

IBAT in HCV Assessments

Guidance for use of the Integrated Biodiversity Assessment Tool (IBAT) and related conservation datasets in High Conservation Value assessments

HCV HIGH CONSERVATION VALUE *resource network*



This note provides some guidance for the use of a web-based spatial portal for conservation data, the Integrated Biodiversity Assessment Tool (IBAT) for business¹, as an input to HCV assessments for corporate partners at the landscape and site scale. IBAT for business is available via www.ibatforbusiness.org. Special consideration is given to the overlaps between the Key Biodiversity Area approach, one set of core data presented via IBAT, and the HCV concept.

High Conservation Values (HCVs) are biological, ecological, social or cultural values which are considered *outstandingly significant or critically important*, at the national, regional or global level.



Use of the HCV Concept

The HCV approach is primarily applied at a site level for conserving exceptional or highly significant biodiversity, social and cultural values within a production landscape. It is used both in forest management and agricultural planning, and its application is mainly driven by voluntary certification processes. HCV assessments cover a very wide range of scales (management areas between ca 10 – 10⁶ Ha) and are typically conducted or commissioned by commercial entities wishing to certify their production e.g. of timber, pulp, palm oil or other natural resources.

Conservation decisions at the site scale need to take into account the wider landscape and human context, including e.g. the spatial distribution of remaining natural habitats and pressures arising from land use patterns and development plans. These larger scale parameters can be difficult for commercial entities to map and interpret on their own, and governments and conservation NGOs have a large part to play in providing a context within which sensible, consistent site-scale decisions can be made.

Conservation of biodiversity values depends largely on the conservation of natural ecosystems, including appropriate management of suitable habitat for threatened and endemic species (HCV 1), functional landscape-level ecosystems or mosaics (HCV 2) and rare or threatened ecosystems (HCV 3).

In many cases, identification of biological HCVs should begin with a review of existing data on biodiversity priority areas identified by national and international organisations², and assessors should be guided as far as possible by an existing national conservation planning framework.

Identification of socio-cultural and livelihood values of biodiversity is an integral part of HCV assessments and needs to be done at an appropriate scale – usually at the site itself where local communities can be consulted. Biological and socio-economic values of biodiversity are equally important in the HCV approach even if the scales of appropriate mapping and assessment approaches may be different.

¹ Information on subscription costs for commercial users is available on the website.

² See 'Good Practice Guidance for HCV assessments'



Use of the IBAT and Interpretation of KBA Datasets for HCV Assessments

'IBAT for business' is an innovative tool backed by a group of international conservation organizations³, supported by a range of major companies⁴, which is designed to facilitate integrated access to accurate and up-to-date biodiversity information to support critical business decisions at the earliest stages of project development. The globally compiled data sets integrated via IBAT should be included in mapping datasets consulted at the HCV assessment preparation and planning stages, to understand what biodiversity mapping work has already occurred and to prioritize areas or species for further field assessment and verification. The core datasets integrated via IBAT for business currently include:

- **World Database of Protected Areas (WDPA):** a joint venture of UNEP and IUCN, produced by UNEP-WCMC and the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas (IUCN-WCPA) working with governments and collaborating NGOs. The WDPA is compiled from multiple local and national sources and is the most comprehensive global dataset on marine and terrestrial protected areas available. It also includes the official set of protected areas submitted by national protected areas authorities and the secretariats of international conventions (e.g. World Heritage, Man & Biosphere, Ramsar) which is used to compile the United Nations List of Protected Areas.
 - **Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs):** KBA status is triggered by the presence of key biodiversity criteria (see Box 1), informed by the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™. KBA mapping builds upon the work of a number of existing partnership-supported initiatives - such as BirdLife International's Important Bird Areas, PlantLife International's Important Plant Areas, IUCN's Important Sites for Freshwater Biodiversity and sites identified by the Alliance for Zero
- **IUCN Red List of Threatened Species:** The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™ is widely recognized as the most comprehensive, objective global approach for evaluating the conservation status of plant and animal species. This is based on a scientifically rigorous approach to determine risks of extinction that is applicable to all species, and has become a world standard. In order to produce the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™, the IUCN Species Programme working with the IUCN Survival Commission (SSC) and with members of IUCN draws on and mobilizes a network of scientists and partner organizations working in almost every country in the world, who collectively hold what is likely the most complete scientific knowledge base on the biology and conservation status of species. Spatial information, where available, on potential occurrence of these species is presented via IBAT.
 - **Other data sets:** in addition, IBAT for business presents additional selected datasets to provide context to these site-scale priorities such as broad-scale conservation priorities (e.g. Biodiversity Hotspots, Endemic Bird Areas, High Biodiversity Wilderness Areas) and data on populated areas, national and sub-national boundaries and topography.

