



## CONVENTION ON MIGRATORY SPECIES

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### ECOTOURISM AND MIGRATORY SPECIES

*(Prepared by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)*

#### Summary:

This document reports on implementation of Decision 13.136 *Sustainable Tourism and Migratory Species*. It provides a summary of a review of definitions and impacts of ecotourism, and includes an overview of selected case studies, which highlight both risks and good practice.

This document summarizes the review in UNEP/CMS/COP14/Inf.30.6, and proposes adding an Annex to Resolution 12.23 to provide guidance to Parties and other stakeholders.

This revision incorporates suggestions for amendments made at the 6<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Sessional Committee of the Scientific Council, plus some minor typographical corrections.

## ECOTOURISM AND MIGRATORY SPECIES

### Background

1. At the 12<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP12), [Resolution 12.23 Sustainable Tourism and Migratory Species](#) was adopted. Resolution 12.23 recognizes “*the value of migratory species in the promotion of ecotourism and in the national economy*”, and in operational paragraph 1 urges Parties “*to adopt, as they consider appropriate, measures such as national action plans, regulations and codes of conduct, binding protocols or additional legal frameworks and legislation, aiming to ensure tourism activities do not negatively affect species anywhere within their migratory range*”.
2. COP13 subsequently adopted [Decision 13.136](#):  
  
*13.136 Directed to the Scientific Council*  
  
*Subject to the availability of resources the Scientific Council shall conduct periodic appraisals of the latest scientific evidence on the impacts of ecotourism activities on migratory species and to recommend refined guidelines. Produce and submit a draft report at COP14.*
3. The Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland undertook a review of ecotourism, which is presented in UNEP/CMS/COP14/Inf.30.6, and which underpins this document (the review is presented separately due to length). Parties and other stakeholders are invited to read Inf.30.6 in conjunction with this document, which is presented to the Sessional Committee of the Scientific Council and the Conference of the Parties as a contribution to implementation of Decision 13.136.

### Definitions

4. Operational paragraph 2 of Resolution 12.23 sets out the ‘*basic philosophies*’ for migratory species ecotourism:
  - a) *Tourism activities should not inhibit the natural behaviour and activity of migratory species nor adversely affect their associated habitat;*
  - b) *The activities should not have significant negative impact on the long-term survival of species populations;*
  - c) *Tourism activities should create sustainable social and economic benefits within local communities;*
  - d) *Revenues generated from the activity should be able to provide resources for the conservation of the species or group of species subject to tourism, including the protection of their habitat, and sustaining best practices;*
  - e) *Tourism involving wildlife should take into account the safety of observers and wildlife as well as risk to human health.”*
5. There are a range of definitions of ‘*ecotourism*’, but the most relevant generally refer to tourism that takes place in natural areas, contributing to nature conservation and local livelihoods, and providing an educational experience for participants. Alternatively, ecotourism can be used to refer to rural tourism without a wildlife focus. Here ‘*ecotourism*’ is used somewhat more broadly, without spatial or scale restrictions, in order to capture the broad range of activities impacting migratory species, and because

sustainability and direct benefits to nature and local communities may represent '*best practice*' rather than inherent features of ecotourism.

6. While sustainable hunting and fishing tourism may meet the conditions outlined above, here they are considered out-of-scope, with the focus on non-lethal forms of ecotourism. Captive conditions are excluded, but day trips are included.

