COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

Issue #16

KBA
KEY BIODIVERSITY AREAS

Black and white Ruffed Lemur © Mathias Appel

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HIGHLIGHTS FOR THIS ISSUE

GLOBAL

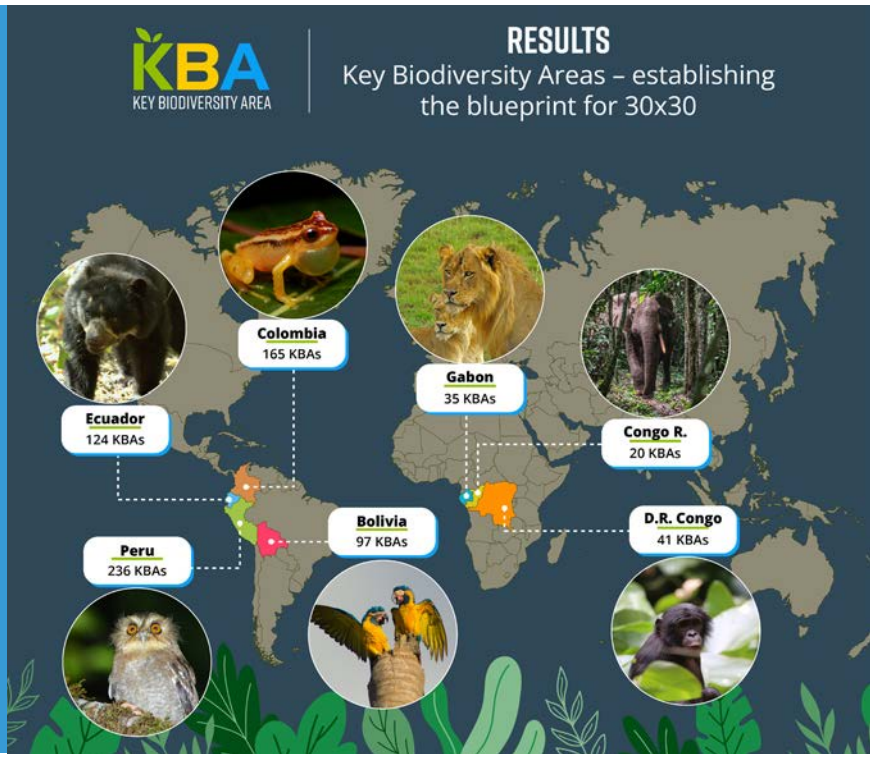
Bezos Earth Fund Fuels Groundbreaking Biodiversity Project: 719 Key Biodiversity Areas Identified in the Tropical Andes and Congo Basin

In a landmark achievement, the "Key Biodiversity Areas – establishing the blueprint for 30x30" project, has confirmed 719 Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) across seven countries in the Tropical Andes and Congo Basin regions. This is the most ambitious project of the KBA Partnership to date and was possible thanks to the funding of the Bezos Earth Fund, the leadership of BirdLife International, and the pivotal support of the implementing organizations in each country. The comprehensive assessment made in these two rich regions is a significant step towards achieving the ambitious goals of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), also known as the Biodiversity Plan.

- **719 KBAs identified across 7 countries** in the Tropical Andes and Congo Basin regions.
- The comprehensive assessment included **248 new KBAs**, in addition to **re-assessments of 575 sites.**
- **3,060 KBA trigger species found** in the seven project countries.
- Colombia has the **world's first KBA based on applying the distinct genetic diversity** assessment parameter.
- The Republic of Congo has the **world's first KBA identified for its ecological integrity** under KBA criterion C.

The project was a truly joint endeavour. For two years, seven implementing organizations, over 600 experts, and 129 member organizations of seven National Coordination Groups (NCGs) worked tirelessly to collect, organise, analyse, and submit data on thousands of potential trigger species. With this information, 575 previously identified KBAs were re-assessed, whilst 248 new KBAs were identified and assessed against the rigorous KBA criteria.

"The Bezos KBA project has been a great success, not only by comprehensively assessing and updating the list of KBAs in the seven participating countries, but also by putting KBAs firmly on the radar of governments and other stakeholders", said Zoltan Waliczky, Global Site Conservation Coordinator at BirdLife International. *"We hope that our experiences will serve as a model for future national KBA assessments and that our findings will contribute to the global effort to protect biodiversity."*



In the project countries, national and sub-national authorities are keen to use KBAs for new protected area establishment and conservation management to achieve the goals of the GBF. The Global Biodiversity Framework, adopted at the COP15 conference, sets ambitious targets, including the 30x30 goal of protecting at least 30% of the world's lands, inland waters, coastal areas, and oceans by 2030. The identification and protection of KBAs will be crucial in achieving these targets, as they represent the most important sites for biodiversity conservation.

KBA awareness meeting with Agriculture general direction. Congo Republic (Photo by: WCS Congo)

Pioneering applications of the KBA Standard


Dahl´s Toad Headed Turtle in Northern Colombia (Photo by: Daniel Nielsen/WCS)

Colombia has achieved a significant milestone with the designation of the world's first KBAs based on applying the distinct genetic diversity assessment parameter: Carranchina and Bajo Sinu. Carranchina is home to a 30% of the unique genetic diversity of the critically endangered Dahl's Toad Headed Turtle (*Mesoclemmys dahli*), a unique and endemic species found only in the fragmented tropical dry forests of this region. Bajo Sinu contains half of the unique genetic diversity of the critically endangered Magdalena River Turtle (*Podocnemis lewyana*). These two sites' assessment marks a crucial step in identifying and prioritizing them for preserving the genetic heritage of these rare species, which face habitat loss as its main pressure.

