

SEVENTH MEETING OF THE TECHNICAL ADVISORY GROUP TO THE RAPTORS MOU

(Online, 27 March 2024)

UNEP/CMS/RAPTORS/TAG7/Report

MEETING REPORT

(Prepared by the Coordinating Unit of the Raptors MOU)

1. Welcome Note

Mr André Botha, newly elected Chair of the TAG, opened the meeting by welcoming all participants (refer to Annex 1) and informing the Group that TAG members, Ms Arianna Aradis, Ms Darcy Ogada, Mr Munir Virani, and Mr Ralph Buij, could not attend the meeting and had sent their apologies.

2. Adoption of Agenda

The Chair then opened the floor to proposals for changes to the meeting's agenda. By suggestion of the Coordinating Unit of the Raptors MOU, it was agreed that the meeting would start by discussing the agenda items 'Identification of Biogeographical Populations' and 'Analysis of Trends in Threat Load'.

3. Identification of Biogeographical Populations

Mr Stephen Garnett (CMS COP-appointed Scientific Councillor), invited speaker to the meeting, presented his work on identifying biogeographical populations of avian taxa, which included an extensive analysis of several raptor and non-raptor species to assess whether or not they met the CMS criteria for being classified as 'migratory species'. Mr Garnett closed his presentation putting forth the following questions for discussion:

- (a) Have populations as conservation units been helpful in the context of the Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA)?
 - a. Should population size and trend data be assembled?
 - i. Have AEWA's estimates been helpful for conservation?
- (b) Would it be useful to have raptors populations as conservation units for the purposes of the Raptors MOU?
 - a. If useful, how could Mr Garnett's work be checked for quality?
 - b. If useful, should populations be considered as:
 - i. Just migratory populations?
 - ii. Just migratory species?
 - iii. All raptor species?
 - c. If useful, how could the disaggregation be undertaken and implemented?

Mr Sergey Dereliev (Head of Science Implementation and Compliance Unit, AEWA), invited guest to the meeting, explained that listing populations under AEWA was not an end, but the start of a commitment to work towards their conservation. Unlike the Raptors MOU, AEWA was a legally binding agreement. He clarified that AEWA had been designed to function at population-level, as opposed to species-level, which was the standard approach of CMS. He explained that AEWA had already undertaken similar work to that of Mr Garnett on exploring the biogeographical identification of avian taxa, and that AEWA had assessed every population separately and according to set criteria.

He also presented potential *pros* and *cons* of working at one level versus another. For instance, he noted that working at population level would provide a finer scale of data on species but also require more information to underpin it in terms of population delineation and the necessary monitoring to provide population size estimates and trends. He also explained that population-level listings involved a lot more maintenance work because of the constant need to review their status. In closing, Mr Dereliev offered AEWA's technical expertise in case further advice was needed.

Ms Vicky Jones, pointed out that making a change from a species-level approach to a population one would be an ambitious endeavour that would likely require a major rethink of the MOU's approach to conservation. Such shift would require a mandate from the Meeting of Signatories and could potentially have implications for funding and national reporting. Ms Jones considered that there was insufficient raptors monitoring data to enable estimates of population size (noting that AEWA had the Waterbird Population Estimates [WPE] Portal to base its estimates on) or successful delineation of populations. Ms Jones questioned whether raptor populations segregated quite as discretely as waterbird populations did. She also considered that the change in approach could be a major challenge for the MOU's implementation at national level that might not be needed for successful delivery of raptor conservation. She flagged that population-level listing made sense where a large number of huntable species needed to be managed at population scale, as in the AEWA case, but that among the raptor species covered by the MOU only a small number were subject to legal take, so the benefits of taking a population-level approach were less clear. Ms Jones recalled that the TAG was tasked with undertaking work to better define how 'regional level' should be interpreted in the application of Category 2 of Table 1 and that that work could help reflect under the MOU different trajectories of raptor populations in different areas.

Mr Campbell Murn agreed with Ms Jones' remarks on the current knowledge gaps on raptor monitoring and the challenges that that posed.

Mr Neil Deacon remarked that a population-level disaggregation could make sense for certain species. He cited as an example the African Hobby, for which a separation into West versus East African populations would make sense on the basis of threats faced.

