

52nd Meeting of the Standing Committee

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REPORT OF THE COP PRESIDENCY

52nd Standing Committee meeting 21-29 September 2021

(Prepared by India)

The CMS COP12 had adopted the resolution (UNEP/CMSCOP12 4.2) formalizing the role of the Chair of the Conference as President of the COP and during the inter-sessional period.

The COP Presidency is to help facilitate positive outcomes that further advance the objectives of the Convention, including steering efforts towards implementing the Resolutions and Decisions adopted by the Conference of Parties.

India hosted the 13th Conference of Parties to the CMS from 17th to 22nd February 2020 at Gandhinagar, Gujarat. India was also able to successfully list Asian Elephant, Great Indian Bustard and Bengal Florican to the Appendix I of CMS for a cooperative action from the range countries of these species. The 'Gandhinagar Declaration' that was adopted during the COP emphasized the need for "Connectivity" for better conservation of migratory species and their habitats .

India has also been elected as the Chair of the CMS Standing Committee, thereby making India steering ahead with proactive actions for conservation of migratory species and also enhanced cooperation with several countries, both CMS Parties and Non-Parties.

Immediately after the successful hosting of the COP, the entire world was gripped under one of the most devastating pandemic (COVID-19). India was also severely affected during Pandemic.

However, the work never ceased and almost all the meetings, etc. were taken up through virtual mode. In spite of the limitations, Government of India with the help of the Scientific communities, Civil Society Organizations, have taken many actions as was promised during the COP at Gandhinagar, Gujarat.

Synergies with other Range states/Conventions, etc.:

Conservation of Asian Elephants: The CMS COP -13 had recommended for listing Asian Elephant in Appendix I of CMS along with taking up Concerted Action for their conservation. For conservation of Elephants, including their safe natural migration across international borders, as well as to mitigate Human-Elephant Conflicts, India initiated a series of dialogues with the Government of Bangladesh on trans-boundary conservation of elephants which resulted in drafting a Protocol on Trans-boundary Elephant Conservation between Republic of Bangladesh and Republic of India. The Protocol was signed by both the countries on 17th December, 2020.

As per this protocol, movement of elephants across borders, during the migration season, will be facilitated by both the partner countries. The protocol also enables both the countries to ensure safety for both animals and humans through advance warning systems thereby ameliorating the human elephant conflict situation.

The initiative of Government of India to sign an MOU with Government of Bangladesh is a step towards taking forward the concerted action on Asian Elephants.

Cooperation with Myanmar: The CMS COP 13 had adopted the Resolution [UNEP/CMS/Resolution12.26 (Rev.COP13)] regarding “Improving ways of addressing connectivity in the conservation of migratory species. Taking this resolution forward, The Government of India has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Government of Myanmar for cooperation on combating of timber trafficking and conservation of tigers and other wildlife.

The MoU also aims to jointly intensify the efforts for combating wildlife and timber trafficking which is threatening the habitats of globally endangered species, particularly tigers and elephants etc, as well as ensuring the continued survival of other wildlife species.

Cooperation with Royal Government of Bhutan: India has signed an Memorandum of Understanding with the Royal Government of Bhutan establishment and promotion of closer and long-term cooperation between the two countries in the field of environment protection. This forms the platform for India to also take up matters relating to biodiversity conservation including those relating to conservation of migratory species and their habitats.

Cooperation with Government of Nepal: The Government of India is envisaging for strengthening bilateral cooperation with Government of Nepal in the field of biodiversity conservation, including conservation of Gangetic River Dolphin and also transboundary protected area management.

Central Asian Flyway Conservation:

UNEP/CMS/Resolution 12.11 (Rev. COP 13) on ‘Flyways’ was adopted during the COP 13, which, *inter-alia*, calls on India to take the lead in supporting Parties with the implementation of conservation action for migratory birds along the Central Asian Flyway.

In pursuance of this Resolution and also the CMS COP 13 decision - 13.46, India has taken initiatives for creating a common platform for promoting research, capacity building and conservation initiatives and is finalizing a programme in association with the CMS Secretariat to build the capacity of CAF range countries for preparation of their respective National Action Plans for conservation of migratory birds along the Central Asian Flyway.

Taking forward ‘Connectivity’:

The COP 13 had adopted the ‘Gandhinagar Declaration’ (UNEP/CMS/Resolution 13.1), which, *inter-alia*, affirmed that the commitment to maintaining and restoring ecological connectivity is one of the top priorities for CMS and had called on the Parties and other governments and relevant stakeholders to promote the importance of ecological connectivity and functionality, international cooperation and the conservation of migratory species.