The Republic of Congo has the world's first KBA identified for its outstanding ecological integrity, KBA criterion C: Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park. Covering 4,000 square kilometres of lowland rainforest and harbouring globally significant populations of endangered large mammals, this site has never been logged, contains no roads within its borders, still boasts wildlife that has had little or no contact with humans, and plays a demonstrated role in climate regulation and carbon storage. It is one of the most intact parts of the Northwest Congolian Lowland Forest Ecoregion.


Gorilla at Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park (Photo by: Thomas Nicolon)

The power of diversity and local voices

Indigenous women at Naranjos, Shambuyacu, Peru
(Photo by: Constantino Aucca/ECOAN)

The project has led to increased collaboration between national and local governments, local communities, and experts, with many countries expressing interest in using KBAs as priority sites for conservation and management. Indigenous communities were also actively involved in the process and their knowledge was crucial for the project's success. In Colombia and Ecuador, indigenous communities were active in proposing their territories as KBAs in the hope that this international designation will help them protect and manage their ancestral territories.

The rich information generated and collected during the Bezos KBA project will be crucial in informing the development of national biodiversity action plans and strategies, ensuring that the goals of the Global Biodiversity Framework are met. The project's success demonstrates the importance of identifying and protecting KBAs as a key strategy for conserving the world's biodiversity.

For more information, please contact Zoltan Waliczky at **Zoltan.waliczky@birdlife.org**.

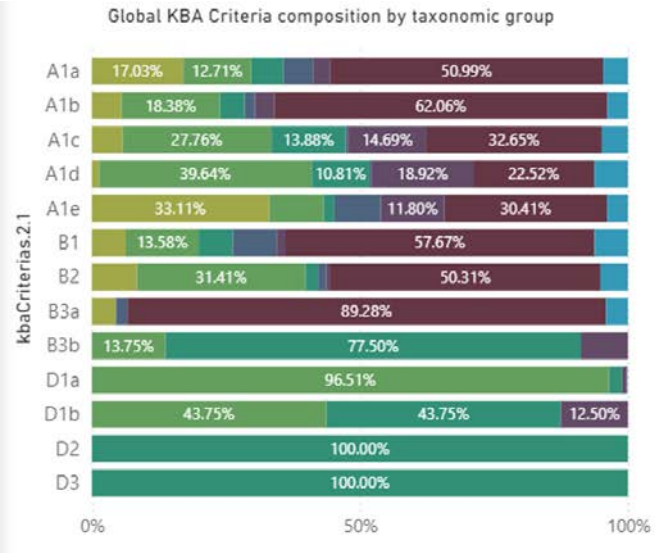
Discover more about KBAs visiting **www.keybiodiversityareas.org**, and for more about the Bezos KBA Project visit this **link**.

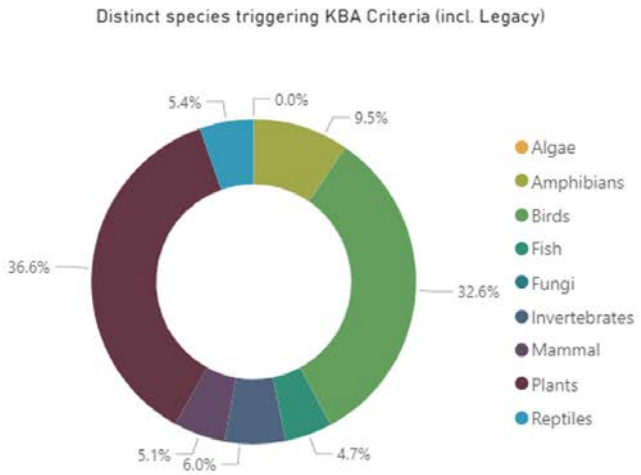
Mapping the World's Biodiversity: Key Updates and New Discoveries in the June 2024 KBA Release

By: Andrew J. Plumptre, Head of the KBA Secretariat

The World Database of KBAs has recently been updated to include all of the newly assessed and re-assessed sites from four countries in the Andes (Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru), three in the Congo Basin (Democratic Republic of Congo, Gabon, Republic of Congo), South Africa and Uganda. As of June 2024, a total of 16,551 KBAs were published.

These countries have undertaken relatively comprehensive assessments of their KBAs, applying many of the KBA criteria and doing so across many taxonomic groups. South Africa contains its own floral kingdom and as a result, and for the first time, plants are the most numerous species group with 6,815 species that trigger KBA status, overtaking birds which have been dominant because of the inclusion of the Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs) in the database. You can investigate the triggers and sites in more detail using the **KBA dashboard** or login to the **World Database of KBAs**.





SOUTH AMERICA

First Key Biodiversity Area (KBA) based on Distinct Genetic Diversity was Designated in northern Colombia

By: WCS Colombia

Habitat of Dahl´s Toad Turtle in the "La Carranchina" KBA, recently designated, within the Tropical Dry Forest of Northern Colombia. (Photo: Daniel Nielsen/WCS)

- First KBA designated globally applying the distinct genetic assessment parameter.
- Harbors a 30% of the unique genetic diversity of Dahl´s toad Headed Turtle.
- An important area for the protection this freshwater turtle, endemic to Northern Colombia.

