



## - P R E S S   R E L E A S E -

### WATERBIRD CONSERVATION IN NORTH AFRICA GETS A BOOST

#### - International project to strengthen waterbird and wetland conservation capacities in North Africa launched -

**Bonn/ Cambridge/ Madrid/ Gland, 23 March 2009** – A new 3-year project on “Strengthening waterbird and wetland conservation capacities in North Africa (WetCap)” is embarking on its first year of implementation as of this month. Within the framework of this project capacity building activities will take place in Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Egypt and Mauritania.

The WetCap project is linked to the ongoing UNEP-GEF African-Eurasian Flyway Project, also known as “Wings over Wetlands (WOW)”. It will be implemented under the umbrella of the UNEP Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA), in cooperation with its project partners BirdLife International, SEO/BirdLife (Spanish BirdLife partner), Wetlands International and the Ramsar Convention.

“This unique project perfectly complements the Wings over Wetlands Project by implementing its objectives in North Africa, a region which has not been in the focus of the WOW project so far. Moreover it sets a first positive example of how the outcomes of the WOW project can be used beyond the implementation phase of the WOW project itself, thus ensuring its longevity” says Bert Lenten, Executive Secretary of AEWA.

Sponsored by the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID), the WetCap project integrates nature conservation efforts into the context of development cooperation, thus benefitting both people and nature. “The Strait of Gibraltar is a bottleneck for bird migration between Europe and Africa” says Juan Criado, Head of the International Unit of SEO/BirdLife. “This is why the cooperation between Spanish and Moroccan conservationists is very close. One of our common projects in the past has been the establishment of a wetland centre of expertise in Rabat. The WetCap project will profit from the centre and at the same time strengthen its position as a centre for knowledge and training for local conservation professionals. It is a real win-win situation”.

Through a series of regional and national workshops specifically tailored to the needs and requirements of the region, the WetCap project will provide targeted training of trainers and of conservation professionals from the five countries and thus improve the conservation status and management of waterbirds at local key wetland sites.

Dr. Jonathan Barnard, Senior Programme Manager at BirdLife International says: “Waterbird conservation work is often hampered by a lack of data on population sizes, the movements of the birds or the sites used by them. In the framework of one of the workshops organized under WetCap, conservation professionals will be made familiar with the Critical Site Network Tool, a newly developed flyway-level information portal for the whole AEWA region developed under the WOW project scheduled to be launched in October this year.” This regional workshop, which will enable participants to review the existing data for their region, will be followed up by targeted gap-filling surveys and monitoring field missions in all five countries during the second and third years of the WetCap project.

Ward Hagemeyer, Head of the Biodiversity and Ecological Networks Programme of Wetlands International: “We are happy to see that both the Training of Trainers programme and the Critical Site Network Tool, two key tools developed for capacity building and information sharing with the coordination of Wetlands International under the WOW project, are now used in a new project and offer an opportunity to test the transferability of these tools”.

Another important component of the WetCap project foresees the allocation of small grants to local waterbird and wetland conservation projects in the five project countries.

Within the framework of the AEWA Agreement, the WetCap project responds to the African Initiative for waterbird conservation in Africa established by government representatives from 80 countries attending the fourth Meeting of the Parties to AEWA in Antananarivo, Madagascar, September 2008. AEWA provides the basis for international cooperation on the conservation of 255 species of migratory waterbirds and their habitats in Africa, Europe and parts of Asia and Canada; the African Initiative will help to particularly strengthen cooperation and mobilize resources for the conservation of migratory waterbirds in Africa.

The WetCap project also responds to the Ramsar Convention’s Resolution X.22 on flyways adopted at the 10<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties in 2008 on “Promoting international cooperation for the conservation of waterbird flyways”.



## Notes to Editors

### **WETCAP PARTNERS:**

**African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA)** is an intergovernmental treaty administered by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) through which countries cooperate to conserve migratory waterbirds and their habitats. The Agreement covers 255 species of birds ecologically dependent on wetlands for at least part of their annual cycle. The treaty covers a large geographic area, including Europe, parts of Asia, Canada, the Middle East and Africa. So far 62 out of the 118 range states have become Contracting Parties to the International Agreement. AEWA's aim is to maintain or restore these waterbird species and their populations at a favourable conservation status along their flyways, i.e. throughout the entire area within which the birds migrate. <http://www.unep-aewa.org/>

**BirdLife International** is a global partnership of conservation organisations that strives to conserve birds, their habitats and global biodiversity. BirdLife International has long been committed to the conservation of migratory birds and the habitats upon which they depend. The BirdLife Partnership is engaged in migratory bird conservation at numerous scales, from projects focused on individual species or key sites, to broader policy and advocacy work to promote migratory species conservation, and involvement in flyway-scale projects. <http://www.birdlife.org/>

**BirdLife/SEO – Sociedad Española de Ornitología** - is the Spanish partner of BirdLife International. SEO/BirdLife is a scientific and environmental NGO founded in 1954 for the study and conservation of birds and nature in Spain. Over 11,000 members back the work of SEO and collaborate in various ways with the organisation. SEO activities are supported by nine delegations and 32 local groups in 30 provinces. <http://www.seo.org/>

The **Wetlands Centre** in Rabat, Morocco was established by SEO/BirdLife in 2003 in the framework of a LIFE project, developed in close collaboration and cooperation with the Moroccan Government. The Wetlands Centre is currently run by two SEO staff members.

**Wetlands International** is an independent, non-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 has pioneered flyway conservation work in all major flyways of the World and has coordinated the development of the Critical Site Network and Capacity Development components of the Wings Over Wetlands Project. <http://www.wetlands.org/>

The **Ramsar Convention on Wetlands** counts 159 Contracting Parties, which have committed themselves to ensuring the conservation and wise use of wetlands. Under the Convention, a List of Wetlands of International Importance (the Ramsar List) has been created and to date over 1830 designated sites around the world have been included in the List. <http://www.ramsar.org/>

The **Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID)**, attached to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, is the body responsible for fostering, managing and implementing Spain's International Development Cooperation policy thus accounting for an essential part of the Government's external action. The AECID's main objectives are the fight against poverty and the fostering of sustainable human development. <http://www.aecid.es/>

### **WINGS OVER WETLANDS (WOW) UNEP-GEF AFRICAN-EURASIAN FLYWAYS PROJECT:**

Wings over Wetlands (WOW) is a joint effort between UNEP/GEF (The Global Environment Facility), Wetlands International, BirdLife International, the African-Eurasian Waterbirds Agreement (AEWA), The German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN), the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), the United Nations Environment Programme's World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC) and a range of donors and local partners along the African-Eurasian Flyways.

For more information on the WOW project please see: <http://www.wingsoverwetlands.org/>



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