The Additional Director General of Forests (WL) and Director, Wildlife Preservation, Government of India has been taking up the cause of conservation of migratory species and connectivity at various forums. The important amongst these include:

- The Additional Director General of Forests (WL) had represented India during the Bern-II Consultative Workshop on Biodiversity related Conventions on the Post 2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, held during January-February 2020, wherein, the need for appropriately and adequately incorporating ‘Connectivity’ in the Post 2020 Biodiversity Framework was emphasised. On the similar lines, the matter regarding “Connectivity” was also taken up with the CBD Focal Point for India.

- The importance of Central Asian Flyway and need for conservation of migratory birds and their habitats was emphasized while making key note address during the webinar on Wetlands of Central Asian Flyway held in September 2020 which was jointly hosted by the UN Environment and Wetlands International.
- During the meeting with International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development, the Additional Director General of Forests (WL) had emphasized on conservation of trans-boundary cooperation for conservation of species.
- The need for developing trans-boundary cooperation with neighbouring countries for conservation of wildlife, especially the migratory species and developing ecological connectivity was highlighted during the meeting “ Exploring potential collaboration between Myanmar and India” held in October 2020.
- The Additional Director General of Forests (WL) while participating in Indo-French meeting in November 2020, had also highlighted the role of connectivity and conservation of Protected Areas and migratory species.
- During a number of meetings and interactions with the State Wildlife heads (Chief Wildlife Wardens) the concept and relevance of connectivity have been reiterated and they have been requested for taking up the objective of connectivity to the grass root level so that it can reach the lower most strata of wildlife conservation in the country.
- While participating in webinars organized by civil society organizations on wildlife conservation matters, the concept of connectivity and its relevance in conservation of wildlife and specially the migratory species was emphasised.
- The need to take effective measures to control spread of zoonotic diseases and the relevance of one health approach was highlighted during the online meeting on one health organized by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH.
- Linkages with focal points of Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of wild fauna and flora (CITES), International Whaling Commission (IWC), World Heritage Convention (WHC) were established and objectives of Gandhinagar Declaration was conveyed.

Championing the cause of conservation of Migratory Species:

India has pledged for championing the cause of conservation of migratory species under the CMS Champions Programme for following two initiatives, viz.,

Initiative 1: Energy for people, Life for Animals Making Energy safe for wildlife. This initiative promotes deployment of green energy and contributed to the attainment of various Sustainable Development Goals.

Initiative 2: Sustaining initiatives for the conservation of wildlife and its habitat worldwide: The CMS Small Grants Programme serves as a catalyst for action to solve some of the most complex challenges to migratory species survival, funding projects in more than 30 countries since its inception. Through targeted funding and technical support, the CMS Small Grants Programme empowers local communities, NGOs and Governments to protect their natural and shared assets.

National Initiatives for conservation of migratory species:

A. Project Dolphin

In his address from the ramparts of the Red Fort on the occasion of 74th Independence Day celebrations on 15th August 2020, Hon'ble Prime Minister of India announced a new National programme 'Project Dolphin' aimed to bring more focussed conservation of Dolphins (both riverine and marine).

The Project Dolphin aims to address existing conservation concerns for the species and also to empower the stakeholders to participate in conservation of dolphins. This includes a multi-sectoral approach involving forest department, fisheries department, fishermen and other stakeholders, through science based conservation. The river and marine ecosystem is the lifeline for the most marginal people in the country, apart from several threatened and endangered fauna. The Project Dolphin would also encourage the Dolphin Tourism in the country, which would generate income for several people living in the vicinity of Dolphins habitats. It also has components for transboundary cooperation.

India's had in CMS COP 13 proposed for taking up concerted action for the Gangetic River Dolphin (*Platanista platanista*) and the Irrawady Dolphin (*Orcaella brevirostris*), which was adopted. The 'Project Dolphin' would pave the way for taking up concerted action for these two species as well.

B. National Marine Turtle Action Plan:

India is home to five species of Marine Turtles. India is also home to one of the largest congregations of nesting of the Olive Ridley Turtles. Considering the importance of conservation of marine turtles, the Ministry had included them as one of the 22 species for taking up focussed conservation programme under the Centrally Sponsored Scheme Development of Wildlife Habitat.

