

Upper Lao Mekong

Criteria: A3 & A4i

Province(s): Bokeo, Oudomxai and
Xaignabouli

Area: 10,980 ha

Latitude: 20°20'N

Protected area: None

Longitude: 100°55'E

General description

The IBA is located along the Mekong River in northern Lao P.D.R., and comprises a 377 km section of the Mekong channel, from Ban Xiangkhok on the Lao-Myanmar border to Ban Bo on the boundary between Oudomxai and Xaignabouli provinces. This section supports three basic habitat types: featureless stretches with a well defined channel but no, or negligible, exposed bed; stretches with many sandbars; and stretches of channel mosaic habitat, comprising sand and gravel bars and islands, rock outcrops, bushland and braided streams. The stretches of channel mosaic habitat support a relatively rich riverine bird community, including River Lapwing *Vanellus duvaucelii* and Jerdon's Bushchat *Saxicola jerdoni*. The stretches with many sandbars are important for Small Pratincole *Glareola lactea*; the IBA supports 5% of the estimated world population of this species, although the IBA is probably not as important as Mekong Channel from Phou Xiang Thong to Siphandon IBA (LA007) for this species. The IBA also supports large numbers of Plain Martin *Riparia paludicola* and significant numbers of Grey-headed Lapwing *V. cinereus*, and is the site of the only recent Lao records of Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* (Duckworth *et al.* 2002). Finally, there are single records of both Swan Goose *Anser cygnoides* and Black-bellied Tern *Sterna acuticauda* from the IBA, although it is unlikely that it regularly supports significant numbers of either species.

Key bird species

Species	IBA criteria	Global threat status	Lao threat status	Notes
†Swan Goose <i>Anser cygnoides</i>	A1	EN	ARL	A single bird was recorded in the main Mekong channel at Chiang Saen in January 1996 (Robson 1996 cited in Duckworth <i>et al.</i> 1999). It is unlikely that the IBA regularly supports a significant population of this species.
River Lapwing <i>Vanellus duvaucelii</i>	A4i		ARL	A maximum of 76 birds was recorded along the length of the IBA during December 1999 and January 2000, while a maximum of 71 birds was recorded in April 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, it is very likely that the species meets the 1% threshold. The population at the IBA is of high national significance but moderate to low global significance.
Small Pratincole <i>Glareola lactea</i>	A4i		PARL	A maximum of 1,271 birds was recorded along the length of the IBA during December 1999 and January 2000, while a maximum of 936 birds was recorded in April 2000 (Duckworth <i>et al.</i> 2002). The population at the IBA is of moderate national and global significance.
†Black-bellied Tern <i>Sterna acuticauda</i>	A1	NT	ARL	A single bird was recorded in the main Mekong channel at Chiang Saen (U. Treesucon in Round 1995 cited in Duckworth <i>et al.</i> 1999). The IBA is very unlikely to regularly support a significant population of this species, although it is likely that it would have done in the past. Given the availability of suitable habitat, if disturbance to breeding birds was curtailed, it is possible that numbers of this species could recover, although this would be contingent on sufficient numbers remaining on the Mekong channel and its major tributaries in Cambodia to recolonise the IBA in the future.

Note: † = not confirmed to regularly occur in significant numbers.

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.* 2002). See Appendix 3 for details.

Threats to biodiversity

Most of the IBA is easily accessible from along the banks of the Mekong River, and levels of human activity are high. Major threats to biodiversity at the IBA are active persecution, in the form of hunting and egg collection, and incidental disturbance, including boat traffic and accidental nest destruction.

References

- 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.
- 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.