



# Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals

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### **THE “SEA MIGRANTS PROJECT” MONITORING, PUBLIC AWARENESS AND CAPACITY BUILDING IN KEY AREAS FOR MIGRATION WORLDWIDE**

*(Submitted by Dr. Fernando Spina, Scientific Councillor for Italy)*

1. The Mediterranean sea divides continents but it could as well be considered a continent in itself. Much is nowadays known on how islands represent stepping-stones for bird species in their migration routes. Italy started in 1988 a “Small Island Project” to study birds migrations in the Mediterranean, now such project is developing into a network of similar experiences among partners from 7 Countries around the Mediterranean.
2. Long-term spring migration data gathered in Italy have shown how trans-Saharan migrants are advancing their departure from south of the Sahara, suggesting micro-evolutionary effects of global change on a largely genetically-based migration time-table, which is another reason of strong concern, confirming how seriously climate changes are affecting long-distance migrants.
3. Furthermore, data gathered in the Mediterranean had already pointed out the most serious threats which might affect large numbers of migratory bird species due to the ongoing desertification in Africa, causing a progressive enlargement of the barrier represented by the Sahara.
4. Along their flyways migrants often concentrate in a relatively small number of sites, usually referred to as “bottlenecks”, where huge numbers of birds stopover. These sites are of crucial conservation values, and offer unique opportunities to carry on cost-efficient monitoring activities on large numbers of species.
5. On the other hand, much less is known on what happens to marine species which conduct displacements over time and space and throughout different marine habitats, which are more difficult to ascertain and monitor given the intrinsic properties of the marine environment.
6. The experience developed so far in the Mediterranean through the Small Island Project could represent an initial step, for CMS and its Parties, to contribute to the effort of monitoring the status of certain marine migratory species, thereby allowing to address the issue of the effects of climate change and human pressure on global biodiversity, as well as monitoring the progress towards the 2010 target.

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7. Notably, there are projects, like the Italian Small Island Project, ongoing in other regions, geographically distinct but functionally similar, that could be strategically linked. For instance the long-term monitoring project of spring migration across the Gulf of Mexico can be a strategic partner to set up a series of parallel initiatives in terms of environmental education and capacity building in key areas for avian migrants.

8. A similar approach to the one used for birds can be adopted to investigate status and conservation problems and to address capacity building and public awareness needs for other marine species that are object of attention by CMS (i.e. marine turtles, Mediterranean monk seal, basking shark) as well as other pelagic fish species that are not yet object of conservation attention by CMS but which are worthy of management measures. To this effect, it is known that seasonal movements of fishes around the Mediterranean created traditional habits in terms of fisheries practices that indicate that some species could be considered as falling within certain types of “migratory species”.

9. The idea of choosing as fieldwork platform the small islands or “Bottleneck areas”, where migrants birds gather in large numbers and where the concentration of animals has led to historical and often conflicting traditions in bird-man interactions can be transposed to the marine scenario for different but equally important reasons. Small islands and capes are areas where, due to oceanographic features and currents, pelagic and migratory species can occur relatively near to the coast and can be observed more frequently as well as where they can incur more easily in human related interactions. Moreover, these areas tend to be characterized, due to their size and isolation, by a lower degree of human encroachment and a correspondent higher degree of naturalness which implies a higher likelihood of presence for certain endangered species that tend to have disappeared from more continental areas.

10. Small islands are also areas where traditional and artisanal fisheries are still practiced and where the practice of sustainable fishing methodologies can be more easily approached to the benefit of local communities. These areas seem to represent ideal sites for monitoring species’ trends through the establishment of permanent observatories for the study of migratory and pelagic species and to carry out specific capacity building activities and public awareness campaigns directed at reducing the threats to which various CMS migratory species. This can be extended, through a “network” approach, to similar situations throughout the Mediterranean basin.

11. The Italian Ministry of Environment, Land and Sea Protection is in the process of identifying a number of Marine Protected Areas, situated on small islands and capes, that could provide specific support and facilities for the establishment of a Mediterranean observatory on certain migratory species.

12. An added value of such initiatives is represented also by the direct involvement of the public, through e.g. volunteer ringers who offer an invaluable contribution of human resources which would otherwise be far too expensive to get. Simple local supports (e.g. logistics, communication) to the monitoring activities would enhance the potential for seasonal and geographical coverage, and offer CMS international visibility and profile in the contribution to the conservation of migratory species.

13. Based on the many positive experiences gathered through long-term projects like the Italian Small Islands Project, and opportunities arising with the creation of the “*Pelagos*”

Sanctuary for Marine Mammals, Italy suggests that the continuation of these activities be developed within the framework of CMS and possibly in coordination with other Mediterranean Parties. Such opportunity could facilitate the transfer of experience and capacity to other geographical areas and groups of species.

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