India is also a signatory to the Indian Ocean South East Asian Marine Turtle MOU (IOSEA-Marine Turtle MOU) under the aegis of the CMS and has been playing an important role in conservation of marine turtles in the region. Considering the need for having a coordinated effort in marine turtle conservation, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has launched the 'National Marine Turtle Action Plan (2021-2026)' on 28th January 2021.

The Action Plan is in sync with India's commitment towards conservation of Marine Turtles and Resolution UNEP/CMS/ Resolution 12.7 (Rev.COP13). This Action Plan focuses on reducing threats, conserving critical habitat, exchanging scientific data, increasing public awareness and most importantly emphasizes on a participatory approach in conservation of marine turtles and its habitats. The Action Plan is set out for a period of five years, which will enable the stakeholders to perform their roles in a coordinated manner and take effective measures for the conservation of marine turtles.

Through conservation of Dolphins and Marine Turtles, the complete ecosystem of river and ocean will also be addressed.

Marine Megafauna Stranding Management Guidelines:

India had witnessed incidences of stranding of marine megafauna on several occasions. These include stranding of Whales and Dolphins on the sea shore, as bycatch in fishing vessels etc. The reasons for such stranding have been varied. The implication of such stranding could include pollution, spread of diseases and altering the balance in the marine ecosystem.

Considering the need for having a guidance for handling and managing such stranding situations, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change on 28th January 2021, released the guidelines for managing marine megafauna stranding, viz., 'The Marine Mega Fauna Stranding Management Guidelines' which is the first of its kind in the country. The Guidelines have taken into

account the global best practices in management of marine mega fauna stranding. This guideline is in sync with various decisions of CMS COP-13 pertaining to Cetacean conservation and reducing by-catch.

The Guidelines provide for a participatory approach and recognises importance of the local communities in partnering for conservation initiatives. The Guidelines aims to help the relevant stakeholders in better understanding and bringing much needed awareness on stranding of marine megafauna and also guide them in handling such stranding situations in an effective manner with the purpose of saving lives of these species.

Conserving the Great Indian Bustards:

The Great Indian Bustard (*Ardeotis nigriceps*) is a critically endangered bird and is a good indicator of grassland ecosystem. Conservation of this species helps in protecting grasslands which supports millions of pastoralists and agriculture practicing communities who breed some livestock breeds. In addition, conservation efforts also assist in well managed grasslands that, in turn, support carbon sequestration and reduce the negative impacts of Climate Change.

The **Mascot for the CMS COP 13** was christened as “**GIBI The Great**” giving wider publicity for conservation of Great Indian Bustard. The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has taken up an initiative on conservation breeding of the Great Indian Bustard (GIB) in collaboration with Rajasthan, Gujarat, Karnataka and Maharashtra Forest Departments and with the technical support of Wildlife Institute of India (WII), Dehradun.

The Government of India had sanctioned an additional financial support of 4.628 Million USD for the duration of five years(2016-2021) for the dedicated programme for GIB titled ‘Habitat Improvement and Conservation Breeding of Great Indian Bustard-an integrated approach’. Over the last one-year critical power lines stretches have been identified to mitigate the issues of collision related mortalities of birds including the GIBs and other migratory birds.

Seven (07) eggs of GIB were collected and artificially incubated and hatched during March- October, 2020. A total of 16 Great Indian Bustard chicks have been hatched in the breeding facility from eggs collected from wild till date. Four Great Indian Bustard female birds were tagged in Desert National Park in Rajasthan between March and July 2020.

The actions initiated by Government of India towards conservation of Great Indian Bustard illustrate the commitment for implementation of its commitment for taking forward the Concerted Action for Great Indian Bustard, as the CMS COP-13 had recommended India’s proposal for listing GIB in Appendix I along with its concerted Actions.

Conserving Vultures:

Vultures have ecological, social and cultural significance in India. Vultures, being the natural scavengers, play a very important role in quickly disposing carcasses that could harbour millions of pathogenic organisms bacteria and fungus and cause serious implications for human and animal health. A number of conservation measures are being taken by the Government of India and State Governments for the conservation and protection of Vultures.

As a key signatory to the CMS Raptors MoU, India launched its five-year Action Plan for Vulture Conservation in India (2020-2025) in November, 2020. The Action Plan has identified priority actions for the conservation of vultures and their habitats. It also advocates prevention of misuse of veterinary non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs and awareness of the importance of conservation of vultures.

