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FOURTH MEETING OF THE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE OF THE AGREEMENT ON THE
CONSERVATION OF AFRICAN-EURASIAN MIGRATORY WATERBIRDS (AEWA)
12-13 MAY 2003, Tashkent, Uzbekistan

DRAFT AEWA BROCHURE ON CONTROL OF NON-NATIVE SPECIES

INTRODUCTION

One of the 33 projects listed in the International Implementation Priorities 2000-2004 was the development of a Guideline on Avoidance of Introduction of Non-native Migratory Waterbirds Species. This project foresaw not only in drafting the guideline mentioned-before but also in preparing a brochure for wide circulation to owners of captive waterbird collections.

The Guideline was adopted by the Meeting of the Parties at its second session, which took place from 25-27 September 2002 in Bonn, Germany. The draft Brochure "Control of Non-native Species" was not submitted for approval to the MOP2 and became only available early 2003.

PROPOSAL OF THE SECRETARIAT

The Secretariat proposes that the Technical Committee will review the information given in the draft brochure, as attached hereto. It has to be taken into account that the target group will be owners of captive waterbird collection.



AFRICAN - EURASIAN
MIGRATORY
WATER

THE CONTROL OF NON-NATIVE SPECIES

BIRD
AGREEMENT

NON-NATIVE WATERBIRD SPECIES



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THREATS TO MIGRATORY WATERBIRDS ARISE FROM FACTORS SUCH AS HABITAT LOSS AND deterioration and disturbance, but these are being addressed through implementation of the AEWA Agreement.

Another threat to native species, also caused by man, arises when birds not native to the AEWA area, or to parts of it, become established in the wild. Waterbirds are generally attractive and have for centuries been kept by man to adorn lakes and waterways. Very large numbers of birds are kept by individuals and organisations and a sizeable trade in these birds exists, especially in western Europe. For example, it is estimated that about 100,000 birds are held in the Netherlands and a similar number in Britain.

Non-native species have become established in the wild, either because people who thought they would make an attractive addition to the fauna deliberately released them or because birds accidentally escaped from collections that were not managed carefully enough. A

recent survey indicated that no less than 113 kinds of waterbirds, not native to the part of the AEWA area where they occurred, have been recorded in the AEWA area. Most of these were in north west Europe (for example 79 kinds in the UK, 43 in Switzerland, 24 in Germany and 20 in the Netherlands). However, they occurred in other parts of the region too, such as the United Arab Emirates (25 kinds) and South Africa (24).



We refer here to *non-native* species, which is the equivalent term to *alien* in other conventions. What we term a *high risk non-native species* is equivalent to the term *invasive alien species* referred to elsewhere.



AEWA - is the abbreviation of the Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds.



***DOES THIS MATTER –
WHAT THREAT DO THEY POSE?***

SOME NON-NATIVE SPECIES APPEAR TO BE HARMLESS AND COEXIST AMICABLY WITH NATIVE SPECIES, BUT IN CERTAIN CASES THEY CAN POSE A THREAT TO NATIVE WILDLIFE OR HABITATS.

The threats fall into a number of categories:



Perhaps the most serious is that introduced birds may breed with closely related native species and threaten their existence as a discrete species.



Non-native species can compete with native ones for an essential resource such as food or nesting sites.



Predation (including on plants (grazing)) could cause damage to native flora and fauna, especially if the number of predators is large in relation to prey populations.



Non-native species could carry diseases with them that are not prevalent in the area of introduction and these could threaten susceptible native species.



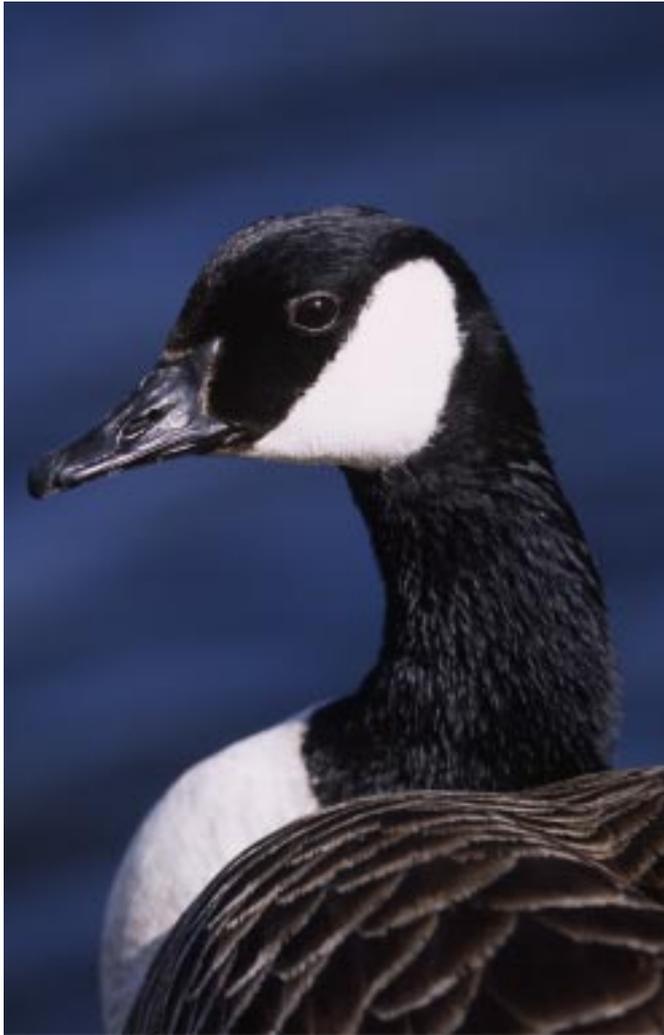
Large numbers of non-native species could cause pollution in waterways, which could alter the nutrient dynamics to the detriment of native flora and fauna.

