COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER
Issue #17

KBA
KEY BIODIVERSITY AREAS

Megaptera novaeangliae © Gregory Smith

KBA PARTNERS:

BirdLife International · IUCN · American Bird Conservancy · asa amphibian survival alliance · Conservation International · Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund · gef · NatureServe · Rainforest Trust · re:wild · RSPB · WCS · WWF

HIGHLIGHTS FOR THIS ISSUE

GLOBAL 3

KBA Annual Report for 2024 released 4

Improving national spatial planning for the conservation of biodiversity 6

Enhancing Biodiversity Protection: Insights from COP16 on KBAs 8

HIGH SEAS 9

Opportunities to identity Key Biodiversity Areas in the Southern Ocean through animal tracking data 10

SOUTH AMERICA 11

A beak of hope for Argentina's biodiversity 12

First National workshop on the identification of Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) in Guyana 14

NORTH AMERICA 15

An update on Canada's KBA program 16

AFRICA 17

The identification of 35 KBAs has led to a major step forward in conservation in Gabon 18

Advancing KBA Identification Through Biodiversity Experts' Training on Key Biodiversity Areas Criteria 21

Establishment of a Community Conservation Area (CCA) in Mara Bay Key Biodiversity Area (KBA), Tanzania 22

From Training to Implementation: A New Key Biodiversity Area in Malawi Confirmed 25

Rengele-Mutoloa-Condé Mountain complex: a potential KBA site in Mozambique 27

KBA Community Representatives 28

GLOBAL

KBA
KEY BIODIVERSITY AREAS

KBA Annual Report for 2024 released

The KBA Programme Annual Report 2024 outlines significant progress in the identification and conservation of Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) throughout 2023. The report highlights comprehensive assessments conducted in various biodiverse regions, including the Congo Basin and the Andes, aiming to enhance global biodiversity conservation efforts. Here are some of the key topics covered in the report.

KBAs and the Global Biodiversity Framework

Following the ratification of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF) in December 2022, the KBA Policy Working Group developed a document that showed where KBAs were relevant in the KMGBF and suggested actions that could be incorporated into NBSAPs to conserve KBAs. Another important highlight was the publication of a policy-relevant **paper** that seeks to clarify the definition of "areas of importance for biodiversity," to enhance KMGBF implementation.

Countries Making Comprehensive Assessments of KBAs

27 countries established KBA National Coordination Groups (KBA NCGs) by the end of 2023. Of those, 11 countries completed comprehensive assessments of their KBAs, covering multiple taxonomic groups. Countries such as Bolivia, Colombia, and South Africa have made significant progress in identifying new KBAs based on updated criteria. The UAE also published assessments identifying nine global KBAs.

Bezos Earth Fund Financing 7 Country KBA Assessments

A $5 million grant from the Bezos Earth Fund supported comprehensive assessments in four Andean nations (Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru) and three Congo-basin countries (Democratic Republic of Congo, Gabon, and Republic of Congo). Over 600 taxonomic experts re-evaluated existing KBAs and identified new sites, applying advanced criteria for ecological integrity and genetic diversity. By year-end, data on 651 sites were uploaded to the World Database of KBAs (WDKBA).

World Database of KBAs

The WDKBA underwent significant improvements in 2023, enhancing its functionality for KBA assessments. The database was translated into Spanish and French, making it more accessible globally. The report notes that various bugs were resolved during assessments in key regions like the Andes and Congo Basin, streamlining proposal submissions and reviews.

Training Courses in Application of the KBA Criteria

Training initiatives were launched to enhance understanding and application of KBA criteria among stakeholders. These courses aimed to build capacity within countries to effectively identify and manage KBAs, fostering greater engagement from both governmental and non-governmental entities.

KBA and the Private Sector

An increasing recognition of KBAs by the private sector as critical biodiversity sites is impacting business operations. Companies are now required to disclose their biodiversity impacts under various frameworks, integrating KBA data into their decision-making processes.

KBAs are referenced in major private sector disclosure frameworks post-KMGBF ratification. The integration of KBA data helps businesses assess their environmental impacts more accurately and aligns corporate strategies with global biodiversity goals.

Growth in Use of KBAs by Countries

There is a growing trend among countries to utilize KBA data in their national biodiversity strategies. Feedback indicates that many nations plan to incorporate KBA conservation actions into their National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans (NBSAPs).

Conserving Threatened KBAs

As part of the KBA 'Red Flag Group', Re:wild led various communication campaigns to defend threatened KBAs in Ecuador, Namibia, and Botswana from extractive activities like large-scale mining. Other members of the 'Red Flag Group' were equally active in protecting these vital areas from degradation and other human-related threats.

KBA Programme Priorities for 2024

Looking ahead, some of the priorities for 2024 include continuing comprehensive assessments and enhancing collaboration with various stakeholders to ensure effective conservation measures are implemented across identified KBAs. Also, the KBA Programme Strategic plan (2018-2024) comes to an end in 2024 and a new strategic plan (2025-2030) has been developed.