The other important aspects of the Action Plan are to institute a system, which automatically removes a drug from veterinary use if it is found to be toxic to vultures, establishment of additional Vulture Conservation Breeding Centres (VCBCs), Vulture safe zones in every State and establishment of dedicated vulture rescue centres in the country. So far, the focus was on conservation of Gyps species of vultures, but now, the conservation breeding programmes of Red Headed Vultures and Egyptian Vultures would be also initiated. The APVC (2020-2025) will also draw expertise and advice, from the existing Regional Steering Committee (RSC) for Coordination with various countries in South Asia which are within the distribution range of the vultures, as well as from SAVE (Saving Asia's Vultures from Extinction), a consortium of NGOs and International Conservation Organizations which are actively working towards conservation of South Asian Vultures. This Action Plan is in sync with Resolution UNEP/CMS/ Resolution 11.15(Rev.COP13) regarding " Preventing poisoning of Migratory Birds", besides, being a step towards implementing CMS COP-13 Decision 13.50 regarding 'Conservation of African Eurasian Migratory Vultures'.

India has also launched study on the safety testing of Non-Steroidal Anti Inflammatory Drugs (NSAID) for further streamlining the use of such drugs in veterinary use.

Conserving Snow Leopards:

India is taking concrete steps in conservation of Snow Leopard by playing a pivotal role in the Global Snow Leopard and Ecosystem Protection Program (GSLEP). With a view to involve the local communities, "*Himal Sanrakshak – Community Volunteer Programme*", that aims to identify, recognize and build the capacities of dynamic youth and women towards wildlife conservation, sustainable use of biological resources, combating illegal trade in wildlife, mitigating human wildlife conflict and biodiversity governance, was launched on 23rd October, 2020 on the International Snow Leopard Day. The programme is developing a cadre of 100 volunteers from local community in the Himalayan region to support the government in conservation and sustainable management of high-altitude ecosystems through participatory approaches.

This initiative is in line with the CMS COP 13 Decision 13.119-13.120 regarding 'Community participation and livelihood' besides Resolution UNEP/CMS/Resolution 11.10 (Rev.COP13) regarding 'Synergies and Partnerships' wherein Parties have been encouraged to strengthen engagement with indigenous peoples, youth groups and local communities across the CMS Family.

India had also participated in the 5th GSLEP Steering Committee meeting held virtually in October 2020.

Conserving Migratory Birds:

India is taking concrete steps for conservation of migratory birds including Amur Falcons. Community based interventions were done during the year 2020 while maintaining the Covid protocols. The success of conservation of Amur Falcons through community led actions has been replicated in other States of India like Manipur, Mizoram and Assam.

India has been also actively contributing to the Saker Falcon Task Force for issues concerning mitigating electrocutions and development of an adaptive management framework for sustainable use of the species. This initiative is a step forward for taking up the Resolution implementation of UNEP/CMS/ Resolution 12.26 (Rev.COP13) regarding "Improving ways of addressing connectivity in the conservation of migratory species".

Conservation of Critically Endangered Species:

With a view to recover more critically endangered species, the a 'Recovery programme' under the Centrally Sponsored Scheme of the Ministry of Environment Forest and Climate Change, is being undertaken. On the recommendation of the Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife, Caracal has also been included for undertaking recovery programme, making the number of species under endangered species recovery programme as 22 species. The other species include, Snow

Leopard, Dolphins, Vultures, Great Indian Bustard, Arabian Sea Hump Back Whale, *Batagur baska*, Red Panda, Indian one horned Rhinoceros, Clouded Leopard, etc.

The world's largest population of **Greater One Horned Rhinoceros** (*Rhinoceros unicornis*) is found in India. In this context, a protocol for Monitoring of Greater One-Horned Rhinoceros Population and guidelines for handling Greater One-Horned Rhinoceros Carcass in India have also been released.

Elephant Enumeration protocol:

The new methodology and protocol for enumeration of Elephants in the country is being finalized and is proposed to be launched during the forthcoming World Elephant Day.

Advisory on Exotic Species:

In India, several species are listed in the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 and are protected. However, exotic species are imported to India and bred in captivity without proper registration. Considering this, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change had issued an Advisory for Voluntary Disclosure of Exotic Live Species, with the objectives of creating a unified information system of the stock of exotic live species at the State/Central level through voluntary disclosure and the use of that database towards controlling and management of zoonotic diseases, and for facilitating better management of the species and providing guidance to their holders for their proper care and wellbeing. The entire registration process has been made through a hassle free online system for the benefit of the importers and owners of exotic live animals as well as for the concerned authorities. This effort of the Ministry has also been lauded by the Hon'ble Apex Court of India. Ministry is contemplating to widening the scope of the advisory to include non CITES listed exotic species also.

