



## **NATIONAL REPORT**

# **BELGIUM**

Period 2002 - 2004

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**AGREEMENT ON THE CONSERVATION OF AFRICAN-EURASIAN MIGRATORY  
WATERBIRDS (The Hague, 1995)**

**Implementation during the period 2002-2004**

**Contracting Party: BELGIUM**

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**BELGIUM**

## Table of Contents

<b>1. Overview of Action Plan implementation</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>2. Species conservation</b>	<b>10</b>
Legal measures	10
Single Species Action Plans	18
Emergency measures	22
Re-establishments	23
Introductions	23
<b>3. Habitat conservation</b>	<b>25</b>
Habitat inventories	25
Conservation of areas	27
Rehabilitation and restoration	31
<b>4. Management of human activities</b>	<b>34</b>
Hunting	34
Eco-tourism	36
Other human activities	37
<b>5. Research and monitoring</b>	<b>38</b>
Status of research and monitoring programmes for species	38
<b>6. Education and information</b>	<b>41</b>
Training and development programmes	41
Raising public awareness	41
<b>7. Final comments</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>8. Progress to implement Resolutions and Recommendations of the Meeting of the Parties</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>9. OPTIONAL SECTION – Planned and future actions</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>List of abbreviations and acronyms used in the report</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>Appendices</b>	<b>51</b>
Appendix 1: Status of Single Species Action Plans	51
Appendix 2: List of sites of international importance	51
Appendix 3: Status of management plans for sites of international importance	52
Appendix 4: List of research and monitoring programmes and projects	52
Appendix 5: List of national institutions involved in migratory waterbird conservation	53

Appendix 6:	List of relevant World Wide Web addresses for national institutions involved in migratory waterbird conservation	54
Appendix 7:	List of relevant migratory waterbird and habitat conservation projects initiated, ongoing or completed in the last three years	55

## 1. Overview of Action Plan implementation

### 1.1 Summary of progress to date

#### **Federal level: Belgian marine territory + national ratification**

The Belgian marine territory, starting from the baseline (MLLWS) is a Federal/national competence, Nature protection in these areas is thus a Federal competence.

Nature conservation on land is a competence of the three administrative regions of Belgium: the Flemish Region (Flanders), the Walloon Region (Wallonia) and the Brussels Capital Region (BCR). See below.

The formal undersigning for overall national ratification of treaties and agreements with mixed competences, such as AEWA, is also a federal competence. The procedure for ratification by the Federal Government, related to their competence for the marine territory is underway. It is foreseen to happen during the last months of 2005, however.

The ratification procedure by the administrative Regions has been finalized since a while. Thus, as soon as the process of the Federal procedure is completed, accession to AEWA can be formalized.

**Flemish Region:** The Flemish Region is obviously the most important of the three Belgian administrative regions when it comes to the numbers and distribution of the waterbird species covered by AEWA.

The general low lying character of Flanders, at the western end of the North-West European Plain, and the presence of slow moving rivers and broad floodplains are an indication for its wetland potential. The combination of these landscape features with the relatively mild winters make it an area of high importance for wetland birds.

For the Flemish Region, the AEWA-agreement was approved by the Flemish Parliament through the Decree of May 14, 2003. Ratification by the Flemish Government followed on May 23, 2003.

**Walloon Region:** The Decree on the Conservation of Natura 2000 sites, wild flora and fauna (Décret du 6 décembre 2001 relatif à la conservation des sites Natura 2000 ainsi que de la faune et de la flore sauvages), modifying the law on Nature Conservation of July 12, 1973 entered in force on January 22, 2002 (further called Natura 2000 Decree in this report). It lead to the preliminary designation of 240 Natura 2000 sites covering 220.944 ha (approximately 13% of the Walloon territory). These designation mechanisms need to be continued in the following years. The Natura 2000 sites designation was a major step for nature conservation as before these designations only approximately 0.5 % of the Walloon territory had a nature protection status. The goal of this network is to protect Habitats and Species of Community interest and breeding, wintering and migration sites for birds. In the Walloon Region 44 habitats of community interest (of which 10 are priority habitats),

101 bird species of community interest and 31 other species of community interest are present. The network is based on the hydrological network.

Rivers and wetlands are well represented and will have specific management measures for migrating species.

**Brussels Capital region:** The Brussels Capital Region holds a distinctive position due to its limited area (+/-160 km<sup>2</sup>) and its very high urbanization level, high population density, tight infrastructure network and intense economic activity. No locations of international importance for waterbirds do occur. Nevertheless, the Brussels Institute for Management of the Environment puts a lot of energy in the conservation and restoration of the Blue network (as a part of the nature policy in the Brussels Capital Region).

The decree to approve the AEWA-agreement was validated by the Brussels Council on November 28, 2003 and ratified by the Brussels Government on December 5, 2003.

### *1.2 Outline of planned actions for national implementation over the next three years*

#### **Flemish Region:**

- There are plans for the revision of the Special Protection Areas (SPA's) that have been designated in view of the EU Birds Directive (79/409/EEC).
- There are plans for an extension of the number areas designated under the Ramsar Treaty.

**Walloon Region:** The Walloon Government plans to adopt an executive decision in order to phase out the use of lead shot for hunting in the vicinity of wetlands.

**Brussels Capital Region:** The plan is to continue the current policy, with extra attention to non-native species

### *1.3 Outline of priorities for international co-operation over the next three years*

- The Flemish Region gives technical and financial support for the publication of the wader atlas, similar to the publication that has been made about the swans, geese and ducks of the Agreement area (Scott D. & Rose P.M., 1996, 'Atlas of Anatidae Populations in Africa and Western Eurasia'). This wader atlas will be about the development of wader populations in the African-Eurasian region.  
This publication will be of immediate relevance to AEWA. It builds on, and will give added value to, data from many African and European wader sites. It will provide important information about the distribution and



the flyways of waders, pointing at important ecological concerns along the flyways and make proposals for solving these problems.

- The Institute of Nature Conservation, a scientific institute of the Flemish Government, is a partner in the FRAGILE project (FRagility of Arctic Goose habitat: Impacts of Land use, conservation, and Elevated temperature). This is a research project funded under the European Commission's Framework 5 Programme (RTD priority 2.2.1: Ecosystem Vulnerability), with a collaboration between 13 research groups from six European countries. A three-year programme of research started in January 2003. The purpose of this study is to provide stakeholders with a predictive framework of outcomes for fragile tundra ecosystems in relation to European land-use policy, goose conservation and management, and the effect of climate change acting in tandem with these factors.
- The extension and further implementation of cross-boundary projects for nature rehabilitation and management in the coastal zone, the Yzer river and Schelde river estuaries and the Grensmaas river. These are all sites of high importance for migratory waterbird species.
- The development of the conservation objectives for the Birds Directive Special Protection Areas (SPA's) and Ramsar sites, as well as for other wetlands of international importance.

## 2. Species conservation

### Legal measures

*2.1 Has a national policy/strategy or legislation to protect and conserve species covered by the Agreement (Table 1: column A; column B) and their supporting important areas been developed?*

Belgium is a federal country. Nature conservation in a broad sense has been under de jurisdiction of the regions since 1980 except at sea which is a federal territory. The development of national policies/strategies or legislation is thus also the responsibility of the three Belgian regions: Flanders, Wallonia and the Brussels Capital Region (BCR).

**Belgian Marine Territory (federal):** the legislation to ensure environmental protection of the Belgian part of the North Sea is found in the federal Law of January 20, 1999 on the protection of the marine environment in sea areas under Belgian jurisdiction. This is a framework law, dealing with both pollution and nature conservation at sea.

A section of this law is dedicated to species protection. The Belgian part of the North Sea is an important area for breeding, migrating and wintering species covered by the Agreement. This species protection provisions are further developed in the Royal Executive Decision of December 21, 2001.

**Flemish Region:** there is no specific policy/strategy or legislation for the species covered by the Agreement.

Notwithstanding, *legislation* for the direct protection of some of the species covered by the Agreement has been developed, in the form of the Royal Executive Decision of September 9, 1981 (a). This decision is not specifically for waterbird species covered by the Agreement. It covers all bird species occurring in the Flemish region and the European Union as a whole.

There is also legislation for the protection of important areas for birds, including waterbird species covered by the Agreement (b). Specifically aimed at waterbirds, there is the Royal Executive Decision of September 27, 1984, for the designation of wetlands of international importance. This is the implementation of the Ramsar Convention on wetlands. Moreover, the Flemish Government Decision of October 17, 1988 has designated a number of Special Protection Areas for birds in Flanders, based on the provisions of the EU Birds Directive 79/409/EEC; quite a few of these areas are mainly designated for their strong importance for waterbirds. Finally, there is the Decree of October 21, 1997 on nature conservation and the natural environment (in short: the Nature Conservation Decree), which is a considerable progress for a better and more efficient nature conservation policy in Flanders, including the conservation of species of international importance, Birds Directive Special Protection Areas (SPA's) and wetland areas (c).

To ensure a proper transposition of the European Union Birds and Habitats Directives, new aspects were included in the Nature Conservation Decree as changed on July 19, 2002.

A plan has also been developed to undertake swift and efficient action when future incidents should occur at the coast in which large numbers of birds are the victim of oiling (d).

**Walloon Region:** See below: 2.1.a.

**Brussels Capital Region:** The decree to approve the AEWA-agreement was validated by the Brussels Council on November 28, 2003 and ratified by the government on December 5, 2003.

According to the Decree of August 28, 1991 concerning the protection of the wild fauna and concerning hunting, all species of (...), birds, (...), occurring in the wild (...) are protected. Hunting is not allowed (article 2).

*If so:*

a. *What are the main features of the policy/legislation?*

**Belgian Marine Territory (federal):** The Law of January 20, 1999 deals both with marine pollution and with nature conservation at sea. It covers both direct species protection and indirect habitat protection. The Royal Executive Decision of December 21, 2001 specifically offers protection to a set of species, further developing the Law. It covers a considerable number of waterbird species that use the North Sea area: divers *Gaviidae*, grebes *Podicipedidae*, scoters *Melanitta species*, Common Eider *Somateria mollissima*, terns *Sterna species* and plovers *Charadriidae*. The Belgian part of the North Sea is an important area for breeding, migrating and wintering species covered by the Agreement. This legislation also regulates the aspect of introduction of non-native species into the sea.

**Flemish Region:**

a) Concerning the direct protection covered by the Royal Executive Decision of September 9, 1981.

Waterbird species covered by the Agreement have full protection except for two species of gulls that can be controlled under certain circumstances and for those species that are included in the Hunting Decree of July 24, 1991.

