

PRESS RELEASE

UNEP/CMS backed agreement to protect migratory birds of prey in Africa and Eurasia



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Bonn / Abu Dhabi, 23 October – A meeting covered by the UN and the Government of Abu Dhabi, UAE yesterday agreed a new agreement and action plan. 28 countries signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), led by the Minister of Abu Dhabi, H.E. Dr. Rashid Ahmad Bin Fahad, Minister of Environment and Water at an international meeting in Abu Dhabi, hosted by the United Arab Emirates. It will enter into force on 1 November.

Negotiations on the MoU began in Scotland, UK twelve months ago. The Governments of the UK and the United Arab Emirates have led the process, working through the UNEP Convention on Migratory Species (CMS). A new CMS coordinating unit will now be established in Abu Dhabi to promote and monitor the new agreement as a UNEP initiative.

The agreement area stretches across more than 130 countries from the African, Afrotropical, Palearctic and Indo-Malayan realms. More than 70 species of migratory birds of prey - Falconiformes, ospreys, eagles and owls - are covered by this conservation instrument.

More than 50% of migratory birds of prey have a poor conservation status as a result of habitat loss due to agriculture, forestry, industry and fisheries, collision with power lines, hunting and trapping for falconry as well as poisoning throughout their range. The Memorandum's objective is to restore the positive conservation status of these bird species.

The countries are committed to protecting the bird species from illegal killing, including poisoning and shooting and unsustainable exploitation. An ecosystem approach to sustainable development and sectoral land use practices will take into account the needs of bird conservation and mitigate effects of habitat loss and fragmentation.

Birds of prey are important indicators of healthy ecosystems. They are at the end of the food chain, which makes them highly vulnerable to environmental changes and increased competition for food. If they disappear from their habitat, this is a clear sign of a disrupted ecosystem. Protecting the Egyptian Vulture is directly linked to human health. Vultures remove carcasses and prevent the outbreak of epidemics. Instead they face high mortality due to poisoned baits meant to kill them and other predators to protect cattle. In addition, they suffer from reduced reproduction due to toxic substances that accumulate in their bodies.

The action plan foresees more research on species ecology and migratory behavior, patterns and routes as well as data analysis. Collective efforts towards monitoring and establishing reliable population trends will reveal the impacts of threats and necessary mitigation actions. Capacity building and training in institutions and local communities by developing knowledge of birds of prey can create acceptance for necessary conservation actions.

CMS Executive Secretary Robert Hepworth said: "In addition to finalising the agreement, the meeting unanimously endorsed Abu Dhabi's offer to host a co-ordinating unit. This is expected to comprise 6 staff and will also cover the CMS Dugong and part of the IOSEA Turtles agreements. This vital new agreement will not only help raptors, which are at top of the food chain, but also other "nomads of the air" throughout their long journeys. We expect the sharp decline of birds of prey to stop and to see their populations eventually recover.

"The establishment of this tri-continental agreement for birds of prey, with a co-ordinating unit in Abu Dhabi, UAE, marks a new era for the Convention. Here in the Gulf, at the crossroads of migration and culture, we have a chance to establish a new UN base for wildlife conservation. The co-ordinating unit for raptors will also promote the CMS dugong and turtles agreements in the Indian Ocean and beyond. We must now seize the opportunity presented to us by the commitment and generosity of the people of Abu Dhabi. "

Professor Colin Galbraith, Chairman of the meeting highlighted the real contribution that this MoU will make to the conservation of birds of prey. He said that joint action between countries is needed, and that CMS is providing leadership in talking real conservation priorities especially to assist these iconic species.

It's truly remarkable to see so many countries signing this milestone agreement in Abu Dhabi and we hope that this is just the beginning of an impressive journey that we have started to protect such fascinating group of birds, said Dr. Sali Javed, Deputy Manager Bird Conservation at the Environment Agency – Abu Dhabi (EAD).

Mr. John Clorley from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) said that "this is an excellent outcome for the conservation of migratory birds of prey. I am extremely pleased that the cooperation between DEFRA and the EAD has resulted in the acceptance of the MoU. The offer from UAE to host the co-ordination unit means that action to conserve these birds can now be undertaken across their flyways".

The UK's Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is a key partner in this initiative. Nearly 100 participants including government representatives, delegates from range states, scientists and NGOs attended the meeting.

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