



For immediate release

PRESS RELEASE

Populations of migratory waterbirds are declining along the African-Eurasian Flyways

A study showing declines of 41 per cent of migratory waterbird populations along their main migration routes in Africa and Eurasia is presented to the Fourth Meeting of the Parties to AEWA (MOP4) in Antananarivo, Madagascar this week (15-19 September 2008).

Antananarivo, 15 September 2008 – The report: “Conservation Status of Migratory Waterbirds in the African-Eurasian Flyways” prepared by Wetlands International for the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) is being presented to delegates from over 80 countries attending an intergovernmental meeting which began in Antananarivo today.

The study reveals that 41 % of the known trends for 522 migratory waterbird populations on the routes across Africa and Eurasia show decreasing trends. The situation is even worse for waterbirds using Western and Central Asian Flyways, where 55 % of populations with known trends are currently declining.

The decline in numbers is being recorded for many species along African-Eurasian Flyways, in regions used for breeding, migration and wintering by these birds across the African and Eurasian Continents.

Simon Delany, Waterbird Conservation Officer at the Netherlands-based Headquarters of Wetlands International and principal author of the report, said: “The main causes of declining waterbird numbers along the African-Eurasian Flyways are the destruction and unsustainable exploitation of wetlands, which are largely driven by poorly-planned economic development.”

While the exact causes of the declines are complex and inter-related, and vary between species and regions, the most frequent known cause of population decreases is habitat destruction, often caused by unsustainable human activity.

Human impacts such as infrastructure development, reclamation of wetlands, increasing pollution and hunting pressure can develop rapidly, and conservation considerations are often not taken into account. These impacts are in many cases compounded by impacts of climate change and associated phenomena such as increased frequency of droughts, sea-level rise, and change in Arctic tundra habitats.

“Climate change, also caused by unsustainable economic development, is probably making things worse. It is likely to affect all ecosystems, but wetlands are especially vulnerable because of their sensitivity to changes in water level and susceptibility to changes in rainfall and evaporation.” says Delany.

Climate change effects such as expanding deserts and more frequent storms make bird migration more hazardous. Sea-level rise threatens wetland areas both on coast and inland, which are crucial habitats for millions of migratory waterbirds. Huge numbers of waterbirds also breed in arctic tundra habitats which are gravely threatened by rising temperatures.

“The figures in this study and the results of other international reviews being presented to delegates at AEWA MOP4 in Antananarivo this week are a clear signal that both national and international efforts to conserve migratory waterbirds and their habitats need to be significantly increased.” says Bert Lenten, the Executive Secretary of AEWA.

Migratory waterbirds and in particular long distant migrants are very vulnerable to environmental changes. To complete their annual life-cycles, they depend upon separate geographic regions in the breeding and non-breeding seasons that may be thousands of kilometres apart.

The often epic seasonal migrations between these regions require a network of stop-over sites which act as stepping-stones along the route. Damage to and destruction of such sites reduces the integrity of these fragile site networks and makes them less able to support the needs of migrating waterbirds.

"International cooperation is essential in protecting the network of sites required by migratory waterbirds and AEWA was put into place by countries to foster such cooperation for migratory waterbirds along the African-Eurasian Flyways. Yet the evidence presented in this report shows that countries will have to have a clear vision as to how to address these challenges and work together to make sure the objectives of this Agreement can be met." says Lenten.

Many experts agree that one way to adapt to the effects of climate change will be to increase efforts to reduce the other threats to waterbirds and their habitats and to increase efforts to designate, establish and manage adequate networks of protected sites and habitats required by these birds throughout their migratory ranges. Any adaptation efforts will also have to take into account the changes that are predicted to occur to these ranges, as a result of climate change.

Notes for Editors:

AEWA – The African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement, or AEWA is a United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) backed treaty dedicated to the protection of 235 species of waterbirds which migrate along the African-Eurasian Flyways. AEWA provides the framework for countries in the region to work together to conserve such species as ducks, waders, storks, flamingos and many other migratory waterbirds. Countries which have become Parties to the Agreement commit to putting measures in place to conserve the region's waterbird populations and the habitats on which they depend. Currently 62 Parties out of 118 Range States in Africa and Eurasia have joined AEWA. For more information see: www.unep-awea.org

MOP4 in Madagascar – Madagascar is host country to the Fourth Meeting of the Parties to AEWA (MOP4), which is being organised jointly by the UNEP/AEWA Secretariat and the Madagascan Ministry of the Environment, Forestry and Tourism (MEFT). Over 60 of the 235 waterbird species protected under AEWA occur in Madagascar. **The theme of MOP4 is "Flyway conservation at work – Review of the past, vision for the future"**

Flyway Conservation - Flyway conservation aims at conserving the important sites migratory bird species require along their entire migratory range. It recognizes that international cooperation is essential to ensure that migratory birds find the necessary resources and sites they need along their entire flyway to complete their annual journeys. It calls upon countries and the international conservation community to work together to understand the problems migratory birds encounter throughout their life cycle and encourages countries to co-operate to sustainably protect and manage populations of these species. The concept provides the overall framework for this international cooperation and has evolved into a broad policy framework encouraging international cooperation between governments and non-governmental organisations towards the trans-boundary, international flyway-scale conservation of migratory birds. For more information see: www.wingsoverwetlands.org

Conservation Status Report (CSR4) - According to the latest Conservation Status Report (CSR4) of Migratory Waterbirds in the African-Eurasian Flyway the overall trend status of African-Eurasian waterbird populations is declining. Of those internationally protected under AEWA (see description above), less waterbird populations are estimated as increasing (22%) and more estimated as declining (41%) in comparison to 1999. Of the 235 waterbird species protected by AEWA, 19 species are classified as Globally Threatened and a further 15 as Near Threatened; 4 species are classified as Critically Endangered and 5 as endangered. The four most endangered species covered by the Agreement in the Critically Endangered category, are

Northern Bald Ibis, Siberian Crane, Sociable Lapwing and Slender-billed Curlew. To download the full CSR4 Report please see: www.unep-aewa.org/press

Wetlands International – is an independent, not-for-profit, global organisation, dedicated to the conservation and wise use of wetlands. Wetlands International works globally, regionally and nationally to achieve the conservation and wise use of wetlands, to benefit biodiversity and human well-being. Wetlands International coordinates the International Waterbird Census – probably the world's largest and longest running international scheme to monitor biodiversity. It works also with networks of Specialist Groups to compile statistics on the status of the world's waterbirds every three years. These data provide crucial feedback to international conservation treaties, governments and other organisations on the effectiveness of conservation policies for these species. For more information see: www.wetlands.org

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