



CONVENTION ON MIGRATORY SPECIES

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FIRST MEETING OF THE SIGNATORY STATES
TO THE MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING
CONCERNING CONSERVATION MEASURES FOR
THE AQUATIC WARBLER (*Acrocephalus paludicola*)
Criewen, Germany, 25-27 June 2006
Agenda Item 8.4

EXPANDING THE MEMORANDUM'S GEOGRAPHICAL SCOPE: PRELIMINARY DISCUSSIONS

(Note prepared by the Secretariat in consultation with BirdLife International)

1. The geographic scope of application of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) is the geographical area to which the MoU applies. The geographical scope corresponds to part or all of migratory range of the species that the MoU targets.
2. The Aquatic Warbler MoU therefore should apply to the current known range of the species and include countries where the Aquatic Warbler breeds, rests on migration or spends the winter. According to the current state of knowledge, the range of the Aquatic Warbler appears to include countries that have not been initially included in the Memorandum's scope of application.
3. In fact, the Aquatic Warbler MoU does not explicitly define its geographic scope of application, though paragraph 10 provides that all Range States of the Aquatic Warbler are eligible to sign the MoU. It currently applies to 15 Range States defined by the state of the knowledge at the time of the MoU's conclusion in Minsk. It was recognised in the Minsk Declaration of the Meeting to Finalise the Memorandum of Understanding and Action Plan concerning Conservation Measures for the Aquatic Warbler (30 April 2003) that the owing to a lack of information at the time of the MoU's adoption a Range State not originally listed in the instrument could be identified in the future.
4. The MoU's coverage of the breeding range of the Aquatic Warbler is complete. Despite the fact that the Aquatic Warbler has become extinct as a breeding bird in eleven countries in the past hundred years, no potential exists in the foreseeable future to re-establish the Aquatic Warbler in any of these countries.
5. In contrast, the migration and wintering ranges of the Aquatic Warbler are not fully covered by the MoU. Within the European migration range, Portugal might be regarded as a Range State having had a number of registrations in the last 10 years. Two coastal wetlands have special significance for the Aquatic Warbler in Portugal. The existence of a Balkan flyway has been presumed. It was hinted at when an individual bird was caught in Bulgaria in the 1980s. It may justify regarding Romania as a potential Range State. Moreover, the Aquatic Warbler has been registered in Romania on migration although in very small numbers.

6. In Africa, the Aquatic Warbler has so far been recorded in 11 countries – Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Canary Islands (Spain), Western Sahara, Mauritania, Mali, Senegal, Guinea-Bissau and Ghana.

7. For migration, wetlands on the Atlantic coasts of Morocco and Western Sahara, and to a lesser extent the Mediterranean coasts of Tunisia and Algeria, seem to be of particular importance. Active development of coastal regions in these countries, particularly in Morocco, poses a serious threat and disruption or loss of stop-over sites could be a serious bottle-neck for migrating birds especially because the Aquatic Warbler is unable to perform longer non-stop flights (at least in autumn). Thus, it needs a network of suitable stop-over sites along the migration route.

8. In addition to Senegal, which has already joined the MoU, potential wintering range appears to include Mauritania and Mali – presence of birds in winter here has been supported by numerous recent sightings. Other African countries with registrations of the Aquatic Warbler in winter – Niger, Burkina-Faso, Guinea, Ghana and Guinea-Bissau – are, with the current state of knowledge, considered as countries with vagrant winter occurrence only.

9. It must be noted that information available on the wintering grounds of the Aquatic Warbler in Africa is so far incomplete. Desk studies on distribution modeling provide very broad results while sightings of wintering birds need to be verified.

10. Given the uncertainty, expert opinion should be sought as part of the determination of whether to expand the MoU's geographical scope of application to include a particular country. The decision should be guided primarily by the expected conservation impact and, necessarily so, the financial implications of, for example, bringing Range State representatives to regular MoU meetings.

Action requested:

The Signatories are invited to:

- Undertake a preliminary discussion of the general issue of expanding the MoU's geographical scope of application;
- Seek the preliminary opinions of experts attending the meeting; and
- Provide recommendations to the Secretariat on how to proceed.