

# Bird-based ecotourism for conservation and sustainable livelihoods

Connecting research with policy and practice in the Far Eastern Himalaya

## Biodiversity conservation and ecotourism

The Convention on Biological Diversity acknowledges that nature conservation and the sustainable use of biological diversity are critical to meet the food, health, and other needs of the growing world population. Beyond sustaining ecosystem services for human health and well-being, biodiversity also has immense potential to support sustainable livelihood options.

Ecotourism – one of such livelihood options – can not only provide income-generating opportunities for local communities but also spread ecological awareness on the importance of conserving biodiversity. Ecotourism immerses tourists in nature and forges a better understanding of people's dependence on natural environments. Importantly, ecotourism also pushes tourists to confront the reality of the threats facing our ecosystems and the dire consequences climate change is having on

Ecotourism promotes sustainable travel practices and activities that support conservation of natural areas and improve the well-being of local people.

biodiversity and our way of life. In this way, biodiversity conservation and ecotourism development hold a synergistic link.

## Harnessing the landscape's potential for bird-based ecotourism

The Landscape Initiative for Far Eastern Himalayas ([HI-LIFE](#)) – implemented by the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development ([ICIMOD](#)) and its national partners – aims to scale out such bird-based ecotourism within the landscape's three member countries – China, India, and Myanmar – and possibly across other Hindu Kush Himalayan countries. This potential for bird-based ecotourism is supported by the deep environmental, cultural, and socioeconomic ties among the three countries sharing the transboundary landscape. These countries have identified birdwatching tourism as a priority conservation and development strategy.

The Initiative aims to strengthen integrated conservation and development actions in the landscape through bird-based ecotourism by establishing links among communities, civil societies, academia, businesses, and governments.



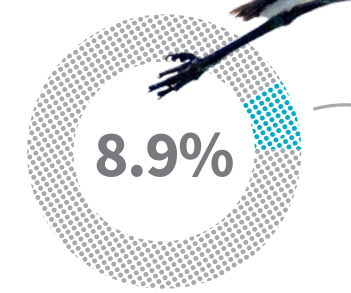
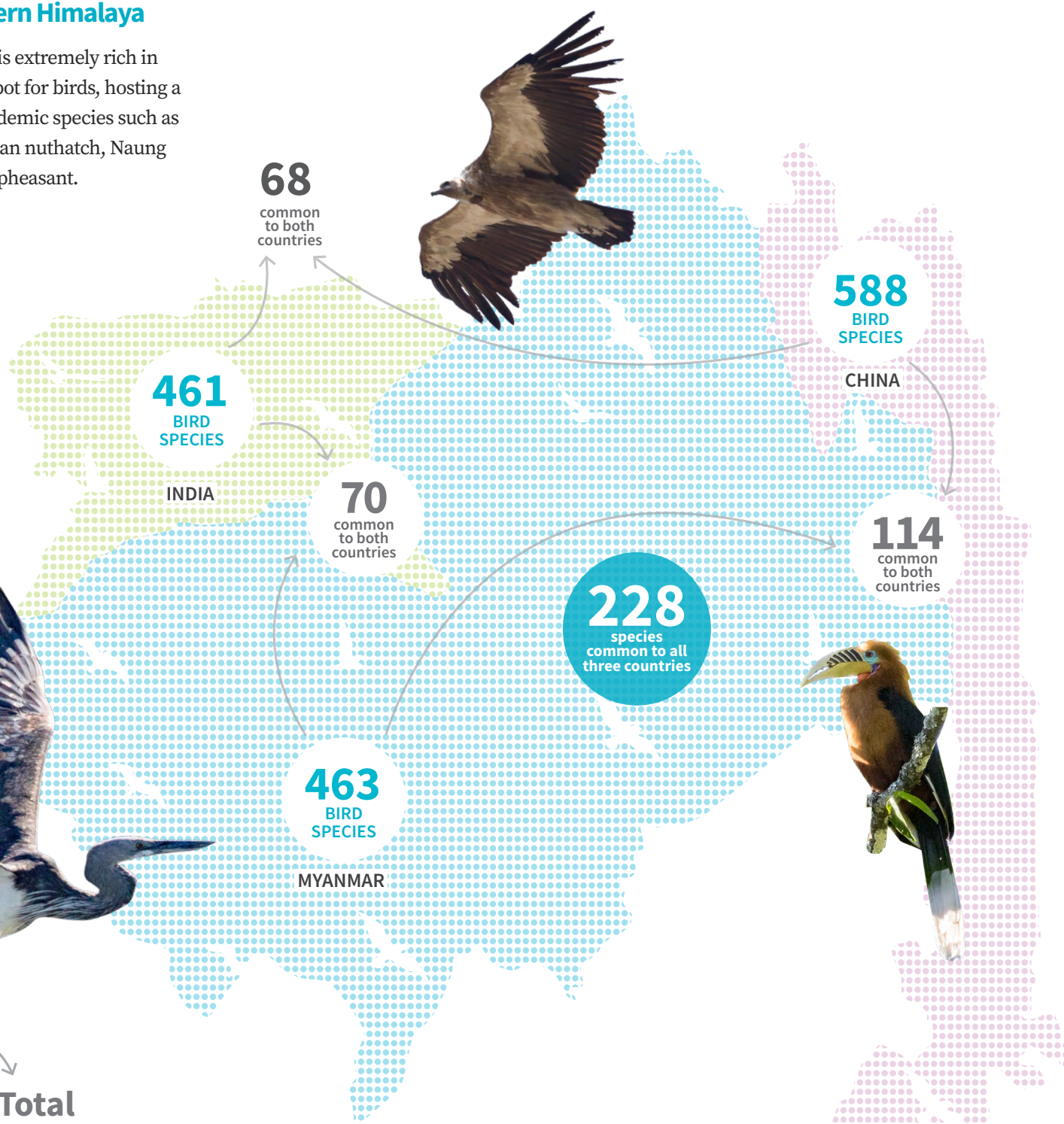
Bird diversity in the Far Eastern Himalaya

