

Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation of Migratory Birds of Prey in Africa and Eurasia (Raptors MOU)



REVIEW OF THE RAPTORS MOU ACTION PLAN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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Geographical Scope

131 Range States in the African-Eurasian region.

Species Scope

The Action Plan of the CMS Raptors MOU currently covers 93 species of birds of prey and owls (Pandionidae 1 species, Accipitridae 65 species, Falconidae 15 species, and Strigidae 12 species) which occur in 131 Range States in Africa, Europe and Asia.

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Introduction

Migratory birds of prey are highly vulnerable to a range of threats, including habitat loss and degradation, illegal shooting and poisoning, collisions with aerial structures and electrocution by power lines. To address these issues in the African-Eurasian region, governments in 2008 agreed the Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation of Migratory Birds of Prey in Africa and Eurasia (the “Raptors MOU”), in the framework of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS).

Included in the MOU (as its Annex 3) is an Action Plan, giving expanded detail on the implementation steps to be taken to achieve the objectives of the MOU, and specifically to ensure that all populations of African-Eurasian migratory birds of prey (including owls) are maintained in, or returned to, a favourable conservation status.

The Action Plan was intended to be in effect for an initial period of seven years following its adoption, with the aim that a full review would be undertaken before the end of that period, and a revised version of the Plan would then be prepared for approval by the Signatories to the MOU. In the event it did not prove possible for that timeframe to be achieved; but the review was launched in 2019, resulting in a detailed report published in April 2020.

The review was not designed to assess the raptor conservation outcomes being achieved, but rather to be a reflection on the functioning of the mechanisms that have been established under the MOU. Information on progress and experiences of implementing the Action Plan is not yet regularly reported by Signatories (although doing so is foreseen), but the review was able to make use of a number of other sources of data and consultation processes (including an extensive questionnaire survey in 2019), and the analysis of these is presented in the 71-page report. Input was received from Range States and other stakeholders who make a significant contribution to implementation as well as from the Signatories themselves.

Individual sections of the review examine in turn and report findings on the six different categories of action defined in the Action Plan and its associated list of 34 activities. These cover improvement of legal protection; protection/management of sites and flyways; habitat conservation; awareness raising; research/monitoring; and other “supporting measures”. Additional sections of the report examine the successful development and operation of two main subsidiary planning initiatives: the global Single Species Action Plan for the Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug*, and the Multi-species Action Plan for African-Eurasian Vultures.

The final section distils the implications from the review’s findings for possible updates and adjustments to the content of the Action Plan; and it notes at the same time some points which have emerged concerning the MOU itself and the other Annexes. A suggestion for a revised version of the Action Plan based on these findings is contained in a separate document.

Growth of the MOU

Since the adoption of the MOU in 2008, its foundations have strengthened, with a steady increase in the number of Signatories towards the present total of 61. While this is very positive, the current figure still represents less than half of the Range States covered within the geographic scope of the MOU and eligible to sign; so there is still some way to go before more complete participation is approached. Intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations associating themselves with the MOU by signing it as “co-operating partners” have also increased in number over time, with five such organisations having signed to date.

With evolving scientific knowledge, the list of species covered by the MOU (Annex 1) has been extended, and work has been undertaken towards filling gaps in the indicative list of important sites (Table 2 in the Action Plan).

Two critically important developments included the establishment of a small Coordinating Unit in the CMS Secretariat's Abu Dhabi office in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in 2009, and the formal establishment of an expert Technical Advisory Group (TAG) in 2015.

The Coordinating Unit is currently hosted by Environment Agency - Abu Dhabi on behalf of the Government of the United Arab Emirates pursuant to a partnership agreement first concluded in 2009. The core support provided by the UAE has been supplemented by voluntary financial and in-kind contributions (such as technical support) from other MOU signatories and cooperating partners and has supported key initiatives designed to implement the MOU and its Action Plan. MOS2 endorsed a scale of estimated voluntary assessed annual contributions by Signatories to generate US\$ 150,000 to meet the growing level of need.