The two gull species are Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus* and Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*. These have only partial protection. These can be controlled year round for reasons of air traffic safety and public health on civil and military airports and on one specified open dump, if there is no other satisfying solution (article 4 of the Royal Executive Decision). The Agreement species covered by the Hunting Decree and thus not protected by the Royal Executive Decision are: Bean Goose *Anser fabalis*, White-

fronted Goose *Anser albifrons*, Pink-footed Goose *Anser brachyrhynchus*, Gadwall *Anas strepera*, Common Teal *Anas crecca*, Shoveler *Anas clypeata*, Pintail *Anas acuta*, Garganey *Anas querquedula*, Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*, Greater Scaup *Aythya marila*, Pochard *Aythya ferina*, Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*, Eurasian Golden plover *Pluvialis apricaria*, Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* and Jack Snipe *Lymnocyptes minimus*.

All other waterbird species covered by the Agreement are protected as followed.

- Article 3 of the Royal Executive Decision: it is always and everywhere prohibited to kill and transport specimens of these species, recognizable parts of specimens or products obtained from these species. It is prohibited to disturb or destroy occupied nests or nests in the building phase of these species. Even so, it is prohibited to photograph these species at or near their nests.
- Article 5 of the Royal Executive Decision: it is always and everywhere prohibited to possess, to sell, to buy, to have in store for sale, to offer for sale or to request for sale any specimen of these species, recognizable parts of specimens or products obtained from these species.
- Exceptions to these protection principles are possible.
  - 1°. Captive bred species, listed in Annex I tot the Royal Executive Decision, which includes many species of Anatidae as well as a few Ardeidae and one species each of the Pelecanidae, Threskiornidae, Rallidae and Gruidae, are not covered by the above protection. Such birds do have to wear a closed foot ring which complies with the provisions set out for such rings in the Annex IV of the Ministerial Decision of September 14, 1981 on the keeping of birds covered by the Royal Executive Decision of September 9, 1981 (article 7 ter of the Royal Executive Decision). The closed foot rings in question can only be attached to very young bird pulli, thus preventing the taking of birds from the wild.
  - 2°. Captive bred specimens of other species than Anatidae can also be kept in captivity under the condition that they wear a closed foot ring which complies with the provisions set out for such rings in the Annex IV of the Ministerial Decision of September 14, 1981 on the keeping of birds covered by the Royal Executive Decision of September 9, 1981. These species can only be bred if the breeder is in possession of a legally kept breeding pair, according to the provisions above. These birds have to be included to an inventory and every single bird has to have an individual identification card. (article 7 bis of the Royal Executive Decision). The closed foot rings in question can only be attached to very young bird pulli, thus preventing the taking of birds from the wild.
  - 3°. The Minister competent for bird protection can give a derogation from the initial protection for the following reasons:
    - for the sake of public health and public safety
    - for the sake of air traffic safety
    - to prevent important damage to crops, cattle, forests, fisheries and surface waters

- for the protection of fauna and flora.
  - Exceptions to these above mentioned exceptions:
    - 1°. article 7 bis and article 7 ter of the Royal Executive Decision: eggs of any of these species can not be traded or transported.
    - 2°. Article 7 bis of the Royal Executive Decision: bird traders can not possess these captive birds.
- b) Concerning the protection of supporting important areas of species covered by the Agreement.
- 1) The Royal Executive Decision of September 27, 1984, for the designation of wetlands of international importance designates four areas in Flanders considered to be wetlands of international importance. These four areas cover a total of 5.571 hectares. This decision is the implementation of the Ramsar Convention on wetlands.
- 2) The Flemish Government Decision of October 17, 1988 for the designation of Special Protection Areas in the sense of article 4 of the EU Birds Directive 79/409/EEC, has designated 23 such Special Protection Areas (SPA's) in total in Flanders. The total area covered by these SPA's is 97.745 hectares.
- c) The actual protection of the areas designated by the above mentioned decisions is included in the Nature Conservation Decree of October 21, 1997, as changed on July 19, 2002. The purpose of this decree is the development of a Flemish Ecological Network. Relevant in the sense of important areas for Agreement species are the following provisions of this decree.
- Article 2, 20° specifies the definition of wetlands: areas with marsh, fens, bogs and other water areas, of natural or artificial origin, with a temporary or lasting character, with stagnant or running water, fresh, brackish or salt, including sea water, of which the depth is less than 6 meter at low tide.
  - Article 2, 21° specifies the definition of wetlands of international importance: wetlands that have been designated in accordance with Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, signed in Ramsar on February 2, 1971.
  - Article 13 § 1, 1° stresses that the Flemish Government can take all necessary nature conservation measures in a number of designated areas for the protection, the conservation, the development and the restoration of natural and semi-natural habitats and ecosystems, including wetlands.
  - Article 13 § 1, 3° stresses that the Flemish Government can take all necessary nature conservation measures for the protection, the conservation and the development of the native wild fauna and flora and for migrating wild animals and their habitats.
  - Article 18: hydrological management measures to be taken in the Flemish Ecological Network includes the reduction of drying out threats for these areas, the restoration of natural areas that have dried out, and the management of watercourses for the conservation and rehabilitation of their natural values, in a way that areas outside the Network do not

- undergo disproportionate effects.
- Article 19: The Flemish Government decides about the projects, plans or activities with direct hydrological effect on areas of the Network, for which the initiator or the watercourse manager concerned is required to carry out hydrological studies, in collaboration with the Institute of Nature Conservation, including the ecological effect, with a view to take effective measures and to achieve a better balance of effects with the present and potential natural elements.
  - The preservation, restoration and/or adjusting of natural elements of high natural quality of the hydrological regime, such as the water quality, the water quantity and the natural structure of watercourses and their peripheral areas in a way that the surrounding areas outside the Network do not undergo disproportionate effects.
- d) A huge incident in the winter of 2002/2003, in which thousands of birds fell victim to oil being spilled into the North Sea after several accidents with ships, provoked the drawing of an action plan to deal with similar incidents in the future. This action plan is a co-operation between the Belgian federal government and the Flemish regional government. This plan should make sure that, when similar incidents would happen in the future, swift and efficient action can be taken by all relevant authorities and parties. This includes efficiently dealing with the beached birds, taking care of the birds, rehabilitating the birds, releasing the birds, monitoring the incident and its impact, co-operation between the relevant parties (both government and non-governmental),...
- The North Sea, including the parts of it within Belgian territorial waters, is of high importance to many species of waterbirds, including many that are covered by the Agreement.

**Walloon Region:** All wild birds of the European continent, normal or mutant, alive, dead or stuffed are strictly protected (art. 2. of the Natura 2000 Decree).

The following actions are prohibited for these species:

- all forms of deliberate capture and deliberate killing;
- the deliberate disturbance of wild birds, particularly during the period of breeding, rearing and hibernation;
- the deliberate destruction or taking of eggs and nests from the wild or keeping these eggs and nests ;
- to possess, to trade, to sell, to give, to buy, to transport, even for transit, birds, eggs, clutch, feathers, part of the animal, or any product made of a bird easily identifiable or any product with a packing telling it contains protected species, except for importation, exportation and transit on non indigenous species

These prohibitions are not valid for poultry, for domestic pigeons, for hunted species and for mutants and hybrids of *Serinus canarius* with a non-protected species.

A Government executive decision regulates the breeding of birds in order to guarantee the bird's protection.

b. Which organisations are responsible for implementation?

**Belgian Marine Territory (federal):** the Federal Public Service for Health, Safety of the food chain and Environment, Directorate General for environment..

**Flemish Region:** Ministry of the Flemish community, Nature Division.

**Walloon Region:** The Nature and Forest Department of the Walloon Region.

**Brussels Capital Region:** Brussels Institute for Management of the Environment (BIME)

c. How does it relate to other national initiatives (e.g. national Biodiversity Action Plans)?

**Flemish Region:** Species protection and habitat rehabilitation and protection for Birds Directive Special Protection Sites (SPA's) and Ramsar sites are included as priority actions under the Theme 'Biodiversity' of the Environment and Nature Policy Plan, covering the period 2003-2007. The overall objectives of this Theme are given by the Countdown 2010 objective for biodiversity, and includes the main strategy lines for the implementation of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity, agreed on the 1992 Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit.

**Walloon region:** The Nature and Forest Department of the Walloon Region is responsible for the Biodiversity action plan, which is in preparation.

2.2 What legal measures or practices has your country developed to prohibit or regulate for the following (refer also to section 4 on hunting):

a. *Taking of, and trade in birds listed in Column A and B of Table 1 (where utilization or trade contravenes the provisions set out in paragraphs 2.1.1 (a) and 2.1.2 of the Action Plan)?*

**Belgian Marine Territory (federal):** The Law of January 20, 1999 prohibits the hunting of any bird species at sea. More specifically, the Law of January 20, 1999 and the Royal Executive Decision of December 21, 2001 fully prohibit any taking or trading of the birds that have been listed in the Royal Executive Decision: divers *Gaviidae*, grebes *Podicipedidae*, scoters *Melanitta species*, Common Eider *Somateria mollissima*, terns *Sterna species* and plovers *Charadriidae*.

**Flemish Region:**

**Column A:** wild specimens of bird species listed in Column A all have full protection in Flanders. Taking of wild birds and their eggs and trade in these birds, their eggs and recognizable parts of these birds are not allowed.

Captive bred specimens of the species mentioned in Column A can be held in captivity and trade in and transport of these captive birds is also allowed. Trade in and transport of eggs of

these captive birds is not allowed however.

**Column B:** One species of Column B can be hunted in Belgium, namely the Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*. The hunting status of this species is specific and very limited however, since strictly confined to civil and military airports, in the interests of air traffic safety and where there is no other satisfactory solution. The Hunting Decree prohibits the taking, the deliberate destruction, the transportation and the trade in eggs and nests of this species.

The taking from the wild of specimens and the taking of their eggs of all other species in Column B is forbidden. Trade in and transport of these species is also forbidden. This latter prohibition is unconditional for species covered by the Hunting Decree. For all the other species, trade and transport of legally held *captive bred* specimens is allowed. Captive bred specimens of every species can also be kept in captivity. However, trade in and transport of eggs of these captive birds is not allowed. See also the answer to question 2.1 a ('main features of legislation') for further specifications: a closed foot ring should guarantee that the bird is captive bred.

Species of Column B which also occur in the Hunting Decree are: Pink-footed goose *Anser brachyrhynchus*, Gadwall *Anas strepera*, Shoveler *Anas clypeata*, Pintail *Anas acuta*, Garganey *Anas querquedula*, Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*, Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* and Jack Snipe *Lymnocyptes minimus*.

