



Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals

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MEDIA ADVISORY

Urgent measures can save long-distance migratory birds from extinction

Bonn, 23 February 2010 – Long distant migrants are especially vulnerable to human-induced threats. Despite existing considerable knowledge gaps, some species might disappear in the near future unless urgent action is taken.

The Spoon-billed Sandpiper and the Chinese Crested Tern are threatened with extinction. The World Conservation Union (IUCN) has classified them as Critically Endangered. With no more than 50 birds, the Chinese Crested Tern is one of the most threatened birds in Asia. The rediscovery of the Chinese Crested Tern's breeding grounds on the Matsu Islands in the Taiwan Strait, of a bird which was thought already extinct in 2000, has been recognized as a highlight of ornithological history. The Spoon-billed Sandpiper has declined dramatically over the last 30 years to an estimated 150-450 pairs only.

New reports including current data on distribution, threats and recommended activities to ensure the survival of these exotic birds have been released today by the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species and BirdLife International.

The reports, which will promote the protection of both species and enhance the cooperation between governments and conservation bodies, have been launched at a meeting of the East-Asian Australian Flyway Partnership in Incheon, Korea. This partnership, of which CMS is a member, has been established to strengthen regional cooperation on migratory birds.

CMS Executive Secretary Elizabeth Maruma Mrema said: "These international species action plans are an important instrument to promote and coordinate activities that seek to restore the places where species live, mitigating obstacles to migration, and controlling other factors that might endanger them."

Ecology and migration of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper are still poorly understood. Also, only little is known about the Chinese Crested Tern, and there is no recent information on its migratory routes or wintering grounds. Breeding and migration patterns of this bird species are still to be better understood. International and regional cooperation and coordination is essential for the survival of the Chinese Crested Tern, as the known breeding and potential wintering sites are mostly in territories claimed by China and Taiwan. Both bird species require the same coastal wetland habitat that is fast disappearing in many parts of in East Asia and face the same threats.

The greatest threat to the survival of the Chinese Crested Tern is egg collection for food in south-eastern China. The immediate priority for governments is to strictly enforce wildlife laws. In a second step, tailored education programmes need to be targeted at local communities, especially at fisheries communities. A comprehensive educational and outreach campaign should be developed for the general public. In addition, the breeding islands should be guarded from invasive predators such as rodents. Contingency plans for oil spills and other disasters must also be considered.

The destruction of inter-tidal mudflats that the Spoon-billed Sandpiper uses as stepping stones during its migration are the major threat to this long distant migrant travelling 8,000 km between its breeding grounds in Russia and its passage and wintering grounds in Eastern and Southern Asia. The action plan seeks to reduce other serious treats such as hunting. In addition, education and awareness programmes should be undertaken. An international monitoring system shall observe possible success of the conservation measures.

Research efforts need to be considerably enhanced to save both the Chinese Crested Tern and the Spoon-billed Sandpiper. They can serve as unique flagship species for the conservation of the many declining waders that utilise the East Asian-Australasian Flyway.

During the preparation of the reports, regional networks of ornithologists and conservationists have been developed among the range states, and some of the actions suggested are currently being implemented. Urgent measures outlined in the action plan now provide a second chance to bring the Chinese Crested Tern from the brink of extinction.

These action plans will be extremely useful tools for policy makers and national authorities, since they outline in a clear and coherent way the priority measures that have to be undertaken to improve the conservation status of the Chinese Crested Tern and the Spoon-billed Sandpiper.

Notes to editors:

Range States of the Chinese Crested Tern: China (including Taiwan), Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam. Range States Spoon-billed Sandpiper: Russia, North Korea, South Korea, Japan, China (including Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macao), Vietnam, the Philippines, Thailand, Cambodia, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Myanmar, Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, USA (Alaska), Canada.

Both bird species are included on CMS Appendix I. Parties to the Convention are to prohibit the hunting, capturing, harassing and deliberate killing of species listed on Appendix I and remove obstacles to their migration.

For more information please contact:

Veronika Lenarz, Public Information, UNEP/CMS Secretariat, on Tel.: +49 228 815 2409 or e-mail: rlenarz@cms.int, www.cms.int

