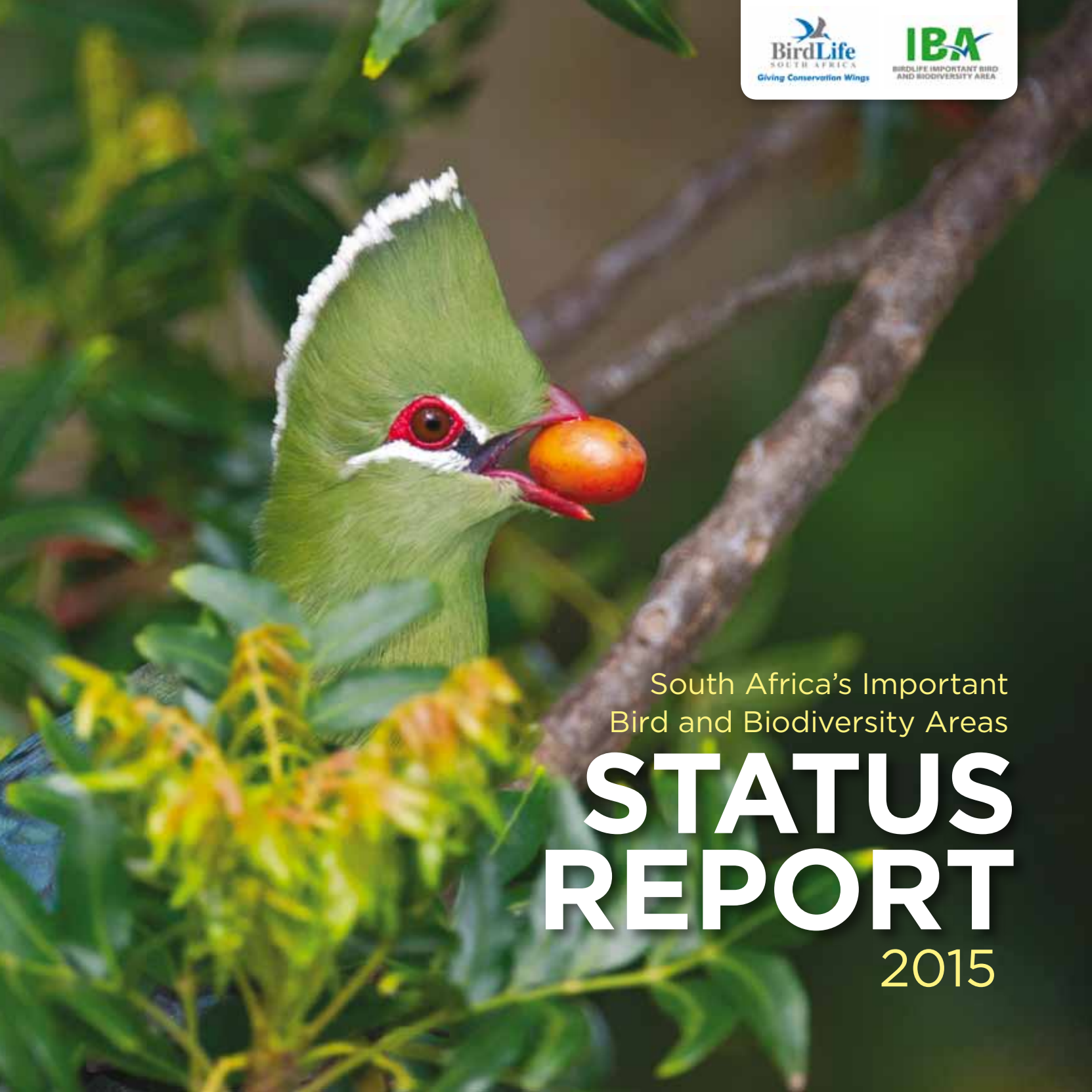

BirdLife SOUTH AFRICA
Giving Conservation Wings

IBA
BIRDLIFE IMPORTANT BIRD AND BIODIVERSITY AREA

South Africa's Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas

STATUS REPORT 2015

THANKS TO OUR DONORS

South Africa's Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas Status Report 2015

Published by BirdLife South Africa
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Without the financial support of our donors (see alongside), none of these IBA assessments would have been possible. Special thanks go to Mitsui & Co. Ltd, which funded many of the IBA assessments and the IBA review processes, and specifically the production of this first IBA Status Report.

BIRDLIFE SOUTH AFRICA

BirdLife South Africa is a Country Partner of BirdLife International; is a registered Non-Profit Organisation and Public Benefit Organisation; and is the only dedicated bird conservation NGO in South Africa. BirdLife South Africa promotes the conservation, enjoyment and understanding of birds and their habitats, which is achieved through a membership network of more than 6 000 members and 32 bird clubs, and through conservation, avitourism, lobbying, advocacy, community conservation and education programmes. As a BirdLife Country Partner, BirdLife South Africa accesses the expertise and global network of BirdLife International.

In line with BirdLife International, BirdLife South Africa commits:

1. To preventing extinctions in the wild.
2. To maintaining, and where possible improving, the conservation status of all bird species.
3. To conserving the sites and habitats important for birds and other biodiversity.
4. To sustaining the vital ecological systems that underpin human livelihoods and enrich the quality of people's lives.
5. In the process, BirdLife will empower people and contribute to the alleviation of poverty, and will strive to ensure sustainability in the use of natural resources.

CONTENTS

SECRETARYBIRD ALBERT FRONEMAN

> “this publication aims to provide an overview of the state of the habitats in IBAs, the pressures on the sites and the conservation action taken to mitigate the threats”

The Tsitsikama–Plettenberg Bay IBA was recently expanded to include the Robberg peninsula.

Many of the BirdLife International Country Partners use IBA assessments to generate IBA Status and Trends reports. BirdLife International has used these country reports to publish its own reports on the state of the IBA network across regions (such as southern Africa). This is South Africa's first IBA Status Report and it will set the benchmark for future IBA Status and Trends reports, which will be published every four to five years.

As a Country Partner to BirdLife International, BirdLife South Africa is responsible for the management of the IBA Programme in South Africa. One of the programme's objectives is to assess and monitor IBAs as well as coordinate and implement conservation actions within them. South Africa's revised network (2015) of 112 IBAs currently spans approximately 14 136 750 ha. Of these IBAs, only 51 (46%) are fully protected, while 33 (29%) have partial protection and 28 (25%) are completely unprotected. For the most part, this unprotected land is privately owned.

IBAs are sites of global significance for bird conservation. They are identified nationally by experts using globally standardised and scientifically agreed criteria. These are based on the significant presence of globally and regionally threatened bird species, assemblages of restricted-range and biome-restricted species, and large concentrations of congregatory species. Often, IBAs also have a significant role to play in the conservation of other biodiversity and ecosystem services, including the provision of fresh water.

As the first IBA Status Report for South Africa, this publication aims to provide an overview of the state of the habitats in IBAs, the pressures on the sites and the conservation action taken to mitigate the threats. It gives a summary and analysis of data gathered for all 112 IBAs and presents these data by protection classes. It provides best-practice case studies across various themes, such as management, protection and monitoring. In conclusion, the report makes recommendations to stakeholders in order to guide their policy-making and management so that IBAs may be successfully protected for the conservation of birds and other biodiversity in the long term. This supports the ultimate aim of the IBA Programme, which is to mainstream IBAs into conservation planning, decision-making and action. The report's target audience therefore comprises government departments and agencies, conservation organisations and environmental practitioners.

ALBERT FRONEMAN (5)

LEFT TO RIGHT *Yellow-billed Stork is Endangered and found in high numbers in IBAs such as Ndumo Game Reserve and iSimangaliso Wetland Park. Ludwig's Bustard is also Endangered and occurs in drier IBAs in the Northern Cape. Southern Bald Ibis is Vulnerable and many of its breeding sites are under threat. Pink-backed Pelican can be seen in large numbers in the iSimangaliso Wetland Park IBA.*

The three variables considered when monitoring the IBAs were the State (condition of the habitats), Pressures (threats to the IBA's habitats and birds), and the Response (management, mitigation, etc.) at the IBA.

