

# Mekong Channel upstream of Vientiane

Criteria: A3 &amp; A4i

**Province(s):** Vientiane, Xaignabouli and Vientiane municipality  
**Area:** 18,230 ha  
**Latitude:** 18°30'N  
**Protected area:** None  
**Longitude:** 102°05'E

## General description

The IBA comprises a c.300 km section of the Mekong channel upstream of Vientiane. The upper section (c.140 km), upstream of Ban Vang, is situated entirely within Lao P.D.R., while the lower section (c.160 km), between Ban Vang and Vientiane, forms the international border with Thailand. The IBA contains a high proportion of mosaic stretches, where the Mekong channel, during the low-flow season, supports a variety of habitat types, including sand and gravel bars and islands, rock outcrops, bushland and braided streams. The IBA also contains significant stretches with open sandy islands. The bird communities of mosaic stretches are considered to be of the highest conservation value of all those along the upper Lao Mekong channel, and include species such as River Lapwing *Vanellus duvaucelii*, Wire-tailed Swallow *Hirundo smithii* and Jerdon's Bushchat *Saxicola jerdoni*. In addition, small numbers of Great Thick-knees *Esacus recurvirostris* persist in these stretches, although the remaining populations may not be viable in the long-term. The open sandy islands are important for Small Pratincole *Glareola lactea*, and the IBA is thought to support greater than 1% of the world population of this species. Although no data are available for the uppermost section (c.80 km), north of Paklay town, from topographic maps, it seems to contain much channel mosaic habitat (Duckworth *et al.* 2002).

## Key bird species

Species	IBA criteria	Global threat status	Lao threat status	Notes
River Lapwing <i>Vanellus duvaucelii</i>	A4i		ARL	A maximum of 42 birds was recorded along the section of the IBA downstream of Paklay during December 1999 and January 2000 (Duckworth <i>et al.</i> 2002). Given the fact that the species was almost certainly significantly under-recorded during surveys in 1999 and 2000, due to birds being not visible to the observers, and that the upper 80 km of the IBA was not covered at all, it is very likely that the species meets the 1% threshold. The population at the IBA is of high national significance and moderate to low global significance.
Small Pratincole <i>Glareola lactea</i>	A4i		PARL	Up to 200 birds were seen around Ban Thadua between February and April 1999 (Duckworth <i>et al.</i> 2002). A maximum count of 218 birds was made along the section of the IBA downstream of Paklay during December 1999 and January 2000 (Duckworth <i>et al.</i> 2002). Given that the species is still widespread and relatively abundant along the Mekong and its larger tributaries, the population at the IBA is only of moderate national significance and low global significance.

**Biome-restricted species:** The site qualifies under criterion A3 because it supports one species restricted to the Indo-Gangetic Plains (Biome 12) (Duckworth *et al.* 1997, 2002). See Appendix 3 for details.

## Threats to biodiversity

The biggest on-going threats to biodiversity at the IBA are active persecution, in the form of hunting and egg collection, and incidental disturbance, including accidental nest destruction. Other potential threats include sand and gravel extraction, and loss of channel vegetation due to heavy human use, firewood collection or fire.

## References

- Duckworth, J. W. (1997) Observations on a population of Jerdon's Bushchat *Saxicola jerdoni* in the Mekong channel, Laos. *Bull. Brit. Orn. Club* 117: 210-220.
- Duckworth, J. W., Davidson, P., Evans, T. D., Round, P. D. and Timmins, R. J. (2002) Bird records from Laos, principally the upper Lao/Thai Mekong and Xiangkhouang province, in 1998-2000. *Forktail* 18: 11-44.