**Walloon region:** The following actions are prohibited for all wild birds of the European continent (art. 2. of the Natura 2000 Decree):

- all forms of deliberate capture and deliberate killing;
- to possess, to trade, to sell, to give, to buy, to transport, even for transit, birds, eggs, clutch, feathers, part of the animal, or any product made of a bird easily identifiable or any product with a packing telling it contains protected species, except for importation, exportation and transit on non indigenous species

These prohibitions are not valid for poultry, for domestic pigeons, for hunted species and for mutants and hybrids of *Serinus canarius* with a non-protected species.

The Law on Hunting identifies as waterfowl the following species which are in the annex 2 of the agreement: Pink-footed Goose *Anser brachyrhynchus*, White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons*, Greylag Goose *Anser anser*, Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope*, Gadwall *Anas strepera*, Common Teal *Anas crecca*, Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*, Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*, Garganey *Anas querquedula*, Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata*, Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*, Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*, Greater Scaup *Aythya marila*, Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*, Common Coot *Fulica atra*, Eurasian Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria*, Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*, Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* and Jack Snipe *Lymnocyptes minimus*.

Hunt is not open for the following species, but their destruction is authorized to insure air safety : Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*, Garganey *Anas querquedula*, Gadwall *Anas strepera*, White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons*, Greylag Goose *Anser anser*, Pink-footed Goose *Anser brachyrhynchus*, Bean Goose *Anser fabalis*, Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*, Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*, Greater Scaup *Aythya marila*, Canada Goose *Branta canadensis*, Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*, Jack Snipe *Lymnocyptes minimus*,



Eurasian Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria*, Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*, Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* (arrêté du Gouvernement wallon du 18 octobre 2002).

Shooting season is open for 2001-2006 for the following species: Common Teal *Anas crecca*, Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope*, Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* and Common Coot *Fulica atra*. (from the 15/10 to the 31/01 for Common Teal *Anas crecca*, Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope* et Common Coot *Fulica atra*, from the 15/08 to the 31/01 for Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*).

*b. Methods of taking?*

**Belgian Marine Territory (federal):** Since no taking of birds is allowed in the marine areas under federal jurisdiction, no provision are made about the methods of taking.

**Flemish Region:**

a) According to the Flemish Government Decision on hunting in the Flemish Region for the period from 1 July 2003 to 30 June 2008, the following methods of taking waterbirds are allowed:

- hunting with guns
- hunting with birds of prey kept for falconry.

Besides these, the following other methods are explicitly prohibited by the Hunting Decree of July 24, 1991: nets, snares, bait, poison or any other device useful to catch or kill huntable species or to make the catching and killing of these species easier.

The use of living decoy birds is also explicitly prohibited by the Flemish Government Decision on hunting in the Flemish Region for the period from 1 July 2003 to 30 June 2008.

b) For the two other species for which the taking is legally allowed, namely the Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus* and the Herring Gull *Larus argentatus* (see answer a) to question 2.1.a)), the following methods of taking can be exercised according to the Royal Executive Decision of September 9, 1981:

- hunting with guns
- scaring devices
- hunting with birds of prey kept for falconry.

Besides these, the following methods are explicitly prohibited by the Royal Executive Decision:

- snares, lime, hooks, blinded or mutilated living birds used as decoys, taping and electrocution devices
- artificial light sources, mirrors and other light related devices
- explosives
- nets, traps, poisoned or anaesthetic bait
- automatic or semi-automatic guns of which the magazine can hold more than two cartridges.

**Walloon region:** For Common Teal *Anas crecca*, Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope*, Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* and Common Coot *Fulica atra* shooting is authorized

c. *Setting of taking limits and monitoring these limits?*

**Belgian Marine Territory (federal):** Since no taking of birds is allowed in the marine areas under federal jurisdiction, no provision are made about this aspect.

**Flemish Region:** For the huntable species, covered by the Hunting Decree, the Flemish Government settles at least every five years, in a Flemish Government Decision, the limits of taking. This includes which species can be taken under which conditions, during what time of the year, and which methods can be used.

For the non-huntable species that can be taken, namely both gull species mentioned above, the limits are set in the Royal Executive Decision of September 9, 1981. The relevant provision in this decision indicates under which conditions the birds can be taken, by who, during what time of the year, by who and which methods can be used.

**Walloon region:** There is no game harvest plan for waterfowl species.

d. *Sustainable hunting of species listed in Categories 2 and 3 (and marked by an asterisk) in Column A only?*

**Belgian Marine Territory (federal):** Since no taking of birds is allowed in the marine areas under federal jurisdiction, no provision are made about this aspect.

**Flemish Region:** No species in Column A is a huntable species in the Flemish Region.

**Walloon Region:** No species in Column A is a huntable species in the Walloon region.

e. *Exemptions to the provisions set out in paragraphs 2.1.1, 2.1.2 and 2.1.3?*

**Belgian Marine Territory (federal):** Similar to the provisions set out in paragraph 2.1.3 of the Action Plan, the Royal Executive Decision of December 21, 2001 has a provision that allows the minister competent for the marine environment to differ temporarily from the initial protection of birds in the marine areas, if there is no other satisfactory solution.

Such exceptions can be made for the following reasons:

- for the protection of the wild fauna and flora and the conservation of natural habitats and biodiversity
- for the sake of public health, air traffic safety, public safety and other reasons of great public importance
- to prevent damage to crops, fishing areas and other properties
- for reasons of research and education, as well as reintroduction.

**Flemish Region:** Similar to the provisions set out in paragraph 2.1.3 of the Action Plan, the Royal Executive Decision of September 9, 1981 has a provision that allows the minister competent for bird protection or a public servant empowered hereto by the minister to differ temporarily from the initial protection of wild birds, if there is no other satisfactory solution. Such exceptions can be made for the following reasons:

- for the sake of public health and public safety
- for the sake of air traffic safety
- to prevent important damage to crops, cattle, forests, fisheries and surface waters
- for the protection of fauna and flora.
- for purposes related to science and education

**Walloon Region:** The Government can give exemptions to bird species protection measures (art. 5. §1<sup>er</sup>).

The exemption is only given if no other satisfactory measure exists and if the exemption will not be of any danger for the population of that species. In that case, the exemption can be allowed for one of the following reasons:

- in the interest of public health and public safety,
- in the interest of air traffic safety
- to prevent serious damage to crops, livestock, forests, fisheries and water
- for the protection of flora and fauna
- for the purposes of research and education, of repopulating, of reintroduction and for the necessary breeding;
- to permit, under strictly supervised conditions, on a selective basis and to a limited extent, the taking, keeping or other judicious exploitation of certain wild birds in small numbers.

## Single Species Action Plans

2.3 Of the species covered by the Agreement (species listed in Table 1: column A), which spend part or all of their life history in your country, which have formal international (Category 1, species marked with an asterisk) or national (column A) Single Species Action Plans:

- a. Proposed?
- b. In preparation?
- c. Being implemented?

Please append a list of species and their action plan status. (For international plans indicate which other countries are involved in plan development/implementation.)

### International SSAP's

On behalf of the European Commission, Birdlife International has set up a number of Species Action Plans for some of Europe's most threatened bird species. These plans are already in the *implementation phase*, with a recent (July 2004) review of these plans been carried out. Only a limited number of species for which such a plan has been developed spend (a part of) their life history in Belgium. Most of them are very rare. The other countries involved in the implementation of these plans are the Member States of the European Union.

The species of this group that spend a part of their life time in Belgium are:

- **Great Bittern** *Botaurus stellaris*: this is a very rare breeding bird (most recent population estimate: 12-20 pairs).
- **Lesser White-fronted Goose** *Anser erythropus*: this is a very rare but yearly visitor, mixed in with other goose species in traditional goose wintering areas. Measures for the conservation of more commonly occurring goose species could benefit this species. Given the rarity of Lesser-white Fronted Goose, species-specific actions are not relevant.
- **Red-breasted Goose** *Branta ruficollis*: this is a very rare but yearly visitor, mixed in with other goose species in traditional goose wintering areas. Measures for the conservation of more commonly occurring goose species could benefit this species. Given the rarity of Red-breasted Goose, species-specific actions are not relevant.
- **Corncrake** *Crex crex*: a very rare breeding bird (21-44 breeding pairs in Belgium in the period 1995-2002, the majority being found in the Walloon region).
- **Great Snipe** *Gallinago media*: a very rare passage migrant. Given the rarity of Great Snipe, species-specific actions are not relevant.

Other Single Species Action Plans are initiated by AEWA, as a joint initiative with the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS).

Such a plan has recently been finished for the **Ferruginous Duck** *Aythya nyroca*. In Belgium this is a rare species, occurring on migration and in winter, among flocks of other *Aythya* species. Measures for the conservation of more commonly occurring *Aythya* species could benefit this species. Given the rarity of Ferruginous Duck, species-specific actions are not relevant.

Other countries that belong to the range of this species are: Afghanistan, Albania, Algeria, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Belarus, Belgium, Bhutan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, China, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, France, Gambia, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, India, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Iraq, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Latvia, Lebanon, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Lithuania, Macedonia (former Yugoslav Republic of), Mali, Malta, Mauritania, Moldova (Republic of), Mongolia, Morocco, Myanmar, Nepal, Netherlands, Niger, Nigeria, Oman, Pakistan, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Serbia and Montenegro, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sudan, Switzerland, Syrian Arab Republic, Tajikistan, Thailand, Tunisia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan, Vietnam, and Yemen.

Specific actions of the above mentioned species action plans are included in ongoing SPA or wetland conservation projects.

#### National SSAP's

##### **Flemish Region:**

A national Single Species Action Plan exists for the **White Stork** *Ciconia ciconia*. This is a joint initiative of Natuurpunt (NGO) and the Nature Division of the Ministry of the Flemish Community (government). This action plan is already being implemented since 1999. This plan is aimed at the monitoring of the Flemish breeding population of the White Stork and its migration strategy. It also includes taking measures to increase the population numbers and the raising of public awareness among the general public about the species and its (habitat) requirements. The latter happens through regular website and media information, school web follow up, brochures and leaflets.

A species plan of limited extent also exists for so called '**meadow birds**'. This is not really a single species action plan as such but it does cover a number of species covered by the AEWA Agreement, and thus merits to be mentioned in this respect. The plan includes birds that are dependent of open grassland areas for breeding. This plan is not solely aimed at waterbirds, but the majority of the species concerned do belong to the group of species covered by the Agreement. The plan is a co-operation between the Flemish Land Agency, the Nature Division of the Ministry of the Flemish Community and Natuurpunt (NGO). Important species covered by the plan are Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*, Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa* and Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*.

The plan involves the creation of suitable conditions for these meadow bird species through management agreements under the Rural Development Programme with land users, mainly farmers.