The habitat types found to be in the worst state are wetlands, grasslands and shrublands (hereafter referred to as 'fynbos'). This was true of all IBAs holding these habitats, but most notably in those IBAs that are partially protected or unprotected. Modification of the natural systems by excessive or unregulated fire and by grazing is a severe threat common to all IBAs. Partially protected and unprotected IBAs face high levels of pressure from agriculture and from invasive alien and other problem species (e.g. *Phragmites australis* and *Typha latifolia* in wetlands, and *Eucalyptus* and *Pinus* plantations). Invasive species also pose a high level of threat to fully protected IBAs. Although conservation response is, not surprisingly, higher in protected IBAs, there are signs that a lack of resources means that formal protection does not always result in effective conservation management. And while partially protected and unprotected IBAs score low for conservation response, there are small but encouraging signs that action is being taken in them nonetheless.

Birds are good indicators of the health of ecosystems and habitats. By monitoring both the presence of birds and the condition of the habitats in IBAs, this report can demonstrate effectively which habitat types are most threatened and what the biggest threats are to them and to the biodiversity associated with them. By protecting IBAs, it is possible to safeguard a larger suite of biodiversity and ecosystem services. The report can therefore be used to inform conservation planning at a landscape level. It can also make a national contribution to the CBD programme of work, i.e. the Aichi targets. The capacity and skills within BirdLife South Africa's IBA Programme and its partner network make it an ideal agent to monitor, assess and work to conserve these sites.

ACRONYMS

AEWA	African-Eurasian Flyways Agreement
BIRP	Birds in Reserves Project
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CMS	Convention on Migratory Species
CWAC	Co-ordinated Water Bird Counts
DEA	Department of Environmental Affairs
DEAT	Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism
DMR	Department of Mineral Resources
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
IBA	Important Bird and Biodiversity Area
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
NEM: PAA	National Environmental Management: Protected Areas Act (57 of 2003)
SABAP2	Southern African Bird Atlas Project 2
SANBI	South African National Biodiversity Institute
WBDB	World Bird Data Base

> “it is BirdLife South Africa’s intention that each IBA in South Africa will be assessed every four to five years”

It is BirdLife South Africa’s intention that each IBA in South Africa will be assessed every four to five years. The results of the monitoring will be analysed and summarised in an IBA Status and Trends Report, which evaluates the progress made in conserving IBAs in terms of improved management, enhanced protection and the mitigation of threats.

This status report will answer the following questions, while comparing results across different protection levels:

a. How do IBAs score in terms of State, Pressure and Response?
b. Which habitat types are deteriorating most significantly?
c. What are the most prominent threats in IBAs?
d. How do conservation responses compare across different levels of protection in IBAs?

The status report will be used to:

a. Identify the major threats to IBAs on which to focus mitigation, lobbying and advocacy.
b. Identify the most threatened habitat types in fully protected, partially protected and unprotected IBAs.
c. Lobby NGOs and government departments to include IBAs in their conservation planning and environmental practices; and companies to include them in their sustainability plans.
d. Make recommendations to best conserve IBAs.
e. Act as a benchmark for future IBA Status and Trends reports.
f. Inform BirdLife South Africa’s conservation priorities for site and habitat conservation.

ALBERT FRONEMAN (3)

Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs) are sites of international significance for the conservation of the world’s birds and other biodiversity. They also provide essential benefits to people, such as food, materials, water, climate regulation and flood attenuation, as well as opportunities for recreation and spiritual fulfilment. By conserving IBAs, we look after all the ecosystem goods and services they provide, which means in effect that we support a meaningful component of the South African economy (such as water management and agriculture).

Since the late 1970s, more than 12 000 IBAs have been identified in virtually all of the world’s countries and territories, both on land and at sea. In 1998, 122 South African IBAs were identified and listed in Barnes (1998). This inventory was revised to 112 IBAs in 2015 (Marnewick et al. 2015). IBAs have also had considerable and increasing relevance when responses have been developed to a number of wider environmental issues, such as habitat loss, ecosystem degradation, climate change and the sustainable use of resources.

Why birds?

The resources needed to comprehensively assess species richness and endemism patterns across all biodiversity are enormous. Birds are a useful proxy for wider biodiversity because:

- Their distribution and ecology are much better known than those of many other wildlife groups.
- Their taxonomy is well known and relatively stable.
- Bird populations are readily surveyed.
- Birds are widespread, occurring almost everywhere.
- Many bird species are specialised and have specific habitat requirements.
- Birds are mobile and respond to environmental changes.
- There are enough bird species to show meaningful patterns, yet not so many as to make identification a significant challenge.
- Birds are unparalleled in their popularity and local experts from every corner of the world document their distribution and status.
- The global IBA network identified for birds overlaps with the distributions of many other taxonomic groups.

LEFT *In the Malati Drakensberg Park IBA in KwaZulu-Natal, the mountains are a breeding stronghold for Cape Vulture and Bearded Vulture.*

BELOW *Lanner Falcon is regionally Vulnerable and occurs in nearly half of the IBAs in South Africa.*

OPPOSITE *Meves’s Starling is a biome-restricted species that occurs only in the Mapungubwe and Kruger National Park and adjacent areas IBAs.*

> “BirdLife South Africa is playing an increasingly important role in the long-term conservation of both individual sites and broader landscapes”

BirdLife South Africa, and specifically its IBA Programme, is in an ideal position to play a leadership role in the conservation of the set of sites identified as IBAs. A coordinated and strategic approach to conserving IBAs is critical since 54% of the network of 112 sites is either only partially protected or completely unprotected. Of greater concern is that the government is currently allocating fewer resources to managing protected areas under its control, many of which are also IBAs. As a consequence, there is anecdotal evidence to suggest that threats to these sites are increasing. With the support of a large and influential membership base and an ever-increasing suite of partners, as well as the backing of BirdLife International's global programme, BirdLife South Africa is playing an increasingly important role in the long-term conservation of both individual sites and broader landscapes.

The core aims of the IBA Programme are:

a. To identify, monitor and conserve the sites and habitats that support South Africa's priority bird species.
b. To develop a network of partners, from grassroots to national level, who collaborate to conserve IBAs.
c. To gather new data regularly and monitor IBAs in order to track status and trends across the network and so that up-to-date information can be passed on to decision-makers, enabling them to take appropriate conservation action.
d. To confirm periodically that existing IBAs continue to meet the selection criteria and to identify other critical sites that may qualify for recognition as IBAs as new information becomes available.
e. To build capacity in the IBA Programme by sourcing funding, and to acquire and develop appropriate skills in staff and volunteers so that these objectives can be implemented at a regional scale.

Fig. 1: IBAs are identified using four international criteria. (Image courtesy of BirdLife International.)

HOW ARE IBAs IDENTIFIED?

The global network of IBAs has been identified using a set of four internationally agreed criteria. These are based upon globally threatened species; groups of species with a restricted range (defined as less than 50 000 km^2); species assemblages confined to a single biome; and congregations of one or more species. The species concerned are referred to collectively as IBA trigger species. For each criterion, lists of trigger species and associated thresholds have been developed. For a site to qualify as an IBA, the presence of one or more populations or sets of species that meet the thresholds under any criterion must be confirmed.

Global science and local expertise

Using a standardised set of criteria applied to information collected locally, the BirdLife Partnership – a unique global network of national conservation organisations – has produced the foremost worldwide inventory of sites of biodiversity importance.

BirdLife International has developed a simple, globally standardised protocol to monitor IBAs. Standardised scores are used and this makes it easy to identify and analyse trends, for example to compare threats in protected and unprotected IBAs. Results can also be collated nationally, regionally and globally, as well as by habitat, biome, species, protection status and other aspects.

The IBA monitoring framework is designed to minimise the cost and effort of standardised monitoring (Bennun et al. 2005). While the method of assessing IBAs is set globally, the entire process is founded upon locally collected, ground-truthed data that are analysed nationally. A key factor in many of the conservation successes of the initiative has been the early involvement of appropriate government agencies. Regional coordination ensures quality control, equitability and experience-sharing. The data are held in an online database, where each BirdLife Partner organisation is responsible for its national data sets.

