



Transition plan for the BirdLife Morocco programme launched

Title A workshop to develop a roadmap for the transition of BirdLife engagement in Morocco from a country programme to the typical NGO representation has been held at the Hotel Ibis in Rabat, Morocco from 26-27 September 2011. The BirdLife Partnership has been active in Morocco for more than 15 years through a Country Programme managed initially by BirdLife International, then by RSPB, and later by SEO/BirdLife, with the engagement of other BirdLife Supporting Partners and the BirdLife Africa Secretariat. This has always been in close cooperation with the Moroccan authorities, particularly the High Commission of Water and Forest and Fight against Desertification. In keeping with its vision for developing national capacity, BirdLife International has had a long standing desire for the transition of the representation of the Partnership in Morocco from a country programme to a national Moroccan NGO. Various efforts have since taken place towards this goal, involving the Council for the Africa Partnership, SEO/BirdLife, RSPB and VBN and the BirdLife Africa Secretariat. These interested parties developed a project titled "Strengthening BirdLife in Morocco: Conservation strategy and NGO development?", through which a plan and set activities were started in 2010, with the aim of transforming BirdLife representation in Morocco to a national NGO by 2012. "A strong foundation has been set in the transition of the representation of BirdLife in Morocco from a country programme to NGO" remarked Fred Wouters, Director of VBN and member of the BirdLife Global Council who participated at a workshop to work out modalities for the collaboration between the BirdLife Morocco Programme and GREPOM. "The pace of transition now rests with GREPOM and the BirdLife Morocco programme, who must work with the BirdLife Africa Partnership and Secretariat to signal when they are ready to advance towards BirdLife affiliation?". "We have already lost a lot of time and wasted efforts working separately in the conservation of biodiversity in Morocco" remarked Prof. Mohammed Dakki, President of GREPOM while accepting to the road map. "By bringing together the capacities of GREPOM and the BirdLife Morocco Programme and the international support from BirdLife, we will achieve much more conservation impact for birds and people in Morocco?". The workshop brought together national and regional representatives of the members of GREPOM, the BirdLife Morocco Programme, SEO/BirdLife, VBN and BirdLife Secretariat. The BirdLife Africa Partnership, through the Chairman of the Council for the Africa Partnership, sent a message recognizing that GREPOM is now the sole contact NGO that will be supported to work with the BirdLife Morocco programme to achieve the transition in BirdLife representation. "This workshop can be likened to the start of a courtship leading to a marriage between GREPOM and the BirdLife Morocco Programme to become one member of the BirdLife family" remarked Julius

Arinaitwe, who delivered the message to Prof. Mohammed Dakki. The letter can be considered as the blessing from the parents for the courtship to begin, and we are all looking forward to the wedding, when a BirdLife Affiliate in Morocco will be recognized. A visibly elated Asuncion Riuz, Director of SEO/BirdLife could not hide her pleasure. This is a very happy occasion for SEO/BirdLife, who under a mandate from BirdLife Global Council is responsible for the BirdLife programme in Morocco. For a long time, we have worked hard to get the local capacity in place to lead in the very important bird Conservation issues in Morocco. This workshop is a concrete step in realizing this dream. We will continue to work hard, together with other partners, to support this initiative as much as possible for however long it takes. Several presentations helped to set the scene, with a key one by Dr Hazell Shokellu Thompson, Assistant Director in charge of Network and Capacity Development, who explained BirdLife International and the key criteria that have to be met by GREPOM to become a BirdLife Affiliate and advance within the BirdLife Partnership. Dr Imad Cherkaoui presented a draft roadmap that has three phases, the first one focused on collaboration between BirdLife Morocco Programme and GREPOM, the second looking at admission of GREPOM as the BirdLife Affiliate for Morocco and the Country programme acting as a Secretariat for GREPOM and the final stage with the Country Programme fully integrated within GREPOM. This is a process that will take some time, and good collaboration. The rest of the workshop engaged the two main Partners to discuss and agree mechanisms for coordination, implementation and monitoring of the road map, including the steps required to develop more detailed workplans. Prior to the workshop, participants went out on an excursion organized by GREPOM and the BirdLife Morocco Programme to Larach Lower Loukkos wetlands, where GREPOM is implementing conservation and awareness raising programme.

Brief information about Morocco Morocco offers a tremendous diversity of habitats and climates which support a wide range of interesting species plants (almost 4000 recognised plants of which 17% are endemic), butterflies, amphibians reptiles (50% more than in the whole of Europe), mammals and, most notably, birds with 481 bird species. Morocco harbours the last wild breeding colonies in the world of *Geronticus eremita* (CR), a formerly widespread species, and until recently, was a regular wintering site for small numbers of *Numenius tenuirostris* (CR). There are globally significant breeding and wintering populations of *marmaronetta angustirostris* (VU) and *Falco naumanni* (VU), and significant wintering populations of *Larus audonimii* (CD). Morocco is a bottleneck of a main migration route between Europe and Africa for tens of millions of western Palearctic migrants. Up to 200,000 raptors and 90,000 storks and Cranes have been recorded passing across the Straits of Gibraltar at Jbel Moussa in northern Morocco. Most of the coastal wetlands and many of the inland waters are crucial resting and refueling stops, or overwintering sites, for water birds using the Atlantic Coastal Flyway that descends the western seaboard of continental Europe and Africa from Norway to Senegal and beyond. A total of 46 Important Bird Areas (IBAs) is identified covering 30,338 km², equivalent to 4.3% of the country's land area.