



15th MEETING OF THE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE
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**DRAFT CONCEPT FOR AN ASSESSMENT OF THE STATUS OF PRINCIPAL BIRD
HABITATS IN THE AFRICAN-EURASIAN FLYWAYS**

Introduction

AEWA context

Under para. 3.2.3 of the Action Plan of the Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA AP) Parties “...shall endeavor to avoid degradation and loss of habitats that support populations...”. Further under para. 3.2.4 Parties “...shall endeavor to develop strategies, according to an ecosystem approach, for the conservation of the habitats of all populations...including that habitats of those populations that are dispersed”.

The AEWA Strategic Plan 2019-2027 adopted by the 7th Session of the Meeting of the Parties (MOP7) in December 2018 introduces a new priority area of work outlined in its Objective 4: “To ensure there is sufficient quantity and quality of habitat in the wider environment¹ for achieving and maintaining favourable conservation status for migratory waterbird populations”.

Target 4.1 of the Strategic Plan foresees that “Priorities for habitat conservation and management in the wider environment (as defined at the Objective level) are identified at Agreement level and corresponding actions are being implemented in at least half of Contracting Parties”.

Action (a) to this target foresees that an Agreement-level **assessment of the status of principal waterbird habitats in the wider environment** is conducted by the 8th Session of the Meeting of the Parties (MOP8) in 2021 drawing on existing studies wherever possible.

Based on the assessment produced, action (b) to this target also foresees the development of an action plan by MOP8. This action plan shall identify priorities, opportunities and a set of recommended actions taking into account regional and sub-regional differences in key habitat types and threats/drivers.

Raptors MOU context

Article 7(b) of the Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation of Migratory Birds of Prey in Africa and Eurasia (Raptors MOU) states that the Signatories will endeavour to “coordinate their efforts to ensure that a network of suitable habitats is maintained or, where appropriate, established inter alia where such habitats extend over the territory of more than one Signatory”.

The Action Plan (Annex III) to the MOU lists priorities such as 4(c) “Conserving bird of prey habitats by encouraging an Ecosystem Approach to sustainable development and sectoral land use practices...” and 4(e)

¹ ‘Wider environment’ encompasses land, coastal and marine areas that constitute important habitats for waterbirds beyond the boundaries of recognized sites and/or formally designated protected areas. These may include, for example, many farmed landscapes and other areas of land and water with multiple uses.

“Taking into account the needs of bird of prey conservation in sectors and related policies such as agriculture, forestry, fisheries, industries, tourism, energy, chemicals and pesticides”, both of which have a strong habitat conservation aspect.

Further, Table 2 to the Action Plan (Activities to be done under paragraph 5 of the Action Plan) contains a set of sub-activities under Activity 3: Habitat conservation and sustainable management which aim at securing appropriate quantity and quality of habitats for birds of prey.

AEMLAP context

The African-Eurasian Migratory Landbirds Action Plan (AEMLAP) under the Convention on Migratory Species strongly emphasises the habitat conservation approach. The Action Plan’s first theme introduces priority topics in relation to habitat conservation such as agriculture, timber and non-timber forest production, water management, energy, revegetation and reducing desertification as well as integrated land-use management.

CAFAP context

The Central Asian Flyway Action Plan (CAFAP) for the Conservation of Migratory Waterbirds and their Habitats under the Convention on Migratory Species has been developed following closely the AEWA AP as a model. Hence, the mandates with respect to habitat conservation between AEWA and CAFAP are very similar. Under para. 3.2.2 Range States *“...shall endeavour to avoid degradation and loss of habitats that support populations...”*.

Join interest

In order to advance the habitat conservation agendas under the four CMS-related instruments, a joint approach will be prudent, especially since many of the taxa listed under the different instruments share the same type of habitats. Prior to devising concrete measures and approaches, it will be useful to inform the planning by undertaking an assessment of the status of the principal habitats for all bird taxa covered by the four instruments rather than just for AEWA-listed waterbirds under its Strategic Plan prioritisation. Thus, the conservation action to follow will be a comprehensive and shared strategic approach.

Geographic scope

The ranges of the four instruments overlap to a great extent with the Raptors MOU extending most further east. Therefore, the geographic scope of the assessment should cover the overlay of the geographic extents of AEWA, the Raptors MOU, AEMLAP and CAFAP.

Species coverage

The assessment should cover all species listed under the four instruments – AEWA, Raptor MOU, AEMLAP and CAFAP.

Habitat classification

It is proposed to use the [IUCN Red List Habitat Classification Scheme](#) which is a global habitat classification system. Its use allows seamless data acquisition from the relevant species databases. In case of inland aquatic habitats this is largely based on the [Ramsar Classification System for Wetland Type](#).

It is also proposed to produce the assessments at the highest level (i.e. Forest, Savanna, Shrubland, Grassland, Inland Wetlands, etc.) but to have three of the four marine habitat classes (9-11) combined and to also consider combining the intertidal (12) and coastal classes (13) because of their similar and shared waterbird taxa.

Identification of principal bird habitats

Bird species listed under the four instruments occupy a very wide range of habitats, but not all are equally important for them. The IUCN species information system records habitat suitability (suitable, marginal, unknown) and whether it is important for the survival of the species (major importance).

It is suggested to assess the importance of the broad habitat types based on the number of species per instrument for which they are of major importance. Principal bird habitats will support a substantial number of either groups of species, i.e. waterbirds, landbirds, birds of prey. The thresholds should be defined in the light of the analyses, but the purpose is to exclude habitats that are marginally important for all three groups. It is not recommended to use the IUCN Red List status as an additional weighting factor, because sites important for globally threatened species would qualify under lower numerical criteria than the near threatened or least concerned species. Consequently, the former could be protected through site conservation and require less habitat conservation measures in the wider environment.

Assessment of the status of principal waterbird habitats

It is suggested that the assessment of the status of principal bird habitats should not be a general abstract assessment of the intrinsic values of the habitat, but it should be linked to the extent these habitats are capable of supporting the associated species. In this context past and expected future changes in the extent and the relevant functions for the associated species will be assessed based on literature review and in consultation with the expert networks related to AEWA, the Raptors MOU, AEMLAP and CAFAP.

Identification of priority bird habitats

It is foreseen that principal bird habitats will be further prioritised based on their importance for each of the species groups and how threatened they are. Further analyses of threats and opportunities as well as subsequent action planning will be implemented only for the priority habitats.