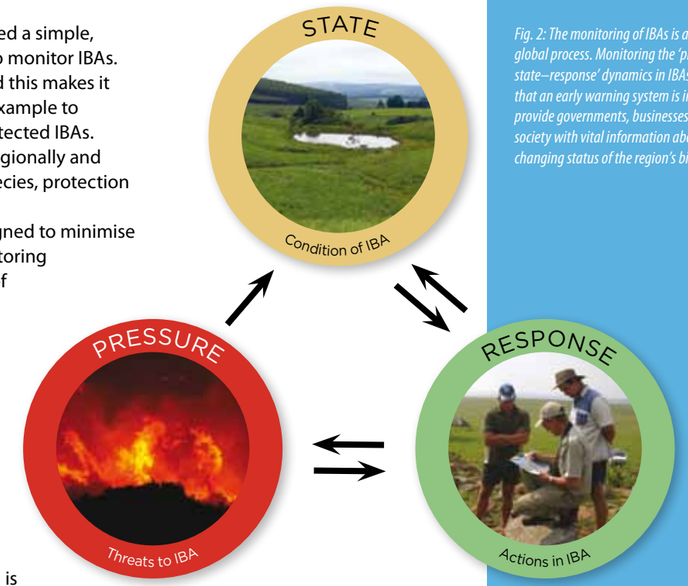

Fig. 2: The monitoring of IBAs is a local-to-global process. Monitoring the 'pressure–state–response' dynamics in IBAs ensures that an early warning system is in place to provide governments, businesses and civil society with vital information about the changing status of the region's biodiversity.

BirdLife South Africa's IBA monitoring makes use of existing monitoring efforts, such as waterbird counts at wetlands in IBAs. These monitoring programmes engage a diversity of people to collect or verify field data, such as Local Conservation Groups, government agencies, volunteer observers (citizen scientists) and researchers.

KEY BIODIVERSITY AREAS

The extension of the IBA approach to a number of other wildlife groups has led to the identification of Important Plant Areas, Prime Butterfly Areas, Important Mammal Areas and Key Biodiversity Areas for Freshwater Biodiversity. To bring these different approaches under a single umbrella, a standard for the identification of Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) is being developed by means of consultations led by the IUCN. The IBA criteria and the experience gained from applying them form the groundwork for this development. IBAs comprise about 80% of the KBAs identified to date and will represent the backbone of a globally comprehensive set of KBAs.

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BELOW, LEFT *Important plants are found in many IBAs.*

BELOW *Government officials, NGO partners and landowners conduct a biodiversity assessment on a farm in Memel in the Grassland IBA. Privately owned land in IBAs can be formally protected through Biodiversity Stewardship, and assessments such as this form part of the programme.*

DEREK ENGELBRECHT

NICK THERON

BIRDLIFE SOUTH AFRICA

IBAs were monitored (hereafter referred to as 'assessed') using an internationally prescribed, standardised assessment format developed by BirdLife International (2006). For the first time since its inception in 1998, the entire South African IBA network was comprehensively assessed between 2010 and 2014, a process that was coordinated by BirdLife South Africa, implemented by its regional conservation managers and supported by a network of partners. These assessments were completed for the original 124 IBAs identified since 1998, covering more than 14 million ha. The IBA Programme staff conducted 90% of the IBA assessments themselves and oversaw the other 10% that were assessed by external professional scientists.

For the purposes of this analysis, the 112 IBAs (as per the revised IBA directory, Marnewick et al. 2015) have been divided up between fully protected (N=51), partially protected (N=33) and unprotected (N=28) IBAs. The divisions were based on the IBAs' protection status in order to better understand the effectiveness of formal protection in mitigating pressures, what the specific threats are in the respective protection classes, and how effective these protection classes are at conserving habitats and the biodiversity associated with them (see page 10 for the complete list of IBAs). The three variables considered during an IBA assessment are the **STATE** either of the birds themselves, through direct counts, or of the habitats they use in the IBA (their quality and the quantity remaining); **PRESSURE** on the IBA's habitats and birds as measured by the various threats to a site; and the conservation **RESPONSES** at the IBA. Standard terms were used for these aspects, following IUCN classifications of habitats, threats and actions[1]. The scores are reviewed externally to ensure objectivity.

The **STATE** measured the condition of each habitat type within an IBA, which was described as being Favourable, Near Favourable, Unfavourable or Very Unfavourable. Because the data for populations of actual bird species are limited, they were not taken into account when the state of the IBA was scored. **PRESSURE** scores were calculated by assessing threats to the trigger species or habitats in an IBA. The timing, scope and severity of each threat were assessed and scored to determine the overall impact of that threat. These threat scores were converted into a threat description of Low, Medium, High or Very High for each threat. The overall threat description for a particular IBA used the weakest link approach, i.e. the highest scoring threat for the IBA was used as the site's overall threat score. The conservation **RESPONSE**, measured by scoring the protection status, management planning and conservation action taken by management, was described as Negligible, Low, Medium or High.

Even though the scores are comprehensively reviewed, the rankings provided by the above scoring system are not exact. Nevertheless, they are useful to draw comparisons between one site and another and to compare changes within a single site over time. All the raw data are held by BirdLife South Africa for future comparisons. The data are summarised for each IBA on the BirdLife South Africa website (*www.birdlife.org.za/conservation/important-bird-areas/iba-directory*).

[1] Available at *www.iucnredlist.org/technical-documents/classification-schemes*

IBA MONITORING SERVES AS AN EARLY WARNING AND EARLY RESPONSE TOOL

IBA monitoring provides a powerful tool for quantifying threats and conservation efforts, as well as measuring their impacts. The primary importance of monitoring is to build a local and national network of observers, caretakers and stake-holders for IBAs who are capable of identifying pressure at sites in good time, so that these threats can be addressed as swiftly and effectively as possible.

> "the three variables considered during an IBA assessment are the STATE either of the birds ... or of the habitats ... PRESSURE on the IBA's habitats and birds ... and the conservation RESPONSES"

LEFT *The annual IBA team meeting in 2015.*

OPPOSITE *An assessment of a newly discovered Cape Vulture breeding site in the Eastern Cape resulted in the proclamation of the Pondoland Cape Vulture IBA.*

LIMPOPO
1 Mapungubwe (P)
2 Kruger National Park and adjacent areas (P)
3 Soutpansberg (P)
4 Blouberg (P)
5 Wolkberg Forest Belt (P)
6 Polokwane Nature Reserve (U)
7 Waterberg System (P)
8 Nyl River Floodplain (P)
9 Northern Turf Thornveld (U)
10 Blyde River Canyon (P)

MPUMALANGA
11 Misty Mountain Natural Heritage Site (F)
12 Kaapsehoop (F)
13 Loskop Dam Nature Reserve (F)
14 Steenkampsberg (P)
15 Songimvelo Nature Reserve (F)
16 Amersfoort–Bethal–Carolina District (U)
17 Chrissie Pans (P)
18 Grasslands (P)

GAUTENG
19 Blesbokspruit (P)
20 Suikerbosrand Nature Reserve (F)
21 Devon Grasslands (U)

NORTH WEST
22 Pilanesberg National Park (F)
23 Botsalano Nature Reserve (F)
24 Magaliesberg (P)
25 Barberspan and Leeupan (P)

NORTHERN CAPE
26 Kalahari Gemsbok National Park (F)
27 Spitskop Dam (U)
28 Augrabies Falls National Park (F)
29 Orange River Mouth Wetlands (U)
30 Dronfield (U)
31 Kamfers Dam (U)
32 Benfontein (U)
33 Mattheus-Gat Conservation Area (U)
34 Haramoep & Black Mountain Mine (U)
35 Bitterputs Conservation Area (U)
36 Platberg–Karoo Conservancy (U)

FREE STATE
37 Sandveld & Bloemhof Dam Nature Reserves (P)
38 Alexpan (U)
39 Ingula Nature Reserve (U)
40 Willem Pretorius Game Reserve (F)
41 Murphy's Rust ((U)
42 Sterkfontein Dam Nature Reserve (P)
43 Golden Gate Highlands National Park (F)
44 Rooiberge–Riemland (U)
45 Soetdoring Nature Reserve (F)
46 Kalkfontein Dam Nature Reserve (F)
47 Upper Orange River (F)

