Panama Bay, a Ramsar site, is one of the most important wetland sites in the Americas, supporting huge numbers of migratory waterbirds and significant mangrove forests. A recent court decision removed its Protected Area status, opening up the bay to wetland reclamation and development. Concerted action by Panama Audubon and the wider BirdLife Partnership contributed to the decision being overturned.

The BirdLife Partnership has since the 1980s identified and documented more than 12,000 Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs) around the world, on land and at sea. This represents by far the most comprehensive science-based effort to identify the world’s key sites for biodiversity conservation. 50% of IBAs have some legal protection with IBA information and BirdLife advocacy contributing greatly to protected area designation.

However, more and more IBAs are under threat from damaging development – much of which is poorly planned and does not take environmental values into account. In early 2013, 95 BirdLife network countries and territories provided data on the pressures at their most threatened IBAs. This has identified a set of IBAs at great risk of losing their biodiversity value.

This resulting list of over 300 ‘IBAs in Danger’ will be used to target enhanced conservation effort for these insufficiently protected or poorly managed sites, through advocacy, campaigning and local action.

‘IBAs in Danger’ provides an essential focus for governments, development agencies, the international environmental and conservation conventions, business and wider civil society to act to prevent the further damage or loss of these sites of international significance.

‘IBAs in Danger’ are under high or very high pressure from 11 main threat types. The most frequent threat, recorded at 138 (out of 333) sites (41%), is agriculture & aquaculture, followed by biological resource use (including logging, hunting/trapping and over harvesting), affecting 116 sites (35%). Many IBAs are suffering serious pressure from multiple threats.

Terminology follows the IUCN standard threats classification: www.iucnredlist.org/technical-documents/classification-schemes/threats-classification-scheme
The 'IBAs in Danger' initiative will provide focused attention to mitigate threats to these sites through:

1. Promoting national, regional and global awareness of seriously threatened IBAs
2. Promoting actions that are needed to mitigate threats
3. Enhancing conservation management of sites
4. Supporting strengthened implementation and effectiveness of national and local laws and policies
5. Guiding site safeguard and casework, ensuring effective application of environmental policies and procedures of development agencies and financial institutions
6. Utilising international conventions, agreements and mechanisms
7. Strengthening IBA monitoring and local conservation groups across the BirdLife Partnership
8. Celebrating and learning from successful and effective actions

IBAs in Danger are sites that have been identified nationally through IBA monitoring as being at severe risk. In the first trial of this new initiative, organisations in the BirdLife network provided details of up to five sites per country with 'very high' threat scores (in some cases those with 'high' scores were also considered). Some countries have no sites with very high threat scores while data for countries outside the BirdLife network have yet to be assessed.

The importance of IBA monitoring

This is the first, preliminary list of 'IBAs in Danger', and will be developed further as IBA monitoring is advanced across the world. The list is not comprehensive and (except for selected High Seas sites) does not cover countries and territories outside the BirdLife network.

IBA information, which comes from field observers, local conservation groups, news/research reports and remote sensing, needs regular updating to remain credible and reliable, and so that urgent threats to IBAs can be recognised and addressed.

BirdLife’s simple scoring framework allows integration/comparison of IBA monitoring information at all scales from individual site to global picture: the state of an IBA (the condition of key birds and / or their habitats) is scored on a four-point scale, as is the pressure (the threats facing the site) and the response (the actions being taken to conserve the site).

These data, together with further information from BirdLife Partners and experts in countries outside of the BirdLife Partnership, will continue to inform the list of ‘IBAs in Danger’, which will be updated on a regular basis.

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