



Contents

Editorial	1
26th CMS Standing Committee Meeting	2
News from the Secretariat	3
Species News	
• Fur trade and the Snow leopard in Afghanistan	4
• Migration patterns and habitat usage of White sharks tagged in California	6
• Tracking turtles in West Africa	8
• The Atlantic humpback dolphin: in retreat?	10
• Using satellite telemetry to track Wild Bactrian camels	12
• Asiatic wild ass in Mongolia	14
• Using Saiga antelope conservation to improve rural livelihoods	16
• Conservation of the White-headed duck in Central Asia	18
• UK Government decides to eradicate the Ruddy duck	19
CMS Agreements	
• Ecuador ratifies ACAP	20
• ACCOBAMS First Scientific Meeting Follow-up	21
• ASCOBANS: laying the groundwork for "Esbjerg"	22
• EUROBATS heading for MOP4	22
• Phocine distemper virus outbreak among seals in 2002	23
Memoranda	
• Siberian Crane Wetlands Project: flyway level co-ordination	24
• IOSEA: New CMS office established in Bangkok	25
• Urgent action for Aquatic warbler	25
Co-operation	
• CMS invited to join Millenium Ecosystem Assignment: experts needed	26
• First JWP concluded between Wetlands International, CMS and AEWA	27
New Projects	
• Studies of aquatic habitats as a basis for conservation of wetlands at Poyang Lake, China	28
• CMS funded project on Saffron-cowled blackbird just started	28
• Survey of the Marine otter and Humboldt penguin populations in Peru	29
Meetings	
• COFI-25: CMS addresses fisheries-migratory species interactions	30
• SPREP Workshop on Regional Marine Mammal Conservation and the CMS	30
New Parties	
• Bolivia 81 st Party to CMS	31
• Cape Verde foreign minister pays visit to CMS	31
New Publication	32
Calendar of Events	32

GOOD NEWS FOR ANTELOPES AND AQUATIC WARBLERS - JOINT ACTION FOR MIGRATORY SPECIES

Busy times for CMS. Ongoing habitat destruction and unsustainable use of wildlife are pushing species further towards extinction. The case of the Aquatic warbler, an extremely endangered bird species, was addressed at an intergovernmental meeting in Minsk, Belarus. Thanks to the Environment Ministry of Belarus, BirdLife International and the constructive work of the representatives of the Range States, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and Action Plan for the Aquatic warbler was concluded on 30 April.

Migratory species conservation issues must be given more focus across the globe. Africa is clearly a continent with a traditional focus for CMS. Increasing human population, unsustainable land use, droughts, desertification and excessive hunting are negative factors, while law enforcement is a problem because of the vast distances involved. These factors contribute to dramatic declines of Sahelo-Saharan antelopes. Five years after the conclusion of an Action Plan and the "Djerba Declaration" (Tunisia, 1998), a CMS-based meeting of the Range States took place in Agadir, Morocco, at the beginning of May - with good results (see insert).

Conservation versus utilisation?

All global biodiversity-oriented conventions, including CMS, aim at the "conservation and management" of migratory species and their habitat. CMS prioritises restoration of species to a favourable conservation status in order to allow, where applicable, their sustainable use thereafter.

However, some authorities, organisations and individuals seem to have a very different understanding of what CMS actually is. A while ago, the official representative of a CMS non-Party country called CMS "a protectionist convention". And only recently, somebody expressed embarrassment about the author of this article suggesting in an alleged fundraising letter that antelopes in Northern Africa would qualify for the

development of tourism, even for subsistence and sport hunting, once the species had completely recovered in their historical areas of distribution. Both views are wrong. And the individual quoted above is recommended to read the preface to the Djerba Action Plan for the Sahelo-Saharan Antelopes.

Human activities will continue to put a considerable proportion of biodiversity at serious risk. A number of flagship species have recovered in some of their distribution areas thanks to enormous efforts of Range and supporting State authorities, IGOs and NGOs. However, there is evidence of a large number of species suffering from over-exploitation. In some African regions, e.g. Elephants, Gorillas, Antelopes, Wildebeests, Zebras and Buffalos are the "raw material" for bushmeat, while hunting and poaching is posing a severe threat to Saiga antelopes in Central Asia, Antelopes in Northern Africa and Houbaras throughout Asia and Africa. There is no excuse for State authorities to allow overexploitation of their countries' natural resources. World-wide, nature will always be the basis for our survival and wellbeing. Every species is an irreplaceable component, and every lost species an option less for food supply, medical care or technical progress.

I would like to draw the reader's attention to the growing number of external experts who write articles for the CMS Bulletin, providing their knowledge to governments, IGOs, NGOs, scientists and journalists who are increasingly using the CMS instruments. This is the right place to thank these experts.

Busy times for the CMS Secretariat's staff, especially since CMS has not been able to advertise any open post owing to a new UN recruitment system. Therefore a number of CMS projects are in delay. I am confident that the CMS Focal Points and co-operating organisations will find out which ones.

Arnulf Müller-Helmbrecht, Executive Secretary

26th CMS STANDING COMMITTEE MEETING

The forthcoming 26th Meeting of the CMS Standing Committee will take place in Bonn, Germany, from 17 to 18 July. It will address some key issues for the Convention including the Secretariat report on inter-sessional activities since COP7 as well as reports from Standing Committee members, working groups, Agreement secretariats and observers. CMS administrative and institutional matters dealing with the CMS Headquarters Agreement and Secretariat legal personality will also be discussed. Furthermore, collaboration with other organisations and conventions, namely UNCCD, CITES and IUCN and preparations with regard to the CMS 25th Anniversary are on the agenda.

The CMS Standing Committee will review the current status of the CMS Trust Fund contributions, CMS budget and resources and matters arising from CMS COP7 Resolutions and Recommendations. Scientific Council topics will be re-examined as they relate to the work of the Standing Committee. Finally, the date and venue of the next meetings of the Conference of the Parties, the Scientific Council and the Standing Committee will be discussed.

Douglas Hykle, long-time Deputy Head of the Secretariat, has been appointed Coordinator of the Memorandum of Understanding concerning Conservation Measures for Marine Turtles of the Indian Ocean and South-East Asia (IOSEA). He has been establishing CMS's first outposted office within the UNEP Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (ROAP), Bangkok, since early April. The new CMS office will be the focal point for the implementation of the IOSEA MOU. At a reception in his honour, Douglas noted: "The important work of the Convention on Migratory Species will benefit from having a regional presence, which the Bangkok office will bring." This would be very welcome, not least in terms of increased membership in the Convention in Asia.

The entire CMS Secretariat team takes this opportunity to thank Douglas for his support, commitment, hard work and substantive guidance for the benefit of the Convention. He takes with him all our wishes.

Anja Pauls terminated her successful work in January as Associate Information Officer at the Bonn office of the United Nations Information Centre Bonn, just one floor below the CMS Secretariat. Ms. Pauls agreed to join CMS with a fixed-term appointment in March 2003. She is going to deal with a few targeted information issues, especially the preparations for the 25th anniversary of the Bonn Convention next year and the further development of information tools.

We all thank **Dirk Hendricks** who had been working with CMS for more than a year on various projects. He set up the first picture database and updated the CMS PowerPoint presentation material both of which are essential tools of CMS information policy. Moreover, he organised the concept and production of a new common exhibition of CMS and the Agreements. It was on display for the first time at the COP7 in September 2002. He is now helping some of the Agreement Secretariats with their organisation of Committee meetings and MOPs. We wish him all the best for his future in an international environment.

Bernd Bruhns joined CMS for a short-term commitment especially to work on the COP Proceedings. He made a major contribution to the time consuming-process of formatting the Proceedings. Without his support we would not have been able to post the Proceedings, including a large number of country reports, on the CMS web site. We hope that he will soon find a new assignment in his preferred area of work.

Ephraim Kariuki has been working with United Nations Office at Nairobi (UNON) in the Budget and Financial Management Service for approximately 20 years. At present, he is on secondment for one year in UNEP/CMS focusing on the budgetary and financial matters of the Secretariat. With his experience of the UN financial regulations, his work ethos and team spirit, he is an asset for the common service unit for CMS and Agreement Secretariats.

Markus Losi was contracted as a consultant in Finance and Administration in December 2002. His main task was to provide financial service for the AEWA and ASCOBANS Secretariats and handling the obligations reports to the HQ. Furthermore, he assisted an expert from the HQ with the implementation of the new Financial System and helped his colleagues with his German language skills. We thank him for his support and wish him a lot of success for the future.

The recruitment of new professional staff has been delayed due to the introduction of the new "Galaxy" recruitment system. Work capacity and internal work organisation will not reach full performance levels before early 2004.

FUR TRADE AND THE SNOW LEOPARD IN AFGHANISTAN

By Charudutt Mishra

A casual walk through the Chicken Street Market in Kabul is enough for one to realise that a very lucrative trade in wildlife pelts exists in Afghanistan. At least half a dozen shops here are trading exclusively in pelts, and an equal number deal in addition to carpets and handicrafts. The main species in trade are the Common leopard, Wolf, Lynx, Foxes, and the endangered Snow leopard (*Uncia uncia*). Additionally, pelts of numerous smaller mammals such as otters and small cats are also being traded. Is it true that the international community in Afghanistan is responsible for the thriving fur market on Chicken Street? Easy to find out. Pretend to be a prospective buyer and ask the fur-dealers a few casual questions. They will be only too happy to tell you that their main customers are the soldiers of the international security assistance force and workers of the international aid agencies. Ironically, the international community, the same people who are there to help rebuild Afghanistan, are helping wipe out its magnificent wildlife to extinction.

Like most serious conservation issues, however, the problem is more complex than this. It is important to take a closer look at the issue, perhaps from the perspective of the Afghan who is directly or indirectly involved in the trade. Let us begin with the thirteen-year-old boy who runs his father's shop, one of the several small nondescript shops in the bustling Faizabad bazaar in northern Afghanistan. The little shop is reasonably priced and well stocked with a variety of commodities – matchboxes, cooking oil, salt and spices, buttons for your torn shirt, detergent, batteries, little plastic toys and a lot more. Mostly harmless, daily household use items. The three shining Iranian made shot-guns prominently displayed in the shop, however, are no harmless plastic toys. Pay the boy US\$ 50 and you can become the owner of one of these lethal weapons, go to the mountains and hunt chukar, ibex, and even a Snow leopard. Not that you really need to buy a weapon in Faizabad to go hunting; most villages even in the remotest corners of Afghanistan are awash with arms, thanks to the three decades of relentless conflict and civil strife.

Drive east from Faizabad on a battered road for two days and you will reach the quiet and remote Wakhan Corridor, a stark contrast to the busy streets of Faizabad. Wakhan is amongst the poorest areas anywhere, its population afflicted with extreme poverty, chronic food insecurity, and opium addiction among a cross-section of the society. The *Wakhi* agro-pastoral people, who scratch out a living in the harsh landscape of the Hindukush and the Pamirs, depend heavily on livestock as the most important source of

protein, cash, wool, and other products and services. Hunting ibex, urial and partridges – all natural prey of the Snow leopard – also provides valuable protein supplements.



Young boy selling shotguns in Faizabad.

