Issue no. 12, December - 2000

CMS Bulletin

CMS

UNEP

The CMS Secretariat takes this opportunity to wish all CMS Bulletin readers a successful 2001

Season's Greetings

Felices Fiestas

Meilleurs Vœux

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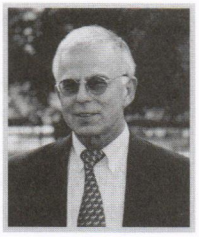
by Arnulf Müller Helmbrecht, Executive Secretary of CMS



Dr. Klaus Töpfer, a self-confessed "optimist by profession", noted recently in UNEP's "Our Planet" magazine: "Some environmentalists are already asking: is the conservation battle lost? Is it too late to rescue more than a few pieces of the natural world that we inherited?". Dr. Töpfer appealed to us not to give future generations reason to "curse us for permanently impoverishing life on Earth." He then urged us to use the "tools at our disposal for granting the environment safe passage ..." He explained that among the biodiversity related conventions, the Bonn Convention "offers strict protection to endangered species that migrate across political borders. It also seeks a coordinated conservation approach by promoting regional agreements amongst states along migration routes ...".

The recent Climate Change Conference of the Parties made it clear that no matter how urgent the situation, it is not possible for the international community to agree on immediate remedial action; all the more reasons for us to be aware of how difficult it is to convince decision makers to develop mechanisms for research, monitoring, protection and sustainable use of migratory species, a subject not high on the political agenda.

Nevertheless, the Secretariat, the Scientific Council Chairman and the Focal Points, even Ministers, are busy implementing the CMS work programme. An event worth highlighting is the negotiation, and hopefully conclusion, of an Agreement for Albatrosses and Petrels of the Southern Hemisphere. While the work on the Houbara Bustard and the Southern African Sand grouse is in need of fresh impetus. Also, the Secretariat is cooperating with the CBD Secretariat to underscore and develop a joint work programme on migratory species which will be discussed at CBD COP6 in April 2002 and CMS COP7 in September 2002.

I should like to express my gratitude to all those who help implement CMS and its related Agreements, colleagues at UNEP for supporting the recruitment of three professional posts and all CMS Secretariat staff who had to compensate for the absence of three regular professional staff. Finally, I appeal to all scientists, experts, political decision makers, IGOs, NGOs and the economic sector to help reverse the trend of impoverishing life on earth by human activities.

For more detailed information and regular news please visit the website of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals: http://www.wcmc.org.uk/cms

22nd Meeting of the Standing Committee of CMS

The Standing Committee met for the 22nd time between 21-22 September at the German Federal Ministry for the Environment in Bonn under the chairmanship of Carlo Custodio of the Philippines.

The Secretariat was able to report encouraging progress in a number of fields, concerning the recruitment of new staff, the implementation of existing agreements, negotiation of new ones and the establishment of the Agreements Unit within the Secretariat.

In accordance with the decision taken at COP6 to make the workings of the Convention more open and to cement the Convention's relations with partner organisations, a number of key international conservation NGOs had been invited to the meeting as observers.

The Executive Secretary reported on efforts by the Secretariat to develop closer working relationships with other bodies, most notably the Convention on Biodiversity (CBD). In addition to commissioning a study on the complementarities between CMS and CBD, the Secretariat has concluded an MoU with the International Whaling Commission (IWC). Similar arrangements are being considered with UNESCO's World Heritage Centre, covering the "Man and Biosphere" programme, and the IUCN.

A Letter of Agreement with Wetlands International Asia-Pacific had also been signed, under which WI-AP will assist CMS's recruitment efforts in the region.

The meeting reviewed progress in the implementation of the Strategic Plan 2000-2005 adopted at COP6 in Cape Town, 1999. The Strategic Plan promotes the conservation of migratory species; prioritizes actions for migratory species, enhances the global membership of the convention, facilites and improves implementation of the convention. The meeting also considered the interim report of the Performance Working Group, established at COP, to identify a set of criteria by which the work of the Convention and the Secretariat could be assessed and success measured. The Standing Committee established another Working Group to examine how to improve the number of Parties participating in or developing Agreements for Appendix II species.

UNEP activities on the harmonisation of reporting requirements under biodiversity-related Conventions had implications for the Information Management Plan adopted by COP6 under Resolution 6.1. The CMS Secretariat has since been involved in discussions with other Conventions and the World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP/WCMC) to chart the way ahead.

Committee members also took the opportunity of visiting the facilities at Bonn's *Hotel Maritim*, the venue chosen for COP7 which will be hosted by the German government. COP7 will take place in September 2002, in conjunction with the second Meeting of the Parties to AEWA.

First Signatures of the Great Bustard MoU

As a side event of the recent IUCN World Conservation Congress in Amman, Jordan (4-11 October), representatives of three countries and three participating organisations signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on the Conservation and Management of Middle-european Populations of the Great Bustard (*Otis tarda*).

The three countries which signed the MoU are Hungary, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Romania. In addition 3 key international organisations: the International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation, BirdLife International and IUCN also signed. It is hoped that further signatures will be added in the course of the next few months. The UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) Conference in Bonn in December presents an ideal opportunity to do it. The Memorandum will enter into force one month after it has been signed by the fifth Range State. The MoU calls for cooperation among national authorities to promote the conservation of the Great bustard and includes an Action Plan with both general provisions and specific activities appropriate for each participating country.

Maritta von Bieberstein Koch-Weser, Director General of IUCN,
Arnulf Müller-Helmbrecht, Executive Secretary of CMS,
Dr. Michael Rands, Director General of BirdLife International (from l. to r.)

In the article concerning the Great Bustard which appeared in the English version of CMS Bulletin 11, Hungary was inadvertently omitted from the list of Range States. Apologies to our Hungarian colleagues for this unvoluntary emission.

MEETINGS

Third Global Meeting of Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans (Monaco, 6-11 November 2000)

Within its current endeavours to strengthen the Regional Seas (RSP) Programme, UNEP convened the Third Global Meeting of Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans in Monaco from 6 to 11 November. The secretariats of major global conventions, agreements and initiatives were invited with a view to explore opportunities to strengthen their linkages with the RSP and its individual plans. CMS was represented through its Secretariat and by the Interim Secretariat of the ACCOBAMS Agreement.

At the meeting 18 Regional Seas Conventions and/or Programmes and Action Plans were represented, in most cases at the level of their coordinators or directors, which provided a unique opportunity for the CMS Secretariat to establish or strengthen contacts and to discuss opportunities for collaboration.

