



# Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals

Secretariat provided by the United Nations Environment Programme



## STOP DUCKING HARD FACTS AND TOUGH POLICY OPTIONS ON BIRD FLU, SAYS NEW SCIENTIFIC TASK FORCE

*International Scientists warned today against panic responses based on the assumption that wild birds are the only cause of avian flu, and called for*

- *regulation of animal markets*
- *global surveillance of avian influenza in wild birds*
- *precautionary suspension or restriction of the global wild bird trade*
- *improved standards in poultry farms, farming and marketing practices and enhanced quality control of animal vaccines*
- *identification of the precise migratory routes of waterbirds and the highest risk location along different flyways.*

*The Task Force, comprising representatives and observers from 9 different international organizations including 4 UN bodies, also seeks much better data and information on the cause of the spread of the disease. It warned that several globally endangered species of birds could be wiped out by the killer disease, including the Lesser White-fronted Goose, Red-breasted Goose, Barheaded Goose, Swan Goose, Oriental Stork and Siberian Crane.*

**Bonn, October 24** – A new task force on avian influenza comprising scientists and conservationists, convened by the UNEP Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), called today for urgent action to combat the root causes of the outbreak. It warned against growing hysteria and a “one-eyed” approach in the media which grossly oversimplifies the causes of the flu outbreak, and the methods needed to counter-act it in the interests of human and animal health.

They emphasized the uncertainty of knowledge on key issues including how the virus is transmitted between domestic and wild birds. They advocated an approach based on combined risk assessment and a research programme funded by Governments and international agencies to answer 3 key questions, framed under the guidance of Professor Colin Galbraith, Chairman of the CMS Scientific Council:

1. How does the flu virus behave in wild birds that catch it, and how long can it survive in the aquatic habitats that are breeding, staging and non-breeding (wintering) grounds for the birds?
2. How is the virus actually being transmitted between domestic and wild birds?
3. Which migratory routes and specific locations can we pinpoint as posing the highest levels of risk both to and from migrating birds, including globally threatened species?

The Task Force commended the European Commission for its early, and sympathetic, approach to bids for research funds. They called on other global and regional donors to follow suit, to co-operate in jointly funded programmes and to avoid duplication and maximize new knowledge.

The Task Force also called for much greater emphasis by Governments and local authorities on combating the role of factory-farming, trade in live poultry, and wildlife markets which provide ideal conditions for the virus to spread and mutate into even more dangerous forms.

Task Force observer William Karesh, Director of the Field Veterinary Program of the Wildlife Conservation Society said:

“We are wasting valuable time pointing fingers at wild birds when we should be focusing on dealing with the root causes of this epidemic spread which are clearly to be found in rural poultry practices, the movement of

domestic poultry, and farming methods which crowd huge numbers of animals into small areas where they are much more susceptible to disease, and where the physical conditions provide ideal conditions for a virus like H5N1 to spread and mutate. On top of this we face a global and domestic wildlife trade in which literally tens of millions of birds and other animals flow through crowded wildlife markets which provide a further opportunity for humans, domestic and wild animals to be over-exposed to pathogenic viruses.”

The Task Force supports tough controls on international and domestic trade and transportation of wildlife and poultry:

“If we are serious about combating H5N1, one step we should take now would be to suspend global trade in live wild birds as this simply adds one more risk to all the others”, said John O’Sullivan of Birdlife International, who is also a special CMS scientific councilor for birds.

The Task Force warned against the use of uncertified vaccines to protect birds. Some have already been found to increase resistance to drugs. Taej Mundkur, Asia-Pacific Migratory Waterbird Conservation Strategy Coordinator of Wetlands International, explained:

“The key to vaccines is quality control. In some countries vaccines are helping to control the spread of the disease, and they have a role to play as part of a package of measures, for example in the rice growing areas of Southeast and South Asia where separation of domestic and wild bird flocks is impracticable under current farming regimes.”

The Task Force is strongly opposed to any general policy of culling wild birds. Jan Veen, associated expert of Wetlands International, presently working for them on avian influenza and migratory birds, commented:

“Quite apart from the effects on wild bird populations, many of which already suffer from habitat destruction or other man-made threats, all the evidence suggests that slaughtering wild birds as a crude form of disease control would be counter-productive, because it would interfere with group migrations, and disperse individuals or small groups of birds over a much wider area, thus magnifying the risks of contact with domestic birds. The same applies to measures aimed at destroying or reducing wild bird natural habitat at known aggregation points.”

The Task Force emphasized the need for a case-by-case approach, based on local conditions and sound science. Niels Kanstrup of the International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation (CIC) said:

“ We have to get away from the misconception that wild birds are the main problem when in fact they are in many ways the victims of this disease. Hunters and their local organizations have an important role to play in detecting and reporting any new outbreaks as well as supporting Government and conservation bodies in the additional research and monitoring likely to be required over an extended period.”

The Task Force also considered a list of 36 waterbird species which are already globally threatened in the wild, and are felt to be especially vulnerable to avian influenza. These include the Lesser White-fronted Goose, Red-breasted Goose, Swan Goose, Oriental Stork and Siberian Crane (Full list attached in Annex). Already the population of the Barheaded Goose (a species restricted to central and southern Asia) has been severely affected by the disease: during May-July 2005 about 10 % of the total estimated population of about 52-60,000 individuals died of AI in China.

Peter Bridgewater, Secretary General of the Ramsar Convention noted that “As the global convention dealing with wetlands and waterfowl, we are concerned that panic about Avian Influenza will promote knee-jerk negative actions to both birds and wetlands. Neither birds nor wetlands are proven culprits at this time, so wise management of these resources, as well as clear and unambiguous human health precautions, is the way forward.”

Task Force Convener, Robert Hepworth, Executive Secretary of the Convention on Migratory Species, concluded

“ The risks to animal health from the existing avian influenza epidemic are real. There is little doubt that it originated within poultry farms, and then infected wild birds which are victims as well as vectors of the virus. As

a result, thousands of wild birds have already died, and millions of domestic birds have been slaughtered, resulting in major economic losses, often to poor communities.

“ Now there is also a very real concern that a further mutation could lead to a pandemic affecting millions of humans. The best chance of avoiding this is to take measures addressing the root causes and based on the best possible knowledge. We know what to do on the animal side – improve farming standards, restrict live animal markets and trade, step up research quickly, ensure quality control of animal vaccines, establish a global programme to monitor the occurrence of avian influenza among waterbirds along their migratory routes and avoid counter-productive measures like culling wild birds, or destroying their habitats. It is essential to help developing countries to acquire sufficient capacity to implement such central measures.

“We hope the media will now present a more balanced picture, focusing on the facts and the action we can take to reduce the risks of a human pandemic being added to the existing tragedy for birds”.