As the prey populations get wiped out by relentless hunting, the Snow leopards increasingly take to killing livestock, intensifying the conflict between people and wild predators. Arms are in plenty, and whenever people get a chance, Snow leopards are shot or hacked, not really to make money from the fur trade, but largely in retaliation against livestock losses. After killing the predator, the hunters preserve the pelt, which eventually finds its way to Chicken Street through itinerant traders. The few tens of dollars that the trader pays the local hunter is more money than what the latter would be able to earn in a whole year. The commission that the trader himself gets from the fur-dealer is an attractive bonus. As the demand for pelts increases, the more enterprising fur-dealers send their own people to procure pelts directly from the hunters. The market is lucrative; the fur-dealer can sell the pelt for two to twenty times the amount that the local hunter is paid for it. This lethal market is rapidly spreading its tentacles, and killing Snow leopards, formerly an act of desperation and retaliation, is swiftly transforming into a business enterprise. For the record, the fur trade is not new to Afghanistan. In the 1960s, there was a sizeable market for furs that supplied the local tourist market, as well as markets in Western Europe and United States. In 1973, the Afghan Government issued a ban on the sale of carnivore furs. The market continued despite the ban, and in the mid 1970s, almost all the provincial centres of Afghanistan, not just Kabul, were trading in fur. This market apparently died down in the years of conflict following the Russian invasion in 1979. The market was again not much in evidence in Kabul during the *Mujahideen* era or the Taliban years, although it did perhaps continue on a low key. The recent influx of foreigners has given this dying market a new life.

Do the Snow leopard and Afghanistan's other magnificent wildlife have any future? First and foremost, the international community needs to be made more aware, answerable, and responsible. Curtailing the fur trade has to become the top priority for wildlife conservation, and there is perhaps no better way of doing it than by removing the demand. However, let us be very clear that this will not be enough. It is absolutely essential that community development programmes in Afghanistan incorporate environmental concerns. People already on the brink of starvation are bearing heavy costs inflicted by wildlife. These costs need to be offset by addressing human-wildlife conflicts. Wildlife conservation needs to start benefiting the Afghan people. Perhaps no other place is as much in need of long-term commitment and financial assistance from the international conservation community as Afghanistan is today. And only this commitment and assistance can secure the future of the Snow leopard in Afghanistan.

The author is an ecologist at the Nature Conservation Foundation, India, and Director of the India Program of the International Snow Leopard Trust, USA. He has been involved in post-conflict environmental assessments in Afghanistan as a consultant to the United Nations Environment Programme.

Editor's note

Norbert van Heyst, Lieutenant General of the German-Dutch Corps of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), the peacekeeping mission in Afghanistan sanctioned by the UN Security Council, has issued an order enforcing an ISAF ban on all purchases of pelt and other body parts of the Snow leopard and other endangered species.

The CMS Secretariat is pleased to host an article that shows the impact armed conflicts have on migratory animals, especially on the Snow leopard in Afghanistan. Snow leopards live in border regions, where mountain chains make up the boundary between states. Populations often extend over several countries. Therefore transboundary co-operation is critical to the Snow leopard's survival.

The Snow leopard is listed in CMS Appendix I. COP7 designated it for concerted action. Tajikistan was invited by the Scientific Council to lead the concerted action, which should bring further international attention to the plight of the Snow leopard. For example, it may result in CMS-supported research or conservation projects. The concerted action in turn could be anchored by a CMS agreement developed and implemented by the Range States. In its Post-Conflict Environment Assessment (par. 118 (d)) UNEP recommended that Afghanistan ratifies relevant biodiversity-related conventions inc. CMS, mentioning the Snow leopard among the threatened species. The report can be downloaded from www.unep.org under "Publications".

MIGRATION PATTERNS AND HABITAT USAGE OF WHITE SHARKS TAGGED IN CALIFORNIA

By *Andre M. Boustany and Kevin C. Weng*

For anyone who has ever seen a White shark (*Carcharodon carcharias*) face to face, the notion that it may need protection from us seems unfathomable. The sheer size, speed and power of these animals make them appear invulnerable, especially to creatures as out of place in the ocean environment as humans. But in addition to these traits, White sharks also possess beauty, grace and mystery. It is mystery and lack of understanding that may pose the greatest threat to the White shark. That mystery extends to many aspects of White shark biology, and we must improve our understanding of this species if proper management strategies are to be enacted. Knowledge of life history parameters, population dynamics and movement patterns is essential in understanding the potential threats that White sharks may face. Like most sharks, this species is slow to mature, is long lived and has a low reproductive output. These traits make it especially susceptible to any increases in mortality, either human-induced or otherwise. In addition, lack of knowledge regarding movement patterns will make it difficult to assess potential threats such as fishery interactions or depletion of food resources. Until recently, collecting information on the movement patterns of a submerged animal, which could not be directly observed, had not been possible.

Recent advances in tracking technology have helped to shed light on some important unknowns in White shark biology. Our group has been tagging White sharks off the central California coast since 1999 with pop-up archival transmitting (PAT) tags. These tags record the depth of the animal, the temperature of the water and light intensity. Light level data allow us to reconstruct the times of sunrise and sunset, which, in conjunction with sea surface temperature measured by the tag, give an estimate of geolocation of the tagged animal, allowing us to see where it went for the duration of the track. At a pre-programmed time, these tags detach from the shark and transmit summaries of stored data to satellites, which then send the data to scientists in the lab. To date, 14 of these tags have been successfully deployed and returned data on the behaviour, habitat preference and migration patterns of White sharks.



White shark

© Burney LeBoeuf

The main question we were hoping to answer was, where do the sharks go when they are not prowling the shores near the seal and sea-lion colonies of the Farallon and Año Nuevo Islands? White sharks are present at these sites from late summer to early winter but absent at other times of the year. Conventional wisdom has long held that white sharks were primarily coastal animals, but our tagging results showed us a lifestyle reaching far into the open ocean. One shark travelled from central California to Hawaii in a period of approximately 30 days, highlighting the speed at which these sharks can travel between distant coasts. These results corroborated other earlier genetic findings that showed movement of White sharks between South Africa and Tasmania. An even more surprising finding from our tagging data was the extent to which White sharks use the open ocean, not only as a highway between distant coastal zones, but as an important habitat itself. All other White sharks tracked for prolonged periods spent eight months or more per year in the pelagic ocean, hundreds to thousands of miles from land in a region of the subtropical eastern Pacific. During this time, White sharks exhibited deep diving (up to 700 metres) and experienced a large range in temperatures (4-26 degrees C). It remains unclear why these sharks travel to this area, but the extended period of time spent in the open ocean suggests that this habitat is as important in the life history of California White sharks as the more studied near-shore habitat. Researchers in Australia and South Africa have initiated tagging studies in those areas, and it will be interesting to see if these sharks exhibit a similar usage of the pelagic ecosystem. The ability of White sharks to travel between distant coasts and the large amounts of time spent in international waters mean that management strategies would be most successful if enacted at the international level.



© Kevin Weng

Andre Boustany and Kevin Weng are marine scientists at the Tuna Research and Conservation Center of Stanford University, USA. Their study on migration patterns of the White shark involved marine scientists from three California institutions: Burney Le Boeuf and Scott Davis at the University of California Santa Cruz (UCSC), Peter Pyle and Scot Anderson of the Point Reyes Bird Observatory (PRBO) in Stinson Beach, California, USA, and Barbara Block of Stanford University.

Editor's note

The CMS Secretariat is pleased to host an article by marine researchers from Stanford University highlighting the needs of improving our understanding of the species in order to implement proper management strategies. Upon the proposal of Australia, the White shark has been included in Appendix I and II during COP7. Although we know about the important role of the White shark in marine life, its migration routes are still largely unexplored. Since the animal's habitat stretches between the Central California Coast, the shelf waters of the mid-Atlantic Bight, the Great Australian Bight, South Africa, New Zealand, Australia, the eastern North Pacific, the western North Atlantic and the Mediterranean, there is a need for an efficient conservation strategy at international level.

TRACKING TURTLES IN WEST AFRICA

By Brendan J. Godley, Annette C. Broderick and Paulo X. Catry

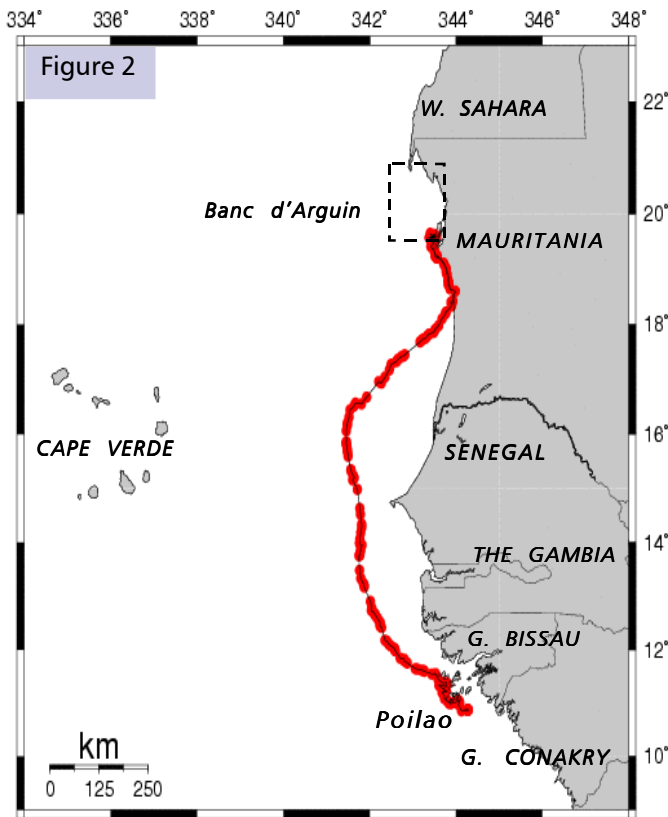
Recent surveys have shown that the small island of Poilão, located amongst the islands of the Bijagós archipelago, Guinea Bissau, hosts the largest Green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*) rookery on the west coast of Africa. It also ranks among the largest in the Atlantic Ocean. Traditionally, Poilão has been regarded as a sacred site by the Bijagós people, and this, along with its remoteness, has contributed to marine turtle conservation. However, an emerging threat is the rapid development of industrialised fisheries in this region. A clear conservation priority was to identify important marine areas used by the Green turtles from this large rookery. Satellite tracking via the ARGOS system was the obvious technique to use to allow insights to be gained rapidly.

Figure 1



Green turtle returning to sea following ST6 attachment.

In late 2001, a multinational team including a wide range of local stakeholders (Figure 4) mounted an expedition to Poilão to allow the attachment of ten satellite tracking units (Figure 3). This work was supported by a large number of organisations with the key financial donors being CMS, Fondation Internationale du Banc D'Arguin and the People's Trust for Endangered Species (see http://www.seaturtle.org/mtrg/projects/guinea_bissau/ for a full listing of project partners). Within a very short time, unparalleled insights into the at-sea movements of the turtles were obtained.



The ten turtles followed via satellite (Figure 1) demonstrated a diversity of behaviours. Four females migrated from Poilão to the Parc National du Banc D'Arguin, Mauritania, where they remained until the transmitter units failed (Figure 2). Data gathered gave insights into the migration paths and habitat utilisation in one of Africa's most important national parks. A further two individuals travelled to Senegalese waters, while the last four individuals were recorded making shorter range movements in the waters of Guinea Bissau before premature cessation of transmissions, probably due to damage to the units, a common problem when turtles remain in coastal waters. The findings illustrate the need for international collaboration for the protection of marine turtles with at least four nations (Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Mauritania and Senegal) clearly sharing responsibility for this population.

