

THIRD MEETING OF SIGNATORIES TO THE MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING ON THE CONSERVATION OF MIGRATORY BIRDS OF PREY IN AFRICA AND EURASIA

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Annex XIV

THE THIRD MEETING OF SIGNATORIES TO THE RAPTORS MOU (MOS3) SIDE EVENTS

1. Enforcement is Key – The Wildlife Crime Academy (VCF)

Jovan Andevski introduced the Wildlife Crime Academy (WCA), which was set on providing the necessary conditions for improvement of law enforcement efficiency in combating wildlife crime in a sustainable framework, based on the exchange of knowledge and best practice experiences of the environmental and enforcement services from Spain. The WCA has established courses tailored to cover all different aspects of wildlife crime (illegal killing, trapping, poisoning, illegal trade), and to suit the different professional profiles of the attendees. After completing the three level training courses, attendees become experts in wildlife crime investigation, fully capable to implement wildlife crime investigation and organize similar training courses in their country.

The WCA was established in 2021 as a VCF initiative in close collaboration with the Spanish authorities. Between 2021 and 2023 it implemented five training courses at different levels, attended by enforcement agents, veterinarians and prosecutors (total of 66 representatives) from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Egypt, Lebanon, Italy, Morocco, North Macedonia and Serbia.

2. Management Strategies for South African Vultures (Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, South Africa)

Ms Humbulani Mafumo facilitated this side event, with presentations from Mr Edward Netshithothole and Ms Tebogo Mashua. South Africa had submitted a proposal for the inclusion of the Southern African population of Bearded Vulture (*Gypaetus barbatus meridionalis*) on Appendix I of CMS. The small geographically isolated population (estimated at 334 individuals) restricted to the Maloti-Drakensberg mountains of Lesotho and South Africa regularly migrates between the two countries. The population is declining, especially due to poisoning and collision with powerlines. It is regionally listed in Southern Africa as Critically Endangered. Uplisting the population to CMS Appendix I was anticipated to increase cooperation between the two Range States, NGOs and other stakeholders to address threats and improve its conservation status.

Nine species of vulture occur in South Africa, seven with established breeding populations. Their continued decline and extinction risk encouraged the Government to develop a Biodiversity Management Plan (BMP) for South Africa's vulture populations through a consultative process

with stakeholder engagements. The BMP envisages healthy growing vulture populations in South Africa, fulfilling their essential ecosystem services through the achievement of a safe and secure environment. A National Vulture Task Force was established to develop the BMP, in enabling South Africa to implement the Vulture MsAP.

Key threats to vultures in South Africa are poisoning, electrocution and collisions, habitat change and traditional medicine use. The BMP aims to reduce and eventually halt intentional poisoning of vultures, to work alongside traditional medicine practitioners to minimise vulture use and to reduce vulture mortalities caused by existing and new energy infrastructure. The BMP further aims to monitor the status of vultures, conduct research, ensure appropriate management practices and promote vulture conservation through awareness raising. An action plan was developed to implement the BMP.

3. Reducing electrocution risk for raptors at a national scale: a study in Mongolia (MBZ Raptor Conservation Fund)

Mr Munir Virani introduced the scale of raptor electrocution in Mongolia, where dangerous poles and lines can electrocute over 20,000 birds annually, including 4,000 Saker Falcons (*Falco cherrug*). MBZ began a mitigation programme in 2019 to insulate thousands of dangerous poles to prevent electrocution. Conservation efforts focused on finding effective, practical, easy-to-install long-lasting solutions to reduce bird electrocution rate, without interrupting electricity supply. By providing support to their conservation partners and engaging with government agencies and power companies in Mongolia, MBZ mitigated 27,000 power poles across 3,000km in the country's steppe region, aiming to reduce raptor mortality by 95%. This was the largest single-line electrocution mitigation effort at scale and a significant achievement for bird conservation.

Mr Virani also highlighted catastrophic declines of African raptors as a result of electrocution. A steep decline of 88% of savanna raptor species was observed between 1969 and 1995, with declines being more pronounced in West Africa and outside protected areas. MBZ urged Signatories to collaborate with the energy and utility industry in their countries to address bird electrocution on powerlines. By working together, they can develop and implement effective mitigation strategies that protect bird populations while benefiting the energy industry through reduced power outages, equipment damage, and financial losses.