



المركز الوطني  
لتنمية الحياة الفطرية  
National Center for Wildlife  
المملكة العربية السعودية



# 1<sup>st</sup> MEETING OF THE SOUTH-WEST ASIA ILLEGAL TAKING OF MIGRATORY BIRDS INTERGOVERNMENTAL TASK FORCE

*Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, 20-21 May 2025*

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UNEP/CMS/SWAITB1/Meeting Report

## MEETING REPORT

*(Prepared by the CMS Secretariat)*

*(August 2025)*

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## Acronyms

BPS	Birds Protection Society
CMS	Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals
COP	Conference of the Parties
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
IFAW	International Fund for Animal Welfare
KSA	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MIKT	CMS Intergovernmental Task Force on Illegal Killing, Taking and Trade of Migratory Birds in the Mediterranean
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NCW	National Center for Wildlife, KSA
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NSAIDs	Non-steroidal Anti-inflammatory Drugs
SWA	South-West Asia
SWA ITB TF	South-West Asia Illegal Taking of Migratory Birds Intergovernmental Task Force
TF	Task Force
ToR	Terms of Reference
UAE	United Arab Emirates
VCF	Vulture Conservation Foundation
WCA	Wildlife Crime Academy

## **Main meeting outcomes**

1. The first Meeting of the South-West Asia Illegal Taking of Migratory Birds Intergovernmental Task Force (SWA ITB TF) was convened from 20 to 21 May 2025, in Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and was attended by around 50 participants from six Range States and many stakeholders from the region.
2. The meeting was generously hosted by the National Center for Wildlife (NCW), government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.
3. Members and observers reported on important advances and actions in the countries of the region.
4. The CMS Secretariat updated participants on progress by the Raptors Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and shared experience and best practice from the CMS Task Force on Illegal Killing, Taking and Trade of Migratory Birds in the Mediterranean (MIKT).
5. Participants agreed the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the SWA ITB TF, and recommended them for adoption by the CMS Standing Committee.
6. Participants working in breakout groups developed the actions under the different objectives of the draft Action Plan for the SWA ITB TF and agreed a timetable for adoption of the Action Plan.
7. It was agreed that the draft Action Plan would be sent out to all participants and country focal points for comments or approval by 12 July 2025.
8. It was agreed that CMS Focal Points would be asked to appoint a focal point for the SWA ITB TF.
9. Participants were informed of the next steps for hiring a coordinator for the SWA ITB TF and for preparation for CMS COP15.

## Background

1. The 1<sup>st</sup> Meeting of the South-West Asia Illegal Taking of Migratory Birds Intergovernmental Task Force (SWA ITB TF) was convened in Riyadh, from 20 to 21 May 2025, generously hosted by the National Centre for Wildlife (NCW) of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which covered the full expenses of one participant per country.
2. The invitation to the meeting was sent out on 3 February 2025, signed by the CMS Executive Secretary, Ms. Amy Fraenkel.
3. The invitation was addressed to all Range States of the Task Force, i.e. Bahrain, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Yemen.
4. The Mandate for organising the 1<sup>st</sup> Meeting of SWA ITB TF came from [CMS Resolution 11.16 \(Rev. COP14\)](#) on the Prevention of Illegal Killing, Taking and Trade of Migratory Birds, which stated “*Decides to establish, subject to the availability of external resources, a South-West Asia Illegal Taking of Migratory Birds Intergovernmental Task Force following a successful meeting of the Working Group in Riyadh in January 2024.*”, which was hosted and covered by NCW.
5. The objectives of the meeting in Riyadh were set out as follows:
  - Be informed about the current CMS mandates following CMS COP14, and initiatives to tackle the illegal hunting, taking and trade of migratory birds in this and other regions of the world.
  - Learn about the activities of different range states and TF observers to combat illegal taking of migratory birds in their territories.
  - Finalise and endorse the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the Task Force and recommend them for adoption by the CMS Standing Committee.
  - Agree on the way forward with regards to the finalisation or improvements needed to deliver an ITB Action Plan in the region and recommend it for adoption for the next TF meeting.
  - Agree on next steps for the Task Force, including the engagement of a Coordinator.

