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CONSERVATION OF AFRICAN-EURASIAN VULTURES

(Prepared by the Secretariat)

Summary:

As requested in Resolution 11.14, the Secretariat has led the development of a Multi-species Action Plan to Conserve African-Eurasian Vultures (Vulture MsAP).

Because of its size, Annex 3 to this document, comprising the draft MsAP and its Annexes, is provided in a separate file. For reasons of economy it has not been possible to translate the whole Vulture MsAP. However, a Summary is provided as an Addendum in the three CMS working languages.

Implementation of the draft Resolution and Vulture MsAP will contribute towards the implementation of targets 1, 4, 7, 8-13 and 15-16 of the Strategic Plan for Migratory Species 2015 – 2023.

Rev.1 clarifies the nature of certain Annexes to the Vultures MsAP.

Rev.2 replaces Annex 3 with a newly formatted version of the Vulture MsAP. No substantive changes have been made to the MsAP.

CONSERVATION OF AFRICAN-EURASIAN VULTURES

Background

1. Vultures are suffering extreme pressure from a wide range of human activities. In recent years, drastic and widespread declines in vulture population in Asia and Africa have been reflected by the elevation of status listings in the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List: the majority of species of Old World vultures are now considered Critically Endangered or Endangered.
2. The catastrophic declines in vulture populations are of particular concern because these birds provide critically important ecosystem services. They clean up carcasses and other organic waste in the environment, thus reducing the spread of dangerous diseases such as anthrax and rabies – resulting in highly significant economic and human health benefits. Vultures utilize vast home ranges, frequently crossing geo-political boundaries and therefore international cooperation is essential for their conservation.
3. In November 2014, CMS Parties adopted CMS Resolution 11.14 - Programme of Work on Migratory Birds and Flyways at 11th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP11) in Ecuador. This resolution established the mandate to develop a Multi-species Action Plan to Conserve African-Eurasian Vultures (Vulture MsAP), under the auspices of the CMS Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation of Migratory Birds of Prey in Africa and Eurasia (Raptors MOU). The mission was to bring together representatives of Range States, partners and other stakeholders, to develop a coordinated Action Plan for submission to the 12th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CMS (COP12) in October 2017.
4. The Second Meeting of Signatories (MOS2) to the CMS Raptors MOU held in Norway in October 2015, formally recognized all Old World vultures (except the Palm-nut Vulture) as migratory species by listing them in Table 1 of Annex 3 of the Raptors MOU. Furthermore, MOS2 tasked the Technical Advisory Group of the Raptors MOU to support the Coordinating Unit in facilitating development of a Vulture MsAP, encompassing all 15 species that are obligate scavengers: Bearded Vulture *Gypaetus barbatus*, Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus*, Red-headed Vulture *Sarcogyps calvus*, White-headed Vulture *Trionoceps occipitalis*, Hooded Vulture *Necrosyrtes monachus*, Himalayan Griffon *Gyps himalayensis*, White-rumped Vulture *Gyps bengalensis*, White-backed Vulture *Gyps africanus*, Indian Vulture *Gyps indicus*, Slender-billed Vulture *Gyps tenuirostris*, Cape Vulture *Gyps coprotheres*, Rüppell's Vulture *Gyps rueppelli*, Griffon Vulture *Gyps fulvus*, Cinereous Vulture *Aegypius monachus*, and Lappet-faced Vulture *Torgos tracheliotus*.

Vulture MsAP

5. The precipitous collapse of populations of at least three species of vultures in South Asia over the last 25 years is mainly ascribed to these birds feeding on the carcasses of animals treated for veterinary purposes with a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID) - diclofenac. On the African continent vulture populations have also declined considerably in most areas in a similar period. In Africa, the threat from poisoning has accelerated in recent times due to a range of drivers, which all lead to carcasses being laced with highly toxic substances; sometimes vultures are the targets, but at other times they are unintended victims due to scavenging behaviour. The immense scale and extent of the population declines of vultures in Africa have only recently been exposed and has led to the term 'African Vulture Crisis'.