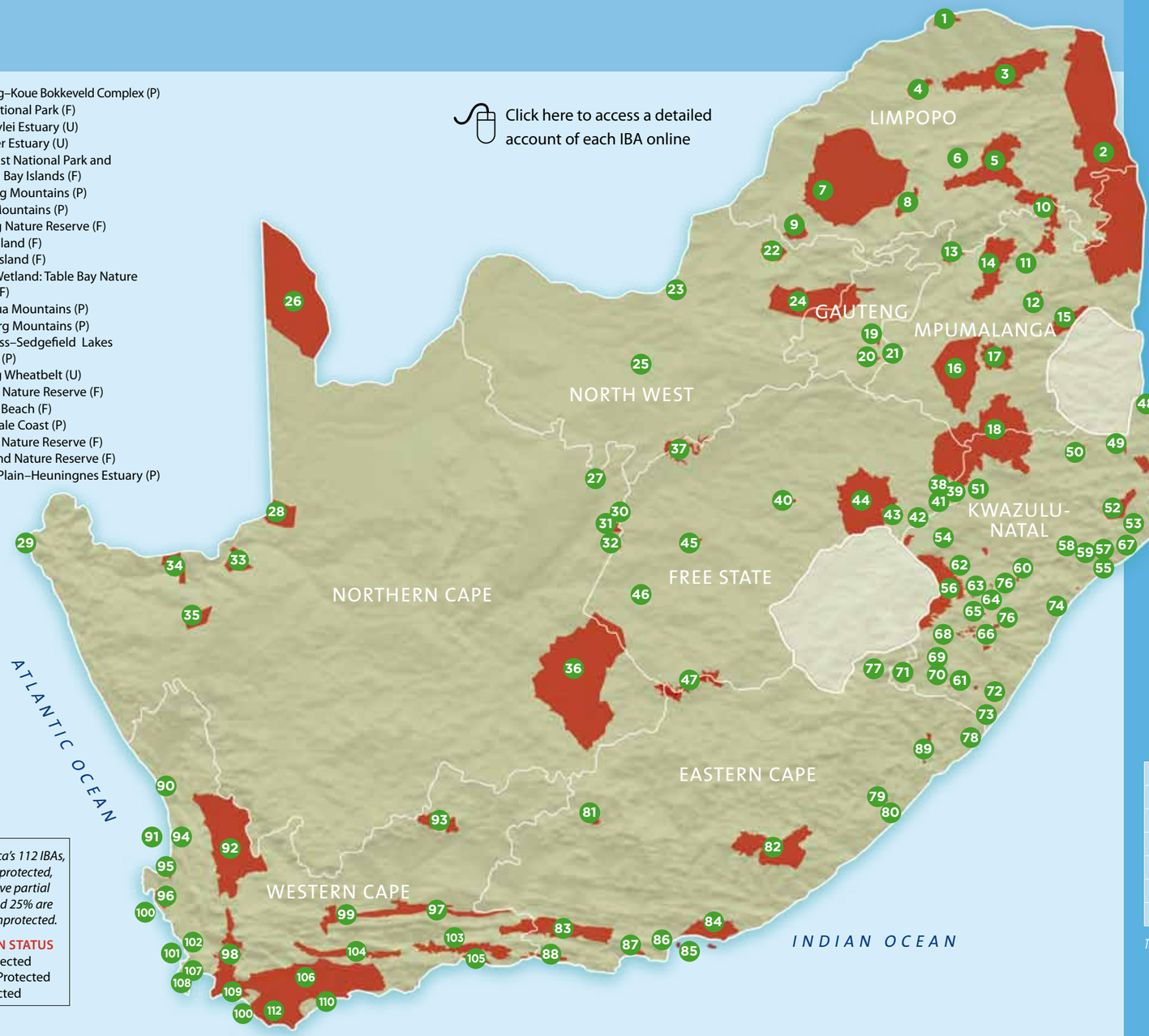
KWAZULU-NATAL
48 Ndumo Game Reserve (F)
49 Phongolo Nature Reserve (F)
50 Ithala Game Reserve (F)
51 Chelmsford Nature Reserve (F)
52 Hluhluwe–iMfolozi Park F)
53 Lake Eteza Nature Reserve (F)
54 Spioenkop Nature Reserve (F)
55 Umlalazi Nature Reserve (F)
56 Maloti Drakensberg Park (F)
57 Ngoye Forest Reserve (F)
58 Entumeni Nature Reserve (F)
59 Dlinza Forest Nature Reserve (F)
60 Umvoti Vlei (P)
61 KwaZulu-Natal Mistbelt Forests (P)
62 Hlatikulu (U)
63 Umgeni Vlei Nature Reserve (F)
64 Midmar Nature Reserve (F)
65 Impendle Nature Reserve (F)
66 KwaZulu-Natal Mistbelt Grasslands (U)
67 Richards Bay Game Reserve (F)
68 Greater Ngwangwana River (F)
69 Franklin Vlei (U)
70 Penny Park (U)
71 Mount Currie Nature Reserve (F)
72 Oribi Gorge Nature Reserve (F)
73 Umtamvuna Nature Reserve (F)
74 Mount Moreland (U)
75 iSimangaliso Wetland Park (F)
76 Karkloof (P)

EASTERN CAPE
77 Matatiele Nature Reserve (F)
78 Mkhambathi Nature Reserve (F)
79 Colleywobbles Vulture Colony (U)
80 Dwesa–Cwebe Nature Reserve (F)
81 Camdeboo National Park (F)
82 Amatola–Katberg Mountain (P)
83 Kouga–Baviaanskloof Complex (P)
84 Woody Cape Section: Addo Elephant National Park (P)
85 Algoa Bay Islands: Addo Elephant National Park (F)
86 Swartkops Estuary–Redhouse and Chatty Saltpans (P)
87 Maitland–Gamtoos Coast (P)
88 Tsitsikama–Plettenberg Bay (P)
89 Pondoland Cape Vulture (U)

WESTERN CAPE
90 Olifants River Estuary (U)
91 Bird Island (F)
92 Cedarberg–Koue Bokkeveld Complex (P)
93 Karoo National Park (F)
94 Verlorenvlei Estuary (U)
95 Berg River Estuary (U)
96 West Coast National Park and Saldanha Bay Islands (F)
97 Swartberg Mountains (P)
98 Boland Mountains (P)
99 Anysberg Nature Reserve (F)
100 Dassen Island (F)
101 Robben Island (F)
102 Rietvlei Wetland: Table Bay Nature Reserve (F)
103 Outeniqua Mountains (P)
104 Langeberg Mountains (P)
105 Wilderness–Sedgefield Lakes Complex (P)
106 Overberg Wheatbelt (U)
107 False Bay Nature Reserve (F)
108 Boulders Beach (F)
109 Cape Whale Coast (P)
110 De Hoop Nature Reserve (F)
111 Dyer Island Nature Reserve (F)
112 Agulhas Plain–Heuningnes Estuary (P)

Of South Africa's 112 IBAs, 46% are fully protected, while 29% have partial protection and 25% are completely unprotected.

PROTECTION STATUS
F = Fully Protected
P = Partially Protected
U = Unprotected



A NETWORK OF SITES FOR BIRDS

In 1998 local experts assisted BirdLife South Africa to identify and compile the first IBA directory for South Africa (Barnes 1998). This original network consisted of 122 sites (later increased to 124), covering more than 14 million ha. Since 2010, BirdLife South Africa has been monitoring this network to ensure that sites still meet the criteria, to identify new sites, to align IBA boundaries and, as necessary, to update site descriptions. Simultaneously, IBAs were prioritised for conservation action. The revised IBA directory (Marnewick et al. 2015) provides an updated inventory of sites and individual site descriptions (Table 1).

Number of Global IBAs	98
Number of Sub-regional IBAs	14
Total area	14 136 750 ha
Mean area	126 220 ha
Smallest IBA	10 ha
Largest IBA	2 136 380 ha
% of South Africa's surface area	11.6%

Table 1: Revised South African IBA network summary

BEARDED VULTURE ALBERT FRONEMAN

> South Africa's 112 IBAs currently span approximately 14 136 750 ha. Only 46% of the IBAs are fully protected, while 29% have partial protection and 25% are completely unprotected

The state of an IBA was monitored exclusively by considering the quality and quantity of habitat rather than by direct assessment of populations of trigger species. All the main habitat types found in an IBA were assessed. Not all the habitat types are found in the different protection classes.

