Western/Central Asian Site Network Launched

Conservation history was made on 18 May 2007, in Almaty, Kazakhstan, where the countries of West and Central Asia joined together to form an international network to save the critically endangered Siberian Crane Grus leucogeranus. The historical partnership aims to protect globally significant natural wetlands, home to tens of millions of migratory waterbirds, including a number of globally threatened species.

The Western and Central Asian populations of the Siberian Crane migrate thousands of kilometres from their breeding grounds in the far north of Siberia, southward through six countries to their wintering grounds in Iran and India. The Siberian Crane is widely known and deeply embedded in the cultures of all the countries of the region. Since ancient times these great white cranes have been revered as models of virtue and symbols of good fortune, long life and fidelity.

Now, with the western and central populations on the brink of extinction in the wild, representatives from nine countries where they have existed and conservationists from around the world joined together in Kazakhstan to set up an international network to save these magnificent birds.

The Western/Central Asian Site Network for Siberian Cranes and other waterbirds was formally launched on 18 May, in a special signing ceremony held during the Sixth Meeting of the Signatories to the Memorandum of Understanding on Conservation Measures for the Siberian Crane. Also known as the CMS Siberian Crane MoU, this international agreement brings together all of the Siberian Crane Range States, the International Crane Foundation, as well as the newest MoU partners: Wetlands International, and the Crane and Cracid Conservation and Breeding Centre.The Site Network will focus conservation efforts on sites of international importance for the Siberian Crane along its West and Central Asian flyways in Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, India, Islamic Republic of Iran, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, Russian Federation (western Siberia), Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

Ten sites from five countries were formally accepted to the Network at the launch ceremony. These include, from Kazakhstan: the Kulikol-Taldikol Lake System, Zharsor-Urkash Lake System, Naurzum Lake System, Delta of the Ural River and Coastal Zone of the Caspian Sea, and the Tyuntyugur-Zhanshura Lake System; from the Islamic Republic of Iran: Bujagh National Park and Fereydoon Kenar, Ezbaran & Sorkh Ruds Ab-Bandans Ramsar Site; Termez in Uzbekistan; Durnaly in Turkmenistan; and Keoladeo Ghana National Park in India.

National representatives of each of the countries in the Network nominated the sites. Mr. Khairbek Mussabaeyev, Deputy Chairman, Forest and Hunting Committee of the Ministry of Agriculture, Republic of Kazakhstan, and Mr. Douglas Hykle of the Secretariat of the Convention on Migratory Species, presented launch certificates.

Additional sites nominated by Azerbaijan, Pakistan, and the Russian Federation are currently under formal consideration. The newly designated Site Network Committee and the Site Network Working Group will advance the work of this initiative before the next meeting by reviewing proposals for additional Network sites.

With the establishment of the Western/Central Asian Site Network for Siberian Cranes and other waterbirds, the sites of importance for the Siberian Crane now receives formal recognition across all its three flyways. The Eastern population of the Siberian Crane of around 3,000 birds breeds in Siberia in Yakutia and migrates through Mongolia and

northern China to central eastern China, where the large majority of the population winters within the Poyang Lake basin. The conservation of the Eastern population is promoted under the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Site Network which was launched in November 2006 under the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership. This new Network covers all migratory waterbirds and incorporates North East Asian Crane Site Network that was active since its launch in 1997.

For more information, visit the following websites: CMS, ICF, Siberian Crane Wetland Project, the Siberian Flyway Coordination and the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership.

To learn more about WCASN-SC launch, please visit the following websites:

International Crane Foundation: www.savingcranes.org

GEF Siberian Crane Wetland Project: www.scwp.info

For more information please contact:

UNEP/CMS Secretariat
Lyle Glowka
Hermann-Ehlers-Str. 10
53113 Bonn, Germany
Tel.: +49 228 815-2422
Fax: +49 228 815-2449
E-mail: lglowka@cms.int
Website: www.cms.int

Mr. Douglas Hykle
Co-ordinator / Senior CMS Advisor
IOSEA Marine Turtle MoU Secretariat
c/o UNEP Regional Office for Asia
and the Pacific United Nations Building,
Rajdamnern Nok Avenue
Bangkok 10200
THAILAND
Tel: (+662) 288 1471
Fax: (+662) 280 3829
E-mail: hykle@un.org

Ms. Elena **Ilyashenko**
ICF/CMS Siberian Crane Flyway Coordinator
UNEP/GEF Siberian Crane Wetlands Project
Moscow Zoo, B. Gruzinskaya Str. 1
123242, Moscow
RUSSIA
Tel: (+7 495) 205 90 01
Fax: (+7 495) 205 90 01
Email: eilyashenko@savingcranes.org