6. Poisoning of various forms, direct and indirect, intentional and otherwise is a serious threat throughout the ranges of African-Eurasian vultures. Other threats, also operating over large areas, although to varying extents, include collisions with powerlines and wind turbines, electrocution on power infrastructure, habitat loss and degradation, decreasing food availability, human disturbance and fragmentation of remaining populations.
7. In February 2016, following consultation with the IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC) Vulture Specialist Group, BirdLife International, the Vulture Conservation Foundation and other specialists, the Coordinating Unit of the Raptors MOU drafted a Project Charter for the development of the Vulture MsAP. The overall aim was to develop a comprehensive strategic action plan encompassing the whole geographic ranges of 15 species of Old World vultures to promote concerted, collaborative and coordinated international conservation actions. The objectives are to rapidly halt current population declines in all 15 species covered by the Vulture MsAP; to reverse recent population trends to bring the conservation status of each species back to a favourable level; and, to provide conservation management guidelines applicable to all Range States covered by the Vulture MsAP.
8. The Project Charter was circulated to all the Range States, partners and other stakeholders, calling for nominations for a Vulture Working Group and for funding support. Nearly 60 nominations were received for the Vulture Working Group; and Switzerland generously stepped forward to offer financial support to develop the Vulture MsAP during 2016 and 2017. These resources complemented core funding for the Coordinating Unit, already provided by Environment Agency – Abu Dhabi, on behalf of the Government of the United Arab Emirates (UAE).
9. Separate Small Scale Funding Agreements were signed with BirdLife International and the Vulture Conservation Foundation to provide regional and overarching coordination of the development of the Vulture MsAP. Four Regional Workshops (Africa, Europe, Asia, and the Middle East) were held in 2016-2017: in Senegal in October 2016 (co-organized by BirdLife International); in Spain in October 2016 (co-organized by the Vulture Conservation Foundation); in India in November 2016 (co-organized by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds); and in the UAE in February 2017 (co-organized with the Environment and Protected Areas Authority of the Emirate of Sharjah), respectively.
10. The development of the Vulture MsAP was overseen by the Coordinating Unit of the Raptors MOU, in partnership with BirdLife International, the Vulture Conservation Foundation and the IUCN SSC Vulture Specialist Group, supported by members of the African-Eurasian Vulture Working Group (Vulture WG), its Vulture Steering Group (Vulture SG) and in particular the Overarching Coordinator and three Regional Coordinators covering Africa, Asia (excluding Central Asia) and Europe (including Central Asia).
11. To elaborate the regional components of the Vulture MsAP, four workshops were held in Dakar, Senegal (October 2016) covering Africa; in Extremadura, Spain (October 2016) covering Europe and Central Asia; in Mumbai, India (November 2016) covering Asia; and in Sharjah, UAE (February 2017) covering the Middle East; and an Overarching Workshop in Toledo, Spain (February 2017) brought these components together into a comprehensive Vulture MsAP. Special thanks to the Governments of India, Senegal, Spain and UAE for supporting the hosting of these workshops.
12. A first consolidated draft of the Vulture MsAP, incorporating the four regional components, was published in mid-February 2017. It was circulated for review to 50 specialists, in advance of an Overarching Workshop held in Toledo, Spain in February 2017 (co-organized by SEO/BirdLife Spain). Participants at this concluding Workshop reviewed the first draft of the Vulture MsAP, elaborated certain key strategic components of the MsAP which had not been collectively considered at the Regional Workshops, and also successfully engendered additional multi-lateral support.

13. A month-long public consultation exercise on the second draft of the Vulture MsAP was launched in mid-March 2017, with the aim of reaching out even further by inviting comments and improvements from anyone who recognized the importance of vultures and the critical need to conserve them. Almost 60 responses were received, raising over 250 issues for consideration. Each response was carefully reviewed and, where appropriate, integrated into a final version of the Vulture MsAP, which was submitted to the CMS Secretariat in May 2017, in time for tabling at the Second Meeting of the Sessional Committee of the CMS Scientific Council (July 2017) and CMS COP12.

Discussion and analysis

14. The Vulture MsAP has been developed in a transparent, collaborative and consultative manner, engaging government officials in all 128 Range States covered by the plan, and including vulture specialists, conservationists, partner organizations, stakeholders and the general public. It presents the most up-to-date information on the distribution, status and population trends of the 15 species of Old World vulture, gathered from a wide range of sources including published literature, over 150 questionnaires completed by officials and vulture experts, participative workshops involving more than 200 people and a month-long public consultation exercise on the second draft of the document, which was circulated by the Coordinating Unit to over 1,000 contacts via email.