### Analysis

7. UNEP/CMS/COP14/Inf.30.6 reviews migratory species ecotourism in terms of species impacts, socioeconomic sustainability and contribution to conservation. It is based upon a literature review and interviews with a range of scientists with expertise in working with the Convention, and with organizations involved in ecotourism.
8. *Species-Specific Guidelines for Boat-Based Wildlife Watching* are available in the [Annex to Res. 11.29 \(Rev.COP12\)](#), and *Guidelines for Recreational In-water Interactions with Marine Wildlife* are anticipated to be submitted to COP14 for formal consideration. These documents were considered as part of the review, but have not been duplicated; accordingly this review is more focused on terrestrial tourism.
9. Within Inf.30.6:
  - Section 1 provides background and definitions;
  - Section 2 reviews environmental and socioeconomic impacts of ecotourism on wildlife and people – both positive and negative;
  - Section 3 uses an organizing matrix to draw out case studies across a range of different species and a spectrum of ecotourism activities based on the degree of human interaction with species (see paragraphs 10 and 11 below);
  - Section 4 highlights some specific considerations related to migration and voluntourism (volunteer ecotourism); and
  - Section 5 provides recommendations.
10. Observing migratory species may of course be one of the reasons why ecotourism takes place, but in considering ecotourism more broadly, Parties may also need to consider impacts on migratory species from ecotourism activities for which migratory species are not the target of the tourism, and from tourism more generally. Four scenarios are explored in Inf.30.6:
  - i. Ecotourism based on direct species interaction;
  - ii. Ecotourism based on dedicated species observation (without direct interaction);
  - iii. Habitat-based ecotourism (not focused on particular species);
  - iv. Incidental wildlife encounters.
11. These scenarios highlight the different implications for the migratory species involved and provide a framework within which a range of case studies are considered. One or more examples are presented in Inf.30.6 for most combinations of the above scenarios within each of the CMS species groups: marine, freshwater, terrestrial and avian:

	<b>Marine</b>	<b>Freshwater</b>	<b>Terrestrial</b>	<b>Avian</b>
<b>Direct species interaction</b>	i. 'Swim-with' e.g., basking sharks	ii. 'Swim-with' e.g., manatees	iii. Mountain gorilla and Japanese 'snow monkey' viewing	iv. Facilitated viewing via attraction techniques
<b>Dedicated species observation</b>	v. 'Boat-based wildlife watching' e.g., Baja grey whales	vi. Thailand 'parading shrimp'	vii. Monarch butterfly migration; viii. Bat tourism	ix. Royal Albatross Centre; x. 'Twitching'
<b>Habitat-based nature tourism</b>	e.g., snorkelling coral reefs	e.g., jungle river cruise	xi. Yellowstone National Park visitor guidance	xii. AEWA guidelines on wetland reserves for migratory waterbirds
<b>Incidental wildlife encounters</b>	xiii. Sea turtle nesting beaches	xiv. Spread of invasive alien species by private use of vessels and gear	xv. Skiing; xvi. Cave tourism (with regards to bats)	xvii. Flight initiation distances in light of recreation

12. The range of ways in which individuals may encounter wildlife and whether that is the focus of their tourism activities, or incidental, is key to understanding what action may need to be taken to make the activity sustainable and avoid possible negative impacts. Beyond the case studies, Inf.30.6 also outlines some specific considerations relating to migratory species, and volunteer tourism (or voluntourism).

#### Discussion and analysis

13. Inf.30.6 summarizes a considerable amount of information from research papers, existing guidance and practitioners. The recommendations in Section 5 of Inf.30.6 relate to themes from the case studies, overarching issues inherent in the definition of ecotourism or identified in the literature, and a range of specific topics: governance; spatial planning; indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLCs); tourism trajectories and market segments; monitoring; training/certification; and messaging. They are abridged into guidance to Parties and other stakeholders in Annex 2 of this document.
14. It is recommended to undertake some minor updates to the preambular paragraphs of Resolution 12.23 to delete out-of-date preambular paragraphs and bring them up to date with the adoption of the new Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, and the new Strategic Plan for Migratory Species, which it is anticipated will be adopted at COP14.
15. In addition, it is recommended to adopt a new operational paragraph to *endorse* the guidance provided in Annex 2 of this document as a new Annex to Resolution 12.23.

Recommended actions

16. The Conference of the Parties is recommended to:
  - a). take note of document UNEP/CMS/COP14/Inf.30.6;
  - b). adopt the draft amendments to Resolution 12.23 contained in Annex 1 of this document;
  - c). endorse as part of the amendments to Resolution 12.23, the Guidelines contained in Annex 2 of this document;
  - d). delete Decisions 13.135 - 13.136.

**UNEP/CMS/Resolution 12.23 (Rev.COP14)**

NB: Proposed new text is underlined. Text to be deleted is ~~crossed out~~.