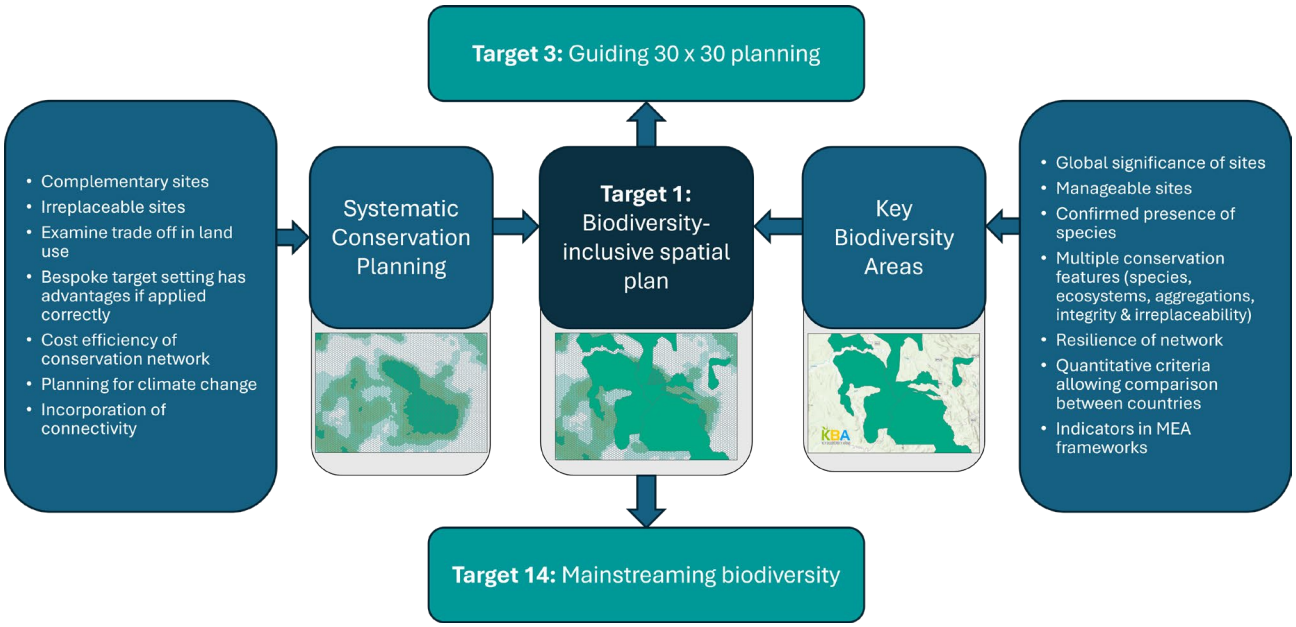
Science and Research

Various research initiatives related to KBAs occurred during the reported period; studies aimed at understanding biodiversity patterns and informing conservation practices based on scientific findings.

Read the full report **here.**

Improving national spatial planning for the conservation of biodiversity

A recently published paper **"The strengths and complementarity of Systematic Conservation Planning and Key Biodiversity Area approaches for spatial planning"** suggests improvements to the way nations currently plan for biodiversity conservation.



The paper addresses the urgent need for biodiversity-inclusive spatial planning, a focus of Target 1 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF). This target emphasizes the importance of integrating biodiversity considerations into national planning processes to mitigate the loss of critical species and ecosystems by 2030. It also emphasizes the need to identify and plan for areas of high biodiversity importance in each country. The authors explore two approaches to how planning usually happens: criteria-based approaches such as the Key Biodiversity Areas (KBA) programme, which identifies globally significant sites for biodiversity, and Systematic Conservation Planning (SCP), which optimizes where conservation should take place, applying quantitative targets to the species and ecosystems that nations want to conserve. IUCN **Resolution 2020_081** encourages all governments to incorporate KBA identification in their national spatial planning and this paper shows how, when integrated, the two processes can develop a stronger outcome.

One of the revelations from the study is the observation that over 75% of existing published conservation plans utilizing SCP have set poor targets amounts for their biodiversity elements. Many current approaches use uniform percentage targets for all species and ecosystems (e.g. select 20% of each) and the paper shows that this tends to favour the more widespread and common species, and does not target those species we should be more concerned about conserving. By integrating KBA criteria, which focus on globally significant biodiversity, the authors argue that conservation planners can create more robust and effective spatial plans.

The authors advocate for a synergistic use of both KBA and SCP methodologies. While SCP offers a structured framework for planning, the KBA approach provides crucial data on sites with globally important species populations and ecosystems, ensuring that conservation efforts are efficient and meaningful in preserving biodiversity. The goals of the GBF aim to halt extinctions and reverse biodiversity loss and this will only be achieved if conservation plans are built incorporating KBAs. Spatial plans for biodiversity conservation will be a crucial tool in the implementation of the GBF and in mainstreaming biodiversity across government sectors, an aim of Target 14 of the GBF. It is critical therefore that the planning is done well and really targets the right places, where conservation will contribute to halting extinctions and reversing biodiversity loss, the mission and goal of the GBF.

Dive into the **full paper** to explore the detailed methodologies and findings that could shape the next generation of conservation strategies.

Enhancing Biodiversity Protection: Insights from COP16 on KBAs

Author: Andrew Plumptre, Head of the KBA Secretariat

Andy Plumptre, Head of the KBA Secretariat, together with many members of the KBA committee, attended the 16th Conference of Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP16) in Cali, Colombia. KBAs were featured in several side events during the conference, including an event focusing on "The Relevance of KBAs for Implementing the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework" (KMGBF) and another that reported the results of comprehensive assessments of KBAs in a country, titled "Are We Missing Half of Our Areas of Importance for Biodiversity?" Through an analysis of 11 countries that have conducted comprehensive assessments of their KBAs, we found that, on average, there has been a doubling of sites recognized as globally significant and more than a doubling of area. If this pattern holds for other countries, it would effectively mean we are missing half of our sites of global significance for biodiversity. This emphasizes the need to conduct comprehensive assessments of KBAs as part of the 30x30 (Target 3) and spatial planning (Target 1) processes in each country.

KBAs were also featured in events about Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) and in sessions aimed at the private sector organized by IBAT. These events made it clear that more governments are engaging with KBAs and incorporating actions into their National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) as a result, which is encouraging. Frustratingly, the Parties did not discuss and finalize the monitoring framework for the KMGBF because they ran out of time; this has now been scheduled for an interim meeting to be held in February. Here, the headline indicator for Target 3 focuses on "Protected Area Coverage" in each country. There are optional disaggregations of this indicator, one of which is by "Areas of Importance for Biodiversity," where KBAs are clearly relevant. If the indicator is only "Protected Area Coverage" in a country, then we will have the same indicator as for Aichi Target 11, which was shown to fail because it did not ensure that protection occurred in the right places. Therefore, we want to see these disaggregations being made stronger than "optional."

