



CONVENTION ON MIGRATORY SPECIES

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Agenda Item 19.3

TAXONOMY AND NOMENCLATURE OF BIRDS CONCLUSIONS OF THE SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL INTERSESSIONAL WORKING GROUP

(Prepared by the Scientific Council Intersessional Working Group)

1. In order to help resolve issues raised at CMS COP9, in Rome in December 2008 (see COP Recommendation 9.4), an Intersessional Working Group on Taxonomy was established by the Scientific Council at its 16th Meeting in Bonn, in June 2010. The Working Group was made up of the following individuals:

Mr. Barry Baker, Conference Appointed Scientific Councillor
Mr. Sergey Dereliev, Technical Officer, AEWA
Dr. Torbjörn Ebenhard, Scientific Councillor, Sweden
Mr. John O'Sullivan, Conference Appointed Scientific Councillor
Prof. Alfred Oteng-Yeboah, Conference Appointed Scientific Councillor
Mr. Jean-Philippe Sibley, Scientific Councillor, France

2. The Working Group worked by correspondence. Its comments and conclusions are set out below. The approach taken was to pose, and answer, what appeared to be key questions, as follows.

Should the CMS harmonize its taxonomy and nomenclature for migratory birds with that of CITES?

3. The Working Group recognized the value of harmonizing the two lists. This could be done by:

- (a) CMS agreeing to use the reference currently used by CITES (Dickinson, 2003).
- (b) CITES agreeing to use the references currently used by CMS (Morony, Bock and Farrand, 1975, plus Sibley and Monroe, 1990). Full titles of these references are given below.
- (c) Both conventions adopting appropriate changes.

4. **Important note:** the original proposal from the CMS Secretariat was, for albatrosses and large petrels, to adopt the taxonomy used by the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP). This proposal has been strongly supported by ACAP itself, and it may be recalled that this daughter Agreement of CMS has its own state-of-the-art Taxonomy Working Group. At the 16th Meeting of the Scientific Council, the Report of the Working Group on Birds indicated that, for these species, the Birds Working Group would also prefer to follow the treatment provided by ACAP, rather than Dickinson (2003), which treats these birds in a significantly different way. Having considered this matter once more, the Intersessional Working Group is convinced that **CMS should follow the taxonomy proposed by ACAP for the species within its remit**. CITES may wish to consider whether to follow CMS in this, thus adopting approach (c) above.

5. We advise that careful communication be maintained between the Secretariats of the CMS and CITES and the ACAP Taxonomy Working Group, to ensure that ACAP-agreed changes to taxonomy can be efficiently taken into account by the two Conventions. We suggest that the methods adopted to do so should replicate as far as possible the convenience of having a single printed point of reference. Care will also need to be taken if and when ACAP widens the number of species on its own species Annex. However, we do not anticipate that such matters will cause inordinate problems.

Leaving ACAP species aside, should the text around which we harmonize be Dickinson (2003)?

6. There appeared to the Intersessional Working Group to be both advantages and disadvantages to choosing Dickinson.

7. A significant advantage is that it is in one volume. The Working Group considers that Dickinson represents a good compromise between taxonomy based on genetic research and that based on traditional methods. To use it would also be convenient for the Secretariat and the Parties of CITES, as they would not have to make changes to their current way of working, except possibly as concerns ACAP species (see above).

8. Dickinson does have some disadvantages. As with any printed text that is infrequently updated, the results of the latest research will not be reflected for a period of years between editions. As an example, the current IUCN Red List of Birds includes Monteiro's Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma monteiroi* as being of Vulnerable status, which means that it is "endangered" in CMS terms. If CMS wished, as a result of this, to include the species in Appendix I, it would not, however, be able to do so based on Dickinson, which does not separate this taxon from *Oceanodroma castro*. There are almost certain to be other such cases, both as regards the 2003 edition and any future editions of Dickinson. However, in many cases, for instance concerning lumping and splitting, it should also be possible to list a taxon under CMS, using a subspecific name and/or a geographic restriction as a means of definition. It also needs to be said that stability over a period of years is considered of great importance by some scientific authorities, rather than making frequent changes based on the latest research. Such stability should also help the authorities, for instance in Contracting Parties concerned with the legal labelling of taxa.

9. A further disadvantage is that, as a published volume, Dickinson may not be readily available to many of the staff working on CMS issues in CMS Party states. This could perhaps be overcome (with some effort and expense) by publishing all or part of the work on the Internet.

10. We also note that Dickinson 2003 does not use the Order rank; this somewhat hinders ready reference, but does not present insuperable problems, we believe.

11. There is a further challenge with using Dickinson. Since the last printed edition in 2003, updates have been made available on the internet, the most recent one being number 8, produced in October 2008. These updates are not designed to be comprehensive; this will be left to the next edition of Dickinson. It is not possible to say with certainty when the latter will be published, but it is possible, judging from some sources (e.g. the booksellers Amazon), that it might be as early as the end of 2011, which is to say soon after CMS COP10. At all events, it is likely to happen sooner rather than later. We comment further on related aspects in our Conclusions below.

12. In adopting Dickinson (or any other new source), there would be considerable implications, including legal ones, for CMS Parties and Secretariat. These are not further pursued here.

Should CMS decide to stay with its existing references, and ask CITES to consider changing to them?