## Day 1, 20 May 2025

### Agenda items 1.-3. Opening of the Meeting and Welcoming remarks

6. The meeting started at 09.05 as per the agenda published [on the meeting website](#). It was attended by around 50 participants of the SWA region, including country representatives from Bahrain, Egypt (observer), Iraq, Kuwait, KSA and UAE, representatives from CMS and AEWA Secretariats, international and national NGOs, local stakeholders, such as the Ministry of Environment, Agriculture and Water (MEWA), Royal protected areas, and Special Forces for Environmental Security, and staff from the National Centre for Wildlife (NCW). A list of participants can be found in Annex 1.
7. The meeting started with welcoming remarks by:

Mr. Ahmed Alboug, General Manager of Terrestrial Wildlife Conservation at the NCW, welcomed participants and wished success with achieving the objectives of the meeting. He stressed the need for collaboration between countries to achieve joint objectives. He also expressed gratitude to CMS Secretariat for support and fruitful efforts for organizing this meeting and he was grateful to all regional entities participating in this first Task Force meeting. He also expressed gratitude to NCW for providing the resources to organize and host this meeting.
8. Next, Dr Iván Ramírez, Head of CMS Secretariat Avian Species Team, welcomed participants on behalf of the CMS Secretariat and he thanked the organisers for a landmark 1<sup>st</sup> Meeting of the SWA ITB TF. He presented other similar CMS initiatives to combat illegal taking of migratory birds, outlined the objectives of the meeting and thanked the NCW for hosting the meeting. He reminded participants that 2026 was a COP year and that COP15 would take place in Campo Grande, Brazil from the 23<sup>rd</sup> to the 29<sup>th</sup> of March 2026. He expressed the wish to meet many participants at COP15 and emphasized that all parties and stakeholders together can make a difference. Dr Ramírez asked participants for volunteers to Chair the meeting and as none volunteered, he continued as Chair to the meeting.
9. Dr Ramírez, continued as Chair of the Meeting and he briefly introduced the agenda of the next two days. He explained the Mandate for the work and that all the relevant documents for the meeting were published online.

### Agenda item 4. Setting the context of the meeting

10. The meeting continued according to [the annotated agenda](#) as posted on the meeting website.
11. Dr Ramírez on behalf of the CMS Secretariat continued with a presentation on the CMS mandate for addressing illegal taking and trade of migratory birds, and a report of CMS COP14 outcomes and mandates. He highlighted briefly the work of other CMS TFs on illegal taking of migratory birds already operating for the Mediterranean and the Asia-Pacific regions. He then outlined the meeting objectives, explaining that the TF Terms of Reference (ToR) need to be finalised and approved and recommended to the CMS Standing Committee for official adoption. He also urged participants to endeavour to agree the ITB Action Plan for the region, in order to recommend it for adoption at the next TF meeting.
12. Finally, he emphasized that resources are key for the success of the TF, and called upon all countries and stakeholders to engage and provide support to ensure the success of the TF.
13. He outlined the important elements for effective action against ITB, noting that National ITB

Action Plans were excellent instruments to promote involvement. Adapting national legislation was considered best performing area in other TFs. Establishing a baseline was fundamental, because without that it was impossible to monitor progress. Motivations were fundamental too, for building on for education and awareness. Finally, he stressed that any materials produced need to be easy to read and understand.

14. In closing, he thanked all the participants, and in particular NCW for all the preparations, and introduced CMS Staff attending, Dr Umberto Gallo-Orsi, Programme Manager Raptors MOU, and Dr Claire (Foteini) Papazoglou, MIKT Coordinator. He invited questions and clarifications.
15. Dr Mohammed Shobrak from NCW, took the floor to stress that the involvement and contribution of other countries to the SWA ITB TF was very important, as were the National ITB Action Plans. He encouraged participants to engage in order to be able to finish the Action Plan in those two days.
16. The session finished and participants gathered for a group photo, before continuing to a coffee break. NCW organisers asked everyone to register online through scanning a QR code.

