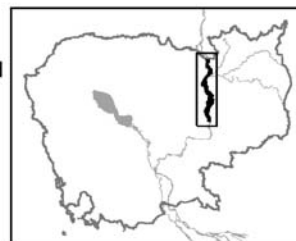


Mekong River from Kratie to Laos

Criteria A1 & A2

Province(s):	Stung Treng and Kratie
District(s):	Thala Bariwatt, Stung Treng, Siem Bok and Sambo
Area (ha)	83,501
Altitude (m asl):	21 to 189
Central coordinates:	13°17'N 105°58'E



General description

The IBA comprises the Mekong River and associated riverine vegetation, from Kratie town to the international border with Laos. Along this stretch, the Mekong River is very varied. Some sections form a single channel, up to 1.5 km wide, with a vast expanse of open water, while other sections are braided into a number of channels and islands. In sections of braided river, several types of river channel vegetation occur: small, periodically flooded, predominantly grass-covered islands; shrubs that become partly submerged for most of the wet season; and trees in open canopy aggregations, which become partly submerged for most of the wet season. Other key habitats include sandbars and rocks. Although much of the fringing riverine forest is degraded, some areas of good condition mixed deciduous/semi-evergreen forest remain around the Kratie-Stung Treng provincial border. Away from the river, this grades into open deciduous dipterocarp forest. Many human settlements, with associated shifting cultivation, are located along the river. The stretch of the Mekong River from a point 5 km north of Stung Treng town to the international border with Laos has been designated as a Ramsar site.

The IBA supports a large proportion of the global population of Mekong Wagtail *Motacilla samveasnae*, a recently described species, which is thought to be endemic to the Mekong River and its major tributaries. In addition, the IBA supports significant populations of a suite of riverine species that have declined severely throughout mainland South-east Asia, including River Lapwing *Vanellus duvaucelii*, Great Thick Knee *Esacus recurvirostris* and River Tern *Sterna aurantia*. Furthermore, a number of globally threatened and near-threatened species have been recorded at the IBA in small numbers, including White-rumped Vulture *Gyps bengalensis*, Red-headed Vulture *Sarcogyps calvus* and Darter *Anhinga melanogaster*. Small, but significant numbers of White-shouldered Ibis *Pseudibis davisoni* have been recorded along forested parts of the river. Finally, the IBA may be one of the last remaining sites in Indochina to support Black-bellied Tern *Sterna acuticauda*, although there have been few recent records and no recent confirmation of breeding. Historically the area supported a breeding population of Indian Skimmer *Rhynchops albicollis*, however, the last record on this stretch of the river was of "several pairs" in 1932, and the failure to find the species on recent surveys indicate that it is probably now extinct on the Mekong River.

Key bird species

Common name	Scientific name	IBA criteria
Small Pratincole	<i>Glareola lactea</i>	A4i
Black-bellied Tern	<i>Sterna acuticauda</i>	A1
Grey-headed Fish Eagle	<i>Ichthyophaga ichthyaetus</i>	A1
White-rumped Vulture	<i>Gyps bengalensis</i>	A1
Red-headed Vulture	<i>Sarcogyps calvus</i>	A1
Darter	<i>Anhinga melanogaster</i>	A1
White-shouldered Ibis	<i>Pseudibis davisoni</i>	A1
Mekong Wagtail	<i>Motacilla samveasnae</i>	A1 A2

Biome restricted species

Two species are restricted to the Indo-Malayan Tropical Dry Zone (see Appendix 4).

Globally threatened primate species

Long-tailed Macaque *Macaca fascicularis*.

Globally threatened turtle and crocodile species

Siamese Crocodile *Crocodylus siamensis* and Asian Giant Softshell Turtle *Pelochelys cantorii*.

Threats to biodiversity

Perhaps the most severe threats to the riverine bird community that have operated at the IBA to date are hunting, egg collection and disturbance due to human activities on sandbanks during the breeding season. Other major threats are cutting of trees and clearance of land for agriculture along the banks of the river. Illegal fishing, particularly the use of poison and explosives is also a cause for concern. A potential future threat with potentially catastrophic impacts is the development of major hydropower or navigation schemes on the Mekong River or its larger tributaries.

Recommendations

- Conservation of the stretch of the Mekong River designated as a Ramsar site is an important priority. However, scale is a vital consideration, and, ideally, the complete length of the Mekong River included in the IBA should receive conservation attention; focusing on just a small stretch in isolation could have disastrous consequences.
- Further surveys and research need to be carried out. These should focus on identifying important stretches of riverine forest and smaller backwater rivers and streams, and better determining the locations, numbers and breeding success of sandbar-nesting species.
- Efforts must be made to protect sandbar-nesting bird species while they are breeding. Community agreements could be set up with individual villages so that nesting areas will not be disturbed.
- New villages and agricultural development along the river should be discouraged, and key stretches of riverine forest should be strictly protected from logging and shifting cultivation.
- Management and conservation activities for key wildlife species should be put in place at the IBA.

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