**SUSTAINABLE TOURISM AND MIGRATORY SPECIES**

*Recalling* UN General Assembly Resolution 69/233, calling for the “Promotion of sustainable tourism, including ecotourism, for poverty reduction and environmental protection”,

*Emphasizing* that UN General Assembly Resolution 69/233 invited “governments, international organizations, other relevant institutions and other stakeholders, as appropriate, to encourage and support best practices in relation to the implementation of relevant policies, guidelines and regulations in sustainable tourism, including the ecotourism sector, and to implement and disseminate existing guidelines”,

*Recognizing* that in the ~~new Agenda 2030~~ 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), approved by the UN General Assembly, tourism is included as a goal under three of the SDGs: SDG 8: *Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all*, SDG 12: *Sustainable Consumption and Production* and SDG 14: *Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development*;

*Noting* that ~~2017 was declared the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development by the United Nations,~~

*Aware* of existing guidelines that address the impacts of tourism on biodiversity, inter alia, the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) on the promotion of “sustainable tourism” and “ecotourism”; the IUCN-WCPA *Sustainable tourism in protected areas*, the World Heritage Convention’s *Managing Tourism at World Heritage Sites*; and the CBD *Guidelines on biodiversity and tourism development*,

*Recognizing* the frameworks and plans under various regional and sub-regional initiatives that include measures to address the impacts of tourism on natural resources and species, such as but not limited to, the Coral Triangle Initiative in the Asia Pacific, the Sulu Sulawesi Marine Ecoregion in South-East Asia, the Caribbean Regional Sea Programme, particularly through its protocol on Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW), the Transfrontier Conservation Areas of the South African Development Community (SADC), and the Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA) with its guidelines on the development of ecotourism at wetlands,

*Emphasizing* the economic importance of the tourism sector in many countries ~~that the tourism sector accounts for 7 per cent of worldwide exports, one in eleven jobs and 10 per cent of global GDP,~~

*Acknowledging* the role of sustainable tourism as a positive driver towards environmental protection, the eradication of poverty, improved quality of life, the empowerment of local communities and its impact to the three dimensions of sustainable development (economic, social and environmental), particularly in developing countries,

*Aware* that ecotourism is a growing market which has the potential to take up increased market share,

*Further aware* that ecotourism that involves wildlife interaction with a range of terrestrial and marine migratory species – birds, marine turtles, whales, dolphins, Dugongs, sharks, rays, seals, among others - increasingly plays a significant role in the industry,

*Recognizing* that ecotourism activities can increase awareness and drive positive change in attitudes towards wildlife conservation, including generating resources to support protection of migratory species and their habitats,

*Aware* that the sustainability of tourism involving migratory species is dependent on the non-disruption of the migration cycle thus providing assurance of regular and predictable influx of migratory species populations,

*Affirming* that all countries need to take equal responsibility for ensuring sustainable and unobtrusive tourism activities in relation to migratory species,

*Noting* that ecotourism activities can have the best intentions but be undermined by a lack of clear understanding on migratory species behaviour and requirements, including potential creation of new inequalities in access to resources and distribution of benefits,

*Welcoming* Resolution 11.29 (Rev.COP12) on Sustainable Boat-based Marine Wildlife Watching, and Resolution 11.23 on Conservation Implications of Cetacean Culture, ~~adopted by CMS Parties at the 11th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties of the CMS in Quito, November 2014~~ and Resolution 12.16 on Recreational In-water Interaction with Aquatic Mammals,

*Further welcoming* the report and analysis of case studies provided in the Convention on Migratory Species' publication Wildlife watching and tourism: *A study on the benefits and risks of a fast-growing tourism activity and its impacts on species*, as well as the report and analysis of case studies provided in the joint Ramsar-UNWTO publication on "Wetlands and sustainable tourism",

*Recognizing* that a number of governments have put in place comprehensive national regulations or guidelines to ensure the sustainability of tourism activities with stringent regulations on interactions with wild animals, but that the effectiveness of such measures can be compromised if similar protections are not provided for migratory species in other jurisdictions throughout their range,

*Recognizing further* the value of migratory species in the promotion of ecotourism and in the national economy, and that adequate management interventions and national policies are provided to support effective wildlife conservation and ecotourism management,

*Acknowledging* that there are numerous voluntary certifications and criteria that responsible ecotourism facilities and organizations have adopted,

*Noting* that sustainable tourism can contribute to global biodiversity and sustainable development goals and targets including the ~~new Agenda 2030~~ 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation Strategies, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework Aichi Targets

~~established in the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 adopted by the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Strategic Plan for Migratory Species 2015-2023<sup>32</sup> of CMS on the reduction of pressures to migratory species, the Conservation Committee Strategic Plan of the International Whaling Commission, and the conservation of wetlands by the Ramsar Convention,~~

