



Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation of Migratory Birds of Prey in Africa and Eurasia (Raptors MoU)

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CONSERVATION INITIATIVES UNDER THE RAPTORS MOU

Prepared by the Interim Coordinating Unit of the Raptors MoU

1. The purpose of this document is to introduce the key conservation initiatives on which the Interim Coordinating Unit (ICU) of the Raptors MoU has either led or actively engaged with, primarily during the last year. Each of the initiatives described below will be supported by a presentation at plenary and/or a side-event at the 1st Meeting of Signatories to the Raptors MoU.

Species (Agenda Item 11.1)

Saker Falcon Task Force

2. The need for a Saker Falcon Task Force was formally established by the CMS Resolution 10.28 (CMS/Raptors/MoS1/Inf.11.1/Annex II), adopted at the 10th Conference of the Parties (COP10) to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), which was held in Norway in November 2011. The Task Force aims to bring together Range States of the Saker Falcon (*Falco cherrug*), as well as co-operating Partners and other interested parties, to develop a coordinated Global Action Plan. This will include a management and monitoring system to conserve the Saker Falcon.

3. The Interim Coordinating Unit (ICU) of the Raptors MoU hosted the inaugural meeting of the Saker Falcon Task Force in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, on 29 March 2012. The objective was to bring together key stakeholders to agree Terms of Reference and a Work Plan for 2012–14, including adoption of the International Single Species Action Planning protocol, developed by the African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) in conjunction with BirdLife International. The Report of this first STF meeting is available online as CMS/Raptors/MoS1/Inf.11.1, and the Task Force's Work Plan 2012-14 is CMS/Raptors/MoS1/Inf.11.1/Annex I.

4. Apart from an initial contribution of EUR 10,000 granted by CMS Parties at COP10, and US\$ 28,000 support contributed by the ICU of the Raptors MoU to prepare and host the 1st Meeting of the Task Force, no financial resources had been identified to implement the Work Plan. Accordingly, between May and October 2012, the ICU developed and submitted five separate international funding proposals.

5. These efforts have secured significant success. The Saudi Wildlife Authority has generously agreed to contribute US\$ 60,000 to fund research required to fill key knowledge gaps in advance of the planned Stakeholders' Workshop. The European Commission has granted US\$ 100,000 to fund the Workshop and preparation of the Global Action Plan. In addition, the ICU is actively discussing with the CITES Secretariat to reach agreement to release US\$ 20,000 for work related to trade and sustainable use of the Saker Falcon.

6. Now that some of the necessary funding has been generated, the preparatory work can begin with a view to organising the Stakeholders' Action Planning Workshop in mid-2013. The first reporting milestone

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set for the Task Force Report was MoS1 – the full report is CMS/Raptors/MoS1/Doc.11.1.

Egyptian Vulture Project

7. The Egyptian Vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*) is classified by IUCN as 'endangered' and is listed on Category 1 (Globally and Near Threatened species) of the Raptors MoU. In September 2012, the ICU initiated a project to promote the conservation of the Egyptian Vulture, in conjunction with Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds (BSPB). The overall aim is to facilitate development of conservation measures for the Eastern European migratory populations of Egyptian Vultures that are believed to winter in Central and North-Eastern Africa.

8. Threats and increased mortality along the migrating route and in the wintering grounds in Africa are thought likely to significantly impact upon the species' population viability in Europe, particularly in the Balkans. Data from Bulgaria (BSPB, unpublished), shows that each year significant numbers of adult birds do not return to the breeding territories, for reasons that are not yet clear.

9. The key project objectives of this joint project are to build capacity amongst local African conservationists to work with the species by: (i) broadening understanding of the problems faced by Egyptian Vultures, particularly in their wintering areas; (ii) implementing field training on species-specific research and conservation methods for use in Africa; and, (iii) initiating research in two little known wintering areas of the species in Western Sudan and Chad, to make rough assessments of the population sizes and potential threats.

10. There is an urgent need to elucidate the wintering range, learn more about the species' ecology during the non-breeding period, and build a comprehensive knowledge of key sites and key threats facing Egyptian vultures in Africa. Given the extremely low density of ornithologists living and working in North-East Africa, and the scale of the continent, this will be challenging. Therefore, strengthening cooperation between different stakeholders in Europe, the Middle East and Africa is essential, to learn more about roosting and feeding locations, migration routes and to locate dead birds and to determine cause of death. Efforts, over time, to provide support and training for young people and country experts are considered to be of high importance for the conservation of Egyptian Vultures in the long-term.

11. Subject to the outcomes of this project, consideration will be given to the possibility of replicating the principles for future initiatives in other countries and/or for other species for which significant data-deficiencies exist.

Sooty Falcon International Single Species Action Plan

12. The Sooty Falcon (*Falco concolor*) is classified as 'Near Threatened' in the IUCN Red List, due primarily to slow or moderate and on-going population declines being suspected. However, information on the species' ecology is fragmented and incomplete, particularly during the migration and wintering periods of its lifecycle. The species is listed in Category 1 of the Raptors MoU.