The first KBA based on distinct genetic diversity has been designated in Colombia, for the endemic and critically endangered Dahl´s Toad Headed Turtle (*Mesoclemmys dahli*). This landmark designation results from over a decade of dedicated research conducted by scientists from the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) and the Turtle Survival Alliance (TSA). Their extensive studies include population and habitat assessments across the species range, and molecular studies. The latter demonstrated that the species has a genetic structure with at least four subpopulations, which are very small and isolated, with little to no contemporary gene flow among them. Therefore, mating among related individuals has been occurring, translating into high degrees of inbreeding. The genetic assessments across the species distribution also allowed the estimation of the relative importance of different sites for the maintenance of the genetic diversity of the species. The recently designated KBA, Carranchina, located in northern Colombia, contains 30% of the species distinct genetic diversity. If effectively protected, it serves as a vital refuge for the turtle, ensuring its distinct genetic traits are preserved for future generations.

Dahl´s Toad Headed Turtle in Northern Colombia (Photo by: Daniel Nielsen/WCS)

The designation of this KBA underscores the importance of conserving genetic diversity as a key component of biodiversity. It sets a precedent for future conservation efforts worldwide, emphasizing the need to protect not only species and populations but also the genetic variation within them. Its designation was possible thanks to recent efforts by WCS, TSA, Rainforest Trust, and the Alexander von Humboldt (IAvH) Institute, and the guidance of the KBA Regional Focal Point for Latin America. The organizations involved in this proposal and

the Key Biodiversity Areas Secretariat celebrate this achievement as a testament to the power of science-driven conservation planning and the collective efforts to safeguard our planet's unique and irreplaceable natural heritage.

Carranchina is the first one, but not the only one

Podocnemis lewyana © Jay

Another site has also been assessed by applying the distinct genetic diversity parameter: Bajo Sinu. This site is located in the floodplain savannahs of the Colombian Caribbean coast in the department of Córdoba. The parameter was triggered in this site because it contains half of the unique genetic diversity of the critically endangered (CR) Magdalena River Turtle (*Podocnemis lewyana*). Bajo Sinu also has a complex mosaic of habitats that include mangroves, swamps, marshes, channels, sandy marine and riparian beaches, grasslands, dry forest fragments, flooded forests, and freshwater wetlands. This site has been formally nominated and is now confirmed.

CENTRAL AMERICA

KBA Community Head's Visit to Central America: Insights from Honduras and Guatemala

Meeting with DiBio/SERNA authorities in Tegucigalpa, Honduras. Dec 2023.

In December 2023, Adrian Aspiroz, Head of the KBA Community, embarked on a trip to Central America, visiting Honduras and Guatemala. The visit had two main components: meetings and a field trip in the Tegucigalpa-Danlí area of Honduras and visits and meetings in and around several protected areas (including Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas, or IBAs/KBAs) in central and northern Honduras and Guatemala.

Informal chats with landowners to provide insights about efforts to preserve and manage native forest in Danli area, Honduras.

In Honduras, Aspiroz held a Zoom virtual meeting with authorities of the Dirección General de Biodiversidad (DiBio) to discuss the potential advantages of the KBA Strategy within a National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) update framework. During the meeting, DiBio authorities highlighted their current efforts to update Honduras' NBSAP, which includes a focus on protected areas and the need to extend the protected areas system.

Aspiroz also met with members of Aves Honduras, the local BirdLife International affiliate, and a USAID representative to discuss ongoing conservation efforts, including the development of the IBAs Programme and the potential for USAID support for work related to biological corridors, IBAs, and KBAs.

In Guatemala, Aspiroz visited several protected areas and private reserves, all part of IBAs-KBAs. These included Finca El Pilar, a coffee farm that protects significant areas of native forest and combines coffee production with traditional tourism and ecotourism proposals.

The visit to Central America provided valuable insights into the current state of biodiversity conservation efforts in the region, including the need for stronger environmental governance and the challenges faced by local communities and environmental defenders.

AFRICA

South Africa's new KBA network is a staggering 263 terrestrial sites with more in the pipeline

By: South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI)

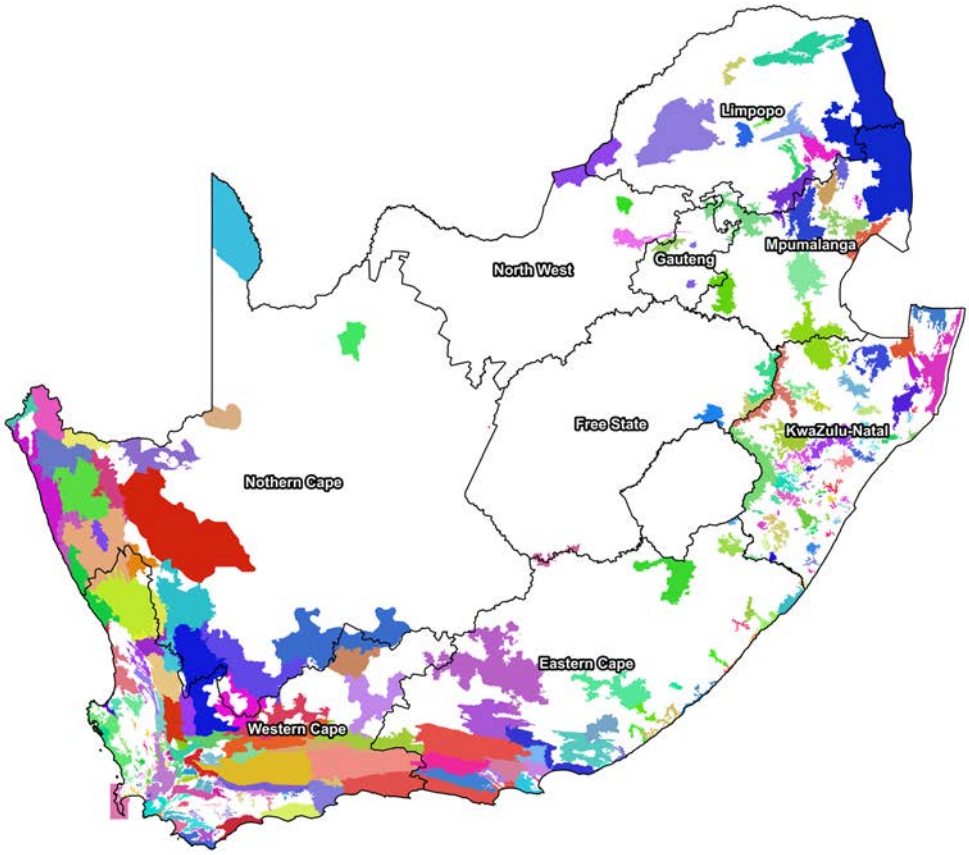
Mimetes cucullatus, a KBA trigger B3a due to it being endemic and restricted to the ecoregion, is located in the Kogelberg Key Biodiversity Area, Western Cape, South Africa. The site has several ecosystem triggers (A2 and B2) from the following ecosystem types Hangklip Sand Fynbos, Cape Winelands Shale Fynbos, Kogelberg Sandstone Fynbos, Kogelberg Sandstone Fynbos and Western Coastal Shale Band Vegetation. ©Martine Robinson

