

FOURTH MEETING OF SIGNATORIES TO THE MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING ON THE CONSERVATION OF MIGRATORY BIRDS OF PREY IN AFRICA AND EURASIA

(Victoria Falls, 30 November- 2 December 2026)

UNEP/CMS/RAPTORS/MOS4/Doc.13.3

INTERNATIONALLY IMPORTANT RAPTOR AREAS (IIRAs)

(Prepared by the Coordinating Unit)

Summary:

This document informs Signatories of the adoption by the Conference of the Parties to CMS, at its 15th Meeting, of Resolution 15.10 and Decisions 15.175 to 15.178 on Internationally Important Raptor Areas (IIRAs), building on the list of internationally important sites established under the Raptors MOU. It outlines the recognition of existing sites as IIRAs and the role of the Technical Advisory Group in reviewing proposals for further sites.

The Meeting of Signatories is invited to take note of these developments and support the further identification of IIRAs within the geographic scope of the MOU, including through site proposals and voluntary financial and technical contributions.

Background

1. The Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation of Migratory Birds of Prey in Africa and Eurasia (Raptors MOU) calls upon Signatories, in paragraph 8(d) of its text, to “*identify important areas, significant routes, breeding and congregatory sites for birds of prey and promote their protection and/or appropriate management, rehabilitation and/or restoration*”. The protection and management of important sites is one of Priority Actions of the MOU’s Action Plan¹ and detailed in Activity 3.2. “*Designate nationally and internationally important sites for birds of prey (including those sites listed in Table 3) as protected areas with management plans, or as areas subject to other effective area-based conservation/ restoration measures, including where appropriate at the landscape scale*”.
2. When the Raptors MOU came into effect, Table 3 of Annex 3 contained a ‘Provisional list of Important Bird Areas that are currently known to be important congregatory bird of prey sites in Africa and Eurasia’. Annex 3 expressly stated that the indicative list should be treated as a minimum list of internationally important areas.
3. Acting on the mandate given to it by Signatories, the Technical Advisory Group of the Raptors MOU (TAG) undertook a comprehensive revision and expansion of Table 3. The exercise was conducted between the first and third Meetings of Signatories (MOS1 to MOS3) through successive rounds of consultation with experts, Signatories and Cooperating Partners, to ensure that the resulting list is scientifically rigorous, reflects the updated list of species covered by the MOU and incorporates broad regional input.
4. The revised list – renamed ‘List of internationally important sites for migratory birds of prey in Africa and Eurasia’ – was approved by Signatories at MOS3 (Dubai, United Arab Emirates, 3 to 6 July 2023) and is contained in Table 3 of Annex 3 to the Raptors MOU². It comprises Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs) and Special Protection Areas designated under the European Union’s Birds Directive that host one or more raptor species listed in Annex 1 of the MOU, together with sites proposed by Signatories that meet the IBA criteria. With 7,495 sites³ listed across the geographic scope of the MOU. The approved list provides a substantial evidence base for site-based conservation of migratory birds of prey across Africa and Eurasia.
5. At MOS3, Signatories also considered the results of a Pilot Site Network Analysis carried out by the TAG on a representative subset of eleven Annex 1 species ([document UNEP/CMS/RAPTORS/MOS3/Doc.12.2](#)). The Meeting agreed that the analysis provided considerable value in strengthening the comprehensiveness of the network and that it should be expanded, resources permitting, to all species listed in Annex 1 of the MOU. That mandate is reflected in Action 10 of the TAG Workplan 2023-2026. Given the limited availability of resources the TAG concentrated the analysis on the Category 1 species in Table 1 of Annex 3. The Site Network Analysis for Priority Species is presented in document [UNEP/CMS/RAPTORS/MOS4/Doc.12.3](#).

Adoption by CMS COP15 of Resolution 15.10 and Decisions 15.175 to 15.178

6. The Conference of the Parties to CMS, at its 15th Meeting (Campo Grande, Brazil, 23 to 29 March 2026), considered document [UNEP/CMS/COP15/Doc.26.8](#) *Internationally Important Raptor Areas (IIRAs)*, prepared by the Secretariat on the basis of the work

¹ https://raptors.cms.int/sites/default/files/basic_page_documents/Annex%203%20Tab1%262_EN_0.pdf

² https://raptors.cms.int/sites/default/files/basic_page_documents/Annex%203%20Table%203%20List%20of%20Sites_EN.pdf

³ Based on the [list published after MOS3](#).

carried out under the Raptors MOU. The Conference of the Parties adopted [Resolution 15.10](#) *Internationally Important Raptor Areas (IIRAs)* and [Decisions 15.175 to 15.178](#).

