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RAPTORS IN THE AFRICAN-EURASIAN REGION

(Document submitted by the United Kingdom)

Below is reproduced the executive summary of the document submitted by the United Kingdom on "Assessment of the merits of a CMS Instrument Covering Migratory Raptors in the African-Eurasian Region". The full text of the document and the "Status report on Raptors in the African-Eurasian region" are available, in English only, in document UNEP/CMS/Inf. 8.18.

1. SUMMARY

Of all groups of birds, the predatory species have always attracted man's special attention for their grace of flight and perceived qualities of speed, agility and strength: even today, eagles and falcons, for example, feature in the national regalia of many countries. Collectively known as *raptors*, birds like eagles, buzzards, hawks, falcons, vultures and owls are characterised by their relatively long lifespans, low reproductive rates and general scarcity all stemming from their high position in the food web. Unfortunately, these elegant evolutionary adaptations also make raptors particularly vulnerable to rapid changes in their environment.

Ever since the mid-1960s, when peregrine falcon numbers across Eurasia and North America were decimated because of the use of persistent agricultural pesticides that, through their prey, accumulated in their bodies, thinned their egg shells and reduced their breeding success, there has been widespread concern over the status of raptors. In Europe, where monitoring schemes have a long history, many raptors have clearly experienced significant (and in some cases, severe) range contractions and population decreases.

Research has shown that raptors face many threats. The most important derive from intensive land use practices that reduce prey availability and suitable breeding habitat. However, other factors alone or in combination can also negatively affect raptors under various circumstances. These factors include: environmental pollution, pest control poisoning, trophy shooting, capture and trade for falconry, collisions with and electrocution by overhead power-lines, general disturbance, and the looming threats from climate change. Moreover, migratory raptors require adequate networks of suitable habitat along their migration paths, and many species tend to congregate at land-bridges, mountain passes and along coastlines where they are especially prone to intensive hunting and trapping.

The cumulative evidence of national or regional declines of raptors, increasing pressures on their populations, and apparent failings in current conservation measures to redress the situation, led the VI World Conference on Birds of Prey and Owls (Budapest, May 2003) to adopt a resolution proposing the establishment of a new multilateral agreement for the conservation of African-Eurasian migratory raptors, under the auspices of the Bonn Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals.

This resolution was taken up by the UK Government's Department for Environment, food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), which suggested to the CMS Scientific Council that a study of the merits of developing a new instrument on raptors should be undertaken in time for the next Conference of Parties to be held in Nairobi, 16-25 November 2005. The suggestion was endorsed, and this report contains the results from the study commissioned by DEFRA and carried out by the NatureBureau.

The overall aim of the study was to "assess whether or not an international agreement to conserve migratory raptors [including owls] should be established under the auspices of the CMS in the African-Eurasian region". In particular the study should "examine the merits and drawbacks of a CMS agreement in the region and result in a fully reasoned recommendation on whether or not such an agreement should be established."

1.1 Area and Species Covered

The study started by determining which raptors regularly occur in the Palearctic and Afrotropical realms yielding a total of 211 species. A more detailed assessment was then carried out to identify which of these regularly undertook migratory movements of more than 100 km at some point in their annual cycle within the Afrotropical realm or Western Palearctic. The aggregate range of these populations was then defined as the African- Eurasian region for the purposes of the study.

1.2 African-Eurasian Migratory Raptor Status Review

Having established the area and species to be covered, the current status of the species concerned and the threats facing them was reviewed in some depth. This involved consulting recently published literature, interrogating the BirdLife International World Bird Database, and correspondence with an expert panel comprising raptor researchers who had extensive direct experience in the African-Eurasian region. The review resulted in the production of a *Status report on raptors in the African-Eurasian region* (Tucker and Goriup, August 2005), referred to as the Raptor Status Report (available separately from DEFRA).

The review revealed that out of 211 raptor species in the African-Eurasian region, 74 are migratory and of these seven are globally threatened and a further three near threatened.

The ten species concerned are:

Species	**English Name**
Milvus milvus	Red Kite
Aegypius monachus	Cinereous Vulture
Circus maurus	Black Harrier
Circus macrourus	Pallid Harrier
Aquila clanga	Greater Spotted Eagle
Aquila adalberti	Spanish Imperial Eagle
Aquila heliaca	Imperial Eagle
Falco naumanni	Lesser Kestrel
Falco vespertinus	Red-footed Falcon
Falco cherrug	Saker Falcon

All these raptors, apart from the black harrier, are intercontinental migrants, breeding primarily within the Western Palearctic. However, this finding might partly reflect inadequate knowledge of the population status of some inter-African migrants and whether or not some threatened species are migratory.

