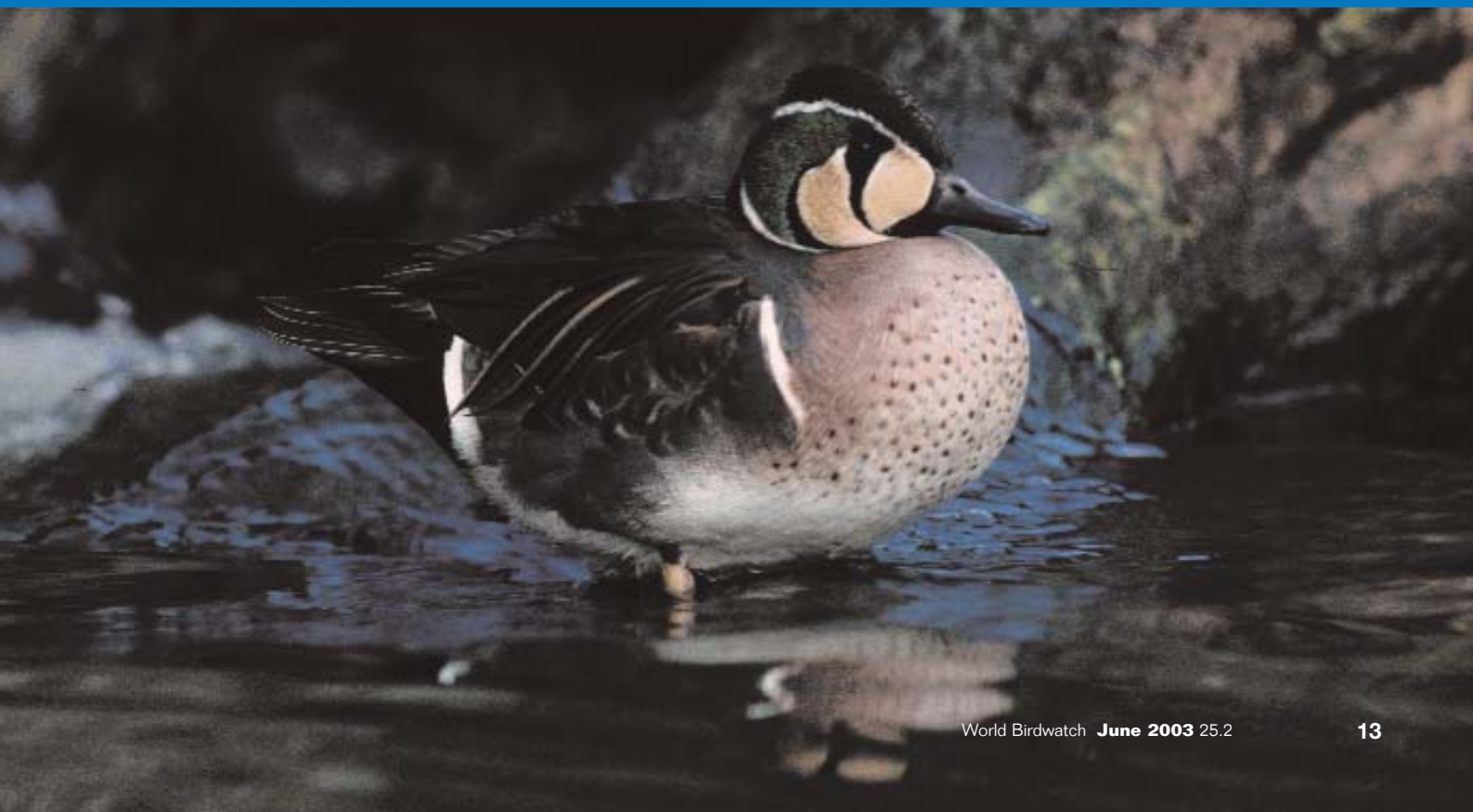




# Agreeing to save migratory species: the Bonn Convention

John O'Sullivan, a specialist on the Bonn Convention (or CMS), discusses BirdLife's role in this important international treaty.



There is something special about migration. Birds, mammals, fish, and insects that change where they live with the seasons have long fascinated humans, and inspired our artists, writers and poets. A piece of legislation is a long way from poetry, but migration has similarly inspired an international convention.

