



Migrant birds in hot water!

Climate change is a major threat to migratory waterbirds, according to a new report by the British Trust for Ornithology and Wetlands International. Of 235 species of migratory waterbirds protected in Europe and Africa, all except one are experiencing some threat from climate change, and nine species face severe threats that could cause extinction.

Launched today in Madagascar at the 4th Meeting of the Parties of the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA), the report highlights the need for more international co-operation in helping migratory species cope with climate change and other environmental problems. Dr Andy Musgrove, Head of the Wetland Bird Survey at the BTO, said, *“Climate change is of over-arching importance for the conservation of the planet’s biodiversity. This is an extremely important and timely report, drawing together a huge amount of information that not only highlights threats but also suggests many practical ways in which we can help waterbirds across this huge region.”*

When animals migrate, they often traverse political boundaries that have no inherent meaning to them, but which dramatically influence them due to the great differences that exist between countries in conservation policy. International co-operation is required to reduce the many pressures that they face and the report shows that many of the existing threats these birds face are being compounded by the effects of climate change.

With warmer temperatures, many birds are finding their current living conditions increasingly unsuitable. Some are shifting their ranges towards cooler climates. The report also highlights that warmer temperatures are not the only risk that waterbirds face in Africa and Eurasia. Many regions, particularly in Africa are predicted to become drier and consequently the wet habitats upon which waterbirds depend will dry up. This is a particularly pressing problem just north and south of the Sahara. Waterbirds must make the perilous journey across this vast arid expanse without stopping for food and water. If the wetlands either side of this desert dry up too, the journey is likely to be a wing-beat too far for the exhausted, hungry and thirsty birds.

Examples of affected waterbirds found in the African-Eurasian region include species such as the Crowned Cormorant, which confined to the extreme southern coast of Africa, need land to nest on and are prevented from moving poleward by the presence of the sea. A similar situation exists for those species that breed in the high Arctic, such as the Sanderling. Dr Ilya Maclean, lead author of the report said, *“Although these species are at severe risk of extinction if temperatures increase too much, we can help them in other ways. Many of the species are also threatened by activities such as habitat loss and over-fishing. If we can minimize these other pressures, we increase the birds’ ability to cope with climate change.”*

The Meeting of the Parties currently taking place in Madagascar brings together delegates from over 80 countries in Africa and Eurasia to discuss, among other pressing issues, urgent conservation responses needed to address the effect climate change is having on these species in this particular region.

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The BTO is the UK’s leading bird research organisation. Over thirty thousand birdwatchers contribute to the BTO’s surveys. They collect information that forms the basis of conservation action in the UK. The BTO maintains a staff of 80 at its offices in Norfolk and Stirling, who analyse and publicise the results of project work. The BTO’s investigations are funded by government, industry and conservation organisations.

BTO, The Nunnery, Thetford, Norfolk IP24 2PU. Tel: 01842 750050 Fax: 01842 750030; BTO Scotland, School of Biological and Environmental Sciences, Cottrell Building, Stirling, FK9 4LA. Tel: 01786 466560
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Notes for Editors

1. **The report**, launched on 17 September 2008, highlights the effects climate change is having on the 235 migratory waterbird species which are internationally protected under the AEWA – a United Nations Environment Programme treaty which aims to foster international cooperation in the conservation of waterbirds along all the mayor migration routes in Africa and Eurasia. For a summary of the report please see, www.bto.org
2. **The British Trust for Ornithology (BTO)** is the UK's leading bird research organisation. Over thirty thousand birdwatchers contribute to the BTO's surveys. They collect information that forms the basis of conservation action in the UK. The BTO maintains a staff of 80 at its offices in Norfolk and Stirling, who analyse and publicise the results of project work. The BTO's investigations are funded by government, industry and conservation organisations. www.bto.org
3. **AEWA** This agreement covers 118 countries (and the European Community) from Europe, parts of Asia and Canada, the Middle East and Africa, in recognition of the huge numbers of waterbirds occurring within the region and regularly migrating between different countries. Parties to the Agreement are expected to engage in a wide range of conservation actions designed to help waterbirds. The AEWA covers 235 species of birds ecologically dependent on wetlands for at least part of their annual cycle, including many species of divers, grebes, pelicans, cormorants, herons, storks, rails, ibises, spoonbills, flamingos, ducks, swans, geese, cranes, waders, gulls, terns and even the South African penguin. www.unep-aewa.org
4. **Wetlands International** is a global organisation that works to sustain and restore wetlands and their resources for people and biodiversity. www.wetlands.org
5. **The Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS)** is the monitoring scheme for non-breeding waterbirds in the UK, which aims to provide the principal data for the conservation of their populations and wetland habitats. Around 3,000 volunteers participate in monthly counts at wetlands of all habitat types throughout the country. WeBS is a partnership between the British Trust for Ornithology, the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (the latter on behalf of Natural England, Scottish Natural Heritage, the Countryside Council for Wales and the Environment and Heritage Service for Northern Ireland). For more information about the WeBS survey see www.bto.org/webs
6. **Colour photographs.** Images of migrant birds are freely available for use in association with this press release. Please contact images@bto.org to request an electronic version. Please quote reference number 2008/09/27
7. The BTO has an ISDN line available for radio interviews.

For further information please contact:

Mark Rehfisch on 01842 750050 (during office hours)

Ilya Maclean on 01842 750050 (during office hours)

**Paul Stancliffe on 01842 750050 or e-mail: press@bto.org (during office hours)
or mobile 07845 900559 (anytime)**