



AEWA Implementation Review Process (IRP)
On-the-spot assessment mission

Sociable Lapwing conservation in Syria
23 February – 1 March 2010



Final Report of the international mission team

24 May 2010

Acknowledgements

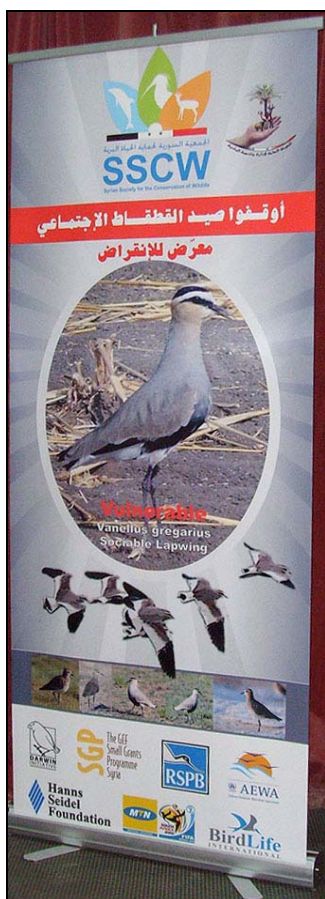
The members of the international AEWA team that visited Syria from 23 February to 1 March 2010 would like to extend their thanks to the many stakeholders that contributed to the successful organization and implementation of the mission, in particular representatives of:

- Syrian Ministry of State for Environment Affairs (MSEA)
- Syrian Ministry of Agriculture & Agrarian Reform (MAAR)
- General Commission for Al Badia Management & Development
- Governorate of Ar Raqqa
- Governorate of Deir ez Zor
- El Enize Tribe
- Syrian Society for the Conservation of Wildlife (SSCW)
- Syrian Higher Council of Hunting

Cover photo: Male Sociable Lapwings staging in north-east Syria, 27 Feb 2010
Photo: Sharif Jbour.

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1. Introduction

Syria and AEWA

Syria is one of 63 Contracting Parties to AEWA (the Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds). The Agreement entered into force for Syria in August 2003 and the country has therefore accepted an international obligation to implement AEWA at national level and to be guided by the decisions of the Meeting of the Parties (MOP).

AEWA Implementation Review Process

Resolution 4.6 of the AEWA Meeting of the Parties (adopted in September 2008) established the Implementation Review Process (IRP) as a mechanism for assisting individual Contracting Parties that wish to address specific implementation issues. The text of Resolution 4.6 is reproduced as Annex 1 to this Report.

IRP Case – Sociable Lapwing conservation in Syria

In August 2009 the AEWA Secretariat received a completed IRP ‘Possible Case Information Sheet’ from BirdLife International’s Middle East Secretariat. **This raised concerns that the globally threatened Sociable Lapwing (*Vanellus gregarius*), which stages in Syria during its spring and autumn migrations, was being subjected to serious mortality and disturbance due to reported illegal hunting in Syria.**

In conformity with the IRP mechanism established by Resolution 4.6, the AEWA Standing Committee reviewed the Possible Case Information Sheet. In addition, the Standing Committee received advice from AEWA’s Technical Committee, which also reviewed the Information Sheet. The Standing Committee determined that an IRP Case should be opened. The AEWA Executive Secretary then wrote to the Syrian Minister of State for Environment Affairs (the national focal point for AEWA in Syria) requesting further information and offering the possibility of an IRP mission to Syria in early 2010 (see Annex 2).

The AEWA Secretariat’s Technical Officer visited Syria in November 2009 for further consultations and the Syrian Minister of State for Environment Affairs wrote to the AEWA Executive Secretary in December 2009 accepting the offer to send an IRP mission and confirming the dates (see Annex 2).

It was confirmed that an international mission would visit Syria in the framework of the IRP in late February 2010, thereby constituting the very first implementation of the AEWA IRP anywhere in the African–Eurasian region. The Terms of Reference for the mission are reproduced in Annex 3.

Composition of the international IRP team

The international membership of the IRP mission team was as follows:

- Mr Sergey Dereliev, UNEP/AEWA Secretariat, Germany
- Mr Sharif Jbour, BirdLife International Middle East Secretariat, Jordan
- Mr Tim Jones, Consultant to UNEP/AEWA Secretariat, UK
- Dr Robert Sheldon, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, UK



Members of the mission team discuss hunting of Sociable Lapwings with local stakeholders and the General Secretary of SSCW during the Sociable Lapwing conservation workshop held in Deir ez Zor on 26 February 2010.

Itinerary for the mission

The team arrived in Damascus on 23 February 2010 and met with the Ministry of State for Environment Affairs (AEWA focal point), the Ministry of Agriculture & Agrarian Reform (responsible for the enforcement of hunting legislation) and the Syrian Society for the Conservation of Wildlife (SSCW). In subsequent days, the team travelled to Palmyra, Deir ez Zor and Ar Raqqa and met with a wide range of stakeholders at national, district and local levels, including the General Commission for Al Badia Management & Development, the Governorate of Ar Raqqa, district offices of the key national institutions in Al Hassakeh, Ar Raqqa, and Deir ez Zor, hunters and representatives of local communities. The full itinerary and list of institutions and individuals met is contained in Annex 4.

