



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*)
Crieven, Germany, 25-27 June 2006
Agenda Item 8.2

REPORT ON INTERIM MOU COORDINATION

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

1. BirdLife International has had a long involvement with the Aquatic Warbler Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). Throughout 2001 and 2002, BirdLife International worked closely with the CMS Secretariat to develop a draft MoU which formed the basis for consideration by the Range States.
2. It then worked with CMS to arrange an international meeting in Minsk, Belarus, from 29-30 April 2003, to negotiate and adopt the MoU and Action Plan. Belarussian Minister of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection, Leonty I. Khoruzhik, hosted and chaired the meeting, in cooperation with the CMS Secretariat, BirdLife International, Akhova Ptushak Belarusi (APB - the BirdLife International Partner in Belarus), the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB – the BirdLife Partner in the United Kingdom) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The MoU was opened for signature during the meeting, signed by delegates from nine Range States and entered into effect the same day on 30 April 2003. The CMS Secretariat and BirdLife International signed the MoU as collaborating organisations.
3. The MoU's implementation got off to a strong start when RSPB, with the endorsement of the CMS Secretariat, raised funds in order to employ an officer to support the implementation of the MoU. The Michael Otto Foundation in Germany generously provided financial support for 3 years. The appointment in April 2004 of Mr. Viktor Fenchuk, as Aquatic Warbler Conservation Officer (AWCO), provided an important catalyst to the MoU's implementation.
4. Reflecting the fact that Belarus hosts around 60% of the world population of Aquatic Warblers, that the Government of Belarus was and remains strongly committed to protecting this species and had already hosted the meeting to conclude the MoU, and that APB already ran a well-developed conservation programme for the species, the decision was taken to place the AWCO within the structure of APB in their Minsk office. The AWCO would be also supported locally by UNDP Belarus.
5. Within about one year on the job, the AWCO had published the first edition of the Aquatic Warbler Flyway Newsletter (document CMS/AW-1/Inf/10) and established close links with the key organisations involved in Aquatic Warbler conservation.

6. Most importantly, the AWCO participated in the development of several applications for funding, including a LIFE project for funding by the European Union submitted by OTOP (the BirdLife partner in Poland). A five-year € 5.4 million LIFE project grant (“Conserving *Acrocephalus paludicola* in Poland and Germany”) was secured. The project focuses on the survival of the critically threatened “Pomeranian” population of the Aquatic Warbler and establishes the recovery of the Polish core population of the species in the Biebrza Valley. Other projects financed by GEF focus on conservation of Aquatic Warbler key breeding grounds in Belarus and are aimed to introduce regular habitat management at Zvanets and Sporava fen-mires.

7. In addition, the AWCO has been working closely with the CMS Secretariat, RSPB and other NGOs across the Aquatic Warbler’s range in order to assist the co-ordination of the implementation of the MoU, to promote the exchange of information between the Range States and cooperating organisations, and to support partners with the development, fundraising and implementation of conservation projects aimed at this species.

8. A good example is follow-up work to a project to identify the wintering grounds of the Aquatic Warbler. Despite remarkable progress that has been made over the last decade in both research and conservation of Aquatic Warbler breeding grounds, the wintering territories of the species still remain unknown. This poses a serious threat to the survival of the Aquatic Warbler, as all the measures that are being taken now to conserve the breeding sites and expand breeding population of the Aquatic Warbler may be seriously impaired by adverse conditions at the species’ wintering grounds.

9. Addressing this issue, RSPB in cooperation with the BirdLife Aquatic Warbler Conservation Team and conservation organisations in several West African Countries, including the Ghana Wildlife Society, Naturama in Burkina Faso and AMCFE in Mali, had set-up a project aiming to narrow down the potential Aquatic Warbler wintering areas in West Africa.

10. The research project was financed through CMS by Defra (the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs of the Government of the United Kingdom) that, together with support from the Darwin Initiative, has already provided substantial support to a number of Aquatic Warbler conservation initiatives. The research has helped to identify the likely areas where the Aquatic Warbler winters so that wintering ground conservation measures can be instituted as necessary as part of the Action Plan annexed to the MoU. An executive summary of the project is available to the meeting as document CMS/AW-1/Inf/10).

11. Now two years on since being recruited, the AWCO has also been involved in the development and implementation of a number of other Aquatic Warbler conservation projects and project components in Belarus, Poland and Ukraine which have targeted key Aquatic Warbler breeding populations. He is producing the second edition of the Aquatic Warbler Flyway Newsletter.

12. The AWCO has also been working closely with the CMS Secretariat to support the preparations of the MoU Meeting including developing a draft reporting format, producing the Secretariat’s Overview Report and providing other technically-oriented papers. He will act as the MoU meeting’s rapporteur and following the meeting will produce the meeting report in collaboration with the CMS Secretariat.

13. The three year AWCO project will coming to close at the end of 2006. Proposals are made in document CMS/AW-1/7 to extend the project with the support of BirdLife/RSPB and CMS.

Action requested:

The meeting is invited to take note of the report.