The meeting was opened by Dr. Klaus Töpfer, Executive Director of UNEP, who also chaired a round table discussion on critical problems and issues facing regional seas conventions and action plans. Representatives of MEAs and agencies were invited to contribute to the discussion in terms of their potential role in addressing those issues in collaboration and/or complementarity with the relevant Regional Seas Programmes. As regards CMS, the possibility of the Convention acting regionally through the establishment of agreements on species included in its Appendix II was stressed, suggesting the opportuneness of collaboration on species of common interest.

During the meeting a presentation on CMS and its related agreements was given by a CMS representative, focussing on institutional aspects, species of interest, mechanisms of the Convention and the Agreements and potential relevance to the Regional Seas Programme. Several participants expressed interest in the possibility of undertaking joint initiatives with CMS, particularly in the identification and funding of conservation projects, and sought further information on the best way to approach the Convention for cooperation.

The meeting programme included a marine mammal workshop. This was organized as a brainstorming session in which options on the development of the UNEP's Marine Mammal Action Plan (MMAP) were discussed. The majority of views advocated a modernized and better resourced MMAP. Of relevance to CMS, several participants indicated the CMS Secretariat as the best placed body to play a secretariat/coordinating role for a revised MMAP in the event that UNEP were not in a position to continue to do it. Besides participating in the workshop, the CMS Secretariat also contributed a paper on the role of CMS and activities in the conservation of marine mammals.

In parallel to the meeting, consultations were held among representatives of the secretariats of interested conventions and programmes on action to be taken and the allocation of responsibility to face the critical situation of most species or populations of sturgeons, particularly in the Caspian Sea area. Initiatives in the short term are expected to be taken for the Caspian region within the framework of the CITES Animal Committee and the Caspian Environment Programme. A more global role in the conservation of these species throughout their range was acknowledged for CMS, which presently includes 18 sturgeon species in its Appendix II.

Oryx dammah; © D. Joffe, BIOS

France approves Gazelle Project

by Roseline Beudels-Jamar de Bolsee, Institut Royal des Sciences Naturelles de Belgique

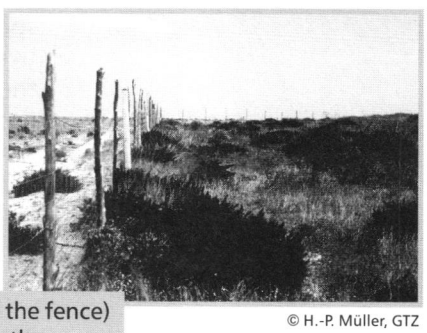
Natural phenomena and anthropogenic factors have taken their toll in recent years on the fauna of the Sahelo-Saharan region, already under pressure from unsustainable levels of hunting. Declining numbers of herbivores have also had repercussions for the entire ecosystem, because of their important role in maintaining vegetation structures. Wars, encroachments by human settlements, expanding agriculture and mineral exploitation coupled with severe drought have had a serious effect on the populations of larger animals, especially antelopes. Good rainy seasons in 1998 and 1999 have created ideal conditions for attempts to reestablish the animals and there is a growing realisation that the presence of interesting species in the region's protected areas and national parks could be an important factor in attracting visitors in the growing eco-tourism sector.

This is the background to a CMS-backed conservation project which has just been approved for funding under the French World Environment Fund — *Fonds Français pour l'Environnement Mondial* (FFEM) — to implement an Action Plan to restore and conserve Sahelo-Saharan antelopes. The project will cover the range of six large ungulate species: Scimitar-horned Oryx *(Oryx dammah),* Addax *(Addax nasomaculatus),* Dama Gazelle *(Gazella dama),* Slender-horned Gazelle, *(Gazella leptoceros),* Cuvier's Gazelle *(Gazella cuvieri)* and Dorcas Gazelle *(Gazella dorcas)* across fourteen countries: Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Mauritania, Senegal, Mali, Niger, Chad, Sudan, Burkina Faso, Nigeria and Ethiopia.

The four main objectives of the project are:

- to set up institutional, regulatory and human frameworks to enable key elements of Sahelo-Saharan biodiversity to be conserved and restored;
- to preserve the last vestiges of natural environments and to restore habitats on the basis of historic data;
- to involve local communities in conservation work, linking it to socio-economic development and efforts to combat desertification;
- to develop environmentally friendly tourism and promote sustainable use of natural resources.

Key to the success of the project is the participation of a number of European and North American zoos which are providing captive-bred stock to be released into protected areas within the historic range of the species concerned. Research elements of the project will also augment the level of understanding of how the species interact with their habitat and more particularly how they have adapted to survive in such extreme conditions. As is the case with all such international efforts, enhanced working relationships among experts in the countries involved through pooling ideas and sharing experiences will be another invaluable benefit.



Contrast between grazed land (right of the fence) and non-grazed land (left) after 18 months

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UNGULATES

Reintroduction Programme of the Scimitar-Horned Oryx to Sidi Toui National Park, Tunisia

by Renata Molcanová (Zoological Garden Bratislava, Slovak Republic) and Simon Wakefield (Marwell Zoological Park, UK)

The conservation status of a multitude of species of plants and animals is in many cases critical, and many have been lost forever. Conservationists are alarmed by the increasing rate of species extinction. However, there are species which still exist thanks to captive breeding. The role of the zoos has moved from being not only a place for entertainment or re-creation, but, more importantly, to being centres for research and conservation. The ultimate goal of conservation through captive breeding is to restore species to their historic range through reintroduction activities. Restoration and reintroduction programmes of single species of plants and animals are becoming more frequent around the world (IUCN, 1998). Some succeed, many fail, but all should be carried out with scientific rigour and within the framework of national and international action plans.

© R. Molcanová & S. Wakefield

Hand-reared male of a Sender-horned gazelle

One of the most recent reintroduction projects has been devoted to the Scimitar-horned Oryx (*Oryx dammah*) - a semi-desert antelope species classified as critically endangered (IUCN Red List of Threatened Animals,1996) and which is included in the *Action Plan for Sahelo-Saharan Antelope and Gazelle* (CMS, 1999).

This project is being carried out under the umbrella of the Bonn Convention, with funding from the Flemish Ministry of the Environment. The project has been coordinated by the authors, with Marwell Zoological Park (UK) and the Zoological Garden of Bratislava (Slovakia) as the executing agencies and representatives of EAZA/EEP (the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria/European Endangered Species Programme).

