

Mekong Channel from PXT to Siphandon Criteria: A1, A2 & A4i

Province(s): Champasak and Salavan **Latitude:** 15°00'N
Protected area: Phou Xiang Thong NPA **Longitude:** 105°40'E
Area: 34,200 ha

General description

The IBA comprises the section of the Mekong channel from Phou Xiang Thong National Protected Area to Siphandon IBA (LA022). The upper section (c.90 km) forms the western boundary of Phou Xiang Thong National Protected Area and the international border with Thailand. This section comprises wide stretches with earth banks and narrow stretches with rocky banks, and contains a few rocky islands (Evans *et al.* 2000). The lower section (c.130 km), which lies entirely within Lao P.D.R., is one of the widest sections of the Mekong River in the country. Although there is probably no natural riverine vegetation left along this section, there are many seasonally flooded sandbars, low vegetated islands and rocky islets (Thewlis *et al.* 1998). Some islands have very large sandy beaches or bars up to 10 km long (Evans *et al.* 2000). The upper section of the IBA supports small numbers of Small Pratincoles *Glareola lactea*, moderate numbers of River Lapwings *Vanellus duvaucelii* and high numbers of Wire-tailed Swallows *Hirundo smithii* (Evans *et al.* 2000). The lower section, which has a high proportion of sandbars, supports large numbers of Small Pratincoles, and smaller numbers of other sandbar-nesting birds, including River Lapwings, River Terns *Sterna aurantia* and the last known nesting Little Terns *S. albifrons* in Lao P.D.R. The recently described Mekong Wagtail *Motacilla samveasnae* has been confirmed to occur in the lower section of the IBA, and provisionally recorded in the upper section (Duckworth *et al.* 2001).

Key bird species

Species	IBA criteria	Global threat status	Lao threat status	Notes
Small Pratincole <i>Glareola lactea</i>	A4i		PARL	At least 542 birds were counted on the section of the IBA downstream of Phou Xiang Thong National Protected Area between April and May 1996 (Thewlis <i>et al.</i> 1998). The population of this species at the IBA is probably larger than that at any other IBA in Lao P.D.R., and may total several thousand birds. The population is certainly of high national significance and probably of moderate global significance.
Mekong Wagtail <i>Motacilla samveasnae</i>	A1, A2	NT		A single bird was observed near Ban Mounlapamok, in the lower section of the IBA, in April 1996, and a single bird was provisionally recorded near Ban Donkoum, in the upper section, in March 1996 (Duckworth <i>et al.</i> 2001). Given that the population at the IBA is probably relatively small, it is of moderate to low national and global significance.

Biome-restricted species: The site is not known to qualify under criterion A3 (Evans *et al.* 2000). See Appendix 3 for details.

Threats to biodiversity

The major threats to biodiversity at the IBA are hunting and incidental disturbance to nesting birds (Evans *et al.* 2000). By comparison with historical data (Engelbach 1932), populations of many riverine species are believed to have declined along the southern Lao Mekong as a result of these factors (Evans *et al.* 2000). Potential future threats include sand and gravel extraction, and loss of riverine vegetation, particularly along the stretch that forms the boundary of Phou Xiang Thong National Protected Area.

References

- Duckworth, J. W., Alström, P., Davidson, P., Evans, T. D., Poole, C. M., Seta, T. and Timmins, R. J. (2001) A new species of wagtail from the lower Mekong basin. *Bull. Brit. Orn. Club* 121(3): 152-182.
- Engelbach, P. (1932) Les oiseaux du Laos méridional. *Oiseau et R.F.O.* 2: 439-498.
- Evans, T. D., Towll, H. C., Timmins, R. J., Thewlis, R. M., Stones, A. J., Robichaud, W. G. and Barzen, J. (2000) Ornithological records from the lowlands of southern Laos during December 1995-September 1996, including areas on the Thai and Cambodian borders. *Forktail* 16: 29-52.
- Thewlis, R. M., Timmins, R. J., Evans, T. D. and Duckworth, J. W. (1998) The conservation status of birds in Laos: a review of key species. *Bird Conserv. Internat.* 8(suppl.): 1-159.