## **Walloon Region:**

Programs have been launched for some bird species:

The **Black Stork** *Ciconia nigra*: the monitoring of the migration of the Black Stork to Africa with Argos beacon. Locally, particular measures of conservation are applicable:

- the control of the disturbances, so that the quietness of the area is insured (nest and its surroundings);
- the non-exploitation of the trees carrying nests or the delay in felling;
- raising public awareness, particularly to the forest and fishing sector, about the importance of the return of the species and its ecological significance;

The **Corncrake** *Crex crex*: There have been two Life Nature projects for the Corncrake (from 1994 to 2001). These projects included an assessment of the state of the population, a network of protected areas favorable to its population, and public awareness campaign (particularly to farmers as their participation is of prior importance for the success of such a project). Approximately 250 hectares have been protected.

Local naturalists keep on monitoring these populations and try to enhance farmers to use some AEM which are of benefit for the corncrake.

**Birds of Reedbeds in “Basin de la Haine” (Life project):** A life Nature aiming at elaborating an action plan for birds of the reedbeds in the Haine river basin. Many of those birds are very rare in Wallonia, such as the Great Bittern *Botaurus stellaris*, the Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus* and other species that are not included in the AEWa agreement. The Life project includes a part on scientific monitoring, creation of new protected areas, management and restoration of habitats, and communication and public awareness actions.

“Les Marais d’Harchies”, “ Etang de Virelles”, and “Lac de Bambois” have nature conservation oriented management measures. These sites are of particular importance for the Walloon populations of Anatidae and Ardeidae.

There is an agreement between naturalists and the management of the Eghezée sugar refinery in order to preserve the sedimentation basin.

## **Emergency measures**

*2.4 Describe any bilateral or multilateral co-operative action that your country has undertaken to develop and implement emergency measures to conserve species in response to unfavourable or endangering conditions occurring in the Agreement area.*

No such bilateral or multilateral co-operative actions have been undertaken until now.

## Re-establishments

2.5 Has a policy on species re-establishments been developed in your country? If yes, please outline the main features of the policy and give details of any re-establishment programmes for species covered by the Agreement.

**Flemish Region:** For the time being there is no specific policy on this topic.

However, proposals have been formulated in the wider scope of a future change in the legislation on species in the Flemish region. Thus, a real policy on re-establishments should hopefully be developed in the near future.

These proposals are inspired by the internationally accepted IUCN/SSC Guidelines For Re-Introductions, set up by the IUCN, the World Conservation Union.

## Introductions

2.6 Has your country developed and implemented legal measures to prohibit the introduction of nonnative species? Please provide details, particularly describing measures to control the release or introduction of non-native species (please indicate which species and their status).

**Belgian Marine Territory (federal):** The Law of January 20, 1999 prohibits the introduction non-native species into Belgian marine areas. Measures can be taken to control or remove non-native species. No such executive measures have been taken yet, however.

**Flemish Region:** Yes, legislative measures have been taken in this respect. The Flemish Governmental Decision of April 21, 1993, on the introduction into the wild of non-native animal species deals with this.

This decision contains two definitions, defining 'non-native animal species' and 'introduction into the wild' (article 1).

- *non-native animal species*: animal species which do not occur in Belgium in the wild under natural circumstances and animal species that have started to occur in the wild in Belgium since less than 50 years from the entry into force of the Decision. An exception is made for animal species that have known a natural range expansion.

- *introduction into the wild*: the deliberate release animals in all sorts of places and all sorts of sites that have not been enclosed by a continuous construction from the adjoining lands, thus making the free access to these lands impossible, no matter what the condition and state of these places and sites are.

The decision prohibits the introduction into the wild of non-native animal species, unless a special permit has been granted (article 2).

Such a special permit will only be granted after it has been assessed what the influence of the requested introduction into the wild would be on the native fauna and ecosystems and after it has been investigated what the chances are of spread into adjoining lands from the

introduction site. These introductions can not be allowed when there would any expected negative influence on the native fauna and flora (article 3).

In order to protect the native flora, the native vegetation and the native fauna, the Flemish minister responsible for nature conservation can take all necessary measures to control or remove non native animals species and their offspring who have been introduced into the wild non-deliberately or as a violation of the Decision of the Flemish Government of April 21, 1993 (article 4 of the Decision).

However, no such executive measures have been taken yet.

Thus, *every* non-native animal species is covered by this regulation. Especially the past 10 years, a considerable number of non-native animal species have started to occur in Flanders, many of them now breeding in the wild and the majority of them being waterbirds. Well known examples are Canada Goose and Egyptian Goose.

**Walloon Region:** The introduction of non-indigenous species or indigenous species of non-indigenous origin into the wild is forbidden except for species used for agriculture and forestry (Natura 2000 Decree).



### 3. Habitat conservation

#### Habitat inventories

*3.1 Has your country developed and published inventories of important habitats for species covered by the Agreement? If yes, please provide details, including any provisions to maintain or update these inventories.*

**Flemish Region:** There have no such specific inventories of important habitats for Agreement species been developed or published.

The Biological Valuation Map is a vegetation and land-use map covering the whole of the Flemish Region. This map gives a good indication of the different habitat types in Flanders but no link has been made yet to bird species covered by the Agreement. At a smaller scale, the relation between vegetation types and wintering geese has been studied in the coastal polders (see 5.1).

This Biological Valuation mapping is a project conducted by the Institute of Nature Conservation, a scientific institute of the Flemish Government.

For the coastal zone and the Schelde river estuary, both being Birds Directive Special Protection Areas (SPA's), studies have been carried out for identifying conservation objectives for species occurring there which are covered by the Birds Directive; most of those are also covered by AEWA.

For all bird species of Annex I of the Birds Directive which occur in Flanders, a species profile has been developed in 2002, by the Institute of Nature Conservation. Such a profile includes: species description, distribution in Europe and in the Flemish region, ecology, legal protection, red list status, threats and references.

**Walloon Region:** Several initiatives have been carried out since the late 70's in order to have an inventory of the biological resources of the Walloon Region. These initiatives have lead to the creation of lists of sites of great biological value ("Sites de Grand Intérêt Biologique" or SGIB). These lists of major sites are of major importance to the elaboration of the ecological network and in order to have a basis for political negotiation.

In 2005, we have 251 Nature reserves (government nature reserve and chartered nature reserve) covering approximately 8.401,4ha, 48 wetland's of biological interest covering ~ 1.036,7 ha, 12 Forest reserves covering 547,9 ha and 61 new underground caves of scientific interest have been designated.

These sites were registered as Sites with high biological value ("Sites de grand intérêt biologique", SGIB). The high biological value of these sites is due to the presence of protected or threatened habitats or species or even sites or species considered as having a great interest from naturalists.

Naturalists associations (Ardenne et Gaume, Aves, Virelles Nature, Réserves Naturelles RNOB) also play a very important role in identifying and protecting important habitats.

**Brussels Capital Region:** No specific inventories of important habitats for Agreement species have been developed or published. A Biological Valuation Map was developed (Brichau et al. 2000), but no links are made towards species covered by the Agreement.

3.2 Has your country undertaken a strategic review of sites to develop a national network of important sites or areas for species covered by the Agreement? Please append a list of identified sites of international importance.

**Flemish Region:** At the Institute of Nature Conservation, a yearly update is made of all wetland sites that hold internationally important numbers of waterbirds (exceeding 1 % criteria), based on the most recent available data. The actual list for Flanders contains 17 sites (species for which the 1 %-criterium has been reached at least once since 1994 are mentioned):

The list below shows the sites and the species reaching the 1 % criteria for every site. It is indicated whether a site is a Birds Directive Special Protection Area (SPA).

Blankaartgebied + IJzerbroeken	SPA	<i>Anser albifrons, Anas penelope, Anas crecca, Anas acuta, Anas clypeata</i>
Oostkustpolders	SPA	<i>Anser brachyrhynchus, Anser albifrons, Anser anser, Anas penelope</i>
Havengebied Zeebrugge		<i>Anser anser, Anas penelope, Anas strepera, Anas acuta, Anas clypeata</i> Breeding: <i>Sterna hirundo, Sterna albifrons, Sterna sandvicensis, Larus fuscus</i>
Zwinstreek Knokke-Heist	SPA	<i>Platalea leucorodia, Anser anser, Anser albifrons</i>
Krekengebied + polders Noord-Oost-Vlaanderen	SPA	<i>Cygnus columbianus, Anser fabalis, Anser albifrons</i>
Bourgoyen-Ossemeersen Drongen		<i>Anser clypeata</i>
Gentse Kanaalzone		<i>Anas strepera, Anas acuta, Anas clypeata, Aythya ferina, Platalea leucorodia</i>
Zeeschelde Gent-Zandvliet	SPA	<i>Anser anser, Anas strepera, Anas crecca, Anas acuta, Aythya ferina, Avosetta recurvirostra</i>
Rivierengebied Mechelen-Willebroek		<i>Anas strepera, Anas clypeata</i>
Netevallei Lier-Duffel		<i>Anas strepera, Aythya ferina</i>
Kanaalzone Wintam - Rupel	SPA	<i>Anas strepera, Anas acuta</i>
De Kuifeend Oorderen	SPA	<i>Anas strepera, Anas clypeata</i>
Blokkersdijk Antwerpen	SPA	<i>Anas strepera, Anas clypeata</i>
Havengebied Antwerpen LO + RO	SPA	<i>Anser anser, Anas penelope, Anas strepera, Anas acuta, Anas clypeata</i> Breeding: <i>Avosetta recurvirostra</i>
Schulensbroek	SPA	<i>Anas strepera</i>
Vijvergebied Midden-Limburg (inclusief Maten)	SPA	<i>Anas strepera, Anas clypeata</i>
Maasvallei (Vlaanderen)		<i>Phalacrocorax carbo, Aythya ferina</i>

**Walloon Region:** There are 4 sites registered on the Ramsar List of wetland's of international importance: "Les Marais d'Harchies Hensies Pommeroel", the "Vallée de la Haute-Sûre", the "Hautes Fagnes" and the "Grotte des Emotions" which are respectively marshes, a transboundary wetland, peatlands and a karst. The 3 first sites are particularly important for migrating waterbirds.

**Brussels Capital region:** There are no sites of international importance for waterbirds in this region. Hence, there is also no network of such sites and no strategic review.

## **Conservation of areas**

*3.3 Describe the legal frameworks and other measures through which sites (including transfrontier sites) including of international importance gain practical protection. (Please append a list of internationally important protected sites.)*

**Belgian Marine Territory (federal):** The Law of January 20, 1999 creates a frame for the protection of marine areas in the North Sea. The designation of several types of protected areas is under finalisation. The administration of the minister responsible for the protection of the marine environment is currently preparing a royal decree on Marine Protected Areas (designation of SPA's and SAC's) .

