

The Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) and the Caribbean Region

The Caribbean region has an enormous diversity of fauna, including many migratory species. Whales, dolphins, sea turtles, fish, various terrestrial mammals and numerous birds are some of the animals that regularly cross international borders. This variety of migratory terrestrial, aquatic and marine species represents an important component of the biodiversity of the Caribbean.

Besides their intrinsic value, migratory species provide numerous benefits and services to humankind and to ecosystems. Many are crucial elements in the subsistence and culture of numerous human populations, and form the basis of several other activities of economic, cultural and social value. The remarkable biological phenomenon of migration is exhibited among many birds, terrestrial mammals, whales, turtles, fish and insects. Yet the behavioural adaptation of these animals – which causes them to travel vast distances in search of feeding and breeding sites – makes them especially vulnerable to human-induced threats and natural processes.

The **Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals** (CMS, also known as the Bonn Convention) is an international agreement that aims to conserve terrestrial, aquatic and avian migratory species throughout their range.

Goals and Objectives

The overall goal of CMS is to ensure the favourable conservation status of migratory species, thereby contributing to global sustainability.

The objectives of CMS are:

- To ensure that the conservation and management of migratory species are based on the best available information in accordance with the Aichi Targets;
- To ensure that migratory species benefit from the best possible conservation measures;
- To broaden awareness and enhance engagement in the conservation of migratory species amongst key actors; and
- To reinforce the overarching and unifying role of CMS in the conservation and management of migratory species.



Ospreys (Appendix II) spend summers in North America and winters in warmer countries, such as Guyana and Suriname. (© NASA)

Relationship with the Convention on Biological Diversity

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), to which all Caribbean Community (CARICOM) States are Party, acknowledges that migratory species are unique components of global biodiversity and recognizes that CMS provides the required international legal framework in order to conserve these animals throughout their range. Therefore CBD has declared CMS to be its lead partner on conservation and sustainable use of migratory species.

Furthermore, CMS contributes to CBD's efforts to implement the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and the Aichi Biodiversity Targets. CMS contributes directly to a number of Aichi Targets by providing scientific and technical information for monitoring purposes – in particular, many migratory species have an important role as indicator species for monitoring the state of biodiversity for the region due to their direct link to different ecosystems, habitats, and pressures along the migration route.

How CMS Works

As an environmental treaty under the aegis of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), CMS provides a global platform for the conservation and sustainable use of migratory animals and their habitats. CMS was adopted in 1979 and entered into force on 1 November 1983. The Convention brings together the countries through which migratory animals pass, i.e. the **Range States**, and lays the legal foundation for internationally coordinated conservation measures throughout a migratory range. As of 1 August 2016, CMS had 124 Parties, including CARICOM member Antigua and Barbuda.

The CMS Appendices

CMS has two Appendices which list all the migratory species to which the Convention applies. The text of the Convention defines the basic obligations of the Contracting Parties, which are quite distinct for the two Appendices. However, a migratory species can be listed in both Appendices at the same time, if the circumstances warrant it.

Appendix I includes migratory species that have been assessed as being in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of their range. The Conference of the Parties has further interpreted the term “endangered” as meaning “facing a very high risk of extinction in the wild in the near future” (Resolution 11.33 paragraph 1). This Resolution also defines a general connection between ‘endangered’ as used by CMS and the same term applied by IUCN Red List Criteria (Version 3.1).

Appendix II covers migratory species that have an unfavourable conservation status and that would benefit significantly from the international cooperation that could be achieved by an international agreement. The Convention encourages the Range States to conclude global or regional agreements covering Appendix II species.

In this respect, CMS acts as a framework convention from which separate instruments evolve. The development of instruments tailored according to the conservation needs of species and adapted to the requirements of particular regions is a unique capacity of CMS.

Appendices I and II may be amended at any meeting of the Conference of the Parties. Amendments consist of migratory species or their populations being added to (or potentially removed from) the Appendices. Proposals for amendment can be submitted by any Contracting

Party, in accordance with the procedure defined in Article XI of the Convention. The Conference of the Parties decides to accept or reject proposals, taking into account the advice of



The sanderling (Appendix II) is one of many migratory shorebirds often seen in the Caribbean.

the CMS Scientific Council. Resolution 11.33 provides guidelines for assessing proposals for the amendment of the Appendices.

Any amendment to the Appendices will enter into force for all Parties ninety days after the meeting of the Conference of the Parties at which it was adopted, except for those Parties that make a reservation.

Obligations of Parties to CMS

As participants in the only global convention specialized in the conservation of migratory species, CMS Parties 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 Range States of many of the Appendix I species.

Parties that are Range States of migratory species listed in Appendix I shall endeavour to strictly protect them by: prohibiting the taking of such species, with very restricted scope for exceptions; conserving and, where appropriate, restoring their habitats; preventing, removing or mitigating obstacles to their migration and controlling other factors that might endanger them.

