

**5th Meeting of the Sessional Committee of the
CMS Scientific Council (ScC-SC5)**

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ACTION PLAN FOR THE YELLOW-BREASTED BUNTING

(Prepared by the Secretariat)

Summary:

In the context of the implementation of Decision 13.48 *Action Plans for Birds*, this document provides information on progress made in the development of the Action Plan for the Yellow-breasted Bunting (*Emberiza aureola*), and envisaged next steps towards its finalization and adoption. The Sessional Committee is expected to take note of progress and make recommendations, as appropriate, for the further elaboration and finalization of this Action Plan.

ACTION PLAN FOR THE YELLOW-BREASTED BUNTING

Background

1. The Conference of the Parties at its 13th meeting (COP13, Gandhinagar, India, 2020) adopted Decision 13.48 *Action Plans for Birds*, which reads as follows:

*Following consultation with the Scientific Council, the Standing Committee is authorized to adopt the Yellow-breasted Bunting Action Plan or Multi-species Action Plan for Eurasian migratory species under the genus *Emberiza* (Buntings) in an unfavourable conservation status, in the intersessional period between COP13 and COP14.*

2. The Yellow-breasted Bunting (*Emberiza aureola*) was formerly a common bird that spread from Finland to eastern Siberia with wintering grounds in China and south-east Asia. In China, it is known as the “rice bird”, because it was a common species in the rice fields during the winter. Over the last 30 years it has suffered a rapid decline which is due in part to the intensive trapping in the wintering grounds, especially in China where this bird is commonly consumed as food. The Yellow-Breasted Bunting is currently assessed as a Critically Endangered species under the IUCN Red List.
3. In response to the alarming decline of the species, CMS COP11 (Quito, Ecuador, 2014) through Resolution 11.14 *Programme of Work for Migratory Birds and Flyways*¹ recommended the development, adoption and implementation of species action plans for the Yellow-breasted Bunting² and for other priority species. Furthermore, through Resolution 11.17 *Action Plan for Migratory Landbirds in the African-Eurasian Region*³ COP11 requested the African Eurasian Migratory Landbirds (AEML) Working Group and the CMS Scientific Council, in liaison with the Migrant Landbirds Study Group (MLSG) and the Friends of the Landbirds Action Plan (FLAP), and with the support of the CMS Secretariat, to develop action plans for species including the Yellow-breasted Bunting.

Development of the Action Plan for the Yellow-breasted Bunting

4. Based on the above-mentioned mandates, the development of an International Action Plan for the Yellow-Breasted Bunting was undertaken under the responsibility of the AEML Working Group, with Birdlife International taking the lead in its capacity as a member of the AEML Working Group, MLSG and FLAP. This section summarizes progress to date in the development of the Action Plan, and is largely based on a recent progress report submitted to the Secretariat by the coordinator of the development of the Action Plan, Mr. Simba Chan, who is now affiliated with the Wild Bird Society of Japan.
5. Progress and planned activities towards the development of the Action Plan were presented and acknowledged at the Second Meeting of the AEML Working Group, Abidjan, Côte D’Ivoire, 25-27 November 2015. In the intersessional period between COP11 and COP12, consultations on research and priority conservation actions to halt the decline of the Yellow-Breasted Bunting took place with governmental representatives and scientific experts of the East Asian Range States at dedicated round table discussions at meetings of the Japan Ornithological Society (JOS), in Kobe, 18 September 2015 and Sapporo, 16 September 2016.

¹ Superseded by [Resolution 12.11 \(Rev.COP13\) Flyways](#)

² In addition, Action Plans for the Baer’s Pochard (*Aythya baeri*) and Far Eastern Curlew (*Numenius madagascariensis*) were recommended. These action plans have been developed and adopted by the CMS COP12 (Manila, 2017) through Resolution 12.12 (now superseded by Resolution 12.12 (Rev.COP13)).

³ Superseded by [Resolution 11.17 \(Rev.COP13\)/Rev.1 Action Plan for Migratory Landbirds in the African-Eurasian Region \(AEMLAP\)](#)