15. All known threats to vultures are presented and reviewed in the Vulture MsAP, including at regional and species levels. The drivers behind these threats are also considered. To address these threats, 12 Objectives are listed in the Vulture MsAP followed by a Framework of Actions that sets out 125 activities that need to be implemented to meet these challenges.

16. The various key stakeholders, including their respective roles in achieving the 12 Objectives, are listed in the Vulture MsAP, alongside policy opportunities and barriers to effect wide-scale changes. An overview of international conventions, agreements, and policies presented in the Vulture MsAP also provide context in terms of existing structures and possible synergies that can be used to support and assist in achieving the overall goal of the Vulture MsAP.

17. The Vulture MsAP also contains information on the proposed structure, approach and resources required for its successful implementation. Furthermore, it provides guidance on the monitoring, evaluation and review processes to be followed during the 12-year implementation period. It also outlines key components that should be included in communications and fundraising and resource mobilization plans to promote and garner support for the plan from governments in the Range States and other target audiences.

18. The Plan also contains information on, or links to, existing plans and policies focused on relevant threats, individual species or groups of species (including through links presented in Annexes). Two of these documents were developed concurrently with the Vulture MsAP and were consulted extensively with regard to the two species concerned. These are:

- Flyway Action Plan for the Conservation of the Balkan and Central Asian Populations of the Egyptian Vulture; (Annex 4 to the Vulture MsAP);
- Flyway Action Plan for the Conservation of the Cinereous Vulture¹ (Annex 5 to the Vulture MsAP).

19. Finally, a Blueprint for the Recovery of Asia's Critically Endangered Gyps Vultures is included as Annex 6 to the Vulture MsAP. It was developed by the Saving Asia's Vultures from Extinction (SAVE) consortium and is annually updated by SAVE members. The

¹ Under development; expected to be finalized by stakeholders in advance of CMS COP12. On receipt, Rev.1 of Vulture MsAP/Annex5 will be posted online.

Blueprint provides clear guidance in terms of regional vulture conservation; the recommended actions in the Vulture MsAP reflect this.

20. The above-mentioned three Annexes to the Vulture MsAP have been compiled by third parties via separate processes and therefore are not open for amendment by CMS Parties. They are included as Annexes to the Vulture MsAP due to their high relevance for vulture Range State governments and are recommended to be consulted when vulture conservation action plans are developed at a national level.
21. Financial contributions were made by Environment Agency – Abu Dhabi and the Environment and Protected Areas Agency, Sharjah, on behalf of the Government of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the Government of Switzerland, and the Regional Authorities of Extremadura and Castilla-La Mancha, on behalf of the Government of Spain, plus in-kind support from BirdLife International, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB – BirdLife UK) and the Vulture Conservation Foundation, , as well as of the wider support in the form of working time contributed by all the members of the Vulture Working Group. Without all of these valuable contributions the Vulture MsAP could not have been developed.

Recommended actions

22. The Conference of the Parties is recommended to:
 - a) adopt the draft Resolution contained in Annex 1;
 - b) adopt the draft Decisions contained in Annex 2;
 - c) adopt the draft Vulture MsAP contained in Annex 3.

DRAFT RESOLUTION

CONSERVATION OF AFRICAN-EURASIAN VULTURES

Affirming the commitment to supporting implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure prosperity for all,

Recognizing the continuing loss of biodiversity, as established in Global Biodiversity Outlook 4 (2014), which provides a mid-term assessment of progress towards the implementation of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD),

Affirming the commitment to the implementation of the Aichi Targets adopted under CBD, inter alia the achievement of Target 12, within Strategic Goal C - To improve the status of biodiversity by safeguarding ecosystems, species and genetic diversity,

Concerned that the 15 species of African-Eurasian Old World vulture (namely, Bearded Vulture *Gypaetus barbatus*, Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus*, Red-headed Vulture *Sarcogyps calvus*, White-headed Vulture *Trigonoceps occipitalis*, Hooded Vulture *Necrosyrtes monachus*, Himalayan Griffon *Gyps himalayensis*, White-rumped Vulture *Gyps bengalensis*, White-backed Vulture *Gyps africanus*, Indian Vulture *Gyps indicus*, Slender-billed Vulture *Gyps tenuirostris*, Cape Vulture *Gyps coprotheres*, Rüppell's Vulture *Gyps rueppelli*, Griffon Vulture *Gyps fulvus*, Cinereous Vulture *Aegypius monachus*, and Lappet-faced Vulture *Torgos tracheliotus*) are one of the most threatened groups of migratory birds in the world, with eleven being globally threatened, eight critically so, and three being Near Threatened according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List,