The Tunisian co-partner is the Direction Generale des Forêts. This international co-operation brought together 14 oryx from 6 zoos in 5 countries; as an extension of the main aims, and an additional 2 female slender-horned gazelle (*Gazella leptoceros*) from a seventh zoo were included to establish an *in-situ* captive breeding group with a wild-caught male.

Each reintroduction is generally a long-term activity requiring the commitment of financial and political support in addition to the efforts of several specialist organisations and experts. In Spring 1999 after almost two years of preparation all the animals were transported to Sidi Toui National Park in Tunisia. The park, 6135ha of desert steppe in the south of Tunisia, had no ungulates other than a small free-ranging population of dorcas gazelle (*Gazella dorcas*), and had previously been assessed by the authors as suitable to support an expanding population of oryx. The animals were chosen to be a genetically separate line to the existing population in Bou Hedma NP, where the first oryx were brought to Tunisia in 1985. Three other oryx were transferred to Oued Dekouk NP, to become the first oryx there, and one male to Bou Hedma National Park in order to increase the genetic base of the present population of 120 animals.

The planning, preparation and release stages followed *the IUCN Guidelines for Reintroductions* laid down by the IUCN/SSC Reintroduction Specialist Group.

(see next page)

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Procedures followed:

Forty-nine days after their arrival in Tunisia, during which time the animals acclimatised to their new conditions and were introduced to each other, they were released into the park. The group at that time consisted of one adult male and nine young and adult females. Intensive monitoring was conducted for 5 months after their release and since that time the authors have visited Sidi Toui two more times. The released group seems to be in good condition, and has produced seven calves, of which 5 have survived.

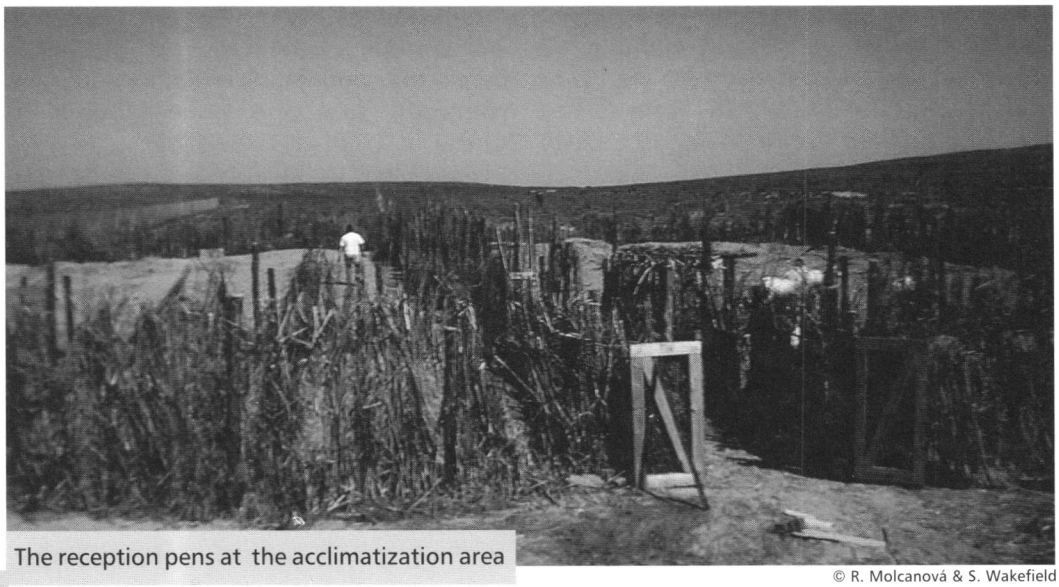
With a view to a longer-term development of reintroduction programmes in Tunisia, it was felt extremely valuable to continue and expand the training begun during the Sidi Toui project. As a continuation of the co-operation between our project and the DGF, it was proposed to hold workshops in Tunisia to address both theoretical and practical aspects of management of antelope and gazelle and to increase contacts between academics and those involved in day-to-day management. To cover the variety of issues involved, a two day workshop was held in Tunis in November 2000 for veterinarians, conservationists and several NGOs. The areas identified as being of importance were disease surveillance, monitoring of wild ungulates, and practical management techniques for antelope and gazelle species inhabiting national parks.

The first day of the workshop was attended by 60 veterinarians and other experts in the fields of toxicology, parasitology, pathology, and anatomy of ungulates and carnivores. Presentations were given on the project in Sidi Toui, genetic management of species, disease monitoring in wild ungulates and captive management. A report is being prepared by the DGF.

The second day was given over to conservationists of national parks and had a representative from almost every national park in Tunisia. It focused more on the practical aspects of management. A new dart gun with syringes and drugs for immobilisation was also presented at this workshop to the DGF by the authors for use in the national parks.

After two days of formal workshop sessions, groups of conservationists in three national parks (Bou Kornine, Bou Hedma and Sidi Toui) were given practical demonstrations of how to immobilise gazelle and oryx, and how to take samples and measurements. This included the immobilisation of two of the original animals sent to Sidi Toui, and will allow comparison of their present health parameters against their captive baseline condition.

Overall, the workshop, which was the first of its type to be held in Tunisia, was considered to be very successful and established contacts which will greatly assist future development of reintroduction programmes in Tunisia.



The reception pens at the acclimatization area

CMS and the Convention on Biological Diversity: Forging Synergies and a Joint Work Programme

Following the important decisions made at recent UN meeting of the General Assembly to improve collaboration and synergies among the environmental conventions, CMS and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) have engaged in an productive dialogue and process of active consultations.

Building up from previous CBD and CMS decisions and resolutions, at the last CBD COP (Nairobi 2000) a decision was made to invite the CMS to discuss in a joint and coordinated manner issues related to the importance of migratory species in biodiversity conservation and sustainable use efforts, and synergies between the CMS instruments and the CBD.

Therefore, at the forthcoming meeting of the CBD SBSTTA (March 2001 in Montreal), a key discussion will be held to consider the possible contents, structure and modalities of implementation of a proposed joint work programme which would foster collaboration, propose concrete lines of action for the conservation of migratory species while at the same time avoid unnecessary duplication of efforts and resources.

The proposed joint work programme will address areas of mutual interest for CMS and CBD and will include important matters such as protected areas, monitoring and assessment, indicators, sustainable use, and public education and awareness.

