



**5<sup>th</sup> SESSION OF THE MEETING OF THE PARTIES**  
*14 – 18 May 2012, La Rochelle, France*

*“Migratory waterbirds and people - sharing wetlands”*

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**REPORT ON  
WORLD MIGRATORY BIRD DAY  
2006 - 2012**

*Prepared by the UNEP/AEWA Secretariat*

## **Executive Summary**

Initiated by the UNEP/AEWA Secretariat in 2006, the global World Migratory Bird Day campaign has helped to increase awareness on migratory birds and on AEWA both inside and outside the AEWA region in unprecedented ways. In the period 2006–2011, close to 800 registered events took place in 105 countries to mark World Migratory Bird Day. In the same period World Migratory Bird Day was celebrated through local events in 45 AEWA Contracting Parties and a further 29 AEWA Range States.

While the UNEP/AEWA Secretariat has taken the lead in developing and coordinating the annual campaign, it is clearly a joint activity organized with the support from the Secretariat of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS). World Migratory Bird Day is also being supported by a number of other major global partners, including BirdLife International, Wetlands International, the Secretariat of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and is being celebrated by a growing number of local authorities, organizations and individuals around the world. Over the few years of its existence, World Migratory Bird Day has grown into a major UN-backed, international awareness-raising campaign dedicated to migratory birds.

The following report provides a short historic overview of World Migratory Bird Day as it has developed since 2006 and highlights the central role played by the UNEP/AEWA Secretariat in organizing the annual global campaign. The report ends with a number of suggestions on how to strengthen and improve the coordination of the campaign in the future. One of the suggestions proposed, is to try to establish World Migratory Bird Day as an official **UN Day** (UN global observance day) through a UN General Assembly resolution, possibly submitted by CMS and AEWA Contracting Parties.

## **I. Introduction**

1. World Migratory Bird Day is an annual awareness-raising campaign highlighting the need for the protection of migratory birds and their habitats. On the second weekend each May, people around the world take action and organize public events such as bird festivals, education programmes and bird watching excursions to celebrate World Migratory Bird Day.

2. Activities take place in many different countries and places, but are all linked through a single global campaign and an annually chosen theme. Anyone interested in organizing an event to mark World Migratory Bird Day is encouraged to register their planned activity on the dedicated website ([www.worldmigratorybirdday.org](http://www.worldmigratorybirdday.org)).

## II. Development History and Overview of Themes (2006 – 2012)

3. World Migratory Bird Day was initiated in 2006 by the Secretariat of the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) in collaboration with the Secretariat of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS).

4. Originally, the idea of designating a day for migratory birds arose in the United States of America (USA) in 1993, when the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center and the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology initiated celebrations of the 'International Migratory Bird Day' (IMBD), which encourages bird festivals and education programmes across the United States and other parts of the Americas. Although this day continues to be successfully celebrated in the western hemisphere, something similar was missing for the rest of the world.

5. On the occasion of its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2005, the UNEP/AEWA Secretariat initiated the Migratory Waterbird Days (MWD), which were held in Africa, Europe and parts of Asia. As this event was well received in the African-Eurasian region, the idea arose to broaden the scope into a commemorative day which celebrates the phenomenon of migration and all migrating birds, including waterbirds on a global scale.

6. The first World Migratory Bird Day took place on 8-9 April, 2006. At the time, migratory birds were receiving very negative media coverage as a result of them being erroneously singled out as the main cause for the spread of Avian Influenza (H5N1) around the world. So the idea arose to use the first World Migratory Bird Day to counter some of the negative and often unbalanced publicity migratory birds were receiving at the peak of the Avian Influenza discussion.

7. For this reason the theme of the first World Migratory Bird Day in 2006 became: “**Migratory birds need our support now!**” The centre of the campaign was a launch event called WINGS which took place on the edge of the Great Rift Valley in Kenya and was hosted by Ms. Kuki Gallman, the famous writer and conservationist. This impressive artistic show reflected the symbolic value of birds and their historic and cultural significance. More than 200 international guests participated in the event which brought together artists from Turkey, India, Peru, Italy, Kenya, Germany and the USA. Altogether, 68 events related to World Migratory Bird Day took place in all corners of the world to support the launch of the global campaign in 2006.

8. In 2007, World Migratory Bird Day was celebrated in more than 58 countries and with more than 100 different events on 12-13 May 2007. The central theme for 2007 was “**Migratory birds in a changing climate**” and helped to focus world attention on the threats migratory birds are facing due to global warming.

9. Under the theme “**Migratory birds – ambassadors for biodiversity**”, World Migratory Bird Day was celebrated for the third time on 10-11 May 2008. Over 136 activities took place in 59 countries to mark World Migratory Bird Day 2008 and the events helped spread the idea of migratory birds as messengers for the conservation of biodiversity worldwide. World Migratory Bird Day 2008 coincided with the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 9) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) which was held in Bonn, Germany in May 2008.

10. On 9-10 May 2009 World Migratory Bird Day was celebrated in over 50 countries around the world. Under the theme “**Barriers to migration**”, 130 registered events took place. These events helped to raise awareness on the negative effect man-made barriers such as power lines, communication towers, windows, and tall buildings have on migratory birds.

11. World Migratory Bird Day 2010 was celebrated in over 40 countries around the world on 8-9 May 2010. Under the theme “**Save migratory birds in crisis - every species counts!**” over 90 registered events took place worldwide. The 2010 campaign was closely linked to the International Year of Biodiversity and raised awareness on globally threatened migratory birds, with a particular focus on those on the very edge of extinction – the Critically Endangered migratory birds.

