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Species of Wild Animals**

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REPORT OF THE SLENDER-BILLED CURLEW WORKING GROUP
(Prepared by the Secretariat)

Background

1. The Report of the Slender-billed Curlew Working Group is attached to this note in the form and language in which it was submitted to the CMS Secretariat by the Working Group Secretariat, BirdLife International. What follows is a short summary provided by the Working Group Secretariat.

Report Summary

2. Since April 2001, the Slender-billed Curlew Working Group has been affiliated with the training of ornithologists and surveys undertaken in Ukraine and obtained funds for an international (Iranian - Dutch - French) expedition in Iran and surveys undertaken in Yemen and Morocco. The surveys undertaken identified potentially valuable wintering areas and threats to these sites.

3. A total of 15 unconfirmed Slender-billed Curlew records have been collected and are being verified.

4. Studies have started aimed at identifying Slender-billed curlew breeding areas through stable isotope analysis of museum specimens.

5. The Working Group has revised the conservation priorities and produced a consolidated draft international action plan for the species.

6. The Scientific Council and Conference of Parties may wish to consider:

- (i) the mandate of the Working Group and its extension for another two years;
- (ii) the Working Group's proposed activities and the funds needed to fulfil these, including the reassignment of funds previously allocated to the Range State meeting by COP 6; and
- (iii) acknowledging, with appreciation, the contributions of the outgoing Working Group Chair, Dr G.C. Boere.

Report to the CMS Scientific Council of the Activities of the Slender-billed Curlew Working Group

April 2001- July 2002

**Prepared by BirdLife International
Secretariat to the Slender-billed Curlew Working Group**

1.0 - Update on the Activities of the Slender-billed Curlew Working Group since April 2001

1.1 Surveys and research

1. Increasing the number of visits to potential Slender-billed curlew wintering areas (North Africa and Persian Gulf) was among the priorities identified at the Kiev meeting that took place in 1-2 April 2001. The Slender-billed Curlew Working Group (SbC WG) succeeded in obtaining funds from the African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) to carry out winter surveys in Iran, Yemen and southern Morocco. While the surveys did not gather additional data on the physical presence of Slender-billed curlew, they did identify wintering areas potentially valuable to the birds as habitat, and importantly, threats to the conservation status of these sites.

2. Twelve Ukrainian ornithologists were trained to identify the species by Marco Zenatello (INFS, Italy) following the Kiev meeting. Many of them spent a number of weeks in the field on the Black Sea coast of Ukraine and Crimea. Twelve unconfirmed observations were recorded. Some of the birds sited were photographed. The original slides have been scanned and the images sent to experts for comment.

3. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) (the BirdLife International Partner organisation in the United Kingdom) has begun research aimed at narrowing down the breeding areas of the Slender-billed curlew. The project involves analysing the stable isotopes found in the feathers of juveniles from museum specimens. The SbC WG Secretariat prepared a letter of support that was then sent to European museums as an annex to a request from RSPB.

4. The Institut Royal des Sciences Naturelles de Belgique has started a similar project to analyse the stable isotopes of Siberian waders' feathers. It is hoped that the two studies will provide useful results to improve the chances of locating the Slender-billed curlew's breeding grounds.

1.2 National action plans

Italy and Ukraine have produced their national action plans for the species. Copies have been distributed widely both nationally and internationally. Both documents call for the protection and adequate management of the key sites. The next step should be making funds available for the actions.

1.3 Plans for conservation activities

1. As part of the consultations between the Working Group Secretariat, the Working Group Chair and the CMS Secretariat, it was concluded that it was premature to hold a formal meeting of the MoU's Range State signatories and interested organisations in September 2002. As a result, it was concluded that existing funds for the meeting could be more usefully allocated to develop project concepts and proposals derived from the revised Action Plan's proposed activities.

2. It was subsequently agreed that the SbC WG should take a proactive role in developing and fundraising for conservation activities at site level within an international project. First thoughts have been developed and BirdLife International has agreed to investigate further the feasibility of developing such a proposal.

1.4 New observations

1. The United Kingdom Rarities Committee has accepted the United Kingdom record of the Slender-billed Curlew in Druridge Bay, Northumberland on May 1998. This is the last confirmed record of the species. The fact that the bird was identified as a juvenile indicates that the species has bred in 1997.

2. A bird-watching group in the Kiskunság National Park (Hungary) has observed a possible Slender-billed curlew on 15 April 2001. The record is currently under evaluation by the national rarities committee in Hungary. The record account, and some images from a video, is available at: <http://www.sakertour.hu/news.php>. At least one of the observers had previous experience with the species.

