

## **Governments Convene for International Wildlife Conference in Rome from 1-5 December**

Rome/Bonn, 28 November 2008 - Whether they are speeding across the African savannah or navigating brackish waters in Asia, some of the world's most charismatic species need an urgent boost in international protection.

Over 100 governments meeting next week for the ninth conference of the parties to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) will consider proposals to strengthen conservation of close to 30 endangered land and marine animals that often cross international borders, by placing them on the Convention's appendices.

Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary General and Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) which administers the CMS, said: "Species that migrate across countries and continents are facing ever greater hurdles from loss of habitat and feeding grounds to unsustainable use and the unfolding and often complex threats emerging from climate change."

"Indeed the world is currently facing a sixth wave of extinctions mainly as a result of human impacts. Urgent and accelerated action is needed to ensure that a healthy, productive and functioning planet is handed on to the next generation," he added.

"The Convention on Migratory Species is an important part of our international cooperative response to such challenges. It reflects the shared responsibility of nations for these species as each year they attempt their epic journeys across continents and oceans".

Robert Hepworth, Executive Secretary of UNEP-CMS, added: "Many migratory species are now important parts of the local and international economy generating income and supporting livelihoods via industries such as tourism. For example an estimated 150,000 people visit the Serengeti annually in order to see its famous wildlife. Based on 2003 figures, the park generates income of \$ 5.5 million from tourists".

"Congress Avenue Bridge in Austin, Texas, is home to 1.5 million Mexican free-tailed bats which flock in the evening to feed. The spectacle attracts between 200 and 1,500 people daily and annually puts millions of dollars into the local economy. This underlines that migratory species are part of the world's natural assets and have their role in realizing a Green Economy," he added.

### **Racing against extinction**

Cheetah, the world's fastest land animal reaching speeds up to 120 km/h, has suffered a dramatic 90 percent decline over the past century, becoming extinct in 18 countries of its original range. Less than 10,000 adult cheetahs now live in Africa while a meager 50 survive in Asia, mainly around Iran's Kavir desert. Severe habitat loss, over-hunting and poor breeding in captivity are all to blame for cheetah's critically endangered status today.

The Saiga antelope, hordes of which used to roam the Eurasian steppes, are on the brink of extinction for the second time in just one hundred years. After being nearly exterminated in the 1920s, Saiga numbers went up to two million by mid-century thanks to USSR's conservation efforts. By the end of the twentieth century, however, their population has shrunk to just 50,000 due to hunting and obstacles on migration routes. Today Saiga antelopes are confined to isolated pockets in Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Mongolia. CMS administers an agreement to conserve saiga.

Agile climbers of the Saharan desert and the Sahel region, the Barbary sheep, are also threatened by unsustainable and illegal hunting after the 1968 ban. The species is proposed for Appendix I listing, which entails a commitment by all parties to prohibit hunting and removing obstacles to their migration like fences or habitat conversion.

The African Wild Dog has been eradicated from western and most of central Africa. Fewer than 8,000 animals are estimated to survive as a result of conflict with humans, other animals, as well as infectious diseases. Fences on their migration paths further endanger these roaming predators. The proposed Appendix II listing would call on nations to establish regional agreements for their protection

### **Swimming against extinction**

Seven cetacean species - more commonly known as whales, dolphins and porpoises - are expected to join CMS Appendices I and II, pending decisions by the Convention's member states.

The reclusive Irrawaddy dolphins used to inhabit coastal areas and estuaries throughout south-east Asia. But today, habitat loss, live capture, entanglement in fishing nets, electrocution and boat collisions put the survival of the remaining small populations at risk.

Unique to one of the most degraded marine environments in the world, the Black Sea Bottlenose Dolphin has also suffered from uncontrolled hunting and bycatch despite the ban on cetacean fishery in the sea since 1983.

Both dolphins are proposed for Appendix I listing. Other cetaceans up for listing are: the Atlantic Humpback Dolphin, Clymene or Short-Snouted Spinner Dolphin, Risso's Dolphin, Mediterranean population of the Bottlenose Dolphin, and harbour porpoise.

One of the world's most camera-shy species, the West African Manatee migrates in search of food as a result of changes in water levels in lagoons, rivers and sweet waters of Northern, West and Central Africa.

The manatees act as a key clean up and recycling mechanism of the river ecosystems by controlling floating algae and processing the limited nutrients. Although crocodiles and sharks occasionally kill manatees, their only significant threats are from humankind, such as poaching, habitat loss, and other environmental impacts.

Manatees' listing on Appendix I would complement the conservation efforts laid out in the CMS agreement on Western African small cetaceans and manatees concluded in October.

Furthermore, three shark species have been identified as candidates for Appendix II listing. These are two species of mako sharks, the Porbeagle shark and the Spiny Dogfish, which continue to be seriously threatened by over-fishing.

- The populations of Spiny Dogfish, which is sold as "rock salmon" in fish and chips shops throughout Britain, have plummeted by more than 95 percent in the northeast Atlantic in just 10 years. The species is known for particularly slow reproduction rates with gestation lasting up to two year. It currently lacks any form of international protection.

Despite being one of the fastest swimming fish in the sea, mako sharks in the western and central Mediterranean declined by over 96 percent in recent years. The shortfin mako is popular with anglers and shark fin soup lovers alike. A recent study reveals that up to one million mako sharks enter the shark fin trade each year regardless of finning bans in 19 countries.

### **Flying against extinction**

Seven birds have been identified for the Appendix I listing and another two for Appendix II listing.

Prized as hunting companions by royalty and the aristocracy, the Saker falcons have suffered an almost 70 percent decline since 1990. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan may have lost up to 90 percent of their populations to meet the increasing demand in falcons.

Pesticides are to blame for the high mortality rates in Egyptian Vultures, which get poisoned by feeding on carcasses of feral animals. Birds of prey such as falcons and vultures are important indicators of healthy ecosystems, and are most vulnerable to environmental changes.

In Latin America, the Peruvian Tern numbers have halved over the past decade, to less than 2,500 birds recorded in the twelve known breeding sites in Peru and Chile. The principal direct threat to the species is disturbance in its breeding grounds caused by human activities.

With a range spreading from South-East Asia to the Korean peninsula and Japan, Baer's Pochards - a duck considered a delicacy in Asian cuisine - number less than 5,000 and are in urgent need for legal protection all along its migration route.

### **Notes to editors:**

UNEP/CMS is an international environmental Convention dedicated to the protection of avian, aquatic and terrestrial animals, which migrate across political borders. Countries which have become Parties to the Agreement commit themselves to implementing measures to conserve migratory animals and the habitats on which they depend.

Currently 110 Parties in Europe, Africa, America, Asia and Oceania have joined the Convention. Montenegro will shortly become the 11th Party.

Appendix I of the Convention lists migratory species in danger of extinction, while Appendix II lists species suffering from unfavorable conservation status and would benefit from international cooperation. In this respect, the CMS acts as a framework convention from which independent instruments evolve, including legally binding treaties to less formal instrument such as Memoranda of Understanding targeting regional or international cooperation.

Full list of species included in Proposals for Amendment of Appendices of the Convention at COP 9 is online at:

[http://www.cms.int/bodies/COP/cop9/cop9\\_species\\_proposals1.htm](http://www.cms.int/bodies/COP/cop9/cop9_species_proposals1.htm)

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