## ANNEX

**List of Eurasian migrant Globally Threatened bird species considered to be at particular risk from Avian Influenza**

John O'Sullivan, BirdLife International and CMS Scientific Council

IUCN threat status is shown in brackets (CR=Critical; EN = Endangered; VU = Vulnerable)  
Where appropriate, CMS Appendix is given as CMS I and/or II

Dalmatian Pelican *Pelecanus crispus* VU CMS I  
 Spot-billed Pelican *Pelecanus philippensis* VU  
 Chinese Egret *Egretta eulophotes* VU CMS I  
 Japanese Night-heron *Gorsachius goisagi* EN CMS I  
 Milky Stork *Mycteria cinerea* VU  
 Oriental Stork *Ciconia boyciana* EN CMS I  
 Lesser Adjutant *Leptoptilos javanicus* VU  
 Greater Adjutant *Leptoptilos dubius* EN  
 Black-faced Spoonbill *Platalea minor* EN CMS I  
 Northern Bald Ibis *Geronticus eremita* CR CMS I & II  
 White-headed Duck *Oxyura leucocephala* EN CMS I & II  
 Swan Goose *Anser cygnoides* EN CMS I & II  
 Lesser White-fronted Goose *Anser erythropus* VU CMS I & II  
 Red-breasted Goose *Branta ruficollis* VU CMS I & II  
 Baikal Teal *Anas formosa* VU CMS I & II  
 Marbled Teal *Marmaronetta angustirostris* VU CMS I & II  
 Baer's Pochard *Aythya baeri* VU CMS II  
 Scaly-sided Merganser *Mergus squamatus* EN CMS II  
 Steller's Eider *Polysticta stelleri* VU CMS I & II  
 Siberian Crane *Grus leucogeranus* CR CMS I & II  
 Sarus Crane *Grus antigone* VU CMS II  
 White-naped Crane *Grus vipio* VU CMS I & II  
 Hooded Crane *Grus monacha* VU CMS I & II  
 Black-necked Crane *Grus nigricollis* VU CMS I & II  
 Red-crowned Crane *Grus japonensis* EN CMS I & II  
 Swinhoe's Rail *Coturnicops exquisitus* VU  
 Masked Finfoot *Heliopais personata* VU  
 Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius* CR CMS I & II  
 Wood Snipe *Gallinago nemoricola* VU CMS II  
 Slender-billed Curlew *Numenius tenuirostris* CR CMS I & II  
 Spotted Greenshank *Tringa guttifer* EN CMS I & II  
 Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Eurynorhynchus pygmeus* EN CMS I & II  
 Saunders's Gull *Larus saundersi* VU CMS I & II  
 Relict Gull *Larus relictus* VU CMS I  
 Chinese Crested-tern *Sterna bernsteini* CR CMS I  
 Indian Skimmer *Rynchops albicollis* VU

NB This list (total 36 species) should be regarded as indicative rather than the final word. In particular, it does not include purely African migrant species, which might be affected if avian influenza reaches that continent. Nor does it include true seabirds, birds of prey and passerines associated with wetland habitats, all of which may be at some risk.

## **Avian Flu Early Warning System Given Green Light**

### **Conference of the Convention on Migratory Species - Nairobi, Kenya, 21 to 25 November 2005**

Nairobi/Bonn, 20 November 2005 -An avian flu early warning system, able to alert countries and communities to the arrival of potentially infected wild birds, is to be developed by an alliance of organizations led by the United Nations.

The system will be designed to alert authorities on different continents that migratory water birds are on their way.

Special maps are to be developed for individual countries pin pointing the precise locations such as lakes, marshes and other wetland areas where the birds are likely to go.

Armed with such information, local health and environment bodies on continents like Africa, Asia and in Latin America will be better able to prioritize their planning and response.

This may include the issuance of advice to vulnerable groups in potential 'hot spot' areas.

Advice may include recommending that farmers move poultry away from key wetlands so as to minimize cross transmission with migratory birds up to hygiene advice to licensed hunters on handling harvested birds.

The warning system, details of which were announced at an international wildlife conference taking place in Nairobi, Kenya, is to be developed by the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) with support and funding from the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

Experts from other leading organizations such as Wetlands International, Birdlife International and the International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation are also expected to be part of the scheme.

Klaus Toepfer, Executive Director of UNEP which is hosting the meeting, said: "Precise information on the places where migratory birds go including their resting sites and finally destinations is currently scattered across a myriad of organizations, bodies and groups. It is absolutely vital that this is brought together in a way that is useful to those dealing with the threat of this pandemic backed up by high quality, precision, mapping".

"There are also important gaps in our scientific knowledge about 'fly ways' and migratory routes for some species. We need to urgently bridge that gap too. In doing so I believe this initiative can make a valuable contribution to the world-wide effort to deal with this threatened pandemic," he added.

Robert Hepworth, Executive Secretary of CMS, said: "We will, with UNEP and other partners, be treating the development of this early warning system as a matter of priority. To fully realize it may take two years. But we know that it is needed and we know that the issue of avian flu and similar infections is likely to be a long term one. So such a system should be useful not only over the short but over the long term

too. We hope it will be particularly useful in developing countries which are under particular pressure to make the best use of limited resources”.

He said the UNEP-CMS initiative would also be holding talks with other bodies who have expressed interest in the need for such a system, including the European Commission, so as to dovetail efforts and avoid duplication.

The exact workings of the system have yet to be ironed out. However, the timing of migrations can vary from year to year and from season to season depending on numerous factors including weather and climatic conditions.

An efficient early warning system will have to feed in observations from sites throughout the world on when water birds are starting their migration and relay this onto countries likely to receive these populations.

News of the system comes as hundreds of delegates have gathered in Nairobi for the eighth conference to the parties to the CMS including the UK environment minister Jim Knight.

Other issues at the conference, which runs until 25 November, include plans for a new agreement among 13 countries to conserve the West African elephant; a new report on threats to dolphins, porpoises and other small cetaceans and studies assessing the conservation status of African and Eurasian birds of prey.

The first ever award of a new Euro 10,000 prize for a Doctoral thesis on migratory species is being made to an American scientist, Dr Zeb Hogan, for his work on the critically threatened giant Mekong catfish—the world’s largest freshwater fish.

Two special sessions also took place over the weekend on relationships between climate change, animal diseases and migratory species. On Sunday delegates attended an informal event to hear presentations on migratory species from many of the CMS convention’s partners including the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society, the World Wide Fund for Nature and IUCN: The World Conservation Union.

Migratory species, creatures that travel across frontiers and territorial waters, face an increasing range of existing and emerging threats to their survival including poaching, habitat loss and pollution up to climate change and animal diseases.

The conference will consider several species for new protection measures and conservation listings including three species of African bats, the basking shark and gorillas.