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CASE HISTORIES

THE FOLLOWING ACCOUNTS ARE EXAMPLES OF CASES WHERE NON-NATIVE SPECIES, DELIBERATELY OR ACCIDENTALLY INTRODUCED, ARE HAVING AN IMPACT ON NATIVE WILDLIFE.



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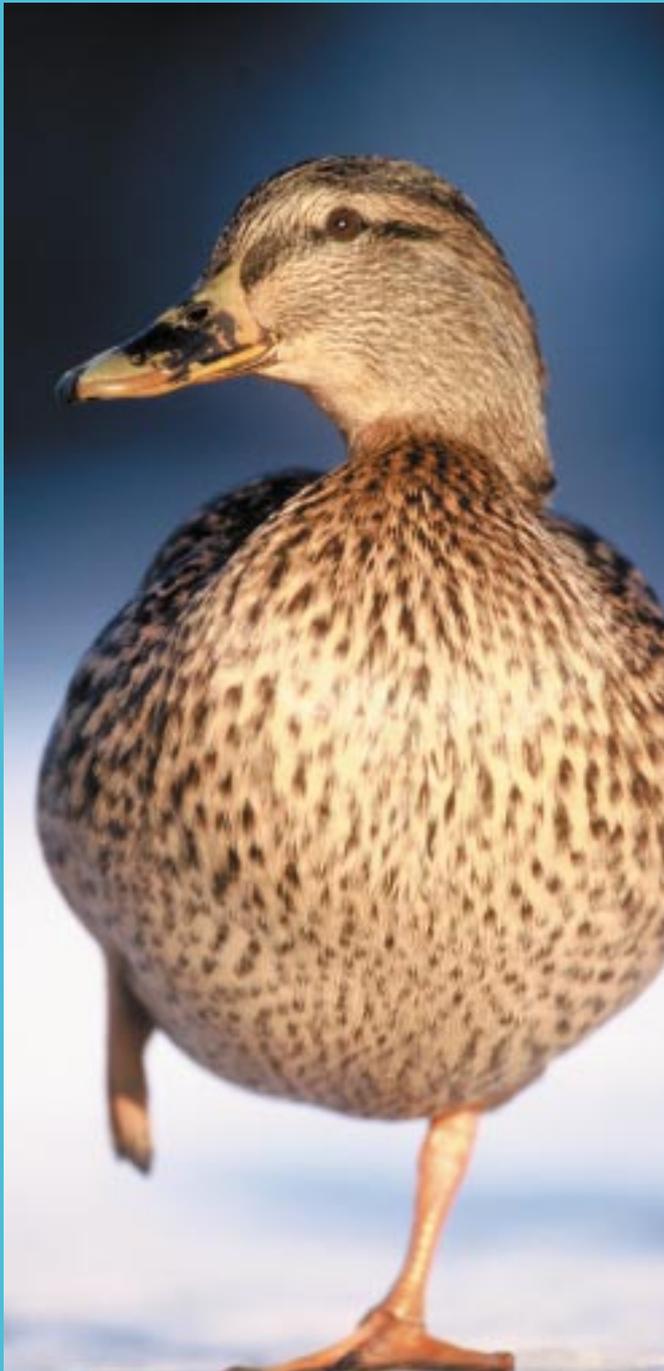
THE CANADA GOOSE

The Canada Goose was introduced into England in the 17th century, primarily as an ornamental bird, but was later deliberately dispersed throughout Britain, to provide hunting opportunities and to lessen the effects of high densities on agriculture. It was introduced to Sweden in 1933 and to other parts of Europe in later years. There are well-documented cases of the effects of these geese on agricultural habitats, but the effects on native fauna and flora are less well understood, though they are likely to exist. The geese winter and breed alongside closely related species such as the Greylag and territorial aggression shown by the Canada Goose is likely to lead to competition.