2. Findings and Recommendations

Finding 1. Species and site protection

The meetings and field visits during the IRP mission confirmed the hypothesis that hunting is the main threat to Sociable Lapwings staging in Syria during both spring and autumn migration periods. Suitable feeding and resting habitat appeared to be abundant and not subject to any obvious threats; development of the steppe is prohibited by law. These circumstances mean that Sociable Lapwings are less vulnerable to the effects of general disturbance from human activities – especially as the species does not nest in Syria. Effective protection therefore depends on prevention of hunting (as required by law) at the key sites for the species during the limited periods of the year when it occurs in Syria.

- **Recommendation 1.1** The immediate focus of all stakeholders should be on protecting Sociable Lapwings from hunting pressure. This should be done in part through application and enforcement of the relevant legislation (see Finding 2 below), but also through raising awareness of hunters, hunting guides and other stakeholders concerning the globally threatened status of the Sociable Lapwing. The principal responsibility for implementing protection of Sociable Lapwings ‘on the ground’ at its main sites should be at local and district level, with coordination and information exchange supported at national level. (Action: Governorates, local community leaders, and hunting organizations; district offices of Ministry of State for Environment Affairs, Ministry of Agriculture & Agrarian Reform, Ministry of Interior, General Commission for Al Badia Management & Development; national/central offices of these institutions).
- **Recommendation 1.2** It would be premature to establish protected areas for Sociable Lapwings in Syria in the short term. Knowledge of the species occurrence and distribution continues to develop, but the network of important sites will always vary from year-to-year according to weather conditions (e.g. winter rainfall prior to spring staging) and habitat status (e.g. impact of drought or over-grazing). The emphasis should therefore be on flexibility and responsiveness to provide ‘mobile protection’ at the sites of importance each season. In summary, the immediate approach should be to focus on protection of the species rather than conservation measures for its habitat. (Action: all stakeholders).
- **Recommendation 1.3** Measures to protect Sociable Lapwings from hunting should be applied during the following periods:
 - in spring: from 20 February to 31 March
 - in autumn: from 1 October to 31 October

These periods have been determined on the basis of data from field monitoring since the discovery of staging flocks in Syria in 2007. However, as scientific knowledge continues to increase with further fieldwork, it might be necessary to extend these periods if it is shown that Sociable Lapwings occur in Syria over longer periods than previously thought. The continued appropriateness of these protection periods should therefore be kept under regular review.

- **Recommendation 1.4** The mission welcomes and strongly endorses the initiative of the Governor of Ar Raqqa to establish a multi-stakeholder committee for the protection of the Sociable Lapwing in Ar Raqqa Governorate (including representation from the local offices of the Ministries of Agriculture, Environment and Interior, the General Commission for Al Badia Management & Development, and local communities). The mission team recommends that similar bodies should be established for Deir ez Zor and Al Hassakeh Governorates. All such bodies should involve representatives of both official institutions and local community/civil society. (Action: Governorates, district offices of official institutions, local community stakeholders).



The mission team discusses conservation of Sociable Lapwings in Syria with the General Director of the General Commission for Al Badia Management & Development and the Head of Biodiversity and Protected Areas Directorate of the Ministry of State for Environment Affairs. Palmyra, 25 February 2010.

Finding 2. Legislation

The principal pieces of Syrian legislation that relate to hunting and environmental protection are:

- **1970 Presidential Decree on hunting**
- **1994 Ministerial Decision on the banning of hunting** (this bans all hunting throughout the country)
- **2007 Ministerial Decision on extension of the complete hunting ban until 2011**
- **2002 Law no. 50 on the environment**

There is no national implementing legislation that translates AEWA requirements into domestic law. The current nature protection and biodiversity legislation is inadequate to implement AEWA as there is no provision for a network of protected areas or for the protection of species.

In principle, the existing hunting legislation (i.e. the ban on hunting until 2011), would – if enforced – be adequate to provide full protection to the Sociable Lapwing in Syria as required by AEWA. However, the legislative ban on hunting is not well enforced in practice.

- **Recommendation 2.1** As the only piece of Syrian legislation that provides a clear basis for the protection of Sociable Lapwings, the ban on hunting should be strictly enforced at the key sites and during the key periods for Sociable Lapwings staging in Syria. (Action: Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Agriculture & Agrarian Reform, in conjunction with Ministry of State for Environment Affairs, General Commission for Al Badia Management & Development, Governorates and local communities).
- **Recommendation 2.2** Urgent steps should be taken to formulate and enact implementing legislation that translates Syrian obligations as a Party to AEWA into national law. (Action: Ministry of State for Environment Affairs to initiate the necessary procedure, in consultation with other Government institutions, as appropriate).
- **Recommendation 2.3** Any future revision or update of Syrian hunting legislation should focus primarily on the means and practicality of its implementation. (Action: Government of Syria).

