

## Dakchung Plateau

Criteria: A1 &amp; A2

**Province(s):** Xekong  
**Protected area:** None  
**Area:** 5,140 ha

**Latitude:** 15°21'N  
**Longitude:** 107°09'E

**General description**

The IBA comprises a small part of the Dakchung plateau, in southern Lao P.D.R. The topography of the plateau is characterised by rolling hills at elevations between 800 and 1,400 m asl. The natural vegetation on the plateau has been extensively degraded, and the existing vegetation is dominated by pine woodland and grassland (Thewlis *et al.* 1998). In addition to pine woodland and grassland, there are small pockets of degraded semi-evergreen forest and dry evergreen forest, and patches of marshy land with tall grasses (Showler *et al.* 1998). The IBA is the only site in Lao P.D.R. known to support the globally vulnerable Black-crowned Barwing *Actinodura sodangorum*, a recently described species, which is believed to breed at the site (Showler *et al.* 1998, Duckworth *et al.* 1999). The significance of the IBA for the conservation of this species cannot currently be fully assessed, due to the lack of ornithological survey data from other montane areas in south-eastern Lao P.D.R., several of which may also be found to support the species. The IBA differs from most other IBAs in Lao P.D.R. in that it was identified for a single species in a very localised area.

**Key bird species**

Species	IBA criteria	Global threat status	Lao threat status	Notes
[Siamese Fireback <i>Lophura diardi</i> ]	A1, A3	NT	PARL	A male pheasant, provisionally identified as this species, was in degraded semi-evergreen forest at 1,150 m asl in December 1997 (Showler <i>et al.</i> 1998). The elevation is unusually high for this species. The population at the IBA is of low national significance and very low global significance.
Yellow-billed Nuthatch <i>Sitta solangiae</i>	A1, A2	NT	PARL	Up to four birds were seen daily in dry evergreen forest at 1,150 m asl in December 1997 (Showler <i>et al.</i> 1998). The species was also recorded outside of the IBA, in pine forest at 1,000 m asl, in May 1996 (Timmins and Vongkhamheng 1996, Thewlis <i>et al.</i> 1998). The population at the IBA is of moderate to low national significance and low global significance.
White-cheeked Laughingthrush <i>Garrulax vassali</i>	A2			During a survey in December 1997, the species was assessed as common to abundant (Showler <i>et al.</i> 1998). The population at the IBA is of low national and global significance.
Black-crowned Barwing <i>Actinodura sodangorum</i>	A1, A2	VU	LKL	Two pairs and at least two singing males were observed at 1,140 m asl in a small marshy area surrounded by degraded semi-evergreen forest and open pine woodland in December 1997 (Showler <i>et al.</i> 1998). Given the paucity of ornithological data from sites potentially important for this species, it is difficult to assess the significance of the population at the IBA. However, it is probably of no more than moderate national significance and moderate to low global significance.

Note: [ ] = unconfirmed record.

**Biome-restricted species:** The site is not known to qualify under criterion A3, although this may largely reflect the relative low ornithological survey coverage of the site (Timmins and Vongkhamheng 1996, Showler *et al.* 1998). See Appendix 3 for details.

**Threats to biodiversity**

Clearance of forest for unsustainable agriculture and over-exploitation of forest products have already resulted in the loss of extensive areas of natural forest within the IBA and the degradation of other areas. Another factor contributing to habitat degradation has been grazing by domestic livestock. However, it is unlikely that the remaining secondary habitats at the IBA are currently under a high degree of threat. Hunting has been a significant

threat to biodiversity at the IBA: some large-bodied, ground-foraging bird species appear to be virtual absent, while others seem to occur at very low densities, indicating quite high hunting pressure (Showler *et al.* 1998). However, none of the key species confirmed to occur at the IBA are considered to be particularly susceptible to hunting pressure. Consequently, while the site qualifies as an IBA, intensive management is probably not necessary to protect the populations of key bird species. Instead, management should focus on maintaining sufficient suitable habitat to support the population of Black-crowned Barwing.

### **References**

- Duckworth, J. W., Salter, R. E. and Khounboline, K. eds. (1999) *Wildlife in Lao P.D.R.: 1999 status report*. Vientiane: IUCN, WCS and CPAWM.
- Showler, D. A., Davidson, P., Vongkhamheng, C. and Salivong, K. (1998) *A wildlife and habitat survey of the southern border of Xe Sap National Biodiversity Conservation Area and the Dakchung plateau, Xe Kong province, Lao P.D.R.* Vientiane: CPAWM/WCS.
- 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.
- Timmins, R. J. and Vongkhamheng, C. (1996) *A preliminary wildlife and habitat survey of Xe Sap National Biodiversity Conservation Area and mountains to the south, Salavan province, Lao P.D.R.* Vientiane: CPAWM/WCS.