

## CMS COP15 Highlights: Monday, 23 March 2026

The fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP15) to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) officially opened on Monday, with participants treated to inspiring remarks, powerful music, and dance performances. The opening was preceded by a meeting of the Standing Committee (SC) and a High-level Segment on Sunday. The COP addressed organizational matters, noted several reports, and established the Committee of the Whole (CoW), which in turn established working groups and considered budgetary agenda items. In the evening, participants attended a CMS Champion Night.

### Opening Plenary

In opening remarks, Marina Silva, Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Brazil, highlighted the significance of hosting COP15 at the gateway to the Pantanal, an iconic wetland that serves as habitat for many migratory species. She pointed to this COP as an opportunity to “rekindle the light of multilateralism.”

Elizabeth Maruma Mrema, Deputy Executive Director, UN Environment Programme (UNEP), underscored that protecting migratory species cannot be done by any actor alone, with their survival depending on parties and partners working in concert across borders.

Illustrating the cases of several CMS-listed species, CMS Executive Secretary Amy Fraenkel underscored the importance of preventing habitat fragmentation, reducing bycatch, and regulating illegal and unsustainable taking, both domestically and internationally. Fraenkel noted concerning trends outlined in the [interim State of the World’s Migratory Species report](#) on the extinction risk and population decline of migratory species, and urged delegates to continue their efforts toward cooperation to achieve the Convention’s goals.

Mauricio Lyrio, Secretary for Energy, Climate and Environment, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Brazil, emphasized that Brazil considers the conservation of migratory species through ecological connectivity to be a fundamental pillar of sustainable development rather than a solely environmental objective. Lyrio underscored that “connectivity has costs” and urged adequate and predictable means of implementation.

Following a cultural performance by six dancers of the Terena People, who are Indigenous to the Pantanal, Adriane da Silva Soares, an Indigenous leader, underscored threats to this iconic wetland. Brazilian scientist Alexandre Zerbini then described the threats facing whales, as one in four cetaceous species risks extinction. Brazilian biologist Tatiana Neves underscored the plight of the albatross, a frequent victim of fisheries bycatch, and highlighted possible solutions, such as night fishing.

### Organizational Matters

**Election of Officers:** Parties elected by acclamation João Paulo Capobianco (Brazil) as COP15 Chair; Khalid Cherki (Morocco) as COP15 Vice-Chair and CoW Chair; and Inka Gnittke (Germany) as CoW Vice-Chair.

**Adoption of the Agenda and Meeting Schedule:** Chair Capobianco invited delegates to review the draft provisional agenda ([UNEP/CMS/COP15/Doc.3.1/Rev.1](#)) and provisional annotated agenda and meeting schedule ([UNEP/CMS/COP15/Doc.3.2/Rev.1](#)), which the COP adopted.

**Adoption of the Rules of Procedure:** Chair Capobianco noted that there were no requests to amend the Rules of Procedure as adopted at COP13 ([UNEP/CMS/COP Rules of Procedure](#)).

**Establishment of In-session Committees:** The COP elected Australia, Zimbabwe, Saudi Arabia, Peru, and the Netherlands to the Credentials Committee.

**Admission of Observers:** The COP admitted international and national agencies and bodies that meet the criteria set out in Article VII, paragraph 9 of the Convention, to participate as observers at this meeting ([UNEP/CMS/COP15/Doc.6](#)).

### Reports

**Report of the Outgoing COP Presidency:** UZBEKISTAN reported on activities of the COP Presidency since COP14, including initiatives focused on expanding protected areas, strengthening ties with global environmental agreements, and regional cooperation under the [Samarkand Strategic Plan for Migratory Species](#).

**Report of the Secretariat and Implementation of the Programme of Work:** CMS Executive Secretary Fraenkel introduced the report on the implementation of the Programme of Work 2024-2026 ([UNEP/CMS/COP15/Doc.13](#)), noting the significant work undertaken despite the shorter than usual intersessional period. She also highlighted efforts on developing legislative guidance, diversifying funding sources, and promoting accession to the Convention. The COP noted the report.

**Reports and Recommendations of the Subsidiary Bodies of the Convention:** Rhiannon Hudson-Jones (UK), for the SC Chair, reported on SC activities since COP14, including on oversight and governance matters such as reviewing the “persistent challenge” of arrears, alongside actions taken regarding an airport development project in Albania negatively impacting several CMS-listed species.

Scientific Council (ScC) Chair Narelle Montgomery (Australia) reported on ScC activities since COP14. She highlighted the range of scientific items under consideration at COP15, noting these reflect the ScC’s significant workload and contributions. Montgomery also outlined work across taxonomic groups and cross-cutting issues, and underlined that the ScC serves as “the engine room of this Convention,” enabling its substantive efforts.

Executive Secretary Fraenkel recognized the outstanding work conducted by Narelle Montgomery in her terms leading the ScC, and thanked her for her contribution.

The COP noted the reports.

**Report of the Depositary and Host Country:** Chair Capobianco introduced this agenda item ([UNEP/CMS/COP15/Doc.9](#)). GERMANY noted the 133 parties to the Convention, with no new accessions or withdrawals since January 2025. They outlined ongoing efforts to recruit new parties, including outreach through diplomatic networks. They further stated that Czechia had withdrawn their reservations regarding the Amendments to the Appendices of the Convention adopted at COP14. The COP noted the report.

