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Agenda Item 28.13

# CONSERVATION IMPLICATIONS OF ANIMAL CULTURE AND SOCIAL COMPLEXITY

*(Prepared by the Scientific Council and its Expert Working Group on Conservation Implications of Animal Culture and Social Complexity and the Secretariat)*

**ScC-SC8 CRP 11.13**

**ANNEX 1**

**DRAFT**

# TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE EXPERT WORKING GROUP ON ANIMAL CUTURE AND SOCIAL LEARNING

## Background

The Animal Culture Expert Working Group (ACEWG) was established through Resolution 11.23 to assist the Parties of the Convention on Migratory Species and its associated instruments with understanding the conservation implications of culture and social complexity. Following an initial focus on cetaceans, since 2017 it has considered the conservation implications of social learning and animal culture for all taxonomic groups covered by the Convention.

## Purpose

A. The primary objective of the ACEWG is to support the delivery of relevant tasks contained in the Programme of Work of the Sessional Committee (POW).

B. In addition, the ACEWG will support the implementation of relevant Resolutions and Decisions directed to the Scientific Council, as well as provide advice to Parties on the application of the increasing knowledge about animal culture and social learning in conservation management.

C. The ACEWG will provide a platform to discuss and exchange information and scientific findings on animal culture-related matters with a specific focus on their relevance for conservation efforts. Mandates will be given through Decisions at each COP.

D. The ACEWG will further, as capacity allows:

a) promote the practical application of the increasing knowledge about animal culture and social learning in conservation management, e.g. by:
   i) reviewing updates on culture-related Concerted Actions and providing guidance as required;
   ii) considering whether further culture-related Concerted Actions should be brought forward and developing proposals as appropriate;
   iii) developing ongoing guidance for engagement with stakeholders to illustrate why and how animal culture and social learning are relevant to conservation;

b) support research on animal culture and social learning, e.g. by:
   i) disseminating guidance on methodologies for detecting social learning;
   ii) incorporating a variety of ‘lines of evidence’ on social learning and animal culture, including from local communities, and traditional knowledge of Indigenous Peoples;

c) promote synergies and collaboration with CMS instruments, as well as the IUCN, e.g. by:
   i) engaging with CMS Agreements, Memoranda of Understanding, and Initiatives and any relevant work streams they may establish;

ii) working closely with the IUCN CEESP-SSC Conservation of Animal Cultures Task Force;

iii) continuing to engage with the relevant IUCN bodies to develop synergies for integrating social learning and cultural processes into management activities.

**Membership**

A. Membership of the Expert Working Group includes members of the Scientific Council and external experts considered leaders in the fields of social learning, sociality or animal culture. Membership is only upon invitation or agreement of the leadership of the ACEWG, i.e. Chair, responsible Councillor and the Secretariat.

B. The ACEWG strives to maintain a balance of gender, regional representation and areas of expertise.

C. The involvement of ACEWG members is entirely on a voluntarily basis.

D. If and when needed, experts external to the ACEWG and interested in contributing to its objectives may occasionally be invited to join meetings or to support specific tasks.

**Organization of Work**

A. The ACEWG will elect a Chair from among its members and will operate by seeking consensus among the group. If not a member of the Scientific Council, the Chair will be supported by the COP-appointed Councillor for Connectivity to ensure close alignment with the Scientific Council's work and procedures. If the Chair has to leave her/his position, a new Chair will be appointed from among its members.

B. The ACEWG will mainly operate electronically by communicating via a dedicated workspace in MS Teams, and email if needed. Meetings (in-person or virtual) will be held as required and, for in-person meetings, depending on funding.

C. The Chair of the ACEWG will report on progress to the Sessional Committee.

D. The CMS Secretariat will support and facilitate the coordination of the activities and the organization of meetings of the ACEWG.