#### **Agenda item 4. Setting the context of the meeting (cont.): 4.2. Reports from the countries**

17. After the coffee break the meeting continued with reports from Range States. First, there was a report from **Saudi Arabia, delivered by Ms Areej Al Zahrani, from the NCW Bird Conservation Department**. She spoke of the new hunting regulation in KSA, and the aim to protect 30% of the terrestrial and 30% marine environment by 2030. She also presented results from the implementation of the hunting legislation the last four years and the Fitri platform for controlling hunting permits, violations, and penalties. She also presented the results of a socio-economic study on hunters' preferences, showing that Turtle Dove was a favourite game species and that hunting was a hobby for most hunters. She finally presented new efforts on wild species rehabilitation and release in the wild, especially waterbirds which were increasingly taken for training of falcons for falconry.
18. Questions followed after her presentation. One participant asked how did the Fitri application work. She replied that the application offered a lot of information to the user, including information on species, prohibited means, and penalties and sanctions.
19. There was a question on the number of individuals/licences, relating to a graph in the presentation by Ms Al Zahrani. Mr Bandar Al Faleh, NCW Head of licences department, explained that in the latest hunting period the hunting of around 7 million individual birds was authorised, which were allocated to 65000 licences, given to 20000 hunters. So, each hunter would hold a permit for each species he was wishing to hunt, and each permit would list the number of individuals he was allowed to hunt.
20. There were follow up questions from Bahrain on how the NCW can ensure that hunters stop hunting when the quota of the number of birds allowed had been reached. NCW explained that due to large size of country, monitoring everywhere was not possible, so emphasis was placed on hotspots where there were regular random checks to hunters, and if they were found breaking the terms of their licences, the sanctions applied were steep, including announcing the name of the person in social media and TV. NCW had done a lot of awareness raising about penalties and sanctions to act as a deterrent, and amateur hunters had been very happy with the rules. NCW had also built a regular dialogue and consultation with hunters.
21. There was a question about releases of rehabilitated wildlife. A representative of NCW explained that NCW keeps a list of the species rehabilitated and released. He emphasized that trapping waterbirds (mainly gulls and herons) for training falcons was a recent development that NCW

- was looking into. The released birds were mainly waterbirds, confiscated, treated and released in protected areas. He also added that the people trapping those waterbirds, seemed to be newcomers to falconry, involved through social media and online groups. NCW had also created an e-crime unit to follow internet and social media for relevant wildlife crimes.
22. The Chair asked about the methodology and data used for the socio-economic study. Dr Shobrak explained that the study was done by a professor in the University of Riyadh, working with people in NCW and addressed hunters in all provinces. The aim was to gather information and raise awareness. One of the questions was also about the evolution of the price of the permit, because currently the permit was free, but in the future, there would be a cost to issuing a permit.
  23. The Chair invited NCW to share the methodology used by the University of Riyadh, so that it can be used by others too.
  24. The next country to present their update was **Kuwait's Mr Abdulaziz Alyousef, from the Department of Wildlife Monitoring, Environment Public Authority**. He presented the priorities of the Department of Wildlife Monitoring, which included law enforcement and monitoring. The laws enforced included laws on trade of endangered species and were enforced using the special forces for environmental security. The department did annual monitoring of birds and compared the data yearly. The country received a lot of expat birders and used the application e-bird from Cornell University extensively for collecting data. More than 90% of application data received were through the e-bird application. The country had available bird records from the early 1990s in a database. They also had access to very good birdwatchers and photographers.
  25. The Chair announced that CMS also had a collaboration with Cornell University and would be launching a migration atlas in COP15 in Brazil.
  26. Next country to report was the **Kingdom of Bahrain, Ms. Jawaher Bunajma, from the Supreme Council for Environment**. She announced that in April 2025, a new ministerial decision had been approved by the Ministers Council and would be examined by a government Committee also. The ministerial decision, not yet in effect, proposed banning hunting of all species of birds, except for invasive species and domesticated birds.
  27. On the issue of falcons and falconers, she said that there were not many falconers in Bahrain. At that moment, there were only six known falconers in Bahrain which are not officially certified, however, the Ministry was studying how to regulate falconry better. A challenge they faced was illegal trapping of the Common Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*) for selling. The law was strict if someone was caught. The Regulation also specified various species programmes, e.g. Sooty Falcon, Steppe Eagle and an assessment of invasive species. Finally, Bahrain would do its 2<sup>nd</sup> Red List assessment using IUCN criteria in 2026.
  28. Next country to report was **Iraq and Mr Arif Alsalim, from the Ministry of Environment**, reported orally. The most important hunting practices in Iraq was hunting with falcons in the deserts. Recently, Iraq banned hunters entering from neighbouring countries, e.g. Kuwait and Qatar, who used to come hunting to Iraq, due to proximity. The Ministry of Environment maintained contacts with hunters and for one year and half the hunting ban had been accepted. Recently however, hunters from abroad were returning again and they were accepted in exchange for payment. The main challenges faced by the administration, included enforcement and application of hunting rules, because care for the security of citizens was a priority. The country is vast with a huge desert so monitoring and inspecting the desert was very difficult.
  29. He then referred to the issue of falconry. Falcons were pivotal species, and the trade required