In Europe, analysis of the population trends of migratory raptors indicates that nearly a third are declining rapidly: by more than 1% per annum. Furthermore, 21% have suffered large declines averaging over 3% per year in the last 10 years. Sadly, there is very little accurate knowledge about the status of raptor populations (breeding and wintering) in much of Asia, the Middle East and Africa. Although there are numerous counts of raptors at particular sites, it is difficult to assimilate them and deduce likely population trends for most species. However, it seems that some species other than those listed above, including tawny eagle *Aquila rapax* and African swallow-tailed kite *Chelictinia riocourii,* are less numerous than in the recent past.

Overall, it is clear that at least 32 (53%) of African-Eurasian migratory raptor species have an unfavourable conservation status at a global or regional level. Thus, an undesirably high proportion of migratory raptors are facing situations that warrant conservation intervention. In contrast with some other migratory bird groups already covered by special Bonn Convention instruments (albatrosses, waterfowl, cranes and bustards), migratory raptors as a group have no specific international conservation action plan at present despite all of them being included in Appendix II of the Convention.

1.3 Threats to Migratory Raptor Populations

According to currently available information, it appears that the following are likely to be the key threats to raptor populations over the coming ten years:

- Habitat loss and degradation (which is the most frequent threat to raptor populations, and is probably the root cause of unfavourable conservation status in most species), in particular habitat loss as a result of agricultural expansion, agricultural intensification, overgrazing of remaining natural grasslands (particularly in the Middle-East and Africa) and wetland loss.
- Shooting of migrating raptors, especially in the Middle-East, for sport and trophies.
- Accidental poisoning (e.g. through the use of poison baits to control feral dogs, jackals and wolves).
- Electrocution by power lines.
- Deliberate persecution of raptors (e.g. shooting and destruction of nests to protect game).
- Disturbance of breeding birds (e.g. by tourism, forestry and agricultural activities).

Collisions with wind turbines could become a significant future problem as a rapid expansion of wind farms is occurring within raptor migration routes. In the longer term, climate change will pose an additional major threat to migratory raptors and exacerbate existing human induced changes throughout the region because, as habitats and the timing of biological events change, migration strategies may be disrupted.

Of particular importance to migratory raptors are those places where they (and other soaring birds) congregate, usually to minimise a sea-crossing or avoid a high mountain range. An important site in this regard is one where at least 3,000 raptors regularly pass on spring or autumn migration. BirdLife International has identified at least 100 such sites in the study area as part of their inventory of Important Bird Areas. However, the legal security and conservation of many of these sites could be greatly improved: only just over half the sites have any form of protection status and only 20 sites have a good level of protection.

1.4 Potential for a New CMS Instrument for Migratory Raptors

In parallel with the status review, the current international conservation measures established by relevant multi-lateral environmental agreements (MEAs) were examined with specific regard to migratory raptors, and the potential role for a new instrument under CMS evaluated. The strengths, weaknesses, opportunities for and threats to different types of CMS instrument were also analysed.

There are eleven multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) that have (or could have) significant relevance for the conservation of raptors (whether migratory or resident) and/or their habitats in the African-Eurasian region, namely:

Broad ecosystem / environmental	MEAs Nature conservation MEAs
European Landscape Conservation	EC Birds Directive
Convention on Biological Diversity	EC Habitats Directive
Climate Change Convention	Bern Convention
Convention to Combat Desertification	African Convention
	Ramsar Convention
	CITES
	Bonn Convention

Our review of these MEAs showed that they provide a panoply of interlocking (if not partially overlapping) legislation that, in principle, covers all the threats faced by migratory raptors in the African-Eurasian region. However, it is also apparent that these arrangements are currently not sufficient to prevent declines in migratory raptor populations in Africa and Eurasia mainly because there is a lack of a unifying international plan of action that leads to concerted efforts for their conservation. Only the Bonn Convention provides a mechanism for formulating and implementing such an international plan of action that can coordinate and integrate the application of existing MEAs and address and remaining gaps.