Many participants at COP16 also visited some of the surrounding sites of Cali, including the Farallones National Park, a KBA identified for several trigger species including the Toucan Barbet. ©A.Plumptre/KBA Secretariat

HIGH SEAS

KBA
KEY BIODIVERSITY AREAS

Opportunities to identity Key Biodiversity Areas in the Southern Ocean through animal tracking data

Thalassarche chrysostoma © Oscar Thomas

Using cutting-edge animal tracking technology, and recently developed methods to analyse data, crucial areas for marine megafauna (seabirds and seals) conservation have been identified in the Southern Ocean. These new sites will form the body of evidence required to start understanding opportunities for identifying Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) in the High Seas. Given the newly adopted High Seas Treaty, which will allow for area-based management tools like MPAs in international waters, along with the new Global Biodiversity Framework, which includes commitments to protect 30% of the ocean by 2030, the new study presents a critical guide for understanding marine conservation opportunities across the world's oceans.

Read the full story **here.**

SOUTH AMERICA

KBA
KEY BIODIVERSITY AREAS

Sajama National Park, Bolivia © Pierre Doyen

A beak of hope for Argentina's biodiversity

Campo Viera and Campo Grande, home of the Threatened Vinaceous-breasted amazon (Amazona vinacea), and Garupa Basin and Campo San Juan, home of the Misiones blackhead snake, are Argentina's recently confirmed KBAs. They both represent progress and hope for Argentina's biological biodiversity.

Amazona vinacea © Luiz Moschini

- Campo Viera and Campo Grande qualifies as a KBA of global significance because the Vinaceous-breasted amazon (Amazona vinacea) meets A1a criteria (Threatened biodiversity).
- Garupa Basin and Campo San Juan KBA qualifies as a KBA under criteria A1a and B1, triggered by the Misiones blackhead snake.

Discovering Campo Viera and Campo Viejo's natural treasure

KBA Campo Grande © Aves Argentinas

Covered by primary forests known as "mixed forest of laurel and guatambú", and crossed by slopes and streams that drain into the basin of the Uruguay River, **Campo Viera y Campo Grande KBA** stands as a unique natural treasure located in Argentina's Misiones province. With an area of 139.2 km², this site has a well-preserved vegetation, in some fragments, presenting a complete jungle structure (i.e., with emergents, canopy, shrub, subshrub, and herbaceous stratum). In these lots we found specimens of Red Anchico (*Parapiptadenia rigida*), Cedar (*Cedrella fissilis*), Alecrín (*Holocalyx balansae*), White Guatambú (*Balfourodendrom riedelianum*), Black Laurel (*Nectandra angustifolia*) among others. The region is dominated by the Vulnerable (VU) naranjillo (*Citronella mucronata*), ñandipá (*Sorocea bonplandi*), catiguá (*Trichilia catigua*), and numerous myrtaceae. In addition to this species, there are several range restricted fish and plants that inhabit this KBA:

- Mojarra (*Andromakhe paris*)
- Botoncito blanco (*Borreria loretiana*)
- Caraguatá (*Dyckia mitis*)
- Butiera (*Butia exilata*)

Campo Viera y Campo Grande has been confirmed as a KBA of global significance because of the presence of Vinaceus-breasted Amazon (*Amazona vinacea*), an Endangered (EN) species that meets the A1a KBA criterion. This Parrot is endemic to the Atlantic Forest and is one of the most endangered birds

in Argentina. It has largely disappeared from its distribution in Misiones. Some of the threats this site and its biodiversity face are human-caused such as agricultural activity (e.g. yerba mate, tea, and tung crops), livestock, and a growing forestry activity in which large hollow trees are largely cut down, reducing the availability of nesting holes.

By identifying this important site, we have taken a positive step to mitigate the threats that might affect it, implement much-needed conservation actions, and guarantee its biodiversity thrives in time. The mapping and comprehensive assessment of Campo Viera y Campo Grande was possible thanks to the work and dedication of Aves Argentinas, BirdLife's partner in Argentina.

KBA Garupa Basin and Campo San Juan, between biodiversity and heritage

Described as a vegetation mosaic, **Garupa Basin and Campo San Juan KBA** locates in the ecotone of the Campos y Maleates, Paranaense Forest, and the fields of southern Misiones ecoregions. With an area of 920.39 km², this site has a rich variety of pampas birds and mammals, and landscape units ranging from marginal or gallery forest, to lagoons and watercourses and the Paranaense Forest. Some species found at this KBA are:

- Guayaibí (*Cordia americana*)
- Deer cinnamon (*Helietta apiculata*)
- Urunday (*Myracroudron balansae*)
- Aguaribay (*Schinus molle*)
- Chichita (*Lithraea molleoides*)
- Gray fox (*Dusicyon gymnocercus*)
- Golden howler monkey (*Alouatta caraya*)
- Streamer-tailed Tyrant (*Gubernetes yetapa*)
- Sharp-tailed tyrant (*Culicivora caudacuta*)

Alouatta caraya © Julia Gastaudo

This site contains the Jesuit ruins of the Nuestra Señora de Santa Ana Mission, a World Heritage Site protected by provincial and national cultural heritage laws. KBA Garupa Basin and Campo San Juan qualifies as such under criteria A1a and B1, triggered by the Endangered Misiones blackhead snake (*Apostolepis quirogai*). This site is also inhabited by the Myers' grass mouse (*Akodon philipmyersi*) a native species from the Misiones region that will potentially trigger at least one KBA criterion once its threat status is updated[1].

This place is a real natural and cultural treasure, where rich biodiversity and heritage interwind, highlighting the importance of protecting it for future generations.

Source: World Database of Key Biodiversity Areas (WDKBA). 2024.

1 At the moment, Akodon philipmyersi does not trigger any KBA criteria due to being a data deficient species.

First National workshop on the identification of Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) in Guyana

From September 9th to 12th, the Protected Areas Trust (Guyana) partnered with the Protected Areas Commission (PAC), and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to host Guyana's National workshop on the identification of Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs). The event featured renowned conservationist and photographer Andrew Snyder from Re:wild, and KBA experts Cecilia Tobar and Gabriela Toscano from BirdLife International.