Furthermore, at its 22nd meeting (held in Bonn, 21-22 September, 2000), the CMS Standing Committee instructed the CMS Secretariat to cooperate with the CBD Secretariat to further develop the above-mentioned issues.

As a very important example of positive cooperation and synergies, and as a follow-up of the implementation of Decision III/21 of the CBD, two PDF B projects of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) have been approved for ecosystem-oriented projects focusing on migratory species as indicators. These are concrete examples of the potential and opportunities that synergies between these two important Conventions offer to the Governments and the international community committed to achieving progress in the conservation and sustainable use of migratory species.

Atlas of Wader Populations in Africa and Western Eurasia: an Update

Effective implementation of Agreements and Action Plans on the conservation of migratory (water)birds requires that detailed knowledge on geographical distribution of their populations is readily available. This includes information about population sizes and trends, migration routes and the networks of sites, critical for their survival. It is particularly important that the geographical distribution of each population are defined on a map, since these constitute the units on which the estimates of population size and 1% criteria, determination of trends and identification of key areas are based. For the ducks, geese and swans of the AEWA region, this information was compiled in the *Atlas of Anatidae Populations in Africa and Western Eurasia* (Wetlands International Publication No.41).

The Wader Study Group, as a specialist group of Wetlands International, is now preparing a similar publication on waders included by AEWA, the Atlas of Wader Populations in Africa and Western Eurasia. With substantial financial support from the Flemish Ministry of Environment and Agriculture and with additional contributions from the European Commission's Directorate General Environment, the Dutch Ministry of Agriculture, Nature Management and Fisheries, Alterra and the UK's Joint Nature Conservation Committee, introductory chapters and 39 species accounts have been written. A consultation draft, containing the texts for these species – 29 breeding in Eurasia and 10 Afro-tropical species – was presented at the first meeting of the Parties of AEWA in Cape Town, November 1999. Of the remaining 49 species, 29 live in Africa and 20 breed in Eurasia. Texts have been drafted for most of them and work on the maps is in progress.

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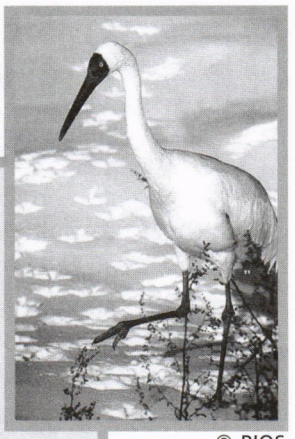
Year 2000 Report of Crane Specialist Group

By George Archibald and various members of the Crane Specialist Group



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North American Cranes

The rarest population of all cranes, the Whooping Crane of North America, reached an all-time high during the winter of 1999-2000. We now have 388 birds as follows: 188 in the migratory population between Canada and the USA, 3 in the Rocky Mountains, 106 in captivity, and 91 in the new non-migratory population in Florida. In March of 2000, one pair of cranes in Florida hatched two chicks, one of which has survived to date. This is the first production since the releases of captive birds in Florida began in 1993. Ten other pairs of cranes in Florida look promising. Water level in wetlands in Florida have been low the past two years. When normal water levels return, many pairs are expected to breed. Plans are being developed to use ultra-light aircraft starting in 2001 to establish a new migratory population that would breed in Wisconsin and winter in Florida.

The rarest subspecies of Sandhill Crane in North America, the Mississippi Sandhill, numbers approximately 110-120 birds and is sustained through annual releases of captive-reared cranes. This augmentation, plus the restoration of the native wet pine savanna habitat, has increased the number of breeding pairs of cranes from 9 in 1990 to 19 in 2000. In 1999, 1 juvenile fledged in the wild and 15 captive-produced cranes were released.

Since 1994, the Cuban Sandhill Crane, endemic to the main island and to the Isle of Youth, has been investigated by Xiomara Galvez and her colleagues at the Cuban Government's National Enterprise for the Protection of Flora and Fauna. Twelve populations have been located and the total population is estimated at 600 birds. Intensive research on the biology of the subspecies is now underway at Los Indios Nature Reserve on the Isle of Youth.

Asian Cranes

The State Forestry Administration (SFA) of China has launched an ambitious China Crane Survey, that will assess numbers, distribution, and habitats for cranes during breeding, migratory, and wintering periods. Given the size of China and its significance for cranes, this survey will provide invaluable information for crane and nature reserve management as well for designation of new nature reserves. In addition, strategies are needed for cranes outside protected areas. As part of the larger effort, Dr. Mary Anne Bishop, ICF Research Associate, assisted the SFA and Tibet Forestry Bureau in conducting a 12-day survey of wintering Black-necked Cranes in southcentral Tibet. The team counted 4,277 cranes, an increase of 9% over 3,910 cranes counted by Dr. Bishop in 1992.

The eastern population of Siberian Cranes appears to be holding at approximately 2500-3000 individuals. There are concerns, however, about high rates of human development and water diversion programs that might negatively impact wetlands in China that are critical to the survival of these cranes. Unfortunately, in the central population of Siberian Cranes, only a single pair returns to winter in Keoladeo National Park in India and to breeding grounds in western Siberia near Kunovat. In the western population, seven cranes including one juvenile were reported wintering in the waterfowl trapping complex near Fereydoon Kenar on the Caspian lowlands of Iran. At least a few other birds are believed to winter elsewhere.

The International Crane Foundation, the Convention on Migratory Species, and UNEP have received a PDF B grant from the Global Environment Facility (GEF) to protect a series of critical wetlands along the eastern and western flyways. The governments of China, Iran, Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation are actively supporting the program.

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This one-year grant is being used to prepare a project brief for a five-year program. The Siberian Crane will serve as a flagship species for globally significant wetland ecosystems used by migratory waterbirds. Activities will focus on legal protection, developing and implementing management plans, identifying and addressing threats, and involving local communities in conservation.

A flourishing captive population of Siberian Cranes has been established and many captive-produced birds and eggs are available for experimental release programs in western Asia.

Problems facing critical wetlands for four endangered species of cranes in northeast Asia are being addressed by the Northeast Asian Crane Site Network. The Site Network aims to encourage international cooperation on cranes and wetlands conservation, with a special focus on sites of importance as breeding, migratory, or wintering habitats of cranes. The Site Network currently involves 18 sites nominated by their respective countries (Russian Federation, Mongolia, China, North Korea, South Korea, and Japan). A Working Group has been established to guide activities of the Site Network, consisting of representatives of each of the six countries and three technical experts. Noritaka Ichida, Director of the International Center of the Wild Bird Society of Japan, chairs the Working Group, with assistance from the Crane Flyway Officer, Simba Chan. The Site Network and Working Group operate under guidance of an Asia-Pacific Migratory Waterbird Conservation Strategy, coordinated by the Asia Pacific Migratory Waterbird Conservation Committee.

