

Report of the Tashkent Meeting on the Central Asian-Indian Flyway (18-20 August 2001)

On Saturday 18 and Sunday 19 August 2001 an international workshop was organised in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, focussing on the conservation of Migratory Waterbirds and Wetlands in the Central Asian-Indian Flyway. The goals of this workshop were:

- To develop co-ordination and collaboration among the Central and South Asian and Trans-Caucasus States in the research and protection/conservation of migratory waterbirds and their habitats.
- To examine current conservation status of migratory waterbirds and wetlands in the Central Asian-Indian Flyway (CAIF) and propose a new initiative in the region.
- To review a draft Action Plan for the conservation of migratory waterbirds and wetlands in CAIF and come up with recommendations for a follow up approach.

This workshop was hosted by the State Committee for Nature Protection of the Government of the Republic of Uzbekistan under a hosting agreement with UNEP. Funding for the workshop was provided by the Dutch Ministry of Agriculture, Nature Management and Fisheries and the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS, the Bonn Convention) and Wetlands International.

This workshop was a first significant event on the way to large-scale co-operation on the conservation of Migratory Waterbirds and Wetlands in the Central Asian-Indian Flyway and, at the same time, it was a key point for the recent Wetlands International's project, which should promote international co-ordination of conservation efforts between range states from Russia in the north to Maldives in the south.

Although the time for preparation of this workshop was short, representation of the governments from the region was remarkably good: Armenia, Bangladesh, China, Georgia, India, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Pakistan, Russia, Sri Lanka, Turkey, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan participated. Only 6 states - Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal and Tajikistan - were unable to participate. CMS, AEWA, the Ramsar Convention, UNDP, WWF, and the International Crane Foundation contributed to the meeting through the participation of their experts. Wetlands International was represented by five experts from both the AEME-headquarters, the Moscow office and Asia-Pacific office.

In total 40 participants have registered in response to the official invitations that were issued to focal points of all Range States by the Secretariat of CMS. The AEWA Secretariat in Bonn, the Wetlands International offices and the State Committee for Nature Protection of Uzbekistan have provided the participants with a lot of logistical

support. Sequential English-Russian translation was provided throughout the workshop.

The workshop was formally opened by Mr. Kudaibergen Djumabekov, Chairman of the Parliament Committee of Nature Protection, on behalf of Uzbekistan Parliament. The Chairman of the workshop was Mr. Khalilulla Sherimbetov of the State Committee for Nature Protection of the Republic of Uzbekistan. After the formal opening of the workshop and opening statements by Mr. Khalilulla Sherimbetov and Mr. Arnulf Muller-Helmbrecht, Executive Secretary of CMS, the workshop started with presentations of Mr. Bert Lenten, on behalf of AEWA, and Mr. Najam Khurshid, on behalf of the Ramsar Convention. Mr. Ward Hagemeyer gave a short introduction to Wetlands International's role and activities with regards to the CAIF project.

The morning program further included 4 plenary introductions which covered

- 1) flyway approach to the migratory waterbird conservation – Mr. Simon Delany;
- 2) development and implementation of Asia-Pacific Strategy –Dr. Taej Mundkur;
- 3) ornithological and geographical characteristics of CAIF – Dr. Evgeni Syroechkovski; and
- 4) proposed delimitation of the CAIF Area – Dr. Alexander Solokha.

In the next session, national delegates were invited to present the status of wetlands- and waterbird conservation and -use in their countries. All participants believed that future international cooperation would promote conservation activity in their countries and in the region as a whole.

Much attention in the workshop has been paid to reviewing and further developing of a draft action plan. At the end of the first day the first draft of an action plan that had been prepared in the period leading up to the workshop, was presented by Mr. Ward Hagemeyer (background and development & implementation issues) and Dr. Alexander Solokha (priority actions). This draft was then discussed on the next day by two separate language groups. Roughly the language separation in Russian and 'other languages, coincides with a geographical north-south division: Russian speaking group representing Russia, Central Asian States, Mongolia and Georgia, while English languages group comprised representatives from south part, i.e. South Asian and Middle East States, and Armenia.

Both groups were asked to draft amendments to the proposed action plan.

After the lunch, both groups presented their amendments to all participants. The comments were discussed, redrafted and as much as possible included in the text.

Subsequently the action plan including the amendments was discussed once more in the whole group.

After discussion was finished, Mr Arnulf Muller-Helmbrecht proposed three options for the framework under which the Action Plan could be developed, i.e.:

- 1) attach the Action Plan under the Asian Pacific Waterbird Conservation Strategy (APWCS);
- 2) develop and conclude a new Range States' Agreement under CMS; and
- 3) extend the area of AEWA and include the CAIF Action Plan.

Being asked to react to these options, delegates indicated not to be able to instantaneously choose the right solution for the region. A more formal, written presentation of the options, including the advantages and dis-advantages, will be prepared by the CMS secretariat.

The Indian government represented by Mr Asheem Srivastav, kindly volunteered to lead in the further development of the action plan and the choice between options. A second co-leader was asked to step forward, but currently none of the other countries was able or willing to express an offer to take the co-lead with India. More time for the consideration of this important decision was asked.

To help the process of further development of the action plan, Mr Bert Lenten pointed at the existence of a good example for the Central Asian-Indian Action plan in the form of the existing Action Plan for AEWA.

A procedure and timetable, including initial approval of workshop participants, consultation of experts and wider consultation, aims at having the final Action Plan approved and adopted at a follow-up meeting to be organised in the region in March-April 2002.

The Workshop thanked the Government of Uzbekistan for hosting, and Mr Khalilulla Sherimbetov, on behalf of the Government, closed the meeting and invited participants to a dinner-party.

The workshop's program finished on 20 August with the impressive and nice trip to Samarkand, the famous ancient city, within a 3 hours drive from Tashkent, where participants visited famous monuments of the history, culture and Islam.