- two people, the one who trapped the falcon and the one who purchased it, and the motivation was profit. They would like to reduce profitability through a reduction of the money paid to acquire a falcon, thus reduce the motivation to break the law.
30. There was a question regarding registration of foreigners travelling to Iraq to purchase wildlife. Mr Alsalam replied that the law regulating foreign hunters was complete, the problem was enforcement of that law. A participant from NCW remarked that importing a falcon from abroad was now banned in Saudi, because this practice had increased.
  31. There was an additional question about disturbing images from a very notorious wildlife market in Sulaimani in Baghdad and whether there were any moves to control the species traded better. The Iraqi representative agreed that that market was the most important market in Baghdad, for wildlife trading. The government had collaborated with Interpol under Campaign Thunderbird and covered all the regions in Iraq. The media exposure of those markets and the bad publicity through international campaigns had had an impact.
  32. The Chair remarked that market places were a problem for illegal trade of migratory birds in many countries, and referred to the methodology for market surveys developed by the Asia-Pacific Task Force. He also remarked that hunting tourism appeared to be an issue of concern for some countries in the Mediterranean also.
  33. The next country report was from **Egypt**, which was invited as an observer to the 1<sup>st</sup> SWA ITB TF meeting. The report was delivered by **Dr Luay Zonkle, from the Ministry of Environment**, who firstly thanked the NCW for the invitation and explained the hunting system in Egypt. He explained the current hunting system allowed the hunting of 21 species, out of 515 recorded in the country. Hunting was only allowed with a permit. He explained that Egypt had designated 60% of its coastline as 'safe passage' area for birds, where no hunting was allowed. He also added that hunting in Lake Nasser had been banned, despite the ban having negative effects on local people.
  34. He explained that there were around 4000 local hunters and that in the last hunting season there were only 38 hunting tourist licences given. Hunting laws were updated regularly, and hunting was allowed from December to March on only one day but there was an increase in number of areas where hunting was allowed.
  35. Regarding falconry he explained that hunting with falcons was not allowed in Egypt but in collaboration with UAE, they released Houbara bustards, for training of falcons, but not hunting. He noted that there was some inaccurate information reported by organisations regarding the issue.
  36. There was a question from NCW regarding limits to the number of birds that can be hunted and the mechanisms of enforcement.
  37. Dr Zonkle replied that hunting was allowed in fall and winter, in specific locations. A lot of hunting was done through authorised hunting clubs who were allowed 75 birds per week for six weeks. He repeated that only 38 hunting tourism licences were given in 2024.
  38. The next country **to report was the UAE, Ms Nahla Noobi from the Ministry of Climate Change Ministry of Climate Change and Environment**. She reported that UAE was a federal country, with federal level and local laws. At the federal level there were two main laws for regulating hunting and international trade. She explained that UAE had carried out an assessment to identify Important Biodiversity Areas, and completed a recent Red List assessment of all species, which included 167 species of bird. According to the Red List assessment there has been an increase in populations of bird species in UAE since the last assessment, so the measures taken by the government were working. Key Biodiversity areas

