



CONVENTION ON MIGRATORY SPECIES

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MEETING TO CONCLUDE AND ENDORSE THE
PROPOSED CENTRAL ASIAN FLYWAY ACTION
PLAN TO CONSERVE MIGRATORY
WATERBIRDS AND THEIR HABITATS
New Delhi, 10-12 June 2005

REPORT OF THE MEETING TO CONCLUDE AND ENDORSE THE PROPOSED CENTRAL ASIAN FLYWAY ACTION PLAN TO CONSERVE MIGRATORY WATERBIRDS AND THEIR HABITATS

Agenda item 1: Opening Ceremony

1. The meeting was opened with the lighting of the traditional lamp by the dignitaries invited to open the meeting.
2. Dr. Prodipto Ghosh, Secretary, Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India, welcomed the organisers, delegates, guests and members of the media. Being the nodal ministry for conservation and management of India's rich biodiversity, he outlined the special significance that is attached to migratory fauna and efforts made to establish a national network of Ramsar wetland sites of international importance. He expected that this network would grow considerably in the coming years and be complimented by a wider network of wetland protected areas as conservation and community reserves, which will be managed on the principles of wise and sustainable use of resources, without compromising the maintenance of the basic ecological characteristics. The requirement of bilateral arrangements and collaborative management of trans boundary protected areas was also mentioned as well as the bilateral arrangements with Russia and strengthening of the CMS agreements in a mutually beneficial manner.
3. Mr. Douglas Hykle, Senior Advisor, Convention on Migratory Species, addressed the meeting on behalf of Mr. Robert Hepworth, Executive Secretary of the Convention. He outlined the importance that CMS placed on this meeting and for the development of an Action Plan that reflected the needs of the Range States and of a legal framework to support its implementation. He welcomed the delegates from 23 Range States of the Central Asian Flyway, international organisations and other participants (The final list of participants appears at Annex 1). He thanked the Government of India for taking the lead and initiative in organising the meeting and for providing financial and logistical support. He thanked, too, the Governments of Netherlands and Switzerland, UNEP offices in Asia-Pacific, West Asia, and Europe and the International Crane Foundation for providing financial support for the meeting. He also thanked Wetlands International for acting as the Secretariat's technical adviser and for preparing a number of documents for the meeting.

4. Mrs. Désirée Bonis, Deputy Head of Mission, Royal Netherlands Embassy, New Delhi, in her address, referred to the importance that Netherlands placed in flyway conservation and the instrumental role it had played in creating the West Palearctic Flyway which encompasses Europe, North Africa and parts of the Arabian Peninsula. She stated that the Netherlands actively supported the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement action plan and would make similar efforts for the Central Asian Flyway, and made reference to the financial support being made to research in important wetlands and breeding grounds in West Africa and Siberia by the Netherlands government. She particularly highlighted new threats to migratory species, especially birds, such as large-scale windmill parks and climate change, that would need to be considered. She expressed hope that the creation of the new flyway agreement would result in the rehabilitation of the world heritage site of Keoladeo Ghana Bird Sanctuary near Bharatpur and the return of the Siberian Cranes and commended the authorities and NGOs involved in the rehabilitation of Chilika Lake, Sultanpur Sanctuary and creation and conservation of Pong Lake.

5. Mr. Ward Hagemeijer, Head of Biodiversity and Ecological Networks, Wetlands International based in the Netherlands, addressed the meeting on behalf of Mrs. Jane Madgwick, Chief Executive Officer, Wetlands International, expressing the organisation's strong commitment to working with CMS, AEWA, the Government of India and other Range States and partners in the long term to develop and implement an Action Plan to enhance the conservation of waterbirds and the sites they depend upon with all the values these represent for people and biodiversity. He expressed the hope to obtain from the meeting a clear preference for the future direction of flyway cooperation in the region. The strong and continued support of the Dutch Government to the development of flyway-wide activities in this and other flyways was acknowledged.

