

Why conserve migratory animals?



TERN COLONY © UNEP/YORINOBU NAWATA

Of the world's 1.5 million described animal species, an estimated 8,000-10,000 migrate. They range from antelopes to fishes, from whales to elephants, from bats to birds. Even apparently frail insects, such as the Monarch butterfly, cover enormous distances.

Migratory animals are essential components of the ecosystems that support all life on earth. By acting as pollinators and seed distributors they contribute to ecosystem structure and function, for example. They provide food for other animals and regulate the number of species in ecosystems. Migratory animals are potentially very effective indicators of environmental changes that affect us all.

In local and global economies, too, migratory animals play an important role such as through subsistence, recreational and commercial hunting and fishing activities providing food and income. More recently they have become prime attractions for ecotourists such as bird and whale watchers.



ATLANTIC SPOTTED DOLPHINS © UNEP

A HEAVY TOLL

Human pressure is often intense on migratory animals and on the places they need to survive, their habitats. Unsustainable hunting and fishing practices and incidental capture in fisheries take a heavy toll on thousands of animals. Destruction of wetlands, forests and grasslands removes food and shelter vital to life. Barriers to migration such as dams, fences, power lines and wind farms can disrupt migratory patterns and result in significant mortality.



ELECTROCUTION © MANFRED LOEFFLER

The introduction of alien species and the harmful effects of industrial and agricultural pollutants are further risks. The potentially huge impact of climate change is just beginning to be understood, but foreseen to disrupt migratory patterns. Birds also face the danger of electrocution, injuries or death caused by electricity transmission lines or towers. As a result, many migratory animals are becoming increasingly rare. A great many are threatened with extinction.

A global platform for co-operation

As an environmental treaty under the aegis of the United Nations, the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) provides a global platform for the conservation and sustainable use of migratory animals and the places where they live. The Convention brings together the States through which migratory animals pass, the Range States, and lays the legal foundation for conservation measures throughout the migratory range. Measures are embedded in detailed conservation and management plans.

CONSERVING THE MOST ENDANGERED ANIMALS

Migratory species threatened with extinction are listed on Appendix I of the Convention. States strive towards strictly protecting these animals, conserving or restoring the places where they live, mitigating obstacles to migration and controlling other factors that might endanger them. Besides establishing obligations for each State joining the Convention, CMS promotes concerted action among the Range States of many of these species.



PROTECTING THE BUKHARA DEER © BAKHTIER MARDONOV/WWF RUSSIA

OFFERING TAILORED GLOBAL AND REGIONAL SOLUTIONS

Migratory species that need or would significantly benefit from international co-operation are listed in Appendix II of the Convention. For this reason, the Convention encourages the Range States to conclude global or regional Agreements.



SLENDER-BILLED CURLEW © C.H. GOMERSALL/RSPB

In this respect, CMS acts as a framework Convention. The Agreements may range from legally binding treaties to less formal instruments, such as Memoranda of Understanding, and can be adapted to the requirements of particular regions. The development of models tailored according to the conservation needs throughout the migratory range is a unique capacity of CMS. All Agreements are based on concrete management and conservation plans.



SNOW LEOPARD © FRITZ POLKING/ISLT

Since 1990, more than a dozen international Agreements have been concluded under the CMS umbrella, for bats, birds, deer, dolphins and whales, marine turtles and seals.

PROMOTING PRACTICAL RESEARCH AND CONSERVATION

CMS promotes co-operative research and conservation projects on migratory animals worldwide. The spectrum of activities is wide, ranging from population counts to the evaluation of the quality of habitats and threats, as well as the use of satellite telemetry to determine migratory routes. Others focus on studies of breeding habits, fencing of nesting areas, site identification and mapping, or the genetic analysis of sample tissues.



IMPRINTING OF LESSER WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE © INGAR JOSTEIN ØIEN

CONTRIBUTING TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

As a grassroots Convention, CMS supports economic activities involving the sustainable use of migratory species and food production. Ecotourism such as sustainable whale watching generate considerable income.

CMS is committed to the promotion of sustainable development through implementation of the goals set at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, 2002. It supports programmes to bring long-term benefits to local communities and helps to reduce the rate of biodiversity loss.