Notes to Editors

More details on the conference can be found at [www.cms.int](http://www.cms.int)

The Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals is a United Nations Environment Programme-linked convention located in Bonn, Germany, with a current membership of over 90 countries.

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## UNEP News Release



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## **Statement by the Deputy Executive Director, UNEP at the International Pledging Conference on Avian and Human Pandemic Influenza**

**Beijing, China, 17 – 18 January 2006**

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me first of all express UNEP's appreciation to the host country for organizing this most timely event, the Secretary General for having put Global Health on the World's agenda probably best reflected by his personal initiative to establish the Global fund for Aids, Tuberculosis and Malaria as well as the representative of the European Union for having reflected the environmental dimension of avian flu and the potential of controlling a disease by understanding its root causes.

The emergence of avian flu as a challenge to human health is clearly a reflection of major changes taking place in the environment such as through the intensification for example of poultry farming with all its consequences.

We know that migratory birds may be one vector, but they are not the cause of avian flu. Nor are they likely to be the only, or principal vector.

Human-induced movements of poultry, or captured wild or captive-bred birds, and of humans themselves, seem likely to be an equal or greater threat. Live animal markets which facilitate millions of potential cross-infections are also a major but, until recently, less recognized threat.

We know too that avian flu is not the only one disease with an environmental health background - a startling number of new similar vector-borne diseases have emerged in recent years - Lassa, SARS, Ebola, Marburg and avian flu.

A common factor is that such diseases evolve when humans intensively interact with the natural environment. The progress of SARS showed how quickly a new disease can move from one village in a corner of the world around the globe to dozens of other nations.

This is why we must rise to the global health challenge of avian flu.

What can we from the environmental community to complement the human medical and research response?

UNEP is not a wealthy body in terms of funds. But we are rich in environmental expertise. We stand ready to contribute that expertise to the efforts which have so far been focusing on human and animal health issues. This includes the know-how available through the multilateral conventions such as CBD, CITES and CMS and the networks of scientists and informed NGOs whom they partner.

Funds from the larger agencies, and donor states, are needed to utilize this expertise in answering several key questions:

- How does the flu virus behave in wild birds that catch it, and how long can it survive in the aquatic habitats that are breeding, staging and non-breeding

(wintering) grounds for the birds?

- How is the virus actually being transmitted between domestic and wild birds?
- Which migratory routes and specific locations can we pinpoint as posing the highest levels of risk both to and from migrating birds, including globally threatened species?
- By answering these and other questions we should be able to move towards developing a global surveillance or “early warning” system.
- This would monitor the occurrence of avian influenza among waterbirds along their migratory routes, and identify potentially high-risk “hot spots” where cross-infection between wild and domestic birds could be predicted, allowing precautionary measures such as improved hygiene standards and the separation of domestic birds to be taken.

UNEP HQ and the Secretariat of the UNEP-based Convention on Migratory Species have already begun to work towards such a system, taking advantage of the Scientific Task Force set up by CMS and several other inter-governmental and NGO bodies last year.

Education and information are also fundamental to the effort to combat AI, both in delivering the latest results of scientific analysis to government authorities and affected communities, and in ensuring that uninformed or counter-productive response measures, such as attempts to cull large groups of migratory birds, or destroy their wetland habitats, are not taken as a substitute for the real solutions, which we already know must be based on improved hygienic standards in animal markets and farms of all sizes, a move to less intensive forms of poultry production, and the development of human and animal vaccines.

Governments need to promote awareness and in many cases they will need financial help to do so, as part of a wider package of capacity development measures.

I commend the lead which FAO and WHO are taking in these areas. In the conservation and environmental arena, I also commend to you the work of the CMS-led Scientific Task Force on Avian Influenza, which has already helped to explode some of the myths about the spread of the H5N1 virus. I would like on behalf of CMS and the Task Force today to pledge their support to initiatives agreed at this meeting which can benefit from the expertise and advice of the Task Force members.

Moreover I thank the Government representatives at the recent Conference of Parties to three Conventions in Oct-Nov-2005 – UNEP/CMS, the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, and the CMS African Eurasian Water Bird Agreement (AEWA), who passed crucial reductions on AI which must now be funded and implemented.

In conclusion, the real danger is complacency. In fact we have never been in a better position to consolidate our previous gains and to move on to add health, wealth and a better environment to our world.

Now it is essential to help developing countries to acquire sufficient capacity to implement such central measures.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The fact that we meet together, experts from different disciplines promotes consilience. Consilience, literally the bringing together of knowledge from different disciplines.

Our task is to make those connections fit better - the environment lies at the core of the challenge. It is the new interdependence and the new global dynamics which have positioned environment as the defining characteristic of the global society of the 21st century.

Thank you very much!



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## **The environmental dimension behind the avian flu pandemic**

### ***UNEP complementing the human medical and research front***

The emergence of avian flu as a challenge to human health is clearly a reflection of major changes taking place in the environment, underlined by Shafqat Kakakhel, Deputy-Executive-Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) on the occasion of the International Pledging Conference on Avian and Human Influenza in Beijing (17-18.1.2006). The conference will assess the financing needs of countries and regions, and explore how these needs can be met.

Avian flu is not the only one disease with an environmental health background - a startling number of similar vector-born diseases have emerged in recent years - Lassa, SARS, Ebola, Marburg and recently the threat of an avian flu pandemic. A common factor is that such diseases evolve when humans intensively interact with the natural environment.

“We know that migratory birds may be one vector, but they are not the cause of avian flu. Nor are they likely to be the only vector”, underlined Shafqat Kakakhel.

Human-induced movements of poultry, or captured wild or captive-bred birds, and of humans themselves, seem to be an equal or greater threat. Live animal markets which facilitate millions of potential cross-infections are also a major but, until recently, less recognized threat.

“This is why we must rise to the global health challenge of avian flu. What can we do on the environmental front to complement the human medical and research response?” He underlined the need for support in answering key questions, such as:

- How does the flu virus behave in wild birds that catch it, and how long can it survive in the aquatic habitats that are breeding, staging and non-breeding (wintering) grounds for the birds?
- Which migratory routes and specific locations can we pinpoint as posing the highest levels of risk both to and from migrating birds, including globally threatened species?

“By answering these and other questions the environmental community should be able to complement the developing of a global surveillance or “early warning” system” on avian flue, he said. UNEP HQ and the Secretariat of the UNEP-based Convention on Migratory Species have already begun to work towards such a system, taking advantage of the Scientific Task Force on Avian Flue, which was set up last year by CMS and several other inter-governmental and NGO bodies.

“The real danger is complacency. In fact we have never been in a better position to consolidate our previous gains and to move on to add health, wealth and a better environment to our world,” concluded UNEP’s Deputy Executive Director.





