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CONSERVATION OF AFRICAN-EURASIAN MIGRATORY WATERBIRDS (AEWA)
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Towards a Strategy for Waterbird and Wetland Conservation in the Central Asian-Indian Flyway

DRAFT ACTION PLAN

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Introduction

The Central Asian-Indian Flyway (CAIF) covers large intra-continental territories of Eurasia between the Arctic and Indian Oceans. This flyway comprises several important migration routes, most of which extend from Siberia to the Middle East and Indian subcontinent. The birds on their annual migration cross borders of several countries.

This continental flyway comprises large semi-arid habitats with limited wetlands; particularly in the staging areas and different groups of migratory waterbirds appear to overlap considerably in the usage of important sites. Many countries along the CAIF have developing economies with inadequate allocation of resources for research and conservation. Many of the wetlands are situated in areas with dense human populations, and wetland resources are intensively exploited. In some countries the shotguns are available for everybody, and uncontrolled hunting creates much threat for waterbirds. The wetlands and waterbirds are consequently very threatened along the CAIF, and therefore in need of science-based and internationally coordinated conservation measures.

The 1996 meeting of the CMS (CoP5) called on Range States through Resolution 5.4 to take an active role in the development of a conservation initiative for migratory waterbirds in the Central Asian-Indian Flyway. As a part of the large Asia Pacific region, Central Asian-Indian Flyway has been included in *The Asia-Pacific Migratory Waterbird Conservation Strategy*, which has been developed with the support of the governments of Australia and Japan and coordinated by Wetlands International. At the International Workshop organized in October 2000 to endorse the Strategy for 2001-2005, it was recommended to develop and implement an Action Plan, and establish the site networks for conservation of migratory waterbirds and wetlands in the Central Asian-Indian Flyway.

In response to this the project "Towards a Strategy for Wetland and Waterbird Conservation in the Central Asian-Indian Flyway", supported by the Netherlands Ministry of Agriculture, Nature Management and Fisheries, coordinated and implemented by Wetlands International, started in April 2001. Geographically the project includes the area from northernmost breeding grounds in Russia to the southernmost wintering grounds in the Maldives and thus incorporates 21 Range States of Central and South Asia and Trans-Caucasus. From East and Northeast CAIF is considerably overlapped by the East Asian-Australasian Flyway, on which the APMWCS is carrying out successful research and conservation work. From the other

side, The *African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement* (developed under UNEP-CMS) extends into the Caucasus, North, Central and Southwest Asia, thereby including a number of the prospective Range States for the CAIF. These circumstances require the close cooperation between different flyways should be established.

Among the other regional projects, the Asian Wetland Inventory (AWI) is also very relevant to the CAIF. Since 1999 Wetlands International has initiated this program, with support of the Ministry of Environment of Japan, AEON Foundation and Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (DGIS). AWI aims to determine the status of Asian wetlands, including those in Central and South Asia, through the development of special database and training and capacity building of nations to ensure monitoring, sustainable use and management of wetlands. Coordination of activities carrying out under the CAIF and AWI would promote to both projects.

Since the CAIF project has started a first draft Action Plan has been developed and then was presented and discussed at the CAIF International Workshop in Tashkent in August 2001. This workshop was funded by the project mentioned above and by UNEP/CMS, the Dutch Embassy in Moscow and the African-Eurasian GEF project. The draft Action Plan has obtained many remarks and comments from national representatives, CMS and AEWA Secretariats and other international and non-governmental organizations. Taking into consideration all results of the discussion, the second draft of the Action Plan has been developed and is presented below.

1. Field of Application

The Action Plan is applicable to the species of migratory waterbirds listed in Table 1 within the CAIF Project Area (Annex...).

