



## HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE CMS SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL THURSDAY, 4 NOVEMBER 1999

On the first day of the CMS Scientific Council, delegates met in an opening Plenary session to hear welcoming remarks and reports on intersessional activities and to adopt the meeting's agenda. Delegates then considered reports on actions for select Appendix I species, including the Mountain Gorilla, Siberian Crane and Marine Turtles.

### OPENING PLENARY

CMS Scientific Council Chair Pierre Devillers opened the ninth session of the Council. He welcomed participants and expressed great pleasure in convening the Council session in South Africa, a country that is an example of conservation success. Douglas Hykle, CMS Deputy Executive Secretary, welcomed participants and thanked the governments of the Netherlands and South Africa for sponsoring and hosting the meeting. Gerard Boere, Acting Chair of the CMS Standing Committee, wished the Council success and looked forward to receiving the outcomes of the group's work at CMS COP-6. Chair Devillers introduced, and the Council adopted, the meeting's agenda (CMS/ScC.9/Doc.1).

With regard to intersessional activities, Hykle remarked that the CMS is gaining momentum and noted ten new Parties to the Convention in the past year. He highlighted improvements in the CMS Secretariat Website and new publications, including a technical series on the Siberian Crane. He also drew attention to progress being made on new agreements.

Rosaline Beudels (Belgium) highlighted outcomes of the fourth session of the Subsidiary Body for Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA-4) of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) held in Montreal Canada, 21-30 June 1999. She said SBSTTA-4 stressed interlinkages with other Conventions and suggested establishment of a work programme on drylands.

### ACTIONS ON SELECTED ANNEX I SPECIES

Chair Devillers, emphasizing the importance of the concerted actions for Appendix I species, turned the discussion to reports on actions for selected Appendix I species. He underscored, *inter alia*: the formal review process at each COP as set out in CMS Resolution 3.2; the importance of collaboration with the COP-appointed councillors for developing species-specific Action Plans; and the value of funds allocated at COP-4 and COP-5 for implementing activities.

**SAHELO-SAHARAN UNGULATES:** Beudels, reporting on CMS action on Sahelo-Saharan Ungulates, highlighted the Seminar on the Conservation and Restoration of the Sahelo-Saharan Antelopes held in Djerba, Tunisia, in February 1998. The Seminar

updated Sahelo-Saharan Ungulates status reports, amended and adopted an Action Plan and adopted the Djerba Declaration calling upon countries to collaborate in implementing the Action Plan. She noted that twelve ungulate species are now listed under Appendix I. She highlighted financial contributions from the French Fund for Global Environment (FFEM) and technical contributions from Tunisia. Pierre Pfeffer (COP-Appointed Councillor) called for field action to restore ungulates, including safeguarding stations and breeding in semi-captivity.

**MOUNTAIN GORILLAS:** Beudels also reported on CMS activities on Mountain Gorillas. She noted that Mountain Gorilla populations are now restricted to the Virunga Mountains in Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Uganda, as well as in Burundi. Noting difficulties in assessing the Mountain Gorilla population due to political issues, she cited 600 as the estimated population. She identified deforestation and war as threats to Mountain Gorilla habitat and remarked that while the taking of Mountain Gorillas for trophies and recreational hunting has ceased, incidental taking continues. She highlighted the International Gorilla Conservation Programme, a coalition of the WorldWide Fund for Nature-International, African Wildlife Foundation and Fauna and Flora International. She said the Mountain Gorillas should remain on the list for concerted action (Appendix 1) and suggested the CMS support the establishment of a peace park in the Virunga Mountains and encourage Uganda and Rwanda to become Parties to the CMS.

**HUEMUL:** Roberto Schlatter (COP-Appointed Councillor) reported on activities related to the Huemul in South America. He clarified that there are two species of Huemul, one in the high Andes and the other in Southern forested regions, and that CMS activities focus on the latter. He described a joint project between Argentina and Chile with the goal of building observatories, to be managed by the Association of Wildlife of Argentina, for population assessment and monitoring.

**FRANCISCAN DOLPHIN:** Schlatter also reported on the Franciscan Dolphin project and a genetic analysis of the dolphin populations to be undertaken. He underscored the importance of regional technical meetings between Range States.

**MONK SEAL:** Luis Mariano Gonzalez (Spain) emphasized the species' critical status, with a total population of 350 in the Mediterranean Sea and 150 in the Atlantic Ocean. He drew attention to progress in implementing the Mediterranean Action Plan, noting that the Mediterranean Monk Seal population is in decline, with the exception of a stable population in Greece. With regard to the Atlantic region, Gonzalez said an Action Plan is being prepared with the goal of developing a MOU between Range States. In the ensuing discussion, participants considered: coordination between

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conventions, particularly the Barcelona Convention; the status of captive breeding programmes; and the lack of reliable information on Monk Seal populations in Algeria. Chair Devillers noted the CMS had decided to concentrate its efforts on the Atlantic population and requested Gonzalez and others to prepare a brief recommendation addressing whether the Monk Seal should remain in Appendix I and possible value-added activities the CMS could undertake.

**SIBERIAN CRANE:** Hykle noted that the third meeting of Range States in Iran in December 1998 reviewed a previously-agreed Conservation Plan and made revision to the initial 1993 MOU to accommodate China's participation, thereby extending the MOU to address the East Asian populations of the Siberian Crane. Hykle highlighted the GEF's recent approval of up to \$350,000 for a conservation project for Siberian Cranes and other migratory water birds. He noted stabilization of, but concern with, the low number of birds in the West and Central Asian populations, and highlighted efforts to determine precise migration routes, protect breeding grounds and known wintering areas, and identify other potential wintering sites in Iran.