**Flemish Region:** For the implementation of the EU Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC and the EU Birds Directive 79/409/EEC, protected areas have been designated. For the Habitats Directive, these protected areas are called Special Areas for Conservation (SAC's); for the Birds Directive they are called Special Protection Areas (SPA's). The SAC's cover a total area of 101.891 hectares in Flanders, which is about 7,5 % of the Flemish Region. The SPA's cover a total of 97.745 hectares, which accounts for about 7,2 % of the Flemish Region. There is some overlap in these two types of protected areas: 36 % of the SAC's is located within SPA's. Within these protected areas, applications for permits for construction, changes of vegetation or hydrology have to be assessed properly following the EIA procedures. For each activity, plan or programme that may have a significant impact on the SPA or SAC, namely on the habitats and species for which the site has been designated, an EIA has to be included with the application for a permit. If the EIA indicates a possible significant impact, the permit can not be granted. Derogations have to follow the procedure of article 6 of the Habitats Directive, as transposed in article 36 ter of the Nature Conservation Decree. A derogation can only be granted if the indication that there are no alternatives is accepted and that the activity, project or plan is of overriding public interest. This framework is for all the Special Protection Areas, including the ones that are designated because of their importance for species covered by the Agreement.

In view of the general Flemish spatial planning policy, a Flemish Ecological Network (FEN) has been developed (also see 2.1 a) above). Within this FEN, vegetation and hydrological balance are strictly protected. Moreover, permits that can cause unavoidable and irreversible damage to the natural values can not be granted.

For both SPA's and FEN, Nature Objective Plans, have to be developed. These plans describe site specific objectives and the targets for nature within these protected areas and

the specific measures can be imposed. Applications for permits and the likely have to be assessed against these plans and their targets.

**Walloon Region:**

The protection of habitats is ensured through several statuses in the Walloon Region:

- government and chartered nature reserves
- forest reserves
- wetland areas of biological interest
- underground caves of scientific interest
- Natura 2000 sites
- Ramsar Sites

*3.4 Has your country developed a management planning process for protected sites? If yes, please outline the types of management plans and organisations responsible for development and implementation.*

**Flemish region:**

The following types of protected areas are relevant in relation to AEWA.

- Birds Directive Special Protection Areas (SPA's).
- Habitats Directive Special Areas for Conservation (SAC's).
- Flemish Ecological Network (FEN).
- Nature reserves, both Flemish and private.
- Areas zoned for nature conservation according to the Zoning Plan.
- Protected Landscapes.

There is considerable overlap among these different types of protected areas.

The homologation and designation of reserves is based upon the approval of a management plan for the site. Private individuals and legal persons can also obtain subsidies for the implementation of that site management plan. Such a plan contains an extended area description, a description of the management aims that will be strived for and to which a concrete and detailed plan of the management measures to be implemented are attached.

The overview of the management measures to be implemented has to contain both visions on the aspects of content, as well as perception of the practical aspects including: time planning, actions to be undertaken in certain seasons, budgetary implications, implementation of the management and of the monitoring, as well as a plan opening the site to the public. More attention is paid to the management of coastal areas, collaboration with military authorities for the management of military areas and the drawing-up of management plans for protected landscapes.

The following types of management plans can be mentioned in relation to AEWA, with reference to the responsible authority (between brackets)

- Nature Objective Plans, containing conservation objectives (government).
- Management plans for nature reserves. All reserves must have management plans (government and NGO's).
- Management plans for protected landscapes (government).
- Water management plans for river catchment areas (government).
- Zoning plans (government).

**Walloon region:** Natura 2000 sites will have management plans when their designation legislation will be elaborated. These will be defined from 2006 to 2011.

*3.5 How many protected sites have formal management plans (please append a list of sites and their management planning status):*

- a. Proposed?
- b. In preparation?
- c. Being implemented?

**Flemish Region:** The management plans for some 10.426 hectares of nature reserves still have to be proposed.

For the moment, six Nature Objective Plans are in preparation for larger areas in the SPA/SAC/FEN. About 9.400 hectares of military training areas in which attention will be given for nature values have management plans in preparation. The water management plans for river catchment areas are also under preparation.

For a total of 370 nature reserves, covering 15.531 hectares, some 300 have management which are being implemented.

**Walloon Region:** A management plan is being developed for the Ramsar site of the “Vallée de la Haute Sûre”. The “Marais d’Harchies” Ramsar site has a management plan ready for implementation.

*3.6 What measures does your country have in place to ensure the wise use of wetland habitats and to prevent habitat degradation e.g. pollution control and managing water resources? Please provide examples of best practice initiatives particularly involving cross-sectoral co-operation or public participation.*

**Belgian Marine Territory (federal):** The Law of January 20, 1999 creates a frame for the conservation of the marine areas. It includes five general principles of environmental protection: the principle of preventive action, the principle of precaution, the principle of sustainable management, the principle of the ‘polluter pays’ and the principle of recovery.

**Flemish region:** The Decree on Integral Water Management, being an implementation of the EU Directive 2000/60/EC of 23 October 2000 establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy, is the main legislation in this field.

The aim of this legislation is to reach a good ecological quality in all Flemish surface waters by 2015.

So far, only one executive decision has been taken, however, on the reduction of pollution by dangerous substances.

Water management plans for river catchment areas are under preparation, based on the conservation objectives of the site and the overall objectives for environmental sustainability, one of the priorities being water resources rehabilitation and conservation. A participatory approach for the planning and the implementation process is one of the pillars of this, until now based upon existing co-operation with local authorities and NGO's.

Also see the answer to question 3.3 in this respect.

### **Walloon Region:**

- The Walloon Region has a legal status to protect wetlands: "**Wetlands of Biological Interest**" (Zones Humides d'intérêt biologique, Law of June 8, 1989). This status insures to strictly protect flora and fauna but allows hunting and fishing for the species identified as huntable in the executive decision on Hunting (...).
- The "**Code de l'eau**" was adopted by the Decree of May 27, 2004. This decree insures the transposition of the EU Directive (2000/60/CE), the Water Framework. One of its objectives is to maintain Wetlands ecosystems in a good conservation state. It plans to take measures to elaborate a register of protected areas in each water basin.
- Management measures to protect biodiversity in forest ecosystems (**Circulaire Biodiversité en Forêt**, « Normes de gestion pour favoriser la biodiversité dans les bois soumis au régime forestier ») plans actions to forbid filling up wetlands when building roads in forests.

## Rehabilitation and restoration

3.7 Does your country have a policy for the identification, rehabilitation and restoration of wetlands important for species covered by the Agreement? Please provide examples of rehabilitation and restoration projects and initiatives undertaken.

**Flemish Region:** Considering the identification of wetlands important to Agreement species, the Institute of Nature Conservation makes a yearly update of all wetland sites that hold internationally important numbers of waterbirds (exceeding 1 % criteria), based on the most recent available data.

As for wetland rehabilitation and restoration, there is no comprehensive policy for the whole of Flanders. However, a considerable numbers of initiatives are taken, on various levels, to restore and rehabilitate wetlands.

Hereby included is an extensive, albeit non-exhaustive overview of important projects and initiatives in this field.

- Natura 2000 is the network of Special Protection Areas (SPA's), designed to contribute to the implementation of the two important EU nature directives, the EU Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC and the EU Birds Directive 79/409/EEC. In order help establish an efficient Natura 2000 network, the European Union has set up the LIFE-fund, which provides financial support for nature projects within the SPA's. Several projects in Flanders have also gotten this financial support, and are thus called *LIFE-projects*. Although having a wider scope, projects aimed at waterbirds and their wetland habitats are also included. An important example of this is the LIFE-project 'Uitkerkse Polder'. This is a coastal polder area of high importance to waterbirds, both as breeding and wintering ground, as well as on migration. The project aims at the restoration of the typical old polder grasslands, which provide excellent habitat for thousands of waterbirds. This area is especially important for Pink-footed Goose *Anser brachyrhynchus*, White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons* and Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*.
- The *Long Term Vision for the Schelde river 2030* is an initiative which implies the creation of a development plan for the estuary of the Schelde river. This plan was initially inspired by the need to offer protection from flooding. Gradually, it was realized that wetlands can have a great buffer capacity in this respect and the plan was extended in this respect. The current aim of the plan is to provide safety from flooding, to secure the accessibility of the river for economic purposes and to secure the natural richness of the river. A phased approach to this Long-term Vision has been agreed. The first phase is called the Development Plan 2010; this phase is a co-operative initiative between the Flemish Government and the Netherlands. Wetland rehabilitation and restoration projects covered by this plan are:

→ the enlargement of the Zwin, one of the largest salt marsh areas in Belgium and an important area for wetland birds such as Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*, Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia* and White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons*, along the border with the Netherlands, in the province of West-Vlaanderen (Flanders). The present dikes would be replaced by new dikes further inland, hence restoring wetland areas that are currently reclaimed agricultural polder land.

→ the creation of a 600 hectares wetland in the Kalkense Meersen, along the Schelde river in the province of Oost-Vlaanderen.

- The Nature Conservation Decree of October 21, 1997, provides in so called *Nature Development Projects*. The goal of Nature Development Projects is to conserve the existing natural values in the project area in optimal conditions, as well as to restore and develop nature. These projects are carried out by the Flemish Land Agency; 25 projects are currently underway, several of these aiming at wetland restoration and the creation of habitat for waterbirds. Examples of wetland projects are the following:
  - Nature Development Project Bourgoyen-Ossemeersen (province of Oost-Vlaanderen): relicts of the floodplains of the river Leie, being an important area for migrating and wintering waterfowl, especially Wigeon *Anas penelope*, Common Teal *Anas crecca* and Shoveler *Anas clypeata*.
  - Nature Development Project het Vinne (province of Vlaams-Brabant): includes the restoration of the largest natural freshwater lake of Flanders.
- In order to compensate for the loss of breeding areas for terns in areas predetermined for industrial development in the harbor of Zeebrugge (province of West-Vlaanderen), a '*Tern Island*' has been created within the boundaries of the harbor. This is an artificial site, 7 hectares in size, created and managed specifically to meet the needs of breeding terns. This area is very important in both a Belgian and a European context for Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*, Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis* and Little Tern *Sterna albifrons*. Up to 4 % of the bio-geographical population of Common Tern breeds in this area, together with up to 2 % of the world population of Sandwich Tern!
- Following the extension of the Antwerp harbor within the boundaries of the designated Birds Directive SPA 'Schorren en Polders van de Beneden-Schelde' and the designated Habitats Directive SAC 'Schelde- en Durme-estuarium van de Nederlandse grens tot Gent', a large scale nature development is planned on the *left bank of the Schelde river*. The aim of this project is to ensure the conservation objectives in the above mentioned areas. This project includes the restoration of 450 hectares of reclaimed land, thus leading to the development of a large area of tidal mud and sandflats. The area connects with 'Het Verdronken Land van Saeftinge', just across the border with the Netherlands, the largest area of



raised brackish marsh in Europe. Hence, this very important area will be strongly enlarged.