South Africa's National Coordination Group (NCG) embarked on an ambitious process to systematically reassess the **Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) in the country** to be aligned with the Global Standard for the Identification of Key Biodiversity Areas. The aim was to completely update the sites identified in South Africa in the past, through the consideration of a broader range of biodiversity data, and the application of all 11 KBA criteria. The initiative, which started in 2017, was led by the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) and BirdLife South Africa, in collaboration with other conservation agencies. Through this process, South Africa became the first country to apply ecosystem criteria (A2 and B4) as well as an assessment of the irreplaceability of sites for species persistence under criterion E.

It is widely accepted that the world is facing a biodiversity crisis, as biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation continue to rise. Conservation interventions are urgently required to preserve our most vulnerable species and ecosystems. South Africa has recognised this growing concern and is committed to safeguarding its natural heritage for future generations. Globally, South Africa is acclaimed for boasting unique biodiversity, encompassing diverse ecosystems from the highly endemic Fynbos biome to the expansive savannas of the northern parts of the country (including the famous Kruger National Park). With the adoption of KBAs as a globally recognised and effective standardised method of identifying important places for biodiversity, the NCG was tasked with bringing together data and experts that could contribute towards systematically identifying and delineating KBAs for species and ecosystem triggers in the country.

Results of the KBA Reassessment

The NCG identified 263 terrestrial KBA sites, which were confirmed by the KBA Secretariat in May 2024. However, this is only the first step towards the recognition of the importance of South Africa's biodiversity in a global context. South Africa's NCG will continue to work towards the identification of more sites in the marine realm, as well as ensure continuous updates of the terrestrial network.



South Africa's 263 KBA sites showcase the megadiverse wealth of the country.

The large number of terrestrial sites that qualify as global KBAs demonstrates the megadiverse wealth of South Africa. Of the approximately 357,198 km2 that are confirmed South African KBA sites, approximately 28% fall within formal protection. This demonstrates the potential of KBAs in the conservation framework, as KBAs that lack formal protection are positioned to be considered in protected area expansion strategies to ensure that South Africa's protected areas footprint includes the most threatened species and ecosystems.

The KBA network is underpinned by 3598 species triggers and 309 ecosystem triggers. The most frequent species- and ecosystem-related KBA triggers are those that meet criteria B2 and B4. The West Coast Biosphere Reserve is the location with the highest number of KBA species triggers, with approximately 320 triggers, or 9% of all the species triggers for South Africa. Top on the list of ecosystem triggers for KBA sites are the Garden Route and Gouritz Cluster – Kammanassie sites.

The Kloof Frog and Speckled Dwarf Tortoise were the most represented species trigger for the amphibian and reptile taxonomic groups respectively. Black Harrier was the most represented species trigger for birds, as were the Pennington's Protea (butterflies); the White Malachite (dragonflies); the Smallscale Redfin (freshwater fishes); the Mountain Reedbuck; (mammals); and the Common Sunshine Conebush (plants).

South Africa's most represented trigger species for each taxonomic group. Top row from left to right Kloof Frog (amphibians) ©Dylan Leonard, Speckled Dwarf Tortoise (reptiles) ©Ryan van Huyssteen, Black Harrier (birds) ©Stuart Shearer and Pennington's Protea (butterflies) ©Stephen Woodhall. Bottom row from left to right White Malachite (dragonflies) ©Alex Rebelo, Smallscale Redfin (freshwater fishes) ©Riaan van der Walt, Mountain Reedbuck (mammals) ©Clicque, and Common Sunshine Conebush (plants) ©Diana Studer.

Challenges and Innovations in KBA Identification

A task of this magnitude in a megadiverse country made it a complex undertaking. Given South Africa's rich biodiversity, South Africa adopted several innovative approaches towards identifying sites and triggers that meet criteria thresholds. South Africa is the first country to apply all the criteria across species and ecosystems and in the process many technical challenges were solved, and lessons learnt. Throughout the process, South Africa worked in close collaboration with the KBA Technical Working Group and Standards and Appeals Committee, and many of our insights and solutions were adopted into version 1.2 of the KBA Guidelines. Our data also provided many challenges to the functionality of the World Database of KBAs (WDKBA). These were all resolved through the tireless dedication of the WDKBA's technical team, and will hopefully result in a smoother data submission process for other countries wanting to follow South Africa's example.