6. Mr. Namo Narain Meena, Minister of State for Environment and Forests, acknowledged the need to provide administrative and political support in evolving appropriate strategies for managing water bird populations and stated that this can happen only when all of us join hands to together and work in a spirit of mutual co-operation.

7. The Honourable Minister for Environment and Forests, Government of India, Mr. Thiru A. Raja launched a book entitled "Handbook of Indian Wetland Birds and their Conservation", which had been prepared by the Zoological Survey of India.

8. The meeting was officially inaugurated by Mr. Raja. He welcomed the delegates and invited guests and outlined some of the efforts made by India, including the prospect of setting up a "National Network of Wetland Protected Area," and a "National Wetland Policy" and stated that conservation and management of water birds was a priority under the National Wildlife Action Plan (2002-2016) that is supported by the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. Mr. Raja informed the meeting that India stood committed to the sustainable use of wetlands and urged the scientific community gathered here to evolve strategies for use of these resources to address the two pronged issues of conservation and the needs of the communities. He called upon the esteemed experts to throw light on the recent reports of migratory birds acting as vectors for the bird flu in China.

9. Mr. R.P.S. Katwal, Additional Director General (Wildlife), Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India, offered the vote of thanks to all the delegates, the organisers for their participation in the meeting and to the media for their contribution in taking the message of the meeting to the masses.

Agenda item 2: Election of officers

10. The meeting elected by acclamation Mr. R.P.S Katwal (India) to chair the meeting.

Agenda item 3: Adoption of the agenda and meeting schedule

11. The meeting accepted the Chair's proposal that it operate without formal written rules of procedure.

12. The Chair invited the CMS Agreements Officer, Mr. Lyle Glowka, to introduce the provisional agenda (document CMS/CAF/1/Rev.2) and provisional annotated agenda (document CMS/CAF/2).

13. The Chair proposed the following adjustments to the meeting schedule to enable a smooth flow of the discussion: (1) agenda item 7.0 (Action Plan finalisation and endorsement) first; (2) then agenda item 8.0 (Proposals to initially support implementation of the Action Plan); and finally (3) agenda item 6.0 (Regional preferences for a legal and institutional framework to support the Central Asian Flyway Action Plan for Waterbirds and their Habitats). No additional proposals to amend the agenda or to be addressed under agenda item 10 (Any other business) were proposed by the delegates.

14. The agenda and schedule were adopted without further amendment. The adopted agenda is reproduced as Annex 2 to this report.

Agenda item 4: Meeting overview

15. The Chair invited the CMS Secretariat to introduce the meeting, its aims and objectives.

16. Mr. Glowka outlined the process to develop the Central Asian Flyway Action Plan, through the organisation of a first meeting of Range States in 2001 in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, where a draft Action Plan was discussed. At this meeting, India offered to take the lead on developing and concluding the Action Plan. In addition, the issue of appropriate legal and institutional mechanisms was initially broached but the 15 Range States at the meeting did not have sufficient information to reach a conclusion. The CMS Secretariat undertook to prepare a more formal presentation outlining possible advantages and disadvantages of the options that had been presented to the meeting. In designing this meeting as a follow up to the Tashkent meeting, CMS had tried to create a comprehensive meeting which would both inform the participants and seek to identify regional needs and preferences. The four primary meeting objectives were to:

- Provide Range State delegations with an overview of flyway conservation issues (technical session) (agenda item 5.0);
- Finalise and endorse the draft CAF Action Plan (agenda item 7.0);
- Consider, prioritise and endorse selected implementation activities (agenda item 8.0) and lay the basis for exploring in the future and possibly establishing an interim coordination mechanism; and
- Recommend a legal and institutional option to support Action Plan implementation (agenda item 6.0).