The Chair asked Mr Dereliev if he could share some insight on the financial requirements around each of the two approaches. Mr Dereliev noted that there would probably be no great change in terms of the way of generating financial resources for the MOU's implementation. However, disaggregating the species into various populations would certainly require more data for all regions, and this could require more resources. Nevertheless, he noted, incomplete higher-scale data was also not ideal data. AEWA had no cost comparison of the two approaches, as it had always followed the population-level approach, but if data were to be collected consistently and properly at species-level, then costs would probably not differ much.

Mr Thompson remarked that working at population-level would be critical for the MOU's

operability.

The Chair consulted the Coordinating Unit on how a change in approach could be pursued under the Raptors MOU. It was explained that the TAG could start by deciding on whether the change in approach made sense and should be pursued. If deemed relevant, the TAG could start by proposing what exactly would need to be done and how. A proposal for changing the MOU's approach would ultimately need to be submitted to the Meeting of Signatories for adoption. Suggestion was made that the TAG start by preparing an analysis for publication discussing how raptor populations may be successfully delineated, the methods for doing so, existing knowledge gaps and potential applications of the approach. Depending on findings, the Group could then decide whether to produce a subsequent paper, explaining the *pros* and *cons* of the different approaches as well as their implications.

Ms Jones suggested that the Group consider the capacity of Signatories to implement a finer scale approach. She agreed that starting by preparing a paper to set the scene would be better than directly submitting a proposal to the next Meeting of Signatories.

The Group agreed to pursue two avenues to decide on whether a change to a population-level approach under the Raptors MOU made sense:

- i) TAG members would need to look at Mr Garnett's work and assess its value and suitability for the 94 Raptors MOU-listed species;
- ii) Using the information from Mr Garnett's findings and other information available, co-write a paper discussing how raptor populations may be successfully delineated, the methods for doing so, existing knowledge gaps and potential applications of the approach.

The Chair proposed that TAG members volunteered to go through the work of Mr Garnett and it was agreed that they would approach Mr Garnett directly if interested. Regarding the analysis paper, Mr Garnett volunteered to start an outline and a *pros* and *cons* list. TAG members could then participate and contribute as wished.

4. Analysis of Trends in Threat Load

Mr Garnett delivered a presentation on the conservation potential of exploring the loads and impacts of different threats to animal taxa. He noted that such type of analysis could be achieved relatively easily using BirdLife's criteria on threat importance (scope, severity, timing). He explained that the aggregation of threat loads did not allow to understand the impact of individual threats on species. However, analysing individual threat impact scores could enable: comparing potential and actual threat loads to show their trends and associated needs; comparing threat loads over time; and comparing threat loads within and across species. He pointed out that the Raptors MOU could wish to consider using such analysis to understand better the threats to MOU-listed species over time, including how they could impact the conservation status of the species.

Ms Jones noted that caution ought to be taken in analysing trends in IUCN Red List Assessments, as species' categorisations and associated changes in threats data over time often reflect a mix of changes in knowledge on species and actual changes in conservation trends.

Mr Garnett agreed, noting that assessing threat impacts over time required a retrospective assessment in the same way that the Red List Index (RLI) did.

5. Updated TAG Workplan 2023-2026

The Coordinating Unit indicated that a version of the TAG Workplan 2023-2026 updated to reflect the outcomes of the Third Meeting of Signatories to the Raptors MOU (MOS3, Abu Dhabi, July 2023) had been published on the Raptors MOU webpage.

6. Updates on Progress on the Implementation of the TAG Workplan 2023-2026

The Chair indicated that there was no update to share in relation to progress in implementing the TAG Workplan 2023-2026 since the last meeting of the Group. The Coordinating Unit added that a table for tracking such implementation progress had been prepared and would be shared with TAG members.

7. CMS COP14 Updates

The Coordinating Unit noted that Fourteenth Meeting of the CMS Conference of the Parties (COP14, Samarkand, February 2024) brought three new Signatories to the Raptors MOU: Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

At COP14, the Coordinating Unit reported on the activities undertaken under the Raptors MOU largely as reported at MOS3. This included key updates relating to the MOU's work on Vultures, Saker Falcon, and Sooty Falcon. The Coordinating Unit also hosted side-events to present its work on these species.

Relevant COP14 outcomes included the adoption of a revised version of CMS Resolution 12.10 on Conservation of African-Eurasian Vultures, and also adopted a set of Decisions on these species.