**Duration**

The ACEWG will remain in place until the Sessional Committee decides that its work is complete or an alternative arrangement is made. ~~The duration of the ACEWG is open-ended.~~

**ANNEX 2**

PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO RESOLUTION 11.23 (Rev.COP12)

*NB. Proposed new text is underlined. Text to be deleted is ~~crossed out~~.*

| Text from Existing Resolution | Commentary | Clean New Text Proposed |
|---|---|---|
| **CONSERVATION IMPLICATIONS OF ANIMAL CULTURE AND SOCIAL ~~COMPLEXITY~~ LEARNING** | Title amended | **CONSERVATION IMPLICATIONS OF ANIMAL CULTURE AND SOCIAL LEARNING** |
| ~~*Recalling* that Resolution 10.15 Global Programme of Work for Cetaceans (2012-2024) instructed the CMS Scientific Council's Aquatic Mammals Working Group to provide advice on the impact of the emergent science of cetacean social complexity and culture as it related to regional populations,~~ | Remove because Resolution 10.15 was repealed | |
| ~~*Aware* that the CMS Scientific Council expert workshop on the conservation implications of cetacean culture held in April 2014 recommended that "management decisions should be precautionary and assume that populations may contain discrete social elements which have conservation significance warranting further investigation",~~ | Remove, outdated | |
| ~~*Noting* that the CMS Scientific Council endorsed the recommendations of the expert workshop on the conservation implications of cetacean culture, contained in UNEP/CMS/COP11/Inf.18;~~ | Remove, outdated | |
| *Recognizing* that <u>many species of mammals,</u> ~~a number of socially complex mammalian species, such as several species of cetaceans, great apes and elephants,~~ <u>birds and fish, and some reptiles,</u> show evidence of ~~having~~ <u>social learning or</u> non-human culture (hereafter 'culture'), | Reflecting more recent evidence | *Recognizing* that many species of mammals, birds and fish, and some reptiles, show evidence of social learning or non-human culture (hereafter 'culture'), |
| *Concerned* that ~~highly social~~ species <u>that exhibit social learning</u> face unique conservation challenges, | Change of wording to clarify focus | *Concerned* that species that exhibit social learning face unique conservation challenges, |

| Text from Existing Resolution | Commentary | Clean New Text Proposed |
|---|---|---|
| *Aware* that the social transmission of knowledge between individuals may increase population viability and provide opportunities for the rapid spread of innovations and thus adaptation to environmental change, highlighting the importance of maintaining 'cultural capacity' within and between populations for the development and transmission of adaptive cultural behaviours, | Introducing the important concept of 'cultural capacity' in the Resolution text | *Aware* that the social transmission of knowledge between individuals may increase population viability and provide opportunities for the rapid spread of innovations and thus adaptation to environmental change, highlighting the importance of maintaining 'cultural capacity' within and between populations for the development and transmission of adaptive cultural behaviours, |
| *Further a~~A~~ware* that this transmission of knowledge may also increase the impact of anthropogenic threats or can operate synergistically with anthropogenic threats to compound their impact on a specific social group or more widely, | | *Further aware* that this transmission of knowledge may also increase the impact of anthropogenic threats or can operate synergistically with anthropogenic threats to compound their impact on a specific social group or more widely, |
| *Recognizing* that the impact of removal of individuals from populations of ~~socially complex~~ species that exhibit social learning may have consequences beyond simply a reduction in absolute numbers, | Change of wording to clarify focus | *Recognizing* that the impact of removal of individuals from populations of species that exhibit social learning may have consequences beyond simply a reduction in absolute numbers, |
| *Also recognizing* that populations of some species are better delineated by cultural behaviour than genetic diversity or geographic isolation, | | *Also recognizing* that populations of some species are better delineated by cultural behaviour than genetic diversity or geographic isolation, |
| *Grateful* for the groundbreaking work of the CMS Animal Culture Expert Working Group[1] since its establishment in 2015, | New text, including footnote | *Grateful* for the groundbreaking work of the CMS Animal Culture Expert Working Group[1] since its establishment in 2015, |
| *Conscious* that the scientific investigation of culture and social ~~complexity~~ learning in ~~mammals~~ vertebrates is a rapidly evolving field which can be informed by local and Indigenous ecological knowledge, and that collaboration between CMS and IUCN in this field ~~is~~ will be instrumental for informing conservation targets for migratory species, ~~increasingly important for conservation management,~~ and | Broadened species coverage, and added mention of local and Indigenous ecological knowledge, plus the collaboration with IUCN | *Conscious* that the scientific investigation of culture and social learning in vertebrates is a rapidly evolving field which can be informed by local and Indigenous ecological knowledge, and that collaboration between CMS and IUCN in this field will be instrumental for informing conservation targets for migratory species, and |
| *Considering* that the CMS Family is in a strong position to take account of this emerging information in its work, | | *Considering* that the CMS Family is in a strong position to take account of this emerging information in its work, |

