

BirdLife International positions on selected CITES CoP19 agenda items



November 2022

BirdLife International is the world's largest conservation partnership, with national Partners working in 115 countries, and is the pre-eminent international authority on bird conservation. BirdLife is the Red List Authority for birds for the IUCN Red List, mandated to assess and regularly update the global extinction risk of all 11,000 bird species. BirdLife is working to tackle poisoning and illegal and unsustainable hunting and trade of threatened species such as vultures, songbirds, parrots and Helmeted Hornbill.

This document sets out BirdLife International's position for selected CITES CoP19 agenda items, and gives examples of information, tools and activities to support CITES Parties and others.

STRATEGIC MATTERS

Doc.10. CITES Strategic Vision

BirdLife welcomes efforts being made through the CITES Strategic Vision (and outlined in CoP19 Doc.10) to highlight synergies between CITES activities and the development of the CBD Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, its monitoring framework and its domestic implementation (18.23, 19.AA.). This is critical to maximise convergence and minimise trade-offs in tackling the interdependent biodiversity, climate and sustainable development agendas. This means committing to more structured engagement and closer alignment of planning, monitoring, reporting and review, implementation activities and financing. Given the urgency of action needed, and the fact that COP20 is scheduled for 2025 (partway through the official implementation period of the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework), we encourage CoP19 Parties to endorse the following changes to the Vision statement 1. Replace the word "halting" with "reversing" to align to a nature positive future, and in Goal 1 to add to the end 2. "including ensuring the recovery of threatened populations" reflecting the intentions of Objective 1.5.

SPECIES SPECIFIC MATTERS

Doc.58. West African vultures (*Accipitridae* spp.)

BirdLife recommendations

- BirdLife International **supports** the adoption of the draft decisions in CoP19 Doc.58, presented by the Standing Committee with modifications from the Secretariat, on West African vulture trade, and welcomes efforts to address this trade which is causing rapid declines in species.
- BirdLife agrees with the changes suggested by the CITES Secretariat to the document in ensuring that it is as streamlined as possible, stressing the importance of the related Resolutions Conf. 16.7 (Rev. CoP17) on *Non-detriment findings*, Conf. 17.4 on *Demand reduction strategies to combat illegal trade in CITES-listed species*, Conf. 8.4 (Rev.CoP15) on *National laws for implementation of the Convention and Resolution* and Conf. 11.3 (Rev. CoP18) on *Compliance and enforcement*.
- BirdLife strongly advises close attention to trends in the trade in vultures for belief-based use across all of Africa, as this has the potential to cause further deterioration in the conservation status of vultures outside West Africa and could become linked to illegal trade (inward or outward) in West Africa.
- **Building on existing programme and project implementation, BirdLife stands ready to bring to bear, and expand, these efforts to support the work proposed through draft Decision 19.BB: to "a) collaborate in the conservation and restoration of West African vultures and support the implementation of the Vulture [...] MsAP [...]", and, "b) gather and exchange scientific knowledge and expertise on West African vultures"; and also to support implementation of the anticipated *West African Vulture Action Plan (in prep)* where it concerns trade in West African vultures.**

BirdLife International is the world's largest nature conservation partnership, with national partners in 115 countries. Through our unique local-to-global approach, we deliver high impact and long-term conservation for the benefit of nature and people.

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Context

- BirdLife has become increasingly concerned about the impact of vulture killing, exploitation and trade as threats to vulture species in recent years, including illegal international trade relating to belief-based use.
- Over the last 50 years, populations of 7 of the 11 African vulture species have plummeted by 80–97% and, as a result, four species are now Critically Endangered at the global level, including 4 of the 6 West African species that are addressed in this document, with the other 2 species being Endangered.
- Belief-based ritual and medicinal use of illegally killed and traded vultures and their body parts is well known in West Africa. Parts sold include heads, legs, eggs, feathers, bones and even faeces, in the belief that they can cure a variety of ailments be they physical, mental and spiritual in nature. Most are killed using poison, such as carbamates, strychnine and warfarin.
- UNEP-WCMC (2021) reported on *West African vultures: A review of trade and sentinel poisoning* as a contribution to the completion of CITES Decisions 18.186-192 and in support of the Animals Committee working group on West African vultures. BirdLife International among others provided expert input and review of this document, and supports its conclusions, subject to the subsequent modifications through CITES Animal and Standing Committees and the Secretariat.
- The CITES Trade Database shows little reported international trade (commercial or otherwise) but there is growing evidence of significant cross-border trade in vulture parts between West African countries. For example, interviews with 113 market traders in northern Nigeria indicated that vultures are being sourced from countries such as Niger, Benin, Sudan, Cameroon and Chad. This is consistent with the increasing prices, and severe declines or extirpation over certain areas in vulture populations in countries where the trade nevertheless continues. Since CoP18, known mass poisoning incidents have occurred in several other countries in the subregion, each causing the deaths of hundreds of vultures (and in one case over 2000), with Hooded Vultures (*Necrosyrtes monachus*) particularly suffering, and with evidence that some were exported. Local informants indicate that many of the incidents where vultures are poisoned are never reported, so those documented are likely a fraction of the number of birds poisoned for this purpose. Annual offtakes for belief-based use and consumption for many species have been estimated to equate to an important percentage of each species' population.
- Trade in vultures for belief-based use also occurs in Southern and Eastern Africa, with southwest South Africa, Lesotho and Eswatini considered to be areas where there is highest demand, but killings with evidence of a belief-based use driver have taken place over a wide area. The role of international trade is in these cases uncertain.
- Given the dramatically declining conservation status of vultures, BirdLife helped to develop and continues to support implementation of the CMS Multi-Species Action Plan to Conserve African-Eurasian Vultures (Vulture MsAP), which clearly recognises this threat. BirdLife is undertaking numerous vulture conservation activities across Africa, accordingly, working with a wide range of Government, NGO and private sector partners.
- Recognising the need for urgent action in West Africa, in October 2022 a workshop was hosted in association with the Nigerian Government in Abuja. Participants represented 13 different countries, including CITES and CMS National Focal Points, ECOWAS and other Government representatives, academics, and NGOs. The aim was to develop a West African Vulture Action Plan for implementation across the subregion elaborating on the Vulture MsAP and CITES Decisions. The draft Action Plan is in preparation with a final version completed by mid-December.