17. Mr. Glowka introduced the meeting documents list (document CMS/CAF/3). The final list of meeting documents is reproduced as Annex 3 to this report

Agenda item 5: Technical session on flyway issues

18. Mr. Glowka described the rationale of the technical session as to provide the opportunity to (a) review waterbird conservation issues regionally through presentations of experts, (b) review waterbird conservation issues at the national scale through a Country Report synthesis (with individual country reports made available as document CMS/CAF/Inf/4 series) and (c) show how CMS has been trying to assist Range States through various initiatives in the region.

Agenda item 5.1: Issues and priorities for the Central Asian Flyway

19. Mr. Hagemeyer made a presentation entitled “Flyways: Principles and Initiatives”, that provided an overview of the concept of flyways, defined the major flyways of the world and the ongoing flyway-wide initiatives.

20. Dr. Taej Mundkur, Wetlands International, made a presentation entitled “Central Asian Flyway: Main Issues and Opportunities for Cooperation on Migratory Waterbirds and Wetland Conservation.” He provided an overview of the Central Asian Flyway and identified priority issues for conservation of migratory waterbird and their habitats, including the lack of information on population status and trends of waterbirds, information on precise migratory routes of populations, limited capacity of local agencies and groups to monitor and manage wetlands and the need to balance the needs of conservation against the needs of local people living around wetlands.

21. Dr. S. Balachandran, Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), made a presentation entitled “A Review of Bird Migration Studies by India and Future Plan of Action”, in which he outlined the main achievements of the BNHS, including the marking of over 250,000 waterbirds at nine major wetlands with 1,800 recoveries, the publication of an Indian Bird Banding Manual to support the training of students and others to increase capacity for bird ringing and study. The results showed that there were changes in migratory patterns observed between 1980-2002 and these were attributed to habitat degradation in key sites and changes in abundance of species across parts of the country. Amongst waders, there was a sharp decline in coastal waders, but the decline of populations was relatively less along the west coast compared to the east coast. Future strategies needed to include research and monitoring, education and training and habitat restoration.

22. Mr. David Li, Wetlands International, made a presentation entitled “Monitoring the Distribution and Status of Waterbirds in the Central Asian Flyway”, in which he described the Asian Waterbird Census as the regional contribution to the global International Waterbird Census (IWC) programme coordinated by Wetlands International. The IWC was being conducted each January across the Range States by nationally coordinated volunteer-based networks. This programme was providing a strong basis to identify important sites for waterbirds, monitoring distribution and status of species. Some of the main challenges identified for the IWC in CAF Range States included inconsistency of site coverage, need for improved national coordination, lack of capacity, lack of support to volunteer networks and inadequate expertise and lack of financial support. A strategic plan had been developed to guide implementation of the work.

23. Dr. Lalitha Vijayan, Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History (SACON), made a presentation entitled “Habitat Inventory for Migratory Waterbirds: Lessons Learned from the UNDP/GEF Indian National Wetlands Project. She described the results of the project, which had carried out detailed inventories of representative inland wetlands across the country, identified species and pollution levels.

24. Mr. Simba Chan, BirdLife International, described his organisation’s Important Bird Area (IBA) programme in a presentation entitled “Site-based Approaches for Management of Internationally Important Migratory Waterbird Sites: The Role of IBAs”. He discussed the value of IBAs in prioritizing site conservation projects and current partial coverage of IBA in the east and south of the CAF region, with proposed coverage in other areas. Also proposed was the establishment of site support groups to enable monitoring of sites with an eventual aim to build up a network, linking important sites in different countries.

25. Dr. Mundkur provided a brief summary of the reports provided by Range States (documents CMS/CAF/Inf.4/1-17) on the current administrative frameworks for migratory waterbirds, current programmes for management, conservation and raising of awareness for migratory waterbirds and their habitats, species of conservation concern and priorities for conservation action. The information had been sought through provision of a set of guidelines (document CMS/CAF/Inf.3/Rev.1).