The Working Group has held two meetings, one in Muraviovka Park in the Russia in Federation September 1998 and the second in Suncheon City, South Korea in February 2000; a handbook to guide crane research and monitoring at the network sites is about to be published, and a Northeast Asia Crane Action Plan has been prepared.

African Cranes

Carlos Bento of the Museum of Natural History in Mozambique is undertaking his M.Sc. research on the ecology and conservation of Wattled Cranes in the delta of the Zambezi River in Mozambique in cooperation with International Crane Foundation (ICF). Crane populations in the delta are affected by the altered flooding patterns caused by upstream dams. The research team discovered the only known breeding grounds of Wattled Cranes in Mozambique, and is working to link the conservation of this area to the management of floodwaters on the Zambezi River. Sociological surveys are now being made to determine the responses of local people to proposed reflooding of the delta through controlled releases from upstream dams.

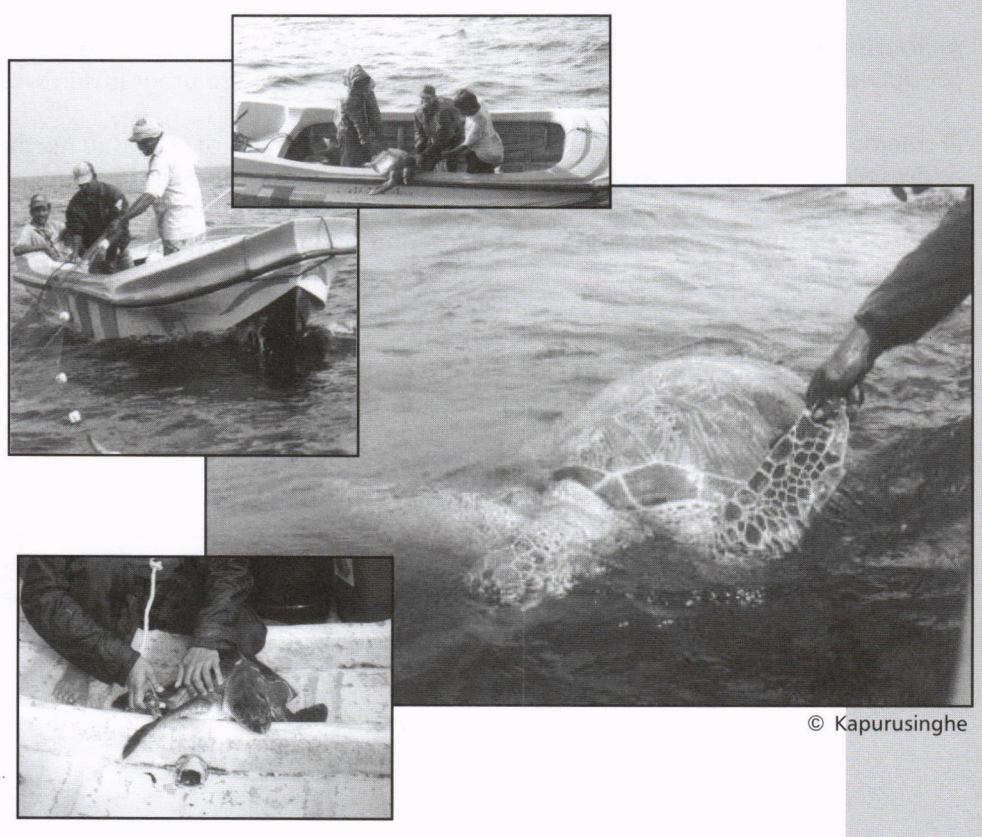
During the first half of 2000, ICF and Wetlands International undertook a first-ever international survey of Black Crowned Cranes in twenty nations throughout their range from Senegal to Ethiopia. The project includes aerial and ground surveys and questionnaires targeting all of the known (current or past) habitats of the Black Crowned Cranes. Emmanuel Williams, the Black Crowned Crane Program Coordinator, is compiling survey results and drafting a Black Crowned Crane Action Plan to promote the recovery of the species through follow-up field projects. In East Africa, Jimmy Muheebwa of Makerere University, Kampala, is conducting his M.Sc. research on the impact of land use activities on the breeding success of Grey Crowned Cranes in Uganda.

The South African Crane Working Group , under the aegis of the Endangered Wildlife Trust, coordinates conservation efforts in all 7 key crane regions in South Africa. This includes three regional crane groups, 6 full time field officers and joint programs with government conservation bodies. Education and awareness, habitat protection, research and monitoring programs focus on the conservation of Wattled, Grey Crowned and Blue Cranes in South Africa, including the release of captive-reared Wattled Cranes into remnant populations of wild conspecifics.

Turtle Conservation Project (TCP): By-catch Survey and Olive Ridley Tagging Programme in Sri Lanka

by Thushan Kapurusinghe, TCP leader

Five of the world's eight species of marine turtle come ashore to nest in Sri Lanka. Despite the protection of marine turtles by government legislation since 1972, marine turtles are still being exploited in Sri Lanka for their eggs and meat. One of the least understood and possibly most serious threats that face Sri Lanka's marine turtle popu-lations is incidental by-catch of marine turtles in fishing gear.