Future Directions and Goals

With the accumulation of more data, the NCG will continue to identify new KBA sites with strategic partnerships. The confirmed KBA sites will receive continual monitoring with the help of public and private entities, with the aim to proactively build up and support conservation management in the sites. We will be exploring how to include KBAs as one of the inputs into the country's well-established land-use decision-making process, and technical working groups are already looking at updating various systematic biodiversity planning guidelines and tools. The KBA network helps to showcase South Africa's unique biodiversity and will inspire future species and ecosystem projects through which conservation and monitoring can be broadened. We look forward to garnering improved adoption and support from private and public entities and individuals through the recognition of the value and uniqueness of South Africa's biodiversity provided by the KBA identification process.

Establishing KBAs in South Africa under the KBA Standard was a crucial stepping stone to ensure the country's ability to report against global conservation goals, and will now form part of the suite of tools for monitoring and reporting on the state of biodiversity that inform policy and decision making in a range of sectors.

World's First Key Biodiversity Area Identified Under Ecological Integrity Criteria in the Republic of the Congo

By: WCS Congo

Images from left to right: Mbéli Baï ©Will Burrard-Lucas; Nouabalé-Ndoki Forest ©Scott Ramsay

As a result of a thorough process based on the Key Biodiversity Area (KBA) Standard, Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park, which has been under WCS management for over 30 years, has become the first site in the world to be recognized for its ecological integrity – a measure of the region's robust natural processes and resilience against disturbances.

The KBA Standard, developed by the conservation experts of the Joint Task Force on Biodiversity and Protected Areas, and published by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), sets rigorous criteria for identifying sites that are globally significant for the persistence of biodiversity. The Ecological Integrity criteria specifically focuses on areas that remain undisturbed by significant impacts, thereby preserving their structure, composition, and function.

Loxodonta Cyclotis - Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park © Will Burrard-Lucas

Covering 4,000 square kilometers of lowland rainforest and harboring crucial populations of endangered mammals, **Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park** has never been logged, contains no roads within its borders, still boasts wildlife that has had little or no contact with humans, and plays a demonstrated role in climate regulation and carbon storage.

Using satellite imagery and field surveys of key species such as forest elephants, gorillas and chimpanzees, WCS field biologists and the KBA secretariat in Cambridge (UK) assessed forest condition and wildlife abundance throughout northern Congo and Gabon and were able to demonstrate that the Park possesses exceptional ecological integrity, one of the most outstanding example of the Northwest Congolian Lowland Forests ecoregion.

Identifying and protecting areas of high ecological integrity is essential for conserving biodiversity, mitigating the effects of climate change, safeguarding against zoonotic pandemics, and maintaining the vital ecosystem services these areas provide.

Supported by Birdlife International, the KBA identification process "*is a significant milestone for global conservation efforts*," said Richard Malonga, Country Director of WCS. "*By recognizing areas of high ecological integrity, we are ensuring the protection of ecosystems that are vital for the survival of countless species and the overall health of our planet*", he added.

"*This project contributes to the ongoing efforts in our country by addressing biodiversity challenges, influencing action priorities to achieve the post-2020 global agenda goal on one hand, and developing a 30x30 action plan on the other.*" commented Arlette Soudan Nonault, Minister for the Environment, Sustainable Development and the Congo Basin, during one of the meetings that led to the recognition of the Park's ecological integrity.


Gorilla at Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park (Photo by: Thomas Nicolon)

This result is a testament to the Republic of the Congo's commitment to preserving its natural heritage. It underscores the exceptional global importance of the Congo Basin's intact landscapes and the values they hold for people and the planet.

This designation comes at a critical time, as the international community ramps up efforts to meet global biodiversity targets under the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

About Wildlife Conservation Society

WCS combines the power of its zoos and an aquarium in New York City and a Global Conservation Program in more than 50 countries to achieve its mission to save wildlife and wild places. WCS runs the world's largest conservation field program, protecting more than 50 percent of Earth's known biodiversity; in partnership with governments, Indigenous People, Local Communities, and the private sector. Its four zoos and aquarium (the Bronx Zoo, Central Park Zoo, Queens Zoo, Prospect Park Zoo, and the New York Aquarium) welcome more than 3.5 million visitors each year, inspiring generations to care for nature. Visit: **newsroom.wcs.org**. Follow: **@WCSNewsroom**. For more information: +1 (347) 840-1242. Listen to the WCS Wild Audio podcast **HERE**.

About WCS Congo

For more than 30 years, WCS has played a major role in the conservation of wildlife and wild places in the Republic of Congo, where it has contributed to the creation, expansion and management of three of the five national parks. WCS works closely with the government, national stakeholders and local communities to protect Congo's rich ecosystems.

About the KBA Standard

The Key Biodiversity Area (KBA) Standard is an internationally recognized framework developed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) to identify sites of global significance for the persistence of biodiversity. The Ecological Integrity criteria highlight the importance of protecting areas that remain largely unaffected by human activities, ensuring the preservation of natural processes and biodiversity.

Progress in Identifying Key Marine and Coastal Biodiversity Areas in Madagascar

By: Faratiana Ratsifandrihamanana, Rémi Ratsimbazafy and Fandresena Ainamanankasina

Magascar's KBA National Coordination Group © GEF-6 Marine Protected Areas

Madagascar is committed to tripling its Marine Protected Areas, with **77 threatened marine species** already identified through the GEF6-AMP project.