SPECIES NEWS

Additional, locally relevant management data were obtained in Guinea Bissau. Turtles usually lay multiple clutches in any given breeding season. For six turtles, we were able to record their behaviour between nestings. During this period, most turtles stayed very close to Poilão within the bounds of the recently declared João Vieira / Poilão National Marine Park. However, at least one turtle moved extensively within the Bijagós Archipelago during the interesting period.

It is recommended that the João Vieira / Poilão Marine National Park (Guinea Bissau) and the Parc National du Banc D'Arguin (Mauritania) continue to receive utmost support for conservation and management. It is clear from these and other findings that these two protected areas constitute key elements of the range of the single largest Green turtle nesting aggregation in West Africa. Given the migratory nature of this species, it is important that direct and incidental catch in both artisanal and industrialised fisheries throughout the region be assessed. Support should be given for additional studies which through telemetry or molecular techniques allow a fuller assessment of additional foraging areas for Green turtles in West Africa. Ongoing monitoring of marine turtles at Poilão should be undertaken to allow a fuller assessment of the current status and trend in population size.

Brendan J. Godley and Annette C. Broderick
Marine Turtle Research Group,
University of Wales,
Swansea, United Kingdom
Email: MTN@swan.ac.uk

Paulo X. Catry
Unidade de Investigação em Eco-Etologia,
Instituto Superior de Psicologia Aplicada,
Portugal

Figure 3



**Castro Barbosa (GPC) with
Telonics ST-18 and ST-16.**

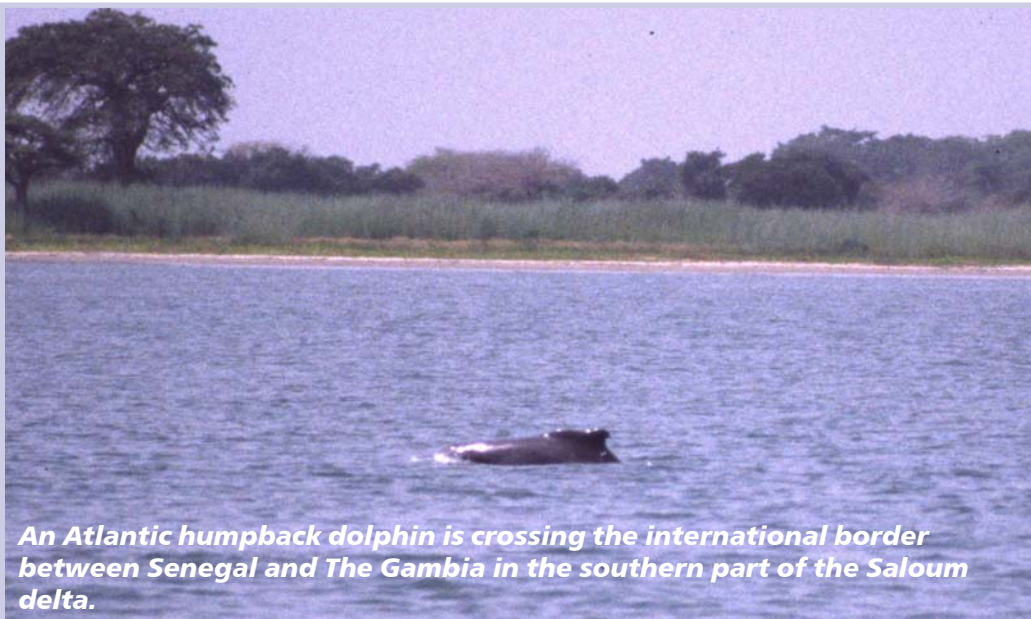
Figure 4



Project Field Team. Back row: Paulo Catry (UICN, ISPA), Januário da Silva (Canhabaque), Preto João Perrida (Canhabaque), Amadeu Almeida (CIPA); front row: Castro Barbosa (GPC), Bucar Indjai (INEP); out of shot: Brendan Godley (MTRG). For details of organisations see project website.

THE ATLANTIC HUMPBAC DOLPHIN: IN RETREAT?

By Koen Van Waerebeek, (Peruvian Centre for Cetacean Research, Museo de los Delfines, Pucusana, Peru)



An Atlantic humpback dolphin is crossing the international border between Senegal and The Gambia in the southern part of the Saloum delta.

© KWW

The Atlantic humpback dolphin (*Sousa teuszii*) is the only small cetacean endemic to (sub)tropical eastern Atlantic inshore waters off West Africa. Described in 1892 from a shark-damaged carcass retrieved in Cameroon, second and third specimens were collected in Senegal in 1925 and 1943. Since then, this dolphin has been found in another six countries. *S. teuszii* used to be referred to as the Cameroon river dolphin, a misnomer as it occupies no true riverine habitat. Suggestions of conspecificity with the Indo-Pacific humpback dolphin from east Africa (nominal *S. plumbea*) are unsupported. Moreover populations are separated both geographically and ecologically by the cold water barrier the coastal Benguela Current forms.

By-catches in coastal gillnet fisheries as well as environmental degradation, including overfishing, are thought to be the main threats to the species' survival. The IUCN Cetacean Specialist Group has long accorded it a high priority for studies in view of its endemism, narrow ecological niche and low population size. No estimates exist partly because of scarce resources, encounter rates too low for effective line transect surveying, a shallow water habitat hardly accessible to survey boats, and extensive coastlines. Aerial surveys may be hampered by low visibility in muddy waters, and positive identification may be problematic. Most authors have assumed a continuous coastal range along West Africa, but field work during CMS/WAF CET-2 and -3 Projects suggests that Atlantic humpback dolphins may occur in a number of subpopulations with more or less pronounced (relative) distribution gaps stretching from Dahkla Bay to northern Angola. If reproductive isolation is confirmed, long-term prospects of the stocks would be sombre.

Northernmost, Dahkla Bay community off Western Sahara is thought to be very tiny, counting a few dozens of animals, possibly a mere remnant of a once stronger Northwest African foothold. The Banc d'Arguin represents the main area of regular occurrence in Mauritania, with two 'hotspots', the baie d'Arguin in the north, and the shallow waters off Iwick in the south. This stock was reported to be small in 1980, possibly 100. Recently, one scientist suggested a more optimistic number of at least high hundreds of individuals. By-catch is a confirmed cause of mortality in Mauritania, and some people occasionally consume dolphin meat. In Senegal, the only area of regular encounters is the Saloum delta. Maigret estimated this population as to count no more

than 100 animals in 1980. Group size ranged from 10–37 individuals (averaging at 23) in 1999–2000, and an educated guess from relative encounter rates could range anywhere from a 100 to a few hundred individuals. Multiple sightings at Djinack creek are probably of a single group. Our records cover the dry season November through February, but locals say the species is present throughout the year.

In 1996 three carcasses were found hauled together on a remote beach of Sangomar Island, their meat untouched, and may have been offered to the island's 'Esprit' in a religious ritual still widely observed among Saloum fishers. Dolphins in The Gambia's Niimi National Park share range with Senegal's Saloum community, hence the name 'Saloum-Niimi' stock. Individuals seem to cross the national borders on a near-diurnal basis, and thus can claim CMS 'migratory' status.

Atlantic humpback dolphins prefer outer estuaries with significant tidal sea-water intrusions like the Gambia river and Gabon estuary. The Saloum and Bandiala, for instance, are no functional rivers at all but huge tidal creeks with little freshwater input, tending even to hypersalinity. Claims of sightings inside the Niger, Senegal and Casamance rivers are unsupported. One or two confirmed records exist from the mouth of the Casamance, but dolphins reliably identified upstream the Casamance and Gambia rivers have all been bottlenose dolphins. Confusion between these species is a major problem, and I suspect it has contributed to insouciance about abundance. The relatively undisturbed waters and extensive mangrove forests of Guinea-Bissau support what is the more robust stock 'Canal do Gêba-dos Bijagos', counting at least several hundreds of animals. In 1953 Cadenat sighted the species in the silt-laden waters of Guinée-Conakry, but since then there has been no sign of it. And yet Guinée features plenty of appropriate habitat, a wide continental shelf with mangrove forests around four river mouths, generating hope that a healthy Guinée population persists.

There is no cetacean information for Sierra Leone and Liberia, and earlier work in Ivory Coast did not find the species. WAF CET-3 Project monitors fisheries in Ghana and Togo for captures of cetaceans and while more than ten species of small cetaceans have been identified, again, there is no sign of humpback dolphins. Unconfirmed fishermen reports point to possible sightings off western Togo, and it is hoped that recently initiated field work around the Volta delta (eastern Ghana), a potential biotope, will meet with more success. Brief whale surveys by the author in coastal Benin in the winters of 2000–2003 and perusal of marine biological collections were negative, although the species could still be a rare visitor. Several authors cite Nigeria as a Range State, apparently based on a 19th century reference so exceedingly vague as to point to any aquatic mammal including the West African manatee, whose range of greatest abundance is precisely the Niger river and its tributaries. It is quite plausible that humpback dolphins inhabited the wider channels of the outer Niger delta, but not the river itself. The 110-year-old holotype from Cameroon was the first and only record, and the obvious question begs whether it still occurs there.

The Humpback dolphin is unknown from Equatorial Guinea (inc. Rio Muni), São Tomé and Príncipe, The People's Republic of the Congo and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Admittedly, however, there is no marine mammal research in these countries. The Parc national des Mangroves at the mouth of the Congo river would deserve some survey effort. In Gabon, a single specimen was collected from the eastern end of the Gabon estuary. Numerous reports from divers on oil rigs and pilots flying the area suggest they would occur off northern Angola and Cabinda. One of them cites a sighting 150km north of Luanda in the early 1990s. However, evidence is lacking. We provisionally discern five extant management stocks from records clustered around a core locality: Dahkla Bay, Banc d'Arguin, Saloum-Niimi, Canal do Gêba-Bijagos, and southern Guinée. Gene-flow between areas may be restricted, especially in the north. The single historical specimens from Cameroon and Gabon do not permit any conclusions. As work progresses with CMS/WAF CET-3 and hundreds of captured dolphins are examined, the practical absence of the species over important stretches of coastline in the northern Gulf of Guinea is emerging. The likelihood of the bleak picture being the result of human impact is high and the Range States, classified as 'confirmed-contemporary' (Morocco/Western Sahara, Mauritania, Senegal, The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau); 'confirmed-historical' (Guinée-Conakry, Cameroon, Gabon) and 'unconfirmed-contemporary' (Angola and Togo) should be particularly concerned.

In the absence of abundance estimates, unknown life history parameters, and without any strategy at hand to drastically reduce by-catches in the near future, much less stop human littoral expansion, national and intergovernmental organisations and NGO's should brace for a worst-case scenario: a combined size of the five northern stocks as low as 1,500–2,000 individuals, increasingly isolated reproductive units with gradual loss of haplotypes and a high risk of extinction. *Sousa teuszii* is a legitimate candidate to reap benefits of the precautionary principle. I recommend consideration of a CMS Appendix I listing to help avoid that this little-known mammal becomes an endangered species in a near future, if it is not already.