1.5 New Bonn Convention Instrument Consultation Exercise

A consultation document was prepared (in English and French) that set out the main options and additional opportunities for improving the conservation status of African-Eurasian migratory raptors. The consultation document, together with the Raptor Status Report, were posted on the study website and distributed among the following interest groups, whose responses were actively solicited:

- Bonn Convention Focal Points (Ministries and government agencies)
- Secretariats of other relevant MEAs
- Researchers
- Non-governmental conservation organisations (NGOs)

This exercise, together with the background documentation, was welcomed by the Bonn Convention Secretariat as an innovative approach for developing new instruments. It elicited 60 responses from a total of 35 range states which, while neither comprehensive nor official, strongly supported the findings of the Raptor Status Report, namely (i) that few migratory owls have an unfavourable conservation status at present; (ii) that a high proportion of migratory African-Eurasian raptors have an unsatisfactory conservation status; and (iii) some 90% of the respondents supported the proposition that migratory raptors would benefit from a new Bonn Convention instrument to improve their conservation status. With regard to the latter finding, the main reasons for not supporting the proposition were based on concerns about diverting attention from implementing existing conventions, and the length of time that it takes to agree new CMS Agreements.

The general preference among respondents (whether official agencies or non-government bodies) on the form of a new instrument was for a non-binding Memorandum of Understanding, accompanied by an Action Plan. The consultation did not seek reasons for preferences but respondents presumably based their judgements on the analysis of strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities (SWOT) of different options presented in Table 11. Perhaps the most important advantages of an MoU are its non-binding nature and relatively rapid pace of adoption.

1.6 Conclusions and Recommendations

The Raptor Status Review provides clear evidence for concern about the current status of at least 32 species of migratory raptors in Africa and Eurasia, that for most species the situation is not improving over time, and indeed many other species may also be shown to be in an unfavourable status once more detailed studies are carried out in Asia, the Middle East and Africa.

An assessment of the provisions of existing applicable MEAs showed that despite apparently comprehensive coverage, they were failing to conserve migratory raptors largely owing to a lack of focus, resources and coordination.

The consultation exercise for a possible new instrument under the Bonn Convention indicated an appreciation of the problems faced by migratory raptors in Africa and Eurasia, and the need to take rapid actions. It also demonstrated broad support for the establishment of a non-binding Memorandum of Understanding with an Action Plan in order to facilitate urgent concerted actions among Range States to address these problems.

We therefore recommend that a draft Memorandum of Understanding with an Action Plan should be prepared for further consideration by the next Conference of Parties of the Bonn Convention, and further that it should:

- reiterate and strengthen calls for actions under existing MEAs where appropriate;
- focus on diurnal migratory birds of prey of the African-Eurasian region but also include owls;
- cover all raptors in the Africa-Eurasia region, prioritised according to their conservation status;
- only cover truly migratory raptor species that regularly occur within the African-Eurasian region;
- apply to the aggregate range of all migratory raptors (excluding States that are only visited by migrating Amur falcons *Falco amurensis*) that regularly occur within the Afrotropical or Western Palearctic realms at some point in their annual cycle;
- focus on key transboundary actions that will address the key threats to migratory raptors;
- promote activities that raise awareness of migratory raptors and their problems;
- monitor raptor populations throughout the region;
- identify regions where actions should be taken, and priorities and responsibilities for their implementation.

We consider that the main problems that a new MoU will face in delivering conservation benefits for raptors are as follows:

- obtaining the necessary number and type of signatory range states to make it operational, bearing in mind some have reservations over their existing burdens;
- implementing the MoU given that it has no formal legal standing or budget and therefore depends for effectiveness entirely on the goodwill of the participating states;
- maintaining a high level of coordination and support given the number of species and wide geographic range since the Secretariat is provided by the Convention Secretariat and the level of input will depend on the resources available to them and other programme priorities;
- possible confusion with the existing AEWA.

It is therefore recommended that, if the Conference of Parties supports the establishment of a new MoU and Action Plan for African-Eurasian Migratory Raptors, then an ad hoc consortium of range states should be formed to parent the MoU in consultation with the Convention Secretariat.

Finally, on the assumption that a Memorandum of Understanding and Action Plan along the lines of that proposed in the Attachment to this report is adopted, an estimate of the incremental cost estimation for implementing them over a five year period amounts to US$1,970,000. While this sum is rather higher than for other existing Bonn Convention Memoranda, it should be borne in mind that this one covers by far the greatest number of range states and species. Moreover, in global conservation terms, the amount is quite modest and could be raised through fostering private / public partnerships and by in-kind or offset contributions.
