Foreword

Birds are a very special component of life on Earth. They have a millennia-inspired human civilisations and become powerful cultural icons and spiritual symbols. This is why birds are loved, observed and studied all over the world more than any other category of wildlife. In modern times, we have also discovered that they are excellent indicators of the state of the environment they (and all of us) depend on. This is why BirdLife organisations around the world, and increasingly also institutions and international conventions, use birds as messengers to guide our work to protect nature and the environment, BirdLife International is a worldwide Partnership of local conservation organisations spread over 100 nations and territories with members and supporters who strive to conserve birds, their habitats and global biodiversity, working with people towards sustainability in the use of natural resources.

The IBA Directory for mainland China is the most comprehensive inventory of key sites for biodiversity in China. It is one of the most important countries in the World for birds. It is home to over 80 Globally Threatened bird species and for 40 of these, China is critical for their survival. This phenomenal publication identifies 512 Important Bird Areas, covering over 1 million square kilometres of Chinese habitats. It demonstrates the enormous richness of China’s biodiversity and its international importance. The IBAs are the critical places for the conservation of the birds in China and, with them, a wealth of other biodiversity. IBAs are a crucial subset of key biodiversity areas and can lead the way in helping prioritise conservation planning and funding. This is an inventory of sites that have been clearly identified through a thorough assessment of biodiversity values. It is therefore a formidable tool to guide decision makers in governments, private sector, investment banks and donor institutions in order to avoid adverse impacts of development projects on priority sites and species, and to direct conservation funding towards clearly defined priorities.

It has been a massive task for the team of compilers to gather such detailed information about the birds and IBAs of China. It also shows the incredibly rapid growth of interest and expertise in nature conservation in the country. We are extremely grateful to the many people who have contributed to this book, including members of bird watching clubs as well as academic ornithologists. The World Bank has generously supported the publication of this directory which we hope will make a significant contribution to the conservation of some of the world’s most precious and fragile species and habitats. This work truly represents a milestone for bird conservation in China. I know that I speak for all in the global BirdLife Partnership when I say we very much welcome this new directory and look forward to developing a closer cooperation with everyone in China who shares an interest in conserving the birds and other wildlife of this vast, diverse and magnificent country.

Dr Marco Lambertini
Chief Executive
BirdLife International