Finding 3: Data & information

The implementation and coordination of measures to conserve Sociable Lapwings at their key staging sites in Syria is hampered by gaps in data/information provision and inadequate flow of information between different stakeholder groups.

- **Recommendation 3.1** The key institutions in Syria (Ministry of State for Environment Affairs, Ministry of Agriculture & Agrarian Reform, Ministry of Interior, and the General Commission for Al Badia Management & Development – including both the Central and District offices of these bodies – as well as the Governorates of Ar Raqqa, Deir ez Zor and Al Hassakeh should be provided with all available information concerning the location of sites of importance for Sociable Lapwing in Syria and the periods of the year when the species occurs at these sites. (Action: RSPB/BirdLife International in conjunction with the Syrian institutions mentioned above).
- **Recommendation 3.2** Local communities (including bedouin tribal leaders, farmers, hunters and the wider public) should be provided with information that is relevant and accessible to them concerning the conservation of Sociable Lapwings. (Action: Ministry of State for Environment Affairs/SSCW, in consultation with community representatives).
- **Recommendation 3.3** The Central offices of the above-mentioned Government institutions should play a leading role in improving the flow of information between the centre and the District offices (including in relation to the annual monitoring programme mentioned below). The Central offices of each institution should also coordinate reporting back to AEWA, through the Ministry of State for Environment Affairs, on the measures taken in response to this IRP Report. (Action: Central offices of Ministry of State for Environment Affairs, Ministry of Agriculture & Agrarian Reform, Ministry of Interior and the General Commission for Al Badia Management & Development in conjunction with their District offices and the Governorates of the three Districts).
- **Recommendation 3.4** Syrian Society for Conservation of Wildlife (SSCW). appears to be the body best placed to ensure that appropriate awareness-raising and information materials are developed and made available where they are needed locally. However, SSCW will need some capacity building itself if it is to fulfil this vitally important role in the manner required. (Action: SSCW in conjunction with the Ministry of State for Environment Affairs and local stakeholders, with external capacity building by RSPB/BirdLife International).
- **Recommendation 3.5** The website of the AEWA Sociable Lapwing International Working Group www.sociablelapwing.org should be translated into Arabic. (Action: BirdLife Middle East Secretariat. RSPB to provide updated English text of website to BirdLife).



Female Sociable Lapwing near Deir ez Zor, 27 February 2010.



Members of the mission team with Syrian colleagues observing Sociable Lapwings in the field on 27 February 2010.

Finding 4. Monitoring

A simple but effective annual monitoring programme is needed to support conservation measures for the Sociable Lapwing at its key staging sites in Syria.

- **Recommendation 4.1** International experts, working in conjunction with relevant Syrian stakeholders, should prepare a simple monitoring methodology based on currently-available data about the locations of key sites for staging Sociable Lapwing, as well as the periods of the year during which these sites are used. (Action: RSPB/BirdLife International, in consultation with Ministry of State for Environment Affairs, General Commission for Al Badia Management & Development and other stakeholders).
- **Recommendation 4.2** International experts, working in partnership with relevant Syrian stakeholders, should look into provision of the basic capacity-building measures that would be required for implementation of the annual monitoring scheme recommended above. (Action: RSPB/BirdLife International, in consultation with Ministry of State for Environment Affairs, General Commission for Al Badia Management & Development and other stakeholders).
- **Recommendation 4.3** As part of a wider capacity-building effort required to support long-term monitoring, simple but effective and durable materials should be produced to assist local stakeholders with identification of Sociable Lapwing and its separation from similar species (e.g. Spur-winged Lapwing *Vanellus spinosus* and White-tailed Lapwing *Vanellus leucurus*). (Action: RSPB/BirdLife International, SSCW in conjunction with local stakeholders).
- **Recommendation 4.4** Once established, long-term implementation of the annual monitoring programme should be the responsibility of Syrian stakeholders, working cooperatively at local, district and national level as necessary. A clear national focal point/coordinator should be agreed among the stakeholders. International experts/NGOs may continue to have an advisory role, as appropriate. (Action: national and district offices of Syrian Government institutions, in conjunction with district Governorates, local communities and national/international NGOs).
- **Recommendation 4.5** The effectiveness of the monitoring programme should be reviewed annually (e.g. suitability of methodology, quality and extent of coverage, collation and dissemination of data, feedback to participants) and any necessary adjustments agreed and implemented for the following season. (Action: all relevant stakeholders, led by the national focal point for the monitoring scheme).



Members of the mission team discussing with stakeholders in Ar Raqqa, including the District Director of the General Commission for Al Badia Management & Development.



Sheikh Dham Al G'a shiesh of the El Enize Tribe, in conversation with Sergey Dereliev and Sharif Jbour, Al Ghazli, 28 February 2010.