Madagascar is launching the process of identifying marine Key Biodiversity Areas (KBA) through the Gef6-AMP project within the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development. The first step is to mobilize the necessary resources to map these essential areas. The National Coordination Group on Marine Key Biodiversity Areas (NCG KBA) is hard at work, with a draft decree nearing completion. Recognizing the importance of consolidating marine, coastal, terrestrial, and freshwater KBAs under one umbrella, the MEDD collaborated with public and private stakeholders to transform the marine and coastal GNC KBA into an expanded GNC. The draft interministerial decree for this transformation is currently awaiting government approval.

A scientific workshop was also convened to foster data sharing collaborations and address concerns among data/knowledge holders regarding information usage. Information holders such as ASITY, Madagascar National Parks (MNP), Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), Conservation International (CI), National Center for Oceanographic Research (CNRO), Institute of Halieutic and Marine Sciences (IHSM), Blue Ventures (BV), Whale Shark Project Foundation, CETAMADA, National Museum of Natural History, Institute of Research for Development (IRD), and Reef Doctor were contacted. Coastal regions spanning the North, Northwest, Northeast, West-Center, Southwest, Southeast, and Great South of Madagascar were surveyed to gather data and information for identifying marine and coastal KBAs, where research and scientific studies on the marine environment are extensive and diverse.

These species are distributed across five recognized taxa such as Echinoderms, Fish, Reptiles, Birds, and Marine Mammals. Thus, a total of 77 threatened marine species have been listed, including 2 species of Echinoderms, 52 species of fish, 5 species of reptiles, 11 species of birds, and 7 species of marine mammals. The search for evaluation parameters of these species is underway to lead towards the analysis of criteria and thresholds defined for the identification of Key Biodiversity Areas in Madagascar

ASIA

Nature's Oasis: King Salman bin Abdulaziz Royal Natural Reserve protects Saudi Arabia's unique biodiversity


Aquila nipalensis © Irvin Sabastian

After a comprehensive assessment, Saudi Arabia's King Salman bin Abdulaziz Royal Natural Reserve (KSRNR) has been confirmed as a Key Biodiversity Area (KBA). This significant achievement reflects the reserve's commitment to protecting endangered species, developing natural habitats, enhancing environmental awareness, and reducing natural and human threats.

Located in Saudi Arabia, the KSRNR covers an area of 130,700 square kilometers, making it the largest natural reserve in the Middle East. The reserve is managed by the King Salman bin Abdulaziz Royal Reserve Development Authority, which has been working diligently to restore degraded ecosystems and conserve habitats and wildlife.

The reserve's unique ecosystem supports a variety of habitats, including forests, mangroves, and coral reefs, provide shelter for a wide range of species. This is one of the most important sites for the Endangered (EN) Steppe Eagle (*Aquila nipalensis*). It also supports species such as the Critically Endangered (CR) Sociable Lapwing (*Vanellus gregarious*), Endangered (EN) Lappet-faced Vulture (*Torgos tracheliotus*), and Buzzard (*Buteo buteo*).

The reserve's conservation efforts are multifaceted and include the restoration of degraded habitats, the protection of endangered species, and the promotion of environmental awareness among local communities. Its managing authority also works closely with international organizations, such as the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), to ensure that the reserve's conservation efforts are aligned with global best practices.

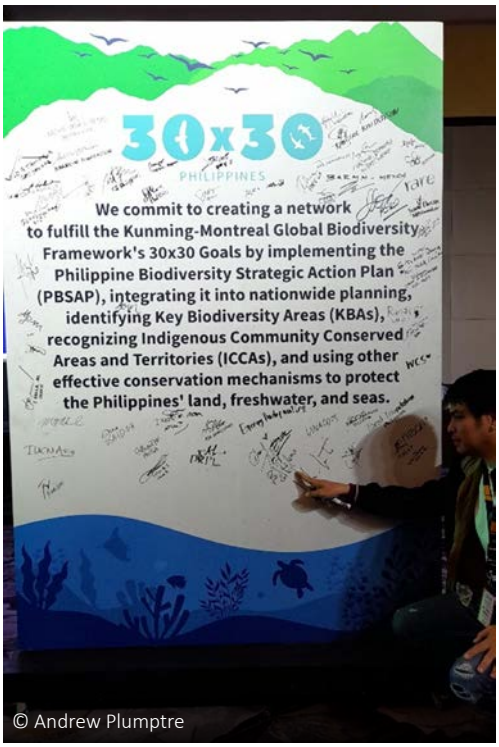
The KSRNR's confirmation as a KBA is a significant milestone in Saudi Arabia's conservation efforts. It demonstrates the country's commitment to protecting its natural heritage and preserving its unique biodiversity for future generations. Also, it highlights the importance of international cooperation in conservation efforts, as it brings together local, national, and global stakeholders to protect the world's most critical ecosystems.

Philippines government commits to planning for 30x30 using KBAs

By: Andrew J. Plumptre, Head of the KBA Secretariat

© Andrew Plumptre

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources of the Philippines held its 3rd National Protected Areas Conference last week in Manila. This three-day event brought together many of the conservation practitioners from around the country to present on their work to conserve the Philippine's protected areas and how they are engaging with the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF). Andy Plumptre from the KBA Secretariat was invited to present on how KBAs are being used by governments as part of a session on planning for 30% conservation by 2030 (30 x 30) under target 3 of the GBF led by the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS). At the end of the meeting those present signed up to a declaration on 30 x 30 which included a statement on identifying KBAs as part of the process of identifying sites for 30 x 30.



