

MALAWI JOINS UN CONVENTION FOR PROTECTING MIGRATORY SPECIES

Embargoed until 1st September 2019

Malawi has taken a significant step forward in its conservation efforts by joining the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS). Part of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), CMS provides a global platform for the conservation of migratory animals and their habitats.

Malawi will be the 129th Party to join CMS when it formally becomes part of the Convention on 1st September 2019. On the same date, Malawi will also join the Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA), an intergovernmental treaty dedicated to the conservation of migratory waterbirds which was developed under the framework of the CMS.

Malawi's biodiversity includes a rich range of migratory species, including birds, bats and mammals such as cheetahs, elephants and wild dogs. More than 650 bird species have been identified in Malawi, 20% of which are migratory from Europe and Asia. Malawi is located on the Rift Valley / Red Sea Flyway, which links European breeding grounds with African wintering areas and is used by 1.5 million birds. Migratory birds are crucial to maintaining healthy ecosystems, particularly in agricultural landscapes where they control pest populations. And yet these species face threats from human activities such as hunting, deforestation and poor waste management practices.

Other important migratory species within Malawi include the straw-coloured fruit bat, which plays a significant role in reforesting African woodlands by disseminating seeds from the fruit they consume across wide areas of land. Hunting has, however, driven this species into serious population decline and they are now classified as 'near extinction'.

Brighton Kumchedwa, Director of the Department for National Parks and Wildlife, said: "The migratory species that pass through Malawi are part of our country's rich natural heritage. We are committed to working in collaboration with the other parties to the Convention and AEWA to safeguard these birds and other animals."

Ian Redmond OBE, CMS Ambassador, said: "Congratulations to the Government and people of Malawi. It is wonderful news that Malawi has acceded to the CMS. Malawi sits on the vast flyway, used by migrating birds to journey back and forth from Europe and Asia to Southern Africa every year, and also shares contiguous habitat with three neighbouring countries. Clearly it is important to coordinate conservation action so that animals, such as elephants, bats and lions, moving to and fro across the border can be protected throughout their home range. Having had the good fortune to meet some of the dedicated rangers and wildlife scientists working on the ground in Malawi, it is great to know that their work now links with colleagues in the neighbouring and distant countries that migrating animals call home at different times of the year."

Jonny Vaughan MBE, CEO of Lilongwe Wildlife Trust, said: "Lilongwe Wildlife Trust is committed to protecting Malawi's wild animals and wild places. We are thrilled to have supported the Government of Malawi's application to join this important body, which will strengthen global conservation efforts across international borders."

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About the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species (CMS)

The Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) aims to conserve terrestrial, aquatic and avian migratory species throughout their range. It is an intergovernmental treaty, concluded under the aegis of UNEP, concerned with the conservation of wildlife and habitats on a global scale. Since the Convention's entry into force in 1979, its membership has grown steadily to include Parties from Africa, Central and South America, Asia, Europe and Oceania. www.cms.int

About the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA)

The Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA) is an intergovernmental treaty dedicated to the conservation of migratory waterbirds that migrate along the African-Eurasian Flyway. The Agreement covers 255 species of bird ecologically dependent on wetlands for at least part of their annual cycle. The treaty covers 119 Range States from Europe, parts of Asia and Canada, the Middle East and Africa. www.unep-aewa.org

About Lilongwe Wildlife Trust

Lilongwe Wildlife Trust (LWT), established in 2009, is a Malawi-based conservation NGO working to protect Malawi's biodiversity for the benefit of its people and wildlife. In collaboration with local and international partners, LWT responds to urgent conservation challenges as well as driving long-term social and institutional change across a number of areas including illegal wildlife trade, deforestation and plastic pollution. LWT has been appointed by the Government of Malawi to administer a number of national wildlife management, justice, and advocacy initiatives, and it is also a member of the International Union for Conservation of Nature, the Malawi representative for the Species Survival Network, and the Secretariat for the Malawi Parliamentary Conservation Caucus. For more information visit www.lilongwewildlife.org.