Finding 5. Mission follow-up

Concerted efforts will be needed by all stakeholders – local, district, national and international – to follow up the AEWA IRP mission and to ensure that all findings and recommendations are acted on.

- **Recommendation 5.1** The Ministry of State for Environment Affairs should play an active role in following up the key actions in response to the IRP and should provide progress reports on behalf of all Syrian stakeholders to the AEWA Secretariat for onward transmission to the AEWA Standing Committee. The AEWA focal point should make available the IRP recommendations to key stakeholders at both national and district levels. (Action: Ministry of State for Environment Affairs, AEWA Secretariat).
- **Recommendation 5.2** All stakeholders should keep the Ministry of State for Environment Affairs informed of their respective activities in response to the IRP (including information on any significant barriers to implementation) so that the Ministry of State for Environment Affairs is able to provide the AEWA Secretariat and Standing Committee with as complete a picture as possible of the latest progress. (Action: all stakeholders).
- **Recommendation 5.3** In particular the multi-stakeholder committee for Ar Raqqa (and any similar mechanisms established for Deir ez Zor and Al Hassakeh) should implement and provide follow-up on its most welcome commitments concerning monitoring and protection of key sites for staging Sociable Lapwings in spring and autumn. (Action: district committees/coordination mechanisms).
- **Recommendation 5.4** International expert bodies should follow up as appropriate with national and local stakeholders to ensure that the latest technical information are properly captured. (Action: RSPB/BirdLife International).
- **Recommendation 5.5** The Syrian representatives on the Sociable Lapwing International Working Group should provide regular briefings to the IWG on follow-up to the AEWA IRP, as well as on Syria's implementation of the revised International Single Species Action Plan (SSAP) for the conservation of the Sociable Lapwing (once the latter document has been approved). A national action plan, based on the SSAP and taking into account the AEWA IRP findings and recommendations, should be developed and implemented with designation of clear roles and responsibilities for stakeholders at all levels (local, district, national). National representatives/coordinators (governmental and NGO), reporting to the AEWA focal point, should be appointed for the SSAP. (Action: Ministry of State for Environment Affairs to coordinate among stakeholders).



Participants in the Sociable Lapwing workshop held in Deir ez Zor on 26 February 2010. Successful long-term efforts for the conservation of the species in Syria will depend on different stakeholders at different levels working cooperatively together.

ANNEXES:

A1. AEWA MOP decision establishing the IRP



AGREEMENT ON THE CONSERVATION OF AFRICAN-EURASIAN MIGRATORY WATERBIRDS



4th SESSION OF THE MEETING OF THE PARTIES

15 – 19 September 2008, Antananarivo, Madagascar

"Flyway Conservation at Work – Review of the Past, Vision for the Future"

RESOLUTION 4.6

ESTABLISHMENT OF AN IMPLEMENTATION REVIEW PROCESS

Expressing deep concern with the findings of the fourth edition of the Report on the Conservation Status of Migratory Waterbirds in the Agreement Area, that of populations covered by the Agreement, 'nearly twice as many show decreasing trends (41%) rather than increasing trends (21%)' and in the Agreement Area in Asia, 'the situation is much worse: only 11% are known to be increasing, but five times as many, fully 55% of populations are known to be decreasing...',

Further deeply concerned about the continuing negative trend of the Red List Index for the AEWA species as presented in the above Report, which indicates that the overall conservation status of all migratory waterbirds continues to decrease within the Agreement area,

Recalling that the Agreement states "that migratory waterbirds constitute an important part of the global biodiversity, which, in keeping with the spirit of the Convention on Biological Diversity, 1992, and Agenda 21 should be conserved for the benefit for present and future generations;" and its recognition of "the need to take immediate action to stop the decline of migratory waterbird species and their habitats in the geographical area and of the African-Eurasian waterbird migration systems",

Further recalling that the target established in 2002 by world leaders at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), Johannesburg, of "a significant reduction in the current rate of loss of biological diversity" by 2010; and the more challenging target set in 2001 by European Union Heads of State in Göteborg "that biodiversity decline should be halted with the aim of reaching this objective by 2010",

Emphasizing the need to take such immediate action in light of the progressively worsening status of Africa's and Eurasia's migratory waterbirds, and that much more needs to be done by the Parties to this Agreement if these targets are to be attained,

Noting that the findings of the Review of the Implementation of Single Species Action Plans (SSAPs) indicate that of the seven SSAPs published in 1996, only two have met their targets of improving the status of the waterbird populations concerned,

Further noting that the findings of the Report on the phasing out of lead shot indicate that only 17 Range States to AEWA out of a total of 64 having responded to the related survey have introduced legal measures to phase out the use of lead shot, despite their longstanding commitment to do so,

Concerned that notwithstanding 30 years of inter-governmental action for waterbirds, notably through the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and AEWA, as well as other multilateral environmental agreements addressing biodiversity conservation in general and the conservation of migratory waterbirds in Europe in particular, their overall conservation status continues to decrease,