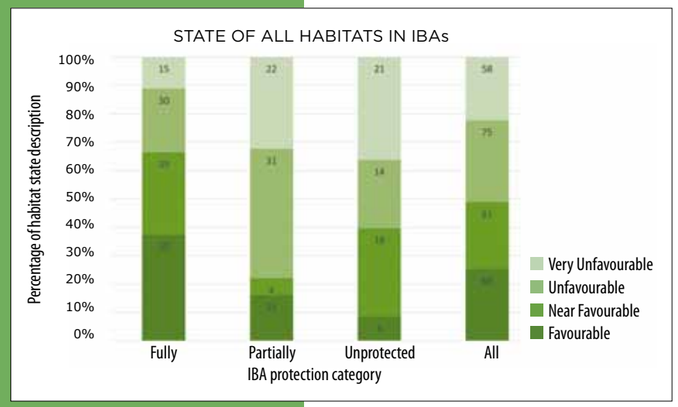


Fig. 3: The state of all habitats across all IBAs and as categorised by their protection status. The numbers in the bars indicate the number of IBAs. N=112. (23 January 2015)

An analysis of all habitats across all IBAs found that for those in partially protected and unprotected IBAs, 78% and 60% respectively are in an Unfavourable or Very Unfavourable state, compared to 34% in these conditions in fully protected IBAs (Fig. 3). Overall, therefore, the habitats in fully protected IBAs are in far better condition than those in partially and unprotected IBAs. However, it is noteworthy that habitat quality in protected IBAs has also declined.

In fully protected IBAs, marine coastal/supratidal (hereafter referred to as 'estuaries') are worst off, although the sample size is small (N=3). Of the fynbos, grasslands and savanna habitat types assessed, 37–44% are in an Unfavourable or Very Unfavourable state (Fig. 4).

In partially protected IBAs, nearly all grasslands and fynbos, 66% of forest and 76% of wetlands (inland) are in an Unfavourable or Very Unfavourable state (Fig. 5).

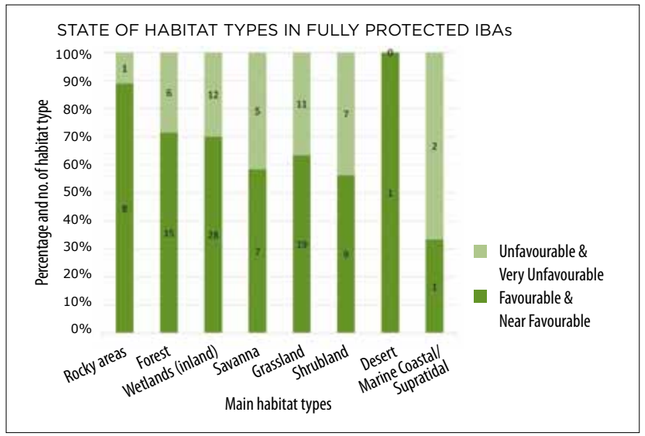


Fig. 4: The state of specific habitat types across fully protected IBAs. The habitat states described as Unfavourable and Very Unfavourable are combined, as are the states described as Favourable and Near Favourable. The numbers in the bars represent the actual number of IBAs. N=51. (23 January 2015)

In unprotected IBAs, all desert habitats are in an Unfavourable or Very Unfavourable state, while 55–64% of wetlands, fynbos and grasslands are in an Unfavourable or Very Unfavourable state (Fig. 6).

Grasslands, wetlands and fynbos are generally in the least favourable state. This corresponds to the 'National Biodiversity Assessment 2011: An assessment of South Africa's biodiversity and ecosystems' (Driver et al. 2012), which found not only that grasslands, wetlands and fynbos are highly threatened ecosystems, but also that they are under-represented in the protected area network. IBAs therefore have an important role to play in protecting these threatened ecosystems.

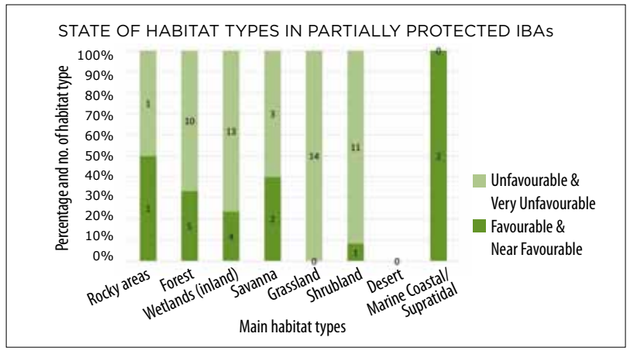


Fig. 5: The state of specific habitat types across partially protected IBAs. The habitat states described as Unfavourable and Very Unfavourable are combined, as are the states described as Favourable and Near Favourable. The numbers in the bars represent the actual number of IBAs. N=33. (23 January 2015)

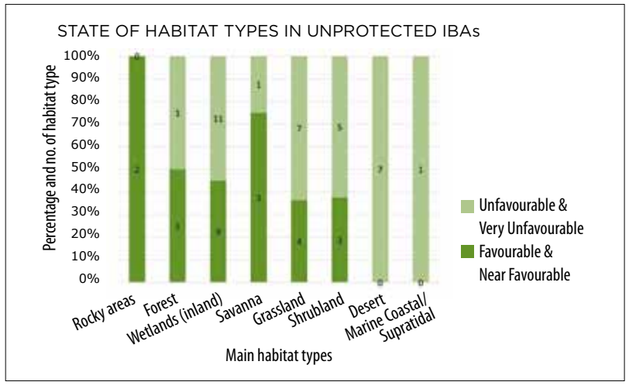


Fig. 6: The state of specific habitat types across unprotected IBAs. The habitat states described as Unfavourable and Very Unfavourable are combined, as are the states described as Favourable and Near Favourable. The numbers in the bars represent the actual number of IBAs. N=28. (23 January 2015)

"grasslands, wetlands and fynbos are generally in the least favourable state"

GRASSLANDS IBA DANIEL MARNEWICK

Fig. 7: The levels of pressure faced by all IBAs combined, as well as the individual categories of fully protected, partially protected and unprotected IBAs. The numbers in the bars of the protection categories reflect the number of IBAs per threat level. N=112. (23 January 2015)

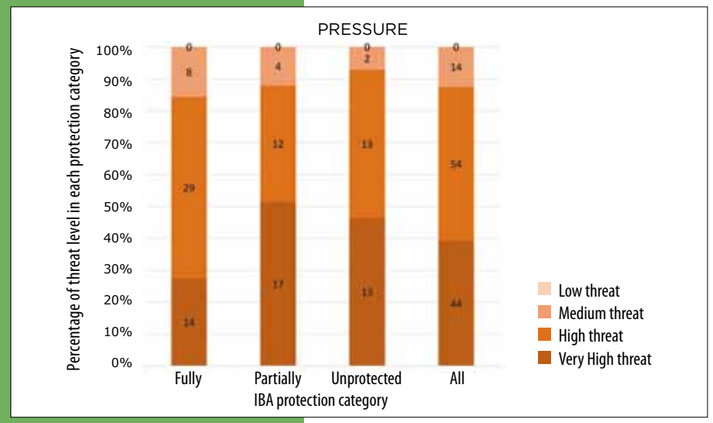
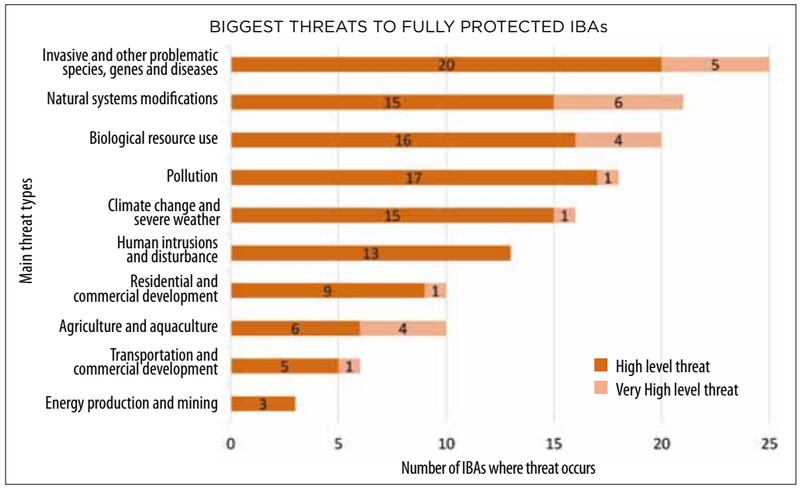


Fig. 8: The different threat types faced by fully protected IBAs in order of frequency. N=51. (23 January 2015)



OPPOSITE *Fire is one of the biggest threats to IBAs in fynbos.*

The threats to IBAs were scored Very High or High for their timing, scope and severity in relation to the key habitats and IBA trigger species. Each existing or potential threat was scored. The 'weakest link' approach was used, i.e. the highest scoring threat at an IBA was used as the site's threat description.