[1] Established as 'Expert Working Group on Animal Culture and Social Complexity' through Resolution 10.15 *Global Programme of Work for Cetaceans (2012-2024)*; now called 'Expert Working Group on Animal Culture and Social Learning'

| Text from Existing Resolution | Commentary | Clean New Text Proposed |
|---|---|---|
| *The Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals* | | |
| 1. *Welcomes* the guidance developed by the Animal Culture Expert Working Group as output of its workshops and as published open access in the 2025 *Royal Society Philosophical Transactions B* issued on 'Animal culture: conservation in a changing world' ~~report of the CMS Scientific Council Expert Workshop on the conservation implications of cetacean culture, contained in UNEP/CMS/COP11/Inf.18~~; | Pointing to the most relevant and recent guidance | 1. *Welcomes* the guidance developed by the Animal Culture Expert Working Group as output of its workshops and as published open access in the 2025 *Royal Society Philosophical Transactions B* issue on 'Animal culture: conservation in a changing world'; |
| *2. Encourages* Parties to consider culturally transmitted behaviours when determining conservation measures; | | 2. *Encourages* Parties to consider culturally transmitted behaviours when determining conservation measures; |
| 2bis. *Further* encourages Parties and other stakeholders to support actions and research that investigate the conservation implications of animal culture and social learning for a diverse range of taxa, including fish and reptiles; | New text in line with guidance from the Expert Group | 3. *Further encourages* Parties and other stakeholders to support actions and research that investigate the conservation implications of animal culture and social learning for a diverse range of taxa, including fish and reptiles; |
| 3. *Also encourages* Parties and other stakeholders to assess anthropogenic threats to ~~socially complex mammalian~~ vertebrate species on the basis of evidence of interactions of those threats with social structure and ~~culture~~ socially learned behaviours; | Clarifying focus | 4. *Also encourages* Parties and other stakeholders to assess anthropogenic threats to vertebrate species on the basis of evidence of interactions of those threats with social structure and socially learned behaviours; |
| 4. *Urges* Parties to consider cultural processes as relevant for the conservation of all species for which there is evidence for social learning, applying a precautionary approach to the management of populations for which there is evidence that influence of culture and social ~~complexity~~ learning may be a conservation issue, and to support conditions for 'cultural capacity' in these species, where appropriate; | Adding the consideration of cultural processes and the important concept of 'cultural capacity' in the Resolution text in line with guidance from the Expert Group | 5. *Urges* Parties to consider cultural processes as relevant for the conservation of all species for which there is evidence for social learning, applying a precautionary approach to the management of populations for which there is evidence that influence of culture and social learning may be a conservation issue, and to support conditions for 'cultural capacity' in these species, where appropriate; |