Aware that waterbirds have considerable potential as indicators, acting as surrogates of the overall ecological status of wetlands, since they can be, and often are, more readily and easily surveyed than other features of wetlands,

Expressing deep concern and regret over recent incidents of loss and threats of loss, of waterbird sites and habitats occurring in the territory of Contracting Parties to this Agreement, regarding which, the Secretariat has been requested to gather and evaluate information in line with its duties under Article VIII (e) to the Agreement,

Emphasizing the need to prevent such incidents in the future, and, in particular, to attempt to halt and reverse the decline of migratory waterbirds by 2010,

Taking into consideration the obligations of Parties under AEWA, and in particular Article III.2. (e), to 'investigate problems that are posed or are likely to be posed by human activities and endeavour to implement remedial measures, including habitat rehabilitation and restoration, and compensatory measures for loss of habitat'; and paragraph 3.2.3 to the Action Plan, 'Parties shall endeavour to make wise and sustainable use of all the wetlands in their territory...',

Conscious of the very extensive science base for waterbird populations in the African-Western Eurasian region, invaluable for assessing progress towards the 2010 targets established by the world's governments, but, noting however, this science base is still not being fully utilized by those responsible for making decisions affecting the ecological character of the wetlands on which waterbirds depend, and

Emphasizing the findings of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (2005), that:

- the degradation and loss of wetlands is more rapid than that for other ecosystems;
- the status of both freshwater and, to a lesser extent, coastal species has deteriorated faster than that of species in other ecosystems; and that
- wetland-dependent biodiversity in many parts of the world is in continuing and accelerated decline.

The Meeting of the Parties:

1. *Establishes* a specific process to assist in the implementation of the Agreement pursuant to its authorities according to Article VI.9.(e) to the Agreement that shall be called the AEWA Implementation Review Process (IRP);
2. *Decides* that this process will be undertaken by the Standing Committee (StC);
3. *Decides* that in the framework of the IRP, the StC will assume the following activities:
 - a) Upon receiving information on adverse effects or potential adverse effects on either migratory waterbirds or on their sites and habitats as a result of human activities, the StC shall submit the information to the Party in whose territory the above activities occur who shall respond immediately, addressing the incident under question.
 - b) In agreement with the Party concerned, the StC may request a mission to assess the impact of the activity at issue on waterbirds, or on their sites and habitats on the spot.
 - c) Upon the conclusion of its on-site assessment, the mission shall report to the StC on its findings. Based on these findings, the StC shall make recommendations to the Party concerned as to preventing or mitigating the impact at issue on waterbirds, or on their sites and habitats.
 - d) The Party concerned will ensure that any measures undertaken regarding the activity, site or habitat under issue will be in accordance with its obligations under the Agreement and will be based on the precautionary principle. The Party concerned will inform the StC as to the above measures at the earliest opportunity, but no later than the next meeting of the StC.
 - e) The StC shall prepare and submit to each ordinary session of the Meetings of the Parties, a report on its operations in the framework of the IRP;

4. *Instructs* the Secretariat to support the StC, resources permitting, in performing IRP activities under this resolution; and
5. *Requests* the StC to ensure that it works in mutual cooperation with other relevant agreements to eliminate any possibility of duplication.

A2. Correspondence between AEWA Standing Committee/Secretariat and Government of Syria



Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA)

Secretariat provided by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)



H.E. Dr. Kawkab Dayeh
Ministry of State for Environment Affairs
Yousef al Azmeh Square
P.O. Box 3311
Damascus
Syrian Arab Republic

Date: 1 October 2009

Subject: Implementation Review Process: Sociable Lapwing Hunting in Syria
Ref: 09-414-LL

Your Excellency,

As you may recall, with Resolution 4.6, the Meeting of the Parties established a specific process to assist Contracting Parties in the implementation of the Agreement called the Implementation Review Process (IRP). The IRP entitles the Standing Committee (StC) to address incidents of adverse effects or potential adverse effects on migratory waterbirds or on their sites and habitats as a result of human activities. Upon receiving information on such incidents, the StC shall contact the Contracting Party concerned and assess the impact on migratory waterbirds and recommend measures for preventing or mitigating the impact. Recently the Technical Committee (TC) devised and endorsed an information sheet in order to make it possible for various stakeholders to submit information to the StC on cases, which in their opinion represent threats to waterbirds and require an IRP procedure. This information sheet is available on the AEWA website.

In August 2009, the BirdLife International Middle East Secretariat submitted information for the attention of the StC about hunting practices in north-eastern Syria that are targeting the critically endangered Sociable Lapwing (*Vanellus gregarius*) at stopover sites during migration. This information was rigorously assessed by the TC and the StC and it has been proposed to open an IRP case.

