

Improving the conservation status of migratory landbirds in the African-Eurasian region

Title

BirdLife's views on the resolution **[click here for pdf](#)**

The first draft resolution seeks to improve the conservation status of African-Eurasian migratory landbirds (mostly passerines), which are probably declining faster than any other suite of birds in the region, and are a priority for conservation attention. Among these species are five that are already listed as Endangered or Vulnerable by BirdLife for the IUCN Red List, and which are therefore included in Appendix I of the CMS. Four of these, plus a further 80 species, are listed on Appendix II of the Convention, as species that need or would significantly benefit from international co-operation.

Appendix II includes at least 13 species which have suffered particularly severe declines, including several species of warbler, European Pied Flycatcher *Ficedula hypoleuca*, Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*, Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*, Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra*, Common Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*, European Turtle-dove *Streptopelia turtur* and European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*. Six trans-Saharan migrants that are now seen as of greatest conservation concern are not listed on either Appendix: Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*, Eurasian Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*, Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*, Northern House Martin *Delichon urbicum*, Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava* and Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*.

African-Eurasian migratory landbirds are not covered by current flyway initiatives and conservation activities, as identified in the existing CMS flyway resolution. They can only be conserved through co-ordinated action, as they face a range of different threats on their breeding, passage and wintering grounds. For many of the fastest declining species, the main drivers of decline appear to be away from European breeding grounds, said Dr Leon Bennun, BirdLife International's Director of Science .

?In the years ahead, this group of birds is likely to receive the sort of attention currently afforded to farmland birds.? CMS provides the only forum through which to co-ordinate action for these landbirds. As most of the species are dispersed over very wide ranges, and not concentrated in sites or priority habitats, there is no provision for them, at the flyway level, from any other forum. ?Without such coordinated action, range states will fail to meet their biodiversity targets?, said Dr Bennun.

No amount of effort within one country or one region can stop these declines. Landbirds are not covered by the existing instruments in the framework of the CMS for the conservation of African-Eurasian migratory birds, namely the African Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) and the Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation of Migratory Birds of Prey in Africa and Eurasia (AEBOP). While much of AEWA can be delivered by a site-based approach, and much of AEBOP by a species-focused approach (eg addressing threats from powerlines, wind farms and poisoning), a land-use policy approach will be required for migratory landbirds. This will require work with many organisations and mechanisms, including FAO, UNDP, and the Conventions on Biodiversity, Desertification and Climate Change, and therefore leadership and coordination from CMS will be essential.

The resolution calls upon Parties to the CMS -and also range states which are not Parties- to adopt strategies to promote the conservation of migratory land, such as alleviating habitat degradation through sustainable land management policies and practices, ending unsustainable levels of hunting, monitoring population trends and supporting research into migration routes and habitat requirements on the staging and wintering grounds, as well as promoting awareness of the plight of migratory landbirds, and sharing knowledge and experience of best practice approaches to conservation.

Following a meeting with the High Commissioner for Ghana at the British Birdwatching Fair in August, and subsequent discussions with the Ghanaian CMS focal point in Accra, the resolution was formally submitted to the CMS secretariat by the Ghanaian government. It is tabled in the agenda for discussion on the morning of Thursday 24th Nov 2012.

It can be found at http://www.cms.int/bodies/COP/cop10/draft_res_and_rec/res10_27_afr-eur_landbirds_e.pdf. In advance of the scheduled discussion, BirdLife is hosting a side event at the conference on Tuesday 22nd November, to which CMS delegates from all appropriate range states will be invited. BirdLife/RSPB (BirdLife in the UK) also supported a preparatory workshop, organised by CMS/UNEP for African CMS national focal points in Entebbe, Uganda, during the last week in October. ?This was hugely successful, particularly for the landbird resolution, since it was used as a case study during the event?, said Dr Danaë Sheehan, Senior Conservation Scientist at the RSPB.

?The outcome of this is that we have fantastic support for the resolution from African signatories to CMS, especially with the knowledge that should the resolution be adopted in Bergen, the Swiss government has already agreed to fund the development of the action plan between Bergen and the next CoP, which takes place three years later.?

But although some European Union member states have already expressed support for the resolution, the European Union itself has yet to follow Africa's example. ?They are very definitely sitting on the fence,? said Dr Sheehan. ?Consequently, we are working hard on coordinating an advocacy action for EU BirdLife Partners to communicate the importance of this resolution, if the EU is to meet its targets on reversing the declines of populations of many of our migratory landbirds. No states have anything to lose by supporting the resolution, but a

lot to gain.?

?It is clear from our discussions with the European Commission that they have not understood the significance of the resolution?, added Nicola Crockford, BirdLife's CMS Focal Point and the RSPB's International Species Policy Officer. ?There is a real risk that, with a busy agenda and a climate of presumption against new initiatives at this Conference of the Parties, the EU will decide not to support the resolution. It is important that they realise they have nothing to lose by supporting the resolution ? it commits them to nothing beyond the preparation of an action plan ? and it is simply not acceptable to Europe's citizens to delay by at least three years something as urgent as action for rapidly declining trans-Saharan migrants.?

The development of an action plan for migratory landbirds has practical backing. In addition to the Swiss government funding, the Birdlife African Partnership can provide a coordinator for the development of the plan, while Ghana, the resolution proposer, has expressed willingness to host an action plan workshop.