Convention on the  
Conservation of  
Migratory Species of  
Wild Animals



Agreement on the  
Conservation of  
African-Eurasian  
Migratory  
Waterbirds (AEWA)



Bonn, 22 February 2006

## PRESS RELEASE

### **Avian Influenza and the United Nations Environment Programme: investigating the root causes of the spreading of the disease and effective solutions for its containment.**

*"Blaming bird migrations is misleading and would not promote lasting solutions" - says the Executive Secretary of the UNEP Convention on Migratory Species. "The international community should focus instead on the ecological, social and economic causes of the spreading such as the drastic reduction of wildlife habitats and unsustainable farming practices, which have led to an unhealthy proximity of migratory birds and domesticated animals".*

As Avian Influenza reaches Africa, India and Western Europe, migrations of birds continue to be identified as the main cause of the spread, threatening panic in areas where wild birds feed, rest or breed and reinforcing the idea that solutions to prevent the pandemic are to be found in the control of this phenomenon which has been a central part of natural ecosystems for millennia.

By continuing to focus only on bird migrations, other mechanisms and paths for the contamination are being underestimated, and effective protection measures ignored. UNEP, in collaboration with its Convention on Migratory Species based in Bonn and the related African Eurasian Waterbird Agreement are convening a meeting of experts to investigate the root causes of the spread and identify effective solutions for its containment. The meeting, to be held in Nairobi at the UNEP headquarters on 10-11 April 2006, will deliver scientific advice to governments by trying to provide an answer to a number of unresolved issues.

Since the AI "story" emerged, too many voices in the media have been pointing at what looks like an extremely easy, although logical, assumption: as outbreaks appear in different locations, the cause should be mobile, 'migratory' in nature, traveling from one site to another. As wild migratory birds were found infected, they immediately became the authors of the crime. However, as in any normal criminal investigation, all clues should be considered, and all evidence gathered.

First, is the spread really following only migratory routes? In the last couple of weeks, outbreaks are appearing contemporarily in different, quite distant locations. However, during their migrations birds reach different grounds at different time and stages. For instance in India migratory birds landed in September, much earlier than the outbreak. "If they at all had carried the virus, it would have been noticed much earlier" remarks Dr.

Taej Mundkur, an ornithologist from Wetlands International member of CMS/AEWA coordinated scientific task force on 'Wild Birds and Avian Influenza'. Why this time gap if an infected bird should normally release the virus within a couple of weeks since the infection?

Also, there seem to be little correlation between the predominantly north-south orientation of flyways and the southeast to northwest path by which the virus has spread from SE Asia to Eastern Europe. How can this be explained? Why are some countries along migratory routes not vulnerable and others, outside of these corridors, being affected? What are other ways in which the virus can be spread? Dr. Mundkur remarked in previous interviews that movement of poultry and poultry products have been found to be most common cause of spread of virus across the world.

Moreover, there are a number of questions on the dangers posed by migratory birds to humans. Are migratory birds primary carriers, if high pathogenic avian influenza viruses are very rare in these wild animals? It should be reminded that wild birds have not been implicated in any human AI infections yet recorded. While there seem to be now sufficient evidence that some wild bird species can survive the H5N1 infection and even not develop the disease, in most cases H5N1 has been detected in dying or moribund birds. It is difficult for sick and dying animals to be vectors as they will not be able to fly long distances. Therefore, to which extent are migratory birds a natural reservoir of H5N1 or are they mainly victims of it, as they have contracted from intermingling with domestic fowl? Why is such intermingling increasingly taking place – could one reason be the reduction of wetlands where migratory birds previously used more exclusively? Who is responsible for the loss of those wetlands?

There is the need to better understand which species can be carriers, and which ones cannot contract the virus. Also, amongst those subject to infection, it is important to differentiate between those that do not survive, and have therefore a limited capability to spread the virus, and the asymptomatic carriers whose role in the transmission of the virus needs to be further explored.

UNEP is also concerned with the solutions proposed to contain the pandemic. While most of the cases are found in poultry, culling of wild birds is still being floated as a possible means to stop the spread. The Convention on Migratory Species, which has 25 years of experience in the conservation of wild animals worldwide, sees culling as the 'quick fix', definitely a wrong approach diverging efforts and attention from the real causes of the spread of bird flu and effective solutions. Unanimously, meetings of the contracting Parties to CMS, AEWA and the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, three international agreements specialized on migratory animals and their habitats, have rejected culling as a plausible solution.

"What's happening in the world with AI is simply highlighting the connection between the degradation of ecosystems and their vulnerabilities" – says Robert Hepworth, Executive Secretary of the Convention. "The proximity of migratory birds to poultry is the outcome of incorrect planning and development paths, which have caused the sharing of important habitats for migratory birds - like wetlands - between wildlife and farms, with the obvious consequences we are now experiencing".

Ecological imbalances caused by proximity, high density of development and unsustainable agriculture and farming, which increase the pressure on ecosystems, compromise their correct functioning.

"The 'quick fix' we are witnessing now is not the solution. Vaccines, quarantine, antivirals could contain this spread, but the truth is that, unless we work to reestablish a correct balance between the human-made world and nature, or to say it in more scientific terms, we work to maintain the resilience of ecosystems to human pressure, the problem will re-emerge" continues Mr. Hepworth "It might be a different disease, involving different species, but it will happen again" he predicts " unless the international community addresses the real causes of environmental degradation".

"Blaming migratory birds seems the easiest way not to focus on the real problems related to development and unsustainable agricultural practices" echoes Mr. Bert Lenten, Executive Secretary of the African Eurasian Waterbirds Agreement. "We should focus on effective conservation measures for wildlife and their habitats, thus maintaining healthy and uncontaminated ecosystems".

The two international conservation agreements have already created, in collaboration with a number of other international organizations concerned with the spreading of the virus in wildlife, a taskforce on avian influenza and wild birds which regularly meets by teleconference since August last year. The scientific taskforce has produced advise, widely circulated in the form of press releases, to raise the awareness of the international community on the effects that the flu is having on wildlife, and to stress how this phenomenon is both a human health concern and a conservation issue.

The meeting in Nairobi will consider the latest scientific evidence, provide expert advice to this investigation and reliable information supported by science. "There is no need for further speculations, now its time to stick to the science" concludes Mr. Hepworth.

The Convention was also tasked by UNEP to create an early warning system, to analyze and study migration paths and hotspots of possible contacts between migratory birds and poultry, so to scientifically map those areas, which need to be alerted for a possible outbreak. The early warning system will consequently identify those areas where domesticated animals and wildlife have to share the same habitat, thus providing a detailed picture of regions which will need careful planning of future developments as well as better conservation and restoration measures.

