

Phou Ahyon

Criteria: A1 & A2

Province(s): Xekong
Protected area: Phou Ahyon PNPA
Area: 148,900 ha

Latitude: 15°48'N
Longitude: 107°09'E

General description

The IBA comprises the proposed Phou Ahyon (Ajol) extension to Xe Sap National Protected Area, in southern Lao P.D.R. The IBA is centred on the Phou Ahyon massif, which, at 2,193 m asl, is the largest and highest massif in southern Lao P.D.R. The vegetation of the IBA is dominated by dry evergreen forest, with *Fokienia* forest above 1,500 m asl, and upper montane forest above 1,800 m asl (Thewlis *et al.* 1998). At lower elevations, in valleys and on lower slopes, the forest on Phou Ahyon has been extensively cleared for agriculture, although most cleared areas lie outside of the IBA. The IBA supports a rich montane avifauna, including populations of several restricted-range bird species found in the Kon Tum Plateau Endemic Bird Area (EBA), such as Crested Argus *Rheinardia ocellata*, Black-hooded Laughingthrush *Garrulax milleti* and Yellow-billed Nuthatch *Sitta solangiae*. To date, there has only been one, brief, ornithological survey within the IBA (Timmins and Vongkhamheng 1996), as a result of which the importance of the IBA for bird conservation has yet to be fully assessed. However, the results of this survey indicate that the IBA is of high importance for bird conservation, and it is likely that it supports populations of the three bird species endemic to the Kon Tum Plateau EBA: Golden-winged Laughingthrush *G. ngoclinensis*, Chestnut-eared Laughingthrush *G. konkakinensis* and Black-crowned Barwing *Actinodura sodangorum* (R. J. Timmins *in litt.* 2002).

Key bird species

Species	IBA criteria	Global threat status	Lao threat status	Notes
Crested Argus <i>Rheinardia ocellata</i>	A1, A2	VU	ARL	One or two birds were heard calling regularly at c.1,450 m asl in May 1996 (Thewlis <i>et al.</i> 1998). The population at the IBA is of moderate to low national significance and low global significance.
Yellow-billed Nuthatch <i>Sitta solangiae</i>	A1, A2	NT	PARL	The species was commonly recorded, generally in association with mixed feeding flocks, throughout forest areas between 900 and 1,200 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.
Black-hooded Laughingthrush <i>Garrulax milleti</i>	A1, A2	NT	PARL	During May 1996, a single bird was seen and several were heard at 1,450 m asl, three birds out of a larger flock were seen at 1,250 m asl, a flock was seen at 1,350 m asl, and the species was provisionally recorded at 1,550 m asl (Thewlis <i>et al.</i> 1998). The species may be common at the IBA, as the relatively small number of records may simply reflect the relatively little time spent at suitable elevations (Thewlis <i>et al.</i> 1998). The population at the IBA is of high national significance but, given the wider distribution and larger populations of this species in Vietnam, it is of only moderate global significance.
White-checked Laughingthrush <i>G. vassali</i>	A2			A large flock was seen in scrub close to degraded forest, and a flock was seen in secondary forest at 1,200 m asl in May 1996 (Thewlis <i>et al.</i> 1998). The population at the IBA is of low national and global significance.

Biome-restricted species: Based on the information currently available, the site is not known to qualify under criterion A3 (Timmins and Vongkhamheng 1996), although, with more comprehensive ornithological survey coverage, it probably would do. See Appendix 3 for details.

Threats to biodiversity

The greatest threat to biodiversity at the IBA is clearance of forest for unsustainable agriculture. The extent of forest clearance appears to be greatest around the northern, western and eastern edges of the Phou Ahyon massif, and seems to be linked to local communities' reliance on shifting cultivation (Timmins and Vongkhamheng 1996).

Another major threat to biodiversity is hunting, with both guns and snares. Snaring has been identified as a particular threat to Crested Argus, especially as the density of snare lines encountered on the lower slopes of Phou Ahyon was among the highest encountered during recent surveys in Lao P.D.R. (Timmins and Vongkhamheng 1996, Thewlis *et al.* 1998). One potential threat to biodiversity at the IBA is forest product extraction. The fact that the IBA is currently not designated as a national protected area, may be a constraint to addressing the major threats to biodiversity.

References

- 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.