According to the information submitted by the BirdLife International Middle East Secretariat, the Sociable Lapwings concentrate in the following sites during spring migration, which are located at the Ar Raqqa / Al Hassakeh Governorates: Eiwa, Al Aumair, Ar Ruweira Rangeland Reserve (Ain Assafra), Al Fedha (Al Cholla), Al Fedha, Tall as Samin, Ar Ruweira and Al Aumair. Their numbers are very high, reaching up to 2,000 birds, and represent the largest observed flocks of this species for the last several decades. They were, however, subject to hunting pressure during the spring of 2007 when a falconry party from a foreign country was situated in the area of their concentration. Intensive hunting was also reported in the spring of 2009 with at least 150 Sociable Lapwings killed in one place. Despite the efforts of a number of authorities and other stakeholders, amongst them the Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform, the Ministry of Environment, the General Commission for Al Badia Management and Development (GCAMD) and the Society for the Conservation of Wildlife (SSCW), who have worked together to combat these illegal hunting practices, which I very much appreciate, it is considered that the measures in place are insufficient and demand further actions, including improvement of the Syrian hunting legislation. It is reckoned that the hunting legislation and its enforcement do not comply with the provisions as laid down in the text of the Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds, to which Syria is a Contracting Party.



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On 30 March – 1 April 2009, an AEWA workshop to revise the Sociable Lapwing Single Species Action Plan took place in Almaty, Kazakhstan, which was also attended by a representative of Syria. This workshop identified the hunting pressure in the Middle East, particularly in Syria, as currently the most critical threat to the species.

The StC kindly requests the Government of Syria to provide any further information on this case, especially on the planning and actions being taken to resolve this problematic issue. It would be greatly appreciated to receive such information at your earliest convenience.

The StC also offers to send an IRP mission to your country in order to assess the issue on the ground and to recommend solutions to your country's Government. The mission will comprise the AEWA Secretariat, an international consultant, BirdLife International, the International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation (CIC) and possibly other international stakeholders (to be identified). The tentative timing of the IRP mission is proposed for early 2010 (February-March).

We would appreciate if you could inform us as soon as possible of your acceptance of the offered IRP mission so that the AEWA Secretariat can assist your Government in organizing it. The AEWA Technical Officer, Mr. Sergey Dereliev, will be visiting Syria in late October-early November 2009 and can discuss further steps with you and other representatives of your Government. Tentatively Mr Dereliev can be available for a meeting in Damascus on 29 or 30 October. Dr. Akram Issa Darwich, AEWA Focal point, will approach your office to arrange an appointment on our behalf.

Please accept your Excellency, the assurance of my highest consideration.

Yours sincerely,



Bert Lenten
Executive Secretary
(on behalf of the AEWA Standing Committee)

cc. Dr. Akram Issa Darwich, AEWA Focal Point for Syria



2959/5
15/12/2009

To: Mr. Bert Lenten

Executive Secretary of AEWA

Dear Mr. Lenten

First of all we thank and appreciate your efforts, Reference to your letter Ref: 09-414-II dated on 1 October 2009 related to an Implementation Review Process Mission to Syria in order to assess the Sociable Lapwing situation in Syria on the ground.

We would like to inform you, that it has been formally approved to receive this important mission to Syria. The proposed dates for this mission (23-28 Feb. 2010) as we received from the Scientific officer of AEWA Mr. Sergey is acceptable for us.

Please confirm officially the final dates and the objectives of this mission, and we hope to receive the obligations of AEWA Secretariat and the Ministry to discuss its and to confirm the final agenda.

Best Regards

Minister of State for Environment Affairs

Syrian Arab Republic

Dr. Kawkab Dayeh





AEWA Implementation Review Process (IRP)

On-the-spot assessment mission

Sociable Lapwing conservation in Syria

Terms of Reference

Background

The Sociable Lapwing (*Vanellus gregarius*) is a globally threatened species (IUCN Red List Category: Critically Endangered (CR)) and is listed on the AEWA Table 1 in Column A, categories 1a, b, c and 2. Currently its population is estimated at ca. 5,600 pairs. Currently the species breeds largely in Northern Kazakhstan and to a much lesser extent in Southern Russia. The Sociable Lapwing population migrates on two separate flyways. The Eastern flyway, which is not well studied, leads to India and Pakistan, where annually small flocks are being recorded. The main part of the population follows the Western flyway leading to NE Africa (Sudan). A number of stop over sites have been identified, some of which are located in the Middle East.

An expedition in February-March 2007 discovered in NE Syria a large stopover site with a total ca. 2,000 Sociable Lapwings. It was unfortunately also found out that the Sociable Lapwing in Syria is being targeted by hunters and falconers. In the autumn of 2007 in Turkey, close to the border with Syria, the largest flock of Sociable Lapwings for over hundred years was observed (ca. 3,200 birds). These new discoveries proved that a large proportion of the world population passes through and stages twice a year in the Middle East, therefore being exposed to the impact of hunting and other adverse factors in the region.

The AEWA Single Species Action Plan for the Sociable Lapwing of 2002/2004 is now being revised and a workshop with attendees from the key Range States took place in March 2009. The hunting pressure in the Middle East, particularly Syria, was identified by the workshop participants as currently the most serious threat to the global population of the Sociable Lapwing.