© Andrew Plumptre

This meeting was followed up by a one day training course in the use of the World Database of KBAs to propose re-assessments and identified new KBAs. Currently KBA partners in the Philippines are working with biodiversity experts to re-assess all existing KBAs. Using results from the KBA Secretariat's scoping tool they are evaluating what species might trigger KBA status using the global KBA criteria. We learned at the training day that the Forest Foundation of the Philippines had agreed to commit significant funding to enable this assessment to be completed in full. A KBA National Coordination Group is starting to be formed, after agreement at the meeting to do so, and we look forward to seeing proposals coming through in due course.

EUROPE

KBAs in Spain? It was about time!

By: David F. Díaz Fernández, Catherine Numa and Octavio Infante

Spain's KBA National Coordination Group © Catherine Numa

Spain is one of the most biodiverse countries in the European Continent and host over half of all European species' biodiversity, including a large number of national and regional endemisms. There are more than 4000 protected areas covering over 36% of the terrestrial and 12% of the marine surface. Additionally, 471 legacy KBA have been identified thanks to IBA (Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas) and AZE (Alliance for Zero Extinction) processes.

- **17 experts from 13 national institutions** are part of the Spanish KBA National Coordination Group.
- The **first KBA training** took place in Malaga in December 2023. Over 20 experts with backgrounds in all major taxa participated in the workshop.
- A **second short training** focused on KBA criteria for arthropods in Spain will take place on July 16th-17th, 2024. Please fill this **form** if you're interested in participating (Online webinar in Spanish).

However, the knowledge and protection of biodiversity remain challenging. While some iconic and threatened species such as the Iberian Lynx or the Spanish Imperial Eagle have improved notably their conservation status in recent years, the situation of other vertebrates show slow but steady declines, and most of the invertebrates and plants species, including numerous micro-endemism known from very few localities, have not been formally assessed, but are suspected to be threatened and occur outside protected areas. On the other hand, of the 471 KBA, only 179 are known or expected to meet global criteria.

In 2023, the IUCN Centre for Mediterranean Cooperation (IUCN-Med) and SEO/BirdLife considered critical to promote the identification of KBAs in the country, expanding the lessons learned, hand in hand with the main conservation and research organizations and institutions in the country. To this end, during 2023 these organizations convened numerous organizations at the national level for the preparation of

the Terms of Reference of the KBA National Coordination Group. In December 2023, the IUCN-Med, with the financial support of Biodiversa+ through the GaP project, and with the technical support of SEO/BirdLife, convened 24 experts from nine institutions to the First Technical Workshop on Identification and Delimitation of KBAs, with the aim of building capacities at the national level, incentivize the development of pilot KBA identification, socialize the Terms of Reference of the KBA National Coordination Group, and identify the main activities and next steps to establish a KBA program in Spain. Octavio Infante, Reponsible of the Site Conservation Program at SEO/BirdLife, was elected as the NCG coordinator for the first period of two years. Five areas were identified as potential pilots exercises for the application of the KBA criteria, including the recently created Sierra de las Nieves National Park, a mountain range where the Endangered Spanish Fir (***Abies pinsapo***) maintains its largest population.

In March 2024 took place the first meeting of the Spanish KBA NCG, with the participation of eleven representatives, to continue developing the action plan to the KBA program in Spain. The Spanish KBA NCG is currently composed by 17 experts from 13 organizations (in alphabetical order): Doñana Biological Station (**EBD- CSIC**), Iberian Society of Ichthyology (**SIBIC**), Institut de Ciències del Mar (**ICM-CSIC**), IUCN SSC Spain Species Specialist Group (**EsSSG**), Society for the study and conservation of sharks, rays and their ecosystems (**Catsharks**), Spanish Biological Society for Plant Conservation (**SEBICOP**), Spanish Committee of the IUCN (**CeUICN**), Spanish Society for the Study and Conservation of Bats (**SECEMU**), Spanish Society of Entomology (**AeE**), Spanish Society of Ethology and Evolution Ecology (**SEEEE**), Spanish Society of Herpetology (**AHE**), Spanish Society of Ornithology (**SEO/BirdLife**) and **WWF España**. Catherine Numa (KBA Focal Point, based in Malaga), Diego Juffe Bignoli (SAC Co-chair, based in Galicia) and two independent experts are also part of the NCG.


KBA NCG working groups © David Díaz

The NCG is currently organized in five main thematic areas (governance, fundraising, technical/criteria, policy and lobbing and communication). While this news is prepared, a second meeting is being organized and the group is starting to work in the elaboration of detailed action plans for each thematic area. Amongst other activities, presentations on the KBA Standard are being promoted in different conservation workshops and conferences, including a short online training on the identification of KBA for arthropods in July, workshop organized by UICN-Med and the Entomological Spanish Society in the framework of the project "GaP: Guiding expansion of protection under the EU Biodiversity Strategy: Threatened species and novel methods for Key Biodiversity Area identification".

An important piece of work now is the coordination with the entities involved in the update of biodiversity atlases and the preparation of national Red List, in a process funded by MITECO (Ministry for the Ecological Transition and Demographic Change) and coordinated by TRAGSATEC. Several of the GNC members are directly involved in these updates for their respective taxa or expertise; and actions are being coordinated with these organizations, including the Spanish Committee of the IUCN (CeUICN) and the Spain Species Specialist Group (EsSSG), to ensure the results of these projects will feed and integrate the KBA process in Spain. Finally, SEO/BirdLife is currently embarked in the IBA (Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas) update, a process in which detailed information for all bird species is being gathered, which will allow the KBA reassessment for birds in Spain.