The total area of restored nature in this area along the left bank of the Schelde will be approximately 1.000 hectares, mainly composed of wetlands. The already existing importance for waterbirds like Greylag Goose *Anser anser*, Wigeon *Anas penelope* and Common Teal *Anas crecca* will only be increased by these measures.

## - 4. Management of human activities

### Hunting

4.1 Outline the main features of legislation or legal measures in your country to control hunting of the species covered by the Agreement (e.g. use of lead shot and poisoned baits, and to eliminate illegal taking).

**Belgian Marine Territory (federal):** Hunting is prohibited in the Belgian marine areas.

**Flemish Region:** The Flemish Government Decision on hunting in the Flemish Region for the period from 1 July 2003 to 30 June 2008, permits the hunting of Greylag Goose *Anser anser*, Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope*, Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*, Common Coot *Fulica atra* and Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*.

The hunt on Greylag Goose is permitted from August 15 to September 30.

The hunt on Wigeon is permitted from October 15 to December 31, but only when serious crop damage has been demonstrated; the hunt is forbidden in so-called "bird-rich areas".

The hunt on Mallard is permitted from September 1 to January 15.

The hunt on Common Coot is permitted from September 15 to January 15, but only on cultures where there has been severe damage by this species on other crops than permanent grassland.

The hunt on Northern Lapwing is strictly limited to airports, in the interests of air traffic safety and where there is no other satisfactory solution.

Hunting of other species covered by the agreement is strictly forbidden.

A total ban on the use of leadshot has been adopted in 2003, by a Flemish Government Decision from September 19, 2003, on the use of firearms and munition during hunting in the Flemish Region. In a temporary provision it is determined that the ban outside some protected areas (e.g. Special Protection Areas from the Bird Directive and Ramsar-wetlands) is only effective from July 1, 2008.

The use of poisoned baits is strictly forbidden by the Flemish Parliament Act on Hunting from July 24, 1991.

**Walloon Region:** Law on Hunting of February 28, 1882) and its executive decisions:

Executive Decision of the Walloon Government of July 17, 2001 gives the dates at which shooting begins and stops from 2001 to 2006.

It is forbidden to sell, to transport for trade and to keep for trade any game caught by falconry, Common Teal *Anas crecca*, Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope* and Common Coot *Fulica atra*.

The use of firearms and ammunition for shooting in the Walloon Region is regulated by the Executive Decision of June 4, 1987.

The Executive Decision of the Walloon Government of October 18, 2002 regulates the destruction of a number game species. This executive decision includes a section on air traffic security for two civil airports and four military airports.

Article 2 §2 of the Law on Nature Conservation forbids trapping, capturing, or killing European wild birds,..., whatever the method used (except for poultry, for domestic pigeons and for mutants and hybrids of *Serinus canarius* with a non-protected species and for hunted species).

The Walloon Government plans to adopt an executive decision in order to phase out the use of lead shot for hunting in the vicinity of wetlands and also to allow archery.

Since 2003, the Walloon region has a unit against poaching (“Unité Anti-Braconnage”, UAB). Its priority mission is the repression of large scale commercial poaching. It can intervene on violations of the Nature Conservation Law, Fishing Law and Forestry Code. 16 police officers, a police captain and administrative staff work in this unit. The files can be initiated by field prospecting, information coming from the local Nature and Forestry sections or from a call center which centralizes requests from nature organizations or private citizens.

**Brussels Capital Region:** Hunting is not allowed, see the answer to question 2.1 above.

*4.2 Does your country monitor hunting levels? If so, how is this information collated and reported?*

Flemish hunters are encouraged to organise themselves in Game Management Units (GMU), which can be recognised and supported. Those GMU’s are obliged to deliver game and bag statistics. The information is handled by a scientific institute from the Flemish government, the Institute for Forestry and Game Management.

*4.3 Describe action undertaken by hunting clubs and organisations to manage hunting activity e.g. cooperative action, issuing of licences and proficiency testing of individual members.*

In order to obtain a hunting license, a Flemish candidate-hunter has to qualify for a hunting examination, in which he demonstrates his theoretical and practical knowledge and his shooting skills.

Hunting organisations are involved in the organisation of the examination.

The organisation in Game Management Units (GMU) increases social control and limits bad behaviour.

## Eco-tourism

*4.4 What is the status of eco-tourism programmes or initiatives in your country? Please provide examples of projects with an indication of the significant outcomes.*

**Belgian Marine Territory (federal):** Voluntary agreements have been set up with recreational organizations with a view to their respect of the natural values of marine protected areas (the designation of which is under finalization). At the same time, a free phone number is also available for all recreants at sea to report e.g. encounters with marine mammals, etc.

**Flemish Region:** There are no specific eco-tourism programs or initiatives aimed at species covered by the Agreement and their habitats.

**Walloon Region:** Several wetland sites offer educational guided tours, educational panels and an environmental education center (Les marais d’Harchies, l’étang de Virelles, les Hautes Fagnes...). Birds are one of the main targets. The nature center of Botrange (in the Hautes-Fagnes) promotes “soft tourism” in order to protect the sites open to visitors.

The development of tourism is one of the goals of Natural Parks in Wallonia. This tourism is to be developed with respect for nature and could be called “green tourism”.

*4.5 What social and economic benefits accrue to the local communities from the conservation of important waterbird sites?*

**Flemish Region:** The conservation and restoration of wetlands is important for the flood control along waterways. By conserving and restoring wetlands, which can serve as reservoirs for superfluous water, the homes and livelihoods of people living along these waterways are being protected from flooding.

In the framework of the agri-environment measures under the EU Rural Development Programme actions to protect nesting meadow birds are financially supported.

## Other human activities

*4.6 Does your country carry out Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) of activities potentially affecting protected sites or areas important for species covered by the Agreement? If yes, briefly describe the main features of your EIA policy and procedures.*

**Belgian Marine Territory (federal):** The obligation of an appropriate environmental impact assessment procedure and licensing regime is adequately met by the royal Decrees (in pursuance of the MMM law of 20/01/1999): the RD of 09/09/2003 establishing the rules related to the environmental impact assessment and the royal decree of the 07/09/2003 establishing the procedures for granting permits and authorisations for some activities in the marine spaces within the jurisdiction of Belgium. The royal decrees provide for a comprehensive regime that is specifically for the marine environment.

**Flemish Region:** A specific procedure for impact assessment and derogation has to be followed for infrastructure projects that may have an impact on FEN sites (art 26bis of the Decree for Nature Conservation) or on Natura 2000 sites (art 36ter, 3-6 of the same Decree that includes the transposition of art. 6 of the EU Habitats Directive). For each EIA study an interdepartmental steering committee is established to ensure proper follow up of issues relevant to each of the concerned sectors.

**Walloon region:**

The Natura 2000 Decree foresees, in its article 29 §2, that each plan or project subject to licensing [...] which is not directly linked to or necessary for the management of a Natura 2000 site, but susceptible to affect the site significantly [...] is subject to an impact assessment as foreseen in the legislation.

- The Environment Code identifies the projects requiring an impact assessment.

*4.7 Please describe the main features of your planning policy and provide examples of practical implementation (e.g. activities to minimising disturbance of species populations or limit the impact of species populations on crops or fisheries). Please summarize any land-use conflicts especially emphasising successful solutions to problems encountered in promoting the wise-use of waterbirds and their habitats.*

**Flemish Region:** An example of a land-use conflict involving waterbirds is the conflict between wintering geese and farmers in the intensive farmland areas of the province of West-Vlaanderen, especially in the northern part of the province. Every winter, tens of thousands of geese stage in this area, mainly White-fronted Geese *Anser albifrons* and Pink-footed Geese *Anser brachyrhynchus*. In order to tackle this conflict, a hunting ban on all goose species was set up, to allow the geese to spread out over a large area. This will spread the grazing pressure and reduce agricultural losses. The increasing amount of naturally managed grasslands will also help to settle this problem by keeping away the geese from more intensively managed agricultural land.

## 5. Research and monitoring

### Status of research and monitoring programmes for species

*5.1 How are priorities for research identified in your country? Please briefly describe your country's research programmes, including any bilateral or multilateral co-operative action, for wetland habitats and for species covered by the Agreement (e.g. studies into species population, ecology and migratory patterns). Please append a list of research activities initiated, ongoing or completed in the last three years.*

#### **Flemish Region:**

- **Geese.** The Institute of Nature Conservation is a partner in the FRAGILE project (FRagility of Arctic Goose habitat: Impacts of Land use, conservation, and Elevated temperature). This is a research project funded under the European Commission's Framework 5 Programme (RTD priority 2.2.1: Ecosystem Vulnerability), with a collaboration between 13 research groups from six European countries. A three-year programme of research started in January 2003. The purpose of this study is to provide stakeholders with a predictive framework of outcomes for fragile tundra ecosystems in relation to European land-use policy, goose conservation and management, and the effect of climate change acting in tandem with these factors.

- **Seabirds.** The Institute of Nature Conservation conducts several research and monitoring projects on seabirds. Counts of overwintering seabirds are done and beached birds are mapped along the Belgian coast. The percentage of birds that is oil contaminated among the seabirds found washed ashore has been proven to be indicative for the chronic oil pollution of the sea and is monitored in Belgium since 1962. Since 1997, the reproductive output and the feeding regimes of chicks of Common Sterna hirundo and Sandwich Terns are monitored in the breeding colony at Zeebrugge. Seabirds at sea are regularly counted from ships and fluctuations in seaducks are monitored from aeroplanes since 1986.

- **Birds and windfarms.** Commissioned by the Flemish government in May 2000 the Institute of Nature Conservation started a project to study the impact of wind turbines on birds, to produce an atlas of important bird areas and migration routes in order to build up the necessary policy knowledge, and to act as a consultancy for proposed windfarms. At several wind farm locations, the Institute currently performs a long-term independent project to study the impact of the turbines on birds.

- **Breeding Bird Atlas.** In 2004, a new breeding bird atlas for Flanders was published, giving detailed information on the current distribution (2000-2003) and relative abundance of all breeding bird species, and population figures for around 65 % of all species.

- Review of data on bird populations, distribution and status of habitats for the Birds Directive SPA's, including wetlands and their related species.