2. Species Conservation

- 2.1. Range States with species listed in column (a) of Table 1 shall provide protection to those species within their territories. Such protection should include 1) prohibition of the taking of birds and eggs, 2) prohibition of deliberate disturbance, especially on the breeding, molting and wintering grounds, and 3) other appropriate measures. By way of exception for those species listed as “Vulnerable” and “Near Threatened”, hunting may continue on a wise-use basis in the countries, where populations of these species are estimated to be stable or increasing during the last years.
- 2.2. Range States shall cooperate with each other, as well as with appropriate international specialist groups, in order to develop and implement, as a priority, international single species action plans for globally threatened migratory waterbirds, listed in column (a) of Table 1.
- 2.3. Range States shall cooperate with relevant international Conventions/ Agreements whereas Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird, Memorandums of Understanding concluded under CMS (AEWA) and the Convention on the Conservation of Wetlands (Ramsar), etc. Furthermore Range States shall cooperate with relevant international programmes whereas Asian Pacific Migratory Waterbird Strategy of Wetlands International, Important Bird Area programme of BirdLife International and others to provide protection and sustainable use for species listed in Table 1, in particular for species listed in the columns (c) and (d) of this table.
- 2.4. Range States shall promote, whenever they consider it necessary, to establish local or site based community organisations to promote enforcement of legislation for conservation of migratory waterbirds and wetlands.
- 2.5. Range States shall prohibit the introduction of non-native species of animals and plants, which could have a negative impact, directly or indirectly, on migratory waterbirds listed in column (a) of the Table 1. In case, when such undesirable introduction already took place in the past, the Range States shall take necessary measures to control non-native species.

3. Habitat conservation

- 3.1. Range States shall endeavour to take decisions of keeping wetlands in a sustainable condition, especially in arid areas. Such decisions should be widely announced and should obtain an international recognition and support.
- 3.2. Range States shall support to establishment of a Network of internationally and nationally important sites for migratory waterbirds conservation in the Central Asian-Indian Flyway.
- 3.3. Range States, within their territories, shall provide official support for designation and conservation of important breeding, molting, staging and wintering sites under appropriate national and international conservation categories (e.g. nature reserves, national parks, sanctuaries, Ramsar sites, World Heritage Sites).

4. Management of Human Activities

4.1. Hunting

- 4.1.1. Range States shall develop and improve/modify their hunting legislation in terms of sustainable exploitation of quarry species and strict protection of threatened ones.
- 4.1.2. Range States shall provide measures of sustainable use in particular for species that are not globally threatened but however listed in any national/regional Red Data Book/Red Data List.
- 4.1.3. Range States shall develop and implement necessary measures to reduce, as far as possible, illegal taking and other unsustainable hunting practices, such as use of poisoned baits, mist-netting, trapping, explosives etc.
- 4.1.4. Range States shall encourage hunters to organise themselves into the associations/societies sharing their responsibilities for sustainable use of migratory waterbirds.
- 4.1.5. Range States shall promote implementation into practice of hunter associations more training courses and testing before issue of hunting permissions.
- 4.1.6. Range States shall reduce as far as possible the lead poisoning in waterbirds by gradual phasing out of the lead shot and using of the non-toxic shot.
- 4.1.7. Range States shall initiate to collect and publish the harvest data/hunting statistics on migratory waterbirds, in order to be able to establish the international coordination of sustainable waterbird harvest in the future.

4.2. Eco-tourism

- 4.2.1. Range States shall support the development of eco-tourism at wetlands, where and when such excursions do not impact harmfully on the waterbirds.

4.3. Other Human Activities

- 4.3.1. Range States shall review their national policy and legislation in the field of hunting activity and waterbird protection with a view of preparing of international guidelines to encourage harmonization, stricter protection of threatened species and sustainable exploitation of quarry species.

- 4.3.2. Range States shall, with support of international organizations, review, develop and promote such kinds of traditional use and such management practices of wetland resources that is sustainable in regards of migratory waterbirds and their habitats.
- 4.3.3. Range States shall, as far as possible, to undertake the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA, Ramsar Guidelines) of all human activities that could have impact on waterbird species and their habitat.
- 4.3.4. Range States shall promote development and implementation of the management plans for wetlands of international and national importance. These plans shall be developed in cooperation with authorities, non-government organizations and local communities.
- 4.3.5. Range States shall endeavour to gather information on the damage, in particular to crop and to fisheries, caused by species listed in Table 1 and report the results to the Specialist Groups.