**ANDEAN FLAMINGOS:** Roberto Schlatter (Chile) noted participation of Argentina, Chile, Peru and Bolivia in a project to conduct censuses on winter populations. He noted uncertainty surrounding breeding areas and linkages with water shortages. He highlighted work on a draft MOU and noted an upcoming workshop on the impact of industrial activities on Andean Flamingo habitat. Schlatter also noted ongoing work addressing separate species.

**LESSER WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE:** Jesper Madsen (Denmark) drew attention to the high mortality of the species caused by hunting during migration in Russia and Kazakhstan and highlighted an awareness campaign to inform inspectors and hunters of the need for protection. Madsen noted recent observations of large numbers of the geese in China, but stressed that the West and East Asian groups did not appear to be mixing.

**SLENDER-BILLED CURLEW:** Gerard Boere, Chair of the Slender-billed Curlew Working Group, said the current population estimate for Slender-billed Curlew is between 50 and 270 and noted difficulties in identifying the species in the field. He highlighted a comprehensive long-term Action Plan and field activities undertaken in a number of countries. He noted the development of a database of observations and a bibliography of literature on the Slender-billed Curlew, as well as collaboration with the Russian Federation for information dissemination to fish and hunting inspectors. He noted upcoming activities including a survey expedition to the Iranian Gulf region to confirm observations as well as a meeting of the Range States.

**GREAT BUSTARD:** Attila Bankovics (Hungary) overviewed CMS activities on the Great Bustard. He said populations in Hungary had stabilized in recent years thanks to conservation measures including, *inter alia*: public purchase of land where species are found; provision of extra food in winter; and protection of breeding areas. He noted that agricultural activities and predation also affect populations and called for protection in natural habitat instead of collection and artificial incubation of eggs. Arnulf Muller-Helmbrecht, CMS Executive Secretary, said a majority of Range States are prepared to sign a MOU, although responses are still pending from the Czech Republic, Austria and Germany. Chair Devillers called for concerted action, whether or not a MOU exists in the field, and for broadening the Action Plan to include participation of additional countries.

**WHITE HEADED DUCK:** Luis Gonzales (Spain) noted that immigration of hybrids from the UK continues to threaten populations in Spain and impedes a formal review process at each COP. He highlighted two cooperation programmes, one with France to achieve non-hybridized genetic pools and another with Morocco.

**MARINE TURTLES:** Hykle reported on the CMS meeting held in Côte d'Ivoire which resulted in a MOU between most West African Range States and a preliminary Conservation Plan. He highlighted Secretariat activities, *inter alia*: finalization of the first comprehensive review of Marine Turtles in the West African region; funding of several small scale conservation projects; and work with IUCN on training workshops.

Colin Limpus (COP-Appointed Councillor) addressed the status of Marine Turtle conservation at the global level. He traced conservation efforts since 1989, highlighting the 1989 South Pacific Regional Environment Programme on Sea Turtle Conservation, the 1996 Turtle Island Heritage Protected Area MOU, the 1997 Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) MOU, the 1999 CMS West African MOU, an Interamerican Treaty awaiting ratification and meetings in the Indian Ocean region on the topic.

Drawing attention to recent research on genetics, he said Marine Turtles from different breeding areas are genetically distinct and should be regarded as separate populations for conservation purposes. He said protection of nesting beaches is inadequate for conservation and drew attention to the special risk long-line fisheries pose to Loggerhead, Olive Ridley and Leatherback Turtles. He drew attention to a 90% decline of Leatherback Turtle populations in the Eastern Pacific as the result of long-line fisheries bycatch, and underscored the need for further documentation of the impacts of long-line fisheries bycatch in the North and South Pacific and Indian Oceans. Stressing the need to place international pressure on fisheries to bring about change, he challenged the COP to address the issue.

Chair Devillers proposed that the current specification of "Pacific" Marine Turtles in Appendix I be removed to reflect the need for concerted efforts on all Marine Turtles at the global level. Colin Galbraith (United Kingdom) circulated a UK draft resolution on bycatch which in part addresses the impact of fisheries on Marine Turtle populations. The World Conservation Monitoring Center (WCMC) reported on a Marine Turtle nesting database available on their Website.

#### CO-OPERATIVE ACTIONS FOR APPENDIX II SPECIES

Chair Devillers drew attention to a report on the Corncrake status prepared by BirdLife International. Schlatter reported on a Black-necked Swan project assessing habitat status and the impact of the El Niño phenomenon. Raul Vaz Ferreira (Uruguay) noted that the Black-necked Swan is suffering from food shortages in Uruguay.

#### IN THE CORRIDORS

A number of delegates indicated their satisfaction over recent momentum within the CMS. While some said it was difficult to put a finger on the exact cause, others pointed to the catalytic effect of the African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) and hoped that the AEWA would engender heightened interest and fuller participation in the CMS.

#### THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY

**SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL:** The Council will review proposals for amendment of Appendices I and II, progress on development of potential new agreements and will draft an indicative list of projects which will guide the Council's work over the next triennium. The Council will also nominate candidates for Chair and Vice-Chair. A Working Group on Taxonomic Reference will present a proposal to the Council for approval.