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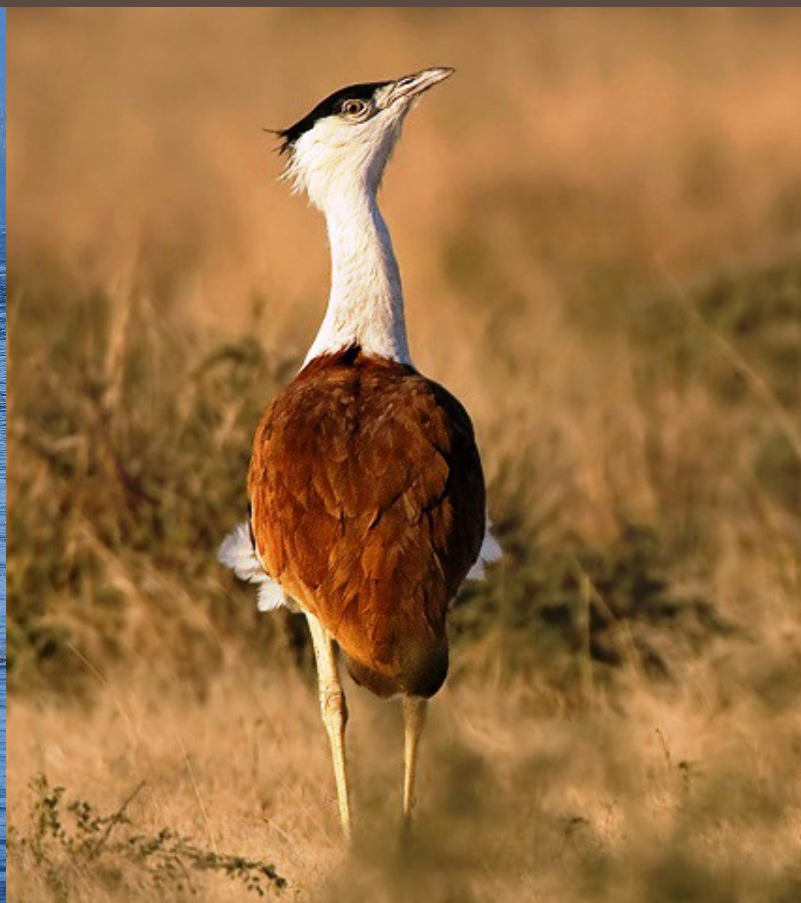
THE CONVENTION ON MIGRATORY SPECIES

Major Topics of CMS COP13



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Major Topics of CMS COP13

The Thirteenth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS COP13) and associated events will be held in Gandhinagar, Gujarat, India from 15 to 22 February 2020. **Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi** is expected to attend the opening ceremony of CMS COP13 on Monday, 17 February.

CMS COP13 will be guided by the theme: '**Migratory species connect the planet and together we welcome them home'** which highlights the need for international action to protect migratory species across the planet.

Outcomes expected at CMS COP13 include negotiated resolutions and decisions, political commitments, and new initiatives, as well as proposals to add ten new species for protection under the CMS. These include the Asian Elephant, the Jaguar, the Great Indian Bustard, and the Smooth Hammerhead Shark. Parties will also discuss the adoption of dedicated actions to protect species including the Giraffe, the Ganges River Dolphin, the Common Guitarfish and the Antipodean Albatross. Several cross-cutting issues will also be addressed, including how to minimize the impact of linear, energy and other infrastructure on migratory species. Below are some of the major topics that will be discussed during the conference:

1. Ecological Connectivity as a Priority Topic for the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework

CMS COP13 kicks off a 'super year' for biodiversity, which will culminate in the adoption of a new global biodiversity framework in October in Kunming, China during the 15th UN Biodiversity Conference. CMS COP13 will discuss priorities for migratory species for the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, with outcomes to be transmitted to that forum. Of high importance is to ensure that the new framework includes commitments to maintain and restore 'ecological connectivity' - the unimpeded movement of species and the flow of natural processes that sustain life on Earth. At CMS COP13, ecological connectivity will be discussed at a special Stakeholders' Forum on Saturday, 15 February.

2. Cross-cutting Issues

Mitigating the Impact of Linear Infrastructure

The significant global expansion of linear infrastructure, such as energy facilities and roads, can pose severe risks to migratory species. Roads and railway lines cutting through natural habitats can act as barriers to migration and result in injury and death to birds and animals. Linear infrastructure can also increase pollution and disturb wildlife as well as ease access for the illegal harvesting of wildlife.

