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## Record Numbers of White-shouldered Ibis found by conservationists in Cambodia

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White-shouldered Ibis *Pseudibis davisoni* photographed in western Siem Pang, Stung Treng Province on 4 November 2006.  
Photo: J C Eames

**BirdLife International<sup>1</sup> in Indochina** - BirdLife International *in Indochina* and the Wildlife Protection Office (WPO) of the Forestry Administration (FA) recently recorded the largest ever flock of White-shouldered Ibis *Pseudibis davisoni*, a bird species close to global extinction. This once again draws attention to the conservation importance of western Siem Pang District in Stung Treng Province, Cambodia.

The White-shouldered Ibis is a large water-bird with most of the world population now found in Cambodia. The species survives in Indonesian Borneo but it is now extinct in Thailand and Vietnam. It probably lingers on in southern Laos and could yet be re-found in Myanmar. In 2001, BirdLife International,

keepers of the IUCN list of bird species threatened with global extinction, estimated that the world population could be as low as 250 individuals, scattered mainly across the wetlands within the dry forests of northern and north eastern Cambodia, especially in Preah Vihear and Stung Treng provinces.

In November 2005 the attention of conservationists worldwide was diverted to western Siem Pang District in Stung Treng Province when staff from BirdLife International *in Indochina* and from the WPO of the FA, recorded a flock of 70 White-shouldered Ibis. This was the largest flock of White-shouldered Ibis ever recorded anywhere in the species' range.

More recently, on 1 November 2006, BirdLife and WPO staff recorded a staggering 108 White-shouldered Ibis at two sites in western Siem Pang District. At the first site 28 birds were recorded in trees at a well known *trapeang*, one of the many forest wetlands that dot the landscape on which these birds depend. Later that day, many kilometres distant at another site in the southern part of the district, 80 White-shouldered ibis were counted coming into roost in the evening.

Prich Phirun, WPO/BirdLife Project Officer said, "This is great news for the White-shouldered ibis! Because the two sites are so far apart, we think there is almost no chance of double-counting."

Although the species is found regularly breeding in a protected forest in Preah Vihear Province, it has not been found in significant numbers in national parks and wildlife sanctuaries elsewhere. This is of great concern to conservationists because it means that, with most of the global population found in Cambodia, it is vulnerable to global extinction if a self-sustaining population is not identified and conserved. So, once again, the attention of conservationists focuses on western Siem Pang District, where forests and wetlands are unprotected and vulnerable to degradation and destruction.



A flock of White-shouldered Ibis take flight. Photo: J C Eames

BirdLife and WPO staff are currently working with local communities to monitor wildlife populations and to promote improved management of *trapeangs* in western Siem Pang. However, these actions cannot prevent conversion of the forest lands to other uses, such as logging or growing plantations. Such conversion would be disastrous for local people and wildlife, as they are both dependent on the forest and the wetlands.

Jonathan Eames, Programme Manager for BirdLife International in Indochina, added “On the available evidence, western Siem Pang District is the single most important

*site in the world for the White-shouldered Ibis. As we learn more about the area we find more and more White-shouldered Ibis. What we don't understand yet is why this area appears to be so important for the species. The possibility must also exist that there are good numbers elsewhere too but this has not yet been borne out by the evidence. Conservationists are working, for example, throughout Mondulhiri Province but are not finding the ibis. Given our current state of knowledge the conservation money must go on western Siem Pang. BirdLife believes that the establishment of a Protected Forest would be the best first course of action for the conservation of this species.”*

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#### NOTES FOR EDITORS

- 1) BirdLife International is a global alliance of conservation organisations working in more than 100 countries worldwide who, together, are the leading authority on the status of birds, their habitats and their conservation. Further information about BirdLife's work in Vietnam, Cambodia and Myanmar can be found at [www.birdlifeindochina.org](http://www.birdlifeindochina.org).