| Text from Existing Resolution | Commentary | Clean New Text Proposed |
|---|---|---|
| 5. *Encourages* Parties and other stakeholders to gather and publish pertinent data for advancing the conservation management of these populations and discrete social groups; | | 6. *Encourages* Parties and other stakeholders to gather and publish pertinent data for advancing the conservation management of these populations and discrete social groups; |
| 5bis. *Encourages* Parties and other stakeholders that, where specific cultural groups have been identified, they give specific attention to threats (including human–wildlife conflict) and good practices that might be specific to this particular cultural unit; | New text in line with guidance from the Expert Group | 7. *Encourages* Parties and other stakeholders to give specific attention to threats (including human–wildlife conflict) and good practices that might be specific to any particular cultural groups that have been identified; |
| 6. *Requests* the ~~CMS~~ Scientific Council to maintain ~~an~~ the intersessional Expert Working Group on Animal Culture and Social Learning ~~expert working group dealing with the conservation implications of culture and social complexity, with a focus on, but not limited to cetaceans~~ which considers the conservation implications of social learning and animal culture for all taxonomic groups covered by the Convention; | | 8. *Requests* the Scientific Council to maintain the intersessional Expert Working Group on Animal Culture and Social Learning, which considers the conservation implications of social learning and animal culture for all taxonomic groups covered by the Convention; |
| 7. *Invites* ~~relevant~~ ~~CMS~~ Scientific Councillors ~~for taxa other than cetaceans~~ with relevant expertise to ~~review the findings of the expert working group and~~ engage in this work ~~expert group~~; and | Edited since no longer a primary focus on cetaceans | 9. *Invites* Scientific Councillors with relevant expertise to engage in this work; and |
| 8. *Requests* the ~~expert group~~ Animal Culture Expert Working Group to report its findings and any proposals for future work through the CMS Scientific Council to each meeting of the Conference of the Parties. | | 10. *Requests* the Animal Culture Expert Working Group to report its findings and any proposals for future work through the CMS Scientific Council to each meeting of the Conference of the Parties. |

CLEAN TEXT OF THE PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO RESOLUTION 11.23 (Rev.COP12)

## CONSERVATION IMPLICATIONS OF ANIMAL CULTURE AND SOCIAL LEARNING

*Recognizing* that many species of mammals, birds and fish, and some reptiles, show evidence of social learning or non-human culture (hereafter 'culture'),

*Concerned* that species that exhibit social learning face unique conservation challenges,

*Aware* that the social transmission of knowledge between individuals may increase population viability and provide opportunities for the rapid spread of innovations and thus adaptation to environmental change, highlighting the importance of maintaining 'cultural capacity' within and between populations for the development and transmission of adaptive cultural behaviours,

*Further aware* that this transmission of knowledge may also increase the impact of anthropogenic threats or can operate synergistically with anthropogenic threats to compound their impact on a specific social group or more widely,

*Recognizing* that the impact of removal of individuals from populations of species that exhibit social learning may have consequences beyond simply a reduction in absolute numbers,

*Also recognizing* that populations of some species are better delineated by cultural behaviour than genetic diversity or geographic isolation,

*Grateful* for the groundbreaking work of the CMS Animal Culture Expert Working Group[2] since its establishment in 2015,

*Conscious* that the scientific investigation of culture and social learning in vertebrates is a rapidly evolving field which can be informed by local and Indigenous ecological knowledge, and that collaboration between CMS and IUCN in this field will be instrumental for informing conservation targets for migratory species, and

*Considering* that the CMS Family is in a strong position to take account of this emerging information in its work,

*The Conference of the Parties to the*
*Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals*

1. *Welcomes* the guidance developed by the Animal Culture Expert Working Group as output of its workshops and as published open access in the 2025 *Royal Society Philosophical Transactions B* issue on 'Animal culture: conservation in a changing world';

2. *Encourages* Parties to consider culturally transmitted behaviours when determining conservation measures;

[2] Established as 'Expert Working Group on Animal Culture and Social Complexity' through Resolution 10.15 *Global Programme of Work for Cetaceans (2012-2024)*; now called 'Expert Working Group on Animal Culture and Social Learning'

3. *Further encourages* Parties and other stakeholders to support actions and research that investigate the conservation implications of animal culture and social learning for a diverse range of taxa, including fish and reptiles;

4. *Also encourages* Parties and other stakeholders to assess anthropogenic threats to vertebrate species on the basis of evidence of interactions of those threats with social structure and socially learned behaviours;

5. *Urges* Parties to consider cultural processes as relevant for the conservation of all species for which there is evidence for social learning, applying a precautionary approach to the management of populations for which there is evidence that influence of culture and social learning may be a conservation issue, and to support conditions for 'cultural capacity' in these species, where appropriate;

6. *Encourages* Parties and other stakeholders to gather and publish pertinent data for advancing the conservation management of these populations and discrete social groups;

7. *Encourages* Parties and other stakeholders to give specific attention to threats (including human–wildlife conflict) and good practices that might be specific to any particular cultural groups that have been identified;