Noting with appreciation the review of ecotourism undertaken by the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland presented in UNEP/CMS/COP14/Inf.30.6,

The Conference of the Parties to the  
Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals

1. *Urges* Parties to adopt, as they consider appropriate, measures such as national action plans, regulations and codes of conduct, binding protocols or additional legal frameworks and legislation, aiming to ensure tourism activities do not negatively affect species anywhere within their migratory range;
2. *Recommends* that Parties in promoting tourism or recreational activities involving wildlife interaction, take into account the following basic philosophies:
  - a) Tourism activities should not inhibit the natural behaviour and activity of migratory species nor adversely affect their associated habitat;
  - b) The activities should not have significant negative impact on the long-term survival of species populations;
  - c) Tourism activities should create sustainable social and economic benefits within local communities;
  - d) Revenues generated from the activity should be able to provide resources for the conservation of the species or group of species subject to tourism, including the protection of their habitat, and sustaining best practices;
  - e) Tourism involving wildlife should take into account the safety of observers and wildlife as well as risk to human health;
3. *Requests* that Parties consider developing appropriate measures and guidelines dependent on the target species, including, but not limited to:
  - a) Accreditation of operators, provisions of training and a clear code of conduct;
  - b) Allowable types of interactions;
  - c) Level of activity, including aspects such as maximum interaction hours per day, maximum observation time per interaction, or number of individuals/vehicles within designated interaction zones or distances;
  - d) Appropriate equipment or technologies to be used with limits on any that could cause undue disturbance to target species;



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- e) Consider seasonal or life stage-specific regulations or exclusions (e.g. during the mating season);
  - f) Monitoring of implementation through the relevant agencies and authorities, with suitable engagements with operators to facilitate compliance;
  - g) Monitoring potential impacts of tourism activities to target species;
4. *Recommends* that the same measures are made applicable to non-dedicated or opportunistic interactions;
  5. *Encourages* Parties to apply the Precautionary Principle where there is a lack of information concerning the effects of interactions brought about by tourism on a species;
  6. *Encourages* Parties to perform regular appraisals of enacted measures to account for any new research or relevant information, ~~and~~ adapt regulations as appropriate, and share experiences of applying measures and guidelines;
  7. *Recommends* that relevant government agencies of Parties provide adequate resources to support thorough ecotourism planning process, and the development of protocols and standards applicable for target species or species groups. Protocols shall be directly and clearly stated to ensure that impacts are avoided especially on breeding, foraging, and resting areas of specific population;
  8. *Recommends* that Parties collaborate closely with relevant stakeholders in planning for tourism involving wildlife such as, but not limited to, regulatory agencies, conservation organizations, scientific experts, private operators, indigenous and local communities;
  9. *Endorses* the guidance in the Annex of this Resolution, and *encourages* Parties and other stakeholders to apply the guidance.

**[NEW] ANNEX TO RESOLUTION 12.23**

**ECOTOURISM AND MIGRATORY SPECIES: GUIDANCE FOR PARTIES AND  
STAKEHOLDERS**

**Human-wildlife interactions**

To maximize the opportunities for ecotourism to achieve sustainability, a positive contribution to nature conservation, support for indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLCs) and local livelihoods, and education for participants, Parties should balance trade-offs between visitor satisfaction, enterprise profitability, species conservation, tourist safety and the welfare of individual animals.

In order to avoid adverse impacts on wildlife, tourists should be encouraged to maintain an appropriate distance. The perception that many recreationists do not feel that they have a negative impact on wildlife and that it is possible to closely approach wildlife should be countered through education, particularly of tour operators, guides, or through publicly available information such as signage.

Participants should avoid direct contact with wildlife (as also recommended in the CMS Guidelines on *Recreational In-water Interaction with Aquatic Mammals* (Res.12.16), and *Sustainable Boat-based Marine Wildlife Watching* (Res. 11.29 Rev.COP12)), and instead practice passive observation. To prevent harm to both tourists and animals, participants should, in particular, avoid directly interacting with: wildlife during important life cycle events (e.g., mating behaviour, reproduction); particular individuals (e.g., females with young offspring, sick or injured animals); or in response to animal behaviour (aggression, stress).