**Statements: Parties:** INDIA underscored their role in the Special Species Initiative for the Central Asian Flyway and stated that these actions strengthen their role in conserving biodiversity and improve the resilience of the initiative.

The EUROPEAN UNION underlined the CMS' work as critical to achieving the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF). They welcomed the entry into force of the Agreement on Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement), underscoring its role in conserving and protecting migratory species.

Costa Rica, for GRULAC, lamented that many developing countries, despite hosting ecosystems of global importance, face limitations in technical capacity, including financial and human resources. They urged for bridging this gap by aligning financial mechanisms, technical cooperation, and capacity building with the level of political ambition, underscoring that otherwise, "connectivity will remain an unfulfilled promise."

UKRAINE lamented the incursion of the Russian Federation and its negative impact on migratory species in Ukraine.

New Zealand, for OCEANIA, noted their leadership in seabird conservation, including proposals for listings under CMS. They said parties have been active, outlining numerous workshops and other capacity-building activities taking place, as well as efforts by the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) to strengthen synergies between CMS and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

Zimbabwe, for the AFRICAN GROUP, said COP15 is happening at a time when migratory species face urgent conservation challenges. They said Africa's prosperity is linked to its biodiversity, and its goals cannot be achieved in isolation. They urged strengthening measures to combat illegal killing and taking of species.

**CMS Agreements:** The COP took note of reports from representatives of the: Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish, and North Seas (ASCOBANS) ([UNEP/CMS/COP15/Inf.10.3.1](#)); Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP) ([UNEP/CMS/COP15/Inf.10.3.2](#)); Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and Contiguous Atlantic Area (ACCOBAMS) ([UNEP/CMS/COP15/Inf.10.3.3](#)); Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA) ([UNEP/CMS/COP15/Inf.10.3.4](#)); and the Agreement on the Conservation of Populations of European Bats (EUROBATS) ([UNEP/CMS/COP15/Inf.10.3.5](#)).

**Intergovernmental Organizations and Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs):** WORLD WILDLIFE FUND, on behalf of multiple NGOs, welcomed initiatives and proposals, including adding new species to Appendices I and II. CITES noted collaboration with CMS to harmonize information, support capacity building, and protect multiple species, including cheetahs,

lions, leopards, and marine turtles. INTERNATIONAL UNION FOR CONSERVATION OF NATURE urged action on bycatch and full implementation of the Samarkand Strategic Action Plan for Migratory Species. ICLEI - LOCAL GOVERNMENTS FOR SUSTAINABILITY underscored the unique position of cities and subnational governments to protect migratory species, including by raising awareness, reducing light pollution, and considering species in land-use planning. BORN FREE FOUNDATION underscored their work supporting CMS objectives, including promoting local stewardship and strengthening capacity. INTERNATIONAL WHALING COMMISSION noted collaboration with CMS, ACCOBAMS, and ASCOBANS to foster synergies and build capacity. ÁGUAS AMAZÔNICAS welcomed the opportunity to contribute to working with partners to deliver meaningful action for the Amazon Basin.

**Report of UNEP:** UNEP introduced [UNEP/CMS/COP15/Doc.11](#), highlighting regional conservation and restoration efforts to enhance ecological connectivity for key migratory species. The COP noted the report.

### *Committee of the Whole*

**Opening of the Committee of the Whole:** CoW Chair Cherki opened the session and with the CoW's agreement, established five working groups on: the budget; avian, aquatic, and terrestrial species, respectively; and institutional and cross-cutting issues.

### *Administrative and Budgetary Matters*

**Budget and Administration: Execution of CMS budget 2024-2025:** The Secretariat introduced the document ([UNEP/CMS/COP15/Doc.14.1](#)), noting that unpaid arrears total USD 510,760. They urged parties to settle their outstanding contributions. The CoW noted the report.

**Budget 2027-2029 and Programme of Work for the Intersessional Period between COP15 and COP16:** CMS Executive Secretary Fraenkel introduced [UNEP/CMS/COP15/Doc.14.2/Rev.1](#) and its three budgetary scenarios: one with zero nominal growth; one with zero real growth; and one with moderate growth. Fraenkel stressed that now more than ever, CMS must be equipped to deliver its mandates in light of the state of biodiversity loss, climate change, and compounding global challenges.

The Secretariat outlined the annexed programme of work for the intersessional period between COP15 and COP16 ([UNEP/CMS/COP15/Doc.14.2/Rev.1/Annex 7/Rev.1](#)).

The CoW referred the items to the budget working group.

### *In the Corridors*

Flocking in scores to the "resting place offered to migratory species by the Pantanal," participants at CMS COP15 nonetheless eschewed the chance to rest and instead dived headlong into their weeklong consideration of a packed agenda. They had, after all, gathered to address critical issues ranging from species-specific initiatives to cross-cutting matters such as the impacts of climate change on migratory wildlife.

In what was hopefully not a portent of events to come, delegates in Campo Grande's Bosque Expo briefly experienced the heat of a small conflagration as the finishing touches were made to the conference rooms. Elsewhere, this incendiary start was felt in the pace at which substantive matters were tabled, with one seasoned observer remarking that "things could get fiery" as the week progresses. "This is the beauty of CMS," another delegate countered. "We know our resources are limited and we're ready to use them efficiently."