The Far Eastern Himalaya Landscape is extremely rich in endemic flora and fauna and is a hotspot for birds, hosting a number of highly valued, rare, and endemic species such as Slater’s monal, Gould’s sunbird, Yunnan nuthatch, Naung Mung wren-babbler, and Mrs Hume’s pheasant.

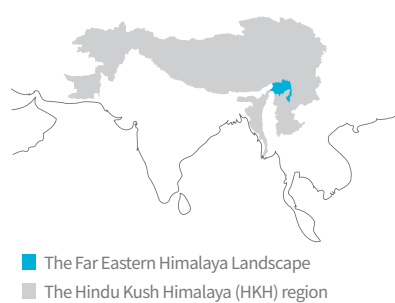
**Total**  
**794**  
bird species

**360** genera   **91** families

**12**  
Important Bird Areas



of the birds in the Far Eastern Himalayan Landscape are Threatened or Near Threatened



**Total**  
**70** species under key IUCN Red List categories

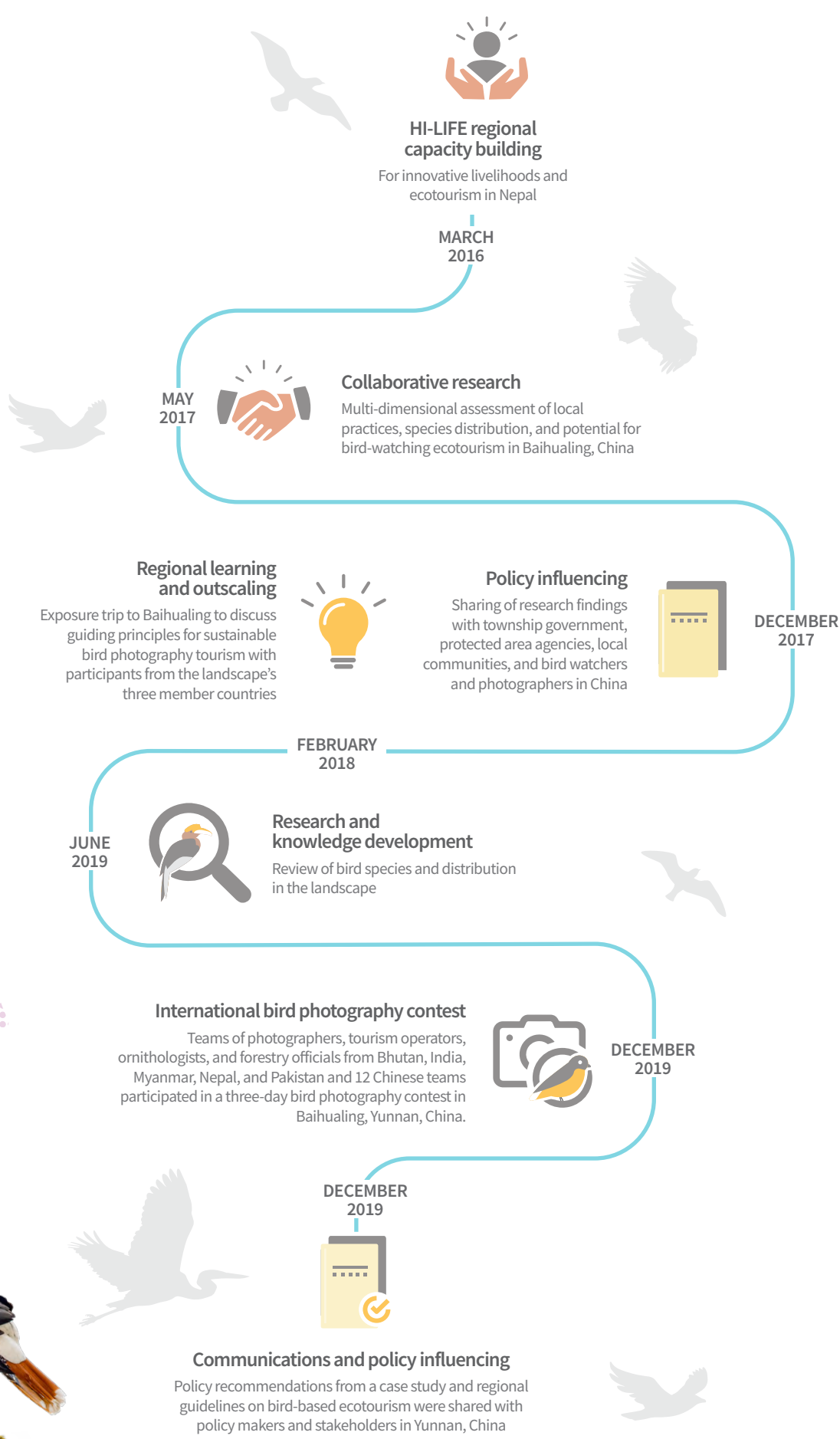
**19** Vulnerable  
**7** Endangered  
**7** Critically Endangered  
**37** Near Threatened

**Baihualing: A model for bird-based ecotourism**

Baihualing, a cluster of mountain villages on the periphery of Gaoligongshan National Nature Reserve in China, has emerged as a popular and model bird tourism destination. Here, the local government, NGOs, and local community have worked together to develop a model that attracts roughly 80,000 visitors a year and brings in substantial revenue for host families, guides, and others involved.



HI-LIFE’s science-to-action interventions





## The many benefits of bird-based ecotourism

- Creates income generation opportunities and fosters community engagement in conservation, with communities as direct beneficiaries
- Limited impact, special interest tourism – caters to high-end tourists, passionate bird watchers, and photographers
- Bird-based ecotourism infrastructure (hides, trails) is not nature invasive and can be co-developed with technical guidance
- Strengthens citizen science through stronger coalition among researchers, photographers, and local communities
- Bird photography requires special skills and understanding of bird habitat and behaviour – bringing local and expert knowledge together
- Photographs of birds can help in resolving taxonomic ambiguities and provide information on bird distribution and migration

## Policy recommendations

- Adopt a landscape approach to integrate farming practices and bird photography tourism
- Encourage traditional and community-based models of ecotourism

- Strengthen tourism value chain
- Establish and follow a strict code of conduct for visitors and hosts
- Link bird photography tourism with biodiversity monitoring
- Build the capacity of local stakeholders

## HI-LIFE's efforts to scale out bird-based ecotourism

- Scoping studies with stakeholders in India and Myanmar to map important bird areas, potential for bird tourism, and market and partnership possibilities
- Establishment of a regional bird information system with a database on bird species to attract global bird enthusiasts and photographers
- Mentoring and capacity building of stakeholders through the development of regional and subnational guidelines on bird-based ecotourism
- Support provided to local communities in improving infrastructure (Community Information Resource Centre in Kachin State, Myanmar) and technical backstopping regarding bird-based ecotourism (China, India, and Myanmar)



### For further information

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**Photos:** Sclater's monal by Wang Bin;  
white-bellied heron and rufous-necked  
hornbill by Karen Conniff.  
All other images from ICIMOD archive.

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