USING SATELLITE TELEMETRY TO TRACK WILD BACTRIAN CAMELS

By Richard P. Reading, (Denver Zoological Foundation), Evan S. Blumer, (the Wilds), Henry H. Mix, (Nature Conservation International) and B. Mijiddorj, (Great Gobi Strictly Protected Area)

Wild Bactrian camels (*Camelus bactrianus ferus*) are critically endangered throughout their range in the harsh deserts of China and Mongolia. They were listed in CMS Appendix I during COP7. However, these animals are poorly understood. Knowledge of the species is derived from only a few short studies and anecdotal information. Recent population estimates suggest that at most only a few thousand individuals - and likely far less - survive in small portions of Mongolia and China. Even these populations appear to be declining. Much of what is known about wild camels is summarised in a book we recently published entitled "Ecology and Conservation of Wild Bactrian Camels" (edited by R. Reading, D. Enkhbileg and T. Galbaatar). We initiated a wild camel conservation project to determine and address the causes of wild camel decline in Mongolia. As a part of this work, we are experimenting with the use of telemetry to monitor camels. In autumn 2002, we began a pilot study involving satellite telemetry to determine the type of telemetry we require.



Wild Bactrian camel

© Richard Reading

Wilds camels in Mongolia are largely restricted to Region A of the Great Gobi Strictly Protected Area in south-western Mongolia. The Great Gobi is a harsh environment featuring cold winters (to -35°C), windy springs with wind speeds of up to 50 metres per second and hot summers (to 40°C). Precipitation averages less than 60 millimetres a year, with some areas going without any moisture at all for several years. As a result, vegetation is sparse and patchy, dominated by plants adapted to extremely arid conditions.

In October 2002, we set out to capture two wild camels and fit them with satellite telemetry collars. We used a Pneu-Dart® rifle to dart animals using a cocktail of drugs previously determined to work well with the species. We tried several darting techniques. First, we constructed a blind out of local vegetation near an oasis that wild camels frequent. Observers warned the darting team of incoming animals using two-way radios. Although several animals approached the oasis, none came within range. Second, we employed domestic Bactrian camels as blinds to try to approach wild camels or as lures in the oasis. Neither ploy worked. Third, we approached animals in open terrain driving a motorised vehicle. This method did work.

We successfully darted and collared one three-year-old female wild camel. A second shot hit another adult female, but bounced off without injection. Unfortunately, lack of sufficient fuel prevented us from trying a third time. In both cases, the chases were relatively short – less than two km. The driver rapidly closed distance on the wild camels while the shooter was sitting in a van with webbing over the door opening as a safety precaution. The door itself had been removed. The darted camel went down after 18 minutes, having travelled about five kilometres. We fitted the immobilised camel with a satellite telemetry collar, took measurements, collected biological samples, and reversed the animal. There were no problems with the anaesthesia or reversal.

To date, the collar has worked well, providing substantial data. Satellites of the Argos System automatically collect data from the collar on an 8-hour-on/24-hour-off cycle. Argos, Inc. downloads these data and distributes them to us every four days. We eliminate spurious results and incorporate locations into a Geographic Information System.

The darted animal moved over 320 km in the first two weeks after darting, but then settled into a region of approximately 350 km² just south of Atas Mountain, where she remained until early March, when she again took off to the northeast. We will continue gathering, refining, and analysing these data until the collar fails or the animal dies. We are already aware that we require satellite or GPS collars for wild camels, as the large movements in difficult terrain would make ground tracking impossible.

We hope to greatly advance our work in 2003. A proposal we initiated in 1998 to conserve wild Bactrian camels and the entire Great Gobi Ecosystem was finally authorised for funding through the Global Environment Facility in late 2002. Implemented by the Mongolian government and the United Nations Development Programme, the project should begin this year. We hope to capture and collar more animals, establish a more permanent research station in the Great Gobi and begin training promising young Mongolian biologists and conservationists to assist and eventually run the programme. As a result, next year should see exciting advances in our conservation efforts.

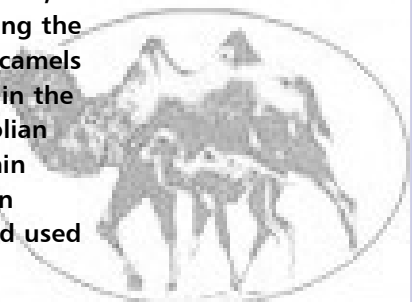
Richard P. Reading
Director of Conservation Biology
Denver Zoological Foundation
2900 East 23rd Ave.
Denver, CO 80205 USA
Tel: +1 (303) 376-49 45
Fax: +1 (303) 376-48 06

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Breeding Centre for Bactrian camels

According to recent information from Mr John Hare, the Wild Camel Foundation is at present preparing the establishment of a breeding centre for Bactrian camels in co-operation with the Ministry. A large space in the original living area of the animals in the Mongolian Gobi desert will be fenced in. Thereafter, a certain number of wild Bactrian camels which have been captured by local shepherds will be collected and used as breeding stocks.



ASIATIC WILD ASS IN MONGOLIA

By Petra Kaczensky and Chris Walzer

In the Equid Action Plan the status of the Gobi wild ass (*Equus hemionus*) – known by the Mongols as the Khulan – is qualified as “insufficiently known”, and the species is listed as vulnerable. With an estimated 33,000 - 63,000 animals, southern Mongolia is one of the most important strongholds of the Asiatic wild ass. In spite of this relatively large Khulan population, very little data concerning movement patterns, habitat use and social behaviour has been collected. Neither has any monitoring of the population been installed, and past population estimates vary considerably.

Since 1953 the Khulan has been protected by law in Mongolia. However, due to human population growth in conjunction with severe winters in the past years, the occurrence of herder-Khulan conflicts seems on the rise for various reasons. The presence of herders and their livestock at water points potentially interferes with Khulan access to this vital resource. Second, Khulan populations are believed to be growing, and herders are increasingly viewing Khulans as pasture competitors for livestock. Hence pressure on the government to allow culling is being increased. Meanwhile, massive livestock losses during the past years have led to increased poaching pressure on Khulans for meat.

In June 2002 we initiated a Khulan project in the Gobi-B Strictly Protected Area (SPA) in south-western Mongolia. The research is being conducted within the frame of the Przewalski wild horse re-introduction project by the International Takhi Group (ITG) and is funded by the Austrian Science Foundation (FWF project P14992). In an initial step we have fitted three animals - two mares and one stallion - with ARGOS satellite collars. So far, each of the animals has been roaming over an area in excess of 5,000 km², but the movements are almost exclusively confined to the 9,000 km² of the Gobi B SPA.

We suspect that the continuous distribution range presently drawn for the Asiatic wild ass in Mongolia might be overly optimistic. On a journey from Gobi B to Gobi A and back (350 km one way), neither Khulan nor Black-tailed gazelle (*Procapra subguturosa*) were seen, suggesting that population fragmentation might have happened or is happening in parts of the Mongolian Khulan range. Furthermore, the Mongolian-Chinese border was fenced in the more accessible areas of western and south-western Mongolia in 2001/02 to discourage alcohol smuggling, as we learnt from a Mongolian border guard. The fence is two metres high and most likely suppresses any exchange of animals between China, Kazakhstan and Mongolia.



Khulan

© P. Kaczensky

In order to address our concern about possible population fragmentation we started to collect tissue samples from all Khulan carcasses found in the Gobi B SPA and initiated sample collection in the Gobi A SPA. In co-operation with Dr. Ralf Kuehn, Conservation Genetics Department, at Technische Universität München, Germany, we are presently analysing these initial samples for genetic evidence of a possible isolation of the two populations. However, sample sizes are still small, and additional sampling will be necessary in the two parks as well as over the whole Khulan distribution range in Mongolia. Marking of additional Khulan with satellite telemetry would also be desirable in order to assess spatial requirements and movement patterns over the whole Khulan range. Without sound knowledge of this far-ranging, controversial species and without a good monitoring system to assess population status and trend, long-term conservation of Khulan in Mongolia cannot be guaranteed.

Petra Kaczensky
and
Chris Walzer
International Takhi Group
Research, Zoo Salzburg,
A-5081 Anif, Austria.
Tel: +43 (662) 820 176
Fax: +43 (662) 820 1766
email: P.Kaczensky@aon.at
CHWALZER@eunet.at

Editor's note

The CMS Secretariat is pleased to host an article on the Asiatic wild ass by the International Takhi Group. It is hoped that new scientific data on migration patterns of the Wild ass will facilitate regional co-operation with a view to long-term conservation of the species. Upon the proposal of Mongolia, the wild ass has been included in Appendix II during COP7. Therefore it is hoped that regional co-operation among the Range States will be initiated soon.

SPECIES NEWS



USING SAIGA ANTELOPE CONSERVATION TO IMPROVE RURAL LIVELIHOODS

By E.J. Milner-Gulland

On the 19-20 April 2003, a meeting of the participants in a new three-year project, "Using saiga antelope conservation to improve rural livelihoods", was held in Elista, Kalmykian Republic. This project is funded by the UK Government's Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, through its Darwin Initiative fund. The Darwin Initiative was set up in 1993 as part of the UK's contribution to the Convention on Biological Diversity. The Darwin Initiative assists countries rich in biodiversity but poor in resources with the conservation of biological diversity and the implementation of the Biodiversity Convention. Projects funded under the Initiative are collaborative, involving either local institutions or communities in the host country. More details about the Darwin Initiative can be found at <http://www.darwin.gov.uk/>



**Meeting participants,
Elista 19 April 2003.**

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The project has four main strands:

- scientific monitoring of Saiga antelope population dynamics, with a particular focus on the rut and birth periods;
- socio-economic surveys in Saiga range areas, so as to understand the livelihoods and needs of the local people, their knowledge of Saigas and poaching, and their willingness to engage in conservation programmes;
- education in schools, training of students and public awareness campaigns to ensure that people understand the conservation needs of this unique and symbolic animal;
- co-operation with local communities, nature reserves, government departments and saiga managers to strengthen capacity for conservation and Saiga management.

We have a particular focus on training young scientists in ecological and socio-economic research methods. A student from Imperial College London, Lini Kuhl, is currently carrying out research for her Masters dissertation as part of this project. In May 2003, she will be working with Marina Frolova of the Chernye Zemli Biosphere Reserve, carrying out studies of Saiga ecology. Then, in June, she will be working with Natalia Balinova of the Centre for Ethnosocial Research, Kalmykian State University, conducting socio-economic surveys.

The project is international, with study areas in the Betpak-dala region of Kazakhstan (team headed by Professor A. Bekenov, Institute of Zoology, Kazakhstan) and in the Chernye Zemli region of Kalmykia (team headed by Dr. A. Lushchekina, Institute of Ecology and Evolution, Russia). By working in two countries at the same time, we will be able to compare the results of our monitoring work, and draw conclusions from each place for overall Saiga conservation.



A male Saiga at the Centre for Study and Conservation of Wild Animals.

© E.J. Milner-Gulland

The author is a Reader in Conservation Science at Imperial College London. She has been working on Saiga ecology in collaboration with colleagues in Russia and Kazakhstan for more than a decade, and is the leader of a new Darwin Initiative project on Saigas.