KBAs have global value for conservation due to their outstanding ecological significance. These sites support important ecosystems with significant populations of animals, fungi, and plants, and can be used as a powerful tool for guiding decisions on conservation and sustainable management.

The workshop was chaired by Ms Nadia Hunte, Assistant Commissioner. During the workshop's opening, Mr. Jason Fraser, Protected Areas Commissioner, highlighted the importance of the Protected Areas for biodiversity conservation and the expansion of the National Protected Areas in Guyana to achieve the 30 by 30 target. Ms Oleta Williams, Executive Director of PAT Guyana, emphasized that a key part of PAT's mission is to mobilize resources to support such activities. She also thanked the contributing donors: the French Agency for Development (AFD), and the French Global Environment Facility (FFEM) through the Caribbean Regional Architecture for Biodiversity (CRAB) Project.

Throughout the four-day workshop, participants gained insights into the process of identifying and delineating KBAs, documentation requirements, and mapping standards. By the end of the workshop, a roadmap was created to advance the identification and assessment of KBAs across the country. The training engaged various organizations[1] and stakeholders, that are committed to forming a Multi-Stakeholder Group and potentially Guyana's first KBA National Coordination Group (NCG).

1 The participants included: Conservation International, Guyana Forestry Commission, University of Guyana, Frankfurt Zoological Society, Protected Areas Commission, Environmental Protection Agency, Guyana Geology

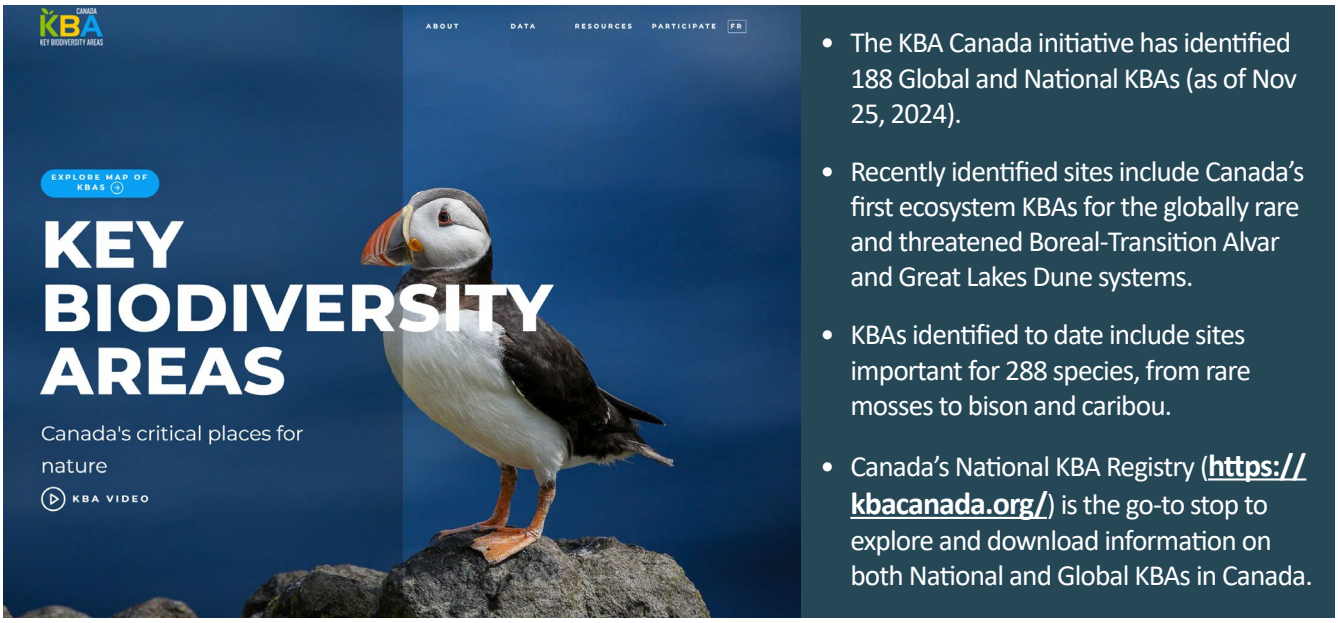
NORTH AMERICA

KBA
KEY BIODIVERSITY AREAS

Marmota vancouverensis © Adam Taylor

An update on Canada's KBA program

Author: Peter Soroye, Key Biodiversity Areas Assessment and Outreach Coordinator, WCS Canada



The KBA Canada initiative is making significant progress in its highly collaborative process to identify all KBAs in the country, with 188 KBAs recognized as of November 25, 2024, and more sites being recognized and published every month. Among the recently identified sites are Canada's first ecosystem KBAs, highlighting globally rare and threatened habitats such as the Boreal-Transition Alvar at **Marble Ridge Alvar KBA** and Great Lakes Dune systems at **Long Point Peninsula and Marshes KBA**. Other sites include **Grasslands National Park and Area KBA**, which contains over a third of all wild Plains Bison (*Bison bison bison*) in Canada, and **La Muraille KBA**, which contains about half of the world's Québec Rockcress (*Boechera quebecensis*). The recognition of these sites as KBAs marks a significant step toward recognizing and preserving Canada's rich natural heritage.

Canada's network of KBAs includes both Global and National KBAs, the latter of which are identified using the "**National Standard for the Identification of Key Biodiversity Areas in Canada**". Information on National KBAs – which consider Canadian threat rankings, endemism within the country, and nationally accepted subspecies and unique populations – has been much requested by the Canadian conservation community. For those interested in exploring or utilizing this information, the KBA Canada Registry (**https://kbacanada.org/**) is the comprehensive resource on all KBAs in Canada. The platform allows users to explore and download detailed data on National and Global KBAs across the country, fostering informed decision-making and engagement in conservation efforts.