TUAREG IN WEST AFRICA © JOHN NEWBY/SSIG

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

As the only global convention specialised in the conservation of migratory species, the places they need to survive and their migration routes, CMS complements and co-operates with a number of other treaties and international bodies, particularly the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Ramsar



SOUTH AFRICAN ELEPHANTS © UNEP

Convention on Wetlands, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species and the International Whaling Commission. It benefits from the support of several non-governmental organisations, including BirdLife International, IUCN - The World Conservation Union, the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society (WDCS), Wetlands International and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF).



MOUNTAIN GORILLAS © IAN REDMOND/GRASP

CMS institutions

CMS institutions include the Conference of the Parties (COP), the decision-making body which meets at three-yearly intervals; the Standing Committee, which provides policy and administrative guidance between the meetings; the Scientific Council, which provides advice on scientific matters and priorities for research and conservation; and the Secretariat, which develops and promotes Agreements, services meetings, supports and supervises research and conservation projects and cooperates with governments and organizations. The Secretariat is provided by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).



SEVENTH CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES, 2002 © CMS

Birds: from the Arctic to the Antarctic

With their predictable and often spectacular journeys, birds are perhaps the best-known group of migratory animals. Many species migrate from high latitudes to the tropics and beyond. One species, the Arctic tern, an elegant white seabird, even breeds in the Arctic and migrates to the Antarctic!

CONSERVATION ACROSS CONTINENTS

The largest Agreement developed so far under CMS focuses on waterbirds. The African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) covers 235 species of migratory birds and promotes a flyway approach, a unique approach among multilateral environment Agreements. AEWA covers 117 countries from Europe, parts of Asia and Canada, the Middle East and Africa. The geographic area stretches from the northern reaches of Canada and the Russian Federation to the southernmost tip of Africa.



LESSER WHITE-FRONTED GEESE © INGAR JOSTEIN ØIEN

CONSERVING SINGLE BIRD SPECIES

In addition, some of the rarest birds in the world are covered by CMS regional Agreements in the form of Memoranda of Understanding.

With the aid of the Convention, the tiny populations of the Siberian crane are benefiting from captive breeding and the release of young birds, which are taught their traditional migratory routes by hang-glider pilots. The Slender-billed curlew, one of the rarest of all migrants, is the subject of urgent efforts under CMS to discover its last winter refuges and where it breeds in the vastness of Eurasia.



SIBERIAN CRANES © ICF

The challenge of conserving the spectacular Great bustard under a CMS Memorandum of Understanding is to manage modern agriculture throughout its range in Central Europe. Another species covered under CMS, the Aquatic warbler, is a small songbird, which entirely depends on a dwindling number of sites of a particular wetland type in Europe. Fortunately, the great majority of the key Range States has now signed up to save it using the instruments of the Convention.

BIRDS IN THE SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE

The crucial CMS Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP) will tackle threats to these ocean wanderers which range from drowning on long-line hooks set to catch fish, to the taking of eggs and young birds by introduced cats and rats.



ALBATROSS © DIDIER VANGELUWE/IRSNB

Marine mammals: a regional approach

The conservation of marine mammals listed in the CMS Appendices is a great challenge, in particular because these creatures often suffer problems far out of sight of land. CMS has adopted a regional approach with promising results. Three CMS Agreements are engaged in different areas of conservation.

CONSERVING WHALES AND DOLPHINS

The Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic and North Seas (ASCOBANS) aims to conserve whales, dolphins and porpoises such as the once-familiar Harbour porpoise and the spectacular Killer whale. The most important threats facing those species of tooth whales are incidental capture in fisheries, disturbances and marine pollution.



KILLER WHALE © INGRID VISSER/WDCS

The second Agreement on whales and dolphins developed under the Convention, the Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and Contiguous Atlantic Area (ACCOBAMS), is to reduce threats to species such as the Fin whale or the Sperm whale. In contrast to ASCOBANS, it also covers great whales.



HUMPBACK WHALE © BILL ROSSITER/WDCS

The conservation plans of those Agreements provide, among other things, for the assessment of human-cetacean interactions, emergency response measures, the establishment of protected areas and the reduction of interaction with fisheries.