Dr E.J. Milner-Gulland,
Reader in Conservation Science,
Renewable Resources Assessment Group,
Department of Environmental Science and Technology,
Faculty of Life Sciences,
South Kensington Campus,
Imperial College London,
SW7 2AZ, UK
Tel: +44 (207) 594 9346
Fax: +44 (207) 589 5319
<http://www.huxley.ic.ac.uk/research/rrag/rrag.htm>

Editor's note

The CMS Secretariat is pleased to host an article by one of the leading Saiga experts outside the Range States.

According to the IUCN Red List, the Saiga antelope is critically endangered. It was listed on CMS Appendix II at COP7 upon Uzbekistan's proposal.

This Darwin Initiative project is the first of what is hoped will be many projects that will contribute to the implementation of the soon to be finalised CMS Memorandum of Understanding concerning Conservation, Restoration and Sustainable Use of the Saiga Antelope (*Saiga tatarica tatarica*) and its accompanying Action Plan. The conclusion of the MOU and Action Plan is expected by the end of the year.

CONSERVATION OF THE WHITE-HEADED DUCK IN CENTRAL ASIA

By David Li, (Waterbird Conservation Officer, Asia, Wetlands International)
Taej Mundkur, (Asia-Pacific Waterbird Strategy Coordination Officer, Wetlands International)



The White-headed duck (*Oxyura leucocephala*) is identified as an endangered species listed both in the World Conservation Union (IUCN) Red List and on Appendix I of the CMS. The range of the species is restricted to a relatively small area of Central Eurasia and North Africa. Over the last decade or so, populations have declined rapidly, especially in the Central Asian region. With a global population of an estimated 8,000-13,000 individuals in 2002, the South Asian wintering population (mainly in Pakistan) decreased from 1,039 in 1968 to 733 in 1987 and to around ten individuals in 2001-2002. On the basis of this alarming decline, the CMS COP6 (Cape Town, November 1999) identified the White-headed duck as a priority species for action.

In the Central Asian region the life cycle and precise migratory habits of the species largely remain an enigma. In this arid region,

the species appears to be adapted to living in a range of shallow, fresh, brackish to saline wetland types, many of which are transient in nature. This appears to force the bird to modify its habits and choice of wetlands in which to breed, moult, stop on migration and spend the northern winter.

With funding from the CMS, Wetlands International undertook a comprehensive review of the status of the species in the Central Asian countries during 2002 and has provided recommendations for its conservation. The review focuses on the Central Asian region, and covers Afghanistan, China, India, Iran, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Mongolia, Pakistan, Russia (Asian part only), Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

According to a questionnaire survey conducted in 2002, the East Mediterranean/Turkey/Southwest Asia wintering population has been estimated at 5,000-10,000 birds, while the South Asian wintering population is put at just ten birds, as is now reported in *Waterbird Population Estimates Third Edition* (Wetlands International 2002).

A field survey carried out in northern Pakistan in January 2002 to evaluate the current status of the species revealed only five individuals.

Major threats to the conservation of the White-headed duck have been identified. The drought in the Central Asian region over the last few years has greatly reduced wetland habitat for this and many other waterbird species. The long-term effects of drought on the viability of this tiny population are unknown, although they are potentially serious. Habitat loss and degradation due to unsustainable use of water resources has further reduced the available habitat for the population. Human disturbance and hunting are also recorded as additional threats.

Six main recommendations have been proposed for conservation of the White-headed duck in the Central Asian Region.

- All countries need to undertake a review of their national policy and legislation to ensure adequate legal protection for the White-headed duck and its enforcement.
- Sustainable management of water resources is needed to ensure adequate allocation of water to maintain viability of wetland habitats used by the White-headed duck.
- Site conservation measures, such as the establishment of an international network of sites of importance for migratory waterbirds, including the White-headed duck, need to be pursued.
- A flyway-wide project should be developed for the conservation of the White-headed duck and its wetland habitats through building and strengthening links between wetland managers and organisations involved in the conservation of the White-headed duck across the region.
- A comprehensive population monitoring programme should be developed to monitor the distribution and the status of the White-headed duck in the Central Asian region during the wintering, migratory and breeding seasons.
- Research to define the migration routes and population boundaries of the White-headed duck is urgently required.

In addition, a number of country specific recommendations have been made.

This report is part of a broader initiative of Wetlands International, CMS and others for the development of an Action Plan for the Central Asian Flyway, aimed at providing a comprehensive framework for the conservation of all migratory waterbird species and their wetland habitats in this region. It is a result of a collaborative effort involving many experts from across the region, and we would like to record our appreciation for their kind contributions.

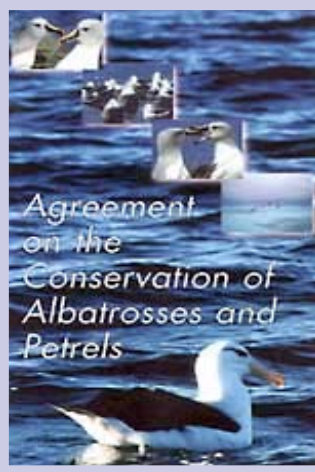
The report can be downloaded from www.wetlands.org

UK GOVERNMENT DECIDES TO ERADICATE THE RUDDY DUCK

The Government of the United Kingdom has recently made a decision towards the eradication of the Ruddy duck (*Oxyura jamaicensis*), an introduced species native of North America. The ruddy duck was introduced to wildlife collections in the UK in the 1940s, from which it escaped and began to breed in the wild. From the UK the species has then spread to other European countries.

The eradication programme aims at conserving the globally threatened white-headed duck, with which the ruddy duck has been proven to hybridise. Hybridisation has been recognised as the most significant threat to the long-term survival of the European population of the White-headed duck. Besides culling of the Ruddy duck, the programme provides for further research into control techniques and co-ordination with other European countries.

ECUADOR RATIFIES ACAP



The Interim Secretariat warmly welcomes any news from Range States about their progress with signature or ratification. Further progress towards entry into force of the Agreement was made recently when another Range State, Ecuador, signed and ratified the Agreement.

The Ambassador of Ecuador to Australia, His Excellency, Dr. Abelardo Posso-Serrano, signed the Agreement and submitted an Instrument of Ratification on behalf of his country at a ceremony in Canberra, Australia, on 18 February 2003.



Dr. Abelardo Posso-Serrano, Ambassador of Ecuador, after signing the Agreement and submitting an Instrument of Ratification.

Ecuador is an important Range State for Albatrosses and Petrels, with the world's population of Waved albatross (*Diomedea irrorata*) breeding within its jurisdiction. Ecuador has exemplary management measures in place for the Galapagos Islands, recognising its importance as the sole breeding habitat for Waved albatrosses and a range of other wildlife species.

This recent ratification brings the number of Parties to the Agreement to three, and two other ratifications are likely before the middle of this year. At CMS COP7 the United Kingdom announced its intention to ratify the Agreement, and another country has recently advised the Interim Secretariat of its intention to ratify soon. The Agreement will enter into force after five ratifications have been achieved.

The Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels aims to improve the conservation status of sea birds in the Southern Hemisphere, where the majority of Albatross and Petrel species occur. Key Range States such as Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, New Zealand, Peru, South Africa, Spain and the United Kingdom have already committed themselves to rigorously conserve these species and their habitats, such as the sub-Antarctic and Antarctic islands and coastal areas used by the birds to breed, and the marine environments in which they forage. It is now vital that all countries conducting commercial fishing operations in the oceans of the world recognise their responsibilities to protect these magnificent birds by becoming a party to the Agreement.

ACCOBAMS FIRST SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE MEETING FOLLOW-UP



ACCOBAMS Secretariat
"Villa Girasole"
16, Boulevard de Suisse
98 000 Monaco
Tel. (+377) 93154229
Fax (+377) 93509591
Email: cvanklaveren@gouv.mc
http://www.accobams.mc

After the First Meeting of the Scientific Committee that was held in Tunis between 3 - 5 October 2002, and according to the priorities defined and adopted during the meeting, eleven working groups were established in order to implement activities. The First Bureau Meeting of ACCOBAMS was held in Monaco on 24 March 2003 and attended by H.E. Bernard Fautrier, (President, Monaco), Mr. Simion Nicolaev (Romania), Mr. Besnik Baraj (Albania), Ms. Maria Jesus de Pablo (Spain), as well as Dr. Giuseppe Notarbartolo di Sciara, the Chair of the Scientific Committee.

During the Bureau meeting, the programme of activities for 2003 was discussed. According to the priorities and the projects discussed in the Scientific Committee meeting, the *Basin-wide Mediterranean sperm whale survey* will be started during the summer of 2003 with the strong involvement of IFAW (International Fund for Animal Welfare). IFAW's research vessel "Song of the Whale" will sail to the Mediterranean during the summer of 2003 to develop this pilot study in the Ionian Sea. The aim is also to demonstrate the feasibility of the scientific methods within the region and to assist Riparian States to gather support for a full basin-wide Sperm whale survey.

Another ACCOBAMS priority, the *Conservation Plan for the short-beaked common dolphin (Delphinus delphis) in the Mediterranean* has received greatest interest from two well-known NGOs: the WDCS (Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society) and the ASMS (Swiss Working Group for the Protection of Marine Mammals). These NGOs will bring financial support to the Tethys Research Institute, the organisation in charge of preparing this plan.

The Bureau Meeting welcomed three new Partners for ACCOBAMS: the Spanish Cetacean Society (SEC), the World Conservation Union (IUCN) and Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes de Montpellier (EPHE, France). According to Resolution 1.13/ MOP 1, these organisations and institutions will contribute to the further development of policies, technical and scientific tools and to their application.

New activities for 2003

were presented by the Secretariat to the Bureau meeting:

- In the frame of the development and implementation of pilot conservation and management actions in well-defined key areas containing critical habitat for populations belonging to priority species, the project area of Losjin (Croatia) for Bottlenose dolphins was finalised and funded by Monaco in the context of bilateral co-operation.
- Tethys Research Institute will start a Pilot Project on Cetacean Photo-identification implemented in the Black Sea. This project is to include a training programme in Kalamos Island (Greece) this summer for a team of Ukrainian, Georgian and Russian scientists and a follow-up in the Azov Sea and Kerch Strait.
- A new ACCOBAMS web site has been designed by Tethys Research Institute that is intended to be the "scientific" counterpart of the ACCOBAMS institutional web site.

The last European Cetacean Society Meeting was a good opportunity to exchange a wealth of considerations of ACCOBAMS interest, in particular, a workshop on "Mediterranean Fin Whale study techniques to decide on research method to apply and harmonise research activities" organised under the auspices of ACCOBAMS and the Agreement Establishing the Marine Mammal Sanctuary in the Mediterranean (Pelagos Cetacean Research Institute). Furthermore, on behalf of the LIFE Project, a very detailed cetacean conservation plan has been developed for Romania covering all the provisions of ACCOBAMS and other relevant international instruments.

ASCOBANS: LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR "ESBJERG"

From 9 - 11 April 2003, the 10th meeting of the Advisory Committee (AC) took place on the banks of the Rhine in Bonn, Germany.

Delegates and observers from eight Parties, two Non-Party Range States and an impressive number of regional intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations and scientific institutions gathered in Germany's burgeoning UN city for a decisive meeting: AC 10 was the last AC meeting before the 4th Meeting of the Parties, to be held in Esbjerg, Denmark from 18-22 August 2003.