Current Situation

According to the IRP information sheet submitted by the BirdLife International Middle East Secretariat the following sites in Syria hold significant numbers of Sociable Lapwings: Eiwa, Al Aumair, Ar Ruweira Rangeland Reserve (Ain Assafra), Al Fedha (Al Cholla), Al Fedha, Tall as Samin Ar Ruweira and Al Aumair. All these

sites are situated in the NE part of the country and belong to Ar Raqqa / Al Hassakeh Governorates.

Already in the spring of 2007, when large congregations in NE Syria were discovered for first time, a serious threat by a foreign hunting (falconry) party was reported. Local hunters were also visiting the area and targeting Sociable Lapwings.

In the spring of 2009 several hunting incidents were reported indicating massive hunting of Sociable Lapwings. Exact numbers of hunted birds remained unclear, but at least 150 birds were reported killed at a single site.

A number of Syrian state institutions and non-governmental organizations have been tackling the hunting threat. The former Ministry of Local Administration and Environment, now Ministry of State for Environment Affairs (National AEWa Focal Point), the Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform (in charge of the enforcement of hunting legislation), the General Commission for Al Badia Management and Development (GCAMD, previously a department under the agricultural ministry), and the Syrian Society for the Conservation of Wildlife (SSCW) have played roles in alleviating the hunting impact on the Sociable Lapwing population. These national stakeholders have been supported by BirdLife International, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the Ornithological Society of the Middle East.

Despite the efforts of national Syrian institutions and organizations as well as their foreign partners and supporters the control of hunting of Sociable Lapwings in NE parts of the country remains a significant challenge to address, given the nature of the area being vast and remote.

On the basis of an advice from the AEWa Technical Committee and invoking Resolution 4.6 the AEWa Standing Committee decided on opening an IRP case to assist the Syrian government in further tackling and preventing the threat to the Sociable Lapwing at stopover sites in the country. On 1 October 2009 the AEWa Executive Secretary sent a letter on behalf of the AEWa Standing Committee to H.E. Dr. Kawkab Dayeh, Syrian State Minister for Environment Affairs requesting further information on this case, especially on the planning and actions being taken to resolve this problematic issue, as well as offering to send an IRP mission in order to assess the issue on the ground and to recommend solutions to the Syrian government.

During a visit to Damascus in the end of October 2009 the AEWa Technical Officer undertook consultations with the representative of the Ministry of State for Environment Affairs Dr. Akram Eissa Darwich, Director of Biodiversity and Protected Areas. On 15 December 2009 at the UNEP/AEWa Secretariat was received a response from H.E. Dr. Kawkab Dayeh, the Syrian Minister of State for Environment Affairs informing on the acceptance of the suggested AEWa IRP mission on the preliminary proposed dates of 23-28 February 2010.

Objectives of the AEWA IRP mission

The principal objectives of the AEWA IRP mission to Syria are:

- to assess the threats to the conservation of the Sociable Lapwing and its habitats in Syria arising from hunting and other adverse factors;
- to review and assess legislative and other measures already in place to tackle hunting pressure and other impacts;
- to review and assess monitoring activities concerning the species and its habitats already in place;
- to investigate options for strengthening the effectiveness of the measures in order to eliminate threats to the Sociable Lapwing and its habitats;
- to determine where monitoring is in need of further enhancement and suggest possible ways of doing so;
- to make recommendations to the Government of Syria, the AEWA Standing Committee and the UNEP/AEWA Secretariat on the conservation measures that should be taken to safeguard the Sociable Lapwing and its habitats in Syria (these recommendations shall be also included in the revised AEWA Single Species Action Plan for the Sociable Lapwing which is currently being developed).

Provisional dates and itinerary

23-28 February 2010

| | |
|----------------|--|
| Day 1 (23 Feb) | Arrival in Damascus; meeting of the IRP mission team |
| Day 2 (24 Feb) | Meetings in Damascus with the Ministry of State for Environment Affairs, the Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform and the Syrian Society for the Conservation of Wildlife |
| Day 3 (25 Feb) | Travel to Raqqa (or Deir ez Zor) (N Syria); stop in Palmyra for meeting the General Commission for Al Badia Management and Development |
| Day 4 (26 Feb) | Field visit to the sites of concentration of Sociable Lapwings |
| Day 5 (27 Feb) | Meeting with local stakeholders, such as provincial governors, hunters and local communities around Sociable Lapwing staging areas |
| Day 6 (28 Feb) | Travel back to Damascus, meeting of the IRP mission team and departure from Damascus |

Provisional IRP mission team

Foreign experts

- International consultant
- UNEP/AEWA Secretariat
- BirdLife International Middle East Secretariat
- International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation (CIC) (tbc)
- RSPB/International Sociable Lapwing Working Group (tbc)

National representatives

- Ministry of State for Environment Affairs (*to act as main focal point for the foreign expert team and to be in charge of the overall organization and coordination of the logistics locally*)
- General Commission for Al Badia Management and Development
- Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform (tbc)
- Syrian Society for the Conservation of Wildlife (tbc)

A4. Itinerary of the AEWA IRP Mission and list of stakeholders met

Day 1, Tuesday 23 February

- Arrival of mission team members in Damascus
- Briefing of mission team by AEWA Secretariat
- Coordination meeting with **Dr Akram Eissa Darwich**, Head of Biodiversity and Protected Areas, Ministry of State for Environment Affairs.