Extinction - to map important sites for a wide range of critical biodiversity in marine, freshwater and terrestrial biomes. Data on KBA sites is compiled from an international network of local, national and international partners in NGOs, academic institutions and government agencies, and is compiled into the World Biodiversity Database (WBDB) managed by BirdLife International and Conservation International. The global inventory of terrestrial Important Bird Areas is nearly complete. Completeness of coverage varies for other taxa and biomes.

³ These include BirdLife International, Conservation International, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), and United Nations Environment Programme-World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC).

⁴ These can be found on 'Partners behind IBAT' on the IBAT for business website.



It is important to note that the current data sets presented via IBAT are *not* a comprehensive list of all data that could potentially be used for HCV assessments. In addition, IBAT for business has been developed as an initial scoping or screening tool that should be supported by further field assessment and ground-truthing. IBAT is thus useful in scoping survey priorities. Additional regional data and tools may also be critical for delivering assessments that are most relevant to national stakeholders. Assessors should therefore also consult other relevant conservation datasets and sources where appropriate, guided by an expert understanding of the local strengths and weaknesses of different schemes. IBAT for business presents information on the quality of data presented. As with all data, quality and coverage issues will exist and the exposure of these gaps to users is important in prioritising further field assessment.

In some countries (e.g. USA or Canada), the government provides extensive and detailed spatial data to support its biodiversity policies, and globally compiled datasets of nationally important sites will be of secondary importance to some assessors. However, even the best national government schemes may leave out important sites identified by other national conservation-related organizations. In addition, some governments lack such data and so data from national non-governmental sources, such as that presented via IBAT for business, may be useful in conducting assessments.

The International Finance Corporation has also recently aligned some of its criteria for critical habitat with thresholds used by IUCN for threatened species and KBAs. A customised version of IBAT for business called "IBAT for IFC", tailored to internal IFC staff needs and screening processes, is currently used by IFC staff. The most recent Performance Standard 6 Guidance Note drafts recommend using IBAT

for business during initial project scoping and screening for critical habitat assessments⁵. This guidance also lists KBAs, along with some HCVs, as likely critical habitats. The Inter-American Development Bank has also been using an internal tailored version of IBAT for business known as the InterAmerican Development Bank Decision Support System (IDB-DSS) to support their project screening processes.

Comparison of KBA and HCV Criteria

KBAs are "sites of global significance for biodiversity conservation. They are identified using globally standard criteria and thresholds, based on the needs of biodiversity requiring safeguards at the site scale"⁶. The criteria for KBAs overlap substantially with the HCV criteria used in HCV toolkits to define HCV areas for biological/ecological values (Box 1). In both cases, a site need only meet one criterion for it to be considered a KBA or an HCV.

More importantly, even where KBAs have yet to be mapped, the guidelines and criteria for mapping KBAs may offer a set of minimum quantitative and consistent standards for identifying critical sites that could inform identification of HCV 1 and potentially 2 and 3. These guidelines are based on over 20 years of testing and application by national partners in over 200 countries and territories. These were recently recognized and published as IUCN Best Practice Protected Areas guidelines for gap analysis, stemming from a program of work established at the World Parks Congress. This process is now being carried forward as a joint IUCN commission between the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) and the Species Survival Commission (SSC)⁷. This task force hopes to engage HCV experts, independently or via the HCV Resource Network in this process.

⁵ See [Draft IFC Performance Standard 6 Guidance Note \(7 January 2011\)](#).

⁶ See Langhammer et al (2007). [Identification and Gap Analysis of Key Biodiversity Areas](#). Gland, Switzerland: IUCN.

⁷ See [The Biodiversity and Protected Areas – SSC/WCPA Joint Task Force website](#).

Box 1: Key Biodiversity Areas and the HCV criteria

The Key Biodiversity Area (KBA) approach is a methodology for identifying important areas of natural habitat at the scale of land management units (in practise, up to a few hundred thousand Ha). These sites are identified at a national level by local stakeholders using a set of global criteria (below), building on the priority-setting data of the main organisations involved. There are strong parallels between the national KBA approach and HCV national interpretation processes.