CMS COP13 will consider the need for guidance and implementation tools to mitigate the impacts of linear infrastructure on migratory species.

Species-Safe Renewable Energy

Global energy demand is set to increase by 30 per cent by 2040. Meeting this demand while preventing global average temperature rises from exceeding 1.5^0C above pre-industrial levels - the goal of the Paris Climate Change Agreement - requires a substantial increase in the generation of renewable energy. Renewable energy installations and related powerline infrastructure have the potential to adversely impact migratory birds and bats. Making renewable energy wildlife-friendly is a major focus of the Convention's work.

The **CMS Energy Task Force** consists of representatives from member countries, multilateral environmental agreements, member organizations and observers. Created in 2015, the Task Force works towards reconciling renewable energy developments with the conservation of migratory species. It monitors the implementation of conservation guidelines, promotes research on planning tools for wind energy and other sectors and assesses the vulnerability of species. On a policy level, it advises development banks and other institutions that finance renewable energy infrastructure projects.

A new draft decision will be presented at CMS COP13 to integrate biodiversity and migratory species considerations into national energy and climate policy. It will enhance collaboration between the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and CMS to achieve better results with a renewable energy mix that is scientifically demonstrated to be wildlife-friendly.

Light Pollution

For the first time, the topic of light pollution will be on the agenda of a CMS COP. Artificial light is increasing worldwide, affecting migratory species such as bats, birds and marine turtles. The decline of insects due to light pollution is reducing available prey for insectivores. However, there are no international guidelines to mitigate and avoid light pollution, which can be a lethal danger to migratory species. CMS COP13 is expected to propose the development of such guidelines.

Insect Decline

Another new topic on the CMS COP13 agenda is the decline of insects, which is an emerging threat because of its effects on migratory insectivorous animals, especially bats and birds. Insect biodiversity plays a vital role in the correct functioning of the world's ecosystems and the services they provide. About 40 per cent of the world's insect species may become extinct over the next few decades. The draft Resolution being presented for adoption, calls for analysis and action to address the decline in insect numbers.

Animal Culture

The cultural learning of non-human animals through socially transmitted behaviour - first raised at CMS COP12 in 2017 - will be further discussed at CMS COP13. There is evidence that whales, dolphins, elephants and primates acquire some of their knowledge and skills through social learning. In addition to individual learning, some animals may learn socially from adults or peers about various behaviours, including optimal use of migration routes. Human

activities that disrupt the social fabric of these species can have severe impacts. Once a species has vanished from an area, critical knowledge can also be lost.

CMS has requested Parties to identify priority species where animal culture and social complexity are factors and to provide information on any assessments of anthropogenic threats to socially complex mammalian species.

Conservation measures that consider animal culture is a new concept which may be applied to many species, such as the Nut-Cracking Chimpanzee of Western Africa. A Concerted Action for this species is being proposed, which will serve as a pilot project to test the effectiveness of this concept for conservation.

Plastic Pollution

Historically, scientific research on plastic pollution has focused on marine environments. However, recent studies have shown that plastics, including microplastics, can affect terrestrial and freshwater species as well. Digestion of plastics and microplastics has been reported in many species including elephants, deer, storks and freshwater fish. Further scientific research is needed to better understand the scale and extent of the impact of plastic waste on migratory species living in terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems.

Parties will be encouraged to conduct further research on the impact of plastic pollution on freshwater and terrestrial CMS-listed species in support of internationally agreed policies.

3. Review of the Conservation Status of Migratory Species

The first-ever Review of the Conservation Status of Migratory Species listed on CMS Appendices will be presented at CMS COP13. It shows that 73 per cent of CMS Appendix I-listed species and 48 per cent of CMS Appendix II-listed species have an overall decreasing population trend. However, for Appendix I species, the population trend is stable for 5 per cent of species and is increasing for 9 per cent. For Appendix II-listed species, the population trend for 10 per cent is stable and for 10 per cent is increasing. The status of the remainder of species is uncertain or was not assessed. Among all migratory animals covered by the Convention, migratory fish appear to be the most rapidly declining taxa followed by birds.

4. Listing Proposals

Ten new proposals to amend one or both Appendices of the Convention covering aquatic, avian and terrestrial species will be considered.

