



UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME

Programme des Nations Unies pour l'environnement Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Medio Ambiente
Программа Организации Объединенных Наций по окружающей среде برنامج الأمم المتحدة للبيئة

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No place to land: Loss of natural habitats threatens migratory birds globally

Observed in over 50 countries on 14-15 May, World Migratory Bird Day 2011 looks at “Land use changes from a bird’s-eye view”

Bonn/Nairobi 12 May 2011 – On their epic journeys, often spanning thousands of kilometres, migratory birds cross many borders, linking different countries as well as ecosystems. The annual migration of an estimated 50 billion birds representing around 19 per cent of the world's 10,000 bird species is one of nature's great natural wonders. Yet each year, more and more of the natural habitats migratory birds need to complete their journeys either diminish or disappear completely.

The theme for World Migratory Bird Day 2011, celebrated around the world on 14-15 May, is 'Land use changes from a bird’s-eye view' and it highlights the negative effects human activities are having on migratory birds, their habitats and the planet’s natural environment.

The loss, fragmentation and degradation of natural bird habitats is occurring globally and is mainly caused by the pressures resulting from a growing human population, rapid urbanization and unsustainable human use of natural areas.

“Although migratory birds face many serious threats, the way humans use the land around them has by far the greatest negative effect. Unsustainable human land use, whether through deforestation, intensive agriculture, biofuel production, land reclamation, urbanization and mining directly removes or damages the habitats of migratory birds, affecting their populations on a global scale”, said Bert Lenten, Deputy Executive Secretary of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) and initiator of the World Migratory Bird Day campaign.

World Migratory Bird Day is being organized by the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) and the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) - two intergovernmental wildlife treaties administered by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP). BirdLife International, Wetlands International

and the Secretariat of the Partnership for the East Asian – Australasian Flyway (EAAFP) are also main partners of the global campaign.

“As the two intergovernmental treaties dedicated to the conservation of migratory animals, including migratory birds at global and flyway scale, the Convention on Migratory Species and the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement have launched World Migratory Bird Day to make people aware of the threats migratory birds face along their migration routes”, added Mr. Lenten.

CMS and AEWA bring together governments and other stakeholders to coordinate and further develop global flyways policy, to ensure that all flyways in the world benefit from some kind of coordination mechanism that promotes cooperation at ground level among the countries involved. This includes working towards establishing a viable network of sites which can be used by migratory birds to breed, rest and refuel during their migration.

Dr. Marco Lambertini, BirdLife International’s Chief Executive said: ‘Land-use change poses an immediate and increasing threat to the world’s migratory birds. Habitats vital to these species on their incredible journeys are being destroyed or degraded at an alarming rate and the bird’s-eye view is becoming bleaker. The BirdLife Partnership, with over 110 conservation organizations along the world’s flyways, is working across borders to help stem this tide and achieve the effective joined-up conservation needed to make a difference for these inspiring birds.’

Initiated in 2006, World Migratory Bird Day is an annual campaign backed by the United Nations and is devoted to celebrating migratory birds and promoting their conservation worldwide.

Events for WMBD 2011 in over 50 countries will include bird festivals, education programmes, presentations, film screenings and birdwatching trips, run by hundreds of volunteers, dedicated groups and organizations around the world.

Link: www.worldmigratorybirdday.org

Notes to Editors

Land Reclamation in the Yellow Sea

The loss of intertidal mud flats due to land reclamation in the Yellow Sea has caused a dramatic decline in migratory shorebird numbers across the East Asian-Australasian Flyway. The shores of the Yellow Sea, bounded by China and North and South Korea are a key staging site for many shorebirds using this

Flyway on their annual migration from Australasia to their Arctic breeding grounds.

"As the number of humans in the East Asian – Australasian Flyway approaches half of the global total, migratory waterbirds that use the same landscapes face escalating, overwhelming threats. Routine destruction of inter-tidal habitats at massive scale and disturbance at key sites are lowering populations of coastal waterbirds, pushing some to threatened status and others to near extinction", said Roger Jaensch, Chief Executive of the Partnership for the East Asian – Australasian Flyway (EAAFP) Secretariat in his statement to mark World Migratory Bird Day 2011.

Land reclamation in the Yellow Sea has destroyed nearly 50 per cent of the region's intertidal mud flats in the last 25 years. "Less well known but equally concerning are the changes to freshwater habitats from intensification of agriculture and diversion of water from wetlands to expanding irrigation and urban areas", added Mr. Jaensch. Link: <http://www.eaaflyway.net/>

Protecting the Critical Sites for Migratory Birds

Knowing where the critical sites for migratory birds are is key to their conservation. Increasingly sophisticated tools such as the **Wings Over Wetlands (WOW) Critical Site Network (CSN) Tool** can tell us where the critical sites for migratory birds are. This information can significantly help conservation efforts, but also facilitate national implementation of international environment agreements, such as AEWA and the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands.

"Our knowledge of the sites critical to the migration of many bird populations has increased steadily over the last decades. For migratory waterbirds in Africa and Eurasia for instance, a lot of information is readily available through the Critical Site Network (CSN) Tool developed within the Wings Over Wetlands (WOW) project. The future challenge is to have this information integrated and taken into account into national multi-sectoral development and land use planning", said Marco Barbieri, Acting Executive Secretary of the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA). "The new impetus to the development of National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans provided by the recent CBD COP in Nagoya could offer a great opportunity in this regard" said Barbieri.

Although currently limited to the African-Eurasian region and those migratory waterbirds covered by AEWA, the CSN Tool brings together some of the most current and comprehensive information available internationally on these species and the sites they use in this area.

The CSN Tool was jointly developed by Wetlands International, BirdLife International and the UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP–WCMC) in the framework of the UNEP-GEF Wings Over Wetlands (WOW) Project, funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the German Government and several other partners and donors. The WOW Project was the largest international, flyway-scale waterbird and wetland conservation initiative ever undertaken in the African-Eurasian region. Link: www.wingsoverwetlands.org/csntool

Migratory birds as indicators for a changing environment

Because of their dependence on many habitats along their migration routes, migratory birds often feel the effects of these changing environments first before many other animal species, making them key indicators for the health of our environment.

In a statement to mark World Migratory Bird Day 2011, Professor Nick Davidson, Deputy Secretary General of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands said: “Migratory birds have been called “global sentinels of environmental change” because in the course of a year they move between and sample the health of many different places and habitats throughout the world. Their state of health provides us with a clear signal about the overall changing state of our environment. And the signal is not good.”

“For migratory birds the world certainly failed to reach the 2010 target of reducing the rate of loss of biological diversity. To address the follow-up “Aichi Targets” adopted at the Convention on Biological Diversity’s COP10 in Nagoya last year and to which all environmental conventions including Ramsar, CMS and AEWA are committed to collaborating on delivery, needs a redoubling of efforts by all of us, whether governments, business or civil society, to stem and reverse the underlying cause of migratory bird declines”, said Professor Davidson. Link: <http://www.ramsar.org/>

Statements to mark World Migratory Bird Day:

All statements received to mark World Migratory Bird Day 2011 can be found here: Link: www.worldmigratorybirdday.org/statements

World Migratory Bird Day (WMBD)

World Migratory Bird Day (WMBD) is a global initiative devoted to celebrating migratory birds and for promoting their conservation worldwide. It is being organized by the Secretariats of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) and the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) - two international wildlife treaties administered by the United Nations Environment Programme

(UNEP). The WMBD 2011 campaign has also received support from the following partners: UNEP, BirdLife International, Wetlands International, the Partnership for the East Asian - Australasian Flyway (EAAFP).

The World Migratory Bird Day 2011 campaign is made possible through part of the voluntary contribution given to the CMS and AEWA Secretariats by the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMU).

Events in over 50 countries

As of 12 May 2011, over 140 separate events in more than 50 countries have been registered on the campaign website. WMBD events will be celebrated in: Argentina, Australia, Bangladesh, Bolivia, Botswana, Burundi, Cameroon, Canada, Colombia, Croatia, Egypt, Ethiopia, Finland, France, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Iraq, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Kenya, Liberia, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mexico, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, Palau, Peru, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Romania, Russian Federation, Rwanda, Serbia, Singapore, Somalia, South Africa, Spain, Syrian Arab Republic, The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Tunisia, Turkey, Uganda, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, United Republic of Tanzania and the United States of America.

Global Event Map

For more information and an overview of all registered World Migratory Bird Day events please see the Global Event Map: Link:
www.worldmigratorybirdday.org/events

Highlighted Events

Vancouver, Canada - Mayor Robinson of the city of Vancouver Proclaims World Migratory Bird Day

For the first time, World Migratory Bird Day Events in Vancouver Canada will celebrate the wonder and importance of bird migration. After reading the City of Vancouver Mayor Robinson's World Migratory Bird Day proclamation, bird watching and educational walks in Stanley Park will be conducted by the Stanley Park Ecology Society to learn about local species that migrate through Vancouver each year.

Erbil, Bagdad and Chibaish, Iraq – Nature Iraq to celebrate the Importance of Iraqi Wetlands on World Migratory Bird Day

To celebrate World Migratory Bird Day, Nature Iraq is participating with the French Cultural Centre in Erbil in an exhibition highlighting the migration routes through Iraq and its marshlands, stressing the importance of sites such as the Iraq marshlands for migratory birds.

Additional activities are planned in Baghdad and Chibaish where Iraq's southern marshes are arguably some of the most important sites in the Middle East as a stop-over site for migratory birds. Nature Iraq has been working with the Iraqi Ministry of Environment to develop protected areas throughout the country including a National Park in the Central Marshes near Chibaish, Southern Iraq.

Wadden Sea, Germany – Events in Northern Germany to Celebrate Unique Wadden Sea Habitats

A large part of the Wadden Sea was recently listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in recognition of its international importance as one of the main breeding, staging, moulting and wintering areas for millions of migratory waterbirds using the East Atlantic Flyway. Birdwatching and educational walks will celebrate these mudflats as critical habitat for up to 10 to 12 million migratory birds which use the site each year.

Main Organizations behind World Migratory Bird Day

Convention on Migratory Species

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 fast-growing convention with special importance due to its expertise in the field of migratory species. At present, 115 countries are parties to the Convention. Link: www.cms.int

African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA)

The Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA) is an intergovernmental treaty developed under the auspices of CMS dedicated to the conservation of migratory waterbirds using the African-Eurasian Flyways. The Agreement covers 255 species of birds ecologically dependent on wetlands for at least part of their annual cycle. The treaty covers a large geographic area, including Europe, parts of Asia, Canada, the Middle East and Africa. So far 63 out of the 118 countries in this area have become Contracting Parties to the International Agreement. Link: <http://www.unep-aewa.org>

Links:

World Migratory Bird Day (official site)
<http://www.worldmigratorybirdday.org>

Spotlight on Flyways (Source: BirdLife International)
<http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/sowb/spotFlyway>

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