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Agenda Item 28.2.11

**PROPOSAL FOR A CONCERTED ACTION FOR
THE BENGAL FLORICAN (*Houbaropsis bengalensis bengalensis*)***

Summary:

The Government of India has submitted the attached proposal for a Concerted Action for the Bengal Florican (*Houbaropsis bengalensis bengalensis*) in accordance with the process elaborated in Resolution 12.28.

This revised version modifies the taxonomic scope of the proposal with a view to align it with the corresponding listing proposal.

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Proposal for Concerted Actions CMS COP 13 2020

Bengal Florican *Houbaropsis bengalensis*

Proponent	India (Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change)
Target Species, Lower taxon or population, or group of taxa with needs in common	<p>Bengal Florican <i>Houbaropsis bengalensis bengalensis</i> (J.F. Gmelin, 1789)</p> <p>Only <i>H. b. bengalensis</i> is proposed for inclusion in Appendix I of CMS Convention. The proposed Concerted Action is therefore foreseen to focus on this subspecies. However, it is anticipated that individual activities might concern and support the conservation of the other recognized subspecies, <i>Houbaropsis b. blandini</i> Delacour, 1928</p>
Geographical range	<p>Globally Bengal Florican is distributed in two isolated and disjunct populations recognized as distinct subspecies- one in South East Asia in Cambodia (<i>H. b. blandini</i>) and the other in South Asia in India and Nepal (<i>H. b. bengalensis</i>). The global population is estimated at <1000 mature individuals (Collar <i>et al.</i> 2017, BirdLife International 2018). It is already locally extinct from Bangladesh and perhaps from Vietnam as well. In India, the Bengal Florican inhabits patches of alluvial grasslands from Uttar Pradesh to the foothills and plains of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh (Rahmani <i>et al.</i> 2016, Rahmani <i>et al.</i> 2017 and Jha <i>et al.</i> 2018) while in Cambodia at the Tonle Sap and Mekong floodplain.</p> <p>The proposed Concerted Action under CMS will strengthen the conservation coordinated action required between range States.</p>
Summary of activities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Assessing distribution and population status in India, Nepal and Cambodia. 2. Understanding sex-specific seasonal variation in habitat use by the species in India and Nepal. 3. Identification of major threats to the species, locale specific as well as at the landscape level. 4. Conservation of the species through community involvement. 5. Bengal Florican focused grassland management in selected protected areas. 6. Protection of non-protected Bengal Florican sites by declaring them as Community Conserved Area through community participation. 7. Promotion of Bengal Florican sensitive agricultural practices on farmed lands within its range.
Activities and expected outcomes	<p>Activities</p> <p>Following activities are proposed-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and implement standardised, coordinated national and trans-boundary monitoring protocol for Bengal Florican population • Understand movement pattern, home range and habitat use of Bengal Florican using ringing and Satellite/GPS-GSM tracking during breeding and non-breeding seasons. • Understand major threats to the species at specific sites and at the landscape level. • Awareness of stakeholders for conservation of the species and its preferred habitat.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop state specific Recovery Plan for conservation of the species in range countries • Conservation of the species through establishing Community Conserved Areas (CCAs) or (or any such appropriate designation) in non-protected areas. • Promotion of Bengal Florican sensitive agricultural practices on farmed lands within its range. • Restoration of suitable grasslands and control of invasive species in the grasslands where it was previously known. • Ensure de-facto protection and appropriate management of key grassland reserves used by breeding birds. • Introduce appropriate mitigation measures for the collision risks with transmission lines • Explore the possibility of conservation breeding as it may be required in the future, particularly in north India <p>Expected Outcomes</p> <p>Following outcomes are expected from the above activities-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present distribution and estimated population of the species across its state ranges to understand the population trend at specific sites and landscape level. • Ecological knowledge of the species such as movement pattern, home range and habitat use are known in certain extent, especially in north India and southern Nepal. No information is available on habitat use of the species during breeding as well as non-breeding season in northeast India which has the largest population of Bengal Florican in the Indian subcontinent. • Each Bengal florican site present different threats to the species. Therefore, for better implementation of conservation action plan, site wise identification of threats will be an important outcome. • The species is under tremendous threat from anthropogenic activities such as land use changes. Spreading awareness among stakeholders will be helpful in gaining support of the local people for conservation of the species and its habitats. • State Recovery Plan for each state is necessary to implement targeted conservation activities in respective states. • Declaring non-protected sites of the Bengal Florican as Community Conserved Area (CCA) or (or any such appropriate designation) will help in protection of the habitat and the species in Northeast India. • Bengal Floricans will be able to safely use farmed lands, at least during the non-breeding season. • Probable recolonization of Bengal Florican in those areas where the species has vanished.
<p>Associated benefits</p>	<p>Conservation of grassland habitats for Bengal Florican will help associated globally threatened birds and other fauna. such as (in India and Nepal) Slender-billed Babbler, Swamp Francolin, Swamp Grass Babbler, Jerdon’s Babbler, Bristled Grassbird, Finn’s Weaver, Indian Grassbird and (in Cambodia): Chinese Grassbird, Yellow-breasted Bunting, as well as other grassland obligatory fauna.</p>