Aware that the precipitous population declines experienced in recent years by most African-Eurasian vulture populations have been driven by anthropogenic factors; primarily poisoning by poison baits set illegally: a) to protect livestock from predators but unintentionally kill vultures; b) by poachers, deliberately targeting vultures to prevent them drawing attention of wardens to illegally killed Elephant; and, c) for the deliberate collection of vultures for belief-based use; and by vultures feeding on carcasses contaminated with the veterinary drug, diclofenac, in South Asia; but also due to a range of other threats including: habitat loss or degradation, decreasing food availability, mortality caused by electrocution on powerline poles, collision with wind turbines and other energy generation and transmission infrastructure, human disturbance and fragmentation of remaining populations,

Commending countries such as Spain and France, which, through intensive and sustained conservation efforts, have secured the recovery of their national populations of vultures, and other countries that have already developed and are implementing national action plans for vultures,

Recognizing that vultures provide critically important ecosystem services, offering significant economic and health benefits by cleaning up carcasses and other organic waste in the environment; where there are no vultures, carcasses can take up to 3-4 times longer to decompose with significant consequences for the spread of diseases in both wild and domestic animals, as well as elevating pathogenic risks to humans; and *also recognizing* that vultures hold special intrinsic cultural value in many countries,

Recalling the 'Programme of Work on Migratory Birds and Flyways 2014-2023' included in CMS Resolution 11.14, and its Action 9 to "[...] promote the development, adoption and implementation of species action plans for priority species in line with CMS priorities for concerted and cooperative action, including: [...] d) all African-Eurasian Vultures (except Palm-nut Vulture (*Gypohierax angolensis*)) via the CMS Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation of Migratory Birds of Prey (Raptors MOU)" to be completed by COP12,

Noting CMS-led initiatives established by Resolution 11.15 – Preventing Poisoning of Migratory Birds, including the associated Working Group, Resolution 11.16 - The Prevention of Illegal Killing, Taking and Trade of Migratory Birds, including the Inter-Governmental IKB Task Force, and Resolution 11.27 – Renewable Energy and Migratory Species, including the associated Energy Task Force,

Recalling the Resolutions of IUCN World Conservation Congress WCC-2016-Res-014 on combatting the illegal poisoning of wildlife, WCC-2016-Res-022 on conservation measures for vultures, including banning the use of veterinary diclofenac, and WCC-2016-Res-082 on a path forward to address concerns over the use of lead ammunition in hunting,

Noting that the Second Meeting of Signatories (MOS2) to the CMS Raptors MOU held in Norway in October 2015 formally recognized all Old World vultures (except the Palm-nut Vulture) as migratory species by listing them in Table 1 of Annex 3 of the Raptors MOU, and, furthermore tasked the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) to support the Coordinating Unit in facilitating development of a Multi-species Action Plan to Conserve African-Eurasian Vultures (Vulture MsAP), encompassing all 15 species that are obligatory scavengers,

Noting that four workshops were held between October 2016 and February 2017 to elaborate the regional components of the Vulture MsAP and an Overarching Workshop in February 2017 brought these components together into a comprehensive Vulture MsAP,

Stressing the need for immediate action by Range State governments, partners, stakeholders and other interested parties, to address the principal threats to the 15 species of African-Eurasian vultures at all stages of their life cycle, and across all 128 countries of their ranges.