Proposals for **CMS Appendix I** - granting the highest degree of protection under the Convention - have been made for the Asian Elephant (*Elephas maximus indicus*)) the Jaguar (*Panthera onca*), the Great Indian Bustard (*Ardeotis nigriceps*), the Bengal Florican (*Houbaropsis bengalensis bengalensi*), the Antipodean Albatross (*Diomedea antipodensis*), and the Oceanic White-tip Shark (*Carcharhinus longimanus*). The Smooth Hammerhead Shark (*Sphyrna zygaena*), the Tope Shark (*Galeorhinus galeus*), and the Urial (*Ovis vignei*), have been proposed for listing under **CMS Appendix II** - migratory species with an unfavourable

conservation status. The Jaguar and the Little Bustard (*Tetrax tetrax*) have been proposed for listing on both CMS Appendices. The full proposals are available on the CMS COP13 website.

For all of the species proposed for listing on Appendix I except the Jaguar and the Oceanic White-tip Shark, there is also a Concerted Action, described in the next section.

The **Jaguar** is the largest native feline in the Americas. It is now found in around 60 per cent of its range compared with hundred years ago. Deforestation, hunting, illegal trade, cattle ranching, and obstacles to migration pose serious threats.

The **Oceanic White-tip Shark** is a species valued for its fins and meat. For this reason, it has been targeted directly and indirectly by different types of fishing operations. Steep population declines have occurred in all oceans with significant historical declines also reported across its range. The IUCN has classified it as 'Critically Endangered'.

5. Concerted Actions

Concerted Actions, which set out priority conservation measures, have been proposed for the following 14 individual species: the Asian Elephant, the Great Indian Bustard, the Bengal Florican, the Ganges River Dolphin (*Platanista gangetica gangetica*), the Nut-cracking Chimpanzee (*Pan troglodytes verus*), the Giraffe (*Giraffa Camelopardalis*), the Harbour Porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*) in Europe and the Humpback Whale in the Arabian Sea (*Megaptera novaeangliae*). Another two Concerted Actions cover the Common Guitarfish (*Rhinobatos rhinobatos*) – one dealing with the Common Guitarfish and the Bottlenose Wedgefish (*Rhynchobatus australiae*), and one dealing with the Common Guitarfish, the Largetooth Sawfish (*Pristis pristis*), and Smalltooth Sawfish (*Pristis pectinata*).

One species group, Sahelo-Saharan Megafauna, has been proposed for priority measures. The Action Plan covers six CMS Appendix I species in total, with five being endemic to the region: Addax (*Addax nasomaculatus*), Cuvier's Gazelle (*Gazella cuvieri*), Dama Gazelle (*Nanger dama*), Scimitar-horned Oryx (*Oryx dammah*) and Slender-horned Gazelle (*Gazella leptoceros*), as well as the wider ranging Dorcas Gazelle (*Gazella dorcas*). The Action Plan is currently being updated under the chairmanship of the IUCN Antelope Specialist Group with funding from the US Fish and Wildlife Service's Conservation Enhancement Fund. It is proposed that the Red-fronted Gazelle (*Eurdorcas rufifrons*) added on Appendix I at COP11 and the Barbary sheep (*Ammotragus lervia*, Appendix II) will be added to the updated Action Plan.

India has submitted a proposal for Concerted Action to conserve Asian Elephants with the main focus on the mainland Asian Elephant in 13 countries across South and South-east Asia. The species is classified as 'Endangered' on the IUCN Red List. The Asian Elephant faces habitat loss and fragmentation, poisoning, poaching, illegal trade and obstacles to migration, such as railways. Blocking traditional migration routes of Asian Elephants across international borders not only affects their migratory behavior, but also intensifies human-elephant conflicts, and can lead to the killing of elephants. The illegal hunting and trade in live elephants as well as in body parts remain major threats to the Asian Elephant.

The Concerted Action aims to initiate a process for developing an agreement among Asian Elephant range countries. Key activities are tackling barriers to the natural migration of

elephants, protecting the animals and their habitats, regulating human-elephant conflicts, and controlling the illegal trade in body parts and live specimens.

Reaching heights of nearly 6 metres, the Giraffe is the world's tallest land animal. Of the nine sub-species, two are classified as 'Critically Endangered' and two others as 'Endangered' on the IUCN Red List. Overall, the Giraffe is listed as 'Vulnerable', as it faces loss, fragmentation and degradation of its habitat, illegal harvesting and trade, disease, and civil unrest as well as the impact of climate change. Of the 28 countries where it used to be found, the Giraffe has become extinct in seven.