Day 2, Wednesday 24 February

- Meeting with **Eng. Imad Hassoun**, Deputy Minister, Ministry of State for Environment Affairs
- Meeting with **Dr Akram Eissa Darwich**, Head of Biodiversity and Protected Areas, Ministry of State for Environment Affairs
- Meeting with **Agronomist Mohammad Deeb Dakkori**, Director of Animal Production and **Agroengineer Mohammad Bakhli**, Head of Breeding and Animal Production Department, Animal Production Directorate, Department of Animal Resources, Ministry of Agriculture & Agrarian Reform
- Meeting with **Mr Osama Al Nouri**, General Secretary of the Syrian Society for the Conservation of Wildlife (SSCW)
- Coordination discussion among members of the Mission team.

Day 3, Thursday 25 February

- Travel from Damascus to Palmyra
- Visit Headquarters of General Commission for Al Badia Management & Development accompanied by **Eng. Mohammad Mohsen Al Nahhas**, Assistant General Director of the Commission
- Meeting with **Eng. Ali Hamoud**, General Director of General Commission for Al Badia Management & Development at Northern Bald Ibis Special Protection Area, Palmyra
- Travel from Palmyra to Deir ez Zor
- Preparation for Ministry of State for Environment Affairs/SSCW workshop on conservation of the Sociable Lapwing in Syria
- Informal discussions with workshop participants

Day 4, Friday 26 February

- Participation in Syrian Society for Conservation of Wildlife (SSCW) workshop on conservation of the Sociable Lapwing in Syria, Deir ez Zor
- Informal discussions with workshop participants, including stakeholders from district offices of national institutions, representatives of NGOs, local communities and local hunters.
- Field visit to Sociable Lapwing staging area in steppe near Deir ez Zor

Day 5, Saturday 27 February

- Departure from Deir ez Zor
- Field visits to key staging areas for Sociable Lapwings between Deir ez Zor and Ar Raqqa; seven birds located in Rangeland Reserve between Deir ez Zor and Ar Raqqa.
- Arrival in Ar Raqqa.
- Meeting with Director of Ar Raqqa District office of General Commission for Al Badia Management & Development.
- Meeting with **H.E. Mohammed Ali Al Ibrahim**, Deputy Governor of Ar Raqqa District.
- Meeting with **Mr Imad Kahtam**, Deputy Chief of Police, Ar Raqqa District

- Also present at these meetings: Deputy General Director of General Commission for Al Badia Management & Development, representatives of District offices of national institutions including Ministry of State for Environment Affairs, Ministry of Agriculture & Agrarian Reform and Ministry of Interior, SSCW, local Hunting Council, local community representatives.

Day 6, Sunday 27 February

- Depart city of Ar Raqqa
- Field visits to key steppe and cropland sites in northern Ar Raqqa District where the largest Sociable Lapwing flocks found by the Dutch team in 2007, including near Eiwa village
- Meeting and lunch at Al Ghazli village with **Sheikh Dham Al G'a shiesh**, Chief of the El Enize Tribe, whose lands are spread across the three Districts of Ar Raqqa, Al Hassakeh and Deir ez Zor
- Return to Damascus
- Discussion and agreement among team members of preliminary Mission findings and recommendations.

Day 7, Monday 1 March

- Coordination meeting between Mr Sergey Dereliev, AEWA Secretariat and Dr Akram Eissa Darwich, National Focal Point, Director of Biodiversity and Protected Areas, State Ministry of State for Environment Affairs.
- Departure of Mission team from Syria.

A5. Key references and sources of further information on Sociable Lapwing

The principal published background document concerning Sociable Lapwing in Syria is:

Hofland R. & Keijl, G.O. 2008. Syrian Sociable Lapwing survey, 18 February - 5 March 2007. **WIWO-report 85**, Beek-Ubbergen, The Netherlands.

The revised International Single Species Action Plan, currently in preparation, will provide a comprehensive overview of the species' status and the conservation actions that need to be implemented nationally and internationally by the Range States:

Sheldon, R.D., Kamp, J., Koshkin, M.A., Dereliev, S., Jbour, S. (compilers). In prep. International Single Species Action Plan for the Conservation of the Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius*. **AEWA Technical Series**. Bonn, Germany.

In the near future, the website of the AEWA International Working Group on Sociable Lapwing www.sociablelapwing.org (currently under construction) will provide a readily accessible source of information and news concerning the species.