In the 1970s, awareness grew that migratory animals were vulnerable in their own peculiar ways. To the natural threats posed by distance, geography and weather, challenging enough in themselves, humanity was adding more. The destruction of vital resting and feeding places, construction of tall buildings, powerlines, dams and other obstacles, and unsustainable levels of killing for food, were taking their toll. Even if one country was careful to protect and conserve migratory animals, another country along the migration route might undo the good work, deliberately or in ignorance. The answer to such a problem was an international treaty that aimed at high standards for all. Thus was established the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals, usually referred to as the CMS, or the Bonn Convention – after the city in Germany where it was concluded in 1979. A professional Secretariat for the Convention was set up in Bonn, with a staff that now comprises about a dozen people.

**Overleaf top left:** The Bonn Convention requires states to combat threats to endangered migratory species, including birds like the White-naped Crane *Grus vipio* (Jon Hornbuckle)

**Overleaf top right:** The Saffron-cowled Blackbird *Agelaius flavus* is one of several threatened South American passerines needing agreement between states to conserve diminishing grassland habitat (Jose Leiberman)

**Overleaf bottom:** All migratory ducks, geese and swans are covered by Bonn, but the globally threatened Baikal Teal *Anas formosa* is one of the species given special attention (Tim Loseby)

**Right top:** Details of the migratory animal species covered, and more, can be found on the Convention's website, [www.wcmc.org.uk/cms/](http://www.wcmc.org.uk/cms/)

**Right bottom:** The Convention has played a key role in focusing attention and resources on the Siberian Crane *Grus leucogeranus* (Critically Endangered) (Ron Saldino)

The Convention covers only migratory species, including whole populations or geographically separated populations, as may be appropriate. It makes two main demands of the countries that join (the Contracting Parties). The first is that they must prohibit the killing or other taking of any endangered migratory species that occur in their territories. These species are listed in Appendix I of the Convention, and include such charismatic creatures as Blue Whale *Balaenoptera musculus*, Snow Leopard *Uncia uncia* and Mountain Gorilla *Gorilla beringei*. Among the birds are included such rarities as Siberian Crane *Grus leucogeranus* and Slender-billed Curlew *Numenius tenuirostris*, and over 60 others from albatrosses to warblers. For these species, Parties must also endeavour to conserve and restore important habitats, eliminate impeding activities or obstacles to migration, and tackle other factors that endanger them.

The second main demand is that Parties endeavour to conclude Agreements with other states for a list of species appearing on Appendix II. Although this list does include some of the endangered species that appear on Appendix I (for instance Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni* and Aquatic Warbler *Acrocephalus paludicola*), the main qualification for appearing on Appendix II is not through being threatened, but the fact that the species would benefit from international co-operation. Thus, among the birds listed we find whole families (such as ducks, geese and swans, the migratory species of which are all covered) as well as individual species such as Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix*. There are now 12 Agreements in place, including ones for cetaceans, bats, and turtles, and five relating to birds. The giant among them is the African Eurasian Waterbird Agreement (AEWA), which covers some 300 species of migratory wetland birds over a huge area of the globe extending from Arctic Canada and Siberia, through Europe and western Asia, to the tip of southern Africa. The Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP) should hold its first meeting by 2004, and will be a key tool in addressing the deaths of

seabirds in longline fisheries (see *World Birdwatch* 24(2): 7). Other Agreements cover individual species, for instance the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) – a less formal type of Agreement – on the Slender-billed Curlew. Indeed the Agreement system was designed to be flexible – a country can join an Agreement even if it hasn't signed the Bonn Convention itself.

BirdLife has always regarded the Bonn Convention as a valuable tool for the conservation of birds. It is essential that endangered species are formally protected and their habitats conserved, and there is an indisputable value in Parties working together along the flyways of migratory birds to protect resting and feeding places, to remove obstacles and other damaging factors. All this fits very well with BirdLife's own objectives, and our data sets on globally threatened migratory species and Important Bird Areas (IBAs) are a key source of reference. For these reasons, BirdLife co-operates closely with the Convention, and has sought to take an increasing role in its work.

For many years, BirdLife has sent its own delegations, drawn from around the BirdLife Partnership, to the three-yearly Conferences of the Parties (COPs) to the CMS. At the last COP, held in Bonn in September 2002, our specialist migration Focal Points from the BirdLife Africa and Americas regions (staff from BirdLife South Africa and Guyra Paraguay, BirdLife in Paraguay, respectively) played a major role, resulting in the addition of almost 20 bird species to the Appendices. NABU (BirdLife in Germany) had a high profile at



the COP. As a result of their work, the Conference adopted a formal Resolution on the electrocution of migratory birds on power transmission lines, and the Resolution contains a reference to guidelines produced by NABU on practical ways to minimise this threat to large birds of prey, storks and other birds.