AFRICA

KBA
KEY BIODIVERSITY AREAS

The identification of 35 KBAs has led to a major step forward in conservation in Gabon

Author: Nicolas Texier, Missouri Botanical Garden

Two innovative working groups created

For the first time at a national level, a group of around 20 experts, including botanists, zoologists and mycologists, representing nine taxonomic groups (flora, terrestrial mammals, marine mammals, marine fish, freshwater fish, birds, reptiles, amphibians, and fungi), collaborated to identify Gabon's most important areas for conservation and the factors that threaten them. Despite the creation of Gabon's 13 terrestrial National Parks in the early 2000s, no prior collaborative effort at this scale had been made among Gabon's biodiversity experts. This technical working group also constitutes a first step towards establishing a national Red List working group.

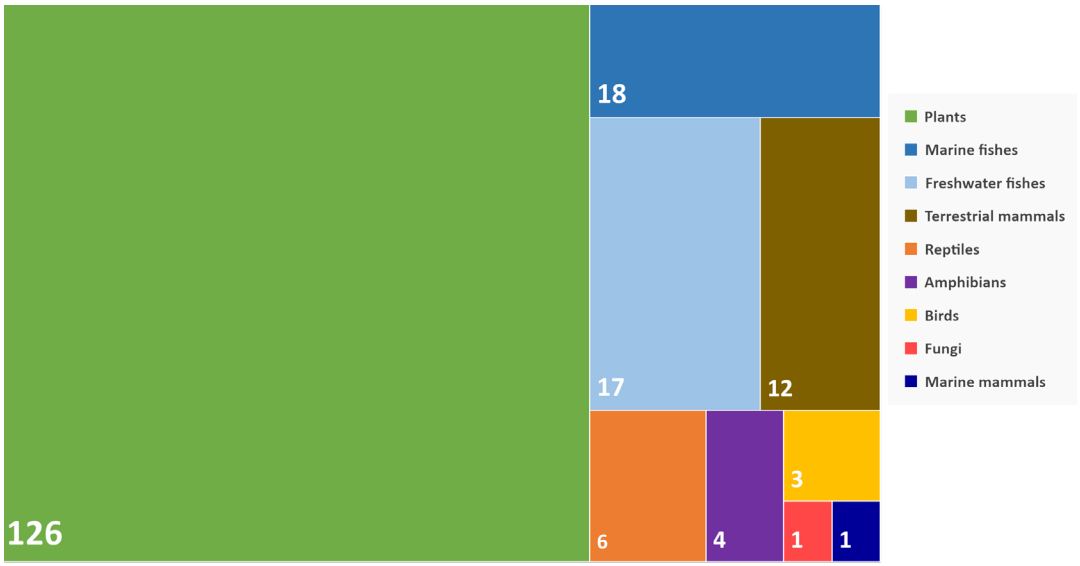
The KBA National Coordination Group of Gabon (ca. 60 members) presenting the results of the 2-year KBA identification process, on March 2024 in Libreville.

In addition, a KBA National Coordination Group was established, bringing together 16 governmental, scientific, academic, conservation and civil society institutions, totalling over 60 people involved in the KBA identification process, and enabling KBAs to be directly taken into account in the National Land Allocation Plan. The discussion between scientists, civil society and political decision-makers demonstrated the value of the group in advancing the country's conservation needs. The next steps include involving other ministries active in spatial planning.

The importance of plants in the KBA identification

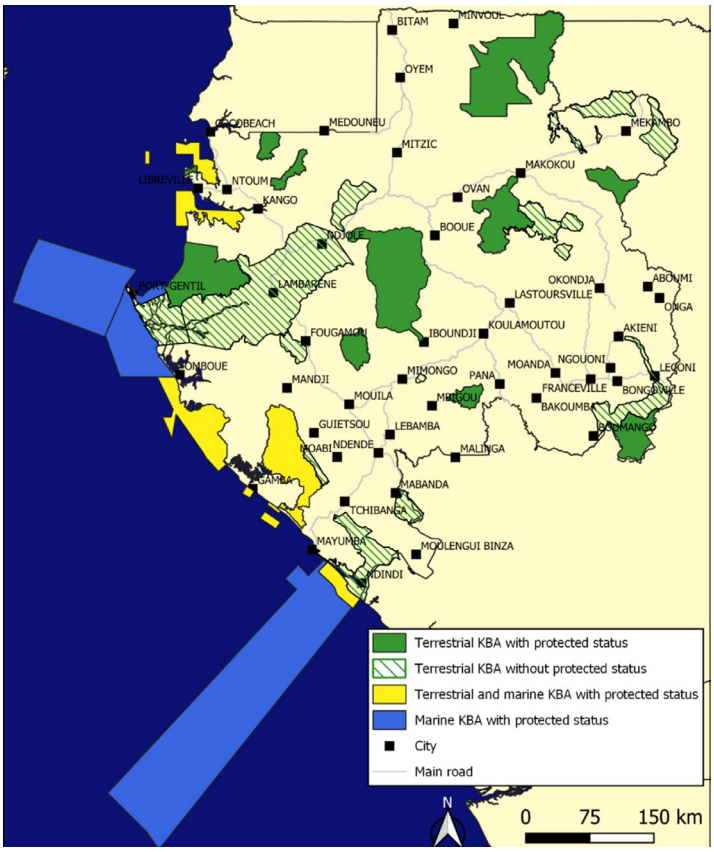
Gabon is home to an exceptional floristic diversity, with over 5,000 recorded plant species, and 85% of its territory is covered by tropical rainforest, only part of which has been lightly exploited for timber, making it unique in tropical Africa. Despite this, the presence of threatened plant species, and unique or threatened ecosystems has been largely overlooked during the design of terrestrial protected areas. With MBG coordinating the KBA identification process in Gabon, these aspects were, for the first time, considered when delineating the country's KBAs. A specific methodology was developed and applied to assess KBA criteria A, B1, B2 and B3a based on rare or threatened plant species, which was used in Gabon and the Republic of Congo. KBA criteria based on ecosystems have not been used due to lack of ecosystem maps or assessments on the Red List of Ecosystems.