*The Conference of the Parties to the
Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals*

1. *Adopts* the 12-year Multi-species Action Plan to Conserve African-Eurasian Vultures (Vulture MsAP) 2017-2029 [Annexed to this Resolution], and *urges* Parties and *encourages* non-Party Range States, partners and stakeholders to implement the Vulture MsAP as a matter of priority locally, nationally and regionally as well as at flyway level;
2. *Urges* Parties and *encourages* non-Party Range States, in implementing the Vulture MsAP, to urgently address: a) the problem of poisoning of vultures, particularly by poison baits, the veterinary use of diclofenac and other non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) toxic to vultures and the use of lead ammunition, in conjunction with the CMS Preventing Poisoning Working Group and in line with the Guidelines to Prevent Poisoning of Migratory Birds adopted by Resolution 11.15, ensuring that national conservation legislation is properly implemented and enforced; b) the impact of electrocution and collisions associated with energy infrastructure in conjunction with the CMS Energy Task Force in line with Resolution 11.27; and, c) the illegal killing, taking and trade in vultures and their body parts in line with Resolution 11.16;
3. *Urges* Parties and *encourages* non-Party Range States to implement existing measures under CMS, the Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA), Raptors MOU and other relevant international environmental treaties, especially where these contribute to the objectives of the Vulture MsAP, in order to increase the resilience of African-Eurasian vultures and their potential to adapt to environmental change.
4. *Further urges* Parties, non-Party Range States and stakeholders and *invites* UN Environment and other relevant international organizations, bilateral and multilateral donors to work collaboratively to immediately begin to mobilize the considerable resources required to fully implement the Vulture MsAP;

5. *Instructs* the Secretariat, through the Coordinating Unit of the Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation of Migratory Birds of Prey in Africa and Eurasia (Raptors MOU), to facilitate continuation of the Vulture Working Group and its associated structures (Vulture Steering Group and proposed Regional Implementation Committees) and team of coordinators, including by continuing to encourage engagement, communication, cooperation and collaboration between the stakeholders, by means of (regional) meetings and workshops, subject to the availability of funds;
6. *Invites* Parties and non-Party Range States to establish National Vulture Task Forces or equivalent bodies to develop National Vulture MsAPs to ensure the national implementation of the Vulture MsAP, integrating them into their (revised) National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) developed under CBD, especially to deliver Aichi Target 12 on preventing extinctions, and also support achieving the Sustainable Development Goals;
7. *Calls* on Parties and *invites* non-Party Range States and stakeholders, with the support of the Secretariat, to strengthen national and local capacity, including through twinning programmes between countries experienced in vulture conservation and those less so, following identification of training and capacity development needs, for the implementation of the Vulture MsAP.
8. *Calls* on Parties to report progress in implementing the Vulture MsAP, including monitoring the efficacy of measures taken, to each Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CMS, including through their National Reports.

ANNEX 2**DRAFT DECISIONS****CONSERVATION OF AFRICAN-EURASIAN VULTURES*****Directed to Parties, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations***

12.AA Parties, non-Party Range States and stakeholders are encouraged to:

- a) Develop partnerships with anti-poaching initiatives and conservation groups concerned with poisoning of other taxonomic groups, including developing training courses, translating and disseminating examples of best practice, sharing protocols and regulations, transferring technology, and promoting the use of online tools to address specific issues that are relevant to the Vulture MsAP.
- b) Contribute, with the support of the Secretariat, to the proposed workshop hosted by CMS-United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), referred to in UNEP/CMS/COP12/Doc.24.1.2 Conservation of Migratory Landbirds in the African-Eurasian Region (especially in relation to sustainable land use in Africa), to ensure the needs of vultures are provided for in the development of a plan (to be proposed for adoption at CMS COP13 in 2020) on the integration of biodiversity requirements, as indicated by wild birds, into the land degradation neutrality delivery at national level with a focus on West Africa (countries of the Sahel and Guinea Savannah) and potentially also North-west Africa (countries of the Maghreb).

Directed to the Scientific Council

12.BB The Scientific Council shall:

- a) Liaise with the Vulture Working Group and the IUCN Vulture Specialist Group, via the Coordinating Unit of the Raptors MOU, to address key gaps in knowledge as highlighted within the Vulture MsAP.

Directed to the Secretariat

12.CC The Secretariat shall:

- a) Convey this Resolution to the secretariats of other multilateral environmental fora, in particular UN Environment, CBD, Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), seeking their support, contributions, cooperation and collaboration in the implementation of the Vulture MsAP;

12.DD The Secretariat through the Coordinating Unit of the Raptors MOU, shall:

- a) Report to the next Meeting of Signatories of the CMS Raptors MOU and subsequent meetings of the Sessional Committee of the CMS Scientific Council.