There are reports that, as densities have increased, the species has a damaging effect on reedbeds in England, a rare habitat there, by grazing and trampling. They may cause pollution of water bodies from the deposition of nutrients by roosting geese and this may have an impact on aquatic plants and animals.

The species has other impacts on man, such as damage to amenity areas (which may also affect native species). Because of its extreme tameness and association with the public in parks, it may also threaten public health in parks and water areas, and threats to air safety (a number of collisions with aircraft have been recorded).

In most European countries Canada Geese may be shot during the hunting season and shooting under licence (mainly on the grounds of alleviating crop damage) is fairly common. The species is easily caught in large numbers during the flightless period and large culls could be made. However, a large-scale programme has not been undertaken in any country because of the association of the birds with humans and the likely adverse public reaction.



THE AFRICAN YELLOW-BILLED DUCK AND THE MALLARD

The African Yellow-billed Duck occurs throughout southern Africa and is relatively common. The Mallard has been deliberately introduced into the Cape provinces of South Africa and has become naturalised, especially in urban and suburban areas. The two species easily hybridise and the progeny are fertile, so the Mallard represents a threat to the integrity of the Yellow-billed Duck. There have been efforts to control the Mallard over a number of years, but there were still some at liberty in the Southwestern and Eastern Cape in the 1990s and escapes from unauthorised keeping are still a problem.



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THE NORTH AMERICAN RUDDY DUCK AND THE WHITE-HEADED DUCK

The Ruddy Duck was brought into the United Kingdom in 1948 as part of a wildfowl collection, and started breeding soon afterwards. The young are good divers and many escaped capture and became free flying. A number escaped onto nearby lakes and numbers increased rapidly reaching about 4,500 at the turn of the century.

Birds soon reached the European mainland, the first record being in Sweden in 1965. By the early 1990s, the species had been recorded in 19 European countries, including 76 records from Spain, where a successful conservation programme had been put in place to safeguard the very rare White-headed Duck. Male Ruddy Ducks are very aggressive towards male White-headed Ducks and can mate freely with White-headed Duck females even in the presence of their mates. The ensuing hybrids are fertile, and a number of hybrids were found in Spain in the early 1990s despite strenuous

efforts being made to control the Ruddy Duck and hybrids. The threat posed by the Ruddy Duck is so serious that it threatens to eliminate the White-headed Duck as a distinct species, at least in Spain. If its spread continues to the core range of the White-headed Duck (as is likely if not checked), the species is threatened globally.

Meetings of interested parties were held at both national and international level in the 1980s to discuss the problem, and agreement was soon reached that the feasibility of control and eradication should be studied. The UK government instigated research into control programmes and undertook an intensive public awareness campaign in the early 1990s. A regional control trial commenced in 1999 (despite considerable controversy). An assessment after the three-year trial, which killed over 2,600 birds, concluded that the UK Ruddy Duck population could be reduced to 5% of the current population (fewer than 175 birds) in between four and six years. Whether eradication goes ahead and is successful remains to be seen.



***WHAT CAN AND
SHOULD BE DONE ?***



ONE OF THE MAIN PROBLEMS WITH ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF NON-NATIVE WATERBIRDS IS THAT THERE IS A LACK OF BASIC INFORMATION ON THEIR NUMBERS, DISTRIBUTION, ECOLOGY AND INTERACTION WITH NATIVE SPECIES. IMPORTANT GAPS IN KNOWLEDGE SHOULD BE ADDRESSED BEFORE ANY ACTION CAN BE TAKEN.

FINDING OUT THE SIZE OF THE PROBLEM

International monitoring programmes that include the recording of non-native waterbirds are necessary to find out how many individuals of non-native species exist in various parts of the range. This can be done through regular count networks but in some cases specific surveys will have to be done.

We should also seek information on the numbers of each species that are being kept in captivity, information that is currently non-existent or at best patchy. Since there is substantial trade, we also need to know how many of these birds are moving across national borders.

HOW GREAT IS THE RISK?

Some species can coexist with native birds without causing problems, but how do we find out whether a particular species is likely to be troublesome? Clearly the more closely related a non-native species is to a native species, the more likely they are to interbreed, and the greater the likelihood that the hybrids will be fertile. Birds that have very similar requirements in terms of food, nesting areas, etc. are more likely to come into conflict than those that occupy different niches. Aspects of the behaviour of non-native species (such as aggressiveness) are also likely to have a bearing. Looking at these issues will give an indication of the risks presented by certain species.