13. For effective conservation measures to be identified and implemented, there is a clear need to establish coordinated international actions to gather more accurate and comprehensive information on the global population status and the main threats faced by this spectacular species.

14. In October 2012, the ICU published a call for a consultant to act as Coordinator for a Sooty Falcon International Single Species Action Plan (ISSAP). Twenty nine applications were received by the 30 November 2012 deadline. Final selection of the Consultant is planned to take place in January 2013.

15. The overall aim is to develop an International Single Species Action Plan for the Sooty Falcon. This will require international cooperation and collaboration with all Range States of the species. It is planned that a Sooty Falcon Working Group will be established to facilitate this, and also to assist key Range States in preparing and implementing Sooty Falcon Conservation Action Plans at the National or Regional levels. Additional funding is required to host an Action Planning Workshop during 2013.

Threats (Agenda Item 11.2)

Minimising the risk of poisoning to migratory birds

16. Poison, in its various forms, has a worldwide impact causing lethal and detrimental sub-lethal effects on wildlife, including migratory species. There is a need for internationally recognised guidance for States wishing to address the problems arising from poisoning faced by migratory species, particularly birds. A considerable number of the migratory species that are significantly affected by poisoning through poison baits, rodenticides, heavy metals (notably lead), aquatic poisons and agrochemicals are migratory birds of prey covered by the Raptors MoU.

17. The 17th Meeting of the CMS Scientific Council (Norway, November 2011) discussed the magnitude, scope and severity of poisoning on migratory species. The meeting agreed that a review of the impact of poisons on migratory birds in particular was needed, as well as clarification of priority responses that may be adopted to address poisoning related problems. CMS Resolution 10.26 on minimizing the risk of poisoning to migratory birds¹ requests a detailed assessment to be carried out to identify the scope and severity of poisoning on migratory birds.

18. A Working Group has been established under the CMS Scientific Council with the main purpose of undertaking this assessment. Given the significant threat posed by poisons to migratory raptors, due particularly to their foraging habits and/or their position in the food chain, the ICU has pledged US\$ 21,000 funding to support this Working Group. The Programme Officer will serve on the Steering Committee.

The CMS Secretariat published a call for a consultancy in September 2012 to seek a Coordinator for the Combating Poisoning Working Group (CPWG) for 12 months. Subject to the selection process, work should commence early in the New Year.

Conflicts between birds and power grids

19. Please refer to CMS/Raptors/MoS1/Doc.11.2.

20. Research undertaken by the Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds (BSPB) and presented at the Pan-African Vulture Summit in Kenya in April 2012, identified a 31km stretch of power line near Port Sudan in Sudan that appears to have been responsible for the deaths of many hundreds, perhaps in even thousands, of Egyptian Vultures over the last 50 years. In the sidelines of the 5th Meeting of Parties to the African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement held in France in April, Germany had expressed interest in sharing knowledge, experience and resources to support bird mitigation activities for power grids outside of Europe. In light of this, the ICU and BSPB jointly developed and submitted a project proposal to the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety in September 2012. Subject to expert assessment, the aim is either to replace or retrofit the power line to make it safe for Egyptian Vultures and other species. The proposal is still under consideration by the German authorities.

Other initiatives (Agenda Item 11.3)

Migratory Soaring Birds Project

21. The Migratory Soaring Birds (MSB - www.birdlife.org/migratorysoaringbirds) Project's full title is 'Mainstreaming Conservation of Migratory Soaring Birds into Key Productive Sectors along the Rift Valley / Red Sea Flyway'. It is focused on the most important route for migratory soaring birds of the Africa-Eurasia system. The overall project goal is to ensure that globally threatened significant populations of migrating soaring birds are effectively maintained.

22. The immediate objective is for key MSB conservation management activities to be mainstreamed effectively into the hunting, energy, agriculture, waste management and tourism sectors, thus facilitating a

¹ http://www.cms.int/bodies/COP/cop10/resolutions_adopted/10_26_poisoning_e.pdf

safer flyway for soaring birds. The MSB project is supported by the Global Environment Facility (donor agency), United Nations Development Programme (implementing agency) and BirdLife International (executing agency).

23. The MSB Project relates to 37 avian species – 32 of these are migratory birds of prey covered by the Raptors MoU. The Governments of the following 11 countries are formal partners – **Djibouti**, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Jordan, Lebanon Palestine, Saudi Arabia, **Sudan** and **Yemen**. All are Range States of the Raptors MoU and the three highlighted in bold are Signatories. Accordingly, the potential synergies between these two initiatives are highly significant.

24. The ICU approached the MSB Project Team in December 2011 via a meeting with Birdlife International at Cambridge in the United Kingdom. A subsequent face-to-face meeting took place in January 2012 and the Programme Officer was invited to sit on the Regional Project Steering Committee for the MSB Project. The first Committee meeting was held in Amman, Jordan in late May 2012.

25. Activities listed in Table 2 of Action Plan to the Raptors MoU include actions that impinge into the five key sectors covered by the MSB Project. Accordingly, success in mainstreaming the mitigation or removal of threats to the MSBs species within these sectors should directly support national implementation of the Raptors MoU.

