



SIXTH MEETING OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE
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REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE WETCAP PROJECT

Preamble

Effective waterbird and habitat conservation in North Africa is of immense importance to the overall preservation of many species migrating between Europe and Africa each year. Algeria, Egypt, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia hold a number of internationally significant wetlands which are essential as breeding, moulting, staging or wintering grounds for millions of migratory waterbirds.

Formally launched in March 2009, the WetCap project is a 3-year initiative, developed under the umbrella of AEWA and in close cooperation with the Spanish BirdLife partner Sociedad Española de Ornitología (SEO/BirdLife). While the AEWA Secretariat is responsible for the overall management of the project, a Regional Coordinator, provided by SEO/ BirdLife, facilitates the project implementation and coordinates project activities. Technical support is provided by the project partners BirdLife International and Wetlands International together with local partner organizations. The project is sponsored by the Spanish development cooperation agency Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional para el Desarrollo (AECID).

The initial idea for developing the WetCap project was conceived at a first consultation meeting between AECID, the UNEP/AEWA Secretariat and BirdLife/SEO, which took place in March 2007 at the request of the Executive Secretary of the AECID Azahar Programme, Mr. José Jiménez García-Herrera. Mr. Garcia-Herrera was highly interested in cooperating with the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) and invited the UNEP/AEWA Secretariat to develop a proposal for a project of three years duration, based on the Azahar Programme. He agreed that on approval of the project proposal and depending on the successful implementation of the first year of the project, AECID would sponsor the project up to a maximum of €1.2 million.

After successive phases of consultation between AECID, the UNEP/AEWA Secretariat, BirdLife/SEO and other partners to be involved in the implementation of the project, a final project proposal was submitted to AECID in May 2008. This proposal was approved by AECID in June 2008 and the first grant of 400,000 € for the first year of implementation was transferred to the UNEP account.

Essentially mirroring the Wings Over Wetlands UNEP-GEF African-Eurasian Flyways Project, the WetCap project was initiated to improve the conservation status of these habitats and their waterbirds. As such, its activities are closely linked to those currently being executed under WOW.

This summary covers the following aspects of the WetCap project:

1. Description of overall components and activities;
2. Activities executed to date and relevant outcomes;
3. Future plans and challenges.

This summary report is largely based on the project's 2009 summary sheet and first progress report submitted to the principal donor following one year of implementation.

1. Description of overall components and activities

The overall aim of the WetCap project is to support the implementation of the relevant Multilateral Environmental Agreements (of both AEWA and the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands) within five project countries by way of advocating for the protection of waterbirds and wetlands, as well as by building local professional capacity.

The structure of activities implemented under the WetCap project is¹:

Component 1: Strengthening the capacities for waterbird and wetland conservation of all important stakeholders in the region. Activities include:

- a) Training Board meeting to adapt the WOW Flyway Training Kit to North Africa. Aims are to review training modules and establish a Training Board (Year 1);
- b) Regional and national adaptation of framework training and awareness raising programme by the Training Board (Year 1);
- c) Translation of key MEA documents into Arabic (Year 1);
- d) Implementation of the training and awareness raising programme – phase 1: Regional training of trainers workshop (Year 2);
- e) Implementation of the training and awareness raising programme – phase 2: National training in each country (Year 3).

Component 2: Building knowledge and providing better access to information on the critical network of sites required by migratory waterbirds. Activities include:

- a) 3-day regional CSN tool workshop: Review of data obtained through CSN tool and identification of gaps (Year 1);
- b) Selection of field survey missions in each country (Year 1);
- c) 2 surveys to be conducted in each country (Year 2);
- d) 2 monitoring field missions in each country (Year 2);
- e) 2 surveys to be conducted in each country (Year 3);
- f) 2 monitoring field missions in each country (Year 3).

Component 3: Support of local waterbird and wetland conservation projects via a small-grant facility. Activities include:

- a) Call for project proposals (Year 1);
- b) Selection and implementation of funded local projects (Year 2);
- c) Implementation of local projects (Year 3).

This component will directly benefit two community projects in each country that focus on waterbird and wetland conservation, e.g. supporting wetland/ habitat restoration or local ecotourism. Eligible projects could, for example, concentrate on the training of local wetland site wardens, bird guides or national park staff. Ideally such projects would at the same time contribute to the implementation of AEWA single species action plans.

2. Activities implemented to date and relevant outcomes

Preparatory activities:

During the period between the formal launch of the project on 23 March 2009 and the start of the actual implementation of project activities, the following series of preparatory activities were undertaken:

- A common workplan was drafted and endorsed by all relevant partners and stakeholders;
- Small-scale funding agreements between the UNEP/AEWA Secretariat and SEO/BirdLife (for the coordination and implementation of the project within the first year) were negotiated and concluded;
- A small-scale funding agreement between the UNEP/AEWA Secretariat and BirdLife International (for technical support during the first year of implementation) were negotiated and concluded;
- Support sub-contracts with Wetlands International and BirdLife Middle East Division were effected;

¹ Based on original WetCap workplan within the project summary (September 2009).

- Preparatory translation of project summary undertaken.

