

CMS COP15 Highlights: Thursday, 26 March 2026

The Committee of the Whole (CoW) of the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP15) to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) heard updates from working groups and reviewed in-session documents. In the morning, delegates addressed agenda items related to the implementation of taxa-specific and cross-cutting mandates, which continued into the afternoon; unless otherwise specified, discussions then continued in relevant working groups, or conference room papers (CRPs) will be produced. At the end of the day, delegates began reviewing proposals to amend the CMS Appendices.

Review of In-Session Documents

Several CRPs were approved, in some cases with minor amendments, and forwarded to the COP for adoption, including on: fish aggregating devices; marine turtles; review mechanism and national legislation programme; communications, outreach and information management; concerted actions; communities and livelihoods; renewable energy; and infrastructure.

Other in-session documents required more substantive revisions. AUSTRALIA outlined amendments to the CRP on the illegal and unsustainable taking of migratory species, including a new paragraph urging Parties to engage with coordinating bodies of key user groups, such as hunting and fishing organizations. The EU requested more time, and the Secretariat will produce a revised CRP.

SOUTH AFRICA, with ZIMBABWE, opposed the inclusion of a reference to hunting in the CRP on conservation implications of animal culture and social complexity. The COP-appointed councillor suggested using the term “removals.” A new CRP will be drawn up for consideration by the CoW.

BRAZIL asked that consideration of the resource mobilization CRP be deferred until the related language in other decisions is resolved. The EU requested additional time to consider the inclusion of a reference to implementing “in accordance with national circumstances” in the CRP on multiple systems of knowledge.

Implementation Of Taxa-Specific And Cross-Cutting Mandates

Fish: Sharks and Rays: The Secretariat introduced [UNEP/CMS/COP15/Doc.25.6.3/Rev.1](#), [Doc.25.6.3/Add.1](#), and eight associated information documents (Inf.25.6.3a-h).

KENYA expressed concern about the report’s findings on the Oceanic Whitetip Shark (*Carcharhinus longimanus*), which indicated that the shark is still being caught and traded by CMS Parties.

The Secretariat will draft a CRP based on discussions.

Single Species Action Plan for the Northeast Atlantic and Mediterranean Sub-Population of the Tope Shark (*Galeorhinus galeus*): The EU presented [UNEP/CMS/COP15/Doc.25.6.4/](#)

[Rev.1](#), inviting range states to provide expertise and funding for the Action Plan going forward, and encouraged non-Party range states to join this initiative. The document will be forwarded to the COP for adoption.

Multi-species Action Plan for Amazonian Migratory Catfish: BRAZIL introduced [UNEP/CMS/COP15/Doc.25.6.5](#) and [Doc.25.6.5/Add.1](#), saying coordinated action in the Amazonian basin is needed, as Amazonian Migratory Catfish support lives and livelihoods.

BOLIVIA, ECUADOR, PERU, VENEZUELA, EU, and the AMAZON WATER ALLIANCE supported the Multi-species Action Plan (MsAP), with many underscoring the use of Indigenous and local knowledge in implementation.

The document will be forwarded to the COP for adoption.

Avian Species Conservation Issues: The Prevention of Illegal Killing, Taking and Trade of Migratory Birds:

The Secretariat introduced [UNEP/CMS/COP15/Doc.26.1](#). GHANA, AUSTRALIA, CHILE, EU, and EAST ASIAN-AUSTRALASIAN FLYWAY PARTNERSHIP (EAAFP) expressed support. A CRP will be submitted to the COP for adoption.

Preventing Poisoning of Migratory Birds: The Secretariat introduced [UNEP/CMS/COP15/Doc.26.2](#) and [Doc.26.2/Add.1](#). The EU urged narrowing the mandate of the preventing poisoning working group to focus on the most important poisons, supported ScC recommendations, and asked for more time to review a CRP.

Flyways: Flyways: The Secretariat introduced [UNEP/CMS/COP15/Doc.26.3.1](#). Many comments focused on the potential development of a permanent flyway instrument, with MONGOLIA, BANGLADESH, EAAFP, and WORLD WIDE FUND FOR NATURE (WWF) among speakers noting concerns such as potential duplication of work and fragmentation of efforts. AUSTRALIA, NEW ZEALAND, and COOK ISLANDS expressed support for exploring such an instrument.