Once again, experts focused on issues such as by-catch, disturbance and a new, large-scale abundance survey for the ASCOBANS Agreement area. Another issue on the agenda was the ASCOBANS Recovery Plan for Baltic Harbour Porpoises (Jastarnia Plan). This Plan, which the 4th Meeting of the Parties is expected to adopt, will hopefully contribute substantially to improving the conservation status of Baltic harbour porpoises. Moreover, while the problems of porpoise conservation are not entirely identical in the Baltic Sea and the North Sea, the experience gained in the elaboration of the Jastarnia Plan should prove valuable in drafting a recovery plan for the North Sea, as called for by the 5th North Sea Conference of Ministers, held in Bergen, Norway, in 2002. This project was also discussed at AC 10. Parties once again stressed that ASCOBANS should play a major part in developing a North Sea recovery plan.

In addition, the meeting finalised nine draft Resolutions for the 4th Meeting of the Parties. These draft resolutions covered topics ranging from scientific matters such as monitoring and population studies to political questions such as the extension of the Agreement area to cover parts of the North Atlantic. The groundwork has therefore been laid for a successful 4th Meeting of the Parties.

At the kind invitation of the government of Poland, the next ASCOBANS Advisory Committee meeting will take place in Poland in April 2004.



ASCOBANS Secretariat
 Martin-Luther-King-Str. 8
 D-53179 Bonn, Germany
 Tel: (+49 228) 815 2418/16
 Fax: (+49 228) 815 2440
 Email: ascobans@ascobans.org
<http://www.ascobans.org>

EUROBATS HEADING FOR MOP4

EUROBATS has held a successful 8th Meeting of its Advisory Committee in the magnificent UNESCO World Heritage town of Røros, Norway, from 12 – 14 May at the generous invitation of the Norwegian Directorate for Nature Management. The Meeting concentrated on the preparation of the 4th Session of the Meeting of Parties (MOP 4) and discussed the draft resolutions on a large number of important topics. The resolution on guidelines for bat-friendly and sustainable forest management will be a substantive contribution to the CMS/CBD Joint Work Programme. Other topics covered *inter alia* the bat conservation and management plan for 2004 – 2006, guidelines for the issue of permits for bat-ringing or other marking activities, the geographical scope of the Agreement and migration routes, the protection of important underground habitats and the use of remedial timber treatment. MOP 4 will take place in Sofia, the beautiful capital of Bulgaria, at the generous invitation of the Bulgarian Ministry of Environment and Waters from 22 – 24 September.



EUROBATS Secretariat
 Martin-Luther-King-Str. 8
 D-53179 Bonn, Germany
 Tel: (+49 228) 815 2420/21
 Fax: (+49 228) 815 2445
 Email: eurobats@eurobats.org
<http://www.eurobats.org>

In March a new issue of the newsletter "Eurobat Chat" was published. It is available on the EUROBATS web site. If you would like to receive a hard copy, please contact the Secretariat at chat@eurobats.org

PHOCINE DISTEMPER VIRUS OUTBREAK AMONG SEALS IN 2002

By Bettina Reineking, (Common Wadden Sea Secretariat, Wilhelmshaven, Germany)

In May 2002, a mortality of Common seals (*Phoca vitulina*) caused by phocine distemper virus (pdv) infection was observed on the island of Anholt in the Danish Kattegat area, the same island where the pdv epizootic amongst seals also started in 1988. The virus spread to the Swedish and Norwegian coast in the Kattegat/Skagerrak area in May/June, and a little bit later to the Baltic Sea, the east coast of the United Kingdom and also to the Wadden Sea. The occurrence of the pdv infection was associated with an unusually high mortality in the above areas. The pdv is very contagious for common seals, but not dangerous for humans. About 80% of the virus-infected seals died due to secondary infections from other pathogens such as bacteria, because the virus weakens the immune system. Most often the cause of death is pneumonia. In the entire affected area, in total about 22,500 dead Common seals were registered between May 2002 and the end of February 2003. Grey seals (*Halichoerus grypus*) were not as severely affected as common seals.

The distribution pattern of the seal epidemic in Northern Europe in 2002 and the first date of occurrence of the unusual mortality of Common seals, which is the starting point of the outbreak of the disease in that region, are given in the **Figure**.



In the Skagerrak-Kattegat area, the epizootic among the seals was over by about mid September 2002, and in the Wadden Sea and most other affected areas at the end of November 2002. Only in the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland were the seals still dying up to the end of 2002 / beginning of 2003.

Figure:

Map of Northern Europe. Areas marked with occurrence of phocine distemper mortality of Common seals in 2002.

In 1988, the same virus caused the death of a substantial part of the common seal population in Western Europe. More than 18,000 seals, mainly common seals, died of the highly contagious disease in northwest Europe. In the entire Wadden Sea, it was estimated that close to 60% of the population died as a result of the virus epidemic, which amounted to about 8,500 dead seals.

In 2001, almost 20,000 common seals were counted in the entire Wadden Sea. However, not all seals in the population are observed during surveys because they do not all rest on the sandbanks at the same time. Research has shown that the total number is at least 30% higher. The seals were in a relatively good condition, and there were no indications of an overpopulation. In 2002, more than 10,600 dead seals were registered in the entire Wadden Sea. It is estimated that about 40-50% of the estimated seal stock in the Wadden Sea died as a result of the virus epidemic. The percentage may differ from region to region. It seems that the 2002 epizootic was slightly less severe than in 1988. However, the loss of seals will become more evident during the next aerial counts in 2003.

The Secretariat can be contacted at www.waddensea-secretariat.org

SIBERIAN CRANE WETLANDS PROJECT: FLYWAY LEVEL CO-ORDINATION

By the International Crane Foundation

Following several years of preparation, the UNEP/GEF Siberian Crane Wetlands Project has finally been approved and is now starting up. The project will have a duration of six years and involves the governments of the People's Republic of China, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation as well as the International Crane Foundation (ICF), which is responsible for overall project management and execution of regional activities. A Regional Coordination Unit office is being established in Beijing at the National Bird Banding Centre – co-located with the project's China National Coordination Unit. The first project steering committee meeting is scheduled for 23-26 April 2003 in Northeast China, close to Xianghai National Nature Reserve – one of the critical wetland sites included in the project. The Steering Committee Meeting will confirm the project personnel, project management systems and annual workplans for 2003.



The project will be co-ordinated with other flyway conservation initiatives through a CMS/GEF sponsored Siberian Crane Flyway Coordinator, Ms. Elena Ilyashenko, based in Moscow. Ms. Ilyashenko will co-ordinate flyway level activities of the project in Western and Central Asia, while Mr. Simba Chan, Flyway Officer for the NE Asia Crane Site Network, will be the focal point for co-ordination of activities in Northeast Asia. In order to ensure good co-ordination between the project and the NE Asia Crane Site Network, a subgroup of the Crane Working Group will be established on the Siberian crane. Both Ms. Ilyashenko and Mr. Chan will attend meetings of the respective flyway groups, thus ensuring good overall co-ordination.

The wider framework for migratory waterbird conservation across the range of the Siberian crane includes the Asia Pacific Migratory Waterbird Conservation Action Plan, the Agreement on the Conservation of Africa-Eurasia Waterbirds (AEWA) GEF project (now in PDF B phase), the Central Asia Flyway project (Wetlands International project with Netherlands Government support) as well as Arctic and national level projects.

The project will contribute significantly to the development of crane site networks through a wide range of activities at regional, national and site levels. These sites include the main breeding grounds, wintering areas and known staging areas for the eastern and western populations of the Siberian crane. At a regional level, there will be co-operation on training, awareness and information exchange, amongst other subjects. In addition, exchange of staff between sites, twinning of sites and other links will be established to strengthen the regional site networks. This will include the development of a site network in Western / Central Asia based on the experience of the NE Asia Crane Site Network and within the larger framework of CMS and the Asia Pacific Migratory Waterbird Conservation Action Plan.

Further details are available on the project's homepage on the ICF Website:
www.savingcranes.org/gefpublic/gefpublic.htm
and on the project's flyway co-ordination homepage:
www.savingcranes.org/scfc/index.htm

Project Contacts:

Elena Ilyashenko, Siberian Crane Flyway Coordinator: eilyashenko@wwf.ru
 Claire Mirande, Project Director: Mirande@savingcranes.org
 Crawford Prentice, International Technical Advisor: cpcranes@aol.com
 Paul McVey, Operations Manager: KPMcVey@aol.com

MEMORANDA

IOSEA: NEW CMS OFFICE ESTABLISHED IN BANGKOK

A new CMS office was set up in Bangkok in early April for the implementation of the Indian Ocean - Southeast Asian Marine Turtle (IOSEA) MOU. It is the first outposted office within the UNEP Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (ROAP). Douglas Hykle, long-serving CMS Deputy Executive Secretary, assumes the post of Co-ordinator of the Memorandum of Understanding concerning Conservation Measures for Marine Turtles of the Indian Ocean and South-East Asia (IOSEA). A likely focal area of his work will be to further develop the membership of CMS in Asia. The main focus of his links to CMS will of course be the implementation of IOSEA. The first meeting of Signatory States to the IOSEA MOU was held in Bangkok, from 22-24 January 2003. Nearly 20 Signatory and observer States participated, together with interested NGOs and IGOs from around the region. Under the chairmanship of Richard Bagine from Kenya, the meeting made solid progress in a number of areas - establishing a six-member advisory committee, reviewing implementation of the Conservation and Management Plan, identifying complementary regional initiatives, reviewing financial matters and discussing arrangements for the MOU Secretariat. Representatives of Madagascar and the Seychelles took advantage of the opportunity to sign the Memorandum of Understanding, bringing to 15 the number of Signatory States. The meeting learned that the internal procedures leading to signature are also well-advanced in India, Maldives and Oman.

The MOU puts in place a Conservation and Management Plan aimed at reducing threats, conserving critical habitat, exchanging scientific data, increasing public awareness and participation, promoting regional co-operation and seeking resources for implementation. It seeks to reverse the decline in populations of Loggerhead, olive Ridley, Green, Hawksbill, Leatherback and Flatback turtles. The management plan contains 24 programmes and 105 specific activities. UNEP provided an initial start-up grant for the IOSEA Secretariat within ROAP and the East Asian Seas Regional Coordinating Unit, with major financial support from the USA, Australia, France, the United Kingdom and CMS.

URGENT ACTION FOR AQUATIC WARBLER:

CMS CONCLUDES MOU AND ACTION PLAN



Aquatic warbler

© A. Kozulin

An international meeting was held in Minsk, Belarus, from 29 to 30 April 2003, to negotiate and adopt a "Memorandum of Understanding and Action Plan Concerning Conservation Measures for the Aquatic warbler" under the auspices of the Convention on Migratory Species. Conservationists see this as a huge milestone in the protection of this globally threatened bird and its habitat.

