



WWF

FACTSHEET

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# Protecting Rare and Endangered Birds along the Mekong River



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## Objectives

- To inform local communities that the MFF is a last refuge for many endangered and threatened bird species.
- To reduce threats to breeding White-shouldered Ibis, Red-headed Vulture, Lesser Adjutant and River Tern.
- To protect and secure critical breeding habitat for these and other bird species.

## A Refuge for Birds

Extending over 60 km from Kratie to Stung Treng province in Northeastern Cambodia, the Mekong Flooded Forest (MFF) is a section of the Mekong River that is recognized for its rich biodiversity and intact natural resources. The MFF plays an important role in supporting the livelihood of local communities, while simultaneously providing important habitat for the critically endangered Irrawaddy Dolphin, Cantor's Giant Softshell Turtle, and a range of rare bird species. These endangered and threatened birds include the White-shouldered Ibis, Red-headed Vulture, Lesser Adjutant, River Tern, as well as many other species.

However, illegal logging, hunting, land clearance, economic development, and human disturbance caused by population growth and immigration threaten the survival of these important species.

## About the Project

The Mekong River between Kratie and Stung Treng towns is a last refuge for many bird species that have nearly disappeared from the rest of Southeast Asia. Since 2008, WWF has been working with local communities, provincial authorities, the Cambodian Fisheries Administration, and the Forestry Administration to protect critical habitat and nests of key species in the MFF.

The project works with local communities to raise awareness about forest and wildlife protection, especially about the endangered and threatened birds in the MFF. In order to involve the local communities and provide alternative, habitat friendly livelihoods, the project has engaged local villagers to guard the nests of the White-shouldered Ibis, Red-headed Vulture, Lesser Adjutant and River Tern.



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White-shouldered Ibis

# About the Species

## White-shouldered Ibis (*Pseudibis davisoni*):

This species uses flooded forests, wetlands, and forest ponds known as trapaengs, and is identifiable by its black body and whitish patch on the inner forewing. The breeding season occurs between October and April when each female has the potential to produce between 2 and 3 eggs, though on average only 2 chicks survive. Currently the MFF supports about 130 birds, making this the third largest population in the world. It is listed as Critically Endangered by the IUCN. Threats to the species include habitat loss, egg and chick gathering, poaching, and human disturbance.

**River Tern (*Sterna aurantia*):** Identifiable by its white body, yellow beak, and red legs, the River Tern is a small bird that nests on sandbars and lays an average of 2 to 3 eggs between January and March. The species has undergone a major decline in Southeast Asia, as its nesting area is vulnerable to flooding, predation and human disturbance. The bird is listed as Nearly Threatened on the IUCN Red List and is one of the rarest birds in Cambodia.

**Lesser Adjutant (*Leptoptilos javanicus*):** This large stork forages in wetland areas along the Mekong River and in trapaengs. The breeding season occurs between October and July, and on average a female produces 2 to 5 eggs. It is classified as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List. Habitat loss and poaching are major threats for this species.

**Red-headed Vulture (*Sarcogyps calvus*):** This species has disappeared from most places in Asia because it is extremely vulnerable to the use of diclofenac, a drug used to treat disease in cattle. If vultures feed on dead cattle that have been treated with even a small amount of diclofenac, it will kill them. Fortunately diclofenac is not legally used in Cambodia and vultures have fared better here than in other Asian countries. There is a small population of this Critically Endangered species living along the Mekong.

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River Tern

## Project Achievements

Over the last four years a nest protection project has expanded to protect more nests with the help of more villagers.

- 2009: 16 local villagers guarded 15 nests of the White-shouldered Ibis and Lesser Adjutant. In total 21 chicks hatched.
- 2011: 52 villagers protected 27 nests. 30 chicks hatched, including 12 White-shouldered Ibis, 14 River Tern and 4 Lesser Adjutants.
- 2012: 98 guards protected 87 nests located both in the MFF and surrounding areas. As a result, 119 chicks hatched, including 32 White-shouldered Ibis, 62 Lesser Adjutants, 23 River Terns and 2 Red-headed Vultures.

While these results are encouraging, more study is needed to confirm the long-term efficacy and sustainability of nest protection efforts.



Lesser Adjutant