (LC)	Occurs across much of South, SE and East Asia.	Freshwater marshes, vegetated edge of ponds and lakes, flooded grassland, agricultural fields	Widespread in Southeast Asia

Schrenck's Bittern <i>Ixobrychus eurhythmus</i> (LC)	Breeds in China, SE Russia, Korea and Japan. Winters across much of SE Asia.	Breeds freshwater marshes (incl. reed beds), vegetated edge of ponds and lakes, winters in freshwater marshes, and forested streams and rivers (including mangroves)	Widespread in Southeast Asia
River Tern <i>Sterna aurantia</i> (NT)	Localised breeding populations in India, Nepal, Bangladesh; formerly bred widely in Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam but now rare throughout; disperses widely during non-breeding season	Breeds on riverine sand bars and spits; also freshwater marshes; disperses widely to riverine and occasionally, coastal wetlands.	Myanmar Upper Irrawaddy River Thailand Inner Gulf of Thailand Cambodia Scattered sites along Mekong tributaries (incl. West Siem Pang Protected Landscape)