5. Research and monitoring

- 5.1. Range States shall endeavour to establish an international network of specialists and organizations involved in research and conservation of migratory waterbirds and wetlands. If necessary, this network at the national levels shall be strengthened by national coordinators.
- 5.2. Range States shall endeavour to prepare and undertake an inventory of important wetlands within their territories, and publish the results gained. Participation in the AWI is very appreciated.
- 5.3. Range States shall endeavour, with international support, if necessary, to carry out survey work in remote and poorly investigated areas, which may encompass the important habitats of migratory waterbirds, in particular, their breeding grounds.
- 5.4. Range States shall support the international efforts to collect/collate available data and publish reviews on the level of understanding of migration strategies, routes, and important habitats. In particular, they shall encourage the examination of the ringing/marketing data.
- 5.5. Range States shall, if they consider it acceptable, collect/collate and publish available data on threats to migratory waterbirds caused by legal and illegal harvest, habitat loss and other reasons.
- 5.6. Range States shall support the development of new local, national and international projects for better understanding of ecology, migratory strategies and routes of selected waterbird species, and their use of important sites.
- 5.7. Range States shall endeavour to be involved into the regular monitoring program, such as the International Waterbird Census, complemented by surveys of important breeding grounds, staging and “wintering” (non-breeding) sites. The results of such surveys shall be published and disseminated widely.
- 5.8. Range States shall cooperate with a view to evaluate and assess the populations of the species listed in the Table 1, in particular, population numbers of threatened and quarry waterbirds.

6. Education and Public Awareness

- 6.1. Range States shall encourage appropriate international organization to provide access of national officials, experts and stakeholders to existing training initiatives on the wetland and waterbird protection and management.
- 6.2. Range States, if necessary, with support of international organizations, shall develop their agencies responsible for waterbird and wetland management and conservation.

- 6.3. Range States shall cooperate with each other and the international organizations, in order to develop and arrange new appropriate training programs for national officials, stakeholders and experts.
- 6.4. Range States shall cooperate with international organizations to develop education and awareness activity, preferably in local languages, in order to improve the level of awareness of the general public with regards to the value of wetlands and needs of waterbirds. Such activity shall include the producing of CAIF posters and leaflets, organizing outdoor excursions, designing of a multi-lingual website, TV and radio programs, and others. This activity should be firstly targeted to the people living in and around important wetlands, to users of these wetlands (hunters, fishermen, tourists, etc.), to local authorities, to community leaders and other decision-makers.
- 6.5. In some cases Range States shall review and adapt existing educational programs in regards to the local circumstances, including translation of resource materials into local languages.
- 6.6. Range States shall promote to broad distribution of information on the education and awareness programs running on their territories.

7. Development and Implementation

- 7.1. Wetlands International, in cooperation with CMS and AEWA Secretariats, shall elaborate first draft Action Plan after Tashkent Workshop in August 2001.
- 7.2. Second draft Action Plan shall be circulated to all governments of Range States, international and NGO's operating in the region, and experts. After Wetlands International obtains the comments, it shall correct and supplement the draft.
- 7.3. As a part of Wetlands International activity, the draft Action Plan shall be discussed at CMS COP and AEWA MOP in September 2002.
- 7.4. Third draft Action Plan then shall be prepared and circulated, and then shall be presented and discussed at the Second CAIF Workshop, which is expected to hold in India by the end of 2002.
- 7.5. The final Action Plan shall be presented to all Range States for endorsement and implementation.

Range States in coordination with Wetlands International and CMS shall propose and establish the CAIF Working Group, and other bodies needed for implementation of the Action Plan.