The TAG serves and assists the Signatories in the effective implementation of the Raptors MoU, including the Action Plan by providing expert advice, information and making recommendations and, among other tasks, provides comments on any proposals to amend the MoU text which have a technical content.

Greatest overall strengths and weaknesses

The review survey undertaken in 2019 asked all recipients (Signatory States, other Range State governments, NGOs, researchers and other stakeholders) to identify up to five of the most positive advances that there had been to date in implementing the MOU and/or Action Plan in the country concerned (or for international organisations, in their field of operation), and to identify up to three of the greatest difficulties experienced.

Matters of increased knowledge, awareness and research effort were the most frequently cited types of positive advance. Strategic efforts relating to legislation, action planning and habitat protection also featured prominently. Notable action planning examples cited at international level included the global Single Species Action Plan for the Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug* (SakerGAP), and the Multi-species Action Plan for African-Eurasian Vultures (Vulture MsAP). Positive species conservation outcomes were mentioned by a smaller number of respondents; but progress with reducing threats and pressures appeared to be being made in many places. Whether the MOU and the Action Plan are actually the cause of these advances is a different question, and is more difficult to establish. Some respondents cited drivers relating to other legal and policy regimes - but even with those, indirect or "in combination" effects with the Raptors MOU might still be a factor.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, inadequate financial resources and capacity were the most frequently cited difficulties. The high frequency of answers that cited particular continuing threats and pressures was perhaps also expected. Political factors and problems with engaging other sectors were also noted, along with issues concerning awareness, coordination and cooperation. A further question about priorities for future action drew a high proportion of answers focused on reacting to immediate problems (such as individual threats, communications, site management); and fewer that cited strategic, long-term priorities (such as legislation, strategies and capacity). Knowledge and research also featured prominently as priority areas for action.

Raptor conservation strategies

A central provision in the MOU is the development by Signatories of national or regional raptor conservation strategies or equivalent documents. These were conceived as a springboard for much of the activity envisaged by the Action Plan, by translating it into specific national or regional contexts. Progress on this however has been slow. No strategies had been developed by the original deadline of 2010, and only a few have emerged since then, despite the provision of a guidance document by the Coordinating Unit in 2012 - although one of the strategies concerned covers the whole of the European Union, and several countries have produced action plans for individual species. The general lack of strategies to report against has been a principal reason for the delay of several years in convening the third Meeting of Signatories (MOS3).

Improving legal protection

Legal protection for raptors is the first of the six categories of action in the Action Plan. The review found that around three quarters of the Signatory countries give full legal protection from killing and taking from the wild to all of the raptor species listed in Annex 1 of the MOU, although in some cases enforcement of this is said to be weaker than it should be. A similar number have banned the use of exposed poison baits for predator control, and over half have legislation that helps to encourage “bird safe” power lines.

Protecting and managing important sites and flyways

The Action Plan contains a list of important sites for birds of prey, relating initially to a selection of countries. Only a minority of the countries concerned reported that all the sites named for them were protected or otherwise appropriately managed; but this is an evolving picture, and the lists themselves are being further developed. Most countries have some form of requirement for Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) that can be used in appropriate circumstances, and some have applied Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) to proposals such as electricity transmission infrastructure or large-scale wind energy developments.

Habitat conservation and sustainable management

The Action Plan here refers to surveying vegetation in former habitats of threatened species, modifying powerlines, supplementing feeding for necrophagous raptors, and factoring raptor conservation into various land-use sectors. Small numbers of countries reported relevant actions for each of these issues, but varying interpretations of what is expected have made any overall trend difficult to analyse.

Raising awareness

Fewer than half of the respondents providing information on public awareness indicated that they had implemented programmes to promote the importance of birds of prey and their conservation needs. Around a quarter had specifically directed awareness efforts at government departments and decision-makers, while slightly more reported education initiatives for schoolchildren and students, and relevant activities for training.

Research, monitoring, and acting on results

Coordinated programmes for monitoring birds of prey have been reported as existing in over 30 countries. Varying smaller numbers of countries also reported the existence of programmes for surveillance of diseases, specific assessments of the impact of habitat loss, toxic chemicals, power lines and wind farms, and projects for captive breeding, reintroduction and restocking of migratory birds of prey.