**Walloon region:** Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*: research related to damage prevention measures for commercial fisheries and the study of the great cormorant's diet in rivers.

**Brussels Capital region:** A new breeding bird atlas is currently in preparation, and should be published in 2006 (Weiserbs & Jacob, 2006)

*5.2 What monitoring activities does your country undertake, including any bilateral or multilateral cooperative action, of wetland areas and species covered by the Agreement (e.g. national monitoring schemes, International Waterfowl Census)? Please append a list of monitoring activities or programmes initiated, ongoing or completed in the last three years*

**Flemish Region:**

**Waterbird counts.** In Flanders, six waterfowl counts are organised every winter. The coordination is in the hands of the Institute of Nature Conservation. These counts take place from October till March, during one fixed weekend in the middle of the month. The mid-January count makes part of the 'International Waterfowl Census', a monitoring project of Wetlands International. About 300-350 sites in Flanders are counted on a regular basis, including at least all major wetlands. Most areas are counted by amateur field ornithologists.

The aim of these counts is to study population size and trends, distribution and habitat choice of waterfowl species. The results are also important as a basis for the protection and management of Flemish wetland sites.

**Seabird counts.** Counts of overwintering seabirds are done and beached birds are mapped along the Belgian coast (see above).

**Rare breeding birds.** Since 1994, a monitoring scheme on breeding birds, the 'Bijzondere Broedvogelproject', has been set up in Flanders. The species involved include all colonial breeders, rare breeding species (less than 150-200 pairs in Flanders) and all exotic (feral) birds, altogether about 60 species. They are censused on a yearly base and in a standardized way. The field work is mainly executed by volunteer field ornithologists. All potential breeding habitats are visited several times during the breeding season. During these visits, territories are mapped and breeding pairs are counted. Completed standardized observation forms (paper or digital) and maps indicating breeding sites are send back to the Institute for Nature Conservation where data are checked, processed and analysed.

**Monitoring of bird and habitat directive areas on the left bank of the river Schelde.** The port of Antwerp is partly located at the left bank of the river Schelde and lies within the perimeter of bird and habitat directive area. The construction of two new docks (Verrebroekdok and Deurganckdok) has a negative impact on the protected species and habitats in the area and must be compensated for. The effectiveness of the compensation measures is assessed by means of a monitoring program. The main focus of the monitoring

plan is on birds: breeding and non-breeding birds on Annex I of the European Bird Directive (70/409/EEG), breeding birds of the Flemish Red List of threatened species and migrating and wintering birds that occur in numbers of international importance (Convention of Ramsar). For some species also breeding success is assessed. Other topics included in the monitoring programme are vegetation, butterflies, damsel- and dragonflies and amphibians. The hydrology of the study area is investigated, in order to link surface- and groundwater levels and quality to developments in vegetation and fauna. The monitoring results are reported to the European Council as an evaluation of the compensation measures. A comparable monitoring project has been set up for the harbour area of Zeebrugge.

### **Ringling of birds by the Royal Institute of Natural Sciences.**

#### **Walloon Region:**

- Implementation of methods to collect data on birds in the framework of the elaboration of the Natura 2000 sites designation legislation.
- Monitoring of common birds (started in 1990 by AVES): records for 2002-2004.
- Monitoring of birds for the State of the Walloon Environment “Etat de l’Environnement Wallon”.
- Statistical analysis for 1990-2003 and data sent to the Euro-monitoring network (Aves).
- Monitoring of wintering birds (by Aves). Counting of waterbirds from October to March. Data are published in the « Bulletin Aves » magazine (in the last edition: Jacob et al., 2004: Les recensements hivernaux d’oiseaux d’eau en Wallonie et à Bruxelles de 1998-99 à 2003-04. Aves 41: 1-61) and communicated to Wetlands international.
- Breeding birds of Wallonia Atlas (co-ordination Aves): Elaboration of an atlas project with field work from 2001 to 2005. (points d’écoute et données spécifiques). This atlas will enable us to identify all breeding birds (approximately 175), even introduced species (approximately 12), to assess their repartition and their populations. A special attention is given to rare species. This atlas will probably be published in 2007.
- Ringing of birds by the Royal Institute of Natural Sciences.

#### **Brussels Capital Region:**

- **Water bird counts:** since 2003 waterfowl counts are organized during winter (six counts, one every month). Waterbirds are counted in the valley of the Woluwe, one of the most important wintering places of waterbirds in the Brussels Capital Region (Beck et al. 2004).



## 6. Education and information

### Training and development programmes

*6.1 Describe the status of training and development programmes which support waterbird conservation and implement the AEWA Action Plan.*

**Flemish Region:** There are no training and development programmes on waterbird conservation.

*6.2 What bilateral or multilateral co-operative action is your country undertaking to develop training programmes and share examples of good practice?*

**Flemish Region:** There have been no co-operative actions to develop training and development programmes on waterbird conservation or specific projects for sharing of good practice during the reporting period.

**Walloon Region:** Training of Natura 2000 agents of the Nature and Forest Department of the Walloon Region for Natura 2000 sites and species.

### Raising public awareness

*6.3 Describe activities to raise public awareness of the objectives of the AEWA Action Plan. Please outline any particular successes generating public interest in, and securing support for, waterbird and wetland conservation (e.g. campaigns, information notes or other initiatives)?*

**Belgian Marine Territory (federal):** A national campaign was launched in April 2005 in order to create a social basis for the different “values” of the sea (natural value but also economic and social-recreational values). Activities were organized during the whole summer period in coastal cities, in particular with young children.

**Flemish Region:** There is no specific AEWA related policy of raising public awareness to of the objectives of the AEWA Agreement. However, several initiatives do exist in which the intention to raise public awareness of nature conservation also or even mainly includes matters that are related to waterbirds and their habitats.

Examples of raising public awareness are:

- The Flemish Government has several nature visitor centers, where the public is informed on a large spectrum of nature conservation issues. In total, six such visitor centers exist, four of which are situated in areas that have a significant importance for waterbirds. In these centers, visitors are informed about waterbirds and their habitat requirements.
- A mobile exposition on the White Stork has been composed, in cooperation between Natuurpunt (NGO) and the Nature Division of the Ministry of the Flemish Government. This exposition is regularly used to inform the public on the White Stork and all the aspects of its ecology. The White Stork project also includes media and internet events.
- In order to broaden the public support for the above mentioned SIGMA-plan (see answer to question 3.7 above), an information campaign has been set up about the natural richness of the Schelde river: 'De Schelde Natuurlijk!'. This campaign focuses on the huge importance of the river and its estuary for tens of thousands of waterbirds, for breeding and wintering and during migration.  
This information campaign is a joint initiative between Belgium and the Netherlands, involving both governments and several NGO's. On June 11 and 12, 2005, the first Schelde river Discovery Weekend was organized on both sides of the border, together reaching almost 15.000 visitors.
- The Nature Conservation Decree of October 21, 1997 contains provisions about the accessibility of nature reserves for visitors. Visitors are allowed in these reserves under certain conditions, in order to permit the public to get acquainted with nature and its conservation. For reserves owned by NGO's, subsidies can be granted in order to take measures to promote the accessibility of the reserves, such as the construction of paths, bird hides and information panels. Public accessibility is an integrated part of the management plan of reserves owned by the Flemish government. The ecological capacity of the reserves is considered in this respect. This policy is of course also applicable to reserves containing species covered by the Agreement. Thus the general public can get acquainted easily with waterbirds and their habitats.
- Nature conservation NGO's also pay attention to raising public awareness about nature conservation in general, including waterbirds and wetland ecosystems.
- The 'Kustactieplan' – 'Coast Action Plan' is a co-operative plan between the Flemish government and Natuurpunt NGO, co-financed by the EU LIFE fund, aimed at the promotion of the coastal area. Nature is considered to be an integral part of the coast in this plan, that wants to ensure a better co-existence of coastal nature and coastal tourism. This implies informing the general public about the rich nature in the coastal area and the need for conserving this biodiversity. The plan covers both the coastal wetlands as well as the actual North Sea, both being important areas for many waterbird species.

### **Walloon Region:**

- Naturalists' associations are financed in order to raise public awareness and conduct educational activities. Nature protection organizations such as the WWF, AVES, the 'Ligue Royale pour la Protection des Oiseaux' (LRBPO), the 'Réserves naturelles et ornithologiques de Belgique' (RNOB), 'Ardenne et Gaume', 'Les Cercles des Naturalistes de Belgique', 'Jeunes et Nature' and 'Forêt Wallonne' all have educational activities oriented towards nature conservation (e.g. excursions, visits to nature reserves, management of nature reserves, publications, etc.) or towards specific thematic areas (e.g. forests, quality of watercourses, etc.).
- The Nature Department of the Walloon Region regularly launches thematic nature protection or development campaigns, which always include an important public awareness and educational part. Some examples of projects include the protection of bats, migration of amphibians, the migration of black storks ([www.explorado.com](http://www.explorado.com)).
- Public education and awareness is one of the missions of Natural parks. They often organize activities related to inland waters and birds (as our Ramsar sites do too).
- Information sessions related to Natura 2000 have been organized by the Nature department of the Walloon region.
- Life projects also include the informing of potential stakeholders and local communities.
- Many brochures on nature conservation have been published by the Nature and Forestry Department of the Walloon region (on Natura 2000, birds, wetlands, ....) .

### **Publications**

- four posters and brochures related to birds in four different habitats, (one of which was inland water) were made for the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Birds Directive.
- Publication on Wetlands of Biological Interest.
- Preparation of an atlas on breeding birds (Aves).
- "Birds in Europe. Population estimates, trends and conservation status". Birdlife Conservation Series n° 12 (contribution (Aves) for Wallonia to the publication of Birdlife International (2004).
- Website of the Walloon region :  
<http://mrw.wallonie.be/dgrne/sibw/especes/home.html#oiseaux> )

## 7. Final comments

### 7.1 General comments on the implementation of the AEWA Action Plan

#### 7.2 Observations concerning the functions and services of the various AEWA bodies

##### a. The Agreement Secretariat

Contacts with the AEWA Secretariat happen in a smooth and satisfactory manner.

##### b. International organizations

##### c. AEWA NGO partners

#### 7.3 How might the Action Plan be further developed as a practical aid for national and international conservation of migratory waterbirds?

As a general remark, we would like to draw attention to the current lack of harmonization in the reporting formats of the various tools for the international protection of birds in general and waterbirds in specific. The national focal points who are responsible for completing these reporting formats are confronted with several formats on similar topics: AEWA, Ramsar-Treaty, EU Birds Directive. The objective of these tools is similar: ensure the conservation and appropriate protection of birds and the areas they need for survival, including both direct species protection on the individual level and indirect habitat protection on the population level. The objectives and goals are similar but the concept of the reporting formats is different for each tool, different enough not to allow a similar responding approach to the various tools.