If tourists are prohibited or advised against taking or purchasing animal products/souvenirs, this information should be made widely available through, *inter alia*, tour operators and hotels.

**Governance**

National action plans, regulations and codes of conduct, binding protocols or additional legal frameworks and legislation should be developed and adopted as urged in Paragraph 1 of CMS Resolution 12.23. Consideration should be given to whether such plans need to vary at a national or local level, and whether they should be formal or informal.

Participants should be made aware of the legal responsibilities incumbent upon themselves and the operator, and if industry codes of conduct differ from local by-laws and other legislation.

Parties should cooperate to regulate ecotourism involving transboundary (including migratory) target species. This is especially important where species are subject to different pressures under different jurisdictions.

The precautionary principle should be applied. Assertions of lack of impact should be supported by scientific evidence. Equally, restrictions, including bans, on activities should only be implemented where there is evidenced need for such strong measures, with consideration for alternative, sustainable, livelihood provision.

## Spatial planning

In order to achieve the aims for which protected areas are designated, consider excluding tourism from core zones and investigating how buffer zones may best be used.

Spatial planning for managing ecotourism should be focused to protect the species tourists wish to see, but should also consider other vulnerable species and habitats in the same area, particularly species with site fidelity, small populations and/or other factors where tourism may cause significant impacts on a population.

Target species should be protected by controlling access in both space and time, for example to aid shielding from less obvious stressors such as noise and light.

To spread the burden of ecotourism, and maximize the benefits to indigenous peoples and local communities, consider incorporating lesser-known attractions and communities into tourism circuits.

The sensitivities and/or vulnerabilities of individual species should be included in planning of tourist schedules, for example to reduce risks of the spread of invasive alien species, or disease transmission.

## Tourism trajectories and market segments

The ecotourism offered in an area should be subject to appropriate levels of regulation based on the sensitivities of species involved, the different types of ecotourism being offered, and the numbers of tourists visiting.

In relation to the development of new ecotourism destinations and activities, providers should focus on maintaining standards of species protection and identify areas that can be developed while maintaining the standards required and attracting a viable segment of the market. As tourist numbers increase, providers should consider how visitor profiles may be changing and whether further information is needed to manage a risk of decreasing concern for species conservation.

## Monitoring

Ecotourism monitoring should be implemented *prior* to observation of negative impacts, enabling establishment of robust baselines and levels of natural variability. Consider leaving some colonies or populations undisturbed; these can act as '*controls*' with which to compare those subject to ecotourism or other stressors.

Some ecotourism target species should be regarded as '*common-pool*' (i.e., with finite interaction potential) rather than '*open-access*' (i.e., with indefinite interaction potential) resources; this may be particularly important for the welfare of individually recognizable animals.

Individual tour operators should consider cumulative effects from other visitors as part of their monitoring programme; some form of external oversight such as formal permitting schemes to demonstrate compliance with relevant legislation may be required to regulate this.

Mechanisms should be in place to ensure that results from monitoring are acted upon. Adaptive management should be used to enable flexible responses to changing conditions as they are detected.

## **Training/certification**

Training of guides should include recommended observation techniques and be assessed through evaluation of whether species show signs of disturbance or not.

While '*good practice*' or even '*best practice*' guidelines can help to identify and reward sustainable ecotourism operators, it is important to ensure optimization '*in practice*'. As a result, and especially for target species that are vulnerable to disturbance, or are '*common-pool*', Parties should consider using labelling and certification to control the number of commercial operators active in an area, and to identify operators committed to excellence.

Labelling and certification should be available for use by small and medium-sized enterprises, and ideally tailored to local and regional criteria.

## **Messaging**

Communication around ecotourism should simultaneously publicize ecotourism attractions and disseminate their associated regulations and sustainability guidelines. Guidelines should be visible, accessible and consistently presented to stakeholders.

A balance should be struck between modifying visitor behaviour through information and via enforcement.

A variety of communication techniques should be deployed, including direct personal interaction and/or incentive-based messaging if descriptive interpretation materials are ineffective. Educational programmes should also maximize conservation benefits by incorporating wider environmental messaging.

Where target species sightings cannot be guaranteed – as is usually the case – ecotourism operators should emphasize '*the thrill of the uncertainty of what may be seen*' rather than put pressure on field staff to break regulations in order to meet the expectations or desires of tourists.