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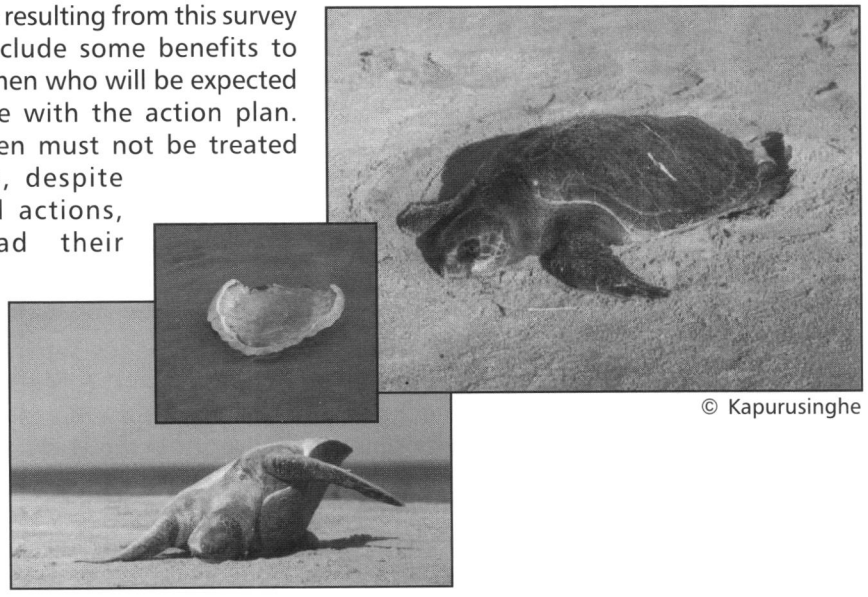
Marine turtle by-catch in Sri Lanka:
In 1986, Gunawardene estimated that in Kandakuliya, a small fishing village on the North West coast of Sri Lanka, approximately 10 turtles were landed and butchered per day. Perera witnessed the butchering of 16 turtles over a 3 day period in May of the same year, in Negombo, a fishing town approximately 110 km due south of Kandakuliya. Both these authors noted that the majority of turtles caught in that area were Olive Ridley turtles (*Lepidochelys olivacea*). In early 1994, staff of the Turtle Conservation Project (TCP) witnessed the butchering of 13 Olive Ridley turtles at Kandakuliya in one morning and found the recently butchered remains of 6 Olive Ridley turtles during another visit. When interviewed, local fishermen said that at least 20 turtles were butchered each week. If we take into account the observations of these authors and the TCP staff, it is quite feasible that the number of turtles landed and killed in Kandakuliya alone has possibly been over 1000 annually for the last 10 years.

Dattari and Samarajeewa revealed that turtle by-catch did not only occur in the North Western fishing communities of Sri Lanka. During their survey they found Olive Ridley turtle carapaces in almost every fishing community located along the Southern, South Western, Western and North Eastern coasts.

The fishermen who were interviewed throughout the island during their study confirmed that Olive Ridley turtles were often caught and drowned in their nets. Indeed, the fishermen were of the "unanimous opinion" that the mortality caused by their nets was the major cause for the decline in Olive Ridley turtle populations around the island. These results would therefore seem to indicate that there may have been a significant decline in Sri Lanka's Olive Ridley turtle populations and it would not be unreasonable to assume that by-catch in fishing gear is one of the main causes for this apparent decline.

TCP Marine turtle by-catch survey and Olive ridley tagging programme
However, before solutions can be found to minimise marine turtle by-catch in Sri Lanka, the extent and nature of this threat must be investigated. In 1999, TCP has initiated a marine turtle by-catch survey and Olive ridley tagging programme with the funding support from the CMS. The outputs of this programme will include an action plan to minimize the marine turtle by-catch in Sri Lanka, new information on marine turtle habitats within Sri Lankan territorial waters, and information regarding the geographical range of the Olive ridley turtles caught by Sri Lankan fishermen in the Gulf of Mannar.

During the TCP surveys, many fishermen stated that they would often kill entangled turtles and sell their flesh or carapaces in order to obtain enough "compensation" money to repair the damage that entangled turtles cause to their nets. Therefore, it is essential to the success of programmes resulting from this survey that they include some benefits to those fishermen who will be expected to cooperate with the action plan. The fishermen must not be treated like villains, despite their illegal actions, and instead their needs will be identified and addressed by the action plan.



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MEDITERRANEAN SEA TURTLE CONSERVATION IN EGYPT

by Dr. Moustafa Fouda, Director, Nature Conservation Sector, Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency (EEAA)

A workshop on Marine Turtle Biology and Conservation in the Mediterranean was held 13-16 November 2000 at the British Council in Cairo. The workshop is the culmination of a three-year Darwin Initiative Sea Turtle Project in Egypt, which was a collaborative initiative between Suez Canal University and the University of London. The project sought to enhance sea turtle conservation along the Egyptian Mediterranean coast through research, training and public awareness programs. Field surveys were conducted to locate nesting sites for sea turtles and assess the threats to the species. These surveys were the most comprehensive to date and found two nesting sites for sea turtles along the Egyptian Mediterranean coast, both in North Sinai; the largest inside and adjacent to the Zaranik Protected Area.

First Meeting of the Technical Committee of AEWA

The first Meeting of the Technical Committee of the African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) took place in Bonn from 23-24 October 2000. During this meeting several items were discussed as a follow-up to the First Session of the Meeting of the Parties, in Cape Town, last year.

The meeting elected Dr. Barry Taylor, representative of Southern Africa, as Chairman. Dr. Taylor will replace Mr. Yousoof Mungroo (Alternate for Southern Africa) who was elected as provisional Chairman in Cape Town for the period up to the first Meeting of the Technical Committee. Prof. Dr. Dan Munteanu, representative of Central Europe, was elected as Vice-Chairman.

Members of the Technical Committee discussed and reviewed during their meeting the following: the regions used for the Technical Committee; the format for national reports; implementation priorities for the years 2000-2004; the register of international projects; the establishment of a Small Conservation Grants Fund; amendments to the action plan; the conservation guidelines; the Brent Goose management plan; and phasing out lead shot in wetlands. In addition a representative of Tour-du-Valat (France) gave a presentation on the 'Colonial Waterbird Atlas'and a representative of Wetlands International (Africa, Europe & Middle East) explained the AEWA GEF project.

A second Meeting of the Technical Committee has been scheduled for next year. The representative of Northern Africa provisionally offered that his country (Egypt) would host the next meeting. It was agreed that the meeting should take place in October 2001.

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One more signature from a Mediterranean country is all that is required for ACCOBAMS to enter into force. A first Meeting of the Parties at the beginning of 2002 is therefore a real possibility.

As the text of the Convention envisages separate coordination units based on existing structures for activities in the Mediterranean and Black Sea, the Secretariat has been in contact with the Barcelona and Bucharest Conventions, which are responsible for biodiversity in the Mediterranean and Black Sea respectively. Initial discussions have been very positive.

The Secretariat has participated in the latest in a series of seminars on Mediterranean cetaceans held in Sète in February, again with the support of the French Environment Ministry, the Regional Activity Centre for Special Protected Areas (RAC/SPA) in Tunis and the Environmental Station for the Mediterranean Coast at Sète. One of the themes discussed was whale-watching.