Of all of South Africa's IBAs, 39% face at least one Very High threat and 48% face at least one High threat. Unprotected IBAs are worst off, with 46% facing at least one Very High and 46% at least one High threat. Of the partially protected IBAs, 52% face at least one Very High threat and 36% face at least one High threat. Fully protected IBAs are only marginally better off at 25% and 57% respectively (Fig. 7), which are particularly worrying percentages considering that these sites should be managed as conservation areas.

IBAs are under serious pressure from a broad spectrum of threats. The threat types recorded most often for fully protected IBAs are (in order of frequency): invasive and other problematic species; natural system modification through fire; and biological resource use from hunting and fishing (Fig. 8). All three threat types are management-related and result in habitat degradation and species loss. The threat types recorded most frequently in partially protected and unprotected IBAs are: natural system modification as a result of fire and changing watercourses; agriculture (livestock, crops and timber plantations); and invasive and other problematic species (Figs. 9 and 10). These threats result in the degradation and loss of habitat.

It should be noted that threat types vary from one biome to another and, therefore, from one region to another. For instance, fynbos faces pressure from fire and invasive species, whereas estuaries are impacted by changes to watercourses upstream of them. Grasslands are largely under pressure from fire and agriculture, although on the Highveld coal mining is one of the most serious pressures on grasslands as well as wetlands.

PETER RYAN

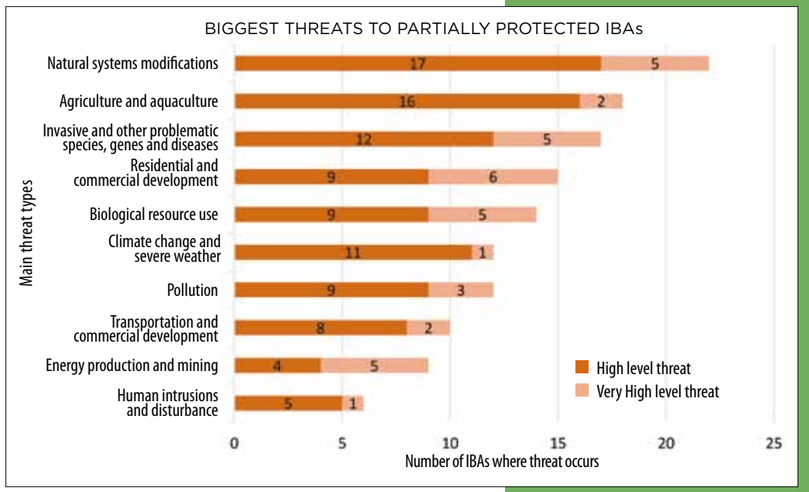


Fig. 9: The different threats faced by partially protected IBAs in order of frequency. N=33. (23 January 2015)

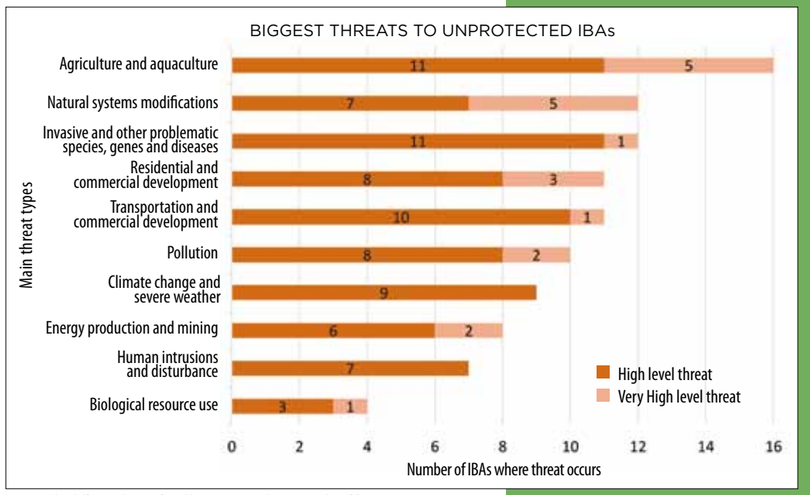


Fig. 10: The different threats faced by unprotected IBAs in order of frequency. N=28. (23 January 2015)

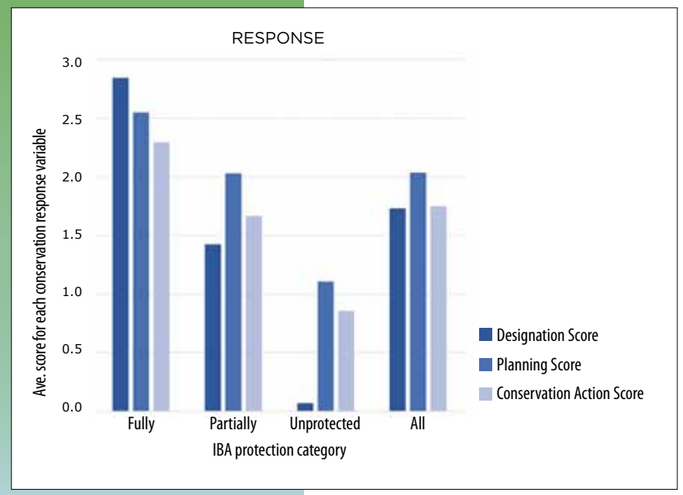


Fig. 11: The average response scores for IBAs, per protection category, in terms of designation, management planning and conservation action. (23 January 2015)

The conservation response is substantially higher in fully protected IBAs, followed by partially protected IBAs (Fig. 11). Perhaps not surprisingly, unprotected IBAs show the lowest conservation response. Fully protected IBAs are formally protected in their entirety under NEM:PAA (DEAT 2003). By law, these sites must have a management plan and be managed for conservation objectives. However, financial constraints often impede the effective implementation of management plans in these IBAs. The degree of conservation response in partially protected IBAs depends on how much of the site is protected, which ranges from 2% to 98%. Interestingly, conservation response is not completely absent from all unprotected IBAs. Where civil society groups carry out monitoring activities to some degree, research and conservation action may still take place at unprotected sites of biological significance.

ALBERT FRONEMAN (3)

RIGHT *The West Coast National Park IBA supports a wide variety of biodiversity, from plants to fish and crustaceans, as well as birds.*

FAR RIGHT *Gurney's Sugarbird is a biome-restricted IBA trigger species.*

BELOW *IBA team members atlasing for SABAP2 in the Waterberg System IBA.*

DATA ON BIRDLIFE'S WEBSITES

BirdLife South Africa has used the IBA assessments to update all IBA data, which are presented on site-specific IBA webpages (*www.birdlife.org.za/conservation/important-bird-areas/iba-directory*). These pages are in effect electronic versions of the IBA directory, but they are updated more regularly with new data. Information is also available about the IBA Programme (*www.birdlife.org.za/conservation/important-bird-areas*). The BirdLife International Data Zone (*www.birdlife.org/datazone/home*) presents data and search facilities that give access to the majority of BirdLife's data holdings on every individual IBA. It also provides explanatory background material, analysis and presentations.

> “this and future IBA Status and Trends reports … will be used by BirdLife South Africa to prioritise IBAs for conservation intervention”

Many IBAs, such as Colleywobbles Vulture Colony, Blouberg and Magaliesberg, were proclaimed mainly because they contain important Cape Vulture breeding colonies.

Prioritising IBAs for conservation action

This and future IBA Status and Trends reports, informed by IBA monitoring assessments, will be used by BirdLife South Africa (and supported by BirdLife International) to prioritise IBAs for conservation intervention. A model has been developed that prioritises such actions for IBAs according to their threat and species scores and filters the highest-ranked IBAs through a decision tree. The result is a list of IBAs that require immediate conservation intervention from BirdLife South Africa and its partners.

Aligning IBAs with other conservation priorities

IBAs are not recognised in NEM:PAA. Less than 40% of the land surface area of the IBA network is formally protected in provincial nature reserves or national parks. However, most of our unprotected and partially protected IBAs overlap with national and provincial priorities for the expansion of the protected areas network. This presents opportunities to collaborate with government departments and NGOs so that these IBAs may be considered when protected areas are expanded in the future.

There is thus value in using other available conservation planning tools to help BirdLife South Africa prioritise and promote the protection of IBAs. Provincial Biodiversity Sector Plans (previously known as Biodiversity Conservation Plans) reflect specific targets for the conservation of important features of biodiversity, including vegetation types, species and ecological processes. These plans incorporate spatial priorities from the National Protected Area Expansion Strategy, as well as listed Threatened Ecosystems, to define areas within each province that are vital for the expansion of the protected area network. Active lobbying on the part of the IBA Programme has resulted in threatened bird species and IBAs being considered in the recent updating of Biodiversity Sector Plans for four provinces.