What connects Dakar, Senegal in West Africa with Minsk, Belarus? Why have representatives of governments and non-governmental organisations in 13 European and African countries been meeting in Minsk? The answer: a little brown bird, migrating up to 12,000 kilometres from Eastern Europe to sub-Saharan Africa. This bird is a "star" species of Belarus: the globally threatened Aquatic warbler. Over half of the world population of this species breed and spend part of the year in the marshes and fen mires of Belarus. The Aquatic warbler is also an important component of global biological diversity that is, and will remain, the basis of human life. The fact that the number of birds and their habitats have been shrinking in recent decades is an alarming indicator for the state of the environment. Belarussian Minister of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection, Leonty I. Khoruzhik, hosted and chaired the meeting in co-operation with the CMS Secretariat, BirdLife International, Achova Ptushak Belarusi (the BirdLife International Partner in Belarus), the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (UK) and the United Nations Development Programme. The MOU expresses the intentions of countries to identify, protect and manage sites where the Aquatic warblers breed (central Europe and Western Siberia), rest on migration (western Europe) or spend the winter (central west Africa). A detailed Action Plan summarising the distribution, biology and threat status of the Aquatic warbler describes precise actions to be taken. Belarus, for instance, will restore 720,000 hectares of drained peatlands, and thus regain a lost homeland of the aquatic warbler. Arnulf Müller-Helmbrecht, CMS Executive Secretary, said: "This very successful event represents a positive example both of the voluntary commitment of many countries to act together for co-ordinated conservation and of co-operation between governmental and non-governmental organisations."

Copies of the meeting's declaration as well as the MOU and Action Plan are available on the CMS web site. For more information please visit www.birdlife.net

CMS INVITED TO JOIN MILLENNIUM ECOSYSTEM ASSESSMENT: EXPERTS NEEDED



Millennium Ecosystem Assessment

CMS was invited to formally join the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA) by the MA Board during its 12 February 2003 meeting at IUCN Headquarters in Gland, Switzerland. CMS now joins a number of other international organisations involved in the MA. The Board invited CMS to appoint a representative.

Migratory species are unique components of the ecosystems that they inhabit across their migratory range. Therefore, CMS and the MA share a mutuality of interests. The Chairs of the MA Assessment Panel, Professor Hal Mooney and Ms. Angela Cropper, concluded that the MA could provide CMS information on:

- habitat extent, quality, and trends,
- the forces of change, such as pollution, climate change, human needs and pressures on species, and
- how ecosystem changes affect species, including migratory species.

Importantly for CMS, the MA Working Groups will take steps to increase the emphasis given to such issues as the role of migratory species in ecosystem structure and function, how migratory species contribute to human well-being and migratory species as indicators of ecosystem condition. The MA may also be able to provide CMS information on species population levels.

Echoing the call by the CMS Conference of Parties in Resolution 7.9, the MA Assessment Panel chairs believed that one of the best mechanisms to ensure the integration of migratory species into the MA at the global and sub-global levels would be to identify a small number of additional natural and social scientists with expertise on migratory species and ask them to join the MA Working Groups as Lead Authors or Contributing Authors. In addition, and importantly for the MA, members of the CMS Scientific Council will be invited to review the draft reports. There are also other opportunities for individuals with expertise on migratory species to contribute as Chapter Review Editors or Expert Reviewers.

CMS Parties, international and other organisations and individuals are encouraged to nominate experts to participate directly. Nominations should be sent to the MA as soon as possible.

Launched in June 2001, the MA is a path-breaking international assessment of the capacity of ecosystems to support human well-being and life on Earth. It is designed to meet the ever-increasing needs among decision-makers for high quality, credible scientific information on the consequences of ecosystem change.

For more information on the MA's structure, process, and associated activities, visit its website at www.millenniumassessment.org

FIRST JWP CONCLUDED BETWEEN WETLANDS INTERNATIONAL, CMS AND AEWA

The first Joint Work Programme (JWP) between Wetlands International, the Secretariat of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) and the Secretariat of the Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA) has been concluded. The document was signed by Dr. Gerard Boere, International Programme Co-ordinator of Wetlands International, CMS Executive Secretary Mr. Arnulf Müller-Helmbrecht and Mr. Bert Lenten, Executive Secretary of AEWA, at a ceremony at the UN premises in Bonn, Germany, on 26 March.

As commented by Mr. Müller-Helmbrecht, his Secretariat has concluded several Memoranda of Understandings and JWPs over the last few years. For the AEWA Secretariat, Mr. Lenten pointed out that this was the first JWP concluded under AEWA, but that it was a very important one taking into account the important role Wetlands International had played and was still playing regarding the development and implementation of the Agreement.

Through the JWP the communication between Wetlands International, CMS and AEWA and their subsidiary bodies will be strengthened. The JWP foresees an exchange of information on annual work programmes and activities with a view to identifying the scope for joint activities. This will certainly lead to combining efforts to gain synergies and economies of scale. Another point mentioned in the JWP is that Wetlands International shall endeavour to assist in the implementation of CMS and AEWA. In doing this, promotion of conservation of migratory species in various ways will take place. Furthermore, some co-operative activities for the conservation of Migratory Wetland species are foreseen in the JWP. One of these activities will be promoting co-ordinated activities on a flyway level with a long-term view of establishing formal instruments. The development of an Agreement for the conservation of migratory waterbirds and their habitats in the Central Asian South Asian Flyway is an example on a regional scale.



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**From left to right: Dr. Gerard Boere,
Arnulf Müller-Helmbrecht, Bert Lenten.**

By signing the JWP, a first step has been taken in close co-operation between the three offices with the aim of using the limited human and financial resources of each of the organisations involved more efficiently. At the end of the day, this should result in an increase of the conservation of migratory species.

STUDIES OF AQUATIC HABITATS AS A BASIS FOR CONSERVATION OF WETLANDS AT POYANG LAKE, CHINA

Poyang Lake is located south of the Yangtze River, in northern Jiangxi Province, People's Republic of China. It is the largest freshwater lake in China, with an area of 3,955 km² in flood season. Poyang Lake is one of the most important wintering places for migratory waterbirds in Asia, including 98% of the world's population of Siberian cranes (*Grus leucogeranus*), 60% of the White-naped cranes (*Grus vipio*), 50% of the Swan geese (*Anser cygnoides*) and tens of thousands of other waterbirds. Poyang Lake National Nature Reserve (PNR) covers six percent of the total area of the Poyang Lake basin and supports a large variety of waterbirds during the winter months. Unfortunately, nature reserve management is hampered by the lack of skilled technical personnel and basic, essential information about the relationships linking wintering waterbirds with water levels and with the distribution of food plants.

Given the pending completion of the Three Gorges Dam and other major water projects affecting the mid Yangtze Basin, the project aims to determine the relationship between cranes and aquatic plants, water levels and turbidity at Poyang Lake and develop an approach for data collecting and analysing. It also seeks to build capacity for the reserve project staff. To achieve these objectives, the project will focus on the following six main activities:

- vegetation sampling,
- tuber sampling,
- water level and water quality sampling,
- crane habitat-use sampling,
- establishment of a database and
- capacity building for project staff.

The project is co-ordinated by the International Crane Foundation (ICF) and is implemented with the participation of the Poyang Lake National Nature Reserve (PNR), the Jiangxi Forestry Department, and the Jiangxi Mountains, Rivers, and Lakes Information Center (MRL). Besides CMS funding, the project is receiving matching financial support from ICF and other sources.

CMS-FUNDED PROJECT ON SAFFRON-COWLED BLACKBIRD JUST STARTED



Saffron-cowled blackbird

© J. Leiberman

The Saffron-cowled blackbird (*Xanthopsar flavus*), a member of the Icteridae family, is classified on a global level as "vulnerable". Its present populations are distributed in fragmented areas of Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay within the River Plate basin. The total population is estimated at a maximum of 7,000 individuals. The species is listed in CMS Appendix I under the name *Agelaius flavus*.

Xanthopsar flavus lives in wet, open grasslands or in shallow marshes. A major cause for the species' decline is represented by the human alteration of its habitat. Total destruction of the habitat has been recorded as a consequence of flooding of grassland areas following dam construction or the afforestation of open grasslands with exotic trees like pines and eucalypts. On the other hand, the species tolerates grazing by livestock (cattle, horses, sheep) and even partial conversion of native grassland to agriculture.

Therefore, it could be feasible to preserve the species in moderately transformed grasslands, as long as suitable breeding sites remain. In this regard, knowledge of the areas currently used by the species and its seasonal movements would appear to be critical. At present, however, it is fragmentary.

The project mainly aims at gathering new information on population numbers and distribution of *Xanthopsar flavus* in the border areas of Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil and Paraguay. It seeks to estimate the dispersal capabilities of the species and establishes the potential demographic and genetic connection between populations living in the four countries. Public awareness on the conservation of the species is to be raised. Activities planned to achieve these objectives include field surveys of potential areas, studies of migratory movements through banding or marking of birds, interviews/visits to stakeholders and the printing and distribution of an information brochure.

The project is co-ordinated by Asociació Guyrá Paraguay, the representative of BirdLife International in Paraguay, with the involvement of local ornithologists in the different countries it covers.

SURVEY OF THE MARINE OTTER AND THE HUMBOLDT PENGUIN POPULATIONS IN PERU

The Peruvian coast is inhabited by significant populations of the marine otter (*Lontra felina*) and the Humboldt penguin (*Spheniscus humboldti*), two species listed in CMS Appendix I and designated for Concerted Actions under the Convention by the 6th Meeting of the COP (Cape Town, November 1999). The marine and coastal ecosystems in Peru are exposed to intense anthropogenic disturbances. These disturbances include direct capture for eggs, animal skins and meat, fishing and mining activities, and industrial and sewage pollution. They have synergetic interactions with the El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO) and are thought to have determined a serious decline in the population size of the two species.

This project aims to evaluate the status of populations of *Lontra felina* and *Spheniscus humboldti*, including an assessment of the risks to the populations in connection with different human activities, and to identify areas along the southern coast of Peru to be considered for some kind of management with a view to preserving these populations. The project is also expected to start a regional effort to protect the two considered species not only in Peru but also in their whole area of distribution.

To attain these objectives, the project provides for a detailed field survey of penguin and otter populations along the southern coast of Peru, from both land and sea. On conclusion of the survey, the organisation of a workshop involving experts and authorities from Chile and Peru is expected with a view to setting the basis for a bilateral Agreement under CMS for the species.

The project is being implemented by the Peruvian Association for Conservation of Nature (APECO) in collaboration with the National Institute of Natural Resources (INRENA) of the Peruvian Ministry of Agriculture.

COFI-25: CMS ADDRESSES FISHERIES - MIGRATORY SPECIES INTERACTIONS

For the first time, CMS was represented at the Twenty-Fifth Session of the FAO's Committee on Fisheries (COFI), held in Rome from 24-28 February 2003. COFI meets every two years to discuss a wide range of fisheries-related matters, including status/trends in capture fisheries and aquaculture, IUU (illegal, unregulated and unreported) fishing, ecosystem-based management, fishing capacity, and subsidies. Also featuring prominently on the agenda was the proposed development of a Memorandum of Understanding between FAO and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES).



Of particular interest to CMS were discussions on the implementation of various FAO international plans of action (IPOAs), including those for seabirds and sharks, as well as a Japanese proposal for FAO to organise an intergovernmental technical consultation on marine turtles, most likely to be held in Bangkok in early 2004. Though the latter received broad support, there was a general acknowledgement that progress on implementation of the existing IPOAs had proceeded slowly. The CMS Secretariat's statement highlighted the Convention's ongoing work in relation to sea birds, sharks and marine mammals, and supported the initiation of a process leading to the development of an IPOA to effectively address fisheries-marine turtle interactions.

