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Agenda Item 29

CONSERVATION OF THE AFRICAN WILD ASS (*Equus africanus*)

(Prepared by the Secretariat)

Summary:

This document reports on progress to implement Resolution 12.18 (Rev. COP13) *Conservation of the African Wild Ass* (*Equus africanus*), its associated *Roadmap for the Conservation of the African Wild Ass Equus Africanus 2017-2027*, and Decision 13.98 *Conservation of the African Wild Ass* (*Equus africanus*). It also proposes the adoption of Decisions.

CONSERVATION OF THE AFRICAN WILD ASS (*Equus africanus*)

Background

1. The Conference of the Parties, at its 12th meeting (COP12, 2017), adopted [Resolution 12.18 Conservation of the African Wild Ass \(*Equus africanus*\)](#) through which it endorsed the [Road Map for the Conservation of the African Wild Ass \(*Equus africanus*\) 2017 – 2027](#).
2. In addition to activities to be implemented by the two confirmed Range States, Eritrea and Ethiopia, the Road Map also sets out activities to be implemented by former Range States, Djibouti, Egypt, Somalia, and Sudan, where efforts to confirm the possible presence of African Wild Ass are ongoing, as well as by actors involved in *ex situ* conservation of populations of African Wild Ass.
3. To this end, COP13 also adopted Decision 13.98 *Conservation of the African Wild Ass (Equus africanus)*:

13.98 Decision directed to Djibouti, Egypt, Somalia and Sudan

As former Range States, Djibouti, Egypt, and Somalia, are requested and Sudan is invited to conduct research into whether naturally occurring extant populations of African Wild Ass remain in their territories, and to report their findings to the 14th meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

Activities to implement Resolution 12.18 (Rev. COP13) and Decision 13.98

4. The Secretariat supported the implementation of several objectives and activities of the Road Map, funded by the Government of Germany.
5. In Eritrea and Ethiopia, knowledge on suitable habitat for African Wild Ass is limited. Therefore, priority activities from the Road Map that address this knowledge gap were conducted.¹ This research determined areas with habitat suitable for African Wild Ass in Eritrea (Messir Plateau) and Ethiopia (northern Afdera/Bidu and the southern Serdo/Hillu areas) using maximum entropy (Maxent) modelling based on direct observations of African Wild Ass locations, bioclimatic data and topography. The presence of African Wild Ass and areas of suitable habitat provided a possible estimate of population density and size across the entire range.
6. Sampling of African Wild Ass populations in Eritrea and Ethiopia between 2016 and 2020 by regional specialists during field surveys resulted in a total of 219 faecal samples (Eritrea: N=56; Ethiopia: N=157). Genetic analyses of these samples concluded that, while the two populations of African Wild Ass are sufficiently distinct to permit the assignment of their individuals to their original populations, they are also closely related. The analyses also detected a long-standing and constant population connectedness, likely in both directions. As the Eritrean population is currently the larger population, some of its individuals might be expanding in or migrating to Ethiopia. This direction of migration was already noted in a previous study.² The analyses did not detect admixture between African Wild Ass and domestic donkeys.

1 Eritrea Threat 1. Habitat degradation, inadequate forage and water; Objective 1.1. Develop a *Denkelia* Ecosystem Conservation programme: Action 1.1.4 Carry out habitat assessments in key sites and compile habitat restoration plans where appropriate.

Ethiopia Threat 6. Improve protected area coverage; Objective 6.1 Establish a protected area in African Wild Ass potential areas.

2 Rosenbom, S. (2015). Genetic diversity, conservation and evolutionary history of the African wild ass (*Equus africanus*): a non-invasive molecular approach. Doctoral Dissertation, University of Porto, Portugal. <https://repositorio-aberto.up.pt/bitstream/10216/84064/2/119774.pdf>

