

Eleonora's Falcon © 2004 Nick P. Williams www.falconimages.com

Migratory birds of prey, like many other migratory species, are essential components of the natural environment, which supports all life on earth.

During their migrations, raptors make links between sites, not only in different countries, but also in different continents. As top predators, they have a key role in defining healthy ecosystems. Their survival is closely bound up with the populations of their prey, many of which are of economic value. Birds of prey can serve as reliable and sensitive indicators of change to the environment such as changes in the global climate which can affect not only wildlife, but people too.

In addition to enriching our lives with their often spectacular presence, they contribute directly to eco-tourism ventures at the local and national levels all along their migration routes, in particular at migratory bottlenecks where significant economic value can be derived from the observation opportunities. However, despite all their value to us, human activities around the globe have exacted a heavy toll on them and their habitats. Without international collaboration, their benefit to future generations will be put at serious risk.

Why are we concerned about birds of prey?

A study commissioned by the UK's Environment Ministry – the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs – has found that:

More than 50% of migratory birds of prey in the African-Eurasian region have a poor conservation status, and many are showing rapid or long-term population declines.

Existing international measures are not dedicated to the conservation of migratory birds of prey, and the prognosis is for populations to continue to decline.

Birds of prey are subject to a variety of human-induced threats, such as habitat loss or degradation, persecution, illegal shooting and poisoning. Collisions with aerial structures and electrocution by power lines also contribute to population declines. Climate change will add to these problems.



© RSPB Deliberately poisoned Common Buzzard

Birds of prey have low reproduction rates, which makes it hard for them to recover from losses and, as they are at the top of their food chains, their falling numbers can lead to population imbalances in other species, with potentially adverse effects for the whole ecosystem.

Governments and conservationists, on initial soundings, like the idea of a new agreement for migratory birds of prey under the auspices of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS).

How will countries benefit from the agreement?

All countries in the African-Eurasian region will benefit from the collaborative conservation activities generated by this agreement

There will be shared access to the collective scientific expertise on birds of prey conservation that will have been drawn together by the agreement. This can be used for the benefit of species in individual countries.

The agreement will be seen as evidence of the international community's commitment to conservation only a few years before the world assesses its performance in 2010 on reducing the rate of biodiversity loss.

Funds secured by the agreement will be spent on the conservation of migratory birds of prey in the African-Eurasian region. Countries will also determine the international priorities of the agreement.

As birds of prey are at the top of their food chains, they are an excellent measure of the health of ecosystems in countries. Understanding and combating the threats to them brings benefits to these ecosystems and other species that use them, including mankind.



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What difference will an international agreement make?

An agreement would promote more effective conservation through the international co-ordination of action targeting the threats to migratory birds of prey

As a banner for the conservation of birds of prey, the agreement would increase the profile of owls and raptors in the region, and highlight the threats they face as well as the benefits they deliver.

The agreement would act as a mechanism to attract funds for the conservation of the species.



© Alexander Kozulin
Aquatic Warbler

For example, Aquatic warbler conservation received a €5.4 million grant from the European Union in 2005. The CMS aquatic warbler agreement was key to securing these resources.

The agreement would act as a vehicle to co-ordinate both national and international conservation activities and, in turn, help develop co-operation between countries to secure conservation benefits for the species.

The collective expertise of scientists, specialising in birds of prey, from countries participating in the agreement will ensure the decisions for conservation action are based on the best available scientific evidence.

For example, experts on the Sociable plover from a range of institutions met at a workshop organised by the CMS waterbirds agreement. The workshop resulted in a clear picture of the species' global population and trends. This was fed into an international action plan to help conserve this globally threatened species.



Sociable plover © Martin Dijk/BirdLife International

The agreement would draw on the expertise of CMS and its other subsidiary agreements, some of which have been established for more than 15 years. This will help ensure it is operationally as effective as possible.

What are we planning to do?

The UK Government is exploring the possibility of a new agreement to help conserve migratory birds of prey in the Africa-Eurasian region. This follows decisions by the World Working Group on Birds of Prey and Owls (Budapest 2003) and the Convention on Migratory Species (Nairobi 2005) calling for action to tackle the threats faced by these birds.

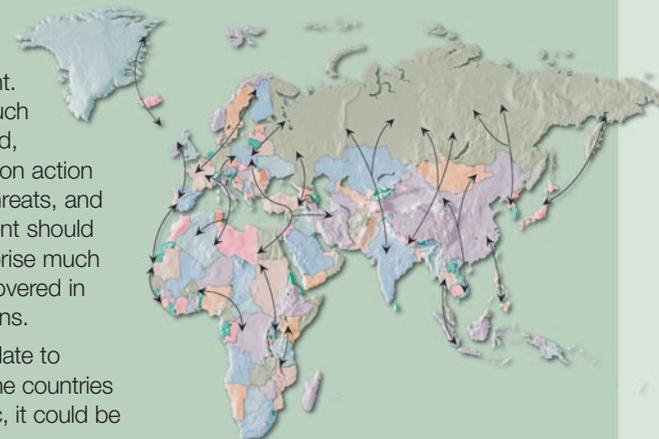
The UK Government is seeking the views of all Range-State governments to gauge their support for a new agreement to be drawn up under the auspices of CMS.

If the support is sufficiently strong, the UK Government will work with CMS and the interested Range States to develop and conclude such an agreement.

Migration routes and flyways of birds of prey in Africa and Eurasia

The actual migration routes (flyways) of the birds will determine the geographical boundaries of the agreement. These and other matters, such as the species to be covered, the contents of a conservation action plan needed to tackle the threats, and whether or not the agreement should be legally binding, will comprise much of the agenda that will be covered in intergovernmental discussions.

Although there is no target date to conclude an agreement, if the countries in the region are enthusiastic, it could be concluded in 2008.



To find out more
Visit the website at www.cms.int/raptors

Conserving Migratory Birds of Prey in Africa and Eurasia: A New International Initiative



Northern Hobby (Falcon subbuteo) © Markus Varesvuo (2006) - www.birdphoto.fi

