

## PRESS RELEASE

### Italy Supports Adoptions of Migratory Antelopes, Cranes and Dolphins at UN Wildlife Conference in Rome

Rome, 1 December - On the occasion of the opening of the 9<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) in Rome, the Italian Ministry for the Environment, Land and Sea offers a special contribution to the protection of migratory animals.

Upon registration each delegate is presented with a certificate of adoption of one of three different species of endangered migratory animals. Hence each participant, by adopting a species, directly supports a conservation project. The participating organizations issuing the animal adoptions are partners to CMS and support the Convention in its endeavor to protect long distance migrants across the globe.

We welcome this tangible initiative by the Italian Ministry for the Environment to protect these charismatic animals during their migrations. It is symbolic of the concerted action by all member states to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals convened at this conference said CMS Executive Secretary Robert Hepworth.

The Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society (WDCS), founding partner of the Year of the Dolphin 2007/2008 initiative coordinated by CMS, aims to secure the survival of these marine mammals threatened by bycatch, overfishing, pollution, ship strikes, noise pollution and climate change. Scientists, conservation bodies, and intergovernmental organizations will address these threats at the conference. These multiple threats pose a risk to the survival of the only remaining resident bottlenose dolphin populations in the North Sea. Moonlight, an adult female, is one of the around 130 dolphins that are part of a WDCS adoption programme. Researchers recognize her due to her significant shape of the dorsal fin.

The IUCN Red List classifies the Siberian Crane as Critically Endangered. The global population is only around 3,200 birds. This long-lived crane's wintering grounds in China, used by the vast majority of individuals, are threatened. Main threats are wetland loss and degradation at staging areas and wintering sites through agricultural development, the development of oilfields and increased human utilization/exploitation. Pesticide use and pollution pose additional threats. Hunting is however the key threat to the central and western populations, and inhibits recovery.

The Saiga Antelope, for which a CMS agreement will be expanded to include Mongolia in the course of this conference, is the third species being 'adopted' by delegates. In the early 1990s around 1 million Saigas roamed the steppes of Central Asia, but following the collapse of the Soviet Union many people became unemployed and poverty was rife. Selling Saiga horn to the East Asian market and selling Saiga meat locally provided an alternative source of income. The Saiga population plummeted by 90% within a decade, and now stands at around 50,000. This is the most dramatic collapse of a large mammal species in recent history. The Stepnoi Sanctuary in southern Russia, which is supported by these adoptions, is vitally important for Saiga as a secure birthing ground. Their work contributes to the CMS agreement on Saiga Antelope, which enables us to track progress towards the recovery of the species.

The CMS Conference of the Parties brings together government representatives, international organizations, conservation bodies and scientists to address among other issues threats to marine mammals, terrestrial arid land mammals and migratory birds.

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