26. The preliminary analysis of the reports provided before the meeting by 14 of 30 Range States revealed that States either had single or multiple national administrative authorities for waterbird management. The involvement of technical institutions, universities and NGO varied considerably between States. While policy and legislation existed for birds, including waterbirds and habitats, they required improvement/strengthening. There is a wide-range of ongoing international, bilateral, national and local actions for species and habitat management and conservation. Furthermore, the membership in biodiversity-related conventions is strong and increasing. There was a wide-range of threats identified to waterbirds and their habitats, and main priorities included: the need for monitoring of waterbirds, development of action plans for conservation of threatened species, accession to or ratification of conventions/agreements (including CMS, AEWA, Ramsar), establishment of new protected areas/sanctuaries, establishment of a network of sites, establishment of species working groups, information exchange, provision of training on waterbird and wetland management and raising of awareness.

27. The information collected was the first reference of its kind for the flyway and there was a need to solicit reports from the remaining Range States. The need to collate and synthesise the information and to make it widely available and updated periodically was proposed, as one of the priority actions proposed in document CMS/CAF/7 discussed under agenda item 8.

Agenda item 5.2: Existing CMS initiatives within the Central Asian Flyway

28. Mr. Glowka briefly introduced CMS to the participants and stated that the Convention established linkages between migratory species conservation, ecosystems and sustainable development. He outlined selected CMS migratory bird achievements (Globally/CAF), including two GEF Projects that would be further described in subsequent presentations. The Asia-Pacific Migratory Waterbird Conservation Strategy and the latest initiative for the CAF region. Document CMS/CAF/Inf.7 provided the text and appendices of the Convention.

29. Mr. Bert Lenten, Executive Secretary, African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement (AEWA), provided an historical overview, and described the Agreement's geographical scope, species coverage, some of its main activities since 1999 and future activities, including the overlap and linkage to the CAF. Document CMS/CAF/Inf.8 provided the text of the Agreement and its Action Plan.

30. Mr. Hagemeyer made a presentation on "Developing a Flyway Scale GEF Project on Conserving Migratory Waterbirds and Wetlands in the African Eurasian Flyway: Applying the Flyway Approach for the Benefit of Biodiversity and People". The major components of the UNEP-GEF African Eurasian Flyways project were highlighted and its strategic importance for building the capacity for conservation and sustainable use and management of waterbird populations and wetlands was demonstrated.

31. Dr. Mundkur described the Asia-Pacific Migratory Waterbird Conservation Strategy which had been active in promoting the flyway approach and conservation action for migratory waterbirds and their habitats for a decade in the region. Document CMS/CAF/Inf.12 contained the current five year Strategy. The free-standing regional cooperative conservation initiative was coordinated by an international committee with representation from the secretariats of CMS and Ramsar, government agencies, development agencies, NGOs and technical experts. The Strategy had overseen the development of three international site networks for migratory Anatidae, cranes and shorebirds, covering 85 internationally important sites for migratory waterbirds in 13 countries in the East Asian-Australasian Flyway and was growing slowly. The site networks focused on increasing recognition of the importance of wetlands for waterbirds, raising awareness, building local capacity for management and monitoring of waterbirds, collection of information, as well as other activities.

32. Mr. Crawford Prentice, International Crane Foundation, made a brief presentation entitled "Use of Flagship Migratory Waterbird Species to Promote Wetlands Conservation: The CMS Memorandum of Understanding concerning Conservation Measures for the Siberian Crane and the UNEP/GEF Siberian Crane and Wetlands Project". The UNEP/GEF project is a major programme in Russia, China, Kazakhstan and Iran along the western and eastern flyways to undertake conservation action for the globally threatened Siberian Crane during its annual life cycle, including through the establishment of a network of sites used for breeding, staging and wintering. Document CMS/CAF/Inf.9 provided a background paper on the proposed network.