The Secretariat also was part of a jury assessing a study entitled "The Role and Importance of Underwater Marine Canyons on the Continental Shelf for the Summer Distribution of Cetaceans in the North West Mediterranean". The study produced some interesting data for the cetacean sanctuary established in the Tyrrhenian and Ligurian Seas.

The Spanish authorities offered to set up a data-management centre to coordinate information concerning strandings in the Mediterranean, following a training seminar held in February and organised by RAC/SPA. Ajaccio in Corsica was the venue for a meeting of experts who discussed ways of developing technical instruments to assist the implementation of initiatives in specially protected areas. The third meeting of Conventions and regional seas programmes under UNEP took place in Monaco in November 2000.

A promotional educational poster on ACCOBAMS has been produced by ICRAM, the Italian Central Institute for Applied Marine Research. The illustrations were provided by Mr. Demma, a well-known artist in this field.

Agreements

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There was general agreement at both the 7th Meeting of the Advisory Committee to ASCOBANS (Bruges, Belgium, 16 – 18 March 2000) and the Third Meeting of Parties to ASCOBANS (Bristol, UK, 26 – 28 July 2000) that further measures were needed to promote ASCOBANS objectives in the Baltic region. Thus it was agreed that the ASCOBANS Baltic Discussion Group (ABDG) should finalize its work and that a workshop aimed at drafting a recovery plan for harbour porpoises in the Baltic Sea should be organized.

The ABDG, which was established in February 1998 to assess research needs and options for the Baltic Sea, will now convene for a final meeting in Charlottenlund, Denmark, from 24 – 26 January 2001. Its report will be considered by the 8th Meeting of the Advisory Committee to ASCOBANS in April 2001 and will provide valuable input for the process of elaborating the recovery plan.

Remaining in the Baltic Sea area:
The ASCOBANS exhibition "Harbour Porpoise in Distress" was successfully shown at Hel Marine Station near Gdansk, Poland from mid-June to mid-November of this year. Located at the tip of Hel Peninsula, Hel is a popular Polish vacation center. During the summer season, Hel Marine Station, which is well worth a stop for its sealarium and informative visitors' center dealing with Baltic marine wildlife, counted an average of 3000 visitors a day, who were able to see the English version of the exhibition. In addition, the exhibition proved useful in teaching 600 students between the ages of 10 and 18, studying harbour porpoises and other small cetaceans as part of the Polish "Blue School" programme, a special project aimed at informing young people about the marine environment. A Polish version of the exhibition is currently being prepared and will be permanently on display at the visitors' center as of the end of this year. Hel Marine Station, which also collects all information about harbour porpoises on the Polish coast, can be contacted at: Hel Marine Station, P.O.B. 37, Morska 2, PL 84-150 Hel, Poland. Tel: + 48 58 6750 836, Fax: + 48 58 6750 420, Email: sekhel@univ.gda.pl

"International Year of the Bat" in 2001

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Noting the fact that the year 2001 marks the 10th anniversary of the signing of the Agreement on the Conservation of Bats in Europe (EUROBATS), the 3rd Session of the Meeting of Parties (Bristol, UK, July 2000) decided to declare the year 2001as the "International Year of the Bat". During the past ten years the Agreement has very successfully given impetus to efforts to promote bat conservation, to combat prejudices commonly held about bats and to raise public awareness, particularly through the European Bat Nights and similar events.

But bats in other parts of the world also need protection. Therefore the Parties to EUROBATS would like to encourage countries in other continents to work towards the conclusion of similar Agreements.

The Parties to the Agreement as well as the Non-Party Range States are called upon to make additional efforts in 2001 to promote bat conservation and public awareness of the problems facing bats. Interested States beyond Europe are also invited to initiate or continue as appropriate collaborative conservation and public awareness campaigns to help improve the conservation status of all bat species worldwide.

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Common Seals in the Wadden Sea in 2000

In 2000, under the framework of the Trilateral Wadden Sea Co-operation again coordinated counts of common seals in the entire Wadden Sea were carried out. During simultaneous aerial surveys, the following results were obtained. The maximum total number of counted seals amounted to about 17,000, of which 2,140 were counted in Denmark, 6,300 in Schleswig-Holstein, Germany, 5,230 in Lower Saxony, Germany and 3,330 in the Netherlands. The total maximum number of pups counted was 3,610. The percentage of pups per total number is similar to the average of 20% found in preceding years. The increase in the total number compared to last year's is about 13%, but the increase is not the same in all areas. Particularly in Denmark, the increase seems to have leveled off in 1999 and 2000. It has to be mentioned that adverse weather conditions through extended periods hampered surveys in some areas. Particularly, the maximum figure for Schleswig-Holstein, Germany is less complete than in other areas and therefore the total maximum number in that area had to be extrapolated. The surveys next year may show whether this was a good expert's estimate.

The observed increase between 1998 and 1999 was 6%. This has been lower than the average 13% found in the years since the virus-epidemic in 1988. This low increase prompted questions about the possibility whether this was the start of a change in the population trend observed so far, or just a one-off event. Lower pup production and/or higher pup mortality were discussed as possible factors explaining the lower increase. At the time, it was not possible to conclude about a possible change in trend.

Under the assumption that the estimated number for Schleswig-Holstein is a roughly correct estimate, the survey results lead to the conclusion that the increase this year has been similar to the average annual increase of 12-13% found from 1989 onwards. However, the numbers observed this year are lower than predicted if the increase from 1989 onwards had continued. Although at present the question of what could have caused the lower increase last year remains unsolved, it is clear that the strong population growth of the last decennium has continued, but at a slightly lower rate than before. Surveys in the coming years will elucidate in which direction the seal population develops.

The Trilateral Seal Expert Group within the framework of the Trilateral Wadden Sea Cooperation is conformed by::

DK: Svend Tougaard, Fiskeri-og Søfartsmuseet, Esbjerg
SH: Ursula Siebert, Kai Abt, FTZ Büsum der Univ. Kiel
Nds: Ekkehard Vareschi, Universität Oldenburg
NL: Peter H. Reijnders, Sophie Brasseur, Alterra Coastal Zone Research Team, Texel

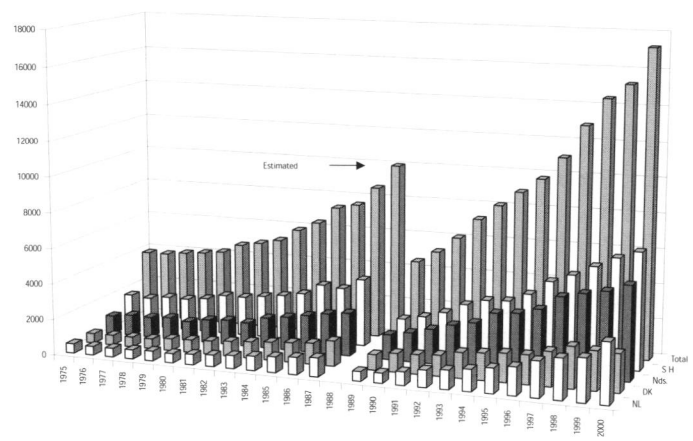


Figure: Number of counted common seals in the Wadden Sea since 1975.

