

**Full text of HH Princess Takamado's speech at the launch of *Saving Asia's Threatened Birds*  
Tokyo, Japan, 12 November 2003**

"I am delighted to be with you today at the presentation of *Saving Asia's Threatened Birds: A Guide for Government and Civil Society*. I would personally like to welcome the ambassadors of Singapore, Sri Lanka and Thailand, as well as Mrs Datin Nora Marzuki, the wife of the ambassador of Malaysia and the representatives of the embassy of the Philippines and Russia and thank you for your attendance.

In May 2001, BirdLife International launched a massive two volume Red Data Book called *Threatened Birds of Asia*. It remains a monumental achievement, representing years of co-operation and dedicated hard work at both an international and regional level, and involving the participation of more than 1,000 Asian ornithologists, conservationists and bird lovers. It is the single most detailed publication ever produced on the subject of birds or conservation and it scrupulously uncovers, analyses and assesses all the evidence, thereby living up to the scientific reputation of BirdLife International. However, as a guide to the highest priorities and to the most important actions, those of you who have seen *Threatened Birds of Asia* would know that it is not exactly the easiest of documents to use!

It is therefore with great pride and satisfaction that we know present to you our new book *Saving Asia's Threatened Birds*. Made possible with funding from the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF), this highly focused, elegant reworking of the Red Data Book consists of 250 pages or 120,000 words of key data and critical information. Therefore, I am certain that it will serve as an effective "field guide" for decision makers as they seek to target their energies and resources towards safeguarding the most threatened bird species and avian habitats throughout Asia.

I have always found birds fascinating. But, I fear that all of us have taken them a little too much for granted. In fact, I sometimes wonder if there is any aspect of our lives that has not been touched by them. Since ancient times, men have looked up longingly at the birds flying effortlessly in the sky. Throughout the ages, birds have always been close to us, although sometimes the proximity is not a physical one. They appear in the mythology and legends of all the countries in the world and they have been the inspiration behind many a creative work, be it in the form of poetry, music, painting or even fashion.

Asia is no exception and we are proud of our heritage and the place that birds occupy in our tradition. With our undulating terrain, our luscious forests and our long coastlines, Asia is blessed with a uniquely varied and abundant number of bird species.

We are lucky, but do we realise just how lucky we are? Colourful pittas and majestic raptors, amazing hornbills, elegant migratory cranes and the various offshore seabirds make our lives richer by their sheer existence. Have we thought of the fact that once these birds are lost to us, they are lost to us forever? Each living species is a work of art that nature took millions of years to create. It is a frightening thought that man, not necessarily through choice, but just through sheer carelessness, ignorance or possibly through stupidity, could destroy such creations in a fraction of the time that it took for them to come into being.

In the past, we have looked towards birds for artistic inspiration. Perhaps now, we should allow them to inspire us into appreciating the rich diversity and the intricacy of the earth's ecological system.

Now, as environmental issues grow into global concerns, it is imperative that we act with intelligent integrity and I am pleased to be part of the BirdLife Partnership in its efforts to guide the world in this direction. It is my sincere hope that the publication of this book and the launching of this strategy will give an added impetus to the conservation efforts to maintain the rich biodiversity that is our Asia."