Conservation and sustainable development are claimed by the United Nations Environment Programme as the policies and solutions for a healthy future. The case of avian influenza is another confirmation for the need of a balanced approach between growth and protection of the environment.

Useful links:

[www.cms.int](http://www.cms.int)

[www.unep-aewa.org](http://www.unep-aewa.org)

[www.wetlands.org](http://www.wetlands.org)

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Convention on the  
Conservation of  
Migratory Species of  
Wild Animals



Agreement on the  
Conservation of  
African-Eurasian  
Migratory  
Waterbirds (AEWA)



Bonn, 22 February 2006

## PRESS RELEASE

### **Migratory birds: from messengers of life to ambassadors of death?**

*While some media are still portraying birds as the main vectors of the spread of avian flu, the United Nations Environment Programme with its associated Convention on Migratory Species and the African Eurasian Waterbird Agreement are launching a campaign to remind the world that migrations are essential to natural processes for the effective functioning of our ecosystems. We must not make the mistake of blaming migratory birds for the creation and spread of deadly new viruses when human destruction of the natural world is the real culprit.*

In ancient Greece the bird of Athena represented the renewal of life. A dove, with an olive branch in its beak, returned to Noah's ark to announce the end of the deadly flood. The dove remained a symbol of peace and hope. For the Egypt of pharaohs the falcon had protective powers and was linked to royalty. For the native Americans birds had different meanings, always positive and linked to the concepts of unity, freedom, community, safe return, love and celebration of life.

In almost all cultures, for centuries flocks of birds have announced the arrival of spring, and the yearly rebirth of nature associated with it. The social acceptance of birds as messengers of life was accompanied by the knowledge that migrations had indeed an important role to play in ecosystem functioning, as providers of services and food supply.

Both farmers and scientists knew that birds provide important ecological services, including seed dispersal, plant pollination and pest control. In addition to being important regulators of ecosystems many species were and still are source of food and livelihoods for many.

However, this year, for the first time in history, nobody seems to be impatient to greet the arrival of migratory birds. On the contrary, media worldwide are depicting the phenomenon as the carrier of a deadly disease. The illness is portrayed as the potential new plague and migratory birds are sometimes being cast in a role little better than that of rats in the middle ages.

"There is no evidence that avian influenza was passed to humans by wild birds, and it is obvious that only the mutation of the virus causing the spreading of the disease from human to human could provoke a real pandemic. Yet, the public perception, supported by incomplete or inaccurate media coverage, is pointing fingers at migratory birds" says Mr.

Bert Lenten, Executive Secretary of the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement and main organizer of a UNEP campaign on bird migrations.

Wrong assumptions and solutions seem to stem from inaccurate or partial information. Also the Executive Secretary of the UNEP Convention on Migratory Species, Mr. Robert Hepworth, reiterates that holding migratory birds responsible is misleading and would not promote lasting solutions. "The international community should focus instead on the ecological, social and economic causes of the spreading such as the drastic reduction of wildlife habitats and unsustainable farming practices, which have led to an unhealthy proximity of migratory birds and domesticated animals".

"Blaming migratory birds seems the easiest way not to focus on the real problems related to development and unsustainable agricultural practices" continues Mr. Bert Lenten, Executive Secretary of the UNEP African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds Agreement. "Instead of wondering where the next deadly landing would occur, we should focus on effective conservation measures for wildlife and their habitats, thus maintaining healthy and uncontaminated ecosystems".

To promote awareness on the importance of bird migrations for ecosystem functioning, as well as to inform on the threats and the conservation challenges birds face, UNEP, AEWA and CMS have launched the "World Migratory Bird Day", to be celebrated every year on a date in early spring (this year the celebration will be held on 8 April). Information delivered during the events to be celebrated worldwide will certainly include up-to-date information on avian influenza and its effects on birds –so far also victims of the disease.

Under the motto: "Migratory Birds Need Our Support Now!" UN is stressing the urgency of action required to undertake a number of conservation measures, which will prevent many birds worldwide from facing extinction.

The campaign is inviting governments, international organization and the general public to raise awareness on the threats faced by birds, from obstacles to their journeys to the effects of climate change on their paths, to habitat degradation, desertification, unsustainable uses.

The organizers of the event have chosen to advertise the event through a poster portraying flyways, now too often seen as the route of the spreading of the disease. "Flyways should remain a symbol of healthy journeys from one breeding, feeding, nursing and resting site to another. Flying birds coming in our direction should not be the reason for concern, but on the contrary the announcement of a new, pleasant, season" concludes Mr. Lenten.

Useful links:

<http://www.migratorybirdday.org>

<http://www.cms.int><http://www.unep-aewa.org>

<http://www.gallmannkenya.org/index.php>

[www.wetlands.org](http://www.wetlands.org)

[www.hwo.org](http://www.hwo.org)

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# Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals

Secretariat provided by the United Nations Environment Programme



## International Scientific Task Force on Avian Influenza (AI) to analyse links between Migratory Water Birds and AI

A new Scientific Task Force on Avian Influenza (AI), composed of representatives and observers from the principal international organizations concerned with migratory species issues, met on October 18 in Bonn, Germany, in an atmosphere of increased concern that, while it is not clearly established how the disease is spreading, migratory birds may be a contributing factor to the spread of the highly pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) strain A/H5N1.

As there is no one organization dedicated to studying and monitoring specifically the complex links between human health and that of animals and the environment<sup>1</sup>, the Scientific Task Force was convened in late August by the UNEP Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) to ensure that international efforts to contain HPAI H5N1<sup>2</sup> did not overlook vital information concerning migratory species and other environmental considerations including the economic impact<sup>3</sup> on those areas where migratory birds support the livelihoods of local populations.

Confirmation of recent outbreaks of H5N1 in Rumania has focused attention of health officials on the Danube delta, which contains Europe's largest wetlands and is a major migratory area for wild birds coming from Russia, Scandinavia, Poland and Germany and flying to warmer non-breeding (wintering areas) in North Africa including the Nile delta, and Western Europe.

While there is a possibility of transmission of the virus through contacts at stop-over sites between birds from Southwest Siberia and other species migrating to western Europe from other areas, the likelihood of this possibility is difficult to estimate because of lack of detailed information on the migratory routes of many species of birds, an accurate quantification of the number of birds involved, or precise information on the veterinary and epidemiological aspects of the AI, all of which are crucial to a credible risk assessment. Task Force fears the paucity of reliable information could lead to actions by well-meaning organizations and individuals, which could have unfortunate and possibly disastrous long-term consequences for conservation, especially some of the species which already have small populations and are considered globally threatened."