Seabirds and Marine Flyways: The Secretariat introduced [UNEP/CMS/COP15/Doc. 26.3.2](#).

AUSTRALIA noted the document’s alignment with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), the Samarkand Strategic Plan for Migratory Species 2024-2032, and the Agreement on Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement). The EU requested deletion of “inappropriately designed and/or sited” when referring to offshore energy and related infrastructure development among the threats to migratory seabirds in the draft resolution. The UK noted the current maps of the six global flyways risk limiting the applicability of CMS resolutions and decisions, while acknowledging this was being addressed in the avian working group. NEW ZEALAND thanked BirdLife International for their analysis of seabird tracking data and, regarding the UK’s comment, confirmed that the maps weren’t final.

BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL highlighted the six global marine flyways as a new framework for intergovernmental action. ASSOCIAÇÃO NACIONAL DE MUNICÍPIOS E MEIO AMBIENTE stressed the importance of assessing the

cumulative impacts of every stage of offshore energy and related infrastructure development, from construction and operation to decommissioning. Highlighting that seabirds are among the most threatened groups of migratory species globally, with more than half of species in decline, SOUTH AFRICA stressed the importance of addressing fisheries bycatch.

Action Plans for Birds: *Action Plans for Birds:* CoW Chair Cherki noted that the three items on action plans for birds would be addressed as a package, and the Secretariat introduced [UNEP/CMS/COP15/Doc.26.4.1](#) and [Add.1](#).

The EU and EAAFP emphasized the need to improve concerted efforts through the action plans. The COOK ISLANDS stressed that action plans are important coordination tools that are most useful when they are implementation-ready.

Multi-species Action Plan to Conserve African, Eurasian and Australian Bustards (2026-2037): HUNGARY, as co-proponent, introduced [UNEP/CMS/COP15/Doc.26.4.2](#) on the Bustards MsAP.

SAUDI ARABIA noted the MsAP builds on the efforts of the South-West Asia Illegal Taking of Birds Task Force. MONGOLIA, EU, SENEGAL, BURKINA FASO, INTERNATIONAL UNION FOR CONSERVATION OF NATURE (IUCN), and ASSOCIATION FOR THE CONSERVATION OF BIODIVERSITY OF KAZAKHSTAN supported the MsAP's adoption and rapid implementation.

Steppe Eagle Global Action Plan: The Secretariat introduced [UNEP/CMS/COP15/Doc.26.4.3](#) and [Inf.26.4.3](#).

KAZAKHSTAN, SAUDI ARABIA, INDIA, and UGANDA noted their support for the Steppe Eagle (*Aquila nipalensis*) Global Action Plan, stressing that the transboundary nature of threats to the species requires strong collaboration among range states.

CMS Executive Secretary Amy Fraenkel provided a clarification regarding the financing of bodies and mechanisms established by the COP.

The CoW forwarded the three items on action plans for birds to the COP for adoption.

Action Plan for Migratory Landbirds in the African-Eurasian Region: The Secretariat introduced [UNEP/CMS/COP15/Doc.26.5](#), [Add.1](#), and [Inf.26.5](#), noting a CRP was already available. The CoW decided to submit the CRP to the COP for adoption.

Conservation of African-Eurasian Vultures: The Secretariat tabled [UNEP/CMS/COP15/Doc.26.6](#), [Inf.26.6a](#), and [Inf.26.6b](#), and noted a CRP was available following discussions in the avian working group.

GHANA, SENEGAL, and BURKINA FASO supported the draft decisions. The CoW forwarded the CRP to the COP for adoption.

Saker Falcon (*Falco cherrug*) Global Action Plan: The Secretariat introduced [UNEP/CMS/COP15/Doc.26.7](#), [Add.1](#), [Inf.26.7a](#), [Inf.26.7b](#), and [Inf.26.7c](#). CoW Chair Cherki noted discussions would be taken up when a CRP was made available.

Internationally Important Raptor Areas: The Secretariat tabled [UNEP/CMS/COP15/Doc.26.8](#) and [Add.1](#). CoW Chair Cherki said discussions would take place when a CRP is available.

Terrestrial Species Conservation Issues: Joint CITES-CMS African Carnivores Initiative: The Secretariat introduced [UNEP/CMS/COP15/Doc.27.1](#), noting discussions in the terrestrial working group had led to a CRP.