Therefore we would like to speak out for a more *harmonized and streamlined approach* to the various reporting formats of the above mentioned tools. Such a harmonized approach has been proposed, for all biodiversity related conventions and agreements, at the 'Haasrode Workshop', held in Haasrode, Belgium in 2004.

We want to stress that we do acknowledge the importance of all these international tools for a satisfactory protection of waterbirds, including AEWA. We believe, however, that a high degree of harmonization would increase the strength of each of the above mentioned international tools and emphasize the synergies. A harmonized co-operation between these conventions and agreements can only create a stronger back up for a thorough protection of waterbirds and the habitats on which they depend.

In this respect, we would also stress the importance of '*indicators*'. The current reporting format does not really use the concept of indicators. Indicators can be described as 'blinkers', which give signals and indications of situations and trends; they do not reveal the full story but they give important clues and indications. Another term to describe indicators is 'performance measures'. Projected on the situation of AEWA, indicators could show how well which goals of the Agreement are being reached in a rather easy way. The great advantage would be that the use of indicators would allow a high degree of standardization in the reporting process. Sets of indicators have been developed at EU-level for the Natura

2000 Network, for biodiversity action plans and for the Countdown 2010 target for halting the loss of biodiversity by 2010. Those sets could form a basis for specific indicators for the AEWA Action Plan.

The combination of a *harmonized and streamlined approach* to the reporting format for the various conventions and agreements focusing on waterbirds and the use of *indicators* in the reporting process could strongly contribute to an effective protection of waterbirds and their habitats.

## **8. Progress to implement Resolutions and Recommendations of the Meeting of the Parties**

***Please summarize progress to implement decisions of previous Meetings of the Parties.***

Little has been done explicitly for the implementation of these resolutions and recommendations. However, on a broader scale, considerable action has been taken in order to comply with the EU directives relevant from the wetland conservation point of view: the Birds Directive and the Habitats Directive.

## **9. OPTIONAL SECTION – Planned and future actions**

Contracting Parties are invited to outline below any further information regarding the aims of the Agreement, for example, planned actions or other informative examples.

1. Species conservation
2. Habitat conservation
3. Management of human activities
4. Research and monitoring
5. Education and information

The theme 'Biodiversity' of the Environment and Nature Policy Plan 2003-2007 includes the continuation of actions for the above mentioned aspects. A synthesis of the Policy Plan is included in annex.

## **List of abbreviations and acronyms used in the report**

A short list of abbreviations used in this report:

- BCR: Brussels Capital Region
- EIA: Environmental Impact Assessment
- FEN: Flemish Ecological Network
- FRAGILE: FRagility of Arctic Goose habitat: Impacts of Land use, conservation, and Elevated temperature (project)
- GMU: Game Management Unit
- SAC: Special Area for Conservation
- SPA: Special Protection Area



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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Status of Single Species Action Plans

International SSAP's	Species	Status
	Lesser-white Fronted Goose <i>Anser erythropus</i>	Being implemented internationally
	Red-breasted Goose <i>Branta ruficollis</i>	Being implemented internationally
	Corncrake <i>Crex crex</i>	Being implemented internationally
	Ferruginous Duck <i>Aythya nyroca</i>	Being implemented internationally
<b>National SSAP's</b>		
<i>Flemish Region</i>	White Stork <i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	Being implemented
	Meadow birds	Being implemented

### Appendix 2: List of sites of international importance

#### Flemish region:

Blankaartgebied + IJzerbroeken	SPA	<i>Anser albifrons, Anas penelope, Anas crecca, Anas acuta, Anas clypeata</i>
Oostkustpolders	SPA	<i>Anser brachyrhynchus, Anser albifrons, Anser anser, Anas penelope</i>
Havengebied Zeebrugge		<i>Anser anser, Anas penelope, Anas strepera, Anas acuta, Anas clypeata</i> Breeding: <i>Sterna hirundo, Sterna albifrons, Sterna sandvicensis, Larus fuscus</i>
Zwinstreek Knokke-Heist	SPA	<i>Platalea leucorodia, Anser anser, Anser albifrons</i>
Krekengebied + polders Noord-Oost-Vlaanderen	SPA	<i>Cygnus columbianus, Anser fabalis, Anser albifrons</i>
Bourgoyen-Ossemeersen Drongen		<i>Anser clypeata</i>
Gentse Kanaalzone		<i>Anas strepera, Anas acuta, Anas clypeata, Aythya ferina, Platalea leucorodia</i>
Zeeschelde Gent-Zandvliet	SPA	<i>Anser anser, Anas strepera, Anas crecca, Anas acuta, Aythya ferina, Avosetta recurvirostra</i>
Rivierengebied Mechelen-Willebroek		<i>Anas strepera, Anas clypeata</i>
Netevallei Lier-Duffel		<i>Anas strepera, Aythya ferina</i>
Kanaalzone Wintam - Rupel	SPA	<i>Anas strepera, Anas acuta</i>
De Kuifeend Oorderen	SPA	<i>Anas strepera, Anas clypeata</i>
Blokkersdijk Antwerpen	SPA	<i>Anas strepera, Anas clypeata</i>
Havengebied Antwerpen LO + RO	SPA	<i>Anser anser, Anas penelope, Anas strepera, Anas acuta, Anas clypeata</i> Breeding: <i>Avosetta recurvirostra</i>
Schulensbroek	SPA	<i>Anas strepera</i>
Vijvergebied Midden-Limburg (inclusief Maten)	SPA	<i>Anas strepera, Anas clypeata</i>
Maasvallei (Vlaanderen)		<i>Phalacrocorax carbo, Aythya ferina</i>

### Appendix 3: Status of management plans for sites of international importance

Nature Objective Plans are being prepared for all sites of international importance. The preparation of the format to be used, types of maps to be produced, the organization of a participatory approach and a specific communication strategy and training of the team members has taken quite some time. Specific legislation for the procedure of the development of these Nature Objective Plans and the measures and instruments that can be used for their implementation was approved in 2003 and 2004. The formal process for the first six Nature Objective Plans started in May 2005. Meanwhile, the conservation objectives, site visions and stakeholders analysis were developed for those sites.

The Nature Objective Plans have to be submitted for a public consultation process as well. The aim is to finalize the draft Nature Objective Plans for these six sites by the end of 2005 and to initiate one or two Nature Objective Plans in each of the five Flemish provinces every year. Due to personnel and budget restrictions, the overall process is much slower than foreseen in the Nature Conservation decree. For all nature reserves, including the ones located in sites for international importance, a management plan has to be included together with the application for the official recognition of the reserve.

For other sites, project based plans were developed, such as for harbor sites, estuaries, the coastal zone, Natura 2000 sites in LIFE-projects, cross border programmes with The Netherlands, etc.

A 'nature sites databank' is being developed to compile an overview on overlapping conservation status of each site, presence of a Nature Objective Plan or a management plan, nature development projects, projects of local authorities or NGO's, LIFE-project areas, etc.

### Appendix 4: List of research and monitoring programmes and projects

#### Flemish Region:

<b>Research programmes and projects</b>	<b>Subject</b>
	FRAGILE: arctic geese
	Seabirds: counts of seabirds
	Seabirds: beached bird survey
	Seabirds: breeding ecology of terns
	Birds and wind farms
	Breeding bird atlas
<b>Monitoring programmes and projects</b>	<b>Subject</b>
	Waterbird counts
	Seabirds: counts of seabirds
	Seabirds: beached bird survey
	Seabirds: breeding ecology of terns
	Counts of rare breeding birds
	Birds and Habitats Directive areas on the left bank of the Schelde river

**Brussels Capital Region:**

<b>Research programmes and projects</b>	<b>Subject</b>
	Breeding bird atlas
<b>Monitoring programmes and projects</b>	<b>Subject</b>
	Waterbird counts

**Appendix 5: List of national institutions involved in migratory waterbird conservation**

**Flemish Region:**

- Nature Division, Ministry of the Flemish Community
- Forest and Green Areas Division , Ministry of the Flemish Community
- Institute for Nature Conservation, scientific institute of the Flemish Government
- Institute for Forestry and Game Management, scientific institute of the Flemish Government
- NGO's: Natuurpunt, Stichting Limburgs Landschap.

**Brussels Capital region:**

- Brussels Institute for Management of the Environment (BIME)

**Appendix 6: List of relevant World Wide Web addresses for national institutions involved in migratory waterbird conservation**

**Flemish Region:**

- Institute for Nature Conservation, scientific institute of the Flemish Government: [http://www.instnat.be/content/homepage\\_nl.asp](http://www.instnat.be/content/homepage_nl.asp)
- Institute for Forestry and Game Management, scientific institute of the Flemish Government: <http://ibw.inbo.be/>
- Nature Division, Ministry of the Flemish Community: [www.natuur.be](http://www.natuur.be)
- Forest and Green Areas Division , Ministry of the Flemish Community: <http://www.bosengroen.be/>
- Natuurpunt NGO: <http://www.natuurpunt.be/>
- White Stork project: <http://www.ooievaars.vlaanderen.be/>

**Brussels Capital Region:**

- Brussels Institute for Management of the Environment: <http://www.ibgebim.be/>

**Walloon Region:**

- <http://mrw.wallonie.be/dgrne/sibw/especies/home.html#oiseaux>

**Appendix 7: List of relevant migratory waterbird and habitat conservation projects initiated, ongoing or completed in the last three years**

**Flemish Region:** the list below is a non-exhaustive list of conservation projects. It does summarize the projects mentioned in the answers to the questions in the reporting format above.

<b>Wetland restoration and rehabilitation</b>		<b>Initiated</b>	<b>Ongoing</b>	<b>Completed</b>
	LIFE-projects (see 3.7 above)			
	Uitkerkse polder		X	
	Long Term Vision Schelde river 2030			
	Zwin enlargement	X		
	Kalkense Meersen	X		
	Nature Development Project			
	<i>Examples</i> Bourgoyen-Ossemeersen		X	
	Het Vinne		X	
	Tern Island, Zeebrugge harbour			X
	NatureDevelopment on the left bank of the Schelde river		X	
<b>Raising public awareness</b>				
	Nature Visitor Centers		X	
	White Stork exhibition		X	
	Promotion campaign Schelde river 'De Schelde Natuurlijk!'		X	
	Kustactieplan – Coast Action Plan		X	
	Brochure + poster 'Natura 2000 in Vlaanderen' ('Natura 2000 in Flanders') + public information sessions on the provincial level.			