- were fully protected, and there were 49 protected areas marine and terrestrial.
39. UAE put a lot of effort into breeding Houbara bustards, supported by the Houbara fund. They collaborated with many countries. Hunting was allowed only for one species, the Houbara bustard, and all hunted birds had to be captive bred and hunted with a falcon. This can only be done in the two areas licenced for this kind of hunting, with the specific permits and certain times of year. There were also a lot of awareness raising and training programmes, and the Falconry Council meet quarterly to discuss potential issues. There were no data available yet, about the impact on wild Houbaras, i.e. if they had benefited from hunting of only captive bred birds.
  40. There was a question about who the training programmes mentioned were targeted to. Ms Noobi explained the training programmes were targeted to people in law enforcement, and they also covered issues like species identification and other issues.

#### **Agenda item 4. Setting the context of the meeting (cont.): 4.3. Reports from Observers**

41. The first report from observers, was from **Mr Abdullah Alsuhaibany, reporting for Birds Protection Society (BPS)** of Saudi Arabia. BPS was a new society, and he explained the strategy, the projects and the collaborations with NCW, universities and students.
42. The Society aimed to develop a large database of bird records, and a rescue centre for birds, especially for oiled birds, as oil contamination was a problem. He also explained that they aimed to promote birdwatching and ecotourism.
43. There was a suggestion from a participant from the King Salman Royal Reserve that for initiatives like ecotourism and birdwatching it was important to involve hunters, as they knew very well where the birds were and their needs. He suggested that especially those hunters hunting for trade, could find this way an alternative source of income and stop hunting.
44. Mr Alsuhaibany replied that the society already involved hunters, and noted that some of the best bird photographers in Saudi Arabia, were ex-hunters. He also offered an anecdote reporting something a hunter told him once. The hunter was asked why he had changed from hunting to bird photography, and he replied that with hunting the pleasure was momentary, whereas with photography the pleasure of the photo remains for years. He also noted that Saudi Arabia, had a lot of well-off hunters, who needed guidance, not an alternative income.
45. Next report was from the **International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), Mr Osama Al Nouri**, reported about the activities of IFAW explaining, in particular, the emphasis IFAW puts on trade and trafficking on wildlife. IFAW had a MENA Region office which focused especially in supporting the implementation of CITES. They also had some new initiatives and new projects in behavioural science trying to reduce demand of some wild animals. They were committed to support the establishment of the SWA ITB TF, and they had expanded operations to provide support for bird rescue in Lebanon under the name 'Levant Operation for bird rescue'.
46. They were operating an Academy of Rescue and Conservation with funding from Suzanne McGraw Foundation and that included a lot of capacity building and training on wildlife rescue and enforcement. At that time, the trainings focused on other species, and not birds, but IFAW was committed to collaborate in order to raise funds in the region and to expand the trainings to include birds. IFAW looked forward to developing links with the Vulture Conservation Foundation and the Wildlife Crime Academy which they operated.
47. There was a question from NCW: He noted Mr Bandar Al Faleh, NCW Head of licences department, that it was important to build capacity in the region, but stressed that it was important to consider new tools that the new generation of employees used. He lamented that that

