

PRESS RELEASE

UN-Waterbird Conference Kicks Off in Durban, South Africa

Durban, 4 December 2018 - The Seventh Session of the Meeting of the Parties to the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA MOP7) opened in Durban, Kwazulu Natal, South Africa today.

The inter-governmental meeting is set to be the most important international conference on the conservation of migratory waterbirds this year, bringing together close to 300 participants from 81 countries, including 67 national delegations and the European Union, a range of non-governmental organizations and renowned experts from across the African-Eurasian region.

The five-day meeting will be an opportunity for governments to agree on actions to improve the conservation status of many species of waterbirds covered by AEWA such as pelicans, cranes, storks, ducks and waders, which face a wide range of threats, including habitat loss and degradation, illegal killing and poisoning, especially by lead gunshot, pollution, climate change, bycatch, as well as collision with powerlines and wind turbines.

MOP7 will be held under the theme: “***Beyond 2020: shaping flyway conservation for the future***” and will cover a plethora of topics related to the future conservation and sustainable use of the 254 species of migratory waterbirds covered by the treaty.

AEWA Executive Secretary, Jacques Trouvilliez said: “AEWA MOP7 is set to be a milestone for waterbird conservation, as Parties will decide on the new course of conservation action under the treaty for the next decade. For the last 20 years internationally agreed actions under AEWA, have made the difference in conservation efforts for many well-known, as well as lesser-known species such as Bald Ibis or White-winged Flufftail which connect habitats over political boundaries.”

AEWA lays the legal foundation for international coordinated conservation measures and their implementation is guided by means of a Strategic Plan and a targeted Plan of Action for Africa. Both a new **Strategic Plan** and a new **Plan of Action for Africa** for the period 2019 – 2027- will be presented to Parties for adoption at the conference. Both plans are designed so that their implementation will contribute to achieving the UN Biodiversity Targets and the Sustainable Development Goals.

At MOP7 delegates will also address for the first time, priority actions for seabird conservation. Seabirds are one of the most threatened groups of birds worldwide. To address threats to seabirds such as plastic pollution, oil spills, mining, illegal killing, human disturbance, wind turbines, overfishing, bycatch, invasive predators and climate change, priority actions for seabirds under AEWA will be recommended.

A total of **14 resolutions** will be considered for adoption by AEWA Parties at MOP7, including on the topic of Single Species Action Plans, Climate Resilient Flyways or Monitoring of Waterbirds. The delegates will also consider a number of new reports such as the **7th Conservation Status Report (CSR)** and ***Plastics and Waterbirds: Incidence and Impacts*** will be presented.

During today’s opening ceremony, the AEWA Waterbird Conservation Awards were presented to the **Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency** and to **Mr. Ohad Hatzofe** an Avian Ecologist of the Israel Nature and Parks Authority. The award recognizes both institutions and individuals who have made a significant contribution towards long-term conservation and sustainable use of waterbirds in the African-Eurasian region.

At the closure of the opening ceremony, David Alan Stroud (Great Britain) was declared Honorary Patron of AEWA for the life-long dedication to international waterbird and wetlands conservation and for his significant contribution towards the development, growth and strong scientific underpinning of the Agreement.

During a special event taking place later in the conference, Norway and the European Commission will be recognized as **Migratory Species Champions** for their long-term support for initiatives that benefit migratory birds' conservation.

A total of **18 side events** on a range of topics will take place over the course of the meeting, both during the lunch breaks and in the evenings. The conference will be open to the media for the duration of the meeting and watched closely by a number of prospective Parties to the Agreement, with the Central African Republic being the next country to join the AEWA in 1 January 2019.

To date seventy-seven countries and the European Union have signed the environmental treaty, which has a geographic range covering a total of 119 countries across Africa, Europe, the Middle East, Central Asia, Greenland and the Canadian Archipelago.