Agenda item 6: Regional preferences for a legal and institutional framework to support the Central Asian Flyway Action Plan for Waterbirds and their Habitats

33. Prior to the consideration of agenda item 6, Mr. B. C. Choudhry, Wildlife Institute of India, on behalf of the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India, provided an overview of the current legislative frameworks, administrative responsibilities and responses for waterbird and wetland conservation in the country. The future strategy and action plan being proposed included identification of all important staging grounds and breeding grounds of water birds and an action plan for protecting those areas, enhancement of conservation and management of Ramsar Sites, establishing a network of wetland protected areas, species specific conservation action plans for important migratory birds, a national bird ringing programme, regional and international cooperation for collaborative waterbird migration study, improving awareness and education programme, and facilitation and development of multilateral & bilateral agreements between neighbouring countries in the region for specific action plans for migratory water birds.

34. Mr. Glowka introduced three options presented in document CMS/CAF/6. The Range States present were invited by Mr. Hykle to provide an indication of their Government's or Ministry's preference to link the Action Plan under discussion either to a legally-binding or non-binding instrument. Of the 23 delegations present, twelve were in a position to express an official view – in most instances reflecting the position of their Ministry, rather than a Government position. It was recognized that the opinions expressed were to be considered preliminary and non-binding, and that they might change after further inter-ministerial consultations. Most of the countries represented had not initiated such consultations with other relevant Ministries prior to the meeting.

35. Delegations expressing an official view were nearly unanimous in their preference for a legally-binding instrument and, of these, there was near unanimity for the Action Plan to be integrated with the existing African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement (AEWA). An informal poll of the remaining delegations also suggested a general tendency in favour of a legally-binding instrument, with the Action Plan linked to AEWA. Three delegations expressed, officially or unofficially, a preference for the Action Plan to be linked to a non-binding memorandum of understanding.

36. While the conclusions of the meeting provide clear guidance for exploring the AEWA-linked option in more depth, it was noted that an official view was still awaited from 18 of the Range States concerned, and most of the others had still to confirm their position on a Government level. The legal, technical and other ramifications of the approach garnering the most support warrant further investigation in the coming months by both the CMS and AEWA Secretariats, as well as detailed consideration by their respective governing bodies when they meet towards the end of 2005.

Agenda item 7: Action Plan finalisation and endorsement

37. Dr. Mundkur introduced document CMS/CAF/5, the proposed CAF Action Plan text that had been updated with input from the Range States at the Tashkent meeting in 2001 and thereafter through correspondence. The format of the Action Plan had been updated to reflect the format and broad content style of the African Eurasian Waterbird Agreement Action Plan.

38. Mr. Hykle, proposed four questions to the meeting as an introduction to discussion of the Action Plan. The questions were (a) Does the Action Plan conform to the needs of your country? (b) Does your country have the capacity and the resources to implement the Action Plan? (c) Did you, within your country, consult with other relevant ministries concerning the Action Plan? and (d) How long would ratification of a formal legally binding agreement for the implementation of the Action Plan take in your country? The answers from the participants of the meeting can be characterised as follows (21 countries answered the questions, unless indicated differently):

Does this AP conform to your country's needs?	Your country's capacity	Your country's resources	Consultation with other relevant ministries in your country	How long would ratification take?
71% yes 29% yes but with some (minor) amendments	76% sufficient 24% cap building needed (some overlap between these categories)	43% sufficient 38% need external sources 19% inconclusive	24% has consulted 14% inconclusive Remaining countries did not consult, including countries where this was not appropriate	Average 2.05 years (n=14)

39. The draft Action Plan was carefully discussed and amended by the meeting. Three working groups were established that dealt with different aspects of the Action Plan: species and population-related issues, threat-related issues and broader issues. Following the break out sessions, the working groups presented the outcomes of their discussions and proposed amendments to the Action Plan were considered.