Members of the Task Force caution against premature finger-pointing at migratory wild birds, indicating that more needs to be known about their precise migratory routes and where they stop, and to understand which species may be more susceptible to such a virus. And thereafter, which of these

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<sup>1</sup> The UN Food & Agriculture Organization (FAO) monitors the production of livestock and crops, but is not mandated to monitor threats or dangers to or from wild animals and plants. (FAO has established an Avian Flu Technical Task Force in order to closely monitor the current situation in Asia, and provide technical support for handling the crisis and facilitate communication between relevant international organizations.) The World Health Organization (WHO) only intervenes in countries threatened by disease when officially invited to do so, and the World Animal Health Organization has a limited volunteer committee to consider wildlife related diseases.

<sup>2</sup> Influenza A (H5N1) virus – also called “H5N1 virus” – is an influenza A virus subtype that occurs mainly in birds. The influenza virus was first isolated when it caused the first known mass death of wild birds (terns) in South Africa in 1961. Like all bird flu viruses, H5N1 virus could circulate over several years among birds worldwide, is very contagious among birds, and can be deadly. <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/gen-info/facts.htm>

<sup>3</sup> Economic impact may include everything from poverty, civil unrest and large-scale human migration, to pollution of water; interruption of plant pollination, removal of pests from crops and forest species and control of invasive plant species; disruption of sustainable development practices; and bankrupting of small farm holdings.

species are able to survive the attack of the virus, and, if fit enough to migrate, able to carry the virus, if at all. And if they can carry it, whether they could spread it to other species or to poultry.

The guiding principle of the Task Force is that the best chance of avoiding a further mutation of A/H5N1 that could lead to a pandemic affecting millions of humans is to take measures addressing the root causes and based on the best possible knowledge.

The Task Force emphasizes the need for a global approach to the thorough analysis of the relationship between AI and migratory birds, noting that while the better-known migration links are with Africa, which along with South and Southeast Asia, represents one of the main non-breeding (wintering) areas for species breeding in Southwest Siberia and Central Asia, any examination of the relationship between AI and migratory birds must be based on a world-wide analysis, addressing not only the whole of Asia, Africa, Oceania and Europe, but also North America (Alaska and Canada).

Therefore the focus of the October 18 meeting was the need to quickly research and establish the data and analysis required to enable or improve risk assessment by:

1. clarifying the virus behaviour in (i) different water bird populations, especially viral incubation periods, the infectious period in birds and the symptoms affecting individual wild birds, as well as determining their survival rate; and (ii) in the aquatic habitats which are breeding, staging and non-breeding (wintering) grounds for the birds;
2. establishing informed assessment of the possibility or likelihood of transmission from wild populations to domestic flocks including other non-water bird species found near poultry areas;
3. identifying the nature of migratory routes and timings for key migratory species to expand and/or refine existing ecological monitoring of these populations;
4. developing a combined risk assessment based on the known behaviour of the virus, risks of transmission, routes and timing of migratory species, as well as known poultry husbandry techniques;
5. improving farming standards and developing strategies to limit the risk of any disease transmission between domestic and wild birds.

It was at the same time agreed that priority action to try to confine and solve the problem should address the root causes of the insurgence and spread of the epidemic, which are clearly to be found in rural poultry practices, the movement of domestic poultry, and farming methods, as well as in global and domestic trade of wild animals. Measures recommended by the Task force include:

- regulation of animal markets;
- improved standards in poultry farms, farming and marketing practices and enhanced quality control of animal vaccines;
- precautionary suspension or restriction of the global wild bird trade;
- global surveillance of avian influenza in wild birds;
- identification of the precise migratory routes of waterbirds and highest risk locations along different flyways, including breeding, staging and non-breeding (wintering) sites;
- avoiding counter-productive measures like culling wild birds, or destroying their habitats.

A new meeting of the Task force is planned at the beginning of November 2005.

The Avian Influenza epidemic and its linkages with wild birds and their natural habitats is on the agenda of three major intergovernmental meetings to be held in the coming weeks:

- 3<sup>rd</sup> Meeting of the Parties to the Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA MOP3), 23-27 October 2005, Dakar, Senegal  
[http://www.unep-aewa.org/meetings/en/mop/mop3\\_docs/mop3.htm](http://www.unep-aewa.org/meetings/en/mop/mop3_docs/mop3.htm)
- 9<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the conference of the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar COP 9), 8-15 November 2005, Kampala, Uganda  
[http://www.ramsar.org/index\\_cop9\\_e.htm](http://www.ramsar.org/index_cop9_e.htm)
- 8<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS COP8), 20-25 November 2005, Nairobi, Kenya  
[http://www.cms.int/bodies/COP/cop8/cop8\\_mainpage.htm](http://www.cms.int/bodies/COP/cop8/cop8_mainpage.htm)

On Saturday November 19, immediately before CMS COP8, the Convention on Migratory Species will host a roundtable discussion on *MIGRATORY SPECIES AS VECTOR OF DISEASES: MYTH OR REALITY?* at which internationally-recognized experts and scientists will discuss and help clarify the role migratory birds

play in the transmission of the avian flu to animals and humans. The roundtable is being held at UNEP Headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya.

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### Members of the Task Force

Robert Hepworth, Executive Secretary, Professor Colin Galbraith, Chairman of the CMS Scientific Council, and Marco Barbieri, Scientific and Technical Officer, UNEP Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), <http://www.cms.int/>

Bert Lenten, Executive Secretary and Sergey Dereliev, Scientific & Technical Officer, Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA), <http://www.unep-aewa.org/about/introduction.htm>

John O'Sullivan, International Treaties Advisor and CMS Scientific Councillor for birds, Birdlife International <http://www.birdlife.org/>

Niels Kanstrup, President, CIC Migratory Birds Commission, CIC - International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation (CIC) (also representing the Federation of Associations for Hunting and Conservation of the EU (FACE)) <http://www.cic-wildlife.org>

Peter Bridgewater, Secretary General, Nick Davidson, Deputy Secretary General and David Stroud, Scientific and Technical Review Panel, Ramsar Convention on Wetlands <http://www.ramsar.org>

Ward Hagemeijer, Programme Head Biodiversity Conservation, Jan Veen, Associate Expert and Taej Mundkur, Asia-Pacific Migratory Waterbird Conservation Strategy Coordinator, Wetlands International <http://www.wetlands.org/>

William Karesh, DVM, Director of the Field Veterinary Program of the Wildlife Conservation Society <http://www.wcs.org/> [Observer]

Willem Schoustra, FAO [http://www.fao.org/ag/againfo/subjects/en/health/diseases-cards/special\\_avian.html](http://www.fao.org/ag/againfo/subjects/en/health/diseases-cards/special_avian.html) [Observer]

Pierre Quiblier, WHO-UNEP Health and Environment Linkages Initiative (HELI) <http://www.who.int/> [Observer]