A total of 126 (67%) of the 188 KBA-triggering species were plants, and 23 (74%) of the 31 KBAs with a terrestrial component were triggered by plant species, including 2 sites triggered solely by plants. In addition, 12 species triggered 5 KBAs according to criterion A1e (global population of CR or EN species totally included in the site), including 11 plant species.



The 188 KBA trigger species distributed by taxonomic groups

A major step towards the 30x30 objective in Gabon



The 35 KBAs currently recognized, covering 24% of Gabon

Gabon is one of the countries that promoted the goal of having 30% of each country's national territory under protected status by 2030 (30x30 target) when designing the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF). Currently, around 27% of Gabon's marine surface and 14% of its terrestrial territory meet this target. Identifying the country's KBAs was therefore an opportunity to find out whether the country's protected areas are essential for preserving global biodiversity, and to identify new territories to be protected as a priority.

Throughout the two-year assessment period, 35 of the country's protected areas, 8 inherited KBAs and 17 terrestrial sites outside the protected area network identified as concentrating rare and threatened species by different taxonomic groups, were assessed against KBA criteria. In total, 35 KBAs, covering 110,432 km² (24% of Gabon), were identified (13 of which include inherited KBAs and/or group together several protected areas managed by the same warden): 26 terrestrial, 4 marine and 5 both terrestrial and marine sites. Among these sites, 16 terrestrial KBAs are located outside the protected area network, representing 29,779 km², or 11% of Gabon's land area. Some of these sites are currently under consideration by the government to become new protected areas or Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) in order to move towards the 30x30 target. While Gabon attaches particular importance to preserving its most intact rivers and wetlands, these 16 sites represent 12% of the country's rivers and 39% of its wetlands.

A book showcasing Gabon's KBAs

The results of this identification process are now available in a richly illustrated 220-page book. Intended for land managers from government to local communities, the private sector, and conservation actors, but also for anyone interested in discovering the often-hidden biological diversity of Gabon and most important sites for conservation, this book offers a detailed overview of Gabon's 35 KBAs and the 188 rare and threatened species that triggered KBA status. It presents the main achievements of the project, explains the methodology used, and addresses the next steps to ensure the conservation and monitoring of the sites.

The book is available as a free download in low resolution **here** or in high resolution **here**. Printed copies will be distributed in Gabon, and an English version, which may be available for purchase, is currently being prepared.

The recently published book prepared by project's participants and presenting the 35 KBAs of Gabon (available online at this **link**)

Advancing KBA Identification Through Biodiversity Experts' Training on Key Biodiversity Areas Criteria

Author: Joshua Sese, Nature Kenya the EANHS

Paul Gacheru, Nature Kenya introducing the KBA concept to the NMK scientists © Joshua Sese

To progress KBA identification, delineation, and updating data on legacy KBAs in Kenya, the engagement of lead taxon scientists from the National Museums of Kenya (NMK) aimed at the translation of thousands of species collection data to contribute to the KBA process. The National Museums of Kenya is a national biodiversity repository hub for Kenya hosting diverse species collection ranging from but not limited to plants, reptiles, amphibians, invertebrates, fish, birds, and small mammals. It is for this reason, that a workshop facilitated by the Kenya KBA National Coordinating Group aimed at enhancing the capacity of NMK scientists to understand the KBA criteria and their application and promote a science-based approach for identifying KBAs and catalyze application of scientific data to guide policy and planning in Kenya was held on 4th October 2024.

NMK Scientist having a discussion on application of the KBA Criteria © Joshua Sese

A total of 26 scientists were taken through the Global Standard for the Identification of Key Biodiversity Areas, the history of Important Bird Areas in relation to KBAs, and the monitoring of KBAs. As a way forward, the team promised to cooperate in the delineation of new KBAs, Reassessing legacy KBAs, and actively assist in filling in the KBA monitoring forms, especially on the sites visited annually for research to aid in the generation of Kenya's annual status and trends report. Further, the participants were guided to sign up for the self-paced **online course** on identifying and delineating Key Biodiversity Areas among other useful trainings such IUCN red listing. A major point to note is that the course is free and open to all with an interest in KBAs, and certificates are available on completion of the course and/or exam.

Establishment of a Community Conservation Area (CCA) in Mara Bay Key Biodiversity Area (KBA), Tanzania

Author: Festus J Massaho, Executive Director, Blue Victoria

Designation of the CCA in Mara Bay as an official breeding site for endangered fish species.

Mara Bay, located in the northeastern region of Lake Victoria, is a biologically rich and ecologically significant area designated as a Key Biodiversity Area (KBA). Despite its importance, the bay has faced increasing threats, including pollution, habitat destruction, overexploitation of fish stocks, and the impacts of climate change. To address these challenges, Blue Victoria spearheaded the establishment of a Community Conservation Area (CCA) in collaboration with local stakeholders, government bodies, and conservation partners.

Objectives

The primary aim of the initiative is to protect critically endangered fish species such as the Ningu (*Labeo victorianus*), Singidia Tilapia (*Oreochromis esculentus*), and Victoria Tilapia (*Oreochromis variabilis*) while enhancing the livelihoods of local communities. The CCA provides a framework for integrating conservation and sustainable fishing practices into the socioeconomic fabric of the Mara Bay community.

Activities and Achievements

1. Stakeholder Engagement:

We organized multiple consultation meetings with the community, local fishermen, government representatives, and conservation organizations to build consensus on the importance of protecting Mara Bay's biodiversity.

2. Mapping and Assessment:

A detailed assessment identified key areas within the bay affected by environmental degradation. These findings informed the boundaries of the CCA and the development of targeted conservation strategies.

3. Community Awareness Campaigns:

Through workshops, public events, and local media, we educated over 2500 residents on the importance of conserving endangered fish species and sustainable resource use.

4. Sustainable Livelihoods:

To reduce pressure on fish stocks, nine community conservation enterprises were established, focusing on alternative income-generating activities such as dairy cattle farming.