Project management and advocacy:

With respect to project management and advocacy issues, the following activities have been undertaken:

- Imad Cherkaoui (Moroccan citizen) was brought on to serve as Regional Coordinator. Mr. Cherkaoui is an ornithologist with a PhD in ornithology and ecology of birds. He is temporarily based at the new SEO/BirdLife facilities in Salé;
- A first project Steering Committee Meeting took place in Bonn, Germany at the United Nations Campus on 25 August 2009. The meeting was attended by representatives of the UNEP/AEWA Secretariat, BirdLife International, SEO/BirdLife, Wetlands International and the Regional Coordinator. The role of the Steering Committee is to guide, advise, and oversee the project's technical progress and to optimise performance;
- A project website (<http://www.unep-aewa.org/activities/wetcap>) was set-up and is actively being maintained by the UNEP/AEWA Secretariat in tandem with project partners. Furthermore, a project brochure, a summary sheet and a series of news bites were developed and disseminated through appropriate channels.

Component 1:

A sub-regional Training of Trainers (ToT) workshop to build wetland and waterbird management capacity and raise awareness for flyway conservation in Western and Central Africa took place in Limbe, Cameroon from 2 - 10 November 2009. The workshop was organized by the Wetlands International Africa office in Dakar, Senegal, in collaboration with the Garoua Wildlife School in Cameroon in the framework of the Wings Over Wetlands (WOW) Project.

This offered participants from the region a first exposure to the Flyway Training Kit developed under WOW. The aim of this intensive capacity-building exercise was to train the participants to conduct workshops in their own countries in order to transfer the knowledge on waterbird and wetland conservation to a wider circle of professionals working in this field (foreseen in Year 3 of WetCap). Moreover the workshop in Cameroon also offered a unique opportunity for the representatives from North Africa to exchange their expertise and to examine potential synergies with countries from neighbouring regions in Africa.

In addition, some work was undertaken on the translation of the training modules that will be used in training workshops organised under the WetCap project. All the main strategic AEWA documents are being translated and will be distributed to all stakeholders in the region.

Component 2:

With respect to this facet of the project implementation, a 3-day workshop for representatives from the five project countries (as well as Libya, which is not covered by WetCap, but was invited to send participants at its own expenses), aiming at reviewing data of the CSN tool and identifying gaps of knowledge took place on 3 - 5 December 2009 in Morocco at the Red Crescent Centre (Mehdia, Kenitra). This workshop was attended by 20 representatives from the governments, NGOs and research institutions of the five project countries Algeria, Egypt, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia as well as of Libya. In addition, experts from BirdLife International, UNEP/AEWA, UNEP/WCMC, Wetlands International, the Spanish BirdLife International partner SEO/BirdLife, BirdLife Africa and the French Office National de la Chasse et de la Faune Sauvage took part.

A technical report in conjunction with the gap-filling analysis workshop is currently being prepared that will recommend field survey missions. A final list of four field survey missions will be selected by the Steering Committee.

Component 3:

Guidelines and relevant application forms for the Small Grant Fund have been drafted and approved by the Steering Committee. These are ready to be sent out as an official call for project proposals.

For additional information and a more detailed overview of project implementation to date, please refer to Annex II (WetCap Project Progress Report March to December 2009).

3. Future outlook and challenges

In November 2009 the UNEP/AEWA Secretariat was informed by AECID that funding for subsequent years (Years 2 & 3) would be terminated due to internal policy changes within the Spanish Government. Such a prospect would have serious and far-reaching repercussions on the project's financial commitments, credibility and image among partners and donors.

In December 2009 the Executive Secretary of AEWA visited AECID on an impromptu mission to request additional clarity on the decision taken and to gauge possibilities to salvage the project and restore funding commitments in full. This initial meeting was followed by a second round of consultations in February 2010 which was attended by SEO/BirdLife and the WOW Project Operations Manager (on behalf of the UNEP/AEWA Secretariat). At this meeting it was conveyed that there could potentially be an opportunity to salvage the project (albeit with a trimmed budget) if a new proposal were developed in line with AECID's new development priorities. In March 2010 a revised proposal was drafted by Catherine Lehmann, Programme Officer of the UNEP/AEWA Secretariat. In the interim, SEO/BirdLife suggested to hold off on submission in order to receive further guidance and direction from AECID.

In April 2010, SEO/BirdLife conveyed to project partners that an official letter from AECID on the status of WetCap and funding commitments was forthcoming. This issue is still pending and no formal correspondence has been received to date.

At the moment therefore, the WetCap project is on hold pending further information and clarity on the availability of funding from the Spanish Government.

The Standing Committee is requested to:

- 1) Take note of the progress made regarding the implementation of the WetCap Project during Year 1;
- 2) To give guidance how to solve and/ or to mitigate the problems that the Secretariat might face in case the WetCap project would not receive any further financial support of AECID.

ANNEXES

- i) Bilingual summary of the WetCap project (September 2009)**
- ii) WetCap Project Progress Report March - December 2009**
- iii) Workplan Year 1**
- iv) WetCap budget overview Feb 2010**