26. A key initial commitment for Signatories is the development of a National or Regional Raptor Conservation and Management Strategy. In October 2012, the ICU actively supported an MSB-led Workshop held in Djibouti City, Djibouti. The aim was to bring together stakeholders from the relevant conservation and key sector organisations to begin the process of developing a National Strategy to guide the country in their strategic conservation planning for raptors.

27. The Programme Officer was unable to attend but three separate presentations were submitted, and given in his absence by the organisers. The Workshop was considered to be highly successful and a report of the outcomes will be published in due course.

EURAPMON

28. Research and Monitoring for, and with, Raptors in Europe (EURAPMON - www.eurapmon.net) is a European Science Foundation (ESF) Research Networking Programme that runs from 2010–2015. The aim of EURAPMON is to strengthen the contribution of research and monitoring to the delivery of biodiversity, environmental and human health benefits, including maintenance and recovery of raptor populations and their habitats, and reducing chemical threats to ecosystems and human health. The EURAPMON network is financed by ESF member organisations and other bodies from 15 countries.

29. There are strong synergies between the implementation of the Raptors MoU and the activities of EURAPMON in the countries covered by the initiative. For example, Signatories are committed to establishing National Contact Points (NCPs) for the Raptors MoU. Likewise, EUROPMON is developing a network of Country Focal Points to coordinate and gather information about monitoring activities at the national level. Information generated by EURAPMON could be shared with the NCPs to support the development of National or Regional Strategies under the Raptors MoU, as well as providing data for inclusion in future National Reports on the implementation of the Action Plan.

30. Well established internal national networks between Government Departments, research institutions and non-Governmental organisations do exist in several Signatory States, but certainly not all. The ICU plans to alert NCPs to the existence of their EURAPMON Country Focal Points, and to provide communication details for them. The aim being to promoting active engagement between the parties, with a view to generating mutual benefits.

31. In addition to creating an international network and undertaking an inventory of existing monitoring activities, EURAPMON aims to provide priorities for areas of potential new research, to share best practice by establishing a web-based database bringing together published studies and datasets, as well as producing

analytical outputs and reports.

EURING

32. The European Union for Bird Ringing (EURING – www.euring.org) is a central, computerised repository for ringing recovery records throughout Europe and holds information dating back over 100 years. Its 10 million records cover 552 different bird species. EURING has been the umbrella organization of all European national Bird Ringing Schemes since 1962. The organisation coordinates and promotes scientific and administrative co-operation between the national Ringing Schemes to ensure the development and maintenance of high standards. EURING also promotes scientific studies on birds, in particular those based on marked individuals, and the use of the specific data that only bird ringing can provide for conservation and management. These objectives are achieved mainly through co-operative projects, the organisation of meetings and the collection of data in the EURING DataBank.

33. EURING holds a unique dataset covering all of the European species of migratory birds of prey that are listed on the Raptors MoU. Analysis of these data would surely provide new and valuable information about certain aspects of the ecology of these species, and offers the opportunity to fill some important knowledge gaps that currently exist.

34. In August 2012, the ICU agreed to contract EURING to carry out a pilot analysis on two species – Red and Black Kite (*Milvus milvus* and *Milvus migrans*, respectively). The aim being to demonstrate the potential conservation value of the information currently stored in the repository. EURING is seeking sponsorship to carry out a thorough analysis of the whole dataset.

Action requested

The Meeting is invited to:

Note : -

- a) Establishment of the Saker Falcon Task Force and its progress to date, including in particular, the intention to develop a Global Action Plan, incorporating guidance on the conservation and sustainable use of the species.
- b) There will be an Open Meeting outlining the work of the Saker Falcon Task Force to be held in the margins of the 1st Meeting of Signatories to the Raptors MoU.
- c) The joint ICU- BSPB Egyptian Vulture Field Capacity Building Project in NE Africa.
- d) Ongoing plans to develop a Sooty Falcon ISSAP and encourage Range States of the species to engage with this initiative.
- e) Establishment of the CMS Working Group to minimize the risk of poisoning to migratory birds and to urge all Signatories and encourage Range States to engage by contributing information to support its work.
- f) The ongoing Migratory Soaring Birds Project, including engagement by the Governments of 11 Range States, and the goals shared with those of the Raptors MoU.
- g) The EURAPMON project and encourage Signatories that are Range States of the initiative to engage with it.

Consider : -

- h) Providing financial and in-kind support to help ensure the implementation the Saker Falcon Task Force's 2012-14 Work Plan, and to enable the Action Planning Workshop for the Sooty Falcon to

be held in 2013.

- i) Actively supporting the work of the Task Force, including, if appropriate, contributing to the Stakeholders' Workshop planned to be held in mid-2013.
- j) Sponsoring further analysis of the EURING DataBank, and/or suggest other potential sponsors who may be willing to do so.

Endorse : -

- k) CMS COP Resolution 10.11 on power lines and migratory birds and urge adoption of the mitigation Guidelines by Signatories, and encourage Range States of the Raptors MoU to do likewise.