The Convention encourages the Range States of species listed on Appendix II to conclude and comply with global or regional Agreements for the conservation and management of individual species or groups of related species. These instruments may vary from legally binding treaties (“Agreements”) to less formal instruments, such as Memoranda of Understanding (e.g. Sharks MOU), Action Plans or Species Initiatives, covering, where possible, the entire migratory range of the species concerned.

The Importance of the Caribbean Region for Migratory Species

Migratory animals are vital components of ecosystems, where they fulfil important ecological functions: they may serve as a crucial food resource for other species in the region, act as pollinators and seed distributors, or may themselves exploit seasonally abundant local food resources, thereby contributing to the biological balance of local ecosystems.

The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) consists of habitat-rich tropical and semi-tropical islands and coastal countries, and has an immense richness in biodiversity. With a vast variety in ecosystems and habitats due to its climate and geographical diversity, it is a hotspot region not only for endemic flora and fauna, but also for migratory species. The countries of the region are located along migratory routes of important avian and marine life. Tracking of migrations (most recently by satellite) is revealing that major migration corridors in the Americas pass through the Caribbean.

Scientists estimate that between 2 and 5 million individual birds take part in a biannual migration through Central America and the Caribbean. Given their large marine and coastal areas, small islands are particularly important marine corridors and pathways.

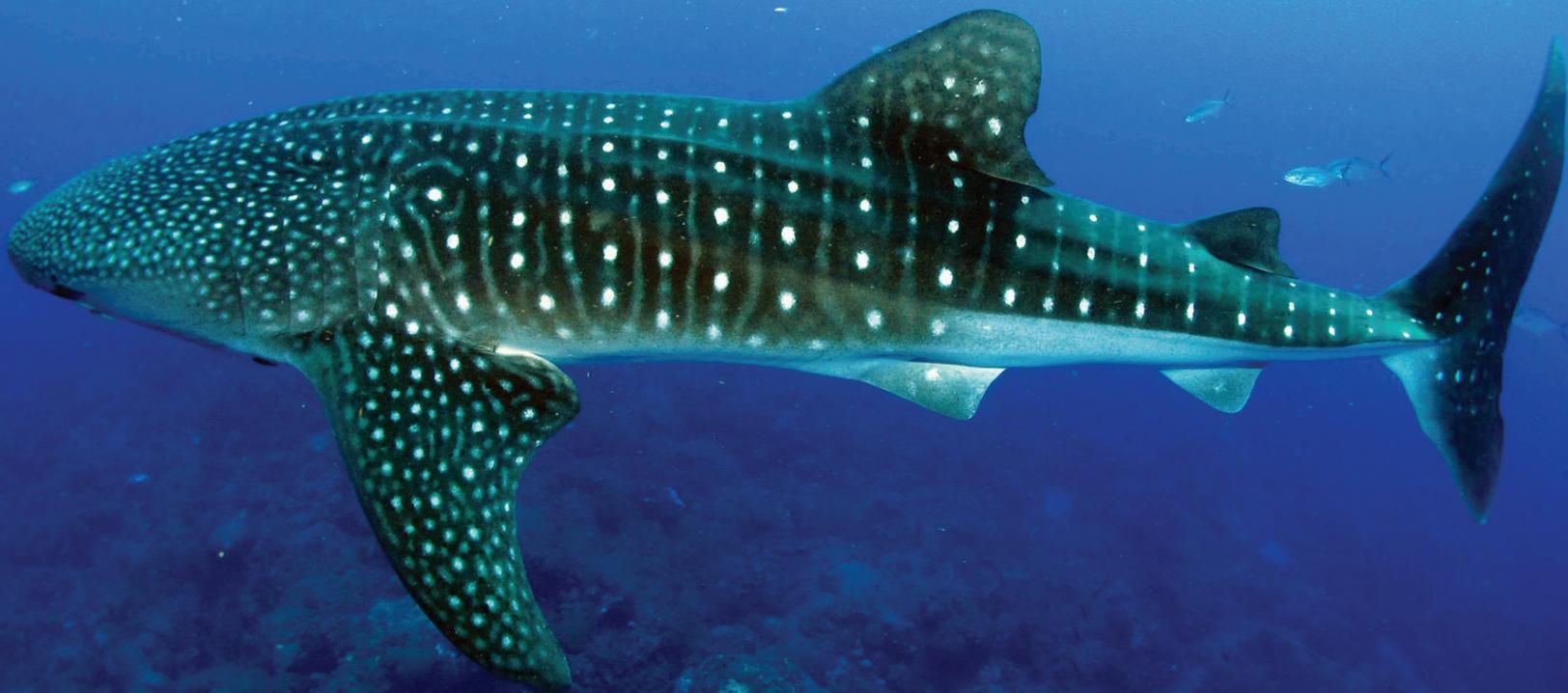
The marine environment provides vital habitats for diverse marine species as well. Such habitats include reefs, seagrass beds and mangroves, all of which are important as wintering and nursery grounds or feeding areas for several migratory species, such as sharks, whales and marine turtles. These animals regularly traverse Caribbean waters, offering essential services to local ecosystems and populations.