8. AOB

The Chair requested that all TAG members submit a report to him two weeks prior to each TAG meeting sharing any progress on implementing the TAG Workplan 2023-2026. He explained that this would facilitate reporting on progress during meetings. The Chair also informed the Group that the Report on the Mid-term Implementation Review of the Multi-species Action Plan to Conserve African-Eurasian Vultures (Vulture MsAP) was available on the Raptors MOU website. He then opened the floor for TAG members to share any updates they had.

Ms Fadzai Matsvimbo provided an update on the publication and launch of the West African Vultures Conservation Action Plan, explaining that it was due to come out within some two weeks. She also provided the Group with an update on BirdLife's work in Africa organising national-level workshops on lead poisoning. Many such workshops had already taken place, and a few more were yet to be organised.

Mr Imad Cherkaoui indicated that a vulture action plan for Morocco was only pending preamble finalisation for publishing.

Mr Ohad Hatzofe reported that many cases of different types of poisoning had been detected by Israel over the past weeks in birds that it had tagged.

Ms Jones reported that the paper on satellite tracking mortality to which some TAG members contributed would be published soon. She thanked those members once again for their contributions.

Mr Deacon informed the Group that an Action Plan for Black Harrier was in early stages of conceptualisation.

Mr Thompson noted that Scotland had a good example of a satellite tracking paper on Golden Eagle giving direct rise to legislation. He proposed that the Group consider rethinking how to best use social media tools to amplify and disseminate the work of the Raptors MOU, quoting [this post](#) on X as an example of the potential to reach many people.

Mr Mátyás Prommer, newly elected Vice-Chair of the TAG, and who could not attend the previous meeting of the Group, thanked TAG members' vote of confidence. He added that a new biodiversity quotas system similar to carbon quotas systems was going to be launched in the European Union soon, and that it would be mandatory for companies to report on their impact on biodiversity starting 2024.

The Chair added that he recently managed to place tracking tags on two Rueppell's Vultures in Chad and that useful results were being obtained on nesting site use and habitat suitability.

The Coordinating Unit informed the Group that it would soon be sharing the details on a common folder for the Group to work from. It also informed the Group that it was exploring Signatories interest in hosting an in-person TAG meeting towards the end of 2024, and that updates would be shared as soon as available.

9. Closing of the Meeting

The TAG requested the Coordinating Unit to organise a subsequent meeting of the Group around the week of 20 May 2024 to discuss the decisions of the present meeting regarding a population-level approach to the Raptors MOU.

The Chair thanked all participants for their contributions and closed the session.

**ANNEX 1
ALPHABETICAL LIST OF PARTICIPANTS**

Members of the TAG

André Botha <i>Chair</i>	Co-Chair Vulture Specialist Group Manager, Vultures for Africa Programme Endangered Wildlife Trust South Africa
Campbell Murn	Head of Conservation and Research Hawk Conservancy Trust United Kingdom Lecturer School of Biological Sciences, University of Reading United Kingdom
Des Thompson	Principal Adviser on Science and Biodiversity NatureScot United Kingdom
Fadzai Matsvimbo	Preventing Extinction Programme Coordinator BirdLife International, Africa Secretariat Kenya
Imad Cherkaoui	Associate Professor Ecole Supérieure de Technologie de Kénifra, University of Ibn Tofail Morocco
Mátyás Prommer <i>Vice-Chair</i>	Nature Conservation Referent Department of Nature Conservation and Ecology Herman Ottó Institute Nonprofit Ltd. Hungary
Mohammed Shobrak	Consultant & Board member National Centre for Wildlife Saudi Arabia
Neil Deacon	President BirdLife Zimbabwe, Zimbabwe
Nyambayar Batbayar	Director Wildlife Science and Conservation Center of Mongolia Mongolia
Ohad Hatzofe	Head Avian Ecologist, Division of Science & Conservation Israel Nature & Parks Authority Israel
Vicky Jones	Flyways Science Coordinator BirdLife International United Kingdom

Convention on Migratory Species

Lauren Lopes	Associate Programme Management Officer CMS Office - Abu Dhabi United Arab Emirates
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Umberto Gallo-Orsi	Programme Management Officer (Raptors MOU) CMS Office - Abu Dhabi United Arab Emirates
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Observers

Sergey Dereliev	Head of Science Implementation and Compliance Unit AEWA Germany
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Stephen Garnett	CMS COP-appointed Scientific Councillor Professor of Conservation and Sustainable Livelihoods Research Institute for the Environment and Livelihoods Charles Darwin University Australia
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