In pursuing its IBA strategy in this collaborative way, BirdLife South Africa can make a meaningful contribution to the setting of comprehensive national and provincial priorities. It can also help the government to meet not only its international commitments to Aichi Biodiversity Target 11 and other multi-lateral environmental agreements, but also its national Outcome 10 Delivery Agreement for environmental assets and natural resources that are valued, protected and continually enhanced.

ALBERT FRONEMAN

DANIEL MARNEWICK

Burning and grazing for grasslands bird conservation

The value of natural grazing for livestock in the Grasslands Biome has been calculated to be worth more than R8 000/km^2 per year (Blignaut et al. 2008). Yet agricultural practices are among the greatest threats to unprotected grassland IBAs. BirdLife South Africa recognised the need for recommendations for the management of habitat for bird conservation in grassland IBAs and, with funding from WWF Nedbank Green Trust, developed ‘Bird-friendly burning and grazing best-practice for grasslands’, a peer-reviewed synthesis of scientific knowledge and expert opinion. The guidelines in this document were incorporated into SANBI’s national ‘Grazing and burning guidelines: managing grasslands for biodiversity and livestock production’ (SANBI 2014). We also developed a user-friendly brochure in English, Afrikaans and isiZulu.

BirdLife South Africa’s guidelines are intended to promote awareness and conservation of threatened grassland birds, primarily in the red-meat production sector. They aim to assist anyone who is working towards the parallel objectives of economically viable livestock production, improved veld condition and biodiversity conservation.

BirdLife South Africa’s take-home message is to manage for variability (and thereby bird diversity) by applying different frequencies, timing and intensities of fire; by implementing grazing regimes that avoid the extremes of high- or low-intensity grazing; and by allowing the land to rest completely for at least one growing season every four years, taking veld condition into consideration.

ABOVE *Since 2011 BirdLife South Africa has been working extensively to formally proclaim unprotected areas within the Grasslands IBA.*

LEFT *BirdLife South Africa’s burning and grazing guidelines for grassland management for birds document was printed in a farmer-friendly version.*

> "it encourages landowners to take pride in the natural assets, especially threatened bird species, for which they are custodians"

BELOW *The KwaZulu-Natal Mistbelt Grasslands IBA is fragmented by plantations and dairy farms.*

OPPOSITE *Cape Siskin is a restricted-range and biome-restricted species found in 12 Western Cape IBAs.*

Biodiversity Stewardship

By arranging voluntary legal agreements with landowners, Biodiversity Stewardship provides a cost-effective conservation tool for securing biodiversity, promoting the sustainable management of natural resources, and expanding the protected areas network outside State-owned national parks and nature reserves. It also bestows important benefits on all those involved: it unites farming communities, fuels passion for the environment and encourages landowners to take pride in the natural assets, especially threatened bird species, for which they are custodians.

For the past four years BirdLife South Africa, in collaboration with provincial conservation agencies/departments and partner environmental organisations, has been engaging landowners with the aim of declaring approximately 120 000 ha of Protected Environments in five priority IBAs: Grasslands, Chrissie Pans, Steenkampsberg, KwaZulu-Natal Mistbelt Grasslands and Verlorenvlei. The first of these, declared in January 2014 as the Chrissiesmeer Protected Environment, adds 60 000 ha to the protected areas network in the grasslands and strengthens the protection for a priority IBA. It is hoped that the other sites will be declared in 2015 and 2016.

Similarly, BirdLife South Africa's IBA Programme will begin to enter into Biodiversity Stewardship with landowners at priority estuary IBAs in the Western Cape. In 2015, BirdLife South Africa will also start ground-breaking work involving the accrual of fiscal benefits to landowners who have signed up to Biodiversity Stewardship.

These proposed declarations will make a meaningful contribution to the conservation of grasslands, fynbos and estuaries while maintaining livelihoods from livestock farming, agriculture and tourism and thus ensuring food and water security. These visionary agreements will go down in South Africa's history as a true representation of inspired good governance.

NICK THERON

The impact of invasive alien plants on grasslands

(www.birdlife.org.za/publications/grassland-best-practice)

One of the biggest threats to South Africa's IBAs, particularly those in grasslands and fynbos habitats, is invasive alien plants. These habitats, together with the birds adapted to survive in them, are especially vulnerable. The most obvious impact is that invasive alien plants encroach on indigenous plants and replace them, making the site immediately unsuitable for the specialist birds.

Indirectly, alien trees deplete water resources that not only are crucial for human beings, but also alter the way remaining habitat fragments function. This is evident in the KwaZulu-Natal Mistbelt Grasslands IBA. The deep soils characteristic of these grasslands have been shaped over time by the action of water flowing above and under them. This phenomenon leads to the creation of sinkholes, which are ideal sites for the nationally Critically Endangered Blue Swallow *Hirundo atrocaerulea* to build its underground nest. However, due to the impacts of alien species on water, fewer natural sinkholes are available to the Blue Swallow for breeding. Invasive alien plants thus threaten our grasslands and a host of bird species that depend on them.

PETER RYAN

Fire and fire suppression

Veld fires occur naturally and are needed to maintain the health of ecosystems. Fire is therefore regarded as a useful tool in veld management. However, too many uncontrolled fires can damage sensitive vegetation types, especially grasslands and fynbos. Fires at the wrong time of year can impact on the breeding success of birds such as African Grass Owl *Tyto capensis*. On the other hand, too few fires, for example in wetlands, allow grasses and reeds to grow rampant, thereby limiting the suitability of this habitat for waterbirds.

Unfortunately, in 33 (29%) of the IBAs assessed, incorrect burning or uncontrolled fires are listed as High or Very High threats to the habitat and species. There are a number of possible reasons for this, including some landowners' lack of understanding about burning as a veld management tool, unintentional fires, arson and a lack of funding to create fire-breaks as needed.

This threat to the IBA network is very real and solutions to it must be found as a matter of urgency. This was the main motivation for BirdLife South Africa to develop 'Bird-friendly burning and grazing best-practice for grasslands'.

Mining in Mpumalanga's IBAs

South Africa's birds and their habitats are under severe pressure from mining. Huge coal deposits lie below ecologically sensitive wetlands and grasslands across the Highveld. Applications to mine inside provincial nature reserves continue to be submitted to the DMR, despite mining being prohibited inside protected areas under NEM:PAA legislation. This reflects the enormous pressure placed on long-term environmental priorities by the competing industries that promise short-term employment.

Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency data for 2000–2011 show that applications for development covered 61% of the province's area. Of these 3 600-odd applications, 88% were mining-related – and they continue to flood in. In December 2013, BirdLife South Africa was aware of 30 prospecting or mining projects in six of Mpumalanga's eight IBAs.

While BirdLife South Africa is not opposed to mining in its entirety, it has identified the industry as one of the biggest challenges to grasslands conservation, especially to Biodiversity Stewardship. We have therefore developed capacity within the organisation firstly to engage the mining sector and guide it as to where mining should and should not take place in this biome, and secondly to mitigate existing threats from mining in IBAs.

> “there are many individuals who act as champions for the IBA Programme and their local sites”

RIGHT *The Waterberg System IBA includes the Waterberg range, which is about 130 kilometres long.*

OPPOSITE *Swift Tern is a congregatory IBA trigger species.*

BELOW *Birders can play a critical role in citizen science bird monitoring. Bird clubs currently form the core of LCGs.*

MARTIN TAYLOR

A wide partnership

Emulating the global BirdLife Partnership, the South Africa IBA Programme works with a wide variety of partners to achieve IBA conservation. These include other NGOs, universities, government departments, bird clubs, individual birders and corporations.

Local Conservation Groups

The Local Conservation Group (LCG) concept is a BirdLife International model. It is defined as ‘a group comprised predominantly of volunteers that has as its objective the conservation of one or more IBAs, and which works under the auspices of a formal or informal agreement with the BirdLife Partner’.

LCGs undertake a variety of activities that include monitoring certain IBA trigger bird species, environmental education and reviewing development applications. Five of these groups have already been established in South Africa, partnering with BirdLife Plettenberg Bay, which focuses on the Tsitsikama–Plettenberg Bay IBA; BirdLife Eastern Cape, which focuses on the Maitland–Gamtoos Coast IBA; BirdLife Northern Gauteng, which focuses on the Waterberg System IBA; Witwatersrand Bird Club, which focuses on the Nyl River Floodplain IBA; and BirdLife Harties, which focuses on the Magaliesberg IBA.

