

Why Study Birds in Rice Fields?

"Rice (*Oryza sativa*) is one of the world's most important crops. The crop is grown in at least 114 countries, occupies over 156 million ha of land annually, is a primary source of nutrition for over half the world's human population and constitutes over a fifth of the global grain supply. Rice is generally grown under flooded conditions and, if managed appropriately, can provide important habitat for wetland species. Waterfowl, wading birds, shorebirds and other waterbirds use rice fields, foraging on a variety of prey, nesting in the crop and in fringing vegetation, and staging during migration. Conflicts also exist, with some cropping practices harmful to birds and some bird activity detrimental to yield production. Much early research on waterbirds in rice fields was conducted in Mediterranean Europe with only scattered work elsewhere. More recently, there has been a growing focus on the conservation value of rice fields, with studies from most of the major regions where rice is grown. The body of research has included: community studies of the range of birds that use rice fields, detailed studies of endangered species, behavioral studies of reproductive success, foraging ecology and movement, and applied studies of cropping techniques. As the world's natural wetlands diminish, researchers studying waterbirds in rice fields are working to globalize interactions with each other. Also, some researchers are working closely with conservation groups and rice growers to identify ways to maximize the benefits of agricultural wetlands while minimizing the agronomic costs."

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