Updating and revising the text

Section 8 of the Action Plan provides for the process of review to lead to proposals for a revised version of the Plan to be offered to the MOU Signatories for approval. At the same time, the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) for the MOU has been charged with reviewing the list of species in Annex 1 (and their allocation to the defined conservation status categories), reviewing the geographical coverage of the MOU in Annex 2, reviewing the list of sites in Table 3 of Annex 3 (the Action Plan), and making recommendations on the issue of raptor taxonomy and nomenclature in relation to species listings within the MOU.

The full review report has been used as an opportunity to consolidate the recommendations arising from several of these streams of work. Further work on this is continuing beyond the date of publication of the report, and a further consolidation of recommendations will be compiled for eventual submission to the next Meeting of Signatories (MOS3).

In addition to technical amendments arising from changes in the conservation status of some raptor species, advances in science, and updating adjustments to the Action Plan arising from the findings of the review, the need for some factual corrections and clarifications in the text of the MOU itself has also become apparent, and a list of those is given in the report.

More significantly, the review has also revealed some structural deficiencies in the texts which could usefully be addressed at the same time. The MOU and the Action Plan together set out a complex matrix of implementation objectives and expectations for Signatories to address, including twelve objectives in paragraph 8 of the MOU, three objectives in section 2 of the Action Plan, nine objectives in section 4 of the Plan, a separate objective in the MOU for the development of raptor conservation strategies, and 34 activities in the Action Plan to be addressed through these strategies. There is some correspondence between these different lists but also a degree of problematic mis-match; and one suggestion from the review is to rationalise this scheme under a single set of headings, as follows:

- Action plans and strategies.
- Legal protection of species against killing and unsustainable exploitation.
- Species population management and recovery programmes.
- Conservation and management of habitats and sites.
- Assessing and responding to threats and pressures.
- Action/integration across sectors.
- Research, monitoring and information management.
- Awareness raising.
- Capacity building.
- International cooperation.

Draft revisions of the MOU and its Annexes, based on all these analyses, have been set out in separate documents. In summary, the changes being suggested are as follows:

- (i) Adding references to “*Accipitriformes*” in the second paragraph of the preamble and in the definition of the taxonomic scope of the MOU, and making consequential amendments to the subdivisions of the list of species in Annex 1.
- (ii) Deleting Brown Boobook *Ninox scutulata* from Annex 1 and replacing it with Northern Boobook *Ninox japonica*.
- (iii) Making a small number of changes to the species status categorisations in Table 1 of the Action Plan.
- (iv) Possibly extending the geographic scope of the MOU into areas of South and Southeast Asia (for later consideration).
- (v) Adding any species that need adding to Annex 1 as a consequence of any extension of the geographic scope of the MOU (for later consideration).
- (vi) Revising/expanding the list of sites in Table 3 of the Action Plan, based on work done by BirdLife International, the Raptors MOU Technical Advisory Group and governments.
- (vii) Rationalising the structure of the objectives, actions, activities and priorities in the Action Plan to give better internal coherence, coherence with the MOU and some simplification. Making consequential (simplifying) changes to the MOU to align with this.
- (viii) Attempting to make targets more measurable.
- (ix) Updating the priorities and timeframes that are assigned to the list of activities in Table 2 of the Action Plan.
- (x) Addressing an activity gap in relation to matters of policy.
- (xi) Giving more explicit attention to objectives relating to capacity strengthening.
- (xii) Clarifying/refining the interpretation of several other issues, e.g. legislation on energy infrastructure, the relationship between protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs), and objectives relating to habitat restoration.
- (xiii) Correcting various typographical errors/ambiguities/updates as listed in the review report, in relation to both the MOU and the Action Plan.

(Corrections etc. have been identified and framed according to the English language text of the MOU and the Annexes, and the same checks will need to be undertaken separately on the French version).

Further information

The full review report can be downloaded from:

<https://www.cms.int/en/publication/first-review-raptors-mou-action-plan-april-2020-0>



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