

CMS COP13 Highlights:

Saturday, 15 February 2020

On Saturday, the thirteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP13) to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) was preceded by the first of three events: a Stakeholder Dialogue discussion on the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework. This will be followed by the meeting of the Standing Committee and the High-Level Segment taking place on Sunday, 16 February.

Stakeholder Dialogue: Discussion on the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework

Soumitra Dasgupta, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, India, welcomed participants to the event. He said that India's commitment to protecting wildlife is ingrained in its constitution. He noted the importance of community partnerships for wildlife conservation, and for the millions of people that live adjacent to India's protected areas. He said that forest-dependent people can be the biggest proponents of conservation, adding that he has seen former poachers transformed into "ardent protectors" of wildlife.

Jochen Flasbarth, Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety, Germany, thanked India for hosting CMS COP13, noting the importance of CMS in establishing concrete provisions for conservation. He emphasized the importance of civil society in ensuring the implementation of the Convention. He said that not all parties are in compliance with all CMS provisions, and urged them to work together to improve implementation. He said that CMS can act as an ambassador for multilateralism, since it is easy to understand why collaboration between states is required to protect migratory species.

Sue Lieberman, Wildlife Conservation Society, stressed the importance of CMS COP13 to raising the visibility of migratory species issues at the 15th meeting of the Conference of Parties to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD COP15) in 2020 in Kunming, China, which is set to adopt a Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework. Noting that delivering on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) depends on the state of the biosphere, she called for more ambition and less "business as usual" in combating the biodiversity crisis.

Amy Fraenkel, CMS Executive Secretary, reviewed CMS' engagement in the development of the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, stressing the "once in a decade opportunity" that CBD COP15 presents to fill gaps in the global biodiversity agenda. Noting the importance of ecological connectivity to migratory wildlife, she highlighted the need to include this concept in the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, along with a commitment to international cooperation, and reference to other biodiversity-related conventions as appropriate in National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs).

Nicola Crockford, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), highlighted the crucial role of NGOs and civil society across the international and national level. She also stressed their importance in bridging global-local perspectives, offering examples of successful collaborations where knowledge and policies become grounded in work with local partners. On the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, she highlighted the need for a migratory species indicator for which CMS would have oversight. She called for the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework to streamline capacity across the biodiversity conventions.

Ward Hagemeijer, Wetlands International, expressed concern at the lack of public attention awarded to biodiversity, and expressed fear that people take it for granted and remain oblivious to ways that we are impacted by biodiversity loss. To address this, he underscored the need for governments to move “beyond silos” and work with local groups and communities.

Sonali Ghosh, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, India, introduced the open discussion and summarized inputs received from community-based organizations (CBOs) in India. She underlined the “phenomenal conservation work” local communities are engaged in, with over 30 CBO representatives in the room. She placed their efforts within the context of India having the world’s second biggest human population. She stressed that the “nature-culture link,” as well as connectivity between habitats, countries, and policies, need to be strengthened. As an example, Ghosh pointed to the success in which local folklore concerning Vhali – daughter of the fisherfolk – was used to generate increased awareness and support for whale shark protection. She mentioned other positive local conservation examples, including the Amur falcon, the five sea turtle species present in India, the greater adjutant stork, and the sarus crane.

The discussion also explored, *inter alia*, how sea turtle conservation work undertaken by communities can be enhanced under CMS, including through the Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation and Management of Marine Turtles and their Habitats of the Indian Ocean and South-East Asia.

In a follow-up exchange on the role of ecotourism, Fraenkel noted that while it is important to convey the economic value of conservation, its importance to ecosystems should not be forgotten. In response to a suggestion to conduct a status report on migratory species, she agreed that this could help identify threats as well as success stories.

Dasgupta noted the importance of wetlands to migratory birds, and described the importance of the Central Asian Flyway Action Plan. Regarding the conservation of mangroves in Maharashtra, he stressed the need for community partnerships.

Hagemeijer noted that the standardization of data helps with migratory species management, and highlighted the launch of a new tool that identifies critical wetland sites along the African-Eurasian Flyway. He said that it also integrates climate modelling

to predict impacts in coming decades, and that this could be done for other parts of the world as well.

An Indian official from the audience highlighted the role of state governments in India in contributing to migratory bird conservation. Ocean Care asked how CMS can benefit from and capture the positive outcomes of conservation work by partner organizations across the globe. Snow Leopard Conservancy India Trust highlighted the threat to migratory birds, like the black-necked crane, from free-roaming dogs. He also asked whether there has been progress in having the Russian Federation, a critical country for many Central Asian flyways, join CMS. Executive Secretary Fraenkel underscored the importance of increasing CMS participation. Lieberman noted that the recognition of CMS’ role in the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework can help promote greater participation in CMS.

Sue Lieberman, in closing the Stakeholder Dialogue, emphasized how the conservation of migratory species is about connectivity, of people and wildlife, and engaging local communities and governments.

In the Corridors

As COP13 delegates gathered in Gandhinagar, a city named for the civil rights activist and lawyer who inspired and led India’s independence movement, it seemed Mahatma Gandhi’s spirit was in the room. “The future depends on what we do in the present,” one presenter quoted him during the Stakeholder Dialogue, a panel discussion preceding the COP on the role of CMS in shaping the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework. She called on Gandhi’s legacy to guide governments in their CMS deliberations, in hopes that “the actions and decisions made here this week will ensure a future for nature.”

Indeed, this meeting presents a unique chance to make sure migratory species issues will be reflected in the CBD targets and strategies to be adopted later this year in Kunming, China. Given the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework will dictate the global conservation agenda for the next decade, weaving into it the concept of ecological connectivity—the theme of COP13—is a top priority for the success of CMS. “Every child—perhaps not every politician, but every child—understands how crucial connectivity is for biodiversity conservation,” as one presenter commented. Given that interconnectedness was at the heart of Gandhi’s teachings, he would no doubt approve.