## Relevant Links

AVIAN FLU AND WILD BIRDS <http://www.wetlands.org/IWC/Avianflu/default.htm>

Avian Influenza: How can we protect human, livestock and wildlife health from Avian Influenza?  
World Conservation Society Fact Sheet <http://www.wcs.org/media/file/avian-influenzamigratorybirdsaug2005factsheetupdatev2.pdf>

Avian Influenza:

Its significance for the conservation of wild birds and the role of hunting  
Joint Position Statement of CIC and FACE  
<http://www.cic-wildlife.org/index.php?id=170>

"Avian influenza" interview with Taej Mundkur of Wetlands International and André Farrar from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds in the United Kingdom (Singapore Radio International)  
15 October 2005  
<http://www.rsi.sg/english/perspective/view/2005101518163/1/.html>

BirdLife International: Statement on Avian Influenza ("Bird 'flu")  
14 October 2005  
[http://www.birdlife.org/action/science/species/avian\\_flu/index.html](http://www.birdlife.org/action/science/species/avian_flu/index.html)

Guidelines for Member States enhanced surveillance for avian influenza viruses in wild birds in the European Union – September 2005 to January 2006  
<http://europa.eu.int/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=MEMO/05/304&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN>

Key facts about Avian Influenza (Bird Flu) and Avian Influenza A (H5N1) Virus Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/gen-info/facts.htm>

Potential risk of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) spreading through wild water bird migration (1 September 2005)  
<http://www.fao.org/ag/againfo/subjects/documents/ai/AVIbull033.pdf>

Wild birds and Avian Influenza  
[http://www.fao.org/ag/againfo/subjects/en/health/diseases-cards/avian\\_HPAIrisk.html](http://www.fao.org/ag/againfo/subjects/en/health/diseases-cards/avian_HPAIrisk.html)

Avian influenza - fact sheet [http://www.who.int/csr/don/2004\\_01\\_15/en/](http://www.who.int/csr/don/2004_01_15/en/)

The World Health Organization (WHO), The Office International des Epizooties (OIE) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) all concur that "the control of avian influenza infection in wild bird populations is not feasible and should not be attempted."  
[http://www.who.int/csr/don/2005\\_08\\_18/en/index.html](http://www.who.int/csr/don/2005_08_18/en/index.html)

"The Human-Animal Link" [William B. Karesh](#) and [Robert A. Cook](#), *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2005  
<http://www.foreignaffairs.org/20050701faessay84403/william-b-karesh-robert-a-cook/the-human-animal-link.html>

"Where Avian Flu Pandemic Looms, A Global Effort Is Underway"

<http://www.wcs.org/353624/avianflupandemiclooms> **Bird Experts Warn Against Culling Wild Birds to Control Flu**

Environment News Service (ENS) , 21 October 2005

CAMBRIDGE, UK, October 20, 2005 (ENS) - The world's top bird conservation organization warned today that attempts to control the avian influenza virus by culling wild birds could spread the virus even more widely.

More: <http://www.ens-newswire.com/ens/oct2005/2005-10-20-02.asp>

### **Threat to rare birds as avian flu spreads**

By David Evans , Reuters (UK) , 21 October 2005

PARIS (Reuters) - Avian flu, believed to be carried south from China and Siberia by migrating wildfowl, threatens to push some of the world's rarest birds toward extinction, conservation groups said on Thursday.

More: [http://today.reuters.co.uk/news/newsArticle.aspx?type=scienceNews&storyID=2005-10-20T130932Z\\_01\\_MOL047169\\_RTRIDST\\_0\\_SCIENCE-BIRDFLU-CONSERVATION-DC.XML](http://today.reuters.co.uk/news/newsArticle.aspx?type=scienceNews&storyID=2005-10-20T130932Z_01_MOL047169_RTRIDST_0_SCIENCE-BIRDFLU-CONSERVATION-DC.XML)

## Backgrounder

*Avian influenza was first identified over 100 years ago during an outbreak in Italy. Since then, the disease has cropped up at irregular intervals in all world regions. In addition to the current outbreak in Asia, recent epidemics have occurred in Hong Kong in 1997-1998 and 2003, in the Netherlands in 2003, and in the Republic of Korea in 2003.*

*Once domestic birds are infected, avian influenza outbreaks can be difficult to control and often cause major economic impacts for poultry farmers in affected countries, since mortality rates are high and infected fowl generally must be destroyed -- the technical term is "culled" -- in order to prevent the spread of the disease. [http://www.fao.org/ag/againfo/subjects/en/health/diseases-cards/avian\\_bg.html](http://www.fao.org/ag/againfo/subjects/en/health/diseases-cards/avian_bg.html)*

Migratory birds are perceived by some as a potential threat to animal and human health, as they carry several infectious agents, which they may spread along their migratory pathways.

Over the last few years, there have been a series of outbreaks of the Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) virus, H5N1<sup>1</sup>, among domestic poultry in China, Japan, South Korea and Southeast Asia, resulting in the culling of several million poultry. In May-July of this year, an outbreak of the same virus at Qinghai Hu Lake in China affected at least three species of water birds and caused the second-largest-ever number of deaths (6,000) among wild birds. A second outbreak at lakes in the north of Mongolia, in which Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI)-H5N1 was also identified, caused the deaths of 90 water birds.

Since May 2005, the virus has expanded to Russia and Kazakhstan, where outbreaks were reported in poultry as well as in wild birds. Most water bird populations that breed in central Asia are migratory, using loosely organised flyways, where many species follow similar migratory paths. Breeding populations in central Asia may migrate southwest into southern Europe (the Black Sea/Mediterranean flyway) or eastern Africa (West Asia-East Africa flyway), or migrate south to southern Asia (Central Asian flyway), or to East and Southeast Asia and Australasia (East Asian-Australasian Flyway). They may also mix with birds in the East Atlantic flyway (which breed in northern Asia and spend the non-breeding, northern winter period in western Europe and western Africa); the Central Pacific flyway (those breeding in East Asia and migrating south to the Pacific Islands and Australasia); and the Pacific Flyway (those breeding in East and Far East Asia and migrating east to North America).

There are several species of conservation concern that frequent the sites or areas that have been affected by H5N1, including: the Bar-headed Goose (5,000 individuals out of a global population of 52,000-60,000 have already died from AI in the current epidemic), Lesser White-fronted Goose, Swan Goose, Red-breasted Goose, Oriental Stork and Siberian Crane. Even species currently not threatened could potentially suffer considerable mortality that would significantly worsen their conservation status.

### **Note on possible transmission of AI through bird trade**

<http://www.wetlands.org/IWC/Avianflu/default.htm>

The interaction between humans and wild and pet birds and their products in a number of ways increases the possibility of dissemination of diseases within a country and around the world. This is illustrated by the following examples:

BIRD TRADE - domestic and international trade in wild and cage birds - involves millions of individuals annually, and the frequent occurrence of mixed markets could allow virus to pass between species and cross borders.