5. Legal Framework:

By-laws were developed in collaboration with local clan leaders and the Beach Management Unit (BMU) to enforce conservation measures and regulate fishing practices within the CCA.

6. CCA Designation:

With support from local authorities, the Mara Bay CCA was officially recognized as a breeding site for endangered fish species, ensuring long-term conservation and monitoring.

Impact on the Community and Ecosystem

The initiative has significantly enhanced community ownership and participation in conservation efforts. Residents now actively protect breeding sites and adhere to sustainable fishing practices, contributing to the recovery of fish populations. The establishment of alternative livelihoods has also reduced dependence on unsustainable fishing, promoting economic resilience among community members.

Global and National Alignment

This initiative aligns with global frameworks such as the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, particularly Goal B, which emphasizes sustainable use and the restoration of biodiversity. It also supports Tanzania's national fisheries strategy by promoting sustainable resource management and enhancing the resilience of aquatic ecosystems.

The establishment of the Mara Bay CCA exemplifies the power of community-driven conservation efforts in safeguarding biodiversity while promoting socioeconomic development. As we continue to monitor and expand the project's impact, we remain committed to the coexistence of thriving ecosystems and resilient communities. Also, we are welcoming supporters to expand our initiatives.

Reach out to us **bluevictoriatz@gmail.com** and explore our website **www.bluevictoria.or.tz**

From Training to Implementation: A New Key Biodiversity Area in Malawi Confirmed

Author: Fred Barasa, IBA/KBA officer, BirdLife International- Africa

Madagascar pond-Heron (*Ardeola idae*) © aie_ling

Malawi has achieved a significant milestone in conservation with the confirmation of a new Key Biodiversity Area (KBA), Elephant Marsh Ramsar Site. This development is a testament to collaborative efforts between conservationists, local communities, and stakeholders to safeguard the country's rich biodiversity. KBAs are internationally recognized as sites contributing significantly to the global persistence of biodiversity and are identified using criteria designed to capture elements of biodiversity across genetic, species, and ecosystem levels.

In March 2024, a KBA Training was held in Malawi in collaboration with the Wildlife and Environmental Society of Malawi (WESM). The training was part of the project implementing activities of the Darwin Initiative Funded 'Community Approach to Waterbird Resource Management, at Chia Lagoon,' Malawi's largest lagoon. As part of the workshop proceedings, participants undertook a training and capacity-building exercise on the identification, proposal, and review of KBAs to the National Coordination Group. National Coordination Groups (NCGs) have been prescribed as the institutional mechanisms in each country for overseeing the process of identifying and monitoring KBAs. Their structures generally involve a mixture of governmental, and non-governmental organizations, local communities, and academics. This mechanism of establishing an NCG encourages national cooperation for overseeing the conservation of biodiversity and brings together different sectors of society, fostering inclusive governance and exchange of experience and co-learning. Establishing and building the capacity of NCGs as comprehensive networks is the recognized approach for the global KBA standard to deliver biodiversity outcomes at regional, national, and local levels.

Following the training, in collaboration with the birdlife secretariat guidance — the Malawian NCG drafted various KBAS/IBAS that were to undergo assessment and re-assessment. One of those sites was the Elephant Marsh Ramsar Site. It had not been assessed before. Thus, through the scoping analysis and various consultations with the various stakeholders within Malawi, this site underwent the KBA assessment process (proposal, review, nomination, and confirmation). Following a rigorous peer-review process to ensure scientific accuracy and relevance, the site was officially recognized as a Key Biodiversity Area and was confirmed in November 2024.

The Elephant Marsh is situated within the floodplain of the Lower Shire River in Southern Malawi in the districts of Chikwana and Nsanje. It was first designated as a Ramsar site in 2017. It supports a lot of waterbird species, fish, amphibians, mammals, and reptiles. The habitats include lagoons, floodplains, marshes, and riverbanks. The marsh is important for both agriculture and fisheries production in Malawi. It's managed as a single unit, where various stakeholders have joined hands with the district councils of Chikwawa and Nsanje to support the communities to ensure sustainable management and utilization of the biological resources in the marsh.

The site qualified as a KBA after the following species having fulfilled the following criteria:

Mozambique tilapia (Vu, A1b,A1d), Yellow-belly Bream (CR, A1c), Silver Barb (DD,B1), African Skimmer (LC, D1a) and Madagascar pond-Heron (EN, A1a, D1a)

The confirmation of this KBA highlights Malawi's growing commitment to biodiversity conservation. The site will serve as a refuge for endangered species and critical ecosystems. The initiative contributes to international conservation efforts and reinforces Malawi's role in addressing the global biodiversity crisis.

This achievement demonstrates how a structured approach—from capacity building to rigorous data analysis and stakeholder engagement—can yield tangible conservation outcomes. The new KBA is not just a symbol of success, but a model for how countries can balance ecological preservation with community empowerment and development.

As implementation unfolds, the lessons learned from this process will inform future initiatives, ensuring that Malawi continues to lead by example in biodiversity conservation.

Elephant Marsh, Malawi © Kevin Souza

Rengele-Mutoloa-Condé Mountain complex: a potential KBA site in Mozambique

Authors: Acácio Chechene, Hermenegildo Matimele, Iolanda Marcolino, Eleutério Duarte, Hugo Costa, Marcelino Caravela, Graça Jaime Mulaúzi, Salvador Nanvonamuquitxo, Cristovão Nanvonamuquitxo, Emerson Joao, Alcino Stelio, Aniceto Cululo, Abel Tome Caetano, Ali Ntombe, Mansur Tarmomad and Erica Tovela

The Rengele-Mutoloa-Condé mountain complex © Acácio Chechene- WCS

In 2019 Mozambique initiated a process of identifying Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) applying the new KBA criteria and thresholds (IUCN 2016). Through this, a network of 29 KBAs was established and formally launched by the Government through its Ministry of Land and Environment (MTA), which worked closely with its partner Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS). In this process, an additional 15 areas were shortlisted as KBAs however, supportive quantitative data on potential trigger biodiversity elements was not readily available. To fill this data gap, WCS together with the Government of Mozambique through MTA is implementing a regional project aimed at Building Biodiversity Knowledge for Action in Southern Africa: Spatial Biodiversity Assessment, Prioritization and Planning (SBAPP). The project is funded by the French Development Agency (AFD) and the French Facility for Global Environment (FFEM) and is being implemented in four countries including South Africa, Namibia, Mozambique, and Malawi. It was under this project that Mozambican scientists from the Lúrio University worked closely with experts from WCS to survey the Rengele-Mutoloa-Condé Mountain complex, in the Morrumbala district of Zambezia Province in central Mozambique.