6. An *International Workshop on the Yellow-breasted Bunting and Migratory Landbird Conservation* took place from 2 to 4 November 2016 in the city of Guangzhou, Province of Guangdong, China. The meeting was organized by the Sun Yat-sen University and BirdLife International, with support from the Hong Kong Bird Watching Society and the Guangdong Institute of Applied Biological Sciences. A roadmap foreseeing the production of a draft Action Plan by mid-2017 was agreed, with a view to its possible adoption by CMS COP12. A preliminary version of the Action Plan was produced in May 2017 by the Asia Division of BirdLife International, that however was not considered ready for adoption by COP12 (see UNEP/CMS/COP12/Doc.24.1.5 for more details).
7. At its 12th meeting in Manila, 2017, the CMS COP, through adoption of Resolution 11.17 (Rev.COP12) *Action Plan for Migratory Landbirds in the African-Eurasian Region (AEMLAP)*⁴, renewed the mandate to continue the development of the Action Plan for the Yellow-breasted Bunting.
8. In the intersessional period between COP12 and COP13, consultations with governmental representatives and experts of the Range States on the draft action plan were held at a number of round table events at international ornithological congresses. Dedicated national workshops and meetings were also convened to discuss priorities on research and conservation of the Yellow-breasted Bunting, in Tver, the Russian Federation, 28-29 January and 1 February 2018; Yangon, Myanmar, 26 February 2019; Changchun, China, August 2019; Bangkok, Thailand, 8 September 2019; and Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 11 September 2019. Progress in the action plan preparation was presented at the Arctic Migratory Bird Initiative (AMBI) Meeting in Changjiang, Hainan, China in December 2018. However, an agreed Action Plan was not available in time for submission to CMS COP13.
9. At its 13th meeting in Gandhinagar, India, 2020, the CMS COP, through [Resolution 12.12 \(Rev.COP13\) Action Plans for Birds](#) recalled the provisions adopted at COP11 and COP12 regarding the development of the Action Plan for the Yellow-breasted Bunting outlined above, and requested Parties to report on progress in the implementation of action plans for priority bird species^{5,6} at each meeting of the COP via their national reports, including with regard to the Yellow-breasted Bunting Action Plan upon its finalization. COP13 also adopted Decision 13.48, noted above.
10. Since COP13, the further development of the Action Plan was discussed at the following occasions: Myanmar International Yellow-breasted Bunting Day Webinar, 15 November 2020; JOS Yellow-breasted Bunting Webinar, 20 December 2020; Japan National Yellow-breasted Bunting Webinar, 4 March 2021; and North-east Asia Yellow-breasted Bunting Webinar (China, Japan, Mongolia, the Russian Federation), 4 March 2021.

The Yellow-breasted Bunting network, a loose network formed after the Workshop in Guangzhou in 2016, has been actively sharing information, including via a page on Facebook.

⁴ Superseded by [Resolution 11.17 \(Rev.COP13\)/Rev.1 Action Plan for Migratory Landbirds in the African-Eurasian Region \(AEMLAP\)](#)

⁵ The Action Plan for the European Turtle Dove was adopted by the 48th meeting of the Standing Committee (Bonn, Germany, 2018), in line with Decision 12.21 *Action Plans for Birds*.

⁶ The Action Plan for the European Roller was adopted by COP12 (Manila, 2017) through Resolution 12.12 (now superseded by Resolution 12.12 (Rev.COP13)).

Discussion and analysis

11. The development of the International Action Plan for the Yellow-breasted Bunting has been facing challenges in terms of the endorsement of the process and the involvement of some key range states, in particular China, and Japan to some extent, neither of which are Parties to CMS. However, prospects towards participation of relevant government authorities of China in the Action Plan development have recently improved. Particularly since 2020, China has shown increased interest in discussing potential actions with counterparts from Japan, the Russian Federation, and South Korea under the East Asian Land Bird Monitoring Scheme. On 5 February 2021, China officially announced the Yellow-breasted Bunting as a First Class Protected Wildlife Species in China. In summer 2021, a set of postal stamps on Nationally Protected Species in China will be issued including one displaying the Yellow-breasted Bunting. NGOs in southern China have suggested an International Yellow-breasted Bunting Day, to be held on 15 November. Further events have been proposed for the Asian Ornithological Congress, organized by the China Ornithological Society, scheduled to be held in Zhuhai, Guangdong, China in November 2021, as well as in Japan.
12. A path forward towards concluding an Action Plan has been mapped out. As an opportunity for discussion and consolidation of comments on the final draft Action Plan, a virtual meeting of the Range States and the Chair of the AEML Working Group has been proposed, potentially to be organized by the Wild Bird Society of Japan. As outlined in Decision 13.48, the Scientific Council is to be consulted on the Action Plan before its possible adoption by the Standing Committee in the intersessional period.
13. In consultation with the coordinator of the development of the Action Plan and the Chair of the AEML Working Group, the following timeline is envisaged for the finalization and adoption of the Action Plan:

May – August 2021:	Revision and update of the draft Action Plan, including consultations and a virtual meeting with key actors in the Range States and the Chair of the AEML Working Group
September – December 2021:	Final consultations with Range States on the revised draft Action Plan
January 2022:	Submission of the draft by the compiler to the AEML Working Group
February – May 2022:	Submission of the draft Action Plan to the Scientific Council by the AEML Working Group for consultation via electronic correspondence
3 rd Quarter 2022:	Finalization of the draft Action Plan on the basis of comments received from the Scientific Council and submission of the final draft to the Standing Committee, as appropriate
4 th Quarter 2022:	Consideration and possible adoption of the final draft by the Standing Committee at its meeting or by correspondence; publication of the final version
14. The Yellow-breasted Bunting Action Plan is currently the only concrete action plan on Bunting species on the international level. The Secretariat is not aware of any multi-species action plan for Eurasian migratory species under the genus *Emberiza* (Buntings). Therefore, with reference to the mandate of Decision 13.48, the timeline and process proposed above is only applicable for the Yellow-breasted Bunting Action Plan at this stage.

Recommended actions

15. The Sessional Committee is recommended to:
 - a) take note of progress in the development of the Action Plan;
 - b) make recommendations to the AEML Working Group and the Secretariat regarding its finalization, as appropriate.