

***Brief Report on the United Arab Emirates for
The Central Asian Flyway Meeting in Abu Dhabi
12-13 December 2012***

Species Conservation

United Arab Emirates has a regular monitoring programme for key species of waterbirds. The programme is focused on covering all key sites for the monitoring of important water bird species. At the moment a regular monitoring is undertaken for important species of waterbirds at important congregatory sites. Additionally a programme is in place to monitor important breeding seabird colonies from nearly 40 islands. At least five species of terns, the Lesser Crested *Sterna bengalensis*, the Crested Tern *Sterna bergii*, White-cheeked *Sterna repressa*, Bridled Tern *Sterna anaethetus* and Saunder's Little Tern *Sterna saundersi* are regularly counted during the breeding season. A monitoring programme is also in place to count the two Crab Plover *Dromas ardeola* breeding colonies on two offshore islands of the Abu Dhabi Emirate. Breeding colonies of the globally threatened Socotra Cormorant *Phalacrocorax nigrogularis* are also monitored every year. Red-billed Tropicbird *Phaethon aethereus* breeding is also monitored on a yearly basis. All the species are relatively well protected. A research programme on the ecology and breeding biology of the Socotra Cormorant is being undertaken in the country, while extensive satellite tracking work on key waterbird species i.e. Greater Flamingos, Crab Plover, Sooty Gull and Red-billed Tropicbird has provided useful new insights into migration patterns and habitat use. Satellite tracking of greater flamingos was largely responsible for the discovery of the biggest breeding colony of the species in the Arabian Gulf.

The country has made sincere efforts to protect its biological diversity which protects waterbirds and their habitats. UAE is signatory to nearly 16 international and two

regional conventions besides 6 protocols related to environment and wildlife including the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Convention on International Trades in Endangered Species (CITES) and the Regional convention on Protection of the Marine Environment (ROPME). The UAE had recently signed the Ramsar Convention and already two sites, one each in Dubai and Fujairah have been declared as Ramsar sites. Proposal for declaration has already been prepared and will be submitted soon. The UAE works very closely with the Wetlands International and has successfully undertaken and contribute to the IWC in the country.

Habitat Conservation

Some of the important waterbirds habitats in the country have been well protected. The Marawah Marine Protected Area (MPA) covering nearly 8 islands protects several important islands, which supports important feeding and breeding habitats for both wintering and resident waterbirds. A new Yasat Marine Protected area further protects important bird habitats including some breeding colonies of the tern species. A coastal sensitivity atlas has been produced, which includes all key waterbirds habitats in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi and their sensitivity to various environmental impacts. AL Wathba Wetland in Abu Dhabi and Ras Al Khor Wildlife Sanctuary in Dubai are key waterbird habitats and have been officially protected, with Ras Al Khor already designated as Ramsar site and a proposal for declaration for Al Wathba has been prepared.

Recommendations/priorities/needs required to improve the implementation of the Action Plan.

UAE is an important area for the wintering, breeding and staging waterbirds and conservation of the waterbirds and their habitats is an important element in the conservation of overall biodiversity of the country. With nearly 50% of all the bird species on the Central Asian Flyway and covered under the Central Asian Action Plan, found in the UAE, the country assumes much greater significance to conserve

waterbirds and their habitats. Past and ongoing work on waterbirds has documented important sites for the conservation. Some of the sites are already protected whereas some other sites, important for breeding and wintering waterbirds, need to be protected immediately. Continued monitoring and research work is essential to document the state of migratory waterbirds so that appropriate conservation actions can be taken as and when needed.

Establishment of a national level task force for wetlands is essential to ensure that wetland protection is accorded due priority in national planning. Such a taskforce should also oversee the implementation of the action plan on CAF and regular reporting on the progress made in implementing the action plan.

There is a need to setup a regional framework for waterbird conservation in the Arabian Gulf which could include monitoring, capacity development, education and awareness components.