- information was often still provided in old-fashioned formats that were not used by young employees, so he stressed the importance of adapting the training ways too. Mr Al Noori fully agreed and stressed the importance of adapting the training to regional and temporal needs.
48. Next presentation was from **BirdLife International, Mr Ibrahim Al Kahder, Regional Director for BirdLife International Middle East Division**. He outlined the activities of BirdLife International to support combating illegal taking of migratory birds, stressing, a workshop co-organised with IFAW organised in Amman, in April 2024. He also announced that BirdLife International had just published an updated report on the situation with illegal taking of birds in the Mediterranean and Europe, called '*Killing 3.0*', which had been presented in Bonn, the week before. The report apart from presenting an update on progress, included recommendations for the different countries.
  49. He also noted that BirdLife International was trying to get funding to do a socio- economic assessment for the Souq Al Ghazal in Iraq, mentioned earlier that day. They were also trying to find funding for activities in the region and would continue with the partnerships they had established in the region.
  50. The Egypt representative objected to the use of previous estimates for the number of birds illegally killed annually in Egypt, being repeated in the *Killing 3.0* report, stating that a study that had been funded by the Ministry found only 600.000 birds illegally killed. He stressed that the estimate for Egypt had been made without government involvement or feedback and the number was rejected by the government.
  51. There was a comment by the MIKT Coordinator, from the CMS Secretariat, stressing that the Secretariat was well aware that the government of Egypt objected to the numbers in the BirdLife International reports, but stressed that was why reporting to the Scoreboard was so important, and why it was a shame that Egypt had not taken the opportunity in 2023 to report to the Scoreboard and present its data and reports.
  52. Dr Shobrak from NCW, also supported the importance of countries reporting using the Scoreboard and shared an experience from KSA. He said when BirdLife originally estimated the number of birds illegally taken in KSA, hunters objected and NCW did not agree with the number. But when they started to get detailed records, they realised that the numbers were truly high. Monitoring and recording were important work. Each country had to do it for themselves and then report the data and take ownership. He called for using the Scoreboard as reporting.
  53. There were additional comments stressing the importance of NGOs in providing data and highlight important issues.
  54. The Chair closed this session, noting that NGOs can provide data, and that governments might object to the data but had the opportunity to provide better ones.
  55. The Chair thanked everyone for their contributions and participation.

#### **Agenda item 5: Endorsement of the TF Terms of Reference**

56. The Chair presented the document as agreed at the Working Group Meeting in January 2024. He explained that the ToR had to be approved at the TF meeting and be sent for official adoption to the CMS Standing Committee, as per CMS Decision 14.128 directed to the Standing Committee.
57. Participants reviewed the documents in Plenary, making only few comments. One comment was to include 'national' under Remit, point 1, so as to read: National Hunting Regulations.
58. Mr Osama Al Nouri, suggested to include the terms 'Capacity Building' in the Remit of the TF, as the TF would play a significant role in organizing and providing opportunities for capacity

- building for all stakeholders across the region.
59. Some discussion followed on Membership, and the need for countries to appoint designated focal points for this TF. Participants asked the CMS Secretariat to send a Notification to all Range States asking them to appoint a focal point for SWA ITB TF. There was also agreement that other frameworks/ institutions could apply for becoming members or observers to the TF. There was also discussion on who should be the Chair and vice Chair for the TF, but participants agreed to review that in a later meeting.
  60. The Chair closed this session mentioning that the amended ToR would be presented to the participants at the start of Day 2 for any final comments.
  61. The morning session ended and participants were invited to buffet lunch. The meeting started again at 14.40hrs.

#### **Agenda item 6: Update on Raptors MOU actions in the Region**

62. The first presentation was by **Dr Umberto Gallo-Orsi, Programme Management Officer, Raptors MOU**, about the activities of the Raptors MOU, firstly about the actions on species, and secondly about addressing particular threats, like electrocution and NSAIDs. He also announced that Uganda had recently signed the Raptors MOU and that Zimbabwe was due to sign two days after the TF meeting. Finally, he called for increased action against illegal trapping of raptors, highlighting that the process was still widely practiced in the Mediterranean and that social media was playing an important role for facilitating trade.