HCV criteria (abridged from the HCV Toolkit, Proforest 2003, and FSC assessment frameworks)	KBA criteria (abridged from Langhammer et al 2007)
HCV 1.1 Protected areas	N/A
HCV 1.2 concentrations of rare or threatened species (e.g. IUCN red-listed)	KBA 1 - One or more globally threatened species
HCV 1.3 Concentrations of endemic species (restricted range)	KBA 2 - One or more endemic species with globally restricted range
HCV 1.4 Areas of critical temporal use (e.g. breeding and migration sites)	KBA 3 - Significant concentrations of a species (e.g. important migratory stops, nesting sites, nurseries or breeding areas)
HCV 2 – large natural landscapes and/or HCV 3 – rare or threatened ecosystems	KBA 4 - Globally significant examples of unique habitat types and species assemblages

Nevertheless, HCV and KBA criteria differ in some respects. Unlike KBAs, HCV national toolkits do not use a globally standardised set of criteria, so may set higher or lower thresholds for high conservation values depending on the national toolkit in question. Some KBAs are triggered by certain minimum populations of one or more globally threatened or restricted range species whereas HCV status often depends on a 'concentration' of similar biodiversity values. Under some circumstances, the national HCV Toolkit may use additional criteria to define 'concentrations' or provide guidance on steps to take to verify the national or global importance of the site.

Using KBA Datasets for HCV Assessments

Identification

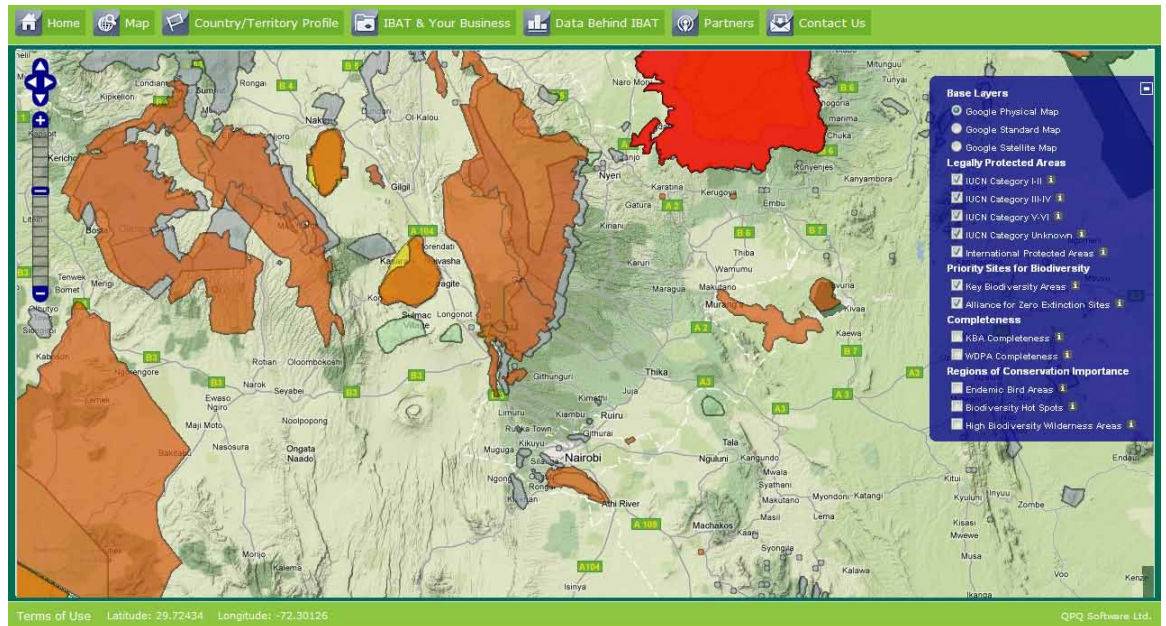
KBA descriptions can serve as input data for the selection of the HCV assessment team by highlighting the need for expertise on specific

species or sites if KBAs are present in the landscape.

The presence of a KBA within a landscape should be used as a strong indicator of potential HCVs 1-3, and for any HCV assessment within a landscape where KBAs have been identified, assessors should look for the characteristics, species and ecosystem types which define that KBA. If these characteristics are found *outside* of the designated KBA, the default assumption should be that these are HCVs requiring verification and management, unless the data used in describing the KBA are demonstrably faulty or out of date. In addition, recent work⁸ suggests higher than expected ecosystem service values within KBAs suggesting that they may be priorities for further survey and assessment for HCV 4-6.

If a KBA has been identified within, or overlapping with the management area itself, this should be a priority for verification of HCV attributes (such as the presence and local

⁸ Larsen (in prep). Contact Frank Larsen at f.larsen@conservation.org.



IBAT for Business offers fast, easy access to integrated spatial conservation data that can inform HCV assesment.

significance of populations of KBA ‘trigger species’).

However, depending on the country, the delineation of KBAs may not have been done at a scale which is appropriate for mapping and management within a specific project area. A credibly qualified field team should check the assumptions inherent in the KBA delineation, ground-truth the data used, and remap critical areas if necessary. This can be facilitated by close coordination and consultation with the relevant national partner organisation that led the KBA delineation process. It is recommended that such improvements be shared with the relevant national organisation in order to improve KBA data quality over time.