The Rengele-Mutoloa-Condé complex comprises several mountains ranging between 400 and 1200 m in altitude. With a height of 1200 meters, mountain Condé is the highest peak of the complex. The survey focused on documenting primary biological data on flora and fauna. The findings show that the area encompasses a wide range of ecosystems including the Northern Inselberg Woodland, Northern Lowland Moist Forest, and Mid-elevation Moist Forest. These ecosystems are home to 287 plant species, 16 reptiles, five amphibians, 93 birds, nine mammals, 16 freshwater fish, and one aquatic crab. Of those, seven species are threatened with extinction; four are endemic to Mozambique and stand a high chance of triggering KBA status. Moreover, information on relevant socio-economic factors was documented to form the basis for the IUCN Red List assessments and further application of the KBA criteria and thresholds. As Mozambique works towards the targets set under the Global Biodiversity Framework, these data sets will be used to inform spatial planning and prioritization for biodiversity conservation.

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

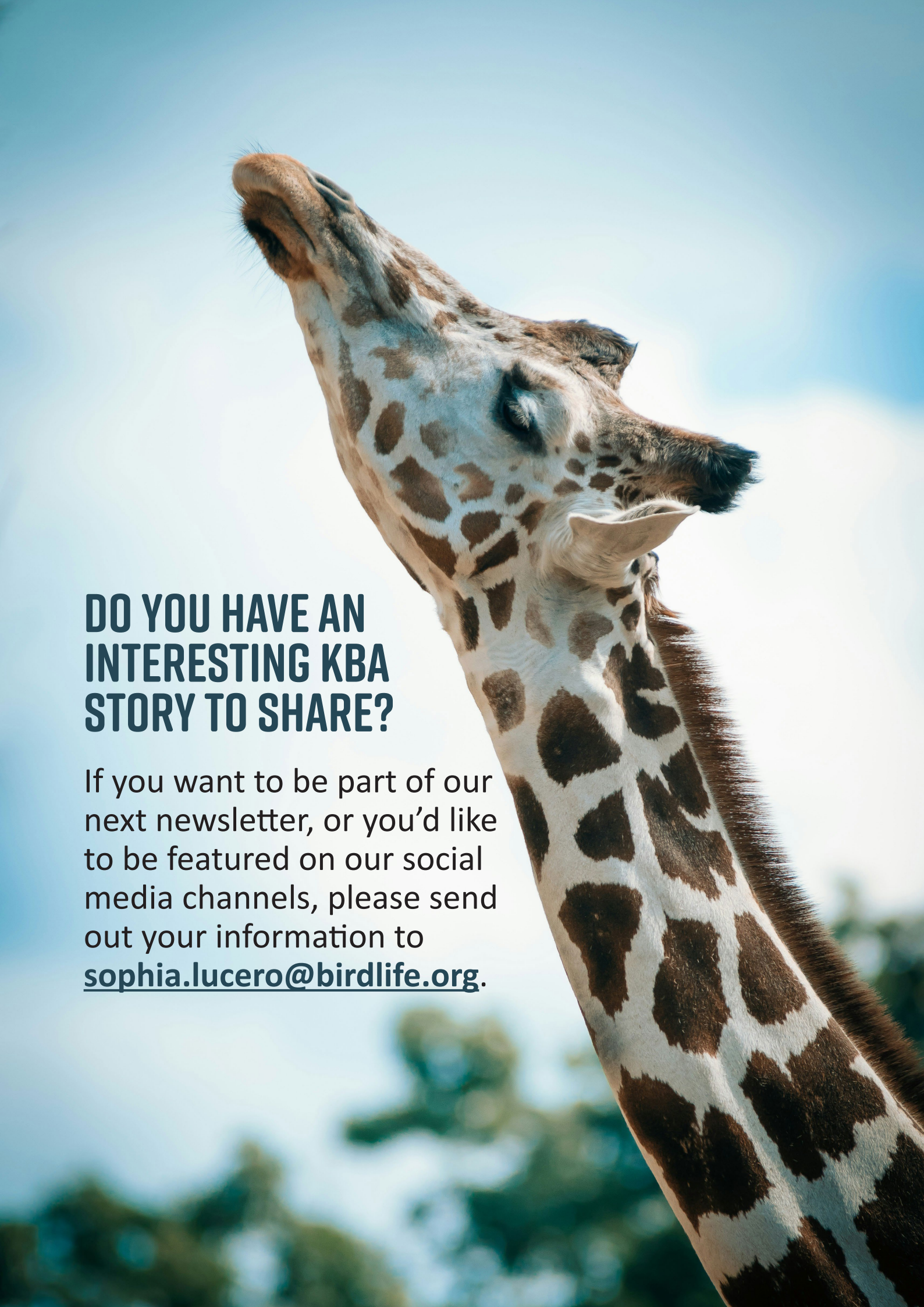
Latin America and Caribbean - Cecilia Tobar-Suárez: CTobar@keybiodiversityareas.org

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



DO YOU HAVE AN INTERESTING KBA STORY TO SHARE?

If you want to be part of our next newsletter, or you'd like to be featured on our social media channels, please send out your information to **sophia.lucero@birdlife.org**.

KBA PARTNERS:

www.keybiodiversityareas.org

@KeyBiodiversity

Megaptera novaeangliae © Gregory Smith