#### **Agenda item 7: Task Force on Illegal Killing, Taking and Trade of Migratory Birds in the Mediterranean (MIKT)**

63. Then followed a presentation by **Dr Claire Papazoglou, MIKT Coordinator, from the CMS Secretariat**, who presented the evolution and development of the Mediterranean TF, and the elements of the current Strategic Plan spanning the period 2020-2030. She also explained how the members of the MIKT reported, presenting the Scoreboard, and highlighting some of the results from the analysis of the Scoreboard submissions by the members of the TF.
64. The Scoreboard experience stimulated a number of questions. First, there was a question on how the answers were validated and Dr Papazoglou, explained that the Scoreboard was a self-assessment tool, so countries reported and scored themselves and there was no independent validation. However, she noted countries are strongly encouraged to reply to the Scoreboard through a consultative, multistakeholder process in order to arrive at accepted common responses.
65. There was also a question about the management of hunting of the Turtle Dove in Europe. Dr Papazoglou, explained that all ITB TFs focused on illegal taking, and did not deal with legal hunting issues. However, she outlined the relevance to ITB in the case of the Turtle Dove. The European Commission after evaluating through a scientific consortium the state of the population of the European Turtle Dove, had recommended a hunting ban for all the European flyways. The western, and central flyway countries had banned the hunting of Turtle Dove, but the eastern flyway countries, specifically Greece, part of Italy, Malta and Cyprus had not. The European Commission had said that if a country objected to closing the hunting for the species, they had to meet some other conditions, among which was to eliminate ITB for that species.
66. Then followed some discussion on the populations of Turtle Dove flying through Arabia.

## Agenda item 8. Agreement on Draft Action Plan for SWA ITB TF

67. The Chair then introduced the next agenda item, explaining the process that had led to the development of the draft Action Plan and explaining the elements that had been agreed at the previous meeting. He proposed that participants split in two groups and discuss the actions under Objectives 1 and 2, group one taking Objective 1 and group two taking Objective 2.

### Day 2, 21 May 2025

68. The Chair started the meeting outlining the main points from the previous day, reminding participants about COP14 outcomes, emphasizing the positive developments presented by country and observer reports, reminding of the updates from the Raptors MOU and the Mediterranean TF (MIKT) and emphasizing the synergies and collaboration.

69. He then presented the amended Terms of Reference for the SWA ITB TF, for approval. There were two comments: One was related to Remit point 1. There was a proposal to remove 'hunting' from point 1 and to relate the regulations to the goal of the Task Force.

70. The participants agreed to modify Remit Point 1 as follows:

- *Support and guide a review on the status of national regulations related to the goal of this Task Force;*

71. The Chair also reminded participants that the previous day, progress had been made in developing and agreeing the actions for Objectives 1 and 2 of the Action Plan. He then introduced the agenda for Day 2, which was focused around developing and agreeing the actions for the rest of the Objectives of the Action Plan and to agree a timetable for its approval. Finally, there would be updates about the Coordinator of the TF, a timetable presented for COP15 and the next in person meeting.

### 8. Agreement on Draft Action Plan for SWA ITB TF (cont.)

72. The participants continued working in two breakout groups. Group one discussed and agreed actions for Objectives 3 and 5, and Group two discussed and agreed actions for Objectives 4 and 7. The CMS Secretariat would develop actions for Objective 6. Breakout groups worked in the morning and reported back at plenary from 12.30hrs. Participants reviewed the proposals for actions as developed by the breakout groups.

### Points of Agreement and next steps

73. Participants agreed that the finished document would be circulated by the CMS Secretariat as soon as possible and countries and stakeholders would have until 12 July to send out their comments and amendments.

74. The CMS Secretariat would then review the Action Plan, incorporating any amendments and would circulate the Action Plan for one last time for adoption in August, giving another 15 days, with silent procedure, i.e. no answer would be taken as agreement. Comments would be invited ideally in track changes. If major comments were sent, including changes to the structure of the document, then a follow up meeting would be required. Otherwise, the document could be