7. By paragraph 1 of Resolution 15.10, the Conference of the Parties *decided* to establish IIRAs as areas internationally important for migratory birds of prey for those sites meeting the criteria used to identify Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas as recognized by the TAG, *including the sites already listed in Table 3 of Annex 3 of the Raptors MOU*. In consequence, the sites listed in Table 3 of Annex 3 to the MOU are recognized as IIRAs, without any further step being required of Signatories. Recognition as an IIRA does not, in itself, confer national protected-area status or replace the applicable national processes for protection and management.
8. Resolution 15.10 further acknowledges that the criteria applied by the TAG are based on the globally standardized scientific criteria developed for identifying IBAs as described by BirdLife International; requests Parties and invites Range States, intergovernmental organizations and partners to support the identification and delineation of IIRAs; r; invites the Convention on Biological Diversity, other multilateral environmental agreements and international financial institutions to consider IIRAs as useful contributions to identifying Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) and areas subject to other effective area-based conservation/restoration measures; encourages Parties and non-Parties to make use of the listed areas when designating protected areas and in spatial planning processes, including through National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans.
9. The Resolution also invites consideration of the IIRA approach beyond Africa and Eurasia. The approach developed under the Raptors MOU can inform equivalent processes in other flyways, supported through the CMS Flyways Working Group. Paragraphs 5 and 7 of the Resolution invite Parties and non-party Range States, via the CMS Flyways Working Group, to establish similar processes and to consider applying the IIRA approach for the identification of internationally important sites for migratory raptors at the global level. Decisions 15.175(b), 15.176(c), 15.177 and 15.178(a) provide the corresponding operational steps...
10. Decisions 15.175 to 15.178 are directed, respectively, to Parties, to intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, to the Scientific Council and to the Secretariat. Parties within the geographic scope of the Raptors MOU are requested to support the identification of new IIRAs by proposing new areas to the TAG; intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations are encouraged to contribute proposals and to provide support to the TAG; the Scientific Council is requested to support the TAG through the sharing of information and data; and the Secretariat is requested to assist the Flyways Working Group in developing mechanisms for identifying, assessing and listing IIRAs beyond the geographic scope of the MOU and to inform Parties of newly identified IIRAs, facilitate consultation and coordination between the TAG and equivalent processes in other flyways, and report on implementation to the Conference of the Parties at its 16th Meeting.

IIRAs as an achievement of the Raptors MOU

11. The establishment of IIRAs marks a significant milestone for the Raptors MOU. For the first time, a network of sites developed under a CMS instrument for a group of migratory birds of prey has received formal recognition through a Resolution of the Conference of the Parties. This recognition builds on more than a decade of work by Signatories, the Technical Advisory Group and partners, and provides a basis for applying the approach in other flyways.

12. The approach follows the precedents of Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs) under [CMS Resolution 12.13](#) and Important Shark and Ray Areas (ISRAs) under [CMS Resolution 14.7](#). There is, however, an important difference: whereas the IMMA and ISRA processes are managed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature, within Africa and Eurasia, the TAG provides the scientific review of proposed sites under the procedures of the Raptors MOU, with amendments to Table 3 considered by the Meeting of Signatories. The Conference of the Parties has thus placed its confidence in a mechanism owned and governed by Signatories.
13. Recognition as IIRAs can help Signatories bring raptor conservation needs into national planning and conservation financing. The information may inform KBA identification and consideration of protected areas or Other Effective Conservation Measures (OECMs), subject to their respective criteria and national procedures. It supports the implementation of Targets 1 and 3 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, including through National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans; and it strengthens the case for the consideration of raptors in spatial planning, in environmental impact assessment and in the appraisal of investment by international financial institutions.
14. The Coordinating Unit is preparing an information brochure on IIRAs. A dedicated webpage and webinar are also proposed, subject to the availability of resources.

The role of the Technical Advisory Group

15. Under its Terms of Reference, the TAG provides scientific and technical advice to Signatories and ensures that changes in taxonomy, conservation status and knowledge of the movements of migratory raptors are reflected in the lists annexed to the MOU. The revision and expansion of Table 3 was carried out under that mandate and was, in terms of volume of work, one of the largest tasks TAG has undertaken.
16. The membership of the TAG includes a representative of BirdLife International, the organization responsible for the IBA programme. This facilitates the application of the IBA criteria and coordination with the relevant BirdLife datasets.
17. Under rule 16 of the [Rules of Procedure](#) for Meetings of Signatories; proposals for amendment may only be made by Signatories or by the Technical Advisory Group to the MOU. Proposal for amending Table 3 of Annex 3 ("List of Sites") should be submitted by any Signatory, using the Site Proposal and Amendment Form ([UNEP/CMS/RAPTORS/MOS3/Report/Annex IX/Rev.1](#)) adopted at MOS3, or by the TAG itself. Decision 15.175(a) invites CMS Parties from Range States of the Raptors MOU to submit areas to be included in the Site List through the TAG. The TAG is tasked with verifying that each site proposed meets the identification criteria and with providing written comments on each proposal tabled. Any amendment to the list is approved by the Meeting of Signatories. Following the adoption of Resolution 15.10, this established procedure is also the procedure by which IIRAs are identified within the geographic scope of the Raptors MOU.
18. The continued capacity of the TAG is therefore a direct determinant of the rate at which IIRAs can be identified, both within the geographic scope of the MOU and, through the sharing of methodology, in other flyways. Actions 3 (Review proposals submitted to MOS for the inclusion of sites in Table 3 of the MOU's Action Plan), 13 (Identify information gaps on key breeding areas, stopovers, refuelling, bottleneck, and other congregational and non-breeding sites along raptor flyways.) and 15 (Assess the