8. *Requests* the Scientific Council to maintain the intersessional Expert Working Group on Animal Culture and Social Learning, which considers the conservation implications of social learning and animal culture for all taxonomic groups covered by the Convention;

9. *Invites* Scientific Councillors with relevant expertise to engage in this work; and

10. *Requests* the Animal Culture Expert Working Group to report its findings and any proposals for future work through the CMS Scientific Council to each meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

**ANNEX 3**

DRAFT DECISIONS

## CONSERVATION IMPLICATIONS OF ANIMAL CULTURE AND SOCIAL LEARNING

***Directed to Parties***

15.AA Parties are requested to apply insights from the Expert Working Group on Animal Culture and Social Learning to enhance work under CMS instruments, emphasizing the conservation value of 'cultural capacity'.

***Directed to Parties, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations***

15.BB Parties, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations are encouraged to provide financial and technical support to the Expert Group on Animal Culture, specifically in relation to hosting an in-person workshop during the next triennium as foreseen in Decision 15.CC.

***Directed to the Scientific Council, through its Expert Working Group on Animal Culture and Social Learning***

15.CC The Scientific Council, through its Expert Working Group on Animal Culture and Social Learning, subject to the availability of resources, is requested to:

a) promote the practical application of the increasing knowledge about animal culture and social learning in conservation management by working to:
   i) assess and provide advice on possible shortcuts for incorporating social learning into management, complementing traditional management techniques, including developing advice on phylogenetic inference;
   ii) continue to identify and compile instances in which social learning may be involved in animal behaviours and mitigation measures for human–wildlife conflict and explore opportunities to collaborate with the IUCN Human–Wildlife Conflict & Co-existence specialist group;
   iii) conduct a review, in collaboration with the Working Group on Climate Change, of any examples of social learning-related changes in behaviour as a result of climate change that increase human–wildlife conflict;
   iv) provide advice on the potential link with Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs), Important Shark and Ray Areas (ISRAs) and other area-based conservation tools that identify sites or seascapes of biodiversity importance;
   v) explore and prepare a report on the impacts of hunting on social structure and cultural capacity;
   vi) investigate and provide advice on the potential of social impact assessment methodologies for understanding impacts of human activities on social learning, social structure and culture in migratory species;

b) convene an expert workshop to:

i) provide best practice advice on identifying specific conservation targets in different settings,

ii) categorize and develop parameters for designating cultural units in different migratory species,

iii) distil practical advice that can be implemented by relevant managers and decisionmakers, and

iv) suggest any further culture-based Concerted Actions;

c) develop user-friendly guidance for scientists on the practical aspects of detecting social learning, based on the special issue, *Animal culture: conservation in a changing world*;

d) identify for which CMS instruments animal culture and social learning are likely to be most relevant, compile examples from the special issue, *Animal culture: conservation in a changing world*, into a document or brochure outlining the relevance for species covered by these instruments, and make use of upcoming meetings to bring this to their attention;

e) seek to convene a workshop in collaboration with the IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC) Human–Wildlife Conflict & Coexistence Specialist Group and the IUCN CEESP-SSC Conservation of Animal Cultures Task Force to further explore human–wildlife interactions in connection with social learning;

f) engage in the five-year initiative (2025-2030) led by IUCN to advance the consideration of animal culture in guiding conservation policy and practice.

***Directed to the Scientific Council***

15.DD The Scientific Council is requested to review the work under CMS to date on animal culture and social learning, including consideration of its relevance to implementation of the Samarkand Strategic Plan for Migratory Species 2024–2032 and to provide advice to COP16 on the direction of further work on this subject under CMS.

***Directed to the Secretariat***

15.EE The Secretariat shall, subject to the availability of resources:

a) convene an in-person workshop to assist the Expert Working Group on Animal Culture with the tasks outlined in Decision 15.CC b);

b) support the Scientific Council and its Expert Working Group with the dissemination of guidance developed as foreseen in Decision 15.CC;

~~b)~~c) support the Scientific Council with implementation of Decision 15.DD; and

~~c)~~d) approach the Secretariat of the GEO BON global biodiversity observation network to explore opportunities for linking work on animal culture and social learning with the network.