40. A number of amendments and new action points were introduced during the discussions that were included in the Action Plan. These included the need to:

- (a) Give adequate attention to gender issues while developing and implementing alternative livelihood options to manage wetlands and other habitats important to migratory waterbirds;
- (b) Ensure adequate statutory pollution controls are in place, including those relating to the use of agricultural chemicals, pest control procedures, oil spills and the disposal of waste water, which are in accordance with international norms, for the purpose of minimizing adverse impacts on the populations listed in Table 2;
- (c) Provide the basis for the Range States to cooperate to determine and monitor the impacts of climate change on migratory waterbirds and their habitats and where appropriate respond to any resulting threats;
- (d) Fine tune the use of the word harvesting in relation to hunting in several parts of the Action Plan;
- (e) Include a 'livelihood support activities' section in the Action Plan, with a reference to traditional uses and management practices;
- (f) Monitor disease occurrence in wild waterbirds and, using a multi-disciplinary approach, assess disease risk and implications for human health, in relation to poultry husbandry and trade practices, trade in wild waterbirds and migratory waterbird movements; and
- (g) Develop an outcome-oriented medium-term Flyway Strategic Plan and complimentary National Strategic Plans to implement actions.

The finalised version of the Action Plan is attached as Annex 4.

41. One piece of outstanding information was awaited from the Russian Federation regarding populations of waterbirds to be included in Table 2. It was confirmed that this information would be provided to the CMS Secretariat within 2 months of the meeting's closure (by 12 August 2005).^{*} It was agreed that the Action Plan would be circulated by the CMS Secretariat to the Range States for final review and comment prior to its adoption at a future intergovernmental meeting.

^{*} The information received by 19.09.2005 is reflected in the version of the Action Plan annexed to this report. Additional useful information was received from Iraq and India by the same date.

Agenda item 8: Proposals to initially support implementation of the Action Plan

42. Dr. Mundkur introduced document CMS/CAF/7 that outlined a list of seven priority international project concepts to support and inform implementation of the CAF Action Plan. The meeting reviewed these concepts and strongly supported in the following order of priority the need to implement projects in the CAF region to (a) prepare a directory of sites of international importance for migratory waterbirds; (b) develop a monitoring strategy and strengthen capacity for monitoring waterbirds; (c) prepare a flyway status overview of national and international conservation aspects of migratory waterbirds and their habitats as a basis for cooperative conservation action; (d) prepare a flyway overview of the status and trends of waterbird populations to determine future monitoring and conservation priorities; and (e) establish a flyway network of key contacts and collate an international register of waterbird and habitat projects.

43. Three additional priorities were proposed by the meeting, including the development of single species action plans for threatened species, an awareness programme and common framework for inventory of wetlands.

44. There was also agreement on the need to develop a medium-term Flyway Strategic Plan to support implementation of the Action Plan.

45. The CMS and AEWA Secretariats were invited to consider the priorities of the meeting in initiating development of flyway activities to support implementation of the Action Plan. The CMS Secretariat was also invited to further explore with Range States, AEWA and other potential partners, the concept of an interim coordination mechanism to initially support the implementation of the Action Plan, once adopted.

Agenda item 9: Endorsement of meeting outputs

46. Dr. R. B. Lal, Inspector General Forest (WildLife), Ministry of Environment and Forests, India chaired the rest of the meeting on behalf of Mr. Katwal.

47. The draft New Delhi Statement summarizing the outcomes of the meeting was read out by Mr. Glowka. Following a brief discussion, the Statement was accepted. It is attached as Annex 5.

Agenda item 10: Any other business

48. Dr. Lal invited proposals for any other issues to be addressed by the meeting.

49. Mr. Hagemeyer stated that Wetlands International placed great importance on the Central Asian Flyway and the proposed Action Plan and had secured some support for the implementation of selected activities for two years in at least part of the flyway.

50. No other business was considered by the meeting.

Agenda item 11: Closure of the meeting

51. Dr. Lal thanked all the delegates, other participants and CMS. The meeting was closed at approximately 21.30 hrs.