13. Morony, Bock and Farrand, 1975, and Sibley and Monroe, 1990 and 1993 are older references than Dickinson, and there have been considerable changes in taxonomic thinking since their publication. It did not seem reasonable to the Working Group to propose that CITES adopt them as their standard reference. In any case, we believe that it is time for CMS to move to something more recent.

Are there other possible nomenclatures we might wish to adopt?

14. Support has been given at CMS meetings to the idea of using BirdLife International's taxonomy/nomenclature as the CMS/CITES reference source. Further support for such a course of action was given during the deliberations of the Working Group. It has been argued that it would have the following advantages:

15. BirdLife is the Red List Authority on Birds for IUCN. BirdLife's taxonomy is drawn from a wide variety of authoritative sources, and is updated and published every year. BirdLife's nomenclature and taxonomy of albatrosses and petrels follows ACAP.

16. The BirdLife website contains a data zone readily accessible to anyone with access to the Web, including, of course, Parties that will not have available either the printed volume of Dickinson or the currently-used CMS references.

17. Conversely, a possible disadvantage of using the BirdLife nomenclature would be that there is no single printed volume that can be taken down and consulted. The CMS and CITES Secretariats would not have the certainties guaranteed by being able to work to a single printed reference. On the other hand, with the use of electronic resources now being commonplace, it could be argued that using such resources would not pose any serious problems for the Secretariats.

18. Although BirdLife International has worked closely with both CMS and CITES over many years, it is an NGO, not an intergovernmental organization. Note, however, that BirdLife International acts as the Red List Authority on Birds for IUCN (which does of course have

government members). It should be further noted that BirdLife International has not promoted the use of its nomenclature by CMS and CITES.

19. The Intersessional Working Group recognizes the great value of the Red List as managed by BirdLife International. However, we consider that, for the particular needs of CMS, a printed work is more convenient, in particular in clearly identifying and documenting the situation at a particular moment in time: this is more difficult to do with an electronic database. It is also helpful to have previous editions of the reference work available with any future editions: again, this seems more straightforward with printed texts than with electronic sources. In the production of CMS documents, including the Appendices, printed references will be less complex to reference, and should also make legal labelling more straightforward.

20. **Note:** one member of the Intersessional Working Group remained convinced that the use of the BirdLife International Red List taxonomy was the best option. The conclusions of the Group are therefore not unanimous in this respect.

Are there any other taxonomies/nomenclatures that we need to consider?

21. Another internationally well-respected ornithological taxonomy is provided by Clements (2007). However, the Working Group considered that a move by both CMS and CITES to this source would of necessity be more disruptive, and have no particular advantages.

22. The acclaimed *Handbook of the Birds of the World*, edited by del Hoyo et al, reaches completion towards the end of 2011 (with a volume of updates also planned). Although a remarkable work and now being widely used as a taxonomic reference at the species level, it appears in 16 heavy volumes, which would be unwieldy as a source of reference. In addition, it has a very great number of illustrations and other material that would be extraneous for treaty reference purposes (and which incidentally help to make the work very costly).

23. Conclusions of the Intersessional Working Group

- (i) As concerns species covered by the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP), we recommend that CMS taxonomy and nomenclature should follow the Agreement's own agreed taxonomy.
- (ii) We recommend that for other bird species, CMS should follow Dickinson. As to which edition of Dickinson should be used, we see considerable advantage in waiting for the next edition, which we understand may come as soon as late 2011. There may be more news on this before we meet in Bergen. Indeed CMS may wish to be proactive in approaching the publishers (Aves Press Ltd.) for both an update and to consider ways of cooperating before, during and after the COP. If, for any reason, CMS should decide that the 2003 edition must be used, we advise that electronic updates until the 8th (2008) should be included.
- (iii) We recommend that the relevant bodies of CMS and its daughter Agreements, should keep in regular review the changing situation with regard to the taxonomic treatment of birds. They should consider and plan for any necessary updates to be made, for instance to their appendices, resulting from the proposal of new taxa or proposed changes to the status of existing CMS taxa. In particular, they should seek to remain aware of cases

where a taxon, proposed by a reputable authority other than Dickinson, is recognized by IUCN to be endangered in the terms of the Convention. If felt to be necessary, appropriate action could then be taken to help safeguard the bird in question by CMS and its Agreements. CITES might also wish to consider similar reviews, working closely with CMS as appropriate.

Action requested:

- The Scientific Council is requested to take note of the report and to consider if its conclusions can be endorsed and submitted to COP.

References:

- Clements, J.F. (2007): *The Clements Checklist of Birds of the World*. Sixth Edition. Ithaca, New York. Cornell University Press.
- Del Hoyo, J. et al (1992-2011) *Handbook of the Birds of the World*. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona.
- Dickinson, E.C. (ed.) (2003): *The Howard and Moore Complete Checklist of the Birds of the World*. Revised and enlarged 3rd Edition. London (Christopher Helm) together with Corrigenda 4 to Howard and Moore Edition 3 (2003).
- Morony, J.J., Bock, W.J. and Farrand, J. (1975) *Reference List of the Birds of the World*. Department of Ornithology, American Museum of Natural History, New York.
- Sibley, C.G. and Monroe Jr., B.L. 1990. *Distribution and Taxonomy of Birds of the World*. Yale University Press, New Haven.
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