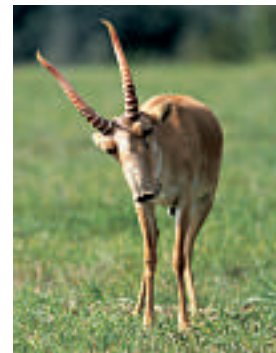
COMMON SEAL © K.-E. HEERS

TACKLING THREATS TO SEALS

The Agreement on the Conservation of Seals in the Wadden Sea was concluded as the first Agreement under CMS after an epidemic in 1988 wiped out 60% of the region's Harbour seals. The Agreement has proved successful: the population has regained its pre-epidemic levels and, although still subject to diseases, the seals are no longer threatened with extinction.

Protecting land mammals: from antelopes to bats

Many different migratory land mammals regularly cross national borders. Several are endangered and therefore listed on the Convention's Appendices, such as bats, the magnificent Snow leopard, the Bactrian camel, Mountain gorillas, African elephants, deer species, several antelope species in Africa and the Saiga antelope. Just as these animals are varied, so too are the strategies for their conservation.



SAIGA ANTELOPE © ROTISLAV STACH

The Central Asian Bukhara deer was almost as culturally significant as the cows in India. Today, only a few hundred animals remain due to illegal hunting and poaching as well as artificial regulations of the water regimes in the river valleys where they live. A Memorandum of Understanding developed under CMS aims to save the species from the brink of extinction.



BUKHARA DEER © OLGA PERELADOVA/WWF RUSSIA

WORKING FOR EUROPEAN BATS

The CMS Agreement on the Conservation of Populations of European Bats (EUROBATS) deals with nearly 45 species known to occur in Europe. The most immediate threats to them nowadays derive from the degradation of the places where they live, disturbance of roosting sites and certain pesticides. EUROBATS achieved new and improved legal protection standards for bats. The 'European Bat Night' is a popular annual awareness-raising event celebrated all over Europe.



GREATER MOUSE-EARED BATS © HUGO WILLCOX/FOTONATURA



DORCAS GAZELLES © JOHN NEWBY/SSIG

CONSERVING AFRICAN ANTELOPES

Gazelles, oryx and other antelope species are keystone species in the ecosystems of the North African Sahelo-Saharan region. They have developed unique adaptation systems to the most arid environment. In addition to being a primary source of food they have historically played a major role in the livelihood of local communities. But due to severe man-made desertification and excessive hunting they have been in rapid decline.

An Action Plan for six seriously endangered species, developed with active support of the Convention, recommends reinforcing some of the populations in the wild with captive-bred individuals, reducing mortality and enhancing international co-operation.

Marine turtles: towards a global approach

Marine turtles are among the oldest life forms on Earth. They are threatened by fisheries by-catch, unsustainable consumption of both meat and eggs, degradation of coastal environment and marine pollution. Little is known about their lives in the open ocean. They provide a perfect example of the need to bring together all stakeholders – local communities, conservationists, researchers and government authorities – to work in a co-ordinated way.



MARINE TURTLE CAUGHT IN A NET © THOMAS DILLINGER



MEASURING A MARINE TURTLE

There are two CMS Memoranda of Understanding concerning marine turtles, for the Atlantic Coast of Africa and for the Indian Ocean and South-East Asia (IOSEA). CMS sponsors surveys of critical nesting beaches, assessment of turtle by-catch identification and capacity building, for example training workshops. Starting at a regional level with an emphasis on developing countries, the Convention works towards a global approach for the conservation of these species.

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Web sites of the Agreements under CMS:
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<http://www.ea.gov.au/coasts/species/seabirds/albatross/index.html>
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BACTRIAN CAMEL © RICHARD P. READING



LESSER WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE © INGAR JOSTEIN



BUKHARA DEER © NATALIA MARMAZINSKAJA/WWF RUSSIA



Convention on Migratory Species



Conserving animals on the move

"... Wild animals in their innumerable forms are an irreplaceable part of the earth's natural system, which must be conserved for the good of mankind..."

"... Each generation of man holds the resources of the earth for future generations and has an obligation to ensure that this legacy is conserved and, where utilised, is used wisely..."

– from the preamble of the Convention