The Concerted Action proposed by Cameroon, Chad, Ethiopia, Kenya, Niger, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zimbabwe, calls for the development of Africa-wide, national and regional plans to catalyze effective conservation of the Giraffe. Additional proposals to help save the species from extinction include increased collaboration across Range States and facilitating the collection and sharing of information through the development of a Giraffe database.

The Nut-Cracking Chimpanzee of Western Africa acquired its name due to its unique use of tools to crack open a variety of nuts using natural materials such as stone and wood as hammers and anvils. This remarkable behaviour occurs only in the most westerly parts of this sub-species' range and has not been observed in other populations across Africa, despite the availability of nuts, stone and wood. The sub-species was classified as 'Critically Endangered' because of habitat loss and degradation, poaching and disease. Only 18,000-65,000 individuals remain, with population declines predicted to continue.

The Concerted Action proposed by the Expert Working Group on Culture and Social Complexity and CMS Ambassador Ian Redmond aims to bring together four Range States to review existing scientific evidence and to plan specific actions for the protection of these animals.

The 'Critically Endangered' Great Indian Bustard, the CMS COP13 mascot, has disappeared from 90 per cent of its historical range. Its population has also plummeted by 90 per cent over the past 50 years. Poaching, collisions with power lines and wind turbines and obstacles such as solar power plants are major threats.

The Concerted Action proposed by India focuses on restoring suitable grasslands and promoting traditional crops and organic farming. Installing reflectors on existing power lines and burying new transmission lines will reduce mortality rates. Establishing protected areas in private or community-owned land will contribute to conserving the species.

The Bengal Florican is an omnivorous grassland bird, with a global population of fewer than 1,000 mature individuals. Two distinct sub-species remain, one in Cambodia and the other in India and Nepal. Across its range, this 'Critically Endangered' species is rapidly declining due to changes in land-use, predation by stray dogs, and collisions with power lines.

The Concerted Action submitted by India proposes to mitigate collision with power lines and promote sustainable agricultural practices. Assessing the distribution and population status

in India, restoring suitable grasslands, controlling invasive species, and involving communities will help restore the Bengal Florican.

Breeding on four islands off New Zealand, the Antipodean Albatross is a seabird species with a wing span of over three metres. Its population of 50,000 mature individuals is rapidly declining. Death resulting from bycatch is the largest threat to the species, with functional extinction likely in 20-30 years. Food shortages and increased storms resulting from climate change, as well as the threat of plastic pollution are also expected to impact its population numbers. The Concerted Action submitted by Australia, Chile and New Zealand proposes to mitigate seabird bycatch from fishing operations, both in Range State jurisdictions and the high seas. Further research would help to better understand potential risks.

Ganges River Dolphins have suffered a decline of 20 per cent due to the construction of dams and barrages in the Indian subcontinent over the past 70 years.

Increasing diversion and the regulation of river flows for irrigation, urban water use and power generation have resulted in continuing habitat loss and disconnected populations. In addition, bycatch in gillnets, hunting and poaching for the animals' oil and flesh, and pollution, are major threats in much of the species' range.

Managing flow in regulated river basins to ensure connectivity of riverine habitats and addressing specific sources of mortality are key activities of the Concerted Action proposal prepared by India.

The Bottlenose Wedgefish is among the most threatened of marine fish species and its population has fallen by over 80 per cent over the last three generations (45 years). This 'Critically Endangered' ray is found in the Indo-West Pacific, its range coinciding with major coastal fishing grounds. Its high-value fins and bottom-dwelling nature make it particularly susceptible to targeted fishing and bycatch.

The Concerted Action proposed by the IUCN Shark Specialist Group suggests developing a Global Rhino Ray Action Plan for species known as rhino rays after their distinctive, pointed snouts. It covers Sawfish, Wedgefish, Common Guitarfish, Giant Guitarfish and Banjo Rays. Furthermore, the designation of no-take zones, the prohibition of certain fishing gear and reducing the demand for shark and ray fins, are proposed to prevent the extinction of the Bottlenose Wedgefish.

The Common Guitarfish looks like a cross between a shark and a ray, growing to around one metre in length. The range of this slow-breeding and endangered ray species reaches from the southern Bay of Biscay in Spain, the Mediterranean Sea, and southwards to Angola. As bottom dwellers, Common Guitarfish are exceptionally vulnerable to bycatch from many fisheries. Their fins are among the most highly-valued on the international market.

