



# CONVENTION ON MIGRATORY SPECIES

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## RESPONSE TO INCREASING THREATS TO MIGRATORY SPECIES FROM WILDLIFE DISEASE

*(Prepared by the FAO and the CMS Secretariat)*

1. Diseases in wildlife can have significant impacts on human, livestock, and environmental health leading to loss of life, livelihoods and food security. They can also impact heavily on migratory species through death, injury, reduced productivity and competitive fitness, and increased susceptibility to predation and other disease. In addition, they can lead to negative human-wildlife relationships. There is therefore a need to understand the causes and epidemiology of these diseases and to coordinate effective and rapid responses as appropriate.

2. Since emerging in 1997 and re-emerging in 2003, highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) H5N1 has had great socio-economic impacts killing poultry across Asia, Africa and Europe, and causing over 560 confirmed human infections with over 300 deaths. Conservation impacts include direct mortality of birds and indirect impacts such as negative perception of wild birds leading to them being killed and their habitat destroyed.

3. COP8 (Nairobi, 2005) created the Scientific Task Force on Avian Influenza and Wild Birds to serve as a coordination and communication network, reviewing the role of wild birds in the epidemiology of HPAI H5N1 and addressing conservation impacts by promoting a balanced opinion based on currently available evidence. The group has been highly successful through the drafting of multiple technical papers, providing input on various policy options and educating the public and professionals about the role that wild birds play in the epidemiology of disease and the many and varied impacts on wildlife. Document UNEP/CMS/Conf.10.42a provides an update on the latest position regarding HPAI H5N1.

4. Whilst avian influenza has been causing global concern, other migratory species across the world have been afflicted by diseases that threaten their survival. Some examples are outlined below:

- a) In North America, bats contribute \$22.9 billion annually to the agricultural industry through insect control and pollination. In 2006 a disease was identified affecting large numbers of bats in the North-eastern United States. The disease, now known as white-nose syndrome and caused by the fungus *Geomyces destructans*, leads to altered patterns of hibernation which cause the bats to wake early and starve to death. So far, a large number of bat colonies has been affected in the US and Canada with a

mortality rate reaching over 90 percent in some cases. Since 2006, over one million bats have been killed by White-Nose Syndrome;

- b) In May 2010 in Kazakhstan, nearly 12,000 endangered Saiga antelope (*Saiga tatarica*) succumbed to an unknown disease within the span of one week. A similar sudden mortality event of approximately 500 individuals occurred in May 2011 in the same population. The 2010 mortality event represented a loss of more than a third of the local Ural Saiga population, in the transboundary area between Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation. Pasteurellosis has been associated with this event, although the full causes remain inconclusive. These recent disease outbreaks have increased the pressure on this already critically endangered species, which is hunted illegally for its meat and horn, the latter of which is used in Traditional Chinese Medicine;
- c) Mongolian Gazelle (*Procapra gutturosa*) are repeatedly affected by foot-and-mouth disease with the most recent outbreak in 2010 which occurred concurrently with a large livestock mortality event. This disease, in addition to other conservation concerns including habitat alteration, human encroachment, climate change, and extractive industries, highlight serious conservation issues but also demonstrate how disease transmission among the livestock and wildlife can also result in impacts to food security and sustainable livelihoods.

5. COP9 (Rome, 2008) adopted Res.9.8 which called upon the CMS Secretariat and United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) to co-convene a second Task Force (in addition to the Scientific Task Force on Avian Influenza and Wild Birds) and to develop guidance on responding to wildlife diseases of importance to wildlife, domestic animals, and people.. The Scientific Task Force on Wildlife Disease was subsequently launched in Beijing, People's Republic of China on 27-28 June 2011, and the meeting report can be found in UNEP/CMS/ScC.17/Inf.13.

6. Res.9.8 also requested the Secretariat and the FAO to determine the relationship between the existing Scientific Task Force on Avian Influenza and Wild Birds, and the Scientific Task Force on Wildlife Disease. The Scientific Task Force on Wildlife Disease proposes to incorporate the Scientific Task Force on Avian Influenza and Wild Birds and maintain it as a technical working group that remains pertinent and of relevance.

7. The Terms of Reference and Work Plan of the Scientific Task Force on Wildlife Disease are included in document UNEP/CMS/ScC.17/Inf.13. The Task Force has a website at [www.wildlifeandecosystemhealth.org](http://www.wildlifeandecosystemhealth.org) which serves as an information portal and a base for working on all Task Force documents and keeping in close contact with members.

8. The Scientific Task Force on Wildlife Disease is currently made up of the following membership categories:

- a) Core Affiliates – African-Union Inter-African Bureau for Animal Resources (AU-IBAR); Secretariats of the Convention on Biodiversity (CBD), the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar); International Veterinary Student Association (IVSA); Max Planck Institute for Ornithology (MPI); Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT);
- b) Observers – World Health Organization (WHO); World Organization for Animal Health (OIE);

- c) Partners – Wildlife Disease Association (WDA); and
- d) National Associates – United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS); Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF); Mongolian State Central Veterinary Laboratory (SCVL); United States Department of Agriculture/Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service/ Wildlife Services/National Wildlife Disease Program (USDA/APHIS/WS/NWDP).

9. The Scientific Task Force on Wildlife Disease intends to have a presence at multiple international conferences to describe its activities, encourage further participation and educate participants on current work at the human-livestock-wildlife-ecosystem interface. The Task Force will continue to hold annual meetings, resources permitting, to discuss relevant work items with quarterly teleconference calls in between face-to-face meetings;

10. Funding is required to guarantee the effective continuation of the work of the Task Force, including the website, creation of technical documents and video-based learning modules, and organization of events to coordinate efforts with other international organizations involved in aspects of wildlife and environmental health. In addition to the regularly scheduled teleconferences with the Core Affiliates, the Task Force is considering organization of a technical workshop to coincide with the annual Wildlife Disease Association Conference in 2012 in Lyon, France. This meeting would consist of technical presentations that illustrate the One Health concept to approaching multi-disciplinary problems, but again, is resource dependent.

11. Since many wildlife morbidity and mortality events can be caused by diseases and events unrelated to pathogens, including plant poisonings, environmental contaminants, natural disasters, or other non-infectious causes, there is an effort underway to link with the Wildlife Health Event Reporter (WHER), an unofficial wildlife morbidity and mortality reporting system, so that events that are of concern to Task Force members can be reported and greater awareness can be created about issues affecting wildlife population health. This reporting system will facilitate rapid reporting of events and serve as a tool for the wildlife community according to the proposed *Modus Operandi* for Conservation Emergencies (UNEP/CMS/Conf.10.38; UNEP/CMS/Resolution 10.2), which is envisaged to improve the rapid response to disease-related and other conservation emergencies.

12. Resolution 10.22 contains a number of actions, including a proposal to change the Task Force name to “The Scientific Task Force on Wildlife and Ecosystem Health” to reflect an increased scope of working areas, as requested by the Core Affiliates. The Resolution also encourages Parties to support and promote the Task Force by joining as National Associates, and to continue to act as co-convenor of the Task Force in partnership with FAO and with the engagement of the CMS Scientific Council.

**Action requested:**

The Conference of the Parties is invited to:

- a. Take note of this document;
- b. Consider the advice of the Scientific Council; and
- c. Adopt UNEP/CMS/Resolution 10.22 on Wildlife Disease and Migratory Species.