protection status of the sites listed in the Action Plan's Table 3 and their effectiveness in conserving migratory raptors) of the TAG Workplan 2023-2026 are all classified as core or very high priority activities. All those activities have been delivered for the intersessional period 2023-2026. The TAG's capacity and available resources will influence progress in reviewing new site proposals and sharing technical experience with other flyways. These activities are included in the proposed TAG workplan 2027-2029 ([UNEP/CMS/RAPTORS/MOS4/Doc.15.2](#)) and remain dependent upon the availability of voluntary contributions.

Supporting further identification of IIRAs

19. Two documents before the present Meeting provide the evidence base for the next phase of work. The Site Network Analysis (document [UNEP/CMS/RAPTORS/MOS4/Doc.12.3](#)), prepared in response to the mandate given at MOS3, extends to the remaining category 1 species the methodology tested in the pilot analysis. It identifies those parts of the range of each species for which the network is incomplete and distinguishes genuine gaps from those explained by the non-congregatory behaviour of the species concerned. The analysis can help guide priorities for further site identification, taking account of data gaps and the ecology of the species concerned..
20. The Second Conservation Status Assessment Report (CSAR2) (document [UNEP/CMS/RAPTORS/MOS4/Doc.12.4](#)) provides, in accordance with Action 15 of the TAG Workplan, an overview of the reported protection status of the sites listed in Table 3. The report, due to limited resources available, does attempt to measure effectiveness. CSAR2 also provides an updated assessment of the conservation status of the species listed in Annex 1. Read together, the two documents indicate both where new IIRAs are most needed and where existing IIRAs require protection.
21. Signatories are accordingly invited to submit proposals for new sites, using the [Site Proposal and Amendment Form](#), giving priority to the gaps identified in those two documents and, in particular, to the species listed in category 1 of Table 1 of the Action Plan. Information on the protection status of listed sites should likewise be reflected in national reports.

Discussion and analysis

22. Resolution 15.10 recognizes the sites already listed in Table 3 as IIRAs, without requiring a separate proposal for those sites. This recognition can strengthen the visibility and use of the underlying scientific information in national planning, cross-sectoral dialogue and conservation funding proposals. National protection and management measures remain subject to the relevant national processes.
23. At the same time, the Resolution and Decisions increase the expectations placed on the Raptors MOU and on its TAG, which are now looked to as the technical reference for a process that the Conference of the Parties intends to extend globally. Priorities should be aligned with the agreed TAG Workplan and include addressing the identified data and site gaps, supporting the preparation and review of proposals, and sharing experience through the Flyways Working Group, subject to the availability of resources.
24. Not all Signatories to the Raptors MOU are Parties to CMS. Decision 15.175 is addressed to Parties, while the related Decisions assign complementary roles to intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, the Scientific Council and the Secretariat. Signatories that are not Parties are nonetheless invited to act in the same

spirit, as the value of the network depends on its completeness across the flyway rather than on the treaty status of individual Range States.

Recommended actions

25. The Meeting of Signatories is invited to:

- a) take note of this document and of the adoption by the Conference of the Parties to CMS, at its 15th Meeting, of Resolution 15.10 and Decisions 15.175 to 15.178 in Internationally Important Raptors Areas, available in documents [UNEP/CMS/RAPTORS/MOS4/Inf.8](#) and [UNEP/CMS/RAPTORS/MOS4/Inf.12](#)
- b) note that the sites listed in Table 3 of Annex 3 to the Raptors MOU are recognized as Internationally Important Raptor Areas;
- c) welcome the contribution of the Technical Advisory Group to the development of the identification criteria and to the compilation of the list of internationally important sites, and confirm the role of the Technical Advisory Group in verifying proposals for the identification of further IIRAs within the geographic scope of the MOU;
- d) invite Signatories to support the further identification of IIRAs by submitting site proposals using the Site Proposal and Amendment Form, giving priority to the gaps identified in the Site Network Analysis and to the needs identified in the Second Conservation Status Assessment Report;
- e) invite Signatories that are Parties to CMS to implement Decision 15.175(a), and encourage other Signatories to support the identification of IIRAs within the geographic scope of the MOU, in line with Resolution 15.10;
- f) encourage Signatories, Cooperating Partners and donors to provide the financial and technical resources required for the completion of the site network analysis and for the continuing work of the Technical Advisory Group; and
- g) request the Coordinating Unit, in cooperation with the TAG, to report to the fifth Meeting of Signatories on progress in identifying IIRAs, including proposals reviewed, activities undertaken and remaining resource needs.