In addition to these volunteer groups, there are many individuals who act as champions for the IBA Programme and their local sites. These men and women voluntarily assist in various activities that are similar to those undertaken by an LCG. Given the vast areas that BirdLife South Africa’s regional conservation managers need to cover and the limits to financial and human resources, these volunteers are essential to meeting our conservation objectives.

ALBERT FRONEMAN (2)

> "monitoring of the trigger species and the habitats in which they occur in IBAs is a huge undertaking and would not be possible without the assistance of thousands of birders, conservation organisations and government officials"

Highmoor is a division of the Maloti Drakensberg Park IBA.

P. FARRINGTON

Agriculture: Cattle farming in the grasslands has the potential to work towards the parallel objectives of producing livestock in an economically viable manner, improving veld condition and conserving biodiversity. BirdLife South Africa's 'Bird-friendly burning and grazing best-practice for grasslands' is intended to promote awareness of threatened grassland bird species and their conservation, primarily in the agricultural (red-meat production) sector. These guidelines complement the 'Grazing and burning guidelines: managing grasslands for biodiversity and livestock production' (SANBI 2014) and should be used in conjunction with this publication. BirdLife South Africa therefore recommends that the agricultural sector broadly, and Biodiversity Stewardship Programmes specifically, use these guidelines as part of management recommendations.

Mining: BirdLife South Africa appreciates the need to extract mineral and fuel resources and is not against mining. Nevertheless, we believe that the location of mines must be sustainable and should balance social, economic and environmental considerations, and we therefore support the 'Mining and biodiversity guideline' (DEA et al. 2013). Mining inside IBAs is a different matter, and BirdLife South Africa commits to commenting on development applications, making strong recommendations and, where necessary, opposing such developments. We encourage environmental consulting firms and mining houses to take IBAs into consideration during the EIA process and preferably commission a report from an avian specialist, along with the other specialist reports (such as on water), to ensure there will be no negative impacts on avifauna or water resources. BirdLife South Africa will continue to be an independent body when engaging the mining sector.

EIA processes: There are a number of resources available to conservation planners and practitioners that can help them to take birds into account when conducting EIAs. All these can be downloaded from w*ww.birdlife.org.za/conservation/important-bird-areas/documents-and-downloads*. They include the updated IBA KML and GIS shapefiles, and a document entitled 'Guide to access avian data for Environmental Impact Assessment reports', which provides clear steps indicating how data from SABAP2, CWAC and other citizen scientist projects can be downloaded and used in EIAs. Other resources available on the BirdLife South Africa website include a wind farm sensitivity map, a list of priority species to consider when doing an EIA for a wind farm, and checklists that contain the most recent species recognised in South Africa, as well as their conservation status. Detailed information about each IBA (*www.birdlife.org.za/conservation/important-bird-areas/iba-directory*) can also be viewed on the website.

Monitoring: The monitoring of the trigger species and the habitats in which they occur in IBAs is a huge undertaking and would not be possible without the assistance of thousands of birders, conservation organisations and government officials. There are a number of monitoring tools available that can be used by organisations such as a bird club or Local Conservation Group or by individuals to collect data about bird distribution and abundance. BirdLife South Africa encourages organisations to support these initiatives. BirdLife South Africa also recommends that more detailed research studies to obtain abundance data for trigger species in each IBA should be considered by tertiary institutions.

Protection: Biodiversity Stewardship Programmes (BSPs) are making a significant contribution to meeting targets for the expansion of national protected areas and at a much lower cost to the State than land acquisition. At the same time, BSPs are increasing the number of IBAs under formal protection. With modest increases in resources, BSPs could make an even larger contribution to protected area expansion (Driver et al. 2012). Importantly, the ultimate goals should be both the formal protection and the effective management of an area. BirdLife South Africa has gained significant experience and skills in implementing BSPs since 2011, and therefore recommends that other NGOs, funders and government departments partner with BirdLife South Africa to further secure the protection of IBAs.

Management planning: Securing a designation of formal protection for an IBA requires a relatively high investment in financial and human capital. Careful consideration should therefore be given to prioritising IBAs for protection, taking into account their conservation needs and the threats they face. Partnerships and grassroots role players can achieve a great deal in terms of conservation planning and action at an unprotected IBA, which often leads to the effective conservation of the site without formal protection. BirdLife South Africa therefore recommends that individuals or groups who are currently engaging in IBA conservation, or are willing to do so, should become a BirdLife South Africa Local Conservation Group.

TAITA FALCON DAVID ALLAN

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GOVERNMENT

1. The conservation agencies/authorities of four provinces have included birds and/or IBAs in their most recently updated Biodiversity Sector Plans: KwaZulu-Natal, Free State, Western Cape and Limpopo. BirdLife South Africa recommends that all provinces consider birds and IBAs in their conservation planning.
2. Management plans for protected areas should be matched with the appropriate allocation of resources for their implementation.
3. National government (the DEA) is responsible for setting targets for expanding the protected areas network. These target areas often overlap with IBAs and therefore BirdLife South Africa should be seen as a partner in identifying common priority areas and in achieving these targets.
4. The DEA is also responsible for ensuring that South Africa meets it responsibilities and commitments in multi-lateral environmental agreements, such as CMS, AEWA and the Ramsar Convention. IBAs overlap with all 21 Ramsar sites in South Africa and are important for migratory birds. Therefore BirdLife South Africa recommends that it continues to support the government's commitments to these multi-lateral agreements by monitoring these sites and helping to ensure their conservation management through, for example, Biodiversity Stewardship.
5. IBAs include many of the most threatened habitat types in South Africa, as listed by the DEA (2011). Therefore it is important that BirdLife South Africa, the DEA, SANBI and provincial conservation agencies collaborate to monitor and ensure that these ecosystems, especially in unprotected areas, are conserved so as to meet multiple conservation targets.
6. The environmental departments and agencies of provincial governments have always been key partners with whom BirdLife South Africa's regional conservation managers have worked to conserve priority sites (both protected and unprotected). These partnerships remain vital to all parties.

CONTACT

Contact the respective regional conservation managers for more information in specific regions, or the national programme manager for general information:

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All documents listed in this report, as well as descriptions for all IBAs, can be accessed at *www.birdlife.org.za*

DIGITAL RESOURCES

Information about the IBA network can be found on the BirdLife South Africa and other websites.

IBA directory ***www.birdlife.org.za/conservation/important-bird-areas/iba-directory***

A webpage was created for each IBA. It includes a Google Earth map, some background information about the site, information about its trigger species, a list of the most important threats and the conservation actions that are planned for it. These pages are regularly updated as new information is acquired.

IBA map ***www.birdlife.org.za/conservation/important-bird-areas/iba-map***

An interactive IBA map for South Africa. More information and a hyperlink to an IBA webpage can be obtained by clicking on an IBA.

Documents and download ***www.birdlife.org.za/conservation/important-bird-areas/documents-and-downloads***

Valuable documents and other files that can be downloaded, including the IBA Newsletter, IBA assessment template and guideline documents such as the 'Guide to access avian data for Environmental Impact Assessment reports'. A Google Earth KML file and GIS shapefile, which map all the IBAs in South Africa, can also be downloaded. These files are updated regularly.

Biodiversity GIS (BGIS) ***www.bgis.sanbi.org***

The Biodiversity GIS, in short BGIS, website of SANBI also hosts the IBA shapefiles (files that are used in Geographic Information System programmes). This website is used regularly by conservation planners, EIA specialists and the general public to obtain biodiversity data.

International IBA network ***www.birdlife.org/datazone/site***

The website of BirdLife International contains information about the IBA network not only in South Africa, but worldwide. The information for this website is gleaned from the WBDB, which contains all the data collected during IBA assessments. The data are entered by the BirdLife International Partners on a continuous basis.

Similar IBA Status and Trends reports compiled by other BirdLife Country Partners are also available at ***www.birdlife.org/datazone/info/ibamonreports***

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“These networks, of important areas for birds and biodiversity, are the tapestries of protection in our landscapes – the warp and weave of our efforts on the ground to secure viable habitats for species. If we can secure these lands, wetlands and offshore areas for birds, we will recreate society in a more wise, just and sustainable way.”

Dr Phoebe Barnard, South African National Biodiversity Institute
and Honorary President of BirdLife South Africa

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