PREVENTING MORE ESCAPES
BETTER MEASURES ARE NEEDED TO PREVENT FURTHER INTRODUCTIONS OR ESCAPES TO SUPPLEMENT EXISTING POPULATIONS OF NON-NATIVE SPECIES. SUCH MEASURES SHOULD INCLUDE:

▶ Strict control through licensing of the keeping of non-native species in captivity. Legislation to control the methods of keeping and breeding such birds should be introduced in AEW range states. All captive birds should be ringed, so that if any escape, their origins can be traced and those responsible for their release contacted to address the reasons.

▶ Measures to monitor and control the import and export of non-native species, including a 'Black list' of those that are known to pose the greatest threat and whose movements should be prohibited.

If these measures are to be effective, these rules must be strictly enforced with heavy penalties for any breaches.





DEALING WITH TODAY'S PROBLEMS

THE AEWA AND A NUMBER OF OTHER CONVENTIONS AND STATUTES COMMIT MEMBER STATES TO CONTROL NON-NATIVE SPECIES THAT ARE AT LIBERTY WITHIN THEIR TERRITORIES, THOUGH AS YET FEW COUNTRIES HAVE TAKEN CONCERTED ACTION ABOUT THEM. THERE IS, HOWEVER, AGREEMENT AMONG SCIENTISTS AND CONSERVATIONISTS THAT THE ISSUE SHOULD BE ADDRESSED, BEGINNING WITH THOSE SPECIES THAT POSE THE GREATEST RISK TO NATIVE WILDLIFE.

WHEN A DECISION IS TAKEN TO UNDERTAKE A CONTROL PROGRAMME, FOUR ESSENTIAL STEPS MUST BE TAKEN TO MAXIMISE THE CHANCES OF SUCCESS:

1

RAISE AWARENESS AMONG KEY STAKEHOLDERS

The people and organisations that might be affected by the control programme should be consulted at the outset and briefed about the extent of the problem and the proposed methods of dealing with it.

2

OBTAIN PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR A CONTROL PROGRAMME

This is a very difficult job, since the arguments for control are not necessarily straightforward and some of the impacts of non-native species are difficult to assess and explain. The two most common issues of concern to the public are effects on non-target species (through accidental killing or disturbance) and the welfare of the target animals (how humane is the control method). Means of control must be devised that minimise these effects and the public must be assured that they are minimised.

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3

CARRY OUT THE ERADICATION OR CONTROL PROGRAMME

It is very important that the legal basis for control should be put in place so that, for example, authorities have a right of access to private land to carry out control. The methods that can be employed include:

- ▶ the control of nests and eggs
- ▶ shooting adults in the hunting season
- ▶ shooting adults at nest sites
- ▶ rounding up and humanely killing flightless birds (many waterbirds are flightless for a number of weeks each year during their moult)
- ▶ poisoning (This is against the AEWA Action Plan)

Most waterbirds are long-lived and prolific breeders so it is unlikely that the control of nests and eggs alone would solve the problem. Poisoning is against the spirit of AEWA and has a number of disadvantages, for example whether it can be targeted solely at the relevant species. A combination of shooting and other methods is likely to be needed.

4

MONITOR THE EFFECTIVENESS OF CONTROL

Surveys must be undertaken during the control programme to assess how well the work is going and, if necessary, propose changes to increase its effectiveness. It is likely that specific surveys in particular areas will be needed to achieve this.



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CONTACT ORGANISATIONS AND WEBSITES

THE AFRICAN-EURASIAN WATERBIRD AGREEMENT

Information can be found on the Agreement website:

▶ <http://www.unep-wcmc.org/aewa>

SPECIES SURVIVAL COMMISSION

The Commission, under The World Conservation Union, has an Invasive Species Specialist Group, which has produced guidelines on the prevention of the loss of biological diversity by invasive non-native species. More information can be found on the website:

▶ <http://www.iucn.org/themes/ssc>

INVASIVE SPECIES SPECIALIST GROUP

▶ <http://www.issg.org>

WETLANDS INTERNATIONAL

Coordinates studies, including international surveys and conferences, on waterbirds from its base in the Netherlands. It has a number of specialist groups, on particular groups of birds such as Geese, Herons or on particular problems, such as Threatened Species. Its website is:

▶ <http://www.wetlands.agro.nl>

CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

▶ <http://www.biodiv.org>

RAMSAR CONVENTION ON WETLANDS

▶ <http://www.ramsar.org>



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AEWA, the largest agreement developed so far under the Convention of Migratory Species (CMS), came into force on 1 November 1999. The agreement covers 237 species of birds ecologically dependent on wetlands for at least part of their annual cycle, including many species of pelicans, storks, herons, ibises, grebes, divers, cormorants, cranes, crakes, flamingos, swans, geese, ducks, waders, gulls and terns and even the african penguin.

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TEXT, DESIGN & LAYOUT: JUST ECOLOGY - UK
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