Whilst the absence of a KBA within a wider landscape where KBAs have been mapped will tend to lower the probability that high biodiversity values are present at the site level, it does not necessarily mean that HCVs are absent. While KBAs for birds, known as Important Bird Areas, have been mapped for over 200 countries and territories, many countries vary in their inclusion of non-bird

species. Information on this expansion is included within IBAT for business, where statements on data quality and coverage for each country are presented.

Management and Monitoring

Both the HCV and KBA approaches stress the need to maintain the critical values which define important sites (e.g. the presence of one or more HCVs, or a KBA trigger species or attribute). It is important to remember that HCV and KBA areas should not be considered protected areas or that protected area status is the desired land use. Appropriate management ranges from complete protection or restoration, to carefully managed extractive activities, so long as these are compatible with maintaining the values identified. However, any extractive management must proceed with great sensitivity under the precautionary principle, unless or until it can be conclusively demonstrated that management activities will not negatively affect the conservation values (or ‘trigger’ species) involved. The degree of precaution needs to be proportionate to the scale and potential impact of proposed operations.

The KBA or HCV 'triggers' may be useful management and/or monitoring targets in themselves, or may guide the land manager towards choosing a management/monitoring proxy (e.g. overall habitat quality, prey species availability, maintenance of nesting or other key sites) that adequately informs the manager on KBA or HCV status.

Management in and around designated KBAs, or areas similar to KBAs within the same landscape, should also take into account HCVs 4, 5 and 6 (environmental services, and social and cultural values), which need to be assessed separately from the biodiversity attributes.

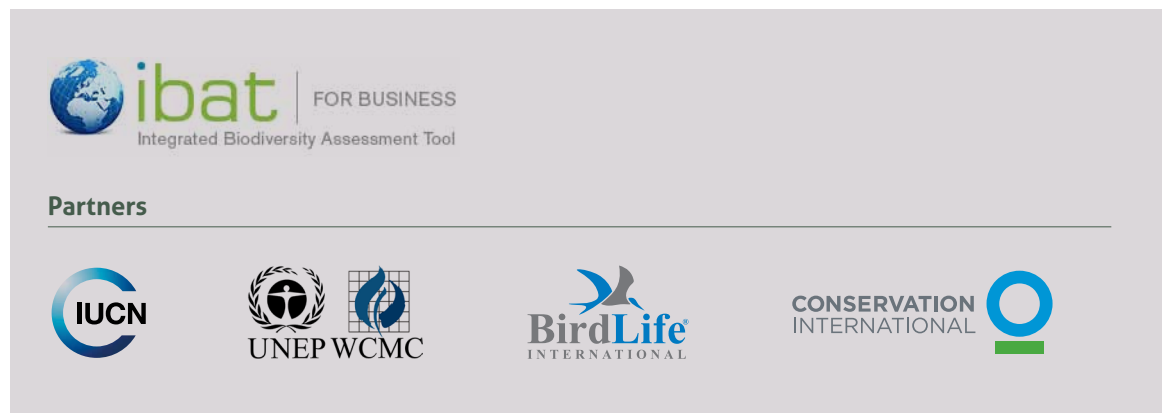
Reporting

Generally speaking it is good practice to share HCV reports and data, and to submit HCV assessments for peer review, for example through the HCV Resource Network⁹. Ideally, relevant data gathered during HCV assessments should feed back to the national partners, particularly within the BirdLife Partner network¹⁰, and the UNEP-WCMC custodians of the WDPA¹¹. Similarly,

information on priority species should be shared with relevant experts to improve ongoing assessments of species conservation status by the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species¹². As these are updated, these can be fed back into the IBAT system in order to complete and improve the global mapping database and better inform future HCV assessments.

Conclusion

IBAT for business offers a useful first step in easily accessing and exploring data on protected areas and KBAs that may be relevant to HCV assessment. It should not be considered a "one stop shop" but rather a "first stop shop" in the process of assessing HCVs that must also consider other national and local information, field assessments and expert reviews. Further information on how KBAs, as well as other data presented via IBAT for business, can be used to support HCV assessment for private sector is available under the "IBAT and your business" tab in IBAT for business. For further information on IBAT for business, visit www.ibatforbusiness.org.



www.hcvnetwork.org • info@hcvnetwork.org

⁹ See the HCV Resource Network website for case studies, and details of the Network [Peer Review](#) service.

¹⁰ See [BirdLife Partners directory](#).

¹¹ GBIF, IAIA and national partners are exploring initiatives in [South Africa](#) and [India](#) to standardize data from environmental impact assessments that may provide the right tools to do this. UNEP-WCMC also allows live editing and upload of new data via [ProtectPlanetEarth](#). See [Help page](#) for more information.

¹² See [Directory for IUCN SSC Specialist Groups](#).