<p>Timeframe</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Satellite tracking of birds (India and Nepal) will depend on research permit from the concerned authorities (first two years). 2. Identification of major threats at specific site and landscape level are under process and will be available within 2-3 years. 3. Awareness programmes were already conducted in few areas and it will be continued to other sites from next year onwards. - Continuous 4. State Recovery Plan will be ready and implemented from year 2020 5. Proposing Community Conserved area will be initiated after selection of sites and understanding the interest of the local communities. - ten years in India, ongoing in Cambodia 6. Research on the ecology of vulnerable species to improve assessments of their spatial / habitat requirements and potential for mitigating management / offsetting (India and Nepal) – ten years 7. Develop tools / guidance for stakeholder outreach particularly to inform the financial risk associated with impacts of renewable energy on species, and to improve capacity building of regulators and consultants (India and Nepal) – two years 8. Guidance for local communities about impacts on local biodiversity and how to avoid/mitigate them – ten years. 9. Protection and habitat management in breeding sites – ongoing and continuous 10. Promotion of Bengal Florican sensitive agricultural practices (ongoing in Cambodia)
<p>Relationships to other CMS actions</p>	<p>Following actions under Bengal Florican CMS proposal can be linked with various resolutions and initiatives</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Resolution 10.03 (The Role of Ecological Networks in the Conservation of Migratory Species) 2. Resolution 11.25 (Advancing Ecological Networks to Address the Needs of Migratory Species) 3. Resolution 10.23 (Species marked for Concerted Actions 2012-14) 4. Resolution 11.10 (Synergies and Partnerships)
<p>Conservation Priority</p>	<p>Bengal Florican population is declining extremely rapidly throughout its distribution range mostly due to habitat modification and grassland habitat conversion to agriculture and is therefore listed as Critically Endangered in IUCN Red List (Birdlife International 2018). Telemetry studies in India and Nepal and also Cambodia indicate that birds disperse from the Protected Areas annually during the flooding, probably because the grass grows too tall and dense. All three fatalities among 11 satellite-tagged birds occurred between mid-August and mid-September when birds left protected breeding areas for adjacent degraded grassland and farmland near human settlements (DNPWC 2016, Jha et al. 2018), suggesting that they were victims of hunting or predation or powerlines, and that threat levels in non-breeding habitats are high and probably the critical/limiting factor for the species' survival. Non-breeding sites of the species in northeast India are still unknown. Identification of non-breeding sites and the key threats to the species are important for conservation.</p>