- approved by September and then would be monitored at each meeting as the Action Plan for the SWA ITB TF.
75. Participants agreed that it was positive that in this regional Task Force all members used the same language, Arabic, and that could give many opportunities for using same materials and communication. Translation and interpretation into Arabic would be essential.
  76. Participants restated the importance for each country to nominate a focal point for the SWA ITB TF.
  77. Finally, participants agreed that once finalized the Action Plan would need to have consistent timelines for action, a Gantt chart for actions, indicators and reporting methods.
  78. The Chair took the opportunity to call for resources by all countries to support implementation of Action Plan. NCW informed the participants that KSA had already made approaches to GCC for funding.
  79. After lunch the participants reconvened around 14.15hrs, and the Chair reminded them about agreements and points discussed during the TF meeting.
  - 80. A. The SWA ITB TF had been launched. ToR had been agreed and would be sent to the CMS Standing Committee for adoption.**
  - 81. B. The Action Plan, would be put together and sent out for comments until 12 July, then the Secretariat would incorporate any comments, and send out again with a two week deadline for final approval. By September, there should be an adopted action plan. It would be sent out to all participants and all CMS Focal Points. Silent procedure would be used.**
  - 82. C. By 12 July, every single country and organization would be invited to identify their focal points. Countries would be invited to appoint either a government expert, or an independent expert, it would be their decision.**
  - 83. D. From that point onwards, the communications of the SWA ITB TF would go to the focal points only.**
  - 84. E. By 12 July, any other interested institution, NGO, advisory body could also apply for becoming observer to SWA ITB TF.**
  85. The Notification would be sent by the CMS Secretariat to all meeting participants and CMS Focal Points, and copied to CMS Scientific Council and Standing Committee. It would announce that the Task Force had been launched and the ToR agreed and recommended for adoption to the Standing Committee, and would ask the Focal Points to appoint the focal points for this TF.

#### **Agenda item 9. Discussion on next steps: Hiring of a SWA ITB Coordinator**

86. The Chair admitted that it would have been ideal to announce the name of the Coordinator at the TF, but unfortunately there had been delays. The CMS Secretariat was looking for someone with international experience, good diplomatic skills, knowledge of Arabic and English, knowledge ITB issues, and capacity to travel. The Secretariat had done four interviews and selected a candidate, but he rejected the offer. A second candidate was being approached, and CMS Secretariat was now negotiating with NCW the next steps. The aim was to finalise the appointment the next weeks and offer to the coordinator a three-year contract.
87. The aim was that the Coordinator would be working as a full time consultant, in no more than two months, as part of Avian Team meeting, participating in staff meetings, etc. He would have interviews with the governments and institutions in the governments.
88. He would maintain a database, monitor the implementation of the Action Plan and would

prioritise fundraising. He would have no other tasks in the Secretariat.

### **Upcoming COP15**

89. The Chair announced that the dates for COP15 had been confirmed and would take place from 23-29 March 2026, in Campo Grande, Brazil. It was going to be long COP, full 7 days. Brazil had chosen unsustainable take of species as one of the priorities for the COP and this was an opportunity for the ITB TFs to showcase their work.
90. At least one side event was planned at the COP. The deadline for proposing side events was December 2025 and ideas were invited by all. Side events were an opportunity for TFs to show what they had done and fundraise for what they wanted to do.
91. The COP was always an opportunity to consider the mandate, and whether Resolution 11.16 needed an update. The Chair invited the participants to inform the Secretariat as soon as possible if they were considering proposing changes. The deadline for submission of the documents was September 2025.
92. Proposals for listing species under the Convention needed to be submitted even sooner as the deadline for such scientific proposals was earlier.
93. Finally, the Chair invited the countries to consider what Decisions would be needed from COP15.
94. There was a question regarding the criteria for being named as CMS Champion, and the Chair read the criteria as they could be found on the CMS website and the Chair agreed to forward the criteria to NCW.

### **Agenda item 10. Any Other Business and Closing of the Meeting**

95. There was no other business, and the Chair proceeded to thank the participants for good participation and contributions. He also thanked and expressed gratitude to the NCW for generosity and organization. He named in particular, Mr Ziyad Alsudays, Ms Razan Almugren, Dr Mohammed Shobrak, the interpreters, and Dr Claire Papazoglou from CMS Secretariat, for supporting and taking notes for the meeting report. He expressed hope that there would be a second TF meeting in person in 2026.
96. Ms Sara Alharith expressed thanks on behalf of NCW, thanking in particular the CMS Secretariat for good collaboration and complementarity. The NCW will continue to support, based on the belief this is the common responsibility for sustainable future.