Doc. 74. Songbird trade and conservation management (*Passeriformes* spp.)

BirdLife recommendations

- BirdLife International **supports** the adoption of the draft decisions in CoP19 Doc.74, presented by the Animals Committee with modifications from the Secretariat, on songbird trade and conservation, resulting in Decisions 18.256-18.258 (Rev. CoP19). Given the deletion of Decision 18.259 concerning funding to the Secretariat for implementation of the Decisions, the separate request for donor support covered by the proposed Resolution on *Financing and the costed programme of work for the Secretariat for the triennium 2023-2025* is urgent for songbirds.
- Work to progress the implementation of these Decisions should be prioritised to ensure momentum is sustained into the next cycle, as since the original CoP18 Doc. 79 highlighting the issue, illegal trade has continued at high levels.

- Action to reduce threats related to international trade is needed, but this needs to be alongside an updated situation analysis with enhanced information on global, international trade to set or refine priorities for CITES. The results of the two reviews by BirdLife and Partners (see above), and by Species360 and the University of Southern Denmark, represent a significant contribution to this.
- **The Consortium that compiled the review of the global trade in wild birds (submitted as an Inf Doc pending acceptance) is ready to participate in the delivery of the decision 18.256 (Rev.CoP19 a-d)) and support subsequent steps for Animals and Standing Committees and/or CoP20 as appropriate. More specific recommendations to fill knowledge gaps and create technical networks (complementing the work of the IUCN Asian Songbird Trade Specialist Groups) are presented in an INFO (submitted to the Secretariat awaiting acceptance, available here), to be taken into account in the international songbird trade study provided for in Decision 18.256 (Rev. CoP19).**

Context

- BirdLife has become increasingly concerned about the impact of songbird exploitation and trade. The threat to some Asian songbirds from unsustainable trade is well known, with increases in extinction risk for a suite of species since 2016 demonstrated on the IUCN Red List. BirdLife is a core member of the IUCN SSC Asian Songbird Trade Specialist Group (ASTSG) and agrees with the group's updated list of priority taxa whose survival is urgently impacted by trade.
- Evidence is mounting regarding the significance of unsustainable trade elsewhere in the world, including in the Americas, where severe trade-related threats are well known for certain songbird species. Trade (sometimes international) for food or cagebirds, is increasingly recognised as an element of the illegal killing and taking of songbirds in Europe, North Africa, the Middle East and Southeast Asia. Further examples exist in all regions of the world, although international trade data are scattered, in part due to the fact that most bird species are not CITES-listed.
- A review of the global trade in wild birds by BirdLife International, TRAFFIC, IUCN, UNEP-WCMC and the University of Cambridge, summarised as an INFDOC for CITES (submitted awaiting acceptance, available [here](#)), has shown that in terms of numbers of birds recovered in seizures or recorded in market surveys, songbirds are globally the single most heavily traded order of birds. However, while songbirds make up 60% of extant bird species, they account for less than 6% of all the bird species listed on CITES Appendices I-III. Only 4% of globally threatened songbird species are listed on CITES Appendices I-III, compared to 45% of globally threatened non-songbird species. The review concludes that songbirds are greatly under-represented on CITES Appendices relative to their prevalence in trade. The consortium of non-governmental organizations Species360 and the University of Southern Denmark have also developed a Species Knowledge Initiative to support CITES Decisions and Recommendations for Passeriformes, independently reaching similar conclusions presented in their INFDOC (submitted awaiting acceptance).