SPREP WORKSHOP ON REGIONAL MARINE MAMMAL CONSERVATION AND THE CMS

The South Pacific Environment Programme (SPREP) has hosted a workshop on regional marine mammal conservation under the Convention on Migratory Species. The workshop, sponsored by the Governments of Australia and New Zealand, was held in Apia, Samoa, 3 and 4 March 2003. Eleven Pacific countries were represented at the workshop as well as conservation non-government organisations and a whale-watching operator attending as observers.

Australia and New Zealand are the only Parties to the CMS from the region and, as such, the key objectives of the workshop were to raise awareness about the CMS and the potential benefits that a regional arrangement under the Convention might bring to future conservation of marine mammals in the region. Presentations were made on a range of issues, including the objectives and role of the CMS, the biology and range of the migratory marine mammals in the South Pacific, and the types of threats these species face during their migrations through the region.

The workshop agreed that it had achieved its objectives and recommended that a future workshop be held by December 2003 with representatives from Pacific countries, the CMS Secretariat and interested stakeholders to discuss how a regional arrangement might be developed and implemented. In addition to its main objective, the workshop would provide an excellent opportunity to continue to build awareness and support for the CMS in the South Pacific region. An additional benefit would be the potential for the workshop to generate regional support for concerted action for Appendix I listed marine mammal species as identified by the Conference of the Parties.

The 7th Conference of the Parties of the CMS in September 2002 listed in the Appendices seven migratory marine mammal species that include the South Pacific in their Range (Antarctic minke, Bryde's, Fin, Pygmy right, Sei and Sperm whales and the Orca). These species join other migratory marine mammal species of the region that have been previously listed in the Appendices: Blue, Humpback, and Southern right whales, Dugong, and Dusky, Indo-Pacific humpback, and Irrawaddy dolphins.

BOLIVIA 81st PARTY TO CMS

Bolivia became the 81st Party to CMS on 1 March 2003. The country is located in Central South America, southwest of South America's largest state, Brazil, with which it shares a common border of 3,400 km. Its neighbouring countries Peru, Argentina, Chile, Paraguay and Peru are already CMS Parties. With Bolivia joining CMS, regional co-operation and cross-border activities will gain further impetus. Bolivia is already Party to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. Bolivia's climate varies with altitude: humid and tropical to cold and semiarid. The rugged Andes Mountains, with the Nevado Sajama as their highest point exceeding more than 6,000 m, and a highland plateau (Altiplano) dominate the country's territory, alternating with hills and lowland plains of the Amazon Basin. On its western border, Bolivia shares Lago Titicaca, the world's highest navigable lake, with Peru.

Pantanal, South America's largest freshwater area, is one of the most important wetlands both at ecoregional and world level due to its excellent state of conservation. It is also the watershed for trinational wetlands encompassing Brazil and Paraguay as well. The wetlands are linked to the Amazon basin, forming a biological and genetic corridor. The Bolivian Pantanal is a priority ecoregion within the larger Pantanal system covering millions of square miles of central-western Brazil, eastern Bolivia, and eastern Paraguay. A landscape of lakes, lagoons, rivers, flooded savannas, palms and dry forests, the Bolivian Pantanal regulates floods and droughts in a large area of Eastern Bolivia. Its extremely rich biodiversity harbours nearly 200 species of fish, more than 70 species of amphibians and reptiles, over 300 species of birds, and more than 50 species of large mammals.

About eight species listed on CMS Appendix I occur in Bolivia. Various hawk and flamingo species as well as river dolphins are included with others in Appendix II. Of particular concern to CMS are two species of river dolphin, the Amazon river dolphin (*Inia geoffrensis*) and the Tucuxi (*Sotalia fluviatilis*), two species of flamingo, the Andean flamingo (*Phoenicopterus andinus*) and the Puna flamingo (*Phoenicopterus jamesi*) as well as three passerine species: the Bearded tachuri (*Polystictus pectoralis pectoralis*), the Dark-throated seedeater (*Sporophila ruficollis*) and Dinelli's doradito (*Pseudocolopteryx dinellianus*). The Seventh Conference of the Parties has recommended these bird species for Cooperative Action. The Andean condor is also included in CMS Appendix II. It is a symbol in several countries in South America, and sits on top of Bolivia's national emblem.

SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC SOON TO BECOME 82nd PARTY

Late but excellent news: the Ambassador of the Syrian Arab Republic has just submitted the instruments of accession to the Depository, the Federal Republic of Germany.

CAPE VERDE FOREIGN MINISTER PAYS VISIT TO CMS

The Foreign Minister of the Republic of Cape Verde, H.E. Maria de Fátima Lima Veiga visited the CMS Secretariat on 4 April. She was accompanied by the responsible Head of the Department for International Cooperation, H.E. the Ambassador of Cape Verde in Germany, and the former ambassador Dr. Antonio Pires, senior advisor of the UNCCD Secretariat.

The CMS Executive Secretary, Mr. Arnulf Müller-Helmbrecht, gave an introduction to CMS and related Agreements and explained the relevance of CMS for migratory species in the Atlantic region, namely, marine mammals and reptiles and birds. He outlined the synergies of CMS with the conventions on Biological Diversity, Wetlands (Ramsar) and the Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). The Foreign Minister informed the CMS Secretariat that the Government of Cape Verde is particularly interested in improving international co-operation in protecting birds, marine mammals and turtles and will therefore continue its national procedure of joining CMS. The Government is also currently examining accession to the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling (ICRW).

NEW PUBLICATION ON THE BIOLOGY AND CONSERVATION OF THE FRANCISCANA DOLPHIN

The Franciscana dolphin (*Pontoporia blainvillei*) is endemic to the coastal waters of the western South Atlantic Ocean. The conservation of the species has been a priority topic at the international level for more than 20 years. The Franciscana is listed in both Appendices I and II of CMS and has been designated for Concerted Actions under the Convention by the 5th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (Geneva, 1997). Among other initiatives, a series of workshops for the co-ordination of research and conservation of the Franciscana has been convened since 1992 with the aim of stimulating and facilitating collaborative, focused work on the species. The "Special Issue on the biology and conservation of Franciscana" constitutes the proceedings of the 4th workshop on Franciscana, held in Porto Alegre, Brazil, 5-9 November 2000. The volume includes reports on issues such as Distribution and Behaviour, Biology and Ecology, Vital Parameters and Demography, Stock Identity, Fishery Interactions, Abundance Estimate, Legislation and Education. The issue constitutes the inaugural volume of "The Latin American Journal of Aquatic Mammals", published by SOLAMAC, the Latin American Society for Aquatic Mammals.

UNEP/CMS Secretariat

Martin-Luther-King-Str. 8,
D- 53175 Bonn, Germany;
Tel. (+49 228) 815 2401/02;
Fax (+49 228) 815 24 49;
e-mail: cms@unep.de
<http://www.wcmc.org.uk/cms>



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

DATE	TITLE	VENUES	ORGANISED BY
MAY			
18-25 May	6 th World Conf. on Birds of Prey and Owls	Budapest, Hungary	Raptors Cons.
21-23 May	Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe"	Kiev, Ukraine	ECE/Ukraine
21-24 May	CIC: 50 th General Assembly of the CIC	Helsinki, Finland	CIC
26 May - 19 June	IWC: 55 th Annual Meeting (16 - 19 June) and Associated Meetings - Scientific Committee (26 May - 6 June)	Berlin	IWC
JUNE			
5 June	World Environment Day: International Year of Freshwater 2003		UNEP
9 - 10 June	AMCEN Special Session of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (NEPAD)	Maputo, Mozambique	AMCEN
9-13 June	5 th Conference on Fish Telemetry	Palermo, Italy	COISPA
16-20 June	Workshop on the Governance on High Seas Biodiversity Conservation	Cairns, Australia	Env. Australia
18-22 June	2 nd International Congress on Chelonian Conservation	Saly, Senegal	SOPTOM
JULY			
17-18 July	CMS: 26 th Standing Committee	Bonn, Germany	CMS
AUGUST			
18-22 August	ASCOBANS: MOP4	Esbjerg, Denmark	ASCOBANS
SEPTEMBER			
8-17 September	World Parks Congress V	Durban, RSA	IUCN
22 - 24 September	EUROBATS: MOP4	Sofia, Bulgaria	EUROBATS
OCTOBER			
1 - 5 October (tentative)	First Meeting Great Bustard MOU (Central Europe) in conjunction with a European experts meeting	Hungary	CMS
9 - 10 October (tentative)	Workshop on the elaboration of the strategy of the CMS Scientific Council	Edinburgh	CMS
(tentative)	AEWA: Standing Committee	Bonn, Germany	AEWA
NOVEMBER			
10-14 November	9 th Meeting - SBSTTA	Montreal, Canada	CBD
DECEMBER			
(tentative)	Workshop on possible CMS Agreement on Whales in the South Pacific	Australia	Env. Australia/CMS

ACTION TAKEN TO CONSERVE NORTH AFRICAN ANTELOPE

First the bad news. Five years after the first inventory on the occurrence of antelopes and gazelles of six Northern African species listed as “endangered” in Appendix I of CMS, it has become evident that the numbers of animals in the wild are in further dramatic decline. However, there is some good news, too. At the recent CMS Seminar of Range States, IGOs, NGOs and individual experts, it was found that a stable number of animals of most of the species are held in captivity in zoos and private parks all over Europe and North America.

At the meeting, which was held in Agadir, Morocco from 1-5 May 2003, the status reports for the respective species were updated, and the Djerba Action Plan was updated and amended. The participants received information on the status of the development and carrying out of projects to implement the Action Plan and collected proposals on what further projects or identified species, habitats and regions should be developed.

In a brief excursion to the Souss-Massa National Park, 30 kilometres south of Agadir, experts from zoos and aquaria in Europe and North America established that a third of the world’s resources of addax (*Addax nasomaculatus*) are found in this park. They informed the Moroccan authorities and the participants of the meeting that the value of this captive population is extremely high: The animals are in their natural surroundings, stay together in a few herds in the same place, can develop in natural surroundings and do not require transport from one continent to another. Moreover, at least the European scattered small stocks are at risk of catching diseases such as foot-and-mouth and BSE which, if transferred to Northern Africa, could cause a major disaster.



Addax

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From left to right: M. Anechoum, M. Haffane, A. Müller-Helmbrecht, Dr. M.R. Gouin (Agence Française de Développement).

Representing the Host Government, Mr. M. Anechoum, the Head of the Moroccan Department for Waters, Forests and Combat against Desertification, welcomed the participants of the meeting and promised to provide all assistance to make it a success. He achieved this by providing excellent conference facilities as well as a group of experienced and dedicated staff members such as Director General of the same Department Dr. M. Ankouz, the CMS Scientific Councillor, Dr. H. El Mastour, and almost the entire staff of the Souss-Massa National Park administration headed by Dr. M. Ribí.

The team of the Belgian Royal Institute for Natural Sciences (IRSNB) saw to the technical organisation. The meeting was followed by the 5th Meeting of the SSIG (Sahelo-Saharan Antelope Interest Group).



Dr. R. Beudels-Jamar de Bolsee (IRSNB), Scientific Councillor Belgium.