KBA COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVES

Americas (and Chair) – Adrián B. Azpiroz: chair.kba.community@keybiodiversityareas.org / pampasbirds@gmail.com
Africa – Daniel Marnewick: daniel.marnewick@iucn.org
Asia-Pacific – Professor Yongut Trisurat: fforyyt@ku.ac.t
Europe and Central Asia- Konstantina Spiliopoulou: konaspilio@gmail.com

KBA COMMUNICATIONS:

Communications working group co-chairs:

Lindsay Renick Mayer: lrenickmayer@globalwildlife.org

Richard Lee: rlee@wwfint.org

KBA SECRETARIAT:

Head of the KBA Secretariat – Andy Plumptre: aplumptre@keybiodiversityareas.org

KBA REGIONAL FOCAL POINTS:

If you have queries about assessing Key Biodiversity Areas or want to nominate a KBA please contact the Regional Focal Points:

Africa and Asia - Jeannot Kivono: jkivono@keybiodiversityareas.org

Australia and Pacific Islands- Mark O'Brien: Mark.Obrien@birdlife.org

Latin America and Caribbean - Cecilia Tobar-Suárez: CTobar@keybiodiversityareas.org

North America- Marcelo Tognelli: mtognelli@abcbirds.org

Europe, North Africa and the Middle East- Catherine Numa: Catherine.numa@iucn.org

For other regions, please contact the head of the KBA Secretariat, Andy Plumptre: aplumptre@keybiodiversityareas.org

Layout and design - Sophia Lucero: sophia.lucero@birdlife.org

KBA PARTNERS:

BirdLife INTERNATIONAL

IUCN

AMERICAN BIRD CONSERVANCY

asa amphibian survival alliance

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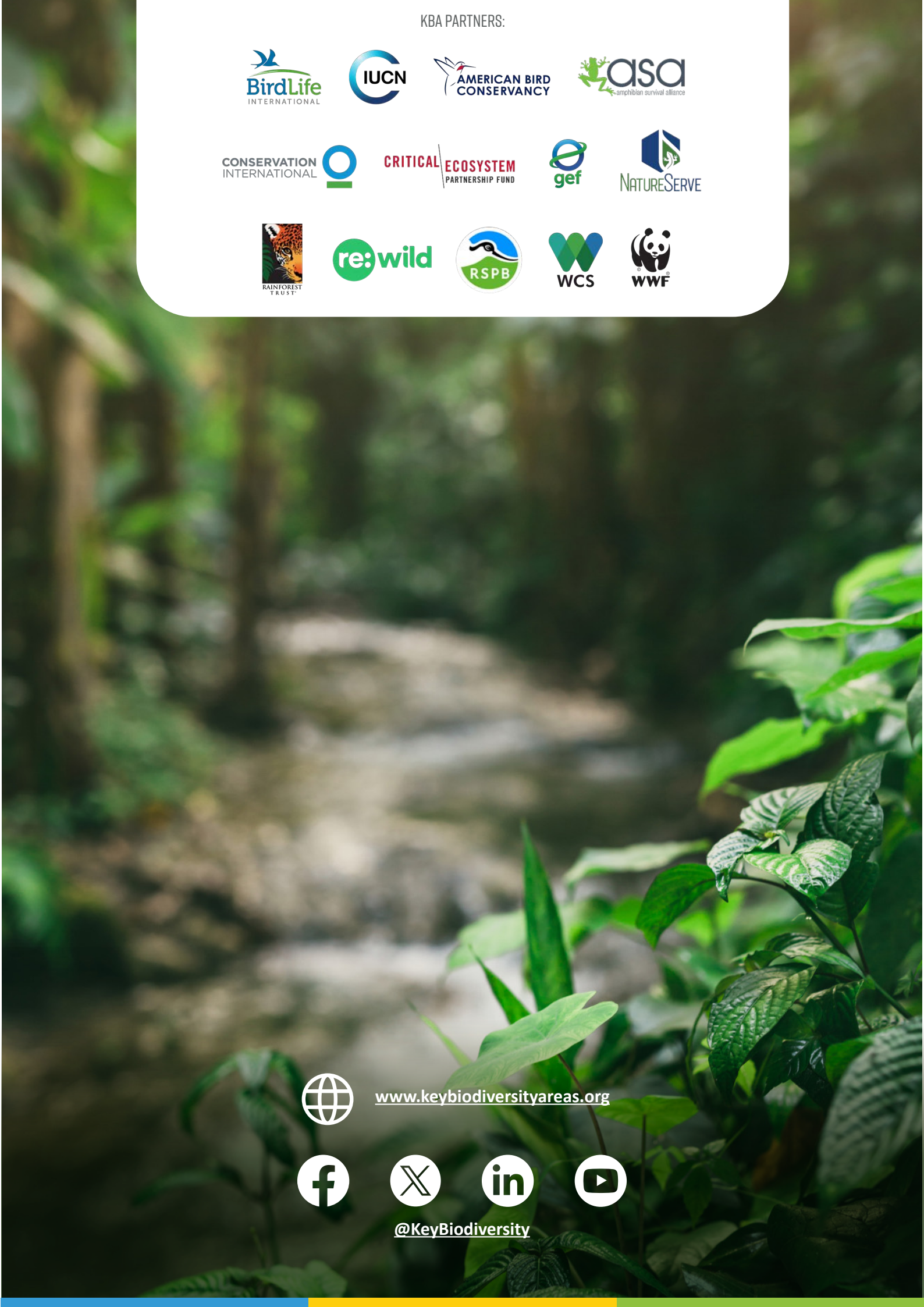

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