

Regional Flyway Initiative

Investing in the East Asian–Australasian Flyway for Nature and People



Source: East Asian–Australasian Flyway Partnership

VISION: Through a coalition of partners, Asian Development Bank (ADB) is seeking to mobilize finance for \$3 billion in investments for wetland protection and sustainable management.

The East Asian–Australasian Flyway (EAAF) encompasses 22 countries from the Arctic Circle to Australia and New Zealand. Over 50 million migratory waterbirds, along with a diverse range of other animal and plant species, depend on the Flyway's thousands of wetlands for food, shelter, and other essential needs. These ecosystems also provide services, such as flood regulation, food, recreation and tourism, and employment to nearly 200 million people in adjacent communities and the region. The **Regional Flyway Initiative (RFI)** will support the protection, maintenance, and restoration of wetlands in East and Southeast Asia, focusing on coastal wetlands.

The Regional Flyway Initiative is looking to develop a long-term program to protect and restore EAAF wetland ecosystems and the services they provide. This will be accomplished through partnerships among governments, nongovernment organizations, communities, regional organizations, development agencies, the private sector, and other stakeholders. It will build on and collaborate with past and ongoing activities in the EAAF to ensure that opportunities for synergy are realized and duplication of efforts is avoided. Migratory waterbirds will provide a focus for RFI activities, as firstly their use of wetlands across the EAAF makes them the perfect barometer for regional and global environmental change, and secondly waterbirds international appeal provides the perfect species group to capture the public imagination and so increasing further buy-in to protect and sustainably manage these wetlands as a “string of pearls” for generations to come.

The Regional Flyway Initiative will deliver a vast regional network of sustainably managed wetlands that protects nature and provides long-term economic and social benefits to people.



Sembilang National Park (Muhammad Iqbal)

FOCUS AREAS



BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION

Protecting vital habitats for migratory shorebirds and other wetland biodiversity



CO-BENEFITS

Maximizing social and economic benefits derived from healthy wetland ecosystems, such as jobs, flood protection, and recreation



GREEN, INCLUSIVE, AND RESILIENT RECOVERY

Investing in development that is nature positive, socially inclusive and builds long-term resilience and aligns with key international agreements including the Paris Agreement, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the Sustainable Development Goals, the Convention on Biological Diversity, and the Ramsar Convention



CLIMATE CHANGE

Contributing to low carbon development through carbon sequestration and enabling climate adaptation in sensitive wetland systems

THE APPROACH



A focus on biodiversity, specifically migratory shorebirds and the coastal wetland ecosystems on which they depend, but also a clear emphasis on investments to sustain or regenerate co-benefits for local residents as well as people in the region.



An inclusive approach where stakeholders are not just consulted but actively contribute to activity identification, design, and implementation, enabling government and civil society actors to work in concert. The roles and engagement of local communities, including women, indigenous people, and youth, will receive special attention.



A flexible, programmatic approach resulting in investment proposals for ADB and other development partners that scale-up proposed and ongoing activities or support complementary new activities in the EAAF.



A regional approach, to scale-up cooperation among all actors flyway wide, building on ADB's existing regional initiatives as well as the existing East Asian–Australasian Flyway Partnership's governmental network whilst enhancing civil society networks.



Bar-tailed Godwits (Ding Li Yong/ BirdLife)

TWO COMPLEMENTARY FINANCING TRACKS

RFI INVESTMENT FRAMEWORK

Through an initial \$1 million grant assistance project from ADB, approximately 50 individual wetland sites and wetland clusters of highest priority within the EAAF will be identified, considering both biological and socioeconomic factors. Consensus on this list will be gained from participating countries with investment concepts then prepared for discussion and consideration for full project development. Proposals for capacity building and other supporting programs will also complement the site focused work at a country and regional level.

RFI SUSTAINABLE FINANCING MECHANISM

International conservation and development finance experts will establish a mechanism to generate funds that will help maintain the wetlands' biological and socioeconomic values over the long term. Resources will support governmental and civil society activities involving site maintenance, monitoring, data collection, enforcement, and community management initiatives, amongst others. The final design will be reached after consultation with relevant governments, civil society organizations, development partners, and other stakeholders during a final project workshop.

CASE STUDY 1

An Integrated Approach to Preserving the Wetlands in the People's Republic of China

TOTAL
PROJECT
COST:



- ADB: \$27.2 million
- GEF: \$1.4 million
- Government counterpart funding: \$30.5 million



Red-crowned Crane (Niu Zhiming/ADB)

One of Asia's largest coastal wetlands is found in Jiangsu Province in the People's Republic of China (PRC). Home to many migratory birds and animals, the wetlands also provide important ecosystem services to local communities. Marine and plant species protect against coastal erosion, tsunamis, and storm surges as well as improving water quality by filtering household and industrial pollution.