- There is reason to believe that the trade in laughing thrushes (*Garrulax spp*<sup>15</sup>) could provide a potential avenue for dissemination of avian influenza virus from China to Indonesia—a spread that does not lend itself to explanation by natural migration, especially in light of the fact that there are no reported outbreaks in either Malaysia or the Philippines.
- In 2005, H5N1 type A influenza virus was isolated from two mountain hawk eagles *Spizaetus nipalensis* illegally imported to Belgium from Thailand; it was believed that the birds may have been fed on infected chicken meat.
- Another highly pathogenic paramyxovirus for domestic poultry entered Italy through a shipment of parrots, lovebirds, and finches for the pet trade that had been imported from Pakistan.

TRADE OF BIRD PRODUCTS – the trade of bird meat and meat products, eggs and egg products, feathers are capable of carrying viruses, for example, in 2003-2004, infected domestic duck meat exported from China to Korea and Japan was found to contain H5N1

### **Note on traditional poultry farming practices and regulating the new western trend to high-density livestock rearing**

The spread of avian flu in Asia over the past two years has been correlated with areas of high populations and high human-to-poultry contact. The locales of recent outbreaks of avian influenza correspond to very high density of the poultry population. In the West, the problem is quite different and relates to the rise of high-density, or factory farming.

Traditional (Asian) farming methods, where by custom the animals live in close, often unsanitary, quarters with people, and where few can afford to adopt higher hygiene standards, provide the conditions for viruses to accumulate mutations and spread rapidly, which may eventually result in an outbreak of infectious disease. Frequent contact with domestic animals, poor animal sanitation and poor personal hygiene will then spread the disease among animals and humans.

Recommended changes include segregation of bird varieties by fencing off poultry and animals, especially free-range chickens and wetland dwelling ducks and geese, and reducing interaction between animals and humans, as well as regulation of wet markets in many countries, where animals and poultry are slaughtered in the open and in unsanitary conditions. On-going scrutiny of farming and animal husbandry practices, of regulatory and inspection regimes, of general codes of practice are vital. Controls and testing of movements of live poultry and eggs within and between countries need to be stepped up.

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<sup>i</sup> Influenza A (H5N1) virus – also called “H5N1 virus” – is an influenza A virus subtype that occurs mainly in birds. It was first isolated from birds (terns) in South Africa in 1961. Like all bird flu viruses, H5N1 virus can over time circulate among birds worldwide, is very contagious among birds, and can be deadly. <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/gen-info/facts.htm>

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Convention on the  
Conservation of  
Migratory Species  
of Wild Animals



Agreement on the  
Conservation of  
African-Eurasian  
Migratory  
Waterbirds (AEWA)



Bonn, 2 March 2006

## PRESS RELEASE

### **Peter Schei is next CMS Ambassador and Chair of the UNEP seminar of international experts on “Avian Influenza, the Environment and Migratory Birds”**

Robert Hepworth, the Executive Secretary of the UNEP Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), announced today that Mr. Peter Schei, current Chairman of BirdLife International and Director of the Norwegian Fridtjof Nansen Institute (FNI) - an independent foundation engaged in research on international environmental, energy, and resource management - will become CMS Ambassador.

Mr. Schei, a biologist by training, could be considered a ‘guru’ of biodiversity also in the diplomatic world, as he worked in the Norwegian Ministry of Environment, and subsequently became International Negotiations Director at the Norwegian Directorate for Nature Management. Mr. Schei is one of the ‘founding fathers’ of the Convention on Biological Diversity and has been chairman of its Scientific Body. He has also worked with the World Conservation Union, as member of the Commission on Parks and Protected Areas, the Species Survival Commission and the Commission on Ecosystem Management. Mr. Schei has also been High Level Advisor for the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) on biodiversity during the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg.

“We are very honored to announce today that Mr. Schei has accepted to become a CMS Ambassador” said Mr. Hepworth. “This title,” he continues, “is issued in recognition of Mr. Schei’s accomplishments and lifetime commitment to promote the cause of biodiversity and his work on the conservation of migratory species and their habitats.”

CMS Ambassadors promote the cause of migratory species through their work and their contacts with the press and media, thus enhancing knowledge of the animals and the threats they face to the public and decision makers worldwide.

The first key contribution Mr. Schei will make to the work of the CMS Family will be in April, when he will chair a UNEP seminar on Avian Influenza, the Environment and Migratory Birds, convened at UNEP Headquarters in Gigiri, Nairobi, on 10 and 11 April 2006. During a short ceremony in the margins of the seminar, Mr. Hepworth will present Mr. Schei with a symbol of CMS and congratulate him for his work on conservation.

The scientific seminar on Avian Influenza is convened by the Convention on Migratory Species (UNEP/CMS) in collaboration with the UNEP Division of Early Warning and Assessment (UNEP/DEWA) and the UNEP African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (UNEP/AEWA). “The meeting” commented Mr. Bert Lenten, Executive Secretary of AEWA, “aims at reviewing the latest scientific studies concerning the evolution and spread of Avian Influenza, its impact on wild birds and the wider environment, including assessing risks of transmission and identifying optimal mitigation measures”.

The seminar is expected to issue recommendations for decision-makers, the media and other stakeholders on action to take in light of the latest scientific findings on Avian Influenza, and in the context of the conservation of biodiversity and the environment. “The CMS-led task force, which has been so far issuing communiqués and press releases on the role of migratory birds as vectors of diseases, has now felt it is time to provide governments with scientific information and advice on causes and solutions for the spread of avian influenza and its impact on the environment” says Marco Barbieri, Senior Scientific Officer of CMS and coordinator of the Task Force.

“Moreover” concludes Mr. Schei, chairman of the seminar, “the participants are due to discuss and suggest options for monitoring and early warning schemes of the spread of the virus in the natural environment, and the development of risk assessment and mitigations measures. This will provide effective and practical tools for the control and management of this disease and its possible impacts.”

Participants will include experts in a variety of disciplines, including, but not limited to, members of the CMS Task Force, presently composed of representatives from organizations such as UNEP, AEWA, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), FAO, WHO, Ramsar, BirdLife International and Wetlands International. Invited observers will also include representatives of governments, other international organizations, relevant biodiversity conventions and non-governmental organizations.

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Useful links:

<http://www.fni.no/about.htm>

[http://www.birdlife.org/worldwide/global/peter\\_schei\\_biog.html](http://www.birdlife.org/worldwide/global/peter_schei_biog.html)

[www.cms.int](http://www.cms.int)

[www.unep-aewa.org](http://www.unep-aewa.org)