CHEETAH CONSERVATION FUND (CCF) noted their support for the joint African Carnivores Initiative and underlined an issue of resource availability under CITES, stressing the need to ensure the Initiative remains fully functional.

Sahelo Saharan Megafauna: The Secretariat introduced [UNEP/CMS/COP15/Doc.27.2](#), noting that discussions in the terrestrial working group produced a CRP.

Central Asian Mammals Initiative: The Secretariat tabled [UNEP/CMS/COP15/Doc.27.3](#) and [Add.1](#), noting that the

terrestrial working group had fully supported the document. The CoW agreed to recommend the item to the COP for adoption.

Jaguar: The Secretariat introduced [UNEP/CMS/COP15/Doc.27.4/Rev.1](#) and [Add.1](#), noting the available CRP.

The EU supported the Regional Action Plan and sought clarification from the UN Environment Programme Latin America and the Caribbean Office on the availability of future funding for this work.

CoW Chair Cherki said that discussions on the matter would continue when delegates had more time to consider the CRP.

Amendment of CMS Appendices

Cheetah of Zimbabwe: ZIMBABWE introduced [UNEP/CMS/COP15/Doc.30.2.1](#) to list the Zimbabwean population of Cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus*), estimated at 150 to 170 individuals, in Appendices I and II. The proposal was supported by SENEGAL, ALGERIA, PANAMA, BRAZIL, GHANA, KENYA, EU, SOUTH AFRICA, SAUDI ARABIA, and CCF. The CoW recommended the proposal to the COP for adoption.

Striped Hyena: TAJIKISTAN AND UZBEKISTAN introduced [UNEP/CMS/COP15/Doc.30.2.2](#) to list the Striped Hyena (*Hyaena hyaena*), a population estimated at fewer than 10,000 mature individuals globally, in Appendices I and II. The proposal was supported by MONGOLIA, ALGERIA, KENYA, EU, PANAMA, SAUDI ARABIA, SENEGAL, UGANDA, BRAZIL, and WILDLIFE CONSERVATION SOCIETY. The CoW recommended the proposal to the COP for adoption.

Giant Otter: FRANCE introduced [UNEP/CMS/COP15/Doc.30.2.3](#) to list the Giant Otter (*Pteronura brasiliensis*), a population estimated to have declined more than 50% over the past 25 years, in Appendices I and II. The proposal was supported by PERU, BOLIVIA, PANAMA, ECUADOR, BRAZIL, PARAGUAY, EU, SENEGAL, VENEZUELA, and IUCN. The CoW recommended the proposal to the COP for adoption.

Bukhara Deer: UZBEKISTAN introduced [UNEP/CMS/COP15/Doc.30.2.4](#) to remove the Bukhara Deer (*Cervus elaphus yarkandensis*) from Appendix I. They noted that the population has rebounded from near extinction in the 1990s to reach 3,000 individuals in Uzbekistan and that the density of the population is degrading habitat and risking die-offs. SAUDI ARABIA and ZIMBABWE supported the proposal. The UK and EU opposed the proposal, citing concerns it would endanger the species.

Gadfly Petrels: NEW ZEALAND introduced the proposal to list Gadfly Petrels (*Pterodroma spp.*) on Appendix I and II ([UNEP/CMS/COP15/Doc.30.2.5/Rev.1](#)), noting they are “some of the rarest, most endangered, and poorly understood seabirds in the world.” Many Parties expressed strong support. The CoW recommended the proposal to the COP for adoption.

In the Corridors

It is that stage in a COP when nothing seems to happen. Agenda items get discussed, only to be deferred to working groups. Working groups eventually generate CRPs, which return to the CoW for approval—only for delegates to ask for more time to review them, or suggest amendments that require a new CRP to be drafted, which then requires further review. This iterative work is just part of the game with multilateral environmental agreements, but after four days, with no end in sight, it's no wonder some participants have admitted to feeling squirrely—or fishy. “I feel like a fish in a bowl, swimming around and around,” as one delegate put it. Asked how the COP was going, another shrugged. “At least we're trying our best.”

Despite the mid-marathon fatigue, the matters under discussion succeeded in drawing out delegates' energy—“don't let the Bustards get you down,” as one participant encouraged another. Indeed, the launch of critically important initiatives such as the new MsAP on Bustards, spanning all 26 species across 102 range states, which is set for immediate and collaborative implementation following the COP, requires all hands on deck.