The Concerted Action submitted by the IUCN Shark Specialist Group proposes no-take zones, temporary fishing restrictions and the prohibition of specific fishing gear. Increased research and international cooperation are also recommended, especially through the creation of a Global Rhino Ray Action Plan, which will include Sawfish, Wedgefish, Guitarfish, Giant Guitarfish and Banjo Rays.

The Angelshark (*Squatina squatina*) population has declined over the past century and is listed as 'Critically Endangered' on the IUCN Red List. The Angelshark belongs to second most threatened family of the world's sharks and rays according to the IUCN Shark Specialist Group. It is probably extinct in the North Sea and parts of the Northern Mediterranean Sea, with no recent sightings around the western coasts of France, Spain and Portugal. The recent launch of the *Mediterranean Angel Sharks: Regional Action Plan* provides a framework for conservation measures. Under the Concerted Action, lessons learned from this plan could be emulated in other regions to minimize threats.

All five Sawfish species face a high risk of extinction with the Smalltooth, Green and Largetooth Sawfish listed as 'Critically Endangered'. Due to climate change, habitat fragmentation and destruction as well as targeted fishing for its fins and liver, 43 countries have lost at least one species of Sawfish, with complete extinction in a further 20. Their historic range used to extend across 90 countries in tropical and subtropical regions. The Concerted Action proposed by Gabon highlights the need for large-scale studies and the development of legal frameworks around Marine Protected Areas. Former migration corridors need to be restored and protected, to allow fragmented populations to return to their original grounds.

Both the Baltic Sea and Iberian Peninsula populations of the Harbour Porpoise are 'Critically Endangered' and have been recognized as a high priority for conservation by many scientific fora.

High mortality rates due to bycatch in fisheries, especially from the use of static gear such as gillnets, is the major threat to the population in the Baltic proper, which covers the part of the Baltic Sea, from the Åland Sea to the Danish sounds. Contaminants may also have contributed to the species' decline there. Underwater noise from shipping and offshore wind farm construction, may displace the animals and affect their behaviour. Fewer than 500 animals are left in the Baltic Sea and fewer than 3,000 off the Iberian Peninsula. The latter population has an estimated annual mortality rate of 18 per cent.

Coalition Clean Baltic, Whale and Dolphin Conservation, Humane Society International and Oceans Research and Conservation Association (ORCA) have proposed a Concerted Action for the Harbour Porpoise, which contributes to the following instruments concluded under CMS: the Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and contiguous Atlantic area (ACCOBAMS), the Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish and North Seas (ASCOBANS) and the CMS Global Programme of Work for Cetaceans.

By proposing Concerted Action for the Irrawaddy Dolphin, India is prioritizing the recovery of the globally endangered population of fewer than 7,000 animals. Key threats are entanglement in fishing gear, pollution, and barriers to migration. Priority actions include training coastal fishing communities to mitigate bycatch and maintaining connectivity in rivers across political boundaries, dams and barrages. Research and monitoring will allow for in-situ protection in Important Marine Mammal Areas. The species, which is listed on both CMS Appendices, can adapt to both fresh and saline water.

The Humpback Whale is found in all of the world's major oceans. All known sub-populations, except for the one in the Arabian Sea, migrate between breeding grounds in tropical waters and feeding grounds in productive temperate or polar waters. The Arabian Sea population is endangered as a result of accidental entanglement in fishing gear, ship strikes and disturbance from underwater noise. According to scientific estimates, fewer than 100 individuals remain in Oman's coastal waters.

Conservation efforts under the renewed CMS Concerted Action would strengthen research and information exchange. Strategies to mitigate ship strikes and bycatch would increase the whales' chances of survival. The planned regional Conservation and Management Plan aims both to prevent further decline and to promote recovery of the population.

Under the Sahelo-Saharan Megafauna Concerted Action, governments, NGOs, scientists, local people and the wider international community have been working together to protect the most threatened antelope and gazelle populations in North Africa. As part of the Concerted Action, the Scimitar-horned Oryx, which is classified as 'Extinct in the Wild' on the IUCN Red List, has been successfully reintroduced in Chad.