3. Repeated unconfirmed records exist from Uzbekistan, where possible Slender-billed curlew were seen in 2002 and 2001 in Sudochie wetland. AEWA has expressed interest in developing a project there. BirdLife International is investigating the feasibility of a project involving training and surveys.

1.5 New museum specimens

1. Four “new” Slender-billed curlew skin specimens (all from the 19th century) have been reported by the Museum of Natural History in Manchester. These had not been included in the Slender-billed curlew database.

2. One eggshell, collected by Ushakov on 2 June 1909, was also discovered at the Museum. This is currently the only known egg. The fate of a clutch of four sold by Ushakov to Mr. Potter in 1909 or 1910, and an egg collected by Schastovski on 20 May 1909, is unclear.

3. Three possible Slender-billed curlews have been reported from a museum at the Jægerskolen in Denmark. Further data have been requested.

1.6 New publications

A number of new articles have been published. Among the most interesting are:

Zenatello M. & Serra L. 2002 *Ageing Slender-billed Curlews: a useful tip*. Wader Study Group Bulletin vol. 97, April 2002.

Gretton A., Yurlov A.K. & Boere G.C. 2002 *Where does the Slender-billed Curlew nest and what future does it have?* British Birds 95, 7:334-344.

McGie H.A. 2002. *The egg of the Slender-billed Curlew at the Manchester Museum: a unique specimen?* British Birds 95, 7: 359-360.

van der Have T.M. & Gallo-Orsi U. 2001 *Population trend of the Slender-billed Curlew Numenius tenuirostris 1850-2000*. Abstract Annual Meeting International Wader Study Group, Kollumerpomp, The Netherlands 31 August - 2 September 2001.

1.7 Consolidated and updated International Action Plan

The Working Group has revised the conservation priorities and produced a consolidated draft international action plan for the species. The executive summary is provided in Annex 3.

2.0 - Mandate of the Working Group

1. The SbC WG mandate (Objectives and Terms of Reference) is provided in Annex 1. No changes are suggested to the mandate.
2. Annex 2 presents planned activities for 2003-2004 and a proposed budget. The Scientific Council may wish to consider rolling over the funds previously allocated to the Range State Meeting to the activities of the Working Group for the next 2 years.
3. BirdLife International has expressed its availability to continue acting as the Working Group Secretariat and administering the funds made available by UNEP/CMS and others.
4. The specific activities that the Secretariat should carry out are:
 - (i) Collect and distribute information on all records and publications;
 - (ii) Develop a Slender-billed curlew web page containing the Slender-billed curlew database, the list of key sites and the list of threats for each Important Bird Area (IBA) and the Bibliography;
 - (iii) Fundraise for further grants for surveys; and
 - (iv) Co-ordinate and administer research (desk study and filed works).

3.0 - New Chair of the Slender-billed Curlew Working Group

1. Dr. G. C. Boere, Chair of the SbC WG since its creation, has expressed his desire to step down from this position.
2. Dr. Boere has been a driving force for the Working Group. His enthusiasm, skilfully matched by his diplomacy, has been a great help for advancing the work of the SbC WG. He himself has been in the field looking for Slender-billed curlews in West Siberia and has first-hand knowledge of the Russian ornithology and ornithological environment.
3. The SbC WG expresses its gratitude for his work, but knows that he, still being part of the Working Group, will be able to further contribute to the SbC WG work.
4. A potential new chair has been identified and approached. A final reply was not available at the time of writing (30 July 2002).

ANNEX I

OBJECTIVES OF THE WORKING GROUP AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

Objectives

- To maintain and enhance, the conservation status of the globally threatened Slender-billed Curlew through co-ordinating the implementation of the Action Plans of the CMS MoU and BirdLife International/Council of Europe.
- To intensify and improve international cross-border co-ordination and concerted action.
- To document the conservation status of the species and its future positive or negative trends, in order to provide for a more timely conservation of similar species in the future.