Yet, the Yancheng coastal wetlands suffered from rapid degradation. More than half of the wetlands had vanished because of reclamation for agriculture or industry, urban expansion, pollution, poaching and the spread of invasive species.



Oriental Storks (Niu Zhiming/ADB); Wetlands (Niu Zhiming/ADB)

The Jiangsu Yancheng Wetlands Protection Project co-financed by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Global Environment Facility (GEF) addressed constraints in protecting the wetland ecosystem by adopting an integrated approach, including the protection of the two nature reserves, the management of two forest farms, and capacity building to improve ecosystem management. Through the project a total of 4,554 hectares of wetlands were restored and rehabilitated providing healthy and critical habitats for wildlife, as illustrated by the spectacular gains in wetland bird populations which grew by 365% in the Rare Bird Nature Reserve core zone. The project also contributed to the successful listing of the Yancheng wetlands as a World Heritage natural site by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization natural site in July 2019.

The project promoted the effective participation of local communities and created employment opportunities for more than 2,900 people in the area, nearly half are women, through improved ecological farming and fishing practices as well as ecotourism and forest-based small businesses. Around 40 hotels and restaurants have opened in the project area since 2017, providing jobs and additional revenue and both nature reserves have become popular tourist destinations, attracting more than 1 million visitors annually.



Whimbrel
(G Allport/ BirdLife)

CASE STUDY 2

Conservation of Pak Thale-Laem Phak Bia

The Inner Gulf of Thailand overlaps with one of the most densely populated parts of Thailand and forms a critical area of coastal wetlands along the EAAF. Pak Thale-Laem Phak Bia is a well-known coast-scape comprising salt pans, intertidal flats and mangroves approximately 100 kilometers southwest of Bangkok. It is also a key Important Bird & Biodiversity Area (IBA). Each year, this site supports over 20,000 resident and migratory waterbirds, and it is regarded as among the most important sites for migratory shorebirds in Southeast Asia. Here, salt farming is a local tradition that dates back 800 years while aquaculture is also a major livelihood. With the increasing loss and degradation of natural wetlands in the Inner Gulf, the salt pans of Pak Thale-Laem Phak Bia continue to play an important role as feeding and safe roosting habitat for migratory shorebirds, including the flyway's two most threatened species, the Spoon-billed Sandpiper and the Spotted Greenshank.

The Bird Conservation Society of Thailand (BCST) has been involved in the conservation of Pak Thale-Laem Phak Bia for over 10 years. BCST has regularly monitored shorebirds here, while reaching out to local communities and the broader Thai public to raise the profile of these important wetlands. Under BCST's stewardship, much has been achieved in these areas of wetlands, including the following:

1. In 2013, the local government with jurisdiction over the site provided a building for BCST and local communities to develop and manage as an ecotourist visitor centre.
2. In 2017, BCST actively restored abandoned salt ponds and mangrove areas for shorebirds, and maintaining some areas mangrove-free for shorebirds to feed in.
3. During the winter of 2017–2018, BCST conducted experimental trials on the management of the abandoned salt pans and successfully restored 24 ha back to productive operation.
4. In 2020, BCST secured considerable financial support to purchase a substantial section of the core area of salt pans for long-term sustainable management to benefit local people and for conservation of threatened shorebirds. This was officially inaugurated as the Pak Thale Nature Reserve.

Through this work, the abundance and diversity of benthic invertebrates have increased, as has the abundance of shorebirds. Years of engagement with local landowners have already led to the successful acquisition of Pak Thale which BCST now manage as a nature reserve, in addition to areas under a comanagement arrangements with the local government. As a working wetland, Pak Thale continues thrive in salt production, directly benefiting local livelihoods and communities, whilst offering a critical refuge for some of the most threatened migratory shorebirds in the region.

Pak Thale Reserve opening (BCST).



Salt pan work in Pak Thale, Thailand (Wicha Narungsri).



ADB

ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK

ADB is committed to achieving a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific, while sustaining its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty. Established in 1966, it is owned by 68 members—49 from the region. Its main instruments for helping its developing member countries are policy dialogue, loans, equity investments, guarantees, grants, and technical assistance.



BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL is a global partnership of conservation organizations (NGOs) that strives to conserve birds, their habitats and global biodiversity, working with people towards sustainability in the use of natural resources. Together there are over 100 BirdLife Partners worldwide – one per country or territory – and growing.



EAST ASIAN - AUSTRALASIAN FLYWAY PARTNERSHIP

aims to protect migratory waterbirds, their habitat and the livelihoods of people dependent upon them. There are currently 39 Partners including 18 countries, 6 intergovernmental agencies, 13 international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), 1 international organization and 1 international private enterprise.



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Pak Thale field surveys (BCST).