If CMS COP13 approves the proposal to continue this Concerted Action, a new Sahelo-Saharan Antelope Action Plan, which will also include the Red-fronted Gazelle (*Eurdorcas rufifrons*) and the Barbary Sheep (*Ammotragus lervia*), will be developed. The Scimitar-Horned Oryx (*Oryx dammah*), Addax (*Addax nasomaculatus*), Dama Gazelle (*Nanger dama*), Slender-Horned Gazelle (*Gazella leptoceros*), Cuvier's Gazelle (*Gazella cuvieri*), and Dorcas Gazelle (*Gazella Dorcas*) are already covered under the existing initiative.

6. Aquatic, Avian and Terrestrial Species Conservation

Migratory species face a number of threats, including habitat loss and degradation, bycatch, pollution, poisoning, poaching, and collisions with wind turbines and power lines. Oceanic species are affected by climate change at twice the rate suffered by terrestrial species. Specific task forces and initiatives have been established under CMS to address some of the most pressing issues. CMS COP13 will consider additional actions on several such threats, including the following:

Aquatic Species

Usually large and more vulnerable animals are deliberately targeted as aquatic wild meat. Among CMS species most affected are small cetaceans, reptiles, seabirds as well as sharks, rays, and skates, which are cartilaginous fishes.

Avian Species

Following the example of the Intergovernmental Task Force on Illegal Killing, Taking and Trade of Migratory Birds in the Mediterranean, CMS COP13 will consider establishing a second intergovernmental task force to ensure that no illegal hunting, taking and trade of migratory birds takes place in the East Asian-Australasian Flyway.

Practical guidance on preventing, reducing or controlling poisoning is contained in the CMS

Guidelines to Prevent the Risk of Poisoning to Migratory Birds. The guidance covers agricultural pesticides, poison bait, and veterinary pharmaceutical treatments. CMS COP13 will also consider a proposal to encourage the European Union and its Member States to complete the process for banning the use of lead shot in wetlands.

Terrestrial Species

The Joint CMS-CITES African Carnivores Initiative (ACI) established by the CMS Secretariat at the First Range State Meeting of the Joint CMS-CITES African Carnivores Initiative in November 2019 has also been formally adopted by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). This has strengthened the mandate of the two conventions to better protect African carnivores, including the African Lion, Cheetah, Leopard and the African Wild Dog. A joint programme of work between the Secretariats of CMS and CITES will be proposed at CMS COP13.

The Central Asian Mammals Initiative (CAMI) currently covers 15 species, among them the Saiga Antelope, the Snow Leopard and the Cheetah, across 14 countries. While the Central Asian region boasts the world's largest intact grasslands, the scale of this habitat is being threatened by the rapid construction of roads and railways. Many migratory mammals rely on these large steppe ecosystems and on the region's deserts and mountains for their survival. These barriers to migration, coupled with illegal hunting put the animals' survival at risk.

Range States have proposed to include the Gobi Bear (the only bear living in the desert), the Persian Leopard and the Urial under the Central Asian Mammals Initiative for adoption by CMS COP13.

7. Special Events

A High-Level Segment will precede CMS COP13 on Sunday, 16 February at 14.00 hrs. At this round-table meeting, environment ministers and executives of international organizations will discuss CMS priorities for the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework.

The Indian Government plans to introduce a Gandhinagar Declaration on CMS priorities for migratory species in the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework. It will be presented as a Resolution to CMS COP13 for adoption.

A Stakeholder Dialogue will be held on Saturday, 15 February from 14.30 to 16.30 hrs at the Seminar Hall 4 of the Mahatma Mandir Convention Centre, organized by the Government of India. Representatives of governments, international and national organizations and local communities will discuss their perspectives regarding the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework and CMS priorities.

The event is open to all CMS COP13 participants holding a conference badge. Further information will be made available shortly on the COP13 webpage.

The Champions Night is an award ceremony, which will be held in the evening of Sunday, 16 February at 19.00 hrs at the Amphitheatre of the Gift City Club. Several governments will be recognized as Migratory Species Champions for their long-term support to the conservation of migratory species. A number of conservation initiatives that require funding will be presented at the ceremony.

The CMS Secretariat will launch a new Ambassadors Programme to advocate the cause of migratory species and the importance of CMS at an evening reception on Monday 17 February.

A special set of stamps issued by the United Nations Postal Administration in a collaborative project with the CMS and CITES will be presented to delegates at CMS COP13. The stamps, featuring migratory species listed on the Appendices of CMS and CITES, will be available at UN centres in New York, Geneva and Vienna.