12. The 2011 World Migratory Bird Day campaign was an absolute record breaker with an amazing 205 registered events in 64 countries. It was celebrated on 14-15 May 2011 and the central theme was “**Land use**

**changes from a bird's-eye view**", focusing on land use changes (conversion of natural areas, infrastructure development, deforestation and mining) and their effects on migratory birds.

13. World Migratory Bird Day 2012 will take place on 12-13 May 2012 and will be celebrating the connections and relationships between migratory birds and people. The theme for 2012 is "**Migratory birds and people - together through time**" highlighting the cultural, social, historic, economic and spiritual connections we have with birds. The 2012 theme is deliberately very similar to the central theme of the 5th Session of the Meeting of the Parties to the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA MOP5) which is taking place in the week directly following World Migratory Bird Day from 14 to 18 May 2012 in the French port city of La Rochelle.

### **III. The Role of the UNEP/AEWA Secretariat in the Campaign**

14. The World Migratory Bird Day campaign is being centrally coordinated by the AEWA and CMS Secretariats. While the UNEP/AEWA Secretariat took the lead in the campaign from 2006 – 2011, the CMS Secretariat has played a more prominent role in the organization of the 2012 World Migratory Bird Day campaign. At the UNEP/AEWA Secretariat, the primary responsibility of organizing the campaign has been with the AEWA Information Officer, heavily supported by the AEWA Information Assistant and 1-2 interns. Other AEWA staff members also contribute to the campaign, although in a more limited way, for example, through advising on content for the website and press releases, translation and editing of materials or conducting interviews upon request. The workload associated with organizing the campaign is considerable, especially for the AEWA Information Unit and particularly in the months when the website and poster are developed and in the period directly leading up to the event.

### **IV. Development of Campaign Materials: Website, Poster, Flyers and Other Materials**

15. The main information products that are developed by the UNEP/AEWA Secretariat to support World Migratory Bird Day each year include a designated website, a central campaign poster, flyers in different languages, postcards, stickers and audio-visual materials. Posters, flyers and stickers are shipped by post to those event organizers who have requested them.

16. Since 2010, the UNEP/AEWA Secretariat has also started using social media to support the World Migratory Bird Day campaign. A Facebook page and Twitter account have been set up and the online community of World Migratory Bird Day supporters is growing steadily.

### **V. Funding the Campaign**

17. With the exception of the first World Migratory Bird Day in 2006, the overall cost of running the global campaign has been relatively small. Costs that occur each year are mainly linked to the design and printing of the central campaign poster, the customization of the website and other materials and the associated mailing costs.

18. In 2011 and 2012 the UNEP/AEWA Secretariat received a voluntary contribution specifically for World Migratory Bird Day from the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMU). These earmarked contributions were used by the UNEP/AEWA Secretariat to support the cost of developing and/or disseminating World Migratory Bird Day posters, postcards, stickers, the website and other campaign related information materials.

### **VI. Future Outlook and Priorities**

19. World Migratory Bird Day has grown into a major communication activity (not foreseen in the current AEWA Communication Strategy) carried out by the UNEP/AEWA Secretariat. While its aim is to provide a global commemorative day dedicated to raising awareness about migratory birds, World Migratory Bird Day has undeniably also indirectly helped to increase awareness of both AEWA and CMS. While the growth in

popularity of World Migratory Bird Day over the years 2006-2012 is a positive signal for the future of the campaign, the Secretariat believes the time is right to step up efforts to try to strengthen the global campaign and to make it more sustainable and internationally recognized in the long run.

Below are a number of recommendations from the Secretariat as to how the World Migratory Bird Day campaign could be strengthened:

- Establishing World Migratory Bird Day as an official UN Day through a General Assembly resolution. This could be pursued by one or more Contracting Parties to CMS and AEWA or as a Resolution from the Conference/Meeting of the Parties;<sup>1</sup>
- A country could volunteer to become the official host to World Migratory Bird Day in a given year and support the development and international promotion of the campaign in that year.(This has been a very successful approach taken in the context of the annual World Environment Day campaign);
- Stimulate greater participation of the World Migratory Bird Day partners in the organization of the campaign;
- Fundraising efforts need to be increased to support the campaign to enable the Secretariat potentially to outsource more of the production of campaign materials and possibly the central coordination of the campaign;
- A comprehensive international assessment of World Migratory Bird Day should be made. The analysis should include an online survey and make concrete suggestions on how to improve the effectiveness of the campaign;
- Establish greater links to other local, regional and international migratory bird related events, such as IMBD and the British Birdwatching Fair;
- To support the global media outreach of World Migratory Bird Day, an international study closely related to the annually chosen World Migratory Bird Day theme should be commissioned and launched before each World Migratory Bird Day;
- World Migratory Bird Day should be used more prominently to highlight the role and work of AEWA and CMS and of the main partners and to showcase the importance of international cooperation in the conservation of migratory birds and their habitats.

### **Actions Requested from the Meeting of the Parties:**

1. To take note of this report and the central role played by the UNEP/AEWA Secretariat in organizing the annual World Migratory Bird Day (World Migratory Bird Day) campaign since 2006.
2. To seek support from Parties towards establishing World Migratory Bird Day as an officially UN-recognized day through a UN General Assembly resolution.

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<sup>1</sup> Models could be similar Resolutions adopted by the UN General Assembly such as GA Resolution [A/RES/49/115](#) proclaiming 17 June as the World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought on 19 December 1994 or Resolution [GA A/RES/65/161](#), which established the United Nations Decade on Biodiversity 2011-2020 on 20 December 2010.