Side event: BirdLife International will participate in a **side event** on *Silent Forest – Songbird Trade*, on 23 November 2022, at 19.00-21.00, Room Istmo 1 in Panama Convention Center. The aim is to share information, including the two reviews mentioned above, with CITES Parties and Observer organisations on songbird trade, and to advance songbird trade research and conservation.

MAINTENANCE OF THE APPENDICES

84. Standard nomenclature

BirdLife welcomes the recommendation to select the non-passerine and passerine volumes of the HBW (Handbook of Birds of the World) and BirdLife International Illustrated Checklist of the Birds of the World as the standard nomenclature for birds. As recognised by the Animals Committee, the HBW/ BirdLife Checklist has advantages both in terms of its format and its adoption as a taxonomic and nomenclatural standard by a number of bodies. It is also supported by a number of Parties representing a significant volume of trade.

BirdLife further welcomes the proposed decision 19.AN1 for the Animal Committee to further evaluate the implications of its adoption and the provision of a recommendation at COP20. **BirdLife offers its expertise on the**

matter to support the review of the implications of updating the CITES nomenclature ahead of the 32nd Animals Committee meeting.

PROPOSAL TO AMEND THE APPENDICES

89. Proposals to amend Appendices I and II

Aleutian Cackling Goose Proposal 7.

BirdLife **supports** the proposed transfer of the species from Appendix I to Appendix II. Aleutian Cackling Goose (*Branta canadensis leucopareia*) is treated by BirdLife and thus for IUCN Red List purposes as a subspecies of *Branta hutchinsii* rather than of *B. canadensis*; however, both species are treated as Least Concern because of their large range; the IUCN Threatened Waterfowl Specialist Group has undertaken Red List assessments of wildfowl subspecies and *B. h. leucopareia* does not feature among the threatened or Near Threatened taxa. BirdLife does not routinely make separate Red List assessments of subspecies and so has not assessed the status of *B. c. leucopareia* but based on the comprehensive review presented by the USA, the proposal to transfer the species from Appendix I to Appendix II is consistent with other proposals accepted by the Conference of the Parties, and supported by the IUCN/TRAFFIC analysis, and CITES Animals Committee and Secretariat.

White-rumped Shama Proposal.8

BirdLife **supports** the listing of the White-rumped Shama (*Copsychus malabaricus*) on Appendix II as proposed by the Malaysian and Singaporean governments. The proposal is robust and meets the criteria for listing in Appendix II. Although this species is listed as Least Concern on the IUCN Red List, the species factsheet justifying this status states explicitly that in parts of its range it has “declined to near-extinction”. It further acknowledges that the survival of several subspecies is now dependent on direct conservation measures. The account further notes that demand for the species in parts of its range is now so high that “even if a small proportion of birds [are procured from the wild...] this would represent a considerable threat to populations”. With accessible populations now greatly diminished in parts of the species range, there is a risk that trapping effort will expand in geographic scope, with substantial evidence that birds from across continental South-East Asia are now traded internationally in significant numbers - to help satisfy demand. We have evidence-based concern that populations not currently at risk may, in the near future, be sequentially targeted by trappers to compensate for extirpated populations elsewhere, with no current mechanism to stop this process impacting substantial parts of the species’ range. Although trade may not yet be threatening White-rumped Shama with extinction, the evidence suggests that regulation across the whole range is required to ensure it does not eventually meet the criteria for inclusion in Appendix I; listing on Appendix II appears appropriate.

Straw-headed Bulbul Proposal 9.

BirdLife **supports** the transfer to Appendix I of the Straw-headed Bulbul (*Pycnonotus zeylanicus*) as proposed by the Malaysian and Singaporean governments. The Straw-headed Bulbul is Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List and evidence suggests a decline of more than 80% over the last 15 years, principally due to the impacts of unsustainable trade which is thought to have extirpated the species from Myanmar, Thailand and large parts of Indonesia and Malaysia. It is considered among the most endangered songbirds in Asia, with recent evidence of trapping in national parks suggesting the species is safe from trade in few or no parts of its range. With a population size likely to number fewer than 1,700 mature individuals, even modest trapping/trade may have a significant impact on the global status of the species. We therefore unequivocally support the species’ transfer to Appendix I.

Short-tailed Albatross Proposal 10.

BirdLife **supports** the transfer of the Short-tailed Albatross (*Phoebastria albatrus*) from Appendix I to Appendix II. It is listed as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List because, although conservation efforts have resulted in a steady population increase, it still has a very small breeding range, limited to Torishima and Minami-Kojima (Senkaku Islands), Japan, rendering it susceptible to stochastic events and human impacts. It has attempted to nest on the Hawaiian islands (USA). Its marine range covers most of the northern Pacific Ocean. The species is well protected at breeding colonies in Japan and USA which are not easily accessible. Historic exploitation for feathers, eggs and oil appears no longer to be a threat and no commercial harvest is known.