In order to fulfil these objectives the working group should carry out the following tasks:

- Collection and analysis of all available data on the Slender-billed Curlew, including as far as possible all negative records and preparation of an annual report summarising the situation.
- Sharing of information among members of the Working Group on progress made in scientific, technical and conservation work related to the Slender-billed Curlew.
- Co-ordination of actions and fund-raising efforts for the conservation of the Slender-billed Curlew.
- Revision of conservation and research priorities for the Slender-billed Curlew and updating the international action plans for the species.
- Carrying out regular assessments of the implementation of the Action Plans including the preparation of regular status reports.
- Recommend amendments to the Slender-billed Curlew MoU to the UNEP/CMS Secretariat.
- Co-ordinating public awareness activities in close co-operation with the UNEP/CMS secretariat.
- Considering various scenarios of what should happen when the breeding area of Slender-billed Curlew is found [including a scheme of systematic co-ordination/concerted research to identify the migration routes] and agree on a possible course of action in this case, and ensuing confidentiality of the information if breeding and/or new wintering areas are found.

ANNEX 2

Slender-billed Curlew Working Group Activities Planned for 2003-2004 and Proposed Budget (in US dollars)

| Activity | 2003 | 2004 |
|---|---------------|---------------|
| Secretariat | | |
| <i>A Collate and verify, in collaboration with national rarities committees, new records of the Slender-billed curlew and update and BirdLife database on Slender-billed curlew</i> | 1,365 | 1,400 |
| <i>B Co-ordinate projects</i> | 4,550 | 5,000 |
| <i>C Develop and update a Slender-billed curlew web page containing the Slender-billed curlew database, the list of key sites and the list of threats for each IBA and the Bibliography</i> | 2,275 | 2,275 |
| <i>D Fundraise for further grants for surveys</i> | 2,275 | 2,350 |
| - Surveys in priority areas as identified in Kiev. Priority targets are: Libya, Tunisia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Persian Gulf States. | 15,000 | 15,000 |
| - Desk study on human population and land use development and climatic cycles in West Siberia (1900-2000). | 3,000 | |
| - Development of a project proposal aiming at the adequate management of a number of key sites | 20,000 | |
| Total | 50,468 | 28,029 |

ANNEX 3

Executive summary of the International Action Plan for the Slender-billed Curlew (*Numenius tenuirostris*)

The International action plan it is based on the most up-dated information available and represent a consolidated version of several documents and in particular:

- the action plan attached to the *Memorandum of Understanding concerning Conservation measures for the Slender-billed Curlew* (1994);
- the *Action plan for the conservation of the Slender-billed Curlew* (1996) prepared by BirdLife International with the financial support of the EU and published by the Council of Europe; and
- the *Conservation plan for the Slender-billed Curlew (2001)* prepared for CMS by the Institut Royal des Sciences Naturelles de Belgique.

The action plan needs to be implemented in: Albania, Algeria, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Egypt, Georgia, Greece, Hungary, Iran, Iraq, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Malta, Morocco, Oman, Romania, Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Tunisia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan, Yemen and Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro).

The Slender-billed curlew *Numenius tenuirostris* is classified as Critical at a global level (BirdLife International 2000). It is almost certainly the rarest and most poorly known bird species in western Palearctic. The population is estimated to be less than 50 birds.

Conservation of the Slender-billed curlew is a truly formidable task. Although major gaps remain in our knowledge of the species in large parts of its range, certain actions can be taken immediately and some results (in particularly in the protection of some key sites) have already been achieved. Effective conservation action will depend largely on a high degree of co-operation and commitment among those responsible, and on funding of the necessary activities.

Threats and limiting factors

- Habitat loss
 - low/high (breeding areas)
 - medium/high (passage and wintering areas)
 - medium / high (?) (in breeding areas)
- Hunting - medium (historically high)
- Illegal / accidental killing - unknown, possibly high
- Disturbance - medium
- Breakdown of social behaviour patterns - medium/high (following initial decline)
- Predation of females and nest - unknown
- Other factors - unknown

Aims

1. In the short term to prevent the extinction of the Slender-billed curlew.
2. In the medium term to prevent any further decrease in the Slender-billed curlew population caused by threats in either the breeding, passage or wintering grounds.
3. In the long term to secure a significant increase in the number of Slender-billed curlews.

Conservation priorities

- Effective legal protection for the Slender-billed curlew and its "look-alike" - essential/high
- Locate the breeding grounds - essential
- Promote international and national policies which protect the Slender-billed curlew and its habitat - high
- Appropriate protection and management of all passage, wintering and breeding grounds - high
- Locate and study key wintering and passage sites - high/medium
- Increase public awareness of the species critically threatened status amongst politicians, decision makers and hunters - high

The action plan Annexes provide the full list of sites where the species has been recorded in the last 25 and 10 years. The list of threats for all key European sites recognised as Important Bird Areas (IBAs) are provided.