Protected Areas:

India has over 20% of the total geographical area under managed forests and thus under effective nature conservation, thereby exceeding the 17 % Aichi target 11. The Protected Areas (PAs) coverage in the Country which stood at 1,65,012.59 sq.kms during the January 2020 has increased to 1,71,921 sq.kms by January 2021. This accounts for 5.03% of the country's total geographic area. There has been a substantial increase in establishment of Community Reserves. The numbers of Community Reserves in the country has increased from 163 to 214 during the period.

In addition, the 51st Tiger Reserve, viz, Srivilliputhur-Meghamalai Tiger Reserve was also notified.

Further, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has taken initiatives for notification of Eco-Sensitive Zones around National Parks and sanctuaries. Eco-Sensitive Zones act as transition zone from areas of higher protection zone to areas of lesser protection. These ESZ notifications presently covers an area of more than 60,000 Sq.kms thereby adding more buffer areas around National Parks and Sanctuaries, for conservation of species. Creation of Eco-Sensitive Zones also adds scientific value to the conservation of migratory animals using corridors for movement. India has been a pioneer in the area of integrating the needs of development and the commitment to environment protection and Eco-Sensitive Zones has become a part of the country's inclusive growth agenda.

Eco-friendly measures for linear infrastructure projects:

With a view to maintain healthy, living landscapes by reducing the conflicts associated with the linear developments, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change had launched the "Eco-Friendly Measures to Mitigate Impacts of Linear Infrastructure on Wildlife". The purpose of these guidelines were to help in better designing of linear infrastructure in the country, that would not only help the wildlife but also be a step ahead towards Green Development. Creation of animal passages has been considered a vital part of construction of linear infrastructure like roads, railway lines, canals, etc., especially those passing through high biodiversity areas. Such animal passages

facilitate the easy movement of wild animals whilst smooth movement of traffic. These guidelines have now been effectively put to practice in the country's development sector.

The implementation of these measures on world's longest and India's first dedicated underpass for wildlife on NH7/44 which passes through Kanha- Pench Corridor has resulted in 468 captures of 15 species during the 90 days of study by Wildlife Institute of India for monitoring of animal movement, including the Tiger. Similarly, a proposal for construction of a tunnel under the Mukundra Tiger Reserve, for 8 laning of National Highway also provides a good example in creating workable solution for taking tiger conservation alongside development. This proposal provides an illustration of maintenance of 'connectivity' for wildlife as well as vehicular movement. Likewise, in the case of the 'Delhi-Saharanpur-Dehradun Economic Corridor', which aims to reduce the travel time between Delhi and Dehradun from existing 6.5 hours to 2.5 hours, also has stretches for underpasses/ over bridges for enabling wildlife crossings. In this, out of the 20 kms stretch passing through Reserve Forest areas, 12 kms is an elevated wildlife corridor.

The implementation of the "Eco-Friendly Measures to Mitigate Impacts of Linear Infrastructure on Wildlife" would also help in mitigation of negative impact to migratory species and is linked with the CMS COP 13 Decision 13.130 as well as action for implementation of UNEP/CMS/Resolution12.26 (Rev. COP13) regarding "Improving ways of addressing connectivity in the conservation of migratory species".

Management Effectiveness Evaluation of Protected Areas:

Management Effectiveness Evaluation (MEE) of Protected Areas (PAs) has emerged as a key tool for Protected Area managers. One full cycle of the Management Effectiveness Evaluation of Protected Areas in the country has been completed. The results of present assessment indicate an overall mean MEE score of 62.01% which is higher than the global mean of 56%.

In order to recognize the contribution of the frontline staff and Park management, from this year onwards 10 best National Parks/Sanctuaries, 5 coastal and Marine parks and top five Zoos in the country will be ranked and awarded every year. This will motivate the frontline to improve their efficiency and thereby enable better conservation efforts.

Also, the Management Effectiveness Evaluation of Indian Zoos(MEE-ZOO) framework which proposes guidelines, criteria and indicators for evaluation of zoos of the country through Management Effectiveness Evaluation Process (MEE-ZOO) in a manner which is discrete, holistic and independent, has also been launched.