	In Cambodia non-breeding movements and habitat use are rather better known, but rapid agricultural intensification, construction of power lines and ongoing small-scale hunting are causing the population to decline very rapidly (Mahood <i>et al.</i> 2016).
Relevance	There is transboundary movement of Bengal Florican between India and Nepal. The Mekong Delta population is located on the border area between Cambodia and Vietnam (Gray <i>et al.</i> 2007). Recent telemetry studies in India and Nepal indicate that birds disperse from grassland reserves to agricultural fields during non-breeding seasons (Jha <i>et al.</i> 2018). Concerted actions from both countries is needed for conservation of the species during their movement in the non-breeding seasons. This CMS proposal can help as a guiding framework to convince the concerned agencies to take up the proposed actions.
Absence of better remedies	In lieu of remedies such as adequate funding, community support, impediments in technology usage and inclusion of species in existing management plans of PA's, it is rather difficult to secure the future survival of the species.
Readiness and Feasibility	The following significant issues exist for practical feasibility- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Require large human resources to monitor the population within the relatively short breeding season • Surveys and monitoring in some areas could prove difficult due limited or no accessibility • Restoration of grasslands need large amount of funds or special provisions under management plans • Government of India should give permission for satellite tracking • Collaboration with state forest departments and local NGOs - Bird Conservation Nepal is a BirdLife Partner and work closely with BNHS, which is also BirdLife International Partner in India. Concerted transboundary actions will help in the species' recovery. Grassland management plan for Protected Areas already exists but need to be updated. • Large numbers of farmers must be involved in habitat management plans outside of protected areas because birds are highly dispersed.
Likelihood of Success	Large team of researchers and ample funds will be required to implement the proposed action with support from respective state forest department. Monitoring of Bengal Florican population periodically (every two years) in India and Nepal depends on many factors. The risk factors include not getting permission for tagging Bengal Florican with satellite transmitters to understand movement pattern and habitat use. Non-participation of communities in conservation of the species outside protected areas. In Cambodia, intensive conservation action has stabilized one population of Bengal Florican and only need to be replicated over a wider area.
Magnitude of likely impact	The proposed actions will help the population of Bengal Florican in India, Nepal and Cambodia. The Bengal Florican can act as flagship

	<p>species for conservation of many other grassland dependent species. The species is a grassland specialist and shares its preferred grassland habitat with many globally threatened birds and mammals, for instance in India and Nepal these include: Swamp Francolin, Slender-billed Babbler, Jerdon's Babbler, Swamp Grass Babbler, Pygmy Hog, Hispid Hare, Hog Deer, Swamp Deer, and Greater one horned Rhinoceros.</p>
<p>Cost Effectiveness</p>	<p>Set of guidelines towards formulating state-specific species recovery plan is available for three resident bustard species of India viz. Great Indian Bustard, Lesser Florican and Bengal Florican which has been endorsed by MoEF&CC (Dutta <i>et al.</i> 2013). WII, Dehradun has received substantial funding under CAMPA for the recovery of Great Indian Bustard and Lesser Florican to certain extent but Bengal Florican got neglected. MoEF&CC funded a project to BNHS in year 2014.</p> <p>Activities such as range state meetings, satellite tracking of the bird, developing Community Conserved Areas (CCAs) will be cost effective. Concerted Action will help to avoid duplication of work. Achieving this is difficult, but any progress would mark the primary criterion for the cost-effectiveness of these projects.</p>
<p>Consultations planned/Undertaken</p>	<p>At local level BNHS has carried out consultation workshops for State Forest Department of Assam and Uttar Pradesh. After consultative meetings, a draft of Species Recovery Plan for Bengal Florican was developed for Uttar Pradesh in year 2017.</p> <p>In November 2019, an international meeting was organized on wetlands, migratory waterbirds, and flyways of Asia by the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS). This event provided a common meeting ground for scientists, conservationists, managers, BirdLife partners. A systematic expert-based assessment of progress and priorities for conservation of the Bengal Florican <i>Houbaropsis bengalensis</i> have been designed after consultation of concerned scientists from India, Nepal and Cambodia (Mahood <i>et. al.</i> 2018).</p>

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