NEWS

News from the Secretariat

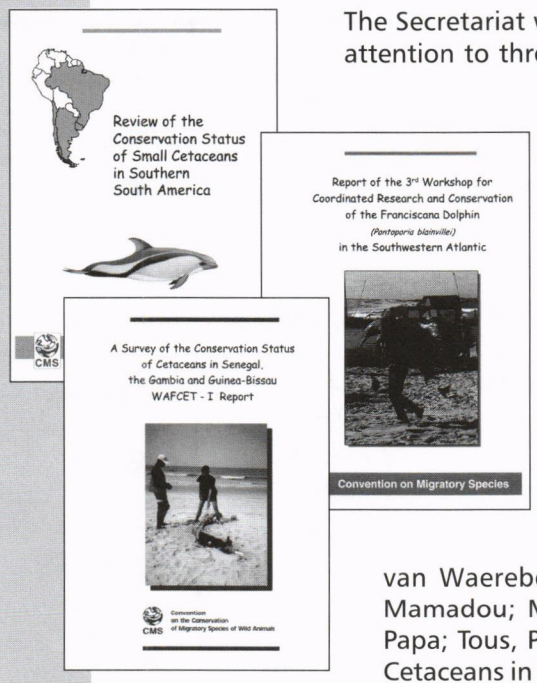
The CMS Secretariat is pleased to introduce its three new staff members

Marco Barbieri (Italy) joins the Secretariat as Scientific and Technical Support Officer. He will be mainly responsible for keeping in contact with, and facilitating the work of the CMS Scientific Council and for projects funded through the CMS Trust Fund. A Marine Biologist, he has in the past worked as a research assistant in the Institute of Zoology of the Genoa University, freelance consultant for the private sector and Programme Officer in the Mediterranean Action Plan of UNEP.

Jasmin Kanza: (Tanzania) The newly recruited Administrative and Fund Management Officer picked up the reins on September 4th, 2000 where Bothena Bendahmane left just over a year ago. Her wide experience of UN procedures brings in a new impetus in the development of the Common Administrative Unit and the overall administration and fund management support to the Agreements Unit and the Secretariat.

Beatriz Torres (Peru) has joined the Secretariat as the Information and Capacity Building Officer, she is also responsible for the projects in Latin America and the Caribbean. She is a biologist (behavioral ecologist) and has done extensive research on endangered mammals and bird species in the Peruvian Amazon. In addition to persuing research and conservation activities in Peru, Beatriz brings in the experience of recently working in the Clearing House Mechanism of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

New Publications



The Secretariat would like to take the opportunity to draw the readers' attention to three new publications which are available free of charge from the CMS Secretariat. They can also be downloaded from the CMS website in a PDF format: http://www.wcmc.org.uk/cms/cms_pub.htm

UNEP/CMS 2000. Report of the Third Workshop for Coordinated Research and Conservation of the Franciscana Dolphin (*Pontoporia blainvillei*) in the Southwestern Atlantic. Bonn, Germany, 112 pages.

Hucke-Gaete, Rodrigo, (ed): Review of the Conservation Status of Small Cetaceans in Southern South America. UNEP/CMS Secretariat, Bonn, Germany. 24 pages.

van Waerebeek, Koen; Ndiaye Edouard; Djiba, Abdoulaye; Diallo Mamadou; Murphy, Paul; Jallow Alpha, Camara, Almamy; Ndiaye, Papa; Tous, Phillippe. 2000 A Survey of The Conservation Status of Cetaceans in Senegal, The Gambia and Guinea-Bissau. UNEP/CMS Secretariat, Bonn, Germany. 80 pages.

ALBATROSS AGREEMENT - NEGOTIATIONS IN CAPE TOWN

Following the most constructive meeting held in Hobart, Tasmania in July 2000 (reported on in Bulletin 11), the next - and hopefully final - stage of the negotiation process for an Agreement on Albatrosses and Petrels of the Southern Hemisphere is set to take place in Cape Town, South Africa 27 January-2 February 2001.

Environment Australia, Dr John Cooper of the University of Cape Town Avian Demography Unit and the CMS Secretariat will be collaborating over the organisation of the Meeting, which will comprise two days discussing the draft Action Plan and five days of the negotiation meeting proper, when both the Action Plan and the text of the Agreement will be discussed.

Buller's Albatross, © BIOS

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

DATES	TITLE	VENUE	ORGANISED BY
11 - 22 December	UNCCD: 4th COP	Bonn, Germany	CCD
	2001		
27 January - 2 February	Negotiation Meeting of the Albatrosses Agreement	Cape Town, South Africa	MOE, RSA, Env. Australia
13 - 15 January	BirdLife International - Regional Meeting	Bahrain	BirdLife
5 - 9 February	21st Session of the Governing Council	Nairobi, Kenya	UNEP
22 - 28 February	21st Annual Symposium on Sea Turtle Biology and Conservation	Philadelphia	Drexel University
19 - 21 March	6th Meeting of the Advisory Committee to UNEP/EUROBATS	Sintra, Portugal	EUROBATS
2 - 5 April	8th Meeting of the Advisory Committee to UNEP/ASCOBANS	West Jutland, Denmark	ASCOBANS
2 - 4 May	CMS 10th Scientific Council Meeting	Edinburgh, Scotland	CMS
5 -12 June	International Workshop on the Conservation of Wetlands & its Wise Use	Korla City, China	WI - China Programme
5 - 9 August	12th International Bat Research Conference	Bangi, Malaysia	IUCN/CSG
October (tentative)	Technical Committee Meeting of AEWA	Cairo, Egypt	AEWA
	2002		
11 - 17 August	23rd International Ornithological Congress	Beijing, China	
1 - 15 September	CMS COP 7 (including AEWA MOP 2)	Bonn, Germany	CMS / AEWA