Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals
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PRESS RELEASE

Record Number of Species Proposed for International Protection at Major Wildlife Conservation Conference

Polar Bear, Sharks and Lion among Species Considered for Listing under the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals

Quito, 3 November 2014 – Thirty-two species, including the Polar Bear, Red-fronted Gazelle, Cuvier's beaked whale, Hammerhead shark and Reef Manta Ray are being proposed for protection at an international meeting of world governments and experts this week in Quito, Ecuador.

Administered by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (also known as CMS or the "Bonn Convention" after the German city in which it was signed) is staging its 11th Conference of the Parties (COP) in Quito, Ecuador from 4 – 9 November.

The COP is bringing together 80 national governments as well as leading experts and non-governmental organizations from around the world to consider means of strengthening conservation measures for migratory species in light of escalating threats to their survival, including from habitat loss, overexploitation, wildlife crime, marine debris and climate change.

A record number of 21 proposals relate to sharks, rays and sawfish – sawfish being among the most threatened species on the planet. Polar Bears, which are literally losing the ground beneath their feet, due to retreating sea ice, are also proposed for listing under the Convention.

The fate of the African Lion which suffered declines of 30 per cent in the last two decades will be considered, as will all populations of the Great Bustard, the heaviest flying bird in the world. Among marine mammals, the Cuvier's beaked whale is being proposed because it is exposed to multiple man-made threats.

UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UNEP said, "The unprecedented representation of the world's nations at this CMS Conference reflects the growing awareness that the responsibility for protecting wildlife is a shared one, and that the threats to wildlife can be tackled most effectively through global cooperation.

"The CMS sets global policies to ensure animals can move freely across international boundaries and establishes rules and guidelines to reduce threats to international wildlife

such as by-catch, illegal hunting, trapping, poisoning and capture, and it directly protects some of the rarest and iconic species on the face of the planet."

"International Agreements such as the CMS work on behalf of citizens and nations across the world who wish to conserve and protect our natural heritage. They are an expression of our shared commitment to uniting nations in pursuit of a common goal – a global environment in which the pursuit of human development does not come at the expense of our natural world," he added.

The massive decline of these and other species has prompted many world governments to convene in Quito to reverse the dramatic decline of migratory wildlife across the globe. Countries are proposing to include a total of 32 species on the Appendices of the Convention. Appendix I would grant them full protection, while Appendix II listing encourages countries to develop and implement transboundary conservation measures.

“Natural migration requires animals to move across and beyond borders. The threats they face along the way are numerous and can only be tackled through international cooperation. The CMS COP in Quito is a historic chance for countries to agree on steps to take to address these threats. The time for action is now if we want to ensure the long-term survival of the world’s migratory species of wild animals,” said Bradnee Chambers, Executive Secretary of CMS.

Continuous loss of critical habitats at destination sites and along migratory routes is the single most important cause of migratory species’ decline. However, this is far from being the only problem migratory species have to face, and a number of other man-made threats are making their journeys increasingly perilous.

Immediate Threats:

Marine Debris

Marine debris is a serious problem for many aquatic migratory species, including marine mammals, turtles, seabirds and sharks. When debris is ingested by animals because it is mistaken for prey, it can block the digestive track and lead to malnutrition, starvation and death. Plastic was found in the stomachs of 97 per cent of Laysan Albatross chicks. Marine debris such as abandoned fishing gear and mono-filament line is known to cause entanglement of several species. A quarter of dugongs in Australia that were recorded as being entangled in nets or ropes died as a result.

Solutions being Proposed

Preventing marine debris from entering the marine environment in the first place, improved waste management and awareness-raising campaigns to support regulatory measures will be discussed to address this global problem.

Wildlife Crime

Poaching of wild animals and illegal wildlife trade have become major threats to the survival

of many migratory species worldwide. Wildlife crime is estimated to be worth between US$20 billion and 50 billion annually worldwide. Illegal killing, trapping and poisoning of migratory birds puts the survival of entire populations at risk.

Solutions being Proposed

The COP is expected to strengthen the role of CMS in contributing to the global fight against wildlife crime, notably through the establishment of cooperative bilateral and multilateral arrangements for the management of shared wildlife populations and habitats, in order to minimize illegal taking and trafficking of migratory animals.

Barriers to Migration

Infrastructure projects often bisect networks of ecosystems on which migratory animals depend. For example, roads and railways leading to mining sites as well as border fences can form impenetrable barriers preventing vital migrations. Asiatic Wild Ass, Saiga Antelope and Mongolian Gazelle are among the species most affected by these barriers.

Solutions to be Proposed

A new Central Asian Mammals Initiative will focus on measures for the conservation of large mammal migrations in the Central Asian region. Guidelines for wildlife-friendly infrastructure development will be presented for adoption at COP.

Climate Change

Evidence is accumulating on the impact of climate change on migratory species. With warmer, wetter winters some migratory species are forced to migrate to breeding grounds earlier, others are experiencing population declines as their breeding and wintering habitats no longer suit their needs. In a survey of European bird populations, this trend has been shown clearly; those species that do not change the timing of their migration are experiencing large-scale population declines. Other species such as the Polar Bear, Marine Turtles and Monarch Butterfly are also threatened by climate change.

Solutions being Proposed

At the COP, countries are expected to agree on a programme of work on climate change and migratory species, providing for the development and implementation of measures to facilitate species adaptation in response to climate change.

Renewable Energy Technology

Growing concerns about climate change have led to increasing efforts across the globe to switch over to renewable energy sources. However, the deployment of technologies to exploit these sources can seriously affect migratory animals if not properly designed and planned.

Solutions being Proposed

The COP will consider a comprehensive review of the interactions between Renewable Energy Technology Deployment and Migratory Species as well as guidelines to minimize the impacts of such technologies on migratory animals.

Other Issues:

Specific Action Plans for Argali Sheep, Pacific Loggerhead Turtles and the endangered Saker Falcon have been elaborated and will be submitted to the COP for adoption. The importance of **cetacean culture** will be considered for the conservation of these marine mammals. A further resolution requests countries to ban live captures of cetaceans for commercial display in marine parks.

A High Level Ministerial Panel on 3 November on *Uniting the Rights of Nature and the Green Economy in the Context of Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication* will precede the COP.

The COP starting on 4 November will act as an impetus for the efforts of the international community to save animal migrations before it is too late.

Notes to Editors:

The Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) aims to conserve terrestrial, aquatic and avian migratory species throughout their range. It is an intergovernmental treaty, concluded under the aegis of the United Nations Environment Programme, concerned with the conservation of wildlife and habitats on a global scale. To date 120 Parties have ratified the Convention.

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