In recent times, spectacular gatherings of seasonal migrant birds, turtles and whales have become prime nature tourism attractions.

Migratory Species of the Caribbean

The Caribbean islands and coastal countries are home to many species of sharks, including several listed on Appendix I such as the **Shortfin Mako Shark** (*Isurus oxyrinchus*), **Smalltooth Sawfish** (*Pristis pectinata*), **Atlantic Devil Ray**

Diving with whale sharks (Appendix II) is a tourist attraction in The Bahamas, Belize and Grenada. (© FGBNMS/Eckert)



Peregrine falcons are found in the Caribbean mainly from October to April. (© Andras Kovacs/RaptorImages.hu)



(*Mobula hypostoma*), and the Appendix II **Whale Shark** (*Rhincodon typus*) and **Silky Shark** (*Carcharhinus falciformis*).

In Caribbean waters and coastal wetlands migratory reptiles are frequent visitors. Some of the Appendix I species found there include the **Green Turtle** (*Chelonia mydas*), **Loggerhead Turtle** (*Caretta caretta*), **Hawksbill Turtle** (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) and **Olive Ridley Turtle** (*Lepidochelys olivacea*).

Appendix I migratory bird species that can be found in the Caribbean region include the **Semipalmated Sandpiper** (*Calidris pusilla*), **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** (*Tryngites subruficollis*) and **Eskimo Curlew** (*Numenius borealis*). The **Osprey** (*Pandion haliaetus*), **Black-Winged Stilt** (*Himantopus himantopus*), **Ruddy Turnstone** (*Arenaria interpres*) and **Sanderling** (*Calidris alba*) are listed on Appendix II. **The Red Knot** (*Calidris canutus*) and **Peregrine Falcon** (*Falco*

peregrinus) are also important migratory birds in the region.

Examples of marine mammals listed on Appendix I that can be found in the Caribbean are the **Blue Whale** (*Balaenoptera musculus*) and the **Humpback Whale** (*Megaptera novaeangliae*).

Why Migratory Species Need Special Conservation

As a consequence of impacts on biodiversity in general, human pressure on migratory animals and their habitats is often intense. This pressure can cause particularly strong declines in populations of migratory animals, as large numbers of individuals concentrate at certain traditionally used sites.

Unsustainable hunting and fishing practices, and incidental fisheries capture, for example,



can result in heavy impacts on many species. Destruction or modification of wetlands, forests and grasslands removes food and shelter vital to species' survival. The presence of invasive alien species, such as rats, poses a serious threat to breeding birds such as petrels and albatrosses, as the invasive species feed on the birds' eggs and nestlings. The harmful effects of industrial and agricultural pollutants also expose migratory species to further risks.

Recent scientific work suggests that climate change is also likely to have an impact on migratory species. Many habitats important for migratory species may be profoundly changed, with traditional migratory patterns disrupted or altered as a result. The status of some species could be seriously affected.

Barriers to migration such as dams, fences, power lines and wind farms can disrupt migratory routes and result in significant mortality. Birds also face the risk of injury or death caused by collision with communication towers and electrocution on electricity transmission lines. For all the above reasons, there is a growing

number of migratory species at serious risk of becoming extinct.

Because of their unique behavior and particular ecological requirements, migratory species have special conservation needs. Most importantly, international cooperation between States which share populations of migratory species is absolutely essential. Those States have a joint responsibility to ensure the long-term survival of migratory animals across and beyond their territories.

Concerted and coordinated actions on the



ground are needed to address the threats to migratory animals if we want to maintain their free movement across international boundaries and continents, thereby ensuring that they continue to contribute to the health and proper functioning of ecosystems and the well-being of human populations which depend on those animals for their livelihood. Such actions will require more research to understand the needs of those species; a multitude of conservation measures on the ground, directed towards both the species and their habitats throughout their ranges; greatly increased awareness of the issues; and international cooperation between relevant agencies and decision-makers.

Many migratory species provide essential ecosystem services which in turn add to human well-being in practically all countries of the world. The conservation and sustainable management of migratory species populations make especially important contributions to the wider aims of global sustainable development.

CMS is committed to the conservation of migratory species and assists its Contracting Parties towards achieving this very important goal.



Humpback whales (Appendix II) migrate between the North Atlantic and the Caribbean, where they breed. (© NOAA)



The Monarch butterfly is the only insect listed in the CMS Appendices. Its recorded range includes most of the countries of the Caribbean.



Several species of ray, including the reef manta ray, are listed in both CMS Appendices. (© Ahmed Abdul Rahman)

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT THE CONVENTION ON MIGRATORY SPECIES OF WILD ANIMALS PLEASE CONTACT

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