7. A scientific publication on the analysis of suitable habitat for Eritrea was, at the time of writing, about to be published.³ Scientific publications based on the analysis of suitable habitat in Ethiopia, and on the genetic sampling and analyses in both Eritrea and Ethiopia, are in preparation and will be published in due course.
8. The Road Map provides actions⁴ for Egypt to implement, based on a possible sighting of 60-80 African Wild Ass in March 2015 by an Egyptian biologist.⁵ However, these animals might also be feral domestic donkeys or hybrids. Therefore, photographs and a collection of faecal samples for DNA analysis of all herd members are needed to verify whether these animals are indeed African Wild Ass.
9. Over the past few years, the CMS Secretariat has facilitated discussions among the Government of Egypt and experts from the IUCN SSC Equid Specialist Group to plan a sampling mission in Elba National Park in Egypt. However, the mission has yet to be conducted.
10. The Secretariat facilitated a sampling mission near Las Anod on the Western side of the Nugaal Valley in Somaliland, as per the Road Map.⁶ In this region, African Wild Ass had been observed in the 1980s and 1990s. In February 2023, a survey led by an expert from the IUCN SSC Equid Specialist Group was conducted to determine the current status of African Wild Ass in Somaliland. Eight Somaliland wildlife experts and four Somaliland wildlife regional coordinators were trained in survey and interview techniques. The entire historic range was surveyed, with the exception of the Nugaal Valley. In addition, local pastoralists were interviewed. During the 2023 survey, no African Wild Ass were observed and therefore no faecal samples could be collected. However, there was a reported sighting of a male African Wild Ass in the area near Meit in 2022. This survey provided information that suggests that the African Wild Ass probably continues to survive in Somaliland. Local experts trained during this survey will continue monitoring this area and collecting data. Further support to the wildlife department and continued surveys, especially in the Nugaal Valley, are needed.
11. In addition, local residents have observed seasonal migrations of African Wild Ass from Ethiopia into Djibouti. These reports need to be substantiated and confirmed through photographic identification of the animals and collection of their samples for genetic analyses.
12. At the recent 3rd Regional Seminar on the Conservation and Restoration of Sahelo-Saharan Megafauna (March 2023, Agadir, Morocco), the Range States unanimously agreed to recommend to COP14 that the Concerted Action for Sahelo-Saharan Megafauna be extended as per Scenario (b) set out in document [UNEP/CMS/ScC-SC5/Doc.6.3.2](#), which would mean the extension of the Concerted Action to the Danakil and adjoining desert and semidesert, and thus the addition of the African Wild Ass (*Equus africanus*). Should the African Wild Ass be added to the Concerted Action, the [Road Map for the Conservation of the African Wild Ass \(2017-2027\)](#) will be added to the

3 Tesfai, R. *et al.*, 2023. Predicting suitable habitat for the threatened African wild ass (*Equus africanus*) in the Danakil Desert (Eritrea). *Oryx*, accepted for publication.

4 Other Actions, Action 1: *Collect samples from Elba National Park for genetic analysis*; and Action 2: *Conduct field surveys to determine occurrence, population and range*.

5 Photos of these animals were posted on the internet by Moss'ad Sultan: https://www.flickr.com/photos/ganay_elba/21992697666/in/album-72157628867476237

6 Other Range States - Goal: Establish the current status of African Wild Ass and implement conservation measures as appropriate:

- Somalia (includes Somaliland Puntland) Action 3. Collect samples for genetic analysis.
- Djibouti Action 3. Collect samples for genetic analysis.

endorsed updated Action Plan, which can be found in [UNEP/CMS/COP14/Doc.29.2.2 Sahelo Saharan Megafauna Initiative](#).

13. More information on this process is contained in document [UNEP/CMS/COP14/Doc.29.2.1 Sahelo Saharan Megafauna Concerted Action](#) <https://www.cms.int/en/document/sahelo-saharan-megafauna-concerted-action-0>.

Discussion and Analysis

14. With the activities carried out as described above, it was possible to determine suitable habitat for African Wild Ass in Ethiopia and Eritrea, which authorities can now use to establish protected areas for the specific conservation of the species. Genetic analyses are still required to determine whether Djibouti, Egypt, Somalia and Sudan still host African Wild Ass. Since the above activities and follow-up actions are all included in the Road Map, which expires in 2027, there is no need for the adoption of additional Decisions.

Recommended actions:

15. The Conference of the Parties is recommended to:
- a) adopt the draft amendments to Decision 14.AA included in Annex 1 to this document.

ANNEX 1

PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO DECISION 13.98

CONSERVATION OF THE AFRICAN WILD ASS (*Equus africanus*)

Directed to Djibouti, Egypt, Somalia and Sudan

14.AA (13.98) ~~Requests~~ Djibouti, Egypt, and Somalia, as former Range States, are requested and ~~invites~~ Sudan is invited to conduct research into whether naturally occurring extant populations of African Wild Ass remain in their territories, as set out in the *Road Map for the Conservation of the African Wild Ass (Equus africanus) 2017 – 2027*, and to report ~~their~~ findings to the ~~14th~~ 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

Directed to the Secretariat

14.BB The Secretariat shall, subject to the availability of external resources, support confirmed and former Range States with the implementation of the Road Map.