At the global level, BirdLife has asked for and obtained seats on the Standing Committee, which runs the business of the Convention between COPs, and the Scientific Council, which advises the Convention on technical matters. Our work in these areas continues to expand, helped by our excellent working relationship with the Secretariat in Bonn.

As to individual Agreements, BirdLife played a major part in drafting the AEWAs and the ACAP, and we expect to go on working closely with them, and their own professional secretariats. The Siberian Crane MoU has been assisted by the Wild Bird Society of Japan (WBSJ, BirdLife in Japan), in particular by the work of the North East Asian Crane Site Network. WBSJ has also been instrumental in several flyway initiatives in the region, and active in promoting the work of the Convention to government and others. Staff at our European Division office provide the Secretariat to the Slender-billed Curlew Working Group, which is crucial to the implementation of the MoU for this species. We have signed the MoU on middle European populations of Great Bustard *Otis tarda*, and a workshop on this magnificent species is planned for 2003. Most recently, BirdLife has been heavily involved with the development of the newest MoU, on the Aquatic Warbler, which was successfully concluded in Minsk, Belarus, in April.

As Bonn prepares to celebrate its 25th anniversary in 2004, the number of Contracting Parties continues to grow steadily and now stands at 81. However, with some 190 countries in the United Nations eligible to join, there is room for growth. This is not just a matter of numbers and the increased income flowing to the Convention from more Parties, important though these are. Where there is no Contracting Party in a particular area of the

world, it may prove impossible to take concerted action for even the most endangered migratory species that occur there. In this context, it is a pleasure to note the recent accession of Mongolia to the Convention, and the consequent addition to the Appendices of several threatened species of eastern Asia that occur there, for instance Baikal Teal *Anas formosa* and Hooded *Grus monacha* and White-naped Cranes *G. vipio*. The Philippines, in promoting the addition of Black-faced Spoonbill *Platalea minor*, Chinese Crested Tern *Sterna bernsteini* and others, has also played a key role. As well as getting more attention and resources for these Asian species, we may hope that the example of these two Parties will help persuade other key countries in the region, such as Russia, China and Japan, of the value of joining the Convention. New members joining from the Caribbean and South America may likewise help to persuade Canada, the USA and Mexico to come on board.

Not all CMS initiatives are making progress. In particular, a planned Agreement on the migratory population of Houbara Bustard *Chlamydotis undulata* has stalled. A draft Agreement and Action Plan are believed to exist in Saudi Arabia, the country that agreed to take the lead for this species, but a fresh initiative by the government there is needed to get things moving again if the Convention is to do anything for this much-admired and increasingly threatened species.

The existing Agreements are progressing steadily but a major challenge exists to boost the money available to them, and to direct it at work that will make a difference on the ground. The Siberian Crane MoU has been particularly successful in these respects, attracting a Global Environment Facility (GEF) grant of US\$10 million over a six-year period for the conservation of an international network of wetlands on which the cranes, and many other wetland species, depend.

The AEWAs have also been active, and BirdLife has been closely involved. BirdLife has drafted international single species action plans for three waders, Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius*, Great Snipe

*Gallinago media* and Black-winged Pratincole *Glareola nordmanni*, and these have been adopted by AEWAs. BirdLife Partners will play a key role in the planned African-Eurasian Flyway GEF Project, which aims to conserve a network of critical wetlands, many of them IBAs. BirdLife will also contribute to the development of an Action Plan for the Central Asian-South Asian Flyway (CASAF), and to the decision on whether a new Agreement is needed or whether the AEWAs area could be extended to include CASAF. Other flyway initiatives will certainly follow; among the strong possibilities is an Agreement for migrant birds of prey.

Migratory species remain as important to people as ever, but the international community is under great pressure to devote resources elsewhere. Bonn needs to maintain a high profile and a reputation for getting the job done if it is to be able to attract the resources to grow and develop. These resources are crucial, as new threats constantly emerge. As just one example, few can have imagined when the Convention was first drafted the giant wind farms that are now springing up, many of them at key migration bottlenecks for birds. For the many new challenges, new initiatives will be needed, and BirdLife is able and ready to help the Bonn Convention take them on.

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**Left:** BirdLife has produced an Action Plan for the Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius* as part of its close involvement with the AEWAs under the Convention (Tim Loseby)

**Right:** Many species, such as the Pink-footed Shearwater *Puffinus creatopus* (Vulnerable), face threats far out of sight of land – a significant challenge for the Convention and its Agreements (Daniela Guicking)

