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Efforts to Conserve Migratory Species Strengthened at UN Conference

Priority Given to Ecological Networks, Climate Change Mitigation and Reduced Incidental Mortality

Bergen (Norway) / Bonn, 28 November 2011 - Efforts to conserve seven migratory species, from the Giant Manta Ray to the Saker Falcon, have been strengthened following a major United Nations conference on conservation.

More than 80 governments met from 20 – 25 November in Bergen, Norway, for the tenth Conference of the Parties to the UN Environment Programme's (UNEP) Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS).

Proposals to strengthen conservation of endangered land and sea animals that cross international borders were considered and approved.

Migratory species threatened with extinction are listed on [Appendix I](#) of CMS, while species that need or would significantly benefit from international co-operation are listed in [Appendix II](#). Inclusion in the appendices grants greater protection to vulnerable species, such as conserving damaged habitats or mitigating obstacles to migration.

The Giant Manta Ray was listed in both Appendices of the Convention, which grants its full protection.

From 200 to 2007, global catch of devil rays including mantas reported to the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization more than tripled from 900 to 3,3000 tonnes. The listing signals the need for better fisheries management and a relief from hunting pressure. The Bobolink, a South American grassland bird, and the Argali sheep of the Central Asian highlands, both in need of reduced hunting, were added to Appendix II.

The theme of the conference, 'Networking for Migratory Species', was given prominence at the launch of a CMS report on ecological networks connected by migration corridors to ensure long-term survival of migratory wildlife.

There was general consensus at the conference to initiate or implement actions to mitigate the most serious threats to migratory species and obstacles to animal migration, in particular relating to wind turbines, power lines, bycatch, climate change, wildlife disease and illegal hunting.

Governments also adopted resolutions to address threats to marine species such as noise pollution and sonar from vessels especially in areas home to whales, dolphins, sea birds and sea turtles. They voiced concern on marine debris, in particular plastic waste, and called for improved waste management. Countries also agreed on measures to reduce bycatch in gillnets by using sustainable fishing gear and

seasonal or area fishing bans in addition to visual or acoustic alerts to deter marine species from fishing nets.

In light of tens of millions of large birds being killed annually as a result of electrocution or collision with power lines, guidelines on how to minimize the impact of electricity power grids on migratory birds in the African-Eurasian region were adopted.

CMS received a stronger mandate to expand its work as more countries signed the agreements on the Aquatic Warbler, Migratory Birds of Prey, Dugongs and Migratory Sharks.

CMS received financial support of US\$ 4million from the United Arab Emirates to support further conservation work on raptors and dugongs. Germany offered funds to protect sharks and gorillas. Norway announced support of the Lesser White-fronted Goose, Cross River Gorillas in Central Africa and ecological networks for migratory species in Africa.

The United States of America announced funding in order to take next steps towards protecting migratory sharks in 2012. UNEP will strengthen capacity building and training programmes in the regions.

Commenting on the final outcomes of the Conference, Elizabeth Maruma Mrema, CMS Executive Secretary, said: "Migratory species are in particular need of international collaboration to help reduce detrimental effects of unsustainable use, habitat loss and emerging threats resulting from climate change and barriers to migration during their journeys across oceans and continents."

"As we continue to face a serious financial crisis, we must stretch our resources further to be able to protect the nomads of the Earth", she added.

During the conference, Norway announced it would withdraw reservations concerning the inclusion of several marine species under CMS.

"I am pleased to announce that Norway has decided to repeal the reservations of all species of whales and sharks on CMS List II and the Great White shark on CMS List I," said Heidi Sørensen, State Secretary from the Norwegian Ministry of the Environment.

These include several different species of cetaceans (mammals such as whales, dolphins and porpoises), including the white-beaked dolphin, Atlantic white-sided dolphin, killer whale, Narwhal, Pygmy right whale, Antarctic minke whale, Bryde's whale, Fin whale, Sei whale, Sperm whale, Great white shark and Basking Shark.

"All these species will benefit from international collaboration for their management and conservation. We already cooperate with other countries on small cetaceans, for instance when it comes to bycatch in fisheries, added Ms. Sørensen.

New Additions to CMS Appendix I and II:

- The Argali, including its nine subspecies, have been listed on Appendix II of CMS. The argali is a wild sheep, occurring in the highlands of Central Asia. The primary threat to the Argali is poaching, followed by habitat loss through overgrazing and displacement by domestic livestock. The Karatau argali and the Northern Chinese argali, two of the nine subspecies, are listed as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List.
- The Giant Manta Ray is the largest of its kind, reaching up to more than 7 metres in width and weighing up to 1400 kg. The species is threatened by direct or indirect fishing pressure. The main threat is bycatch, but there is also an increase in fishing at a global level. In addition, in-

creasing coastal development and human settlements threaten the habitat of this marine species.

- The Red-footed Falcon, already listed on Appendix II, has been included in Appendix I. The species is threatened by illegal hunting and disturbance, causing direct mortality, nest abandonment and reduced breeding success. Loss and degradation of habitats, pesticide use, wind farms and the negative effects of climate change add to the dangers facing the species.
- Prized as hunting companions by royalty and the aristocracy, the Saker Falcon has suffered an almost 70 per cent decline since 1990. The increasing demand for falcons led to a massive decline of the species of up to 90 per cent. Collection of birds from the wild, as well as hunting, habitat loss, electrocution and poisoning pose a severe threat to the species. Threatened with extinction, it was granted listing on Appendix I.
- The Far Eastern Curlew, listed on CMS Appendix II, also received Appendix I listing, is the largest wader in the world. The species has suffered a drastic population decline of almost 50 per cent. Habitat loss, in particular wetland degradation of the Yellow Sea, is the primary threat to these long-distance migratory shorebirds. Increased legal protection and law enforcement would assist in improving the conservation status of the species.
- The Bristle-thighed Curlew, which is currently listed on CMS Appendix II, has been granted full protection by being added on Appendix I too. The introduction of mammalian predators such as rats, cats and dogs on the wintering grounds in Pacific Ocean islands caused a sharp decline in populations. Bristle-thighed Curlews are particularly threatened by predators during the autumn moulting period, when more than 50 per cent of adults are incapable of flight. Habitat loss and degradation of the wintering grounds pose an additional threat.
- The Bobolink, which travels up to 20,000 km, performs one of the largest annual migrations of a grassland bird in the Western Hemisphere. The global population of this migrant has been declining since the 1960s. Threats include hunting, intensive agriculture as well as habitat loss within the breeding and wintering sites. The Bobolink is currently not protected by any international instrument. Appendix II listing recommends habitat conservation, reduced hunting, improved management practices and awareness raising.

Notes to Editors

The Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (UNEP/CMS) works for the conservation of a wide array of endangered migratory animals worldwide through the negotiation and implementation of agreements and action plans. CMS is a growing convention with special importance due to its expertise in the field of migratory species. At present, 116 countries are parties to the Convention.

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