# News

## A 10-year national species action plan for the river tern *Sterna aurantia* in Cambodia

The river tern *Sterna aurantia* is a fish-eating bird that nests on sandbars along the Mekong and 3S rivers in the Stung Treng and Kratie provinces during the dry season. During the rainy (non-breeding) season, the species travels to Tonle Sap Lake. Once widespread throughout Southeast Asia, populations of river terns have rapidly declined in recent decades. In Cambodia, they have decreased by over 80% since the late 1990s, from ca. 300 to fewer than 70 adults. This population decline qualifies the species as regionally Critically Endangered.

Threats to the river tern include human harvesting of eggs for food, predation of nest and chicks by wild and domestic animals (especially rats), trampling of nests by domestic water buffaloes, flooding of nests by water releases from upstream hydropower dams, and human and animal disturbance at breeding sites. Other key threats include the destruction of sandbar breeding habitat by human encroachment and agriculture, development of hydropower dams, and gold and sand mining operations. Declines in fish prey and climate change also threaten the species.

To protect river terns in Cambodia, a 10-year national species action plan was developed by the Department of Freshwater Wetlands Conservation of the Cambodian Ministry of Environment in partnership with BirdLife International, NatureLife Cambodia, Worldwide Fund for Nature (Cambodia programme) and the Department of Natural Resource Management and Development of the Royal University of Phnom Penh, with support from the National Geographic Society.

The action plan is based on a consultation workshop held in Phnom Penh on 24 October 2017 that was attended by over 40 stakeholders, including international experts and representatives from government agencies, NGOs and academic institutions. It describes river tern ecology, population trends and threats, and outlines a conservation strategy aimed at species recovery. The full text of the action plan is available at: www.researchgate.net/publication/327